

Palacký University, Philosophical Faculty

**Translation of Sherman Alexie's Poetry
with Emphasis on the
(Self-) Representation of Native
Americans**

(Bachelor Thesis)

Olomouc 2014

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**Překlad poezie Shermana Alexie s
důrazem na (sebe) reprezentaci
amerických indiánů**

(Bakalářská práce)

Olomouc 2014

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(Bachelor Thesis)

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Number of Pages: 48

Number of Characters: 81 113 (including spaces)

Olomouc 2014

I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography below.

In Olomouc, 7.5.2014

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Most of us (Indian Writers) are outcasts. We don't really fit within the Indian community, so we write to try to fit in and sound Indian. So it's ironic that we become spokespeople for Indian country that we are supposed to be representative of our tribe.

– Sherman Alexie

(Brill de Ramirez 1999, 55)

I would like to thank PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D. for his supervision and guidance and Mgr. Filip Krajník, Ph.D. for the consultation when translating Alexie's poetry.

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Introduction

The image of the Native American is considered by many people to be highly ambiguous. Some have thought of the image in terms of Karl May's novels and imagine the "Indians" living in nature, dancing around a fire, calling out to the spirits of their predecessors and standing side by side with the white hero, fighting for the establishment of order and justice. Others have had in mind the image of the savage warrior scalping innocent white women and fighting the Euro-Americans for control of the New World territories.

With time, as these images faded away, the Native American stereotypes have lingered on, causing confusion as to how the Native Americans should have been perceived (by the non-Natives and by the Natives themselves) or more specifically if they should have been assigned a specific label at all.

The issue of identifying (and perhaps avoiding) Native American stereotypes in the Czech cultural context is burdened by many factors. However, the most important factor is the lack of recent literary works dealing with the American Indian theme. Of course, many of these works are available to the Czech general public, but only in their respective source language (English being the dominant one). This bachelor thesis does not aim to criticize by saying that there are no Czech literary works dealing with Native American ethnic identity. Instead, it aims to present another Czech translation of such literary works, which is rooted in a deep analysis of its cultural context and heritage.

The works of the American Indian writer Sherman Alexie have been chosen for the purpose of the analysis and research of this thesis. Therefore, the primary and several secondary sources used in the thesis are from his own literary portfolio. Another very helpful source was Daniel Grassian's book *Understanding Sherman Alexie*, which provided the theoretical background to Alexie's life and literary voice. When dealing with the textual analysis of Alexie's works, a further important source used was Lewis Turco's book *The Book of Forms*, which provided a much appreciated insight to the prosodic features of the analyzed poems. Finally, during the process of translation and the consequent commentary of the translation choices there were two major linguistic works used – Dagmar Knittlová's book *Překlad a překládání* and Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday's book *Translation: An Advanced*

Resource Book – which contributed to choosing the equivalents and grounding them in the theoretical background. There was one last source which should not be omitted from this list, namely the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (8th Edition)* – an integral part of any linguistic work, paper or thesis dealing with translation from or into the English language.

This bachelor thesis is divided into three main chapters dealing respectively with the theoretical and literary background of Sherman Alexie as a writer, a textual analysis of two specific poems chosen for each in order to show the different levels of contextual, grammatical or lexicological anomalies and specifics important for the hypothetical translator, and finally the commented translation, which is further divided into several points in order to present the individual solutions that the translator chose to use, each with its individual explanation. The result and purpose of this thesis are two of Alexie's poems translated into the Czech target language, adjusted to the Czech target cultural background and hopefully having a similar effect on the Czech target reader.

The reason behind the choice of this particular topic for the bachelor thesis, one that is not so familiar to the Czech historical or geographical context, is mainly two-fold. Firstly, the area of American-Indian relations has been the subject of my interest for several years, especially after seeing Alexie's movie *Smoke Signals* (1998, see Chapter 1.). Secondly, I have wanted to participate actively in the process of spreading the Native American voice beyond the borders of the reservations. My enthusiasm for this particular area is also the reason why certain passages in this bachelor thesis are perhaps more expressive than others.

Before presenting the actual thesis I would like to clarify to the reader that within the thesis I will use the terms Native American and American Indian when talking about the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and that any references to the so-called "Indians" are either intentionally emotionally charged (and therefore placed in quotation marks) or taken from the author himself when he is referring to his ethnical background. The same applies to the term "half-breed", which is also taken from the author's literary works or comments.

1. The Native American Bard

1.1 Sherman Alexie's Life and Works¹

Sherman Alexie was born in 1966 in Spokane, Washington to a Spokane mother and Coeur d'Alene father. Now we have the opportunity to read his poems, short-stories and novels and to see his movies, which originally were not even meant to exist. In fact, as a baby he was diagnosed with hydrocephalus – meaning that his brain was overproducing cerebral spinal fluid – and underwent an operation at the age of six months. He was not expected to survive and if he did, the doctors warned that he would sustain severe lifelong mental damage. Instead, he proved to be something of a miracle for not only surviving, but also by being able to read by the age of three.

While still at the reservation and studying at the Wellpinit school, he suffered from residual seizures and was ostracized by his peers as a result. These events later led to a decision, rarely seen among reservation children, to leave the reservation and continue his education elsewhere. His dream was to become a doctor, but after several human anatomy courses ending with him falling to the ground in a dead faint, he chose to focus on American Studies and later Literature, first at Gonzaga University, after which he transferred after two years to Washington State University. During his university years he took part in a poetry workshop led by his future mentor Alex Kuo, who gave him a contemporary Indian poetry anthology to read, which later inspired Alexie to start writing professionally (Cullum 2004, 13-16).

The author Daniel Grassian discusses the works of Alexie in detail in his book *Understanding Sherman Alexie*, and I will use this source in order to list Alexie's main achievements. In the 1990s he published his first four collections of poetry and short stories, namely *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992, later adapted into a movie of the same name), *I Would Steal Horses* (1992), *First Indian on the Moon* (1993) and *Old Shirts & New Skins* (1993). At the same time he also published *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) – a collection of short stories, one of which was later adapted to a screenplay for the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998),

¹ The bibliographical information are taken from a book entitled *Contemporary American Ethnic Poets: Lives, Works, Sources* edited by Linda E. Cullum.

co-produced by Alexie² and later distributed by Miramax Films. The movie was directed by Chris Eyre, a Native American filmmaker. Whereas Eyre's previous movie *Powwow Highway* had focused upon Native Americans and many more American-made films had Native Americans playing major roles (e.g. *Dances With Wolves*), "*Smoke Signals* became the first feature film written, directed and co-produced by Indians ever to receive a major distribution deal" (Grassian 2005, 4).

Beginning in 1994 he also embarked upon novel writing, producing his novel debut *Reservation Blues* (1994), the detective thriller *Indian Killer* (1996) and a semi-autobiographical novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) among others. He also wrote, produced and directed a second movie, *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002). To conclude, I would like to mention one of his later collection of short stories *Ten Little Indians* (2003), because it is one of the few works of his which has been translated and published in Czech.³

For the purpose of my commented translation analysis, I chose to use two of Alexie's lesser known poems "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel" and "Diabetes" (hereinafter only as "the poems", which are included in his poetry collection entitled *The Summer of Black Widows* (1996). The former poem is also read out loud in Alexie's movie *The Business of Fancydancing* by the main character Seymour Polatkin – a homosexual poet with a Native American heritage living an urban life far from the reservation, who confronts his inner conflict of being trapped between two worlds.

Throughout his career Alexie has received several awards and prizes for his literary achievements – the American Book Award in 1996, the PEN/Faulkner Award in 2007 or a four-time World Heavyweight Poetry Champion title⁴, to name just a few. At the age of 47 and living in Seattle with his family, he is still active in the literary as well as film-making community (e.g. in 2005 he founded a non-profit organization committed to teaching film-making skills to young Native Americans). In 2003, Alexie said in an interview that he now places less emphasis on his distinctive view of ethnic identity and cultural traditions due to the events of 9/11.

² There has been a Czech translation of the collection published in 2009, interestingly entitled *Smoke Signals*.

³ Snižek, Luboš, trans. *Deset malých Indiánků*. Praha: Nakladatelství Maťa, 2005.

⁴ An eight-round competition of poetry reciting established as a part of the Taos Poetry Circus taking place every year in Taos, New Mexico: <http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/bl2002poetrybout.htm>.

“We are making these decisions [of going to war] not based on any moral or ethical choice, but simply on the basis of power and money [...] I am increasingly suspicious of the word “tradition”, whether in political or literary terms.” (Grassian 2005, 5-6)

1.2 The 5 in 5: 5 patterns in 5 genres

If asked to describe Alexie's work in one sentence, I would say that he is a writer of 5 genres – non-fiction, fiction, screenplays, short stories and poetry. However, Alexie considers himself to be first and foremost a poet and a short story writer, then a novelist, then a screenwriter, and only finally a filmmaker. Even though these five genres differ on a formal and structural level, they do contain common patterns defining Alexie's opinions, purposes and the messages he wants to convey. It is necessary, for my thesis to continue properly, to first conduct a detailed examination of Alexie's style, which in this case would be five-fold and later applied to a specific analysis of the poems.

When approaching a text, meaning any text ranging from an advertisement, a warning on a medicine bottle or a formal invitation to a wedding, we have to take into consideration and analyze their semantic structure. If we are dealing with a work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, we should also pay special attention above all to the author's personal style. The author's idiolect is indeed one of the major subjects of an analysis, should we wish to fully comprehend a text, especially from the perspective of a translator. We can use an example of the importance of sentence length in order to demonstrate the possible imbalance caused by omitting or ignoring the author's choice of shorter or more complex sentences. Sentence length has a significant functional role, in which e.g.

Hemingway's preference for shorter sentences and avoidance of subordinate clauses or Proust's tendency for long elaborate sentences, are fundamental not only to their style but also to the view of the world that is being depicted. (Hatim and Munday 2004, 24)

It is therefore an essential part of the analysis of the text to first acquire a deep understanding of the author's, in this case Alexie's, style of writing before continuing with a thorough analysis of the particular poems.

From the temporal point of view we could classify Alexie as a second generation Native American writer. The historical background circumstances commonly affecting all such writers are usually referred to as the "Native American Renaissance" (Moore 2005, 297), meaning the Euro-American rediscovery of their Indian national heritage resulting in a feeling of nostalgia and at the same time fascination. This can be defined as a phenomenon of "Imperialist Nostalgia"⁵, which is usually associated with feelings of guilt about the past Indian-American relations and consequent resolutions, admiration of the uniqueness of the Indian culture or simply wanting to be like Indians, but I would like to deal with that topic later in this chapter.

The majority of the second generation Native American writers naturally responded to this phenomenon; some with anger and some with humor. Sherman Alexie, however, chose a unique approach – he combined the depiction of a harsh reality with humor and irony, while at the same time honoring the big important issues, namely gender roles, power relations and Native American vs. American identity dichotomy.

1.2.1. Humor

As opposed to his predecessors and peers, who often describe the plight of the Native Americans living on the reservations and fighting for their rights, Alexie tends to follow his own sources of humor. The uniqueness of the relaxed and amusing style of his work lies in the capacity of his characters (often teenage boys) to consider, apart from the major cultural and social issues (e.g. living conditions on the reservation, minority status or gradual loss of cultural heritage), the everyday realities - feeling excluded from a basketball game, having an unhealthy attachment to their grandmother or being gay in an urban environment. The fact that every reader can relate to and often finds funny is that as a teenage girl or a boy you often do not get the whole picture and revel in your own problems, as trivial as they may be. They do not feel such a need to pity themselves for their "tragic" way of life as one, or a European-American reader to be precise, would want them to feel.

⁵ The agents of colonialism often display this nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was "traditionally" (meaning upon the first encounter). The paradox is that it usually was the colonizing agents themselves who intentionally destroyed or altered the colonized culture. (Renato 1989, 107)

Humor in his eyes is seen as a self-defense mechanism. As mentioned in the first chapter, Alexie suffered a severe condition as a baby and at the age of six months he had to undergo very hazardous surgery. Even though he survived, he still suffered many side effects, including an enlarged skull, seizures and frequent bed-wetting. Due to his physical abnormal appearance he was often mocked by his peers and was forced to find refuge and a safe space. That space was humor. "He quickly learned the value of humor as means of deflecting the abuse of other children and also as means of personal empowerment" (Grassian 2005, 2). Alexie explains his behavior and also many of the humorous puns in his later works by saying that "Humor is a self-defense on the rez. You make people laugh and you disarm them." (Ibid.)

Even though Alexie acknowledges Native Americans to be a vanishing race, he still maintains a certain humorous distance, because as he himself says "humor can survive even death" (Moore 2005, 300). Whatever journey or transformation his characters have to undergo – be it gathering the ashes of the father who abandoned them or overcoming the long separation with the reservation environment – it often revolves around paradoxes.

1.2.2. Irony

The ironic approach is definitely a key element of all Alexie's films, fiction and poetry. It is visible especially when it comes to depicting Native American – Euro-American relations and the corresponding shifts in power therein. He radically affirms the diversity of the two groups which renders the ongoing process of assimilation rather pointless. The irony is noticeable especially in one of his short-stories "Dear John Wayne" which he presents by constructing a dialogue between a white anthropologist specializing in Native American Studies interviewing a very old Native American woman, who tells a story of her affair with John Wayne. The description alone shows the kind of humor Alexie uses, specifically giving a voice to a white person (the interviewer) to emphasize the extent to which Indians are different from Euro-Americans. The irony is often very personal: "His insider's view of the Indian world, when combined with confessional detail, creates an intimate distance from a non-Indian audience that is one key to the ironic strength of his voice." (Moore 2005, 297)

Alexie approaches irony, as an essential tool of the Native American writer, by saying that irony is “a hallmark of the contemporary indigenous American” (Moore 2005, 299). His reader or movie-goer is very often obliged to put mental quotation marks around most of the utterances of the characters. We will deal with Alexie's irony in practice in the analytical part of the thesis when we approach the poems, where there are plenty of instances of ironic formulations, which make it very hard for the translator to find proper equivalents. His irony is often based on the stereotypical imagery created around the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

1.2.3. Stereotypes

The Native American stereotypes have a long history of creation, especially when we consider the Euro-American and European point of view, dating back to the first written or illustrated accounts of the indigenous peoples of the New World created by the seafarers and explorers of European origin. Right from the beginning, the European public is confronted with images presenting the white superiority over the savage indigenous people and emphasizing the purity and sophistication of the former, contrasted with the animalistic and cruel features of the latter. When the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca began his expedition to present-day Florida in 1527, he described the land he encountered as “a fruitful region were it worked and inhabited by civilized men” (Cabeza de Vaca 2012).

There is not enough space in this thesis to describe the entire history of American-Indian relations, but I would like to mention an important ongoing trend that will help us understand the stereotypes depicted in the poems later. The Boston Tea Party, Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show, Karl May's novels, a contemporary Austrian singer calling himself *Waterloo* and even Cameron's *Avatar* – these are just a few instances of a trend practiced by people of non-Indian descent dressing themselves in “Native American” clothes and behaving in a “Native American” way in order to either conceal their true identity or create a form of entertainment.

This trend does not only affect the European and Euro-American state of mind (or to put it in other words – the way Europeans feel and picture Native Americans), but also Native Americans themselves. We can only guess that they would not feel particularly happy about the Euro-Americans and Europeans pretending to be “Indian” and thus avoiding and shifting blame whilst making a

profit. It is certainly wrong to pretend to be someone you are not, but even more wrong when doing so by using incorrect and often inaccurate images of the American indigenous people and therefore creating a wave of unwanted stereotypes.

From a historical perspective, there have been number of different kinds of stereotypes revolving around Native Americanness classified according to the attitude the Euro-Americans have had towards them. If we move past the classic warrior type – war paint, feathers, tomahawks – we can continue with the more complex image of the so-called Noble Savage. These are the ones quickly assimilating to the Euro-American invasions, who are co-operative and generous to the newcomers. Throughout the post-colonial period they have often worked as mediators in many American-Indian disputes and, real or imaginary (i.e. created by the medium of film or literature), they have become icons of American history.

Alexie argues that these “American-Indian” icons – e.g. Billy Jack (mentioned in detail later in this section), John Dunbar⁶ or Hawkeye⁷ – who are intentionally but wrongly presented as “Indian” make it harder for the general public, as well as for the Native Americans themselves, to recognize what is truly “Indian”. These icons, who are usually “half-breeds” with blue eyes (because they are somehow perceived to be more desirable than full-blooded “Indians”), lack the typical animalistic behavior and seek the love of a white woman to make the romantic tales complete.

This phenomenon of “Playing Indian” (Deloria 1998), together with the feeling of imperialist nostalgia discussed earlier, has opened up a space for the responses of Native American writers. Alexie takes advantage of this space and sees it as an inexhaustible source of irony and satire in his works. We have covered the stereotypical imagery connected with the (power) relations between the Euro-Americans and Native Americans and so far we have mentioned, even if not explicitly, male stereotypical roles. But what about female stereotypes?

1.2.4. Gender (colonization)

Alexie has a very specific and innovative approach concerning his unravelling of the role that gender plays in colonial domination. If you take the image of an Indian

⁶ from *Dances With Wolves*

⁷ from *The Last of the Mohicans*

woman which appears in various works of art, usually she has a slender brown body, with which she moves very cautiously and lightly. Indian women also have enough bodily strength to move around the land without any difficulty, but at the same time they are seen as objects of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, the most memorable Native American woman for many remains to be the Walt Disney's Pocahontas. The animated character of Pocahontas nicely fits all of the physical descriptions stated above, demonstrating amongst other matters also the putative submissive role of the American Indian woman in cultural sexual representations.

Alexie also criticizes the American fixation on the female body, especially the desire in connection with it being perfect and desirable, thus making it the subject of male voyeurism. In one of his stories Alexie describes the journey of Marilyn Monroe to a Native American tribe, where she finally begins to feel safe and secure because nobody is staring at her any more (Alexie 1996, 91). The female Indian body is very important in one of the poems, which will be discussed later in this thesis ("How to write the Great American Novel") and it plays a role in the depiction of blurring the female/male order and discussing the trapping of female spirit in a male body and vice versa.

In the "Dear John Wayne" short story we are presented with a very different depiction of a female Native American, the very old Spokane Indian Etta, and the role she plays in an interview with Spencer Cox, a cultural anthropologist. Etta is perceived by Cox as a tribal elder – the grandmother, the healer, the willow, the shoulder to cry on – and this turns out to be a misconception. She not only crosses boundaries of Native American identity by explicitly stating with irony that she is not an expert on Indian traditions, but she also pushes the limits of the traditional role of a woman in the indigenous American society – firstly, by calling the tune of the interview and mocking the interviewer, thus establishing a superior role in the discourse and secondly, by admitting to having had an affair with the famous actor John Wayne.

The former instance is also accompanied by referring to the obvious colonization process and issues of American-Indian relations by saying "You've colonized Indian land but I am not about to let you colonize my heart and mind." (Alexie 2000). The later instance is presented by the description of her affair with

Wayne. Only later do we come to realize that she experienced a very feminine and sensitive side of Wayne, as opposed to the “macho” personality he was trying to publically represent. Later in the story, when Wayne is explaining to his sons why he is not angry when he catches them playing and putting on their mother's lipstick, he says: “Every man likes to pretend he's a woman now and again. It's very healthy. [...] I often close my eyes and try to put myself into a woman's shoes. I try to think like a woman. I try to embrace the feminine in myself.” (Alexie 2000).

1.2.5. Native American Identity

The Loss of Voice

The issue of identity is a continual and apparently inexhaustible theme for the majority of Native American writers. Due to the history of family separations, children being forced to live in boarding schools and whole tribes being shunted into government designated reservations, the Native Americans have been losing their voice and assimilating to the Euro-American world and its own identities. Unfortunately, even to this day, the assimilation was not entirely “successful” and therefore the Native Americans were trapped between two different worlds without a voice and even without a sense of belonging.

Labeling

Sherman Alexie defines being Indian as the primary determinant of his ethnic identity, as well as the identity of his characters. He describes his writing as follows: “If I write it, it's an Indian novel. If I wrote about Martians, it would be an Indian novel. If I wrote about the Amish, it would be an Indian novel. That's who I am.” (Grassian 2005, 7).

There are number of labels which have been given to the Native Americans throughout history, ranging from “(Noble) Savages” (with the insulting and negative connotations), through “Indians” (a historical term used to refer to the indigenous peoples of the New World) to the more generic “Native Americans” (introduced in the 1960s and later rejected by the Native people being too vague and artificial).

Having a number of labels for the Native Americans, each with a different connotations, certainly makes it difficult to find appropriate equivalents: in this case finding a suitable Czech translation which would have the same effect without sounding too vague, generic or subjective, or, most importantly, without adding up to

the stereotypical usage of these labels. Alexie himself prefers the term Indians, because he argues that cultural colonization (having a strong connotation to the label "Indians") is still in progress even now, and it is therefore essential to acknowledge it.

Playing Indian

For the sake of the argument let's divide cultural colonialism into two main branches. Firstly, we have the obvious type of colonization, which underlines the geographical and historical consequences. On the other hand, we have the philosophical and physical type of colonization, which is described as the taking of Native American characteristics by non-Natives and the appropriation of them in order to exploit the Native American identity for their own purposes.

As mentioned above, this is one of the sources of the creation of Native American stereotypes. There has been a lot of criticism, especially on the part of the current Native American writers (including Alexie), who denounce the "Indian" stereotypes presenting them as nature-loving noble savages and implying their primitive union with nature and therefore placing them in antagonism with the civilized society. What is even more disturbing is the fact that there have been instances (even to this day) when people (especially Europeans), after hearing the word "Indian", immediately imagine almost naked archetypal ecological figures, dancing around bonfires and hunting down buffalos.

The reality, however, is that buffalos are almost extinct and the Native Americans have other fears and worries. There are facing high unemployment, low incomes, dependency on government benefits, alcohol and drugs. Ultimately, the phenomenon of "Playing Indian" can have more than one connotation. It is not just about pretending to be an "Indian", but also exploiting and mocking the Indian, thus playing with him.

I hated Tonto (Still do)

In an article called "I hated Tonto (Still do)" (Alexie 1998), Alexie tries to emphasize the racial tension among Native Americans, not only as he feels it, but also as many reservation "Indians" feel it. The idea behind their frustration stems from the fact that e.g. the famous American movie character, Billy Jack (played in the movie by Tom Laughlin), obviously not an "Indian", portrayed the role of a "half-breed" modern

noble savage, trapped between two worlds and experiencing an identity crisis, fighting to restore the rights of his "Indian brothers".

His popularity went hand in glove with the ignorance of the fact that he is only playing at being an "Indian". There is a dichotomy present in the article, suggesting that Billy Jack was worshiped for being rebellious and fighting against the white racists, whilst at the same time he was loathed for representing everything that is wrong with white Americans appropriating Native American identity. Also, the character of Tonto, as an "Indian" sidekick of the popular American movie and radio character Lone Ranger, which is also discussed in the article, is by Alexie seen as an inaccurate portrayal of Native Americanness. Alexie refers to this so-called Indian identity as "Indian by proximity", which is called into question in his literary works.

In the next chapter, we will take into consideration all 5 patterns discussed above in order to successfully comprehend and subsequently analyze the two designated poems. Alexie's humor and irony, attention to stereotypes in opposition to real reservation life and playing with Native American identity, as well as gender relations, all appear in the two poems, which will be the subject of the commented translation intended to show, above all, the importance of being objective as a translator, whilst at the same time honoring the goings-on in Native American history and the present situation.

2. Approaching the Texts

As mentioned earlier, both of the poems discussed in this thesis are taken from the collection of poems and short stories entitled *The Summer of Black Widows* (1996), although each is included in a different section of the book and therefore has a different theme. "How to Write the Great American Novel" (hereinafter only as the first poem) is a part of the fifth of seven sections entitled "Tourists" and "Diabetes" (hereinafter only as the second poem) is presented in the second section entitled "Father and Farther".

When analyzing, let us first look at both of the poems together in order to identify those elements which they have in common, and then focus on each of them individually and examine them on three levels – the level of content, the textual level and the grammatical level – while paying attention also to the sonic level. The lexical level of the poems will be further dealt with in the third chapter of the thesis, which will include the commented translation.

Although they have different themes, both of the poems follow the tradition of direct confrontation with the reader, which Alexie often appropriates in order to provide the reader with an unfiltered and unpretentious view of reservation life. He himself calls it reservation realism⁸, which would mean the true depiction of the reservation and its inhabitants. The only thing that strongly affects the reader is the irony involved in conveying the message to the target audience. Regarding the target audience, the main purpose of most of Alexie's fiction is to reach the so-called "rez" kids, namely the young generation of Native Americans living on reservations, who have very limited living space. A fact which holds them down and contains them in terms of their education, social life and future careers.

As a result, the majority of his main protagonists are usually from the teenage generation, which allows the "rez" kids to connect with them and the problems they are having. Alexie explains that one of his primary goals is to reach Indian children living on reservations, who are nowadays influenced by the white-dominated popular culture. Toward that end, Alexie often uses references to television shows, movies and music as tools to connect with them and their interests. "It's the cultural

⁸ The term was coined in the introduction to the 2005 edition of his book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fight in Heaven*.

currency,” he explains. “Superman means something different to me than it does to a white guy from Ames, Iowa, or New York City or L.A. It’s a way for us to sit at the same table. I use pop culture like most poets use Latin.” (Grassian 2005, 6-7)

It can happen, however, that the target audience of some Alexie’s work is intended to be wider and spreading beyond the reservation, and that is precisely the case of the two poems discussed in this thesis. They combine a humorous but direct view of the living conditions on reservations (allowing the Native Americans themselves to empathize and feel personally connected) with a confrontational imperative to awaken the reader (prompting the wider target audience to contemplate and perhaps take preventive measures).

Both of the poems were chosen carefully in order to demonstrate the differences in Alexie’s style and the many possible ways of reaching the target audience – whether using humor and irony or harshness and tragedy as tools of communication. At this point, I would like to note that from this point onward I will also use the Czech translation of some theoretical terms or concepts (e.g. grammatical structures, lexical and sonic features, or the appropriate translation of the exact wording of the poem).

2.1. How to Write the Great American Indian Novel

2.1.1 Content Level

The poem was chosen for the purpose of a commented translation and analysis, because it includes several examples of elements which are either characteristic of Alexie’s own work or connected to the stereotypical depiction of Native Americans. The latter is pointed out by Alexie with a sense of irony and mockery. He is essentially giving us a tutorial on how to write an American Indian novel which would fit a lot of the misconceptions and misinterpretations of the Native Americans that continue to be in force. The poem itself, as well as my subsequent translation, is attached to the thesis in the Appendix. Therefore, any reference made to the poem will be directed at the material presented therein and any quotations will include the designated line number.

In the poem he lists all of the essentials that such a novel should not lack – e.g. a crying Indian (see line 4), a slender and beautiful Indian woman in love with a

white man (see lines 5 and 6) or the savage characteristics of the “Indian-Barbarian” (see line 21). The poem also highlights some of the current social issues which the Native Americans are faced with in their reservation lives – e.g. alcoholism (see line 24), gender roles and sexuality issues (see lines 30, 31 and 32) or impending extinction (see line 40). As with every issue confronted by Alexie, even the one of extinction is countered with humor and irony. By saying that “all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts” (Ibid.), he is trying to show that humor will survive even death.

The content is interwoven with references to nature and its importance in the Native American cultural traditions (see lines 11, 12 and 22). These are often used to add up to the creation and perpetuation of the above-mentioned stereotype, which is that Native Americans are the archetypal ecologists and have a primitive relationship with nature. Another important element of the poem is the denouement provided for the reader. Alexie presents the next American generation as the obvious solution of assimilation and compromise (see lines 37 and 38). In this case the solution is seen in birth of mix-raced children, who are able to be empathetic and loving.

As has already been established, in his works Alexie often deals with gender relations and relationships. This poem, in particular, includes a passage conveying a chaotic and complicated situation in which the “interior Indian spirits” are inside a white woman or a man. He emphasizes that gender is not especially important and that there exist such “rare instances” when a spirit of an Indian man is trapped inside a white woman or vice versa. He then states that in this case everybody is a “half-breed”. This is a turning point in the poem, when Alexie tries to blur the boundaries between sexes and ethnicities. “Alexie looks to romantic relationships as possibly effacing ethnic boundaries.” (Grassian 2005, 137)

2.1.2. Textual Level

The 40 lines of the poem together create something that is often seen in Alexie's prosody and which Grassian identifies as a “prose poem” (Grassian 2005, 127). This means that although it has the format and rhythm of a poem, it is still written in complete sentences. However, the sentences are often split in the middle, thus stimulating reader's anticipation and curiosity. The lines are often extensive in length, reaching up to 29 syllables per line, and grouped together in pairs, therefore

often creating a semantically and syntactically meaningful sentence. This is one type of sentence usage in the poem, the second one is several brief sentences per pair of lines. The short and usually disconnected clusters of Hemingway-like sentences (e.g. see line 24) contrast with the longer syntactic units usually used to list examples (e.g. see lines 11 and 12). In addition, the poem is unusual in a sense that it is not divided into single strophes, but into 20 pairs of lines (*kuplety*).

When we are approaching poetry, it is crucial to consider that it is often read out loud. Alexie's poetry especially is often created (sometimes solely) for the purpose of recitation. As mentioned in the first chapter dealing with his literary achievements, he won the Heavyweight Championship Poetry Bout several times, which would signify the importance of the sonic aspect of his poetry. Even though it does not follow a specific meter (either syllabic, accentual or accentual-syllabic), it still contains certain parts, which are, especially when read aloud, more stressed than others.

The poem could be defined as sort of a hybrid –neither prose nor poetry. Even though it is written in sentences and appears to have no countable meter, it still preserves some poetic quality – e.g. its emotional effect on the reader, rhythm and almost paratactic sentences. Parataxis is usually defined as a literary technique which uses very short sentences coordinately arranged in order to make the designated utterance condensed and affective⁹.

2.1.3. Grammatical Level

The fact that the poem is intended to serve as an ironic tutorial on how to be a good writer of Native American fiction affects the poem's grammatical structure immensely. The author uses series of modal verbs and verbs in the present and future simple tense to express different levels of expectations, obligations or consequences. These verbs are accompanied by the existence of mixed conditional clauses. The verb usage can be divided into five separate groups:

- a) Must/have to: expresses the necessity of an action and at the same time has an ironic overtone in this case (see lines e.g. 1, 2 and 13).

⁹ The definition is paraphrased from the website of the Czech Language Institute (Czech Science Academy): <http://nase-rec.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?art=3057>.

- b) *Should*: although usually seen as a modal verb of an advice or an opinion, here it sets a mandatory tone of an action (see lines e.g. 4, 11 and 16). *Should* has a similar meaning here as the legal *shall*, e.g. *Both parties shall be liable for any further damages*, meaning not that they ought to be liable, but that they must be.
- c) Verbs in the present simple tense: these are used to express general and obvious statements, and for the reader they should almost appear as rules. In the poem, however, they again have an ironic connotation (see lines e.g. 5, 10 and 17).
- d) Verbs in the future simple tense: *Will*, in addition to the traditional use for expressing the future, is usually used when promising, offering or predicting something. In this case, it only appears twice, specifically at the very end of the poem, accompanied by the verb *to be* (see lines 39 and 40). By using *will* just in the two final instances, Alexie is trying to hint what his predictions about the American-Indian relations may be.
- e) *Can*: even though *can* does not have any unusual meaning in the poem, merely expressing the possibility or suggestion of an action, it is still vital to include it in the list in order to distinguish it clearly from the other verbal formulations (see lines e.g. 15, 25 and 33).

This classification may be seen as trivial for the purpose of a textual analysis as such, but if such an analysis is then followed by a commented translation (in this case with the target language being Czech, where verbal modality plays an important role in the textual semantic meaning), it is necessary to distinguish the different meanings of such modal verb groups to grasp their meaning in the source language and ultimately to find the appropriate equivalent verb groups in the target language.

2.2 Diabetes

2.2.1. Content Level

This poem was chosen as the subject of the analysis because despite its short length, it has a very strong emotional and reflective effect on the reader. In comparison with the previous poem, it appears to be more serious and tragic, omitting the ironic overtone almost entirely. It is well known that the Native Americans still face several threats on their reservations, although these days they are more of a social and health

character. The previous poem already briefly mentioned one of them – alcoholism – and as the title of the second poem suggests, this one deals with the threat of diabetes.

As mentioned above, the poem “Diabetes” is included in a section of the book entitled “Father and Farther”. This corresponds to a specific autobiographical element appearing in Alexie’s literary work, specifically the absent and often cruel father. His young male protagonists often live with their mother or grandmother, not knowing or being able to remember their fathers at all. The reasons for the absence of the father figure vary. It is not always the case that the father abandons the family, because often he dies of alcoholism or diabetes; the two worst enemies of the Native Americans living on the reservations even to this day.

In an article published electronically on the Smithsonian Magazine website, the author Jen Miller explains that the life on the reservation has included many limitations and restrictions – either geographical or social. One of them gave birth to a traditional element of the Native American Cuisine, so-called “fry bread”. Many Native Americans, especially the Navajo tribe, developed fry bread in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the relocations of the tribes introduced and carried out by the U.S. government. These, so-called “Long Walks”, necessitated an adaptation to new sources of nutrition, and many tribes learned to cook with just a few ingredients given to them in the form of rations by the government (Miller 2008).

Fry bread contains four ingredients – wheat flour, salt, water and baking powder. The resulting dough is then flattened and deep-fried, resembling the Hungarian *langós*, which is popular in Czech culture. In Alexie’s *Smoke Signals* is a scene where the protagonist, Thomas, is telling a story about the other protagonist’s, Victor’s, mother making fry bread for the entire tribe¹⁰; just another example of the importance of this meal to the Native Americans. The difference between the Czech and Native American variant is that fry bread became a symbol of Native American life, an essential part of the Powwows and a growing threat to the Native American’s health.

¹⁰ The “Fry bread” scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_O8bWu6ghE.

Fry bread, therefore, has become a subject of controversy among the Native Americans (as well as U.S. officials), because it plays a vital role in the rise in obesity and diabetes among them. Alexie makes a clear reference to the bread in the poem (see line 9) and the health risks it contains.

2.2.2. The Textual Level

As already stated, the second poem is much shorter than the first, nevertheless it produces almost the same emotional effect upon the reader. The structures of the poems differ greatly. The second consists of 12 lines grouped by four into three separate strophes – creating a “thrice” or a “tristrophic poem” (Turco 2000, 7). The typographical structure of the three strophes creates a constructional scheme and copies itself for the most part – the first being two longer lines (up to 8 syllables per line) followed by the third, shorter one (3-5 syllables per line) and ending with the shortest fourth line (2-4 syllables per line).

Although the poem seems to be written in a free verse, it does contain a non-traditional rhyme discussed in detail in the sub-chapter describing the grammatical analysis of the poem. The rhythm of the poem repeats itself in each strophe – same structure, containing stressed and unstressed passages, with a caesura in the middle of the second line of each stanza, repeats and creates certain dynamics flowing through the poem. The analysis of the sonic level is more apparent when dealing the grammatical, or syntactical, structures of the poem. Therefore, in this case the sonic level analysis will be presented as a part of the sub-chapter on the grammatical level.

2.2.3. Grammatical Level

The twelve lines of the poem are linked into one sentence that extends over all three strophes. However, thanks to the above-mentioned punctuation caesurae, which are prosodic features “caused by punctuation occurring somewhere in the center of the line because of phrasing” (Turco 2000, 22), we can indicate a pause between single phrases. Although there is only one full stop, the whole utterance is divided into four separate phrases. This leaves the end of each phrase to fall in the middle of the second line of each strophe before the caesura. If we focus on the individual ending words, we will extract four words with very similar sounds:

- 1) piece (see line 2),

- 2) feast (see line 6),
- 3) teeth (see line 10),
- 4) me (see line 12).

The rhyming of a chiming syllable or syllables in the middle of a line with another syllable in the middle of the preceding or following line is called interlaced rhyme (*vnitřní rým*) (Turco 2000, 52). It must be mentioned that in the case of the four examples of rhyming words it is not a perfect rhyme, but rather a consonance (*kosonance*). A consonance suggests that all vowel sounds are (in this case almost) interchangeable, as are some of the consonant sounds (Turco 2000, 53).

Another grammatical feature connected with the division into the four syntactic phrases is represented by the initial word of each phrase. With one exception (second phrase, see line 2), they all start with a nominalized verb (*zpodstatnělé sloveso*) created from the gerund form by adding the –ing suffix: having (see line 1), choosing (see line 6) and knowing (see line 10). It is important to mention this grammatical tendency, because when translating it is necessary to avoid being confused by the English syntactical structure and to make alternations to such an extent that would be appropriate for the Czech syntactical tendencies.

3. Translation Bridge

The third and final chapter of the thesis will, as previously outlined, deal with the commented translation of the two poems. The translated, or target, version of the poems will be provided by the author of the thesis and will attempt to demonstrate, in several examples, the choice of appropriate Czech equivalents, which will firstly be based on the literary context of the poems (presented in the first chapter, which identified Alexie's literary work, parallel literary achievements and common thematic patterns). Secondly, it will be based on the textual and semantic specifics of the poems (presented in the second chapter, which highlighted the importance of concentration on the grammatical, textual and contextual specifics of the poems and suggested the areas which a translator will have to take into consideration while working on a proper translation).

Creating the bridge between the English source text (ST, *východí text VT*) and the Czech target text (TT, *cílový text CT*) will be carried out on two levels (treating the two poems separately):

- 1) The specific lexicological or poetical (in the second poem) transfers while systematically working with the "units of translation" (*překladová jednotka*) – "the linguistic level at which ST is recodified in the TT, in other words the element used by the translator when working on the ST" (Hatim and Munday 2005, 17). Again, the translation will use the grammatical, lexical, typographical and rhythmic features of the poems discovered in the second chapter as its foundation.
- 2) The semantic transfers with special consideration for the analysis of meaning, which the American expert on Translation Studies Eugene Nida divided into two major types – the referential and connotative (*denotativní a konotativní význam*) (Hatim and Munday 2005, 35). On this level, the translator will consider the cultural and literary context of the poems while paying a special attention to the target audience, both of the ST and TT, and to the role of the translator as a mediator between two different cultural backgrounds.

Both of the Czech translations are again included in the Appendix part of the thesis, ordered as follows: 1) "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel" – English

Version, 2) "*Indiánský román, jak má být*" – Czech Version, 3) "Diabetes" – English Version, 4) "*Cukrovka*" – Czech Version. For the third chapter it also applies that any references to the ST or TT of the poems will be numbered according to the lines of the poem in which they appear.

3.1. Description of the Translation Bridge

How to Write the Great American Indian Novel – Indiánský román, jak má být

This sub-chapter will deal with the uppermost translation obstacles presented by the first poem. In eight points it will build and follow up on the knowledge gained by the textual analysis from the second chapter and suggest Czech equivalents.

(1) The first obstacle presents itself by giving names, or labels, to the two protagonist ethnic groups – "Indians" and "White men". The labels for Native Americans, as well as Alexie's preference for calling them "Indians", have already been mentioned in the chapter dealing with Native American Identity. Generally, the Czech language is limited when it comes to labeling this particular ethnic minority. The terms used are either "*indiáni*" (which would correspond with the English "Indians") or "*původní obyvatelé Ameriky*" (which would have the same meaning as "Native Americans" or the "indigenous peoples of the Americas", but is too vague and lengthy for our purpose, even if politically correct).

In addition, the importance of the context can be shown in this example. The English language has the same word, "Indian", for both the Native Americans and people from South Asia, citizens of India. Czech does not have this problem, using the term "*indiáni*" to refer to the indigenous peoples of the Americas and "*indové*" to refer to the citizens of India. A simple mistake in adding the wrong suffix would have catastrophic consequences.

The other label is "white man" or "white woman". In this case, Czech has is more compact and has only single word label - "*běloch*" or "*běloška*". Although this has a more negative connotation for the Czech target audience, it still seems to be the most appropriate word to use in the poem. It is also more efficient and elegant concerning the gender disambiguation. While English has to add the "woman" or "man" after the ethnic denotation – "white man", "white woman", "Indian man" and "Indian woman" (see e.g. lines 23 and 24), Czech can manage with single word

constructions – “*běloch*”, “*běloška*”, “*indián*”, “*indiánka*” (see e.g. lines 69 and 71).

(2) Secondly, it is an issue of the specification of the Indians, when said they are originally “from the horse culture” (see e.g. lines 5 and 6). Although Czech has proven to be more efficient with the gender disambiguation, here it is faced with something alien concerning the cultural context. A horse culture is a community which revolves around breeding and using horses. Here specifically it refers to the Plains Indians, which is a common American label for those Native Americans, who are best known among non-Native Americans. In Czech there is no direct translation for those from a horse culture, instead I chose to paraphrase using a description of the origin – “*ti, kteří pochází z oblasti prairie*” (in English: those, who come from the area of the prairie).

(3) Another obstacle was presented by the frequent repetition of conditionals, or “if-clauses” (see e.g. line 8, 12 or 20). To avoid the repetition of “*pokud*”, which is one of the possible Czech equivalents of the English “if”, I chose to use the suffix “*-li*” added to the verb you wish to make the subject of condition (see e.g. lines 45 and 46). The reason behind this choice was twofold. Firstly, by using the “*-li*” clauses I avoided the unnecessary repetitions of the word “*pokud*”. Although this had occurred in the ST version with “if”, English is more tolerant of word repetitions than Czech and therefore it was not abnormal, as it would be in Czech. Secondly, with the “*-li*” structure, the poem more clearly expresses the connotative meaning of it being a pseudo-tutorial and together with the modal verb “should” (discussed later in this chapter) it creates the feeling of it being almost some kind of regulation or order.

(4) In the second chapter we have already noted the 5 groups of modal verbs important for preserving the same meaning with regard to the different levels of strength in the content of the “tutorial”. The verbs “must/have to” were translated into Czech using “*muset*”, which has the corresponding level of obligation. The slightly weaker verb “should” was transferred into Czech as “*měl/měla by*”, which corresponds with the meaning of the English “is supposed to”. The verbs in the present simple tense were kept that way with one or two exceptions, where they were replaced by the Czech future tense in order to weaken the general rule implied by the

present simple, which is not always possible in Czech. Concerning the verb “can”, there were no alternations in meaning made in the translation transfer, so “can” became “*mocht/moci*”. Finally, the future simple tense used only in the last line was transferred as “*stát se*” into Czech, which in English could be translated as “will become”.

Another four examples are less complex than the four already mentioned and are also just single instances, as opposed to the first four which are repeated throughout the poem. They were chosen to join the list of translation obstacles because in these instances are more idiomatic and usually transferred into Czech with a slightly changed connotative meaning.

(5) Right at the beginning of the poem, in the first two lines there are a number of phrases consisting of a noun and the adjective “tragic” – e.g. tragic features, tragic noses or tragic arms. “Tragic” is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (8th Edition, p. 1585) as something “making you feel very sad” or “connected with tragedy (=the style of literature)”. Whereas the obvious Czech corresponding word would be “*tragický*”, which also means something mournful or dreadful, it is often connected with an accident, death or catastrophe. It cannot be used in the context of human tragic features or a tragic writer or poet, when we want to talk about something connected with tragedy.

Therefore, I chose to translate tragic as “*smutný*” (sad), which, on one hand, reduces the expressive function of the word, but on the other hand, fits better in the Czech context of the TT. This practice is unusual, because usually it is the other way around. English uses a lot of emotionally neutral phrases, to which correspond very expressive Czech equivalents (e.g. star = *hvězdička* or *hvězda*, song = *písnička* or *píseň*) (Knittlová 2010, 64-65).

(6) In lines 15 and 16 the Indians are being compared to a storm and the simile lies in the fact that they both bring destruction, in the case of Indians it involves white women who fall in love with them. The comparison is further extended to another feature of the storm – the sudden appearance – which is connected to the disclosure of Indian secrets. Even though, the Czech equivalent “*bouře*” would be just fine, I have decided to use the metonymic transformation (*metonymická transformace*) (Knittlová 2010, 22) and use “*blesk*” (lightning) instead. It does not shift the

meaning because usually when one imagines lightning, one always sees it accompanied by or as a part of a storm.

The lightning comparison better highlights the suddenness of the action as well as the danger that could follow. In addition, later on in the poem the Indians are metaphorically compared to horses and in the Czech cultural context "*Blesk*" is a word that is often used to name a horse (obviously because of its wished-for speed in a horse race).

(7) Another obstacle in the translation process appeared in the line 24, where Alexie writes about the importance of alcohol and fast cars being a part of the great American Indian novel. The exact wording is: "Cars must be driven at high speeds" and we will focus on the adverbial phrase "at high speeds". In this case, I have decided to shift the translation and instead of an equivalent Czech adverbial phrase (which would be e.g. "*velice rychle*") I preferred to use a Czech comparative idiomatic phrase "*jako o závod*" ("as if racing").

In addition, the more idiomatic phrase is used to compensate for the inability of the Czech language to efficiently deal with paratactic sentence conjunction (*souřadnost*). The two English sentences – "Alcohol should be consumed." and "Cars must be driven at high speeds." – stand next to one another in a coordinating position with no interconnection or continuity. In the Czech language it sounds rather unusual to have two sentences with no linkage. Therefore, I tried to compensate by sounding more idiomatic (using the comparative phrase from the previous paragraph) at the end of the designated line (see line 24).

(8) The last issue that occurred during the translation process involved a situation which would come if a "white person loves an Indian". In that case "the white person is Indian by proximity" (see lines 26 and 27), which is a humorous remark on Alexie's part and has to be, therefore, dealt with in the same manner. "Proximity" (*blížkost*) is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (p. 1182) as a state of "being near somebody or something in distance or time", but in this case Alexie obviously meant being near by means of identity (this would be also connected to the "Playing Indian" phenomenon discussed in the first chapter).

For this reason, I insisted on picking a Czech equivalent phrase that would express not only the closeness, but also the taking over of an Indian identity. As a

result I have chosen the phrase “*naoko indián*” (so-called Indian) in order to highlight also the negative connotation, which the adverb “*naoko*” represents.

Diabetes – Cukrovka

The commented translation of the second poem will again be divided into several points as in the case of the first poem. However, it will be focused more on the obstacles to translation arising from the typographical and phrasal division of the poem, respectively in three and four units, as opposed to the first poem's commented translation, which mainly dealt with lexical and cultural issues.

(1) When you approach a poem, what you will first notice is the typographical layout. The question is how big a role the typography plays in the effect on the reader. In his book Turco explains that the respective discipline of prosody which deals with the role of typography is called spatial prosody, or *carmen figuratum* (Turco 2000, 6). Consequently he deals with picture or concrete poems and calligrammes, where the shape of the poem plays a vital role that cannot be omitted or ignored by the translator (Turco 2000, 6-8). In the case of *Diabetes*, the ST text is, as already mentioned, divided into three strophes, which create three spatial triangles. In the translation process I have decided not to strictly follow the triangular shapes of each strophe at the expense of compliance with the caesurae in the second lines and the consonance of the words preceding those caesurae.

(2) The interlaced rhyme, or rather consonance, was the greatest obstacle in the translation process of the second poem, whilst trying to find a way of retaining the consonance in the second line followed by the caesura and at the same time in order not to depart too much from the ST structure. This relates to the above-mentioned list of words:

- 1) piece (see line 2),
- 2) feast (see line 6),
- 3) teeth (see line 10),
- 4) me (see line 12),

which in Czech became:

- 1) *mnohdy* (see line 14),
- 2) *hody* (see line 18),

- 3) *vody* (see line 22),
- 4) *životy* (see line 24).

Even though it was my deepest wish to stay close to the lexical and contextual level of the ST poem, for the sake of conveying the consonance, I have made some alterations. In the case of the ST phrase “piece by piece” (see line 2), which clearly refers to how slowly the sugar is killing the author (see line 1), I chose the Czech adverbial “*mnohdy*” (frequently, often) and instead of linking it to the process of sugar deterioration, I tried to connect it to the rest of the second line by specifying how often he “must eat with more sense than taste” (see lines 3 and 4).

Concerning the second strophe and the word “feast” (see line 6) it was easier to stay faithful to the ST structure and “feast” became the word “*hody*” in the TT, which carries practically the same meaning. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the third strophe, where I was forced to incline towards a looser translation in all four lines. First of all, the four-word phrase “take in my teeth” (see line 10) was replaced by the word “*žvýkám*” (using a notably more expressive action than the English “take”, but meaning the same). I relied on Knittlová's description of the formal differences between Czech and English. In English there tend to be multiword verbal phrases consisting of a semantically weak verb, which is complemented by another linguistic unit carrying the core meaning of the phrase. In Czech these verbal phrases are reflected by semantically strong single word units (Knittlová 2010, 43).

Secondly, line 10 of the TT was expanded by adding the phrase “*jen z mouky a vody*” (meaning “made of only flour and water”), which does not exist in the original ST. I chose to add this phrase firstly to balance the word count (reduced by using “*žvýkám*”) and secondly to keep the word consonance before the caesura. In addition, I wanted to stress the importance of “bread” (specifically the “fry bread” mentioned in the second chapter) as being both the main source of nutrition and the diabetic threat, and consisting of only few main ingredients.

The last translation obstacle was presented by the ST phrase “what contains me” (see line 12) referring to the similarity of content of the bread and the author's body. Another interesting feature of the verb “contain” is its ambiguous double meaning. Again, I consulted the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (p. 313) for the possible definitions, and there are two relevant for our purpose:

- 1) to have as part (or the whole) of its contents or substance (*obsahovat, skládat se z*),
- 2) to restrain, hold in, keep in check; to hold back (from an action) or to prevent from expansion (*potlačit, zabraňovat v rozkvětu či v rozšiřování*).

This creates a pun intended by Alexie to mean both that when one eats the bread it becomes a part of him/her and that eating the bread means to stay limited and constrained in one place (in this case the reservation). It is exceptionally difficult to convey an ambiguous pun from the ST language (English) to the TT language (Czech). In the TT poem I chose the verb “*složit se/být složen*” (to be composed of, to break down). Even though the later meaning “to break down” is more emotionally marked in the target language than in the source language (meaning more informal), it still would have the equivalent effect on the TT reader as it has on the ST reader.

Alexie also takes on a very individualistic approach and refers only to “me”, although he means the broader community of the people living on the reservation, which is also his target audience. I chose to replace the individualistic “me” by the collective “they” in the TT, which resulted in the Czech phrase “*složil se i naše životy*” (“what lives contain”). The reasons behind this replacement were to place more emphasis on the collective lives of the reservation, thus having a greater effect on the Czech target audience, and also to respect the word consonance, which would in this case be maintained.

(3) The last of the most important issues arising during the translation process is alliteration (*aliterace*). I would like to present two passages, in which the alliteration is most visible, starting with line 1. In the first line in the ST – “Having learned sugar kills me” – contains no noticeable alliteration, but thanks to the selection of the Czech words used in the TT a translation shift has occurred. The first line in the TT – “*Zakusit sladké znamená zkázu*” (“Having tasted sweet means destruction”) – is filled with originally unintentional but nicely fitting, “z” alliteration, which I saw as a compensation for not sticking precisely to the typographical layout and word count of certain lines of the poem.

The second most prominent alliteration takes place in lines 7 and 8 of the ST: “[choosing] the right place / and plate”. It was very challenging to find two words which would fit semantically and grammatically and be alliterated at the same time.

Finally, I opted for the following phrase in the TT: “[*a vybírám si*] *správné místo / a správnou misku*” (“and choosing the right place and the right bowl”) (see lines 19 and 20). In this case, two major translation shifts have occurred. Firstly, the English “plate” was replaced by the Czech “bowl” strictly for the purpose of staying faithful to the alliteration. Secondly, the English “right” has doubled into two Czech “*správné/správnou*” with the aim of the phrase sounding more rhythmical and with even greater strengthening of the alliteration.

Conclusion

The two translations of the poems, which formed the practical foundation of this bachelor thesis (with English as the source language and Czech as the target language), played a significant role in the course that this thesis eventually took. Not only with regard to the textual analysis being *ex post facto* influenced by the translation process, but also to focusing on many Alexie's cultural references that would may be otherwise unnoticed by a casual reader of his poetry. As mentioned above, the two poems "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel" and "Diabetes", selected from one of Alexie's later collections of poetry and short stories *The Summer of Black Widows*, differ from one another on almost every level.

The former of the two poems is a prose poem composed of 20 pairs of lines, and the analysis of the poem in the second chapter was focused more on the contextual, grammatical and lexicological choices of the author, which were then also the focus of the commented translation part (e.g. the differences in modality of the verbs used in the poem, the labels given to the members of specific ethnic groups and their connotations in both ST and TT, or the frequent use of mixed conditionals as a way of hinting at the tutorial characteristics of the poem). In addition, there were several instances of translation shifts, when it was necessary to change the wording of certain phrases in the TT in order to avoid sounding awkward and to add to the idiomatic expressivity of the TT poem.

The latter of the two poems is shorter than the former and consists of 3 strophes per 4 lines. In this case, the analysis as well as the commented translation part focused more on identifying (and consequently either staying faithful to or departing from) the rhythmic, sonic and typographical level of the poem (e.g. the interlaced consonance and following caesurae in the middle of the second line of every strophe, the alliterations or the division of the poem into three typographical triangles). Although shorter, the second poem, "Diabetes", consumed more time and creative energy when translating, and this is reflected in the third chapter, which deals with justifying the chosen translation strategies.

The thesis also attempted to connect the knowledge (either already gained or taken from the primary and secondary sources) about Native American culture with at least some of the translation solutions (e.g. Alexie's view of the longevity of the

Native Americans and maintaining their identity intact, blurring of the ethnic and gender boundaries or the importance as well as the curse of the so-called “fry bread” in Native American cuisine). This particular knowledge caused several deviations or translation shifts in the both of the TTs and therefore proved to be highly relevant for the purpose of this thesis.

Although content of this thesis was limited to only two poems, the material still provided for an exhaustive and detailed description in the theoretical part (Alexie's life and work), the theoretical-practical part (the textual analysis of the poems) and the practical part (the translation and its justification). This observation could suggest a possible area of focus for future research.

Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question of how non-Native Americans depict and perceive Native Americans and how Sherman Alexie, the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Native American writer/poet/filmmaker, is trying to emphasize their ethnic identity by using a combination of playful humor and though frankness. In addition, it tries to define Alexie as a representative of this ethnic minority by describing the translation of two of his poems – “How to Write the Great American Indian Novel” and “Diabetes” – and justify the translation solutions given herein.

Initially, it defines Sherman Alexie as an author-poet and identifies common patterns in various genres of his works and at the same time tries to highlight the main characteristics of his literary works that set him apart from his peers or predecessors. It shows how are these patterns interwoven in the two designated poems and the importance of the translator knowing the cultural context of the references used in the poems in the process of translation.

The practical part of the thesis (the second and third chapter) contains the analysis and commented translation of the two Alexie's poems. The findings of the analysis and the translation together with the literary theory defining the author's voice and purpose show how the past and present trends in perception of Native Americans might affect a given literary translation. Throughout the practical part the role of the translator as a mediator between two different cultures will be emphasized.

Keywords: Sherman Alexie, Native American poetry, ethnic labeling, poetry translation, textual analysis of poetry, commented translation

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se snaží odpovědět na otázky, jak lidé, kteří nejsou rodilí Američané, chápou a popisují původní obyvatele Ameriky a jak se Sherman Alexie, spisovatel/básník/režisér pocházející z kmenů Spokane a Coeur d'Alene, snaží popsat indiánskou identitu pomocí kombinace hravého humoru a tvrdé pravdy. Tato práce se navíc zaměřuje na Alexieho literární činnost skrze překlady dvou básní – „*Indiánský román, jak má být*“ a „*Cukrovka*“ – a dále ospravedlňuje použitá překladatelská řešení.

Práce nejprve definuje Shermana Alexie jako autora-básníka a identifikuje společné rysy různých žánrů jeho tvorby, zatímco se snaží zdůraznit, jak se těmito rysy liší od svých vrstevníků a předchůdců. Práce také ukazuje, jak se tyto rysy prolínají v jeho dvou básních a také jak důležitou roli má pro překladatele kulturní kontext použitých odkazů v procesu překládání.

Praktická část práce (respektive druhá a třetí kapitola) se zaměřuje na analýzu a následný komentovaný překlad dvou vybraných básní z autorovy tvorby. Poznatky vyplývající z analýzy a překladu textů spojené s literární teorií definující hlas a záměr autora společně poukazují na to, jak historické i současné trendy chápání amerických indiánů mohou ovlivnit daný literární překlad. V rozsahu praktické části práce je také zdůrazněna role překladatele jakožto prostředníka mezi dvěma rozdílnými kulturami.

Klíčová slova: Sherman Alexie, poezie amerických indiánů, štitkování etnických skupin, překlad poezie, textová analýza básně, komentovaný překlad

Resumé

Pod pojmem "americký indián" si každý představí něco jiného. Některým se vybavili původní obyvatelé Ameriky z románů Karla Maye, kteří žijí v souladu s přírodou, tancují kolem ohně, vyvolávají duchy svých předků a vždy stojí bok po boku s hlavním hrdinou příběhu (často bělochem) a bojují za nastolení pořádku. Jiným se vybavili indiánští válečníci skalpující nevinné ženy a bojující s bělochy o americkou půdu. S postupem času se tyto představy rozmazávají, ale stereotypy s nimi spojené zde existují dodnes. Otázkou zůstává, jak máme tyto stereotypy správně vnímat (či se jim vyhýbat úplně) a jestli vůbec máme přidělovat „štítky“ jednotlivým etnickým skupinám.

V českém kulturním prostředí je velmi těžké rozeznávat stereotypy spojené s původními obyvateli Ameriky, jelikož nám chybí dostatečné množství literárního materiálu psaného v jazyce českém k vytvoření objektivního posudku. Většina literárních či akademických prací pojednávajících o amerických indiánech je totiž většinou v původním jazyce, kterým v tomto případě z velké části bývá angličtina. Tato bakalářská práce však nemá za cíl kritizovat nedostupnost těchto prací v češtině, ale spíše chce prezentovat další možné překlady, které spadají do oblasti zájmu točícího se kolem původních obyvatelů Ameriky.

Pro účely této práce byly vybrány dvě básně z literární dílny Shermana Alexieho, jmenovitě „How to Write the Great American Indian Novel“ („Indiánský román, jak má být“) a „Diabetes“ („Cukrovka“), které budou sloužit jako materiál k textové analýze a následnému komentovanému překladu. Právě proto je také většina primární a sekundární literatury použité a citované v této práci z paralelní či předchozí Alexieho literární tvorby. Mezi další důležitou použitou sekundární literaturu patří kniha Daniela Grassiana *Understanding Sherman Alexie* (použitá hlavně k teoretickému doplnění Alexieho biografie a literárních úspěchů) a dále kniha Lewise Turco *The Book of Forms* (sloužící k analýze textové a básnické). Ke komentovanému překladu bylo použito dvou hlavních zdrojů, a to jmenovitě *Překlad a překládání* od Dagmar Knittlové a *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book* od autorů Basila Hatima a Jeremyho Mundaye. Samozřejmě nesmí být opomenut velmi přínosný zdroj, co se lexikologické stránky týče, a to 8. vydání anglického slovníku *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*.

Co se týče struktury této práce, je rozdělena do tří hlavních kapitol, z nichž první se zabývá Alexieho životem a charakteristikou jeho tvorby, druhá je zaměřená na textovou analýzu dvou určených básní a třetí pak uzavírá práci komentovaným překladem, který spojuje poznatky z prvních dvou kapitol a užívá je v praxi. Třetí kapitola také obsahuje jednotlivá překladatelská řešení společně s důvody a vysvětlením jejich volby. Výsledkem této práce jsou dvě básně z oblasti působení amerických indiánů přeložené z angličtiny (jakožto výchozího jazyka) do češtiny (jakožto cílového jazyka), které usilují o stejný efekt na českého cílového čtenáře a jsou zasazené do českého kulturního prostředí.

Za výběrem tématu této bakalářské práce, jakožto takového, které není v českém kulturním kontextu běžné, stály hlavně dva důvody. První představoval můj dlouhodobý zájem o studia spojená s americkými indiány (hlavně po shlédnutí Alexieho filmu *Smoke Signals*, 1998) a druhým důvodem byla má aspirace o aktivní účast v procesu rozšiřování současné identity amerických indiánů do povědomí těch, žijících za hranicemi indiánských rezervací.

Ačkoliv byla analýza zaměřená pouze na dvě Alexieho básně, stále bylo poskytnuto mnoho praktického i teoretického materiálu k následnému zpracování. Tento poznatek by mohl sloužit jako pohnutka k zaměření budoucích akademických či literárních prací na oblast amerických indiánů.

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Appendix

1. How to Write the Great American Indian Novel

- 2 All of the Indians must have tragic features: tragic noses, eyes, and arms.
2 Their hands and fingers must be tragic when they reach for tragic food.
- 4 The hero must be a half-breed, half white and half Indian, preferably
4 from a horse culture. He should often weep alone. That is mandatory.
- 6 If the hero is an Indian woman, she is beautiful. She must be slender
6 and in love with a white man. But if she loves an Indian man
- 8 then he must be a half-breed, preferably from a horse culture.
8 If the Indian woman loves a white man, then he has to be so white
- 10 that we can see the blue veins running through his skin like rivers.
10 When the Indian woman steps out of her dress, the white man gasps
- 12 at the endless beauty of her brown skin. She should be compared to nature:
12 brown hills, mountains, fertile valleys, dewy grass, wind, and clear water.
- 14 If she is compared to murky water, however, then she must have a secret.
14 Indians always have secrets, which are carefully and slowly revealed.
- 16 Yet Indian secrets can be disclosed suddenly, like a storm.
16 Indian men, of course, are storms. They should destroy the lives
- 18 of any white women who choose to love them. All white women love
18 Indian men. That is always the case. White women feign disgust
- 20 at the savage in blue jeans and T-shirt, but secretly lust after him.
20 White women dream about half-breed Indian men from horse cultures.
- 22 Indian men are horses, smelling wild and gamey. When the Indian man
22 unbuttons his pants, the white woman should think of topsoil.
- 24 There must be one murder, one suicide, one attempted rape.
24 Alcohol should be consumed. Cars must be driven at high speeds.
- 26 Indians must see visions. White people can have the same visions
26 if they are in love with Indians. If a white person loves an Indian
- 28 then the white person is Indian by proximity. White people must carry
28 an Indian deep inside themselves. Those interior Indians are half-breed

30 and obviously from horse cultures. If the interior Indian is male
30 then he must be a warrior, especially if he is inside a white man.

32 If the interior Indian is female, then she must be a healer, especially if she is inside
32 a white woman. Sometimes there are complications.

34 An Indian man can be hidden inside a white woman. An Indian woman
34 can be hidden inside a white man. In these rare instances,

36 everybody is a half-breed struggling to learn more about his or her horse culture.
36 There must be redemption, of course, and sins must be forgiven.

38 For this, we need children. A white child and an Indian child, gender
38 not important, should express deep affection in a childlike way.

40 In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written,
40 all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.

(Alexie 1996, 94-95)

Indiánský román, jak má být

42 Všichni indiáni musí mít smutné rysy: smutné nosy, oči a paže. Jejich ruce i prsty by
měli vypadat smutně, když se budou natahovat po smutném jídle.

44 Hrdina románu musí být míšenec, napůl běloch a napůl indián a nejlépe pocházet z
oblasti prémie. Musí často plakat, když je sám. Tak to musí být.

46 Je-li hrdinkou indiánka, musí být krásná. Musí být štíhlá a zamilovaná do bělocha.
Zamiluje-li se do indiána,

48 musí to být míšenec a nejlépe pocházet z oblasti prémie. Zamiluje-li se do bělocha,
měl by být tak bílý,

50 aby mu kůži prosvítaly modré žíly, proudící jeho tělem jako řeky. Pokud se před ním
indiánka svlékne, musí být běloch ohromen

52 nekonečnou krásou její hnědé kůže. Autor by ji měl přirovnávat k přírodě: k hnědým
kopcům, horám, úrodným údolím, orosené trávě, větru a průzračné vodě.

54 Přirovnává-li ji však k vodě kalné, musí mít nějaké tajemství. Indiáni mají mnoho
tajemství, která jsou časem postupně odhalena.

56 Může se stát, že dojde k náhlému odhalení, jako když uhodí blesk. Indiáni a blesky
mají mnoho společného. Musí zničit život

58 všech bělošek, které se je rozhodnou milovat. Všechny bělošky totiž milují indiány.
Tak je tomu vždycky. Bělošky totiž naoko předstírají odpor

60 vůči tomu barbarovi v modrých džínách a tričku, ale tajně po něm touží.
Bělošky tajně sní o indiánských míšencích pocházejících z oblasti prémie.

62 Indiáni jsou jako koně, jdou cítit po divočině a odvaze. Když si indián rozepne
kalhoty, měla by bělošku hned napadnout plodnost.

64 Indiánský román musí obsahovat jednu vraždu, jednu sebevraždu a pokus o
znásilnění. Bude konzumován alkohol a auta, tam budou jezdit jako o závod.

66 Indiáni musí mít vidění. Běloši je mohou mít také, ale jen pokud jsou současně
zamilováni do indiánů. Je-li běloch zamilován do indiána,

68 stává se z něj naoko indián. Každý běloch má hluboko v sobě indiána. Tito niterní
indiáni musí být míšenci

70 a pocházet z oblasti prémie. Skrývá-li se v nitru indián, bude to válečník, zvláště pak,
pokud je to v nitru bělocha.

72 Skrývá-li se v nitru indiánka, bude to léčitelka, zvláště pak, pokud je to v nitru
bělošky. Někdy ovšem mohou nastat komplikace.

74 Indián může být ukryt uvnitř bělošky. Indiánka může být ukryta uvnitř bělocha. V
těchto zvláštních případech

76 se ze všech stanou míšenci pátrající po svém původu, nejlépe z oblasti prerie.
V indiánském románu musí dojít na spasení a hříchy musí být odpuštěny.

78 Proto potřebujeme děti. Bez ohledu na pohlaví k sobě budou bělošské a indiánské
dítě pociťovat dětskou náklonnost.

80 Ve správně napsaném indiánském románu se všichni běloši nakonec stanou indiány a
všichni indiáni se stanou duchy.

2. Diabetes

Having learned sugar kills me
2 piece by piece, I have to eat
with more sense
4 than taste

so I travel alone in this
6 limited feast, choosing
the right place
8 and plate

and take the hard bread exactly
10 in my teeth, knowing what
the bread contains is
12 what contains me.

(Alexie 1996, 44)

Cukrovka

Zakusit sladké znamená zkázu
14 mnohdy, musím jíst
a spíše se svěřit rozvaze
16 než risku

o samotě se prodírám těmi
18 skromnými hody, a vybírám si
správné místo
20 a správnou misku

žvýkám okoralý chleba,
22 jen z mouky a vody, a vím, že
z čeho on je složen,
24 složí se i životy.