

University of Pardubice

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Religious Traditions in Louise Erdrich's fiction

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Bachelor Thesis

2019

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2017/2018

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Karolína Filáková**
Osobní číslo: **H16252**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obory: **Religionistika (dvouoborové)**
Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi (dvouoborové)
Název tématu: **Náboženské tradice v díle Luise Erdrichové**
Zadávací katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na otázku náboženství, náboženských tradic a jejich případných střetů v románové tvorbě americké spisovatelky Luisi Erdrichové. V úvodu práce studentka charakterizuje tvorbu zvolené autorky a zasadí ji do širšího literárně-historického kontextu, především s ohledem na tradici americké indiánské literatury, případně literárního postmodernismu. Svůj výběr konkrétních děl tvorby Erdrichové krátce zdůvodní. Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolených děl, v nichž se studentka soustředí na postavu sestry Leopoldy a její duchovní vývoj. Bude analyzovat, jakým způsobem Erdrichová prostřednictvím této postavy ztvárňuje indiánské a křesťanské tradice a jejich střet. Zaměří se rovněž na literární prostředky, jichž Erdrichová používá. Své vývody bude vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat se sekundárními zdroji. Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o způsobu zobrazení náboženských tradic v tvorbě Erdrichové.

Rozsah grafických prací:

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná**


Seznam odborné literatury:

Primární díla: Erdrich, Louise. "Marie Lazzare" in *Love Medicine*. 1984.
Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. 1988., Erdrich, Louise. *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. 2001.
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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **30. dubna 2018**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **31. března 2019**



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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2018

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Religious Traditions in Louise Erdrich's fiction

Annotation

This thesis aims to analyse the depiction of religious traditions in the work of the contemporary American writer Louise Erdrich. It also analyses the way the author combines these traditions with other elements typical of her work. The main body of this work focuses on the analysis of characters of selected Erdrich's novels and their attitude towards religious traditions.

Key words

religion, traditions, Catholicism, Anishinaabe, Louise Erdrich

Název

Náboženské tradice v díle Louise Erdrichové

Anotace

Cílem této práce je analyzovat vyobrazení náboženských tradic v díle americké spisovatelky Louise Erdrichové. Práce také rozebírá způsob, jakým autorka tyto tradice kombinuje s jinými prvky typickými pro její tvorbu. Jádrem práce se soustředí na rozbor postav z vybraných knih Erdrichové a na jejich postoj k náboženským tradicím.

Klíčová slova

náboženství, tradice, katolicismus, Anishinaabe, Louise Erdrichová

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 7 |
| 1. The Author | 9 |
| 2. Pauline | 12 |
| 2.1 Pauline's jealousy | 14 |
| 2.2 Pauline's practices | 16 |
| 2.3 Defeating Satan | 18 |
| 3. Nanapush | 20 |
| 3.1 Attitude towards Pauline | 20 |
| 3.2 The symbol of the traditional ways | 22 |
| 3.3 Depiction of intimate life | 23 |
| 3.4 Resistance to colonialism | 24 |
| 4. Fleur | 25 |
| 4.1 Different attitude towards Fleur | 25 |
| 4.2 Similarities between Fleur and Pauline | 26 |
| 4.3 Strong figure | 26 |
| 4.4 The last act of resistance | 28 |
| 5. Father Damien | 30 |
| 5.1 Power, gender and religion | 30 |
| 5.2 Similar or different? | 31 |
| 5.3 Two people in one cassock | 32 |
| 6. Marie Lazzare | 35 |
| 6.1 Marie's origin | 35 |
| 6.2 At the convent | 35 |
| 6.3 Years later | 38 |
| Conclusion | 41 |
| Resumé | 43 |
| Bibliography | 46 |

Introduction

The primary aim of this paper is to analyse the depiction of religious traditions in the novels of Louise Erdrich. I plan to describe how the author mixes them with other important literary elements and aspects. Each chapter explores a selected character of Erdrich's novels because it is their behaviour that can help analyse traditions, beliefs and practices. The novels used as primary sources for this thesis are *Tracks*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* and *Saint Marie*, a short story in *Love Medicine*. Information about was taken from the covers of her books and her blog.

The first chapter provides information about Louise Erdrich, her writing style and where she acquires inspiration. This chapter describes, too, in what ways she resembles other authors and which characteristics are typical for her works.

The second chapter focuses on one of Erdrich's most complex and controversial characters, Pauline Puyat. It touches the subject of her inferiority complex, her desire to belong somewhere and her alienation from her family and culture. The second chapter also provides more detailed description of Pauline's involvement in various relationships and her influence on them. The most important aspect of this chapter is Pauline's fall into darkness and the consequences she, and those around her, must suffer and her subsequent change into Sister Leopolda.

The third chapter describes the figure of powerful Anishinaabe shaman and trickster Nanapush, who personifies the Native American culture and beliefs. The chapter contains analysis of his power, his beliefs and practices. It also contrasts the personalities of Nanapush and Pauline and their different life values.

The fourth chapter is focused on another representative of old Anishinaabe traditions, strong and independent Fleur Pillager. This chapter explores the connection between her supernatural powers and the old spirits, how she uses that power and what she is capable of to protect her ancestors' land and culture.

The following chapter analyses Father Damien, a young priest who arrives at the reservation to spread Christianity and baptize souls. The chapter mainly focuses on Damien's power as a male priest, how his transformation from a woman to a man changes his views and how other characters respond to his secret.

The last chapter examines the life story of Pauline's daughter, Marie Lazzare. It describes her origin, her stay at the convent and her ambiguous relationship with Sister Leopolda. It also includes her opinion on the incidents that transpired on the convent and how her feelings for Leopolda changed with time.

The sources used for this thesis are all in English language.

1. The Author

Louise Erdrich is an award-winning American Indian writer of novels, children's books, short stories, and poetry. As a daughter of a German-American father and a Native American mother she is also a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, also known as the Anishinaabe or Ojibwe Indians. Her Native American heritage greatly influenced her literary work, both as a poetess and a novelist.

In her works, Erdrich is inspired by Native American myths and oral histories, she also often uses the motif of a conflict between the Native and non-Native cultures. She beautifully depicts the life in the reservations, the closeness of the community, and stresses the importance of family bonds. One of the most important things for her, as a contemporary Native American writer, is protecting and celebrating her culture. "Erdrich is also one of many contemporary Native American writers who have returned to (or continued) storytelling as a means of making manifest the many silenced voices of the dispossessed or marginalized, both past and present."¹ Erdrich herself connects this purpose of her works with the place influenced by the culture:

Contemporary Native American writers ... must tell the stories of contemporary survivors while protecting and celebrating the cores of cultures left in the wake of the catastrophe [cultural annihilation]. And in this, there always remains the land. The approximate 3 percent of the United States that is still held by Native American nations is cherished in each detail, still informed with old understandings, still known and used, in some cases, changelessly.²

Erdrich's novels are mostly set in the environment which is well known to her such as the towns in North Dakota or the city of Minneapolis where Erdrich currently lives and runs her own independent bookstore, Birchbark Books. However, the real places where Erdrich's stories are set are well hidden behind carefully painted descriptions and made-up names. This is one of the reasons why many critics tend to compare Erdrich's style of writing to the one of William Faulkner:

Like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, Erdrich's use of geography is fictionalized and cannot be related directly to real locations identifiable on the maps. Indeed, only in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), the seventh novel in the series, is the reservation named as the eponymous Little No Horse. As Peter Beidler and Gay Barton have

¹ Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "Introduction," in *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*, ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

² Louise Erdrich, "Where I Ought to Be," in *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*, ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48.

shown, the geographical spaces depicted in Erdrich's North Dakota novels are represented in deliberately misleading ways to discourage the eager reader from making too-simple identifications with real places.³

Faulkner's influence on Erdrich's writing style, or influence of post/modernist writers generally, can be also found in her focus on family sagas, the importance of a certain region, too, the sense of history haunting the present and the use of both, multiple voices and non-linear narratives.⁴

The idea of using multiple narrators in her books came to life thanks to a comment made by Erdrich's husband and collaborator Michael Dorris. He pointed out that in the language of the Athabaskan Indians of Alaska, there is not any word for "I" but only for "we". This subsequently suggested the concept of multiple narrators which would enable Erdrich to capture the collective perspective of traditional Chippewa oral narratives.⁵

Erdrich's tendency to switch between voices of different characters provides the reader with a very complex picture of every situation. This complexity is underlined by the variedness of the characters, their opinions, their social background and their approaches to life. The most apparent contrast between two narrators can be found in Erdrich's novel *Tracks* (1988) where she uses the voice of a wily tribal elder and a young confused mixed-blood girl:

Tracks is a highly effective, politicized text in which the reader shuttles between, not two different perceptions of reality, but two diametrically different realities: that of a people in the grip of disease, death and spiritual despair, and that of a group of courageous and irreverent survivors. Somewhere in the middle of these two realities emerges the world of the Chippewa in all its power and complexity.⁶

Another of Erdrich's novels, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), provides an extremely intricate story focused on one of Erdrich's most likeable characters, Father Damien. The main protagonist of this book is also the only narrator of this story, except for occasional chapters which provide a slightly different perspective of the events. However, being told by a single character, does not mean that *The Last Report* is any less complex than Erdrich's other novels, such as *Love Medicine* (1984)

³ Deborah L. Madsen, "The Aesthetics of *Mino Bimadiziwin*," in *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, The Plague of Doves*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 4.

⁴ Wong, "Introduction," 6.

⁵ Susan Pérez Castillo, "Postmodernism, Native American Literature and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy," *The Massachusetts Review* 32, no. 2 (1991): 285-94.

⁶ Castillo, "Postmodernism," 285-94.

where each chapter is told by a different person. The complexity of *The Last Report* is based on its non-linear narrative and Erdrich's ability to intertwine different timelines.

In her novels, Erdrich's consummate use of discontinuous and multiple narratives makes the readers identify themselves with the characters and "emphasizes not the individual anguish of the protagonists of Native American novels, but the greater anguish of lost communal/tribal identity and the heroic efforts of a fragmented community to hold on to what is left."⁷

Erdrich's novels are also full of symbols, hidden meanings, unexpected references and well combined literary elements. Whereas some authors focus on, for example, the sociological aspect of their works and others concentrate on hidden criticism, Louise Erdrich's novels have it all. She successfully combines cultural elements, religious traditions, psychological elements and descriptions of characters' mental processes, all bound together with disguised, yet strong, criticism of racism and colonialism. All these aspects of literature are tightly, inseparably and brilliantly interconnected. That is the reason why if we want to discuss one of these aspects, we are bound to mention the others, too. For instance, when discussing religious traditions in *Tracks* (1988) and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), it is necessary to include Pauline's downfall to madness, the problems within the tribe, Father Damien's inner identity struggle and naturally the suppression of the Native American culture.

⁷ Louis Owens, "Erdrich and Dorris's Mixed-bloods and Multiple Narratives," in *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*, ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55.

2. Pauline

Pauline Puyat is one of the main characters of the *Love Medicine* series, one of the narrators of the novel *Tracks*. She provides the reader with a unique view of events that transpire throughout the novel as well as her own thoughts and comments. The way Erdrich wrote Pauline's narrative "not only enables the reader to enter a psychotic mind and see its distorted thought process but also reveals how Pauline's interaction with various family systems contributes to her psychological deterioration."⁸ After careful reading of the text, the reader ascertains that Pauline does not tell a story for the story's sake but by narrating her own tale she tries to persuade her audience to accept her interpretation of the story and her self-evaluation.⁹ Pauline also subconsciously tries to defend her behaviour and justify her actions and crimes.

Pauline is a person of mixed origin. Her father was Polish, her mother was a half-Indian. Her mixed heritage could represent her inner struggle, her sense of not belonging anywhere. She looks like a typical Indian, her hair, her features, just the shade of her skin is a bit fairer than that of other inhabitants of the reservation, but she still considers it a fault, a drawback of her life. "I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white. I wanted to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian. That was because even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us."¹⁰ Pauline believes that the time of Indians is over, that they are considered outdated and on the verge of extinction. Despite her unwanted Indian heritage, the reader can understand that Pauline still believes in the power of Indian shamans and spirits. Her attitude towards the Ojibwe customs is clearly visible in the way she feels about Fleur. On the one hand Pauline fears her and is jealous about her, on the other she feels drawn to Fleur and her family.

The roots of Pauline's troubles can be found in her being unhappy with herself and her origin. She describes herself as "a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes,"¹¹ she refuses to speak her native language and even demands to be sent from the reservation, to her father's sister. Her thoughts suggest that she suffers from strong inferiority complex¹² which in combination

⁸ Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," in *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, The Plague of Doves*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 19.

⁹ Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 25.

¹⁰ Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 14.

¹¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 16.

¹² Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 26.

with her movement to Argus results in her alienation with her family of origin. She does not even care what happened to her parents and sisters during a particularly harsh winter while she still lives in Argus.

When Fleur comes to Argus for work, Pauline gets attached to her, almost infatuated with her. From the beginning Pauline's attitude towards Fleur is quite contradictory. She admires Fleur's strength, independence, physical attractiveness, self-confidence and her ability to manipulate men but at the same time she resents her for the very same reasons. "Erdrich has suggested in an interview with us that Pauline is afraid of Fleur, as many women who allow themselves to be controlled are threatened by women who do as they please."¹³ Pauline's ambivalence is later proved when Fleur is raped by the men working at the butcher's shop. Pauline is present to the whole incident, watches from afar but does nothing to help Fleur:

That is when I should have gone to Fleur, saved her, thrown myself on Dutch ... I closed my eyes and put my hands on my ears, so there is nothing more to describe but what I couldn't block out: those yells from Russell, Fleur's hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language and our names repeated over and over among the words.¹⁴

Pauline then feels guilty about it so she avenges Fleur by locking the rapists in the freezer, where they seek refuge during a tornado, and subsequently by causing their deaths. By this action she tries to relieve her conscience, but it only magnifies her guilt and adds to her already troubled mind.¹⁵

Trying to escape her guilt and the nightmares about her victims Pauline returns to the reservation with Bernadette Morrissey whose pity Pauline obtains by inventing stories about her mistreatment by her relatives in Argus. Bernadette becomes Pauline's mentor, she teaches Pauline the ways of white civilization, "how to read and write the nun's script that she'd learned, French educated in Quebec."¹⁶ As Bernadette works with the sick and dying she also teaches Pauline how to relieve the dying, how to prepare a body for the funeral and what to do for the bereaved. It is during one of these visits, to Pauline's former classmate, that the reader becomes aware of Pauline's strange fascination with death and the joy it brings her. Pauline's perception of herself slightly changes, too, as she now sees herself as a 'bearer of death'. She invites it to the houses she visits with Bernadette, she passes it onto the living by not washing

¹³ Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 27.

¹⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 26.

¹⁵ Michelle R. Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans: Pauline and Fleur in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 1 (spring 1995): 41.

¹⁶ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 64.

her hands after arranging the body.¹⁷ This is also the moment when the reader notices the insinuations concerning Pauline's beliefs. "Then I slept, black and dreamless, . . . , as I would now sleep every night."¹⁸ Since dreams are extremely important for Anishinaabe shamans, as the reader learns from Nanapush and Fleur, Pauline's inability to experience dreams anymore indicates her estrangement from her native culture. However, it cannot be said that Pauline holds true Catholic beliefs either. "It was no matter to me what happened after life. I didn't care."¹⁹ The concept of afterlife is one of the main themes of Christianity so instead of practising the mainstream Catholicism, Pauline rather invents her own version.²⁰

2.1 Pauline's jealousy

Pauline's feelings for Fleur turn even more negative when she gets involved with Eli Kashpaw. Pauline is jealous about their relationship because of her own sexual deprivation. As Pauline's narrative continues, she gradually becomes sexually attracted to Eli. When he rejects her advances, she fabricates a careful plan how to get her revenge on him. In this moment Pauline turns to the Anishinaabe traditions and obtains medicinal powder from a shaman. Not only she uses the powder to bewitch Eli and Bernadette's 14-year-old daughter Sophie but also uses Sophie's youth and naivety to achieve her aim. Pauline influences Sophie by her observations and comments about Eli and later sends her spirit into Sophie's body and controls both Sophie and Eli during their sexual activities.²¹ Due to Pauline's scheming their families find out about the sexual escapade which leads to breaking the bonds between the families and even within them.²² Later after being rejected by both Eli and her family, Sophie breaks down in Eli's yard and refuses to move. Sophie's suffering induces a miracle in the form of a crying statue of the Virgin Mary which then encourages Pauline to become a proselytising Christian²³ as she is the one who witnesses this miracle:

I believed it was meant for the girl alone, and for myself, my private miracle... The girl's face tipped up, slack, less human than the small statue... The Virgin stared down. Her brow was clear, Her cheeks bone-pale, Her lips urgently forming a secret syllable, all of a sudden trembled. That's when I saw the first tear.

¹⁷ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 69.

¹⁸ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 69.

¹⁹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 69.

²⁰ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 41.

²¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Identity Politics, Syncretism, Catholicism, and Anishinaabe Religion in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," *Religion & Literature* 26, no. 1 (spring 1994): 124.

²² Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 29.

²³ Friedman, "Identity Politics," 124.

There were more. Although Her expression never changed, She wept a hail of rain from Her wide brown eyes. Her tears froze to hard drops, stuck visibly in the corners of Her mouth, formed a transparent glaze along Her column throat, rolled down the stiff folds of Her gown and struck the poised snake... I kept my place, kneeling in the Virgin's sight. Our gazes were locked now, and no one noticed when I put out my hand and scooped the hardened tears that lay scattered at Her feet... I dropped them into my side pocket and did not imagine how the warmth of my legs would melt them back to tears again, which happened... the only proof was the damp cloth that soon dried, and my memory.²⁴

Later, when Pauline gains first-hand experience of a man's touch, she associates the tears of the statue with the sympathy of shared knowledge. "In God's spiritual embrace She experienced a loss more ruthless than we can imagine."²⁵

By the time Pauline finds out she is carrying a child, she has already entered the Mission and "has betrothed herself to God".²⁶ Pauline's continuous attempts to get rid of her unborn baby only further prove the increasing hatred towards her Anishinaabe roots as the child was fathered by Napoleon Morrissey. She considers them something dark and evil. "Satan was the one who had pinned me with his horns."²⁷

Pauline's desire to get rid of the child is another proof of her warped character and twisted beliefs as the Christian teaching condemns abortions and considers them a mortal sin. Bearing an illegitimate child would have destroyed Pauline's chances of becoming a nun and confirmed the promiscuity of Indian women, Pauline being one of them.²⁸ With the help of Bernadette, she tries to hide the pregnancy as long as she can, then stays on the farm until the delivery. When she goes into the labour, Pauline once again tries to kill her daughter. "I shook with the effort, ... clenched around my child so that she could not escape. ... I told Bernadette I had decided to die, and let the child die too, no taint of original sin on her unless she breathed air."²⁹ After rejecting her own daughter, believing her to be dark, Pauline leaves the farm and moves to the convent.

²⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 94-95.

²⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 95.

²⁶ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 131.

²⁷ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 133.

²⁸ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 42.

²⁹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 135.

2.2 Pauline's practices

After being paid a visit by Christ, Pauline believes herself to be wholly white despite her Indian features. "The Christ-figure also absolves her from the responsibility of raising her child in view of her greater task of ridding heathenism from the land, the pagan 'enemy' being the Ojibwe, seen as 'a devil in the land, a shadow in the water'." ³⁰ Pauline still visits the dying and being His chosen warrior to fight against the pagan ways, He sends her to bring Him more souls.

At the same time, she still wants to become an assimilate Catholic by being the most humble, self-sacrificing nun on the convent. As an atonement for her sins, she offers self-inflicted suffering and compares herself to many female medieval saints ³¹ like Saint Catherine, Saint Perpetua or Saint Cecilia who "serve for her as models and guardian spirits who help in her struggle to convert the Chippewa." ³² However, she belittles their martyrdoms and creates her own methods:

At night, I did not allow myself to toss or turn for comfort... When I woke, I released myself, and then broke the ice on the buckets. I used my hand and no spoon... I put burrs in the armpits of my dress and screwgrass in my stockings and nettles in my neckband. Superior forced me to turn my shoes the right way around, but I let my toenails grow until it ached to walk again, and each step reminded me of His tread on the path to Calvary. ³³

Pauline takes it as far as that she does not even bath because she believes that God "would rather have a good soul that stank like a cheese than a bad soul fragranced with rose oil and myrrh." ³⁴

Pauline's disinclination to bath also possibly stems from her fear of her own sexuality for she refuses to touch herself at all. ³⁵ During one of Pauline's visits at Fleur's cabin, Fleur snaps and forces Pauline to bath. Pauline's sexual attraction to Fleur then becomes apparent to the reader because her description of the act is quite erotic:

Then Fleur washed me, but I warned myself not to experience any pleasure... It was so terrible, so pleasant, that I abandoned my Lord and all His rules and special requirements. I

³⁰ Mark Shackleton, "Power and Authority in the Realms of Racial and Gender Politics: Post-colonial and Critical Race Theory in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*," in *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, The Plague of Doves*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 73.

³¹ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 42.

³² Friedman, "Identity Politics," 121.

³³ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 152.

³⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 153.

³⁵ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 42.

think I fell asleep, lost awareness, let the water course over me and let the hands on my hips, my throat, my back, my breasts, the cupped hands under my chin and around my feet, break me down.³⁶

Having been washed Pauline feels calm and at peace until Fleur needs her help to avoid a miscarriage. In the face of this crisis Pauline starts panicking, becomes incompetent and cannot recognize the herbs Fleur sends her for which can be counted as a proof that she has forgotten even the most ordinary traditional practices. As Hessler states, the Catholic Church brings death to the Anishinaabe community by eliminating their traditional customs since Pauline cannot offer any help, only baptizing the child after their death.³⁷ Fleur must deal with the birth herself as Pauline is not capable to help. “The Lord overtook my limbs and made them clumsy... I could not work my arms, my hands properly, my fingers.”³⁸

After a scene about bringing a new life into the world, Erdrich shows the reader a glimpse of the Ojibwe afterlife where Pauline follows Fleur and her new born child. There Fleur is supposed to play a game of cards with her former co-players, Lily, Tor and Dutch James, where her children’s lives are at stake. Before returning to the world of the living, Pauline sees that all three men have realised she is the one responsible for their deaths. Her fear of them “awaiting the return of her soul to the afterlife”³⁹ and her guilt over not providing Fleur with the help she needed causes Pauline to mutilate her hands by scraping them raw and “to lose herself in God’s tasks.”⁴⁰ She wholeheartedly dives into Christian practices with even bigger fervour than before and intents to bring Christian God to the pagan Indians.

Being the traditional shaman and medicine woman, Fleur becomes the greatest obstruction to achieving Pauline’s goal. Pauline views Fleur as the anti-Christ and her power as given by Misshepesu, the underwater spirit, who in Pauline’s eyes is the devil. This becomes apparent when Nanapush conducts a traditional healing ritual for Fleur after her miscarriage and Pauline interrupts it by attempting “to prove Christ’s ways”⁴¹ and to prove the supremacy of Christianity over the pagan customs of the Ojibwe:

Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, Pauline believes that God has chosen her to prove his superiority over the heathen gods from whom Fleur’s powers are derived, by showing that she, unlike Nanapush, needs no herbal paste provided by the manitou to protect

³⁶ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 154-155.

³⁷ Hessler, “Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans,” 42.

³⁸ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 157.

³⁹ Hessler, “Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans,” 42.

⁴⁰ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 164.

⁴¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 190.

her arms from the boiling water, only her steadfast faith in Christ. Pauline is no modern-day Elijah, however, as her Christian faith alone proves insufficient and her arms are seared by the scalding water.⁴²

After the event Pauline becomes even more determined to defeat Satan which in her mind equals Fleur and the traditional Anishinaabe ways. She believes she has been chosen to replace Christ as God's servant in this task because "Christ had hidden out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature's unwinding length and luxury. New devils require new gods."⁴³ For this reason, she also believes that Lucifer himself has come to challenge her to a duel. From Pauline's frame of mind, the reader can sense that she does not plan to go to Matchimanito lake to confront and conquer the devil but rather to conquer Fleur. While in the past Pauline wanted to be part of Fleur's family, now she feels only disgust and loathing towards them. "They could starve and fornicate, expose their young for dogs and crows, worship the bones of animals or the brown liquor in a jar."⁴⁴

2.3 Defeating Satan

Before giving her vows and becoming an actual nun, Pauline plans to cut herself off from her past by this last visit to Matchimanito. Instead of encountering the devil, she meets her ex-lover Napoleon Morrissey whom she, however, mistakes for Misshepesu, the lake monster. She attacks him and strangles him with her rosary. In this scene, Erdrich uniquely interconnects several elements. Pauline uses a religious object, a tool for praying and a symbol of faith, to commit a mortal sin, to strangle a human being to death. It is obvious Pauline feels no guilt or remorse over Napoleon's death, she simply convinces herself she managed to defeat Satan who tried to taunt her by appearing in the physical form of her ex-lover.

It is worth noticing that during the fight with Napoleon, Pauline is conscious of "his long tongue dragging down my [Pauline's] thighs."⁴⁵ Her awareness of this fact can be interpreted as a sublimation of her suppressed sexual impulses. Also, the violence she manifests against Napoleon can be regarded as display of her self-hatred⁴⁶ and an attempt to erase her previous sins.

⁴² Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 43.

⁴³ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 195.

⁴⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 196.

⁴⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 202.

⁴⁶ Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 32.

After her victory, Pauline hides Napoleon's body near Fleur's cabin because she knows everyone will assume it was Fleur who killed him. Before returning to the convent, she covers herself with leaves, mud, moss and defecation of animals. Clothing herself in filth insinuates that on a certain level Pauline does not feel like a human being anymore. And yet at the same time her self-negation seems more like self-glorification. "I was a poor and noble creature now, dressed in earth like Christ, in furs like Moses Pillager, draped in snow or simple air. God would love me better as a lily of the field, though no such flower as I had yet appeared on reservation ground."⁴⁷

By the end of her narrative, Pauline sees herself as completely white as she accepts the name Leopolda. Erdrich masterly connects Pauline's new name with her personality. "A name that aptly suggests her 'perverted nature' with its echo of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, an index of her masochistic (and later sadistic) personality."⁴⁸ Pauline sees her transformation as positive and miraculous but what the reader really witnesses is a process of psychological deterioration, moral downfall and emotional cut-off.

⁴⁷ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 203.

⁴⁸ Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 33.

3. Nanapush

The other narrator of Erdrich's *Tracks* is an old survivor and tribal elder Nanapush. Both his name and his personality refer to the Anishinaabe trickster figure Nanabozho who is a cultural hero, a healer and a jokester which is successfully reflected in Nanapush's narrative. While Pauline is a humourless and serious, almost prudish, narrator, Nanapush is humorous and ribald. He manages to stay positive and live on in spite of the loss of his wives and all his children.

The reader can easily observe the difference between the two characters' attitudes towards sexuality, too. Pauline is a puritan who denies and represses her sexuality by absurd religious mortifications, often with indications of masochistic tendencies.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Nanapush, despite not being a young man anymore, is still sexually active and is quite open about it. He is also fond of explicit jokes and stories which he often shares with others.

The last conspicuous difference between these narratives is the way they are told and who the audience is. Pauline tries to justify her behaviour and defend her version of the story. In contrast to that, Nanapush tells the story to his granddaughter Lulu in the hope that she will understand her mother's [Fleur's] actions and forgive her for abandoning her when she was a child. He also hopes that by explaining the feud between her family and the Morrissey clan, he will persuade her not to marry a Morrissey.⁵⁰

Unlike Pauline, who wants to erase her past and forget it, Nanapush is the keeper of history, he remembers and spreads the knowledge.

3. 1. Attitude towards Pauline

At the beginning of his narrative, Nanapush's opinion of Pauline is quite ambiguous. He believes Pauline is different from the Puyats he used to know for they were shy people whereas Pauline, when she opens her mouth, is capable of saying anything:

She was different once her mouth opened and she started to wag her tongue. She was worse than a Nanapush, in fact. For while I was careful with my known facts, she was given to improving truth. Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Castillo, "Postmodernism," 285-94.

⁵⁰ Chavkin, "A Bowen Family Systems Reading of *Tracks*," 25.

⁵¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 39.

Initially, he does not consider her to pose a real threat, she is just a nervous gossip and pathological liar to him. “The practice of deception was so constant with her that it got to be a kind of truth.”⁵² However, he also sees Pauline’s strange fascination with death which slightly perturbs him. He associates her with death, describes her as “the crow of the reservation, she lived off our scraps”⁵³ which is why he does not want to end up in her care after his death. His opinion is further amplified when Fleur goes into labour at which Pauline is present. “She was useless – good at easing souls into death but bad at breathing them to life, afraid of life in fact, afraid of birth, afraid of Fleur Pillager.”⁵⁴

Both Nanapush and Pauline try to ridicule and degrade each other’s practices at some point in the novel so much that it becomes a contest of their religions. Nanapush thoroughly enjoys making Pauline flustered and uncomfortable with his questions and comments about her religion. He inquires about her strange severe practices and her God, he pokes her clothes with his staff. Then he makes fun of Pauline just to annoy her and jokes about any new information she reveals to him.

Nanapush is also aware of Pauline’s feeling of superiority and desire to conquer the Anishinaabe traditional beliefs so, acting the trickster he is, he “plays a scatological trick on Pauline.”⁵⁵ During one of her visits Nanapush constantly refills her cup with heavily sugared sassafras tea while telling a story about a girl saved from a flood. He deliberately describes all aspects of water, its colour, source, volume, and gives a very detailed description of the way the girl coupled with the flood. In her article *Identity Politics, Syncretism, Catholicism, and Anishinaabe Religion in Louise Erdrich's "Tracks"* (1994) Susan Stanford Friedman smartly connects the end of Nanapush’s story and his aim to exact revenge on Pauline:

The baby that results is a flood inside skin that swells and presses unbearably -until Pauline rushes for the latrine, having failed in her test for God. The butt of everyone’s laughter, Pauline is defeated. Along with her, the mortifications of the flesh which she secretly practices as part of her Christianity are exposed and mocked. Nanapush’s storytelling humour, essential to the survival of the Anishinaabe, pokes fun at Christianity’s ritual excesses and denial of the body, thereby turning the tables on the missionaries’ dismissal of his religion as heathen.⁵⁶

⁵² Erdrich, *Tracks*, 53.

⁵³ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 54.

⁵⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 57.

⁵⁵ Friedman, “Identity Politics,” 115.

⁵⁶ Friedman, “Identity Politics,” 115-16.

Erdrich puts this humorous moment in contrast with a more serious situation taking place after Fleur's miscarriage. Nanapush is worried about Fleur's illness and her seemingly impenetrable apathy so, together with Fleur's cousin Moses, he prepares a healing ceremony for her where uninvited Pauline unexpectedly appears. From the words used in this part of the narrative, it is painfully obvious that Nanapush is not pleased by her presence, he refers to her as "the nun who could sniff out pagans."⁵⁷ He predicts she will cause trouble when he notices the way she watches Fleur, as a scavenger bird that focuses on its prey, but as it is against his culture to eject any guest, Nanapush instead tries to make her leave on her own by the intense heat and smoke in the healing tent. Even though he fails, and Pauline manages to interrupt the ceremony, Fleur gets better afterwards.

Despite all the trouble she caused him and his family, Nanapush still tries to save Pauline when it seems she will drown in a broken boat. Somewhere inside of his mind, he still cares about her to some extent because he is not a cruel or evil person. Nevertheless, he rarely takes her seriously and often mocks her faith. The aim of all his teasing is usually to make her leave for Nanapush is often annoyed by her presence. He also has not forgiven her for abandoning her native culture and becoming one of the whites which he considers a sort of betrayal.

3. 2. The symbol of the traditional ways

The character of Nanapush represents the traditional tribal identity and Ojibwe history:

I was considered an old man. I'd seen enough to be one. In the years I'd passed, I saw more change than in a hundred upon a hundred before... I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager.⁵⁸

By saving Fleur, Nanapush is presented as a saviour of the traditional ways as Fleur and Moses, the last Pillagers, are "the least colonized, the ones who most retain their Anishinaabe culture."⁵⁹ Saving these two characters, as Nanapush saved Moses years ago by using traditional Ojibwe medicine, means that the power the Pillagers possess passes to him, too. Throughout the novel Nanapush uses the old Anishinaabe rituals to help others. For example, he helps Eli Kashpaw to get Fleur back by hunting a moose and heals Fleur after her miscarriage, he also uses visions and dreams to provide his family with food during a

⁵⁷ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 189.

⁵⁸ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 2.

⁵⁹ Friedman, "Identity Politics," 110.

particularly harsh winter. The healing ceremony Nanapush together with Moses conduct is a proof of Nanapush's great power because this ritual is not lightly performed as it is very strenuous and powerful. "When I first dreamed the method of doing this, I got rude laughter. I got jokes about little boys playing with fire."⁶⁰ This part of Nanapush's narrative reveals how the rituals, dreams and manitous go hand in hand in Anishinaabe religion. He directly states that he saw the healing procedure in a dream and immediately in the following sentence he says he got instructions for the ritual from a person who visited the dream. The fact that Nanapush has been able to perform this ritual three times already proves his immense power.

However, he has always understood that the power has never really been his, that it was only borrowed from the spirits who can take it back at any time. They are the ones who decide if a certain ritual will be successful or not:

Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength, that was my secret. And so, I never was alone in my failures. I was never to blame entirely when all was lost, when my desperate cures had no effect on the suffering of those I loved. For who can blame a man waiting, the doors open, the windows open, food offered, arms stretched wide? Who can blame him if the visitor does not arrive?⁶¹

Which is why he does not solely rely on his power but in many situations uses his wit. Such as when he was captured with Margaret Kashpaw by a few Morrisseys who seek retribution for what happened between Sophie and Eli. Nanapush shows a quick wit and sharp mind with a certain level of creativity and a talent for talking himself out of unpleasant situations. He uses these characteristics on a latter occasion when he and Margaret's youngest son Nector exact their revenge on the Morrisseys for shaving Margaret's hair.

3. 3. Depiction of intimate life

Another important aspect of Nanapush's narrative is his openness about his sexual life. He does not mind sharing details most people would probably consider very intimate and personal. Eli, for instance, comes to him for advice on how to properly court and please a woman which Nanapush willingly and happily gives.

Even though Nanapush is no longer a young man, he enters a relationship with Margaret Kashpaw. From the beginning, the relationship between them is quite wild and passionate.

⁶⁰ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 188.

⁶¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 177.

Even when they argue, they often speak in double entendre and innuendos. As their relationship progresses, the reader realizes how much they love each other in spite of any problems and arguments.

By this aspect of Nanapush's narrative, Erdrich shows that unlike for the Christians, who don't have intimate relations outside of marriage and avoid speaking about their intimate life, for the Native Americans it is completely natural to speak about these issues as they are a part of life of every person.

3. 4. Resistance to colonialism

Nanapush is one of those Native Americans who were educated in a mission school thus underwent the attempt to be colonised. "I had a Jesuit education in the halls of Saint John before I ran back to the woods and forgot all my prayers."⁶² Nanapush is a man who abandoned his white schooling to return to his native culture. He represents the desire and attempt to decolonize the mind, but the decolonizing is not something he manages as he understands the necessity of mixing of traditions so that the Anishinaabe culture could survive. Moreover, he is driven "to figure out the bureaucracy in order to bring Lulu home from school – to liberate her from the government's grasp and reconstitute the family unit."⁶³ He is aware of the nature of the boarding schools, how they destroy the bond between a child and their family and culture. The boarding school methods often involved brutal punishments for speaking tribal languages, the adoption of Western styles of clothing and food and the separation from the family, the tribe and homeland, in other words separation from every influence of the Native American culture.⁶⁴

In a certain way Nanapush also represents the resistance to the colonizing culture. Erdrich uses his narrative to express criticism of colonialism and to show colonialism from the point of view of the Native Americans, to show the downfall of their culture and its destruction caused by the government.

⁶² Erdrich, *Tracks*, 33.

⁶³ David Stirrup, "To become a bureaucrat myself: History and Law in *Tracks*," in *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, The Plague of Doves*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 59.

⁶⁴ Madsen, "The Aesthetics of *Mino Bimaadiziwin*," 8.

4. Fleur

Fleur Pillager is one of the most significant protagonists of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series. She is a typical representative of the Native American culture as she is a powerful shaman and a traditional medicine woman.

Fleur's supernatural power comes from an underwater spirit Misshepesu who was, according to legends, summoned to the lake Matchimanito by Fleur's ancestor Old Man Pillager. In return for that, Misshepesu grants the Pillagers medicinal powers, influences the abundance of game and protects them from drowning in the lake which is proved a few times throughout the novel. When Fleur falls into the lake, Misshepesu spares her life but instead claims lives of the men who saved her.⁶⁵

4.1. Different attitude towards Fleur

The reader finds Fleur in the centre of the action described by both narrators of *Tracks* who regard her in very different ways. Nanapush cares about Fleur as if she was his own daughter, he even addresses her as such. Pauline's view of Fleur is ambiguous and variable but often tends to be more negative. "Where Nanapush's story focuses on Fleur's racial/cultural fight against the US government and celebrates her fierce spirit of resistance, Pauline regards Fleur as a transgressive female force and fixates on her sexual and reproductive battles with men and male spirits."⁶⁶ The way Pauline and Nanapush speak about Fleur gives the reader an accurate image of their personalities. While Nanapush simply tells Fleur's story and does not try to present himself as the main hero, Pauline's description of events is very biased, and she uses it for her own agenda.

As I have already mentioned, Nanapush, representing the Native American religion, and Pauline, being the personified Catholicism, often battle each other and their confrontations most frequently concern the fate of Fleur's spirit and body. It is possible to say that Fleur becomes their battleground.⁶⁷ By helping and supporting Fleur, Nanapush makes sure the Anishinaabe religious traditions survive. Pauline wants to destroy Fleur's power because she believes it was given to Fleur by the devil to defeat Christ and expel him from the reservation. Defeating Fleur would be the ultimate victory to Pauline in her battle against the Anishinaabe

⁶⁵ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 40.

⁶⁶ Friedman, "Identity Politics," 113.

⁶⁷ Friedman, "Identity Politics," 113.

religion. It would also mean destruction of the last obstacle to the full conversion of the Chippewa to Catholicism.

4. 2. Similarities between Fleur and Pauline

There is a subtly indicated parallel between Fleur and Pauline in the novel since both girls find themselves without any immediate family but whereas Pauline wants to separate herself from her origin, Fleur embraces it. First it was Fleur's mother, then Nanapush as a teacher and a father figure, who taught Fleur to honour her heritage and traditional customs. Her respect for her ancestors is reflected by how far she is willing to go to protect her land. One of the contrasts Erdrich makes between Fleur and Pauline is the reason for which each of them moves to Argus. Pauline wants to escape from her Ojibwe origin, Fleur plans to earn enough money to pay for the allotments where her family used to live.

Another similarity between the girls is that they both cause deaths of three men each. It is true the men Pauline kills are no innocent beings, but she does it mainly to erase her guilt for not helping Fleur and to ease her troubled conscience. In contrast to Pauline, Fleur is motivated again by her desire to save her ancestors' land for the men she kills were employees of the lumber company.

4. 3. Strong figure

It is important to realize that Fleur is a strong, independent young woman who would not let anyone control her. When she starts an affair with Eli Kashpaw, his mother, Margaret, does not approve because she "wanted a simpleminded daughter-in-law she could boss, a girl who would take advice and not bar her from the house. Everyone knew Fleur Pillager wasn't like that, did not need a second mother. Ogimaakwe had raised her daughters to boss themselves."⁶⁸ Both Margaret and Fleur seem to be too independent and strong-willed to be able to get on well with each other. However, Margaret's attitude towards Fleur changes when she gives birth to Eli's daughter and she asks Margaret to help her through it. The evidence of their improved relationship is when Margaret comes to Matchimanito with her hair shorn by the Morrisseys, Fleur shaves her head too.

⁶⁸ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 57.

Fleur's strength enables her to overcome many difficult situations such as the deaths of her relatives or a difficult birth of her second child. Since Pauline is no real help to her and no one else is present, she takes care of it herself:

She took the child from her own blood, then the knife from its sheath where it hung from the bedframe. She cut the cord and breathed into the child's mouth, rubbed its skin and changed its dead grey colour... she came back to scrape the root, to where she dripped water over the shavings with an awful patience, and added a crumbling powder of bees dried and crushed.⁶⁹

She prepares the medicine and tries to give it to her new-born baby while Pauline only sits and prays.

After the miscarriage Fleur sinks into depression inflicted not only by the loss of her child but by many more causes. The money for her family's allotments has been spent, her power is waning, and her dreams no longer provide food during the winter thus her family must rely on the supplies from the government.⁷⁰ Fleur feels responsible for the current situation both of her family and on the reservation. The guilt about not being able to help and protect her people from being dependent on the colonizing culture prevents her from remembering Nanapush's warning. "Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns."⁷¹ It is clear that Fleur's pride has made her forget the supernatural power has never originated from within herself, rather has been lent to her by Misshepesu.

As Fleur's mental state gets worse, Nanapush tries to comfort her but she is not patient enough, or more likely ready, to listen to him:

"You will not be to blame if the land is lost," I told her, "or if the oaks and the pines fall, the lake dries, and the lake man does not return. You could not have saved the child that came so early." This last, however, she could not bear and whirled away from me. She ran, her hands formed into muffs around her ears.⁷²

Nanapush is well aware what Fleur's biggest problem is. As any parent who loses their child, she is not ready yet to face the reality of the situation. Instead of dealing with her grief, she becomes attached to her first daughter Lulu, whom she rarely lets out of her sight since the miscarriage:

⁶⁹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 157-8.

⁷⁰ Hessler, "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans," 43.

⁷¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 177.

⁷² Erdrich, *Tracks*, 178.

But Fleur trusted no one to care for you in the world that seemed so dangerous to her now. She jumped at the crack of a stick, any small sound, and whirled suddenly, only to confront a breath of wind. Eli did not complain loudly, although you slept between them every night, kicked and turned, poked at him before dawn so that he moped all day for lack of good sleep.⁷³

Nanapush understands Fleur because he too lost his children, but he realizes that she cannot continue drowning in guilt and depression. Even though the healing ceremony he prepares is interrupted by Pauline, Fleur takes strength from the ritual and recovers.

4. 4. The last act of resistance

When Fleur finds out the money she saved is not enough to pay for her allotments and the lumber company will get her land, she summons Misshepeshu to her aid one last time. She fills her pockets with stones and resolutely walks into the lake only to be pulled out after some struggle by her lover Eli who considered it a desperate attempt to commit suicide. Yet, that is not her intent. “She can only seek revenge on the lumberjacks by drowning in the waters of Matchimanito to return back to life and have someone else die in her stead.”⁷⁴ As Fleur curses his brother, Eli realizes that the woman he considered merely his wife is still a Pillager, a dangerous powerful shaman, so he retreats from her and flees. Her curse is a strong one for it includes the lumberjacks, the officials of the lumber company, the Morrisseys. The only one who is sure to avoid her curse is Nanapush for he is the one who has always been there for her. “You, who I consider my father, I still owe.”⁷⁵ Since Fleur has already come up with a plan that is quite dangerous and can cause her trouble, she sends Lulu away from the reservation to a boarding school. “You must understand there were reasons: there would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys who shaved heads or the Turcot Company, leveller of a whole forest.”⁷⁶

The consequences of Fleur’s curse soon start to manifest. As the lumbering continues, some of the lumberjacks are injured, others die under mysterious circumstances while Fleur becomes visibly stronger, more cheerful and determined. She often visits Moses, steals equipment from the lumberjacks, her garden full of pumpkins, squash and rhubarb madly

⁷³ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 186.

⁷⁴ Hessler, “Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans,” 44.

⁷⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 214.

⁷⁶ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 219.

flourishes. As Hessler aptly observes, “One wonders with what, or with whom, her plants are fertilized.”⁷⁷

Nanapush wonders about Fleur’s strange behaviour but he does not figure out her plan until it is almost completed. When the employees of the company try to displace Fleur out of her cabin, she conjures a strong wind which levels the trees, which she sawed through at the base before that, around her cabin and makes them completely useless for the lumbering company. In spite of the fact that she has saved her family’s land, Fleur leaves the reservation for she is suspected of murdering Napoleon.

Erdrich does not regard Fleur’s departure as her defeat. “Catholicism and white civilization have not completely destroyed Ojibwa culture, for Fleur prevails in the end.”⁷⁸ She has stayed true to her heritage and has stayed connected to her culture.

⁷⁷ Hessler, “Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans,” 44.

⁷⁸ Hessler, “Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans,” 44.

5. Father Damien

Father Damien is the main protagonist and narrator in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. In this novel, Erdrich uses her ability to mix various timelines and narratives to the full extent. The frame story takes place at the end of 20th century when a papal envoy, Father Jude Miller, arrives at the reservation to investigate the case of Sister Leopolda and her possible canonization. The second timeline is composed of Father Damien's memories of Leopolda and the life on the reservation as he recounts them to Father Jude.

5. 1. Power, gender and religion

Erdrich uses the figure of Father Damien to demonstrate the cases of inequality in the society, whether between men and women, or between Catholics and Native Americans.

At the very beginning of the novel, the reader finds out that Father Damien is in fact a woman, Agnes DeWitt, former Sister Cecilia. She has never been excluded by the society as a woman but when she switches places with the first and real Father Damien Modeste, she comes to realize the difference in her social status. "After donning the robes of a priest, she is immediately aware of the privileges and power allowed men but denied to women. This is even extended into being given more personal space, allowing greater freedom of physical and mental movement."⁷⁹ Agnes notices the difference in the way people used to treat her as a nun and the way they treat her now as a priest and the change pleases her. As Shackleton states "Donning robes or roles not only affects the way others see us but also affects the way we see ourselves."⁸⁰

Immediately after accepting the identity of Father Damien, Agnes feels slightly confused about her real identity. She is, after all, a woman who is supposed to act and move in a manly manner. However, her strong adventurous spirit and her 'double insight' enable her to combine her female wits and male strength. Napoleon's funeral can be considered an exemplary situation as Agnes dispels an argument between two feuding families by jumping onto the coffin wielding a whip. By this act, she gains respect even of those who considered her 'just one of the whites'. Throughout the novel Agnes learns how to mix both her identities to her advantage, female compassion and gentleness and male strength and endurance.

⁷⁹ Shackleton, "Power and Authority in the Realms of Racial and Gender Politics," 77.

⁸⁰ Shackleton, "Power and Authority in the Realms of Racial and Gender Politics," 77.

Erdrich concludes Damien's narrative in *The Last Report* by a sentence that proves he truly became both a man and a woman. "Father Damien's slight figure, serene in its halo of white hair, lay just under the waves. As the dark water claimed him, his features blurred. His body wavered for a time between the surface and the feminine depth below."⁸¹

5. 2. Similar or different?

Erdrich masterfully creates subtle parallels between some of her characters only to show the reader how different those characters really are. In this case, the parallel is between Agnes/Damien and Pauline/Leopolda.

They both suffered a lot at young age. Pauline has never known maternal love thus never created a bond with her ancestral traditions, while Agnes lost her lover, her piano and part of her memory. It can be said another thing they have in common is that they both experienced conversion. Even though she hated her heritage, Pauline used to be one of the Anishinaabe but the proverbial last straw that makes her convert is her fear of the Ojibwe afterlife, of the souls waiting for her arrival to seek retribution.

Agnes gets herself into similar situation as she offers her soul to the devil in exchange for Lulu's. Despite her fear of eternal torment, the conversion does not represent a way of escape as is the case with Pauline. The main reason for Agnes's conversion is her friendship with so many Anishinaabe people for she wants to see them again. "And yet, she thought, with some hope, perhaps here on this island she would be protected from the black dog. Her soul might slip past the cur's slimy teeth and sneak by the hell gates and pearly gates into that sweeter pasture, the heaven of Ojibwe."⁸² Yet, Agnes's words alone prove that her conversion is not absolute because phrases like 'hell gates' or 'pearly gates' suggest Christian influence.⁸³ Another proof that denies Agnes's full conversion is the end of her narrative when she decides to drown herself to hide her gender. In *Tracks* Erdrich mentions that for an Ojibwe there is no worse death than a death by drowning because the soul of the deceased person is then trapped in this world. Thus, Agnes represents the mixing of both cultures as she accepts elements of both religions and speaks both in Christian terms and the Anishinaabe language.

Another experience the two women share is their encounter with Christ and later with the devil. What may at first seem as a similarity between the characters is in reality a significant

⁸¹ Louise Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (London: Flamingo, 2002), 351.

⁸² Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 346.

⁸³ Shackleton, "Power and Authority in the Realms of Racial and Gender Politics," 79.

difference. Pauline's meeting with Christ at the convent is full of glory, her sense of self-importance and an urgent need for her to prove herself. When Agnes meets Christ, it is after he saved her from a flood. He feeds her, calms her and puts her to sleep. The whole encounter is filled with kindness and gentleness.

In spite of the fact that they are both representatives of the Catholic Church, their personalities diametrically differ. Where Father Damien is understanding, kind and selfless, Sister Leopolda does not possess even a trace of compassion. Instead of understanding and kindness, she shows disdain and cruelty.

5. 3. Two people in one cassock

There are not many people on the reservation who know about Father Damien's true identity but there are more than he anticipates.

It is not very surprising that one of them is the old trickster Nanapush. He is one of the most observant characters of Erdrich's novels and he knows from the first moment he meets Father Damien that there is something strange about him. He used to discuss it with his best friend Kashpaw who noticed it, too. "My old friend [Kashpaw] assumed you went and became four-legged to please another man, but that's not true. Inside that robe, you are definitely a woman."⁸⁴ From Nanapush's stories it is apparent that in Native American culture homosexual relationships and transgender people are completely natural and acceptable, not considered wrong or strange as is the case with European people. Unlike the Catholic Church, Nanapush, the representative of Native American religion, does not see a problem with a woman being a priest.

Agnes/Damien is terrified at first that someone knows her secret but as it becomes apparent Nanapush does not care, she feels relieved. "The tedious balloon, pressing inside of Agnes day after day so tightly, now floated out of her mouth, up into the air. She was instantly lighter, so light that when she took in a breath she felt she would lift from her chair."⁸⁵ A few moments later she realizes Nanapush merely used it as a distraction to unnerve her during a game of chess.

Another person who finds out is Father Gregory Weckle whose reaction is worth noting. He becomes sexually attracted to Father Damien even before he finds out Damien is a woman.

⁸⁴ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 231.

⁸⁵ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 231.

Erdrich uses Gregory's thoughts to demonstrate the attitude of Catholic Church towards homosexuality. "In Gregory's mind, there surged the awful and appalling joy of knowing he was one of those whom the Church darkly warned against... The sin he would commit would be equal to the sin of murder, one of those sins crying out to heaven for vengeance."⁸⁶ Their affair is passionate but short-lived as Father Wekkle has responsibilities elsewhere. Yet, he is willing to give up his life as a priest and marry Agnes, nevertheless, she refuses him:

"I am a priest," Agnes said calmly, again. She had left the body they shared and for this moment she existed only in a spirit sad with knowledge that could remove his hands. "This is what I do. Without it, if I couldn't say the Mass..." She held her hands out, tough with work and empty. Nothing. "I am nothing but a priest."⁸⁷

Even if it breaks her heart, Agnes sends Gregory away because she knows her purpose and that without it, she would be nothing.

Despite his outburst during their breakup, Father Gregory Wekkle is not the one who could cause trouble with the knowledge of Damien's identity. Unsurprisingly, it is Sister Leopolda who poses a threat. She confesses to murdering Napoleon but not because she feels guilty, more likely because "she wanted to force some knowledge upon him. To plague him with morbid responsibility."⁸⁸ When Damien tells her to denounce herself to the authorities, she threatens to reveal Damien's identity. "I know what you are. And if you banish me or write to the bishop, *Sister* Damien, I will write him too."⁸⁹ This encounter between Leopolda and Damien only proves Leopolda's twisted nature as she confesses to the murder only to burden Damien with the knowledge and to show him she has power over him.

Mary Kashpaw is Father Damien's constant and the most loyal companion. She has been living on the convent and taking care of Damien ever since her parents died. It is almost expected that she knows that Damien is Agnes. Mary finds out about Agnes after the departure of Father Wekkle when Agnes falls into self-induced coma. Mary pretends to shave Father Damien every day, so she could hide the fact that he does not grow any facial hair. Erdrich depicts Mary as "the embodiment of charity."⁹⁰ She is loyal, kind and caring as Father Damien but unlike him, "her service and giving is not complicated by a hidden agenda

⁸⁶ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 200.

⁸⁷ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 206-207.

⁸⁸ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 272.

⁸⁹ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 273.

⁹⁰ P. Jane Hafen, "We Speak of Everything: Indigenous Traditions in The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse," in *Louise Erdrich: Tracks, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, The Plague of Doves*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 82.

of identity protection or by institutional motivation.”⁹¹ Father Damien realizes the goodness of Mary Kashpaw but also notices something else:

In that strange light, Agnes saw beneath the girl’s disguise. She saw that the face of her constant companion, Mary Kashpaw, was the face of the man with the horn spoon. Then she knew. Christ has gone before the priest, stamping down snow. Christ had bent low and on that broad, angry back carried Father Damien through sloughs. Covered him when he collapsed at the bedsides of the ill. Christ had fed him hot gruel from a spoon of black iron. Protected him so that he never sickened even when the dying kissed his hands or coughed their last prayer into his face. Christ was before him right now, breaking the trail.⁹²

In this paragraph, Erdrich depicts Mary’s character with a certain level of saintliness, purity and self-sacrifice thus associates her with Christ.

Mary’s loyalty to Father Damien is also proved by her last act of compassion when she finds Damien’s body. She is left with the choice whether to bring him back, but she grants Damien his last wish and buries him in the lake. By doing this she keeps his secret about his true identity and gender. However, this act protects not only Father Damien but also the Ojibwe community from the outside colonizers. As Hafen states “Most of the Ojibwe already know about Agnes’s true identity, and, through Father Damien, the rules of Catholicism regarding forgiveness are mildly enforced. The repercussions of Father Damien’s ecclesiastical acts would have been devastating, and Mary protects against their exposure.”⁹³

⁹¹ Hafen, “We Speak of Everything: Indigenous Traditions in The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse,” 91.

⁹² Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 123.

⁹³ Hafen, “We Speak of Everything: Indigenous Traditions in The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse,” 92.

6. Marie Lazzare

Marie Lazzare is one of the main characters of Erdrich's first novel *Love Medicine* (1984) but her origin is also discussed in the previously mentioned novels, *Tracks* (1988) and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001). The story she tells in *Saint Marie* is from the time when she lived at the convent where she encountered Sister Leopolda, her mother, previously known as Pauline Puyat.

6. 1. Marie's origin

Since the moment Pauline finds out she is pregnant, she hates her unborn child and tries to get rid of them. "She punched with her powerful head and rolled and twisted like an otter. When she did this, the fits of hate took me so hard that I wept."⁹⁴ It is Bernadette's idea to name the child after the Virgin, Marie, for immediately after she delivers, Pauline rejects her daughter as a dark and fallen being, the child of Satan.

Since Pauline believes that she is forgiven the sin of giving up her child, she pretends she does not have any. Marie is thus raised by Bernadette on the Morrisseys' farm because it was her brother who fathered Marie. When Bernadette grows older and weaker, the responsibility is assumed by Bernadette's daughter Sophie. Pauline's words about Marie are not very kind or flattering as she refers to her as "the bastard girl"⁹⁵ which is a proof of her non-existent maternal love.

6. 2. At the convent

The mother and daughter meet again when Marie moves to the convent. In the beginning, Marie's opinion about Leopolda is positive. It is possible to say that she sees her as a holy warrior, the only nun at the convent who has not given up the fight with Satan. She admires Leopolda for her courage, her knowledge of the devil and her unwavering will to stand up to him.

Considering the poverty of Marie's family and unsatisfactory living conditions, it is not surprising that she searches for a new mother figure, for someone who would protect her, take care of her and would provide for her. At first, Marie subconsciously associates this mother

⁹⁴ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 133.

⁹⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 198.

figure with Sister Leopolda who, however, later proves to be more like an evil stepmother from a Cinderella story.

Leopolda is a cruel, sado-masochistic nun who uses corporal punishments to enforce obedience from her students. Nevertheless, she saves 'special' treatment for the girl who is in fact her own daughter and who has become her protégé which to her means that Marie is practically her slave.

Marie feels a slight attachment to Sister Leopolda and thinks the nun cares about her. Marie is influenced by Leopolda and her words, she believes her when Leopolda says the devil wants her, that Satan is after her at every moment. When she closes Marie in a coat closet because she saw the devil in her eyes, Marie believes her he is inside of her head. "I glanced back and smiled and looked up at her sly to see if she had noticed. My heart jumped. For she was looking straight at me. And she sniffed. She had a big stark bony nose stuck to the front of her face for smelling out brimstone and evil thoughts. She had smelled him on me."⁹⁶ However, Marie's attitude changes as Leopolda's methods become more drastic. She forces her to sleep in the kitchen behind the stove, the food Marie is given is worse than the food the rest of the nun eat, her clothes is in much worse shape than that of the nuns, dirty, old and tattered.

Leopolda does not stop there, though. When Marie drops a cup and it falls under the stove, Leopolda makes her pick it up without using anything to pull it from under the stove so she is forced to lie on the floor. "Reach with your arm for that cup. And when your flesh is hot, remember that the flames you feel are only one fraction of the heat you will feel in his hellish embrace."⁹⁷ Again, Leopolda tries to convince Marie that her soul belongs to the devil and that she will end up in hell.

Once Marie lies on the floor, Leopolda steps on her neck. This scene imitates a popular representation of the virgin Marie standing on a serpent representing Satan.⁹⁸ It may seem that Leopolda represents the Virgin defeating the devil who possessed Marie, but it is Marie who later has a vision of herself as a saint. Nevertheless, from Marie's point of view in that moment, it is simply an act of cruelty towards her as not only Leopolda insults and humiliates her, but she also pours burning water on Marie's back. Leopolda comments it by stating it is

⁹⁶ Louise Erdrich, "Saint Marie," in *Love Medicine* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 46.

⁹⁷ Erdrich, "Saint Marie," 51.

⁹⁸ Helen Jaskoski, "From the Time Immemorial: Native American Traditions in Contemporary Short Fiction," in *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*, ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

to “warm Marie’s cold ash heart and to boil Satan from her mind.”⁹⁹ While performing the act, Leopolda is cold, almost indifferent, but her reaction afterwards is slightly different:

Tears glittered in her eyes, deep down, like the sinking reflection in a well.

“It was so hard, Marie,” she gasped. Her hands were shaking. The kettle clattered against the stove. “But I have used all the water up now. I think he is gone.”

“I prayed,” I said foolishly. “I prayed very hard.”

“Yes,” she said. “My dear one, I know.”¹⁰⁰

It is difficult to state whether Leopolda’s tears in this moment mean that she regrets hurting her own daughter in such a terrible manner, whether she feels any trace of guilt or whether her tears are the result of her belief that she is actually helping Marie and protecting her from Satan’s influence. Considering Pauline’s mental development and increasingly sadistic behaviour throughout Erdrich’s books, it is probable that she truly believes she was helping her.

Later Sister Leopolda tries to atone for what she did by offering to put salve on Marie’s burnt back. This is the moment when Marie is finally strong enough to wrench herself from Leopolda’s influence. “He was always in you, even more than in me. He wanted you even more. And now he’s got you. Get thee behind me!”¹⁰¹ Later when they bake bread together, Marie finally realizes the depth of the hate she feels for Leopolda. She hates her enough that she tries to push Leopolda into the open burning stove. This scene can be considered a reference to another fairy tale, this time about Hansel and Gretel.¹⁰² However, while Gretel manages to get rid of her tormentor and push her into the oven, Marie’s attempt to kick Leopolda inside is thwarted by the poker in Leopolda’s hands which hits the back wall of the oven first, so Leopolda rebounds back. The argument that follows is ended by Leopolda stabbing Marie through the hand with a fork and knocking her out by hitting her head with the poker.

Later, when Marie wakes up, Leopolda escapes punishment by claiming that she witnessed a miracle and that the wound on Marie’s hand is actually stigmata of Christ. Erdrich creates an interesting parallel between Pauline/Leopolda, Marie and an appearance of a mark. In *Tracks* during Marie’s birth Bernadette must use special forceps to pull Marie out of Pauline which

⁹⁹ Erdrich, “Saint Marie,” 52.

¹⁰⁰ Erdrich, “Saint Marie,” 53.

¹⁰¹ Erdrich, “Saint Marie,” 56.

¹⁰² Jaskoski, “From the Time Immemorial,” 28-29.

leaves dark bruises on her temples. Pauline then rejects Marie by stating that “she’s marked by the devil’s thumbs.”¹⁰³

Marie uses this situation to her advantage and confirms the nuns’ conviction that Christ has marked her, that she is his chosen one. Marie sees herself as a saint which Erdrich corroborates by Marie’s dreams, visions, also by her moral insight, her compassion and kindness which is also supported by the change in her stance towards Leopolda:

My heart had been about to surge from my chest with the blackness of my joyous heart. Now it dropped. I pitied her. I pitied her. Pity twisted in my stomach like that hook-pole was driven through me. I was caught. It was a feeling more terrible than any amount of boiling water and worse than being forked. Still, still, I could not help what I did. I had already smiled in a saint’s mealy forgiveness.¹⁰⁴

Her feelings for Sister Leopolda in that moment are quite ambiguous. On the one hand, Marie pities her because she understands that Leopolda feels pain somewhere deep inside her but is not inclined to admit it to herself. Marie understands that Leopolda has a certain mental problem and is not really capable of feeling love and receiving it from others even though she subconsciously desires it very much. On the other hand, she still hates Leopolda to some extent and knows she cannot really forgive her. Her forgiveness is just for show but at the same time she does not feel any satisfaction with pretending graciousness and humiliating Leopolda by making her kneel.

6. 3. Years later

In the frame story where Father Jude tries to investigate possible Leopolda’s canonization, he visits Marie Lazzare, now named Kashpaw as she married Margaret’s son Nector, to ask her about her relationship with Leopolda since she is probably the only one who can give him some evidence of Leopolda’s holiness. At first, she does not want to talk about it as the memories are still painful even after all those years. In the end, she does tell him something but not the whole story about the relationship between her and Leopolda. She is still angry at Leopolda for the pain and harm she caused her, but she does not reveal what had transpired between the two of them at the convent for she no longer hates her.

Erdrich, by the narratives of Marie and Father Damien, analyses the mental and emotional state of Sister Leopolda. The roots of Leopolda’s problems indeed lie in her origin but not in the way she used to believe. She believed that her main drawback was her Indian heritage in

¹⁰³ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 136.

¹⁰⁴ Erdrich, “Saint Marie,” 60.

general, but the foundation of her disorder is located in her bloodline as Erdrich explains in one of the chapters of *The Last Report*, in Father Damien's *History of the Puyats*.

The problems originate mainly from the first Pauline Puyat, Leopolda's mother, "in whom the bitterness of seven generations of peasant French and an equal seven of enemy-harassed Ojibwe ancestors were concentrated,"¹⁰⁵ and whose parents hated each other. After witnessing her father's violent death, Pauline's relationship with her mother drastically changes because Pauline blames her for what happened to her father and because of the hate she feels as a result of the physical abuse her mother inflicted upon her. In the end, Pauline fulfils her father's last wish and kills her mother. It is no surprise that an experience of this kind negatively affected her. "Pauline could not love or be loved. She had been robbed of her capacity either to give or receive anything so profoundly good,"¹⁰⁶ which means she has never been able to express any sort of maternal love towards her own children; therefore, she passes this inability to love onto her daughter and indirectly causes the conflict between mother and daughter in the following generation.

The main cause of the conflict between Marie and Leopolda is her inability to feel and express love. Marie understands that on a certain level, Leopolda loved her but was not able to properly show it to her. Leopolda's latter behaviour supports the idea that she regretted giving up Marie or at least that she wanted to be reconciled with her. When Marie arrived at the convent, Leopolda claimed her as her protégé and later when Marie tried to leave, she tried to convince, almost pleaded, her to stay, and after Marie's departure, she even tried to persuade Marie to come back to the convent.

At that time Marie still did not know the identity of her mother or whether she was even alive. The person from whom she gets any information about her mother is her aunt, Sophie Morrisey, who has gradually developed a strong addiction to alcohol. As Marie supports herself as a bootlegger since she left the convent, they meet quite often, and it is during one of these meetings that Sophie tells Marie that her father was Sophie's uncle. Marie is desperate to know who her mother is so tries to get Sophie to talk which she eventually does.

She recounts a story of a young woman who bewitched her to fall for a man she did not want. From the way Sophie speaks, it is apparent she was aware of what Pauline was doing to her:

¹⁰⁵ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 156.

Sophie was enforced by the Puyat to witless behaviour. As she told it, the witch drew a certain pattern in the spongy ground just beside the outhouse. Buried in Sophie's path a rag of monthly blood. Cursed her with owl's feathers laid underneath the mattress. My mother bit like a wolf into her dreams.¹⁰⁷

The description of Pauline's past actions proves that even though she has always hated her Indian heritage, she was able to use supernatural powers like Fleur or Nanapush.

Marie finds this story quite ridiculous because Sophie blames Pauline's magical influence for everything bad that has happened to her including her drinking problem but she also understands that "the smoke means fire."¹⁰⁸ From Sophie's description Marie understands that her mother has never been the most likeable person and that she has caused a lot of pain and damage to people around her.

By the way Sophie speaks about Leopolda's attitude towards faith, it is possible to understand she considers Leopolda a hypocrite who presents herself holy and better than anyone else. After a few arguments Marie finally manages to persuade Sophie to tell her the name of her mother. To say that she is surprised by her revelation is a mild understatement. When she realizes what being Leopolda's daughter means for her, she becomes slightly hysterical. "I laughed until I screamed."¹⁰⁹ She eventually accepts the truth but she does not reveal it to anyone, not even her husband.

Marie concludes that she cannot hate someone who loved her, even if she hated that person at the beginning because of the suffering she had to go through. "But the worst thing of all was that Sister Leopolda loved me – I felt that like a blow. It is hard to hate a person if they love you. No matter what they do. What you feel in return twists between two feelings. Not one. Not the other. But painful."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 322.

¹⁰⁸ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 322.

¹⁰⁹ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 324.

¹¹⁰ Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, 318.

Conclusion

Erdrich is reasonably considered one of the best contemporary Native American writers. Her novels are suitable for both Native American readers and non-Native ones, too, because she depicts the life on a reservation in such a readable way that even non-Native readers will find her novels enjoyable. Due to the fact that Erdrich herself is a member of Native American community it probably should not be astonishing that her books are so well written. The plot and the setting of her novels is carefully crafted and successfully combined with the cultural background that not only her books are entertaining but also very educating.

Erdrich tries to make her characters likeable so the readers could easily identify themselves with some of them. The figures depicted in her novels are no superheroes or ancient knights fighting dragons and saving the world. They are usually normal people with ordinary trouble. The appeal of Erdrich's novels lies mainly in the ordinariness of the situations and every day life.

Erdrich's focus on depicting religious traditions in her books makes sense since religion still plays an important role in the lives of Native Americans. However, as a member of oppressed community, she often uses the motif of clash of cultures. In her novel *Tracks*, she describes the mental problems of many characters, the destruction of the Anishinaabe culture and community.

However, in her novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, as well as *Tracks*, she breaks many stereotypes, such as stereotypes about gender. Females are usually viewed as the 'weaker' and passive gender. The character of Agnes DeWitt is a perfect example of that. She refuses to be restricted by traditional gender roles and becomes a priest. Another female character Erdrich uses is Fleur Pillager. She is strong, independent, powerful shaman who is able to use both her beauty and powers as a weapon.

Erdrich also breaks religious stereotypes. Usually, people see nuns as kind and friendly, even if a little bit reserved. This is not the case of Sister Leopolda who is cruel, violent and often abusive towards her students. Not to mention her own daughter whom she humiliates, tortures and tries to persuade her of her own unimportance.

Erdrich depicts the religious traditions in her fiction to express her criticism of colonialism and suppression of the traditional practices of her people. She also describes how the power given through religion and traditions can be used for good as well as for bad. Traditional

Anishinaabe religion can be used for healing as Erdrich shows by the character of Nanapush but it can be also used for defensive and offensive purposes as is the case with Fleur.

Erdrich shows that the Catholic religion has two faces and interpretations, too. The character of Father Damien represents the kindness, the ability to forgive, the Catholic Church as it is supposed to work. He helps people without caring what gender, religion or race they are, he does not make differences between them. On the other hand, there is Sister Leopolda who is the second most important representative of the Catholic Church. Erdrich uses her character to show the stark contrast between different types of power the Catholic Church uses. Leopolda uses it to cause harm, to belittle people and show them that being a nun makes her better than others and that she can escape punishment for her actions.

The most important message of Erdrich's works is that it does not matter whether a person is a man or a woman, Anishinaabe or Catholic, it is his actions that define them. She stresses that even a woman can fight for herself, that even a man can be compassionate and emotional.

She also stresses the importance of family relationships but the way Erdrich presents them, it is clear that the blood relations are not the most important thing on which a family is based.

Resumé

Tato práce se zaměřuje na díla americké spisovatelky Louise Erdrichové a jejich charakteristické znaky. Louise Erdrichová je spisovatelka smíšeného původu, z části má evropské kořeny a z části pochází z linie původních obyvatel Severní Ameriky, což se v jejích dílech výrazně projevuje. Postavy jejích knih jsou velmi často buď příslušníci kmenů původních obyvatel, nebo jsou smíšeného původu jako ona.

V práci je nejdůležitějším tématem rozbor a výklad náboženských tradic v dílech Erdrichové, také jakým způsobem je vykresluje a přenáší do kulturního kontextu. Práce se zabývá i tím, jak dané náboženské zvyky, prvky a tradice ovlivňují postavy vybraných knih. Navíc práce také popisuje, v co postavy věří, zda provádí nějaké náboženské praktiky a jakým způsobem tyto praktiky využívají ve svůj prospěch. V práci se soustředím hlavně na analýzu postav právě z toho důvodu, že náboženské tradice se nejlépe rozebírají na základě jejich praktické podoby.

Nejdůležitější postavou děl, které tato práce rozebírá, je postava Pauline Puyat, mladá Indiánka smíšeného původu. Její smíšený původ je svým způsobem její největší zhoubou, jelikož ho sama z počátku považuje za obrovskou nevýhodu a svoji největší chybu. V kapitole věnované této postavě se zabývám jejím psychickým stavem spojeným právě s jejím původem a s její podvědomou sebestenávistí. Tato kapitola se také zaměřuje na její vztahy a interakce s jinými postavami, jakým způsobem se tyto vztahy mění a vyvíjejí. Paulinina nenávist se promítá do jejího chování vůči sobě samotné i lidem okolo.

Dalším důležitým bodem této kapitoly je Paulinin přístup k náboženským tradicím jak křesťanským, tak k tradicím náboženství kmene Anishinaabe. I přesto, že se rozhodla opustit svůj kmen a vstoupit do kláštera, nedá se říci, že by už v duchy a přírodní síly nevěřila. Naopak je považuje za ztělesnění Satana a jeho temných sil. Nejvíce je spojuje s mocnou šamankou Fleur Pillager, ke které má velmi zvláštní a protichůdný přístup. Na jednu stranu Fleur považuje za krásnou a mocnou, obdivuje její sebevědomí a moc, ale na stranu druhou ji z hloubi duše nenávidí, v podstatě z těch samých důvodů. Závidí jí její přístup k mužům, její sebevědomí, vzhled i moc nad silami předků. Její závist k Fleur se ještě prohlubuje, když si Fleur nachází milence, který Pauline ve skutečnosti také přitahuje.

Kvůli Paulininým negativním emocím se mění její mentální stav, což se projevuje i na jejím přístupu ke křesťanským zvykům. Křesťanská praxe, kterou provozuje, se za křesťanskou

pomalou označit nedá, jelikož její praktiky hraničí až se sebepoškozováním. Ona sama si nic takového nepřipouští a považuje se za nejdokonalejší mučednici. Své utrpení chápe jako svůj největší dar Kristu. Její přehnané praktiky znepokojují jak její kolegyně v klášteře, tak i její příbuzné a známé z kmene. Jak se její psychika i přístup mění, stává se z Pauline úplně jiná osoba, což vrcholí její proměnou v sestru Leopoldu.

Ve třetí kapitole se zaměřuji na nejvýznamnějšího představitele původního náboženství kmene Anishinaabe, starého šamana a medicinmana Nanapushe. Kapitola obsahuje rozbor jeho myšlení, jakým způsobem nahlíží na svět a lidi kolem sebe. V práci rozebírám i jeho přístup k Pauline a jejím praktikám.

Z počátku se Nanapush o Pauline příliš nezajímal, nevěděl totiž, co si o ní má myslet. Postupem času se jeho názor formuje a mění, což je důležitým prvkem v této kapitole. Z počátku si z Pauline i jejího nového přístupu k tradicím a náboženské praxi dělá legraci. Lehce se jí kvůli tomu vysmívá, s ostatními členy své rodiny Paulininu novou praxi příliš nechápu. Avšak jak se Pauline mění v nepříjemnou fanatickou křesťanku, Nanapush ji začíná vnímat spíše jako hrozbu.

V této kapitole je mým cílem také rozebrat Nanapushův přístup k původním tradicím jeho lidu, jakým způsobem tyto tradice chápe a využívá. Důležitým momentem pro většinu postav, které v práci zmiňuji, s ohledem na jejich vývoj je léčivý rituál, který Nanapush pořádá pro svou adoptivní dceru Fleur.

Kapitola zaměřená na Fleur rozebírá paralely mezi Fleur a Pauline, jejich osudy a životní příběhy, jejich moc a náboženskou praxi. V první části kapitoly se zaměřuji na počátek vztahu mezi Pauline a Fleur, jakým způsobem se seznámily a čím vším si spolu prošly. Pozastavuji se nad tím, jakým způsobem je ovlivňuje jejich původ a jaký k němu mají postoj. Fleur na rozdíl od Pauline nemá se svými kořeny žádný problém, přijímá je a je na ně hrdá. Učí se, jak ovládat svou sílu a k čemu všemu ji může využít.

Důležité je i zakončení kapitoly, kde se zaměřuji na moment, kdy Fleur použila svou moc proti zaměstnancům dřevařské společnosti. Za využití pomoci prastarého, mocného jezerního ducha vyvolá silný vítr, který poláme stromy okolo jejího domku. Tím překazí plánovanou těžbu dřeva na území jejích předků.

Následující kapitola se soustředí na jednoho z představitelů křesťanské tradice, otce Damiena. První část kapitoly je věnována jeho proměně, jakým způsobem tato proměna změní jeho

pohled na sebe sama, jak změní jeho postavení ve společnosti a jeho moc. V další části kapitoly se zaměřuji na to, jakým způsobem někteří lidé žijící v rezervaci reagují, když zjistí, že otec Damien je ve skutečnosti mladá žena. Postoj většiny příslušníků indiánského kmene je nejčastěji neutrální, někdy až pozitivní. Jediná osoba, která se snaží této vědomosti nějak zneužít je sestra Leopolda, původně známá jako Pauline Puyat. Ta se otci Damienovi přiznává k vraždě, kterou kdysi spáchala, jen, aby ho mohla způsobit problémy. Oznamí mu, že pokud se rozhone ji udat, ona napíše náboženským autoritám, že otec Damien je ve skutečnosti žena, čímž by ho úplně zničila.

Poslední kapitola se věnuje mladé Marii Lazzare, která je ve skutečnosti Paulininou dcerou, již se hned po narození vzdala. Kapitola se zabývá jejich vztahem po Mariině vstupu do kláštera, kde působí právě i sestra Leopolda. Zatímco jejich vztah zpočátku vypadá kladně, postupně se mění v Mariinu noční můru. Kapitola se soustředí na psychické pochody obou postav a jakým způsobem spolu navzájem jednají. V kapitole také zmiňuji historii Paulinina rodu, vztahy a konflikt mezi jejími ženskými předky a jaký má tato rodinná historie vliv na Leopoldino chování a její vztah k Marii. Důležitou součástí kapitoly je i Mariin postoj ke vztahu s Leopoldou a její vzpomínky a názor na události, ke kterým tenkrát v klášteře došlo.

V závěru práce už pouze shrnuji, na co autorka ve svých dílech klade důraz a co si z jejich knih můžeme odnést za poučení.

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