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“Idolatry”: a Reader Response Analysis

Sherman Alexie is a Native American short-story author and poet whose main characters are always Native Americans, or as he refers to them in his books, Indians. His book *Blasphemy* is a collection of new and old short stories, and contained in it is a very short, one page story called “Idolatry.” When I first read the name, I thought it was supposed to be an intentional typo, that what the title really was, was “Idoltary,” playing on the words “Idol,” and “Adultery.” However after looking the word up, I found that it means “worship of idols...extreme admiration, love, or reverence for something or someone” (“Idolatry”).

In America, anyone would tell you the first thing they think about when they hear the word “idol,” is the singing competition show *American Idol*. They would also tell you that they had a love/hate relationship with arguably its most famous judge, Simon Cowell, a British man who often “rubbed people the wrong way,” but also give great compliments when he was really blown away by a performance. The story “Idolatry” specifically refers to a British man asking “What are you going to sing?” This, along with

the previous statement that “this audition wasn’t Indian,” is the first hint that this show’s setting is the *American Idol* auditions (Alexie). This is apparent to any American, but what about other readers who have never known *American Idol*? They might take it as someone auditioning for some kind of singing gig in any British-colonized or postcolonial country.

Sherman Alexie is known in America for writing about “Indians.” We, Alexie-read Americans, know him as one of the most influential Native American writers of this century because he is able to bring to light Native American histories in a way that European Americans can understand without being angered. However, what about anyone who has never heard of Alexie, or read his work? It is possible, that they would have read the word “Indian,” and thought someone from India, which would also work with the British man, since India is a postcolonial country. Someone who has read Alexie before, however, would have known that he writes about Native Americans, and that he often ridicules European American customs in his books. Examples of this from “Idolatry” would be that it is set during auditions for *American Idol*, and that Marie (the protagonist) sings a Patsy Cline song.

The last sentence of the story is where readers are going to determine what they feel is the meaning of the story. After Marie is told that she is a bad singer, and that everyone in her life has lied to her all her life, she runs back to her mother (one of those people who has lied to her), and cries. The last line says: “In this world, we must love

the liars or go unloved” (Alexie). Here, readers can take this a few different ways. A reader who has very few people in their life and feels that you shouldn’t throw out people who wrong you, because it might not be worth it to lose them over it, would likely love this ending and really enjoy the story. However someone who is quick to hold a grudge and doesn’t often forgive would likely hate this story and think it sends out the wrong message.

Works Cited

Alexie, Sherman. "Idolatry." *Blasphemy*. New York: Grove Press, 2012. Kindle. Web.

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"Idolatry." Google Online Dictionary. May 2014.