FLEUR PILLAGER: STORYTELLERS AND STORIES TOLD

by

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich uses storytelling within her *Love Medicine* series in order to weave countless intricacies throughout her narrative pertaining to the several generations that reside in her fictional North Dakota reservation named Little No Horse. Analysis of Erdrich's storytelling methods illuminates her ability to draw inspiration from and honor traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling through the story and character of Fleur Pillager. Several similarities between traditional Ojibwe storytelling and Erdrich's narrative can be found within her storytelling methods surrounding the character of Fleur Pillager, most notably being the interconnected nature of these narratives and how they relate to the traditional Ojibwe symbol of the circle. Erdrich's integration of the oral storytelling tradition is highlighted by analysis of each individual *Love Medicine* novel, therefore providing a new lens with which to understand Erdrich's Ojibwe influences and narrative techniques and how they are used to create and define the character of Fleur Pillager.

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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has established itself as the center of many of the provocative and meaningful narratives created through time in order to provide human connection and meaning, and has endured as the cornerstone of communication. Storytelling has the ability to create and define meaningful relationships between people and events, and serves as a fundamental aspect within some cultures. This is the case regarding many Native American cultures that have traditionally relied specifically upon oral storytelling. The importance placed on storytelling within the Native American community is also relevant today, as authors like Louise Erdrich continue to honor the oral storytelling tradition within their present day written narratives. Throughout Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series, storytelling is employed in order to present the interconnected lives and relationships within the North Dakota landscape. The ways in which these lives are depicted, as well as the meanings to be derived from the characters' experiences, create a sense of the reader becoming a collaborator within the story as they take on the role of listener. The character of Fleur Pillager, who appears throughout Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series, serves as an excellent example of a character created and defined through storytelling. Erdrich is able to craft this specific character throughout the book series internally and externally, using the action of storytelling within each narrative to great effect, which works alongside how Fleur Pillager's story is told to the reader as Erdrich herself takes on the role of storyteller. Through Erdrich's narrative techniques which take inspiration from the oral storytelling found within Anishinaabe culture, specifically concerning the Ojibwe tradition that Erdrich takes influence from, Fleur

Pillager's character and life journey are slowly and intricately weaved throughout the series.

The activity of storytelling remains an essential part of the Native American culture, having been passed on orally for generations. This activity has served as a creative and engaging way in which to pass information and establish traditional ideas, such as the creation of the universe and explanations for the world around us. "Traditionally, most Native communities used storytelling as the primary instrument for historical record-keeping… The stories contain lessons that helped individuals and families make sense of how they and the tribe fit into the larger collective world" (LaPoe 14). It is specifically within the Ojibwe community, one of the many tribes found within the Anishinaabe culture found in the North American landscape, that storytelling can be viewed as a teaching tool, utilizing familiar settings and characters, such as the trickster character of Nanabozho, to understand the physical world. This concept of the trickster character is essential to many traditional Ojibwe stories due to their constantly changing role within these stories:

> Oftentimes he is the maker of the earth and/or he is the one who changes the chaotic myth-world into the ordered creation of today; he is the slayer of monsters, the thief of daylight, fire, water, and the like for the benefit of man; he is the teacher of cultural skills and customs; but he is also a prankster who is grossly erotic, insatiably hungry, inordinately vain, deceitful, and cunning toward friends as well as foes; a restless wanderer upon the face of the earth; and a blunderer who is often the victim of his

> own tricks and follies. What kind of logic combines all these disparate elements into one mythical personality? (Ricketts 327)

Many notable scholars such as Paul Radin, Kimberly Blaeser, and Gerald Vizenor have all tried to provide context regarding the very complex identity of the trickster which is always changing and ever present, as seen in Kirstin Squint's "Gerald Vizenor's Trickster Hermeneutics". The multifaceted trickster character embodies each different quality of humans, both positive and negative, and the trickster narrative affects all aspects of the storytelling experience through their introduction (Squint 107-108). Most often within Ojibwe oral tradition, the character of Nanabozho embodies this role as the trickster character, "He is sometimes described… as paradoxically both a trickster and a culture hero, in that he is very racy and many of his actions involve imaginative deception while at the same time establishing the basic institutions and practices of Ojibwe life and landscape" (Valentine 349). Nanabozho's character and role as a trickster are central within many of these stories that act as a teaching tool, and his multifaceted trope of the trickster allows him to fluctuate in his role within those stories.

Alongside Nanabozho's character, the use of animals are represented to the same effect within traditional oral stories in their goal to teach listeners, as detailed in Mary Magoulick's "Telling New Myths: Contemporary Native American Animal Narratives from Michigan": "These narratives are also intentionally and overtly told to focus on issues of identity and worldview, exploring what it means to be Nishnaabe today through the lessons of animals like wolves, coyotes, and buffalo…" (35). The prominent use of animals within Ojibwe oral storytelling acts as a repeating characteristic which, according to Magoulick, many contemporary Native Americans still consider important and

traditional. Author Victoria Brehm notes that some of these animals act as recurring characters in oral storytelling similar to Nanabozho and possess specific personalities and functions which still become fluid through the repeating act of storytelling over time (677-679). In fact, Nanabozho is known within some traditional Ojibwe stories as an animal instead of a human due to his transformational powers that allow him to change form throughout stories. Ojibwe author Linda LeGarde Grover details this animalistic transformation within Nanabozho stories which are typically shared during the winter season in her work *Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year* (148-150).

The traditional Ojibwe creation story is a prime example of storytelling as a teaching tool through the use of the trickster Nanabozho as well as other animal characters. This creation story details a flood of destruction upon Earth from the hand of the great spirit Kitchi Manitou, and how Nanabozho uses the help of air and sea animals in order to restore life on Earth as the only human survivor. Despite many versions and variations of the creation story existing, many share this common theme of flood and restoration of the Earth. With all of the Earth covered in water, Nanabozho and/or the sea animals take turns diving to the bottom in order to retrieve soil that would create new land. Once each of even the strongest of the sea animals fail to reach the bottom of the sea, such as the beaver and otter, the muskrat volunteers to try and reach the bottom of the sea, despite being much weaker than the ones before him:

> The muskrat then cast himself into the waters and bravely dived into the depths. After remaining therein nearly an entire day and night he appeared motionless at the aide of the raft, belly uppermost and paws closed. The other animals carefully took him out of the water, opened one of his paws,

> then a second, then a third, and finally the fourth, where there was a small grain of sand between his claws. (White 334)

This story serves as a microcosm of the various objectives behind storytelling, as it not only attempts to explain the physical world and its past, but also serves as a teaching tool regarding human nature and the lessons to be learned from ancestors. Exemplified through the sacrifice of the muskrat in order to provide for all other life at its own expense, this story and the actions of its characters represent ideals such as sacrifice and renewal. Nanabozho's story, the traditional Ojibwe creation story, teaches what the Ojibwe ancestors considered to be valuable, such as selflessness, resilience, and bravery.

In this way, traditional storytelling teaches on both internal and external levels. Externally, these stories find ways to explain and understand the physical world, as well as how those things came to be. Listeners of these stories must contextualize what they have learned about the natural world. As they are passed from one generation to the next, these stories try to teach listeners about their place within nature, and how they are linked with the other types of life surrounding them. This applies much more in a physical way, as this story teaches to care for those who are smaller and weaker, to give them opportunities, and to learn from them. In regard to learning about the past and the creation of the Earth, listeners will see that the Earth's re-creation was based on the foundation of sacrifice and community. These lessons demand physical action of the singular listener, and address their role within the community, and how they can use these same resources in order to create as well. The creation story specifically teaches through the character of Nanabozho and other animal characters like the muskrat that there is a

connection between all living things, and listeners can become physically impacted through this important relationship with nature and the immediate ecosystem.

Internally, these stories teach the listener lessons about humanity by showing what human qualities are essential to a beneficial and benevolent existence. Basil Johnston, Ojibwe storyteller and scholar, captures this humanity-centered aspect through his retelling of this specific story within "Ojibway Heritage", a book which details many traditional Ojibwe stories and mythology,

> They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed. Smiles turned to worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of the muskrat turned into despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, the muskrat floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed, the small succeeded. (14)

Through Basil Johnston's emotional retelling of this story, the humanity and importance in each of the animal's actions is highlighted. Listeners of this traditional story are taught resilience through the hopelessness and doom that clouds over each of the waiting animals. Listeners are taught patience and hope alongside that resilience, as the other animals must depend and rely upon the muskrat. Once the muskrat returns from the water having successfully reached the bottom of the sea, Johnston takes special note to highlight how the weakest, most unassuming of the animals has triumphed, where the strongest and exceptional before have failed. The muskrat's victory demands respect from his brethren, who previously had laughed at and mocked the muskrat for volunteering to help. It is through these specific emotions and realizations that come to

fruition in Johnston's retelling that listeners can internalize a beneficial lesson regarding how to act and think throughout life.

Combining these external and internal avenues in which traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling presents teachings, listeners gain generational knowledge which has been passed down to teach previous interpretations and understandings of life. In a way, these stories teach how to survive. In addition to providing teachings to help future generations survive on a physical and mental level, storytelling also helps previous generations preserve their unique identities. Storytelling becomes a transference of knowledge and wisdom to the listener, who then carries on that unique identity and keeps previous generations' identity from disappearing. Without storytelling in the Anishinaabe culture, past traditions and beliefs would disappear, and future generations would have no direction or guidance as to how to navigate life. This benefits both past and future generations as the unique Anishinaabe identity preserves itself through storytelling, connecting the present-day natives with their ancestors. Mary Leen describes this survival tactic in "An Art of Saying: Joy Harjo's Poetry and the Art of Storytelling" (As cited by Katryn Anne Sandler in her dissertation "Storytelling As Survival: The Native American Struggle for Selfhood and Identity"):

> In oral cultures, storytelling maintains and preserves traditions. It takes listeners on a journey toward a renewal of life, a common survival theme in Native rituals and ceremonies. Older generations pass on stories told when they were young. Thus, storytelling knits a new generation into the fabric of generations gone. This act serves as a "gentle survival" tactic-a productive way to fight extinction. (1)

This mutualism surrounding storytelling benefits both storyteller and listener, as both gain something from the act of storytelling. The storyteller is able to preserve and pass on knowledge of the previous generations' identity, while listeners gain that knowledge and wisdom to wield and learn from. Storytelling has become such an essential activity within the Anishinaabe and Ojibwe cultures partly because of this act of preservation, which was made even more essential during colonialism when these cultures' histories and identities were in danger of becoming erased.

The primary avenue of this traditional storytelling was oral. A regular occurring activity within the Ojibwe community, oral storytelling between community members became the main way to share stories and lessons. This oral nature of storytelling introduced many freeform aspects that influenced the storytelling, such as memory and remembering. Through the introduction of memory and recalling, storytelling begins to take on a fluid character, as stories begin to change and morph over time. Different situations may recall slightly different versions of stories, and this aspect of dynamic occurrence influences each story through qualities of plasticity. Therefore, stories and oral storytelling begin to become alive, as stories gain ever-changing identities that form to different situations.

Presently, this same type of oral storytelling is translated into writing, preserved on page to remember. Many contemporary Native American authors rely on this written form of storytelling to speak and relate with audiences currently, and still retain this essential aspect of memory and recalling events through remembrance: "While most contemporary American Indian writers are literate and Western - educated, many of them say that oral traditions-especially the act of remembering and repeating heard stories-

inform their literatures" (Ballenger 791-792). This exact case can be seen through the writings of Louise Erdrich, as her narratives detail multiple narrators who each give their own, personal memories and recountings of events, sometimes at odds with each other.

Traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling has the unique quality of interconnectedness, as different stories and interpretations of them remain subjective, while also being accepted and valid within the larger community. Again, Ojibwe oral storytelling is seen to work on two separate levels which focus on the different stories told, as well as the reception and beliefs surrounding them. Due to the living and ever-changing nature of stories as they are told orally, many stories change and morph throughout time to include different characters, events, or morals to be learned. Many foundational stories within the Native American cultures exist in multiple different variations, as seen with the creation story seen earlier. While the specific Ojibwe version of this creation story contains Nanabozho as the last person left after the great destructive flood, some versions in other cultures do not feature Nanabozho at all. The Iroquois culture's version of the creation story still features the muskrat and its sacrifice to reach the bottom of the ocean to grab some of the Earth, but instead gives that soil to Sky Woman, who has just fallen to Earth from Skyworld (Kimmerer). Within the Ojibwe community, many small digressions can be seen resulting from the oral tradition, such as the many different spellings of Ojibwe or Nanabozho's name. However, despite these digressions, each interpretation becomes valid and accepted by the Ojibwe community; there are no superior readings.

In the same way, interconnectedness can be seen through these stories by the different interpretations of stories. While each of these stories are meant to teach about the past or lessons concerning human nature, each individual may take away different

meanings or interpretations regarding the stories. Similarly to how there are no superior versions of stories, there is also no superior analysis of stories. The different morals or objectives of these stories that are created depend on the individuality of each reader and their circumstances. Nonetheless, each of these interpretations becomes accepted and included into the Ojibwe culture. When combined together, these two levels of interconnectedness work together to present a multidimensional depiction of not only the tradition of oral storytelling, but the culture of the Ojibwe people as a whole.

This concept of interconnectedness seen so easily through oral storytelling is essential to the understanding of Ojibwe culture. Its circular, repetitive nature through stories, as well as its all-encompassing acceptance of the individual, form together to connect everything. Each of these qualities encourage a very relative worldview, and they slowly weave together perfectly in tandem. Lydia Schultz in her essay "Fragments and Ojibwe Stories: Narrative Strategies in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine", uses the concept of a "Sacred Hoop" to articulate the repetition and interconnectedness seen in Ojibwe storytelling. This concept describes an existential structure of repetition, interconnectivity, and equality, and is directly inspired by Paula Gunn Allen's book of the same name. Schultz's use of the "Sacred Hoop" branches from the defining techniques of these oral narratives such as alternating, first person narratives. These work alongside the Ojibwe culture's mindset of relating events and experiences to one another, reinforcing the idea that Ojibwe storytelling and worldview is circular and connected, "Multiperspectivity does not serve as the sign of uncertain, individual solutions that it is in dominant American culture. Instead the multiple narrators are part of the hoop-like repetition and variation of Chippewa storytelling" (91). This profound analysis of Ojibwe

storytelling exemplifies how the culture uses several different techniques that combine together in order to connect across stories, characters, and interpretations.

In a similar way to the comparison of interconnectivity that becomes intricately woven together, these same concepts apply to one of the most essential symbols in Ojibwe culture: a circle. This symbol encapsulates repetition with no beginning or end in an uninterrupted pattern, similar to the way in which oral storytelling is performed, through endless repetition and acceptance of the resulting equilibrium. Even the traditional way of life relies on this symbol of a circle, as seen within *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt, found in "Nations within a Nation: The Dakota and Ojibwe of Minnesota" by Thomas Peacock and Donald Day, where Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux shaman relates the depiction of this circular symbol in life to transcriber John G. Neihardt:

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is done in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it … Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down in a circle. The moon does the same, and both

> are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. (194-196)

Here we see multiple ways in which the symbol of a circle pervades the traditional Ojibwe way of life, not just within storytelling. The symbol of the circle and its influence on the Ojibwe culture is essential because the receiving part of storytelling relies on the different interpretations and meanings that listeners create, and with this worldview in mind these stories change in significance and explanation. It also directly correlates to this repetitive storytelling in which oral storytellers must continuously recall the past through memory in order to preserve tradition and protect the future of their culture. Additionally, the importance of the circle within the Ojibwe community can be seen on a physical level alongside this metaphysical level, as seen through tangible objects such as the drum:

> As a visual cosmological symbol, the circle concentrates the totality of everything that is from all directions and the four colors to which it points. Drums, which serve as perhaps the most emblematic symbol of Ojibwe religion and as powerful vehicles for prayer and exchange with the manidoog, are uniformly, significantly round. (McNally 56)

From this interconnected mentality seen on a concrete level, the concentric patterns that surround the traditional Ojibwe culture begin to materialize, as well as a more accurate understanding of oral storytelling.

Using the creation story again as a microcosm of this idea, we can see the Ojibwe culture's aboriginal way of life evident in the very creation of the Earth. The symbology of a circle encourages interpretations of interconnectedness and harmony, all of which are seen within the creation story. Themes of reliance, community, and alliance all combine together in a pervasive sense of relativity. It is this interdependence and repetition in relation to the united body that is highlighted within not only the creation story, but the Ojibwe people's general worldview:

> Aboriginal worldview is grounded in the Creation story. Aboriginal people view the earth as their Mother and the animals as their spiritual kin. There is an interconnectedness between all living things and we are all part of a greater whole which is called life. Aboriginal worldview is expressed through the symbol of the circle… Aboriginal culture recognizes natural law. Time was marked by the changing seasons and the rising and setting of the sun, rather than by numbers, and their existence was marked by an acceptance of and respect for their natural surroundings and their place in the scheme of things. The thinking of Aboriginal peoples was cyclical, rather than linear like that of the Europeans. Everything was thought of in terms of its relation to the whole, not as individual bits of information to be compared to one another. Aboriginal philosophy was holistic, and did

> not lend itself readily to dichotomies or categories as did European philosophy. (Manitowabi)

From as early as the creation story, the Ojibwe people reinforce a worldview centered around relativity. Humanity's reliance upon nature, as well as vice-versa, encourages a connected harmony between man and nature. The actions of Kitchi Manitou, the repetitive nature of life, and the resulting peace of a restored balance weave together to provide a foundation of cyclical interconnectedness upon which the Ojibwe people stand. This cornerstone to the Ojibwe way of life is presented through repetitive storytelling that incorporates all individuality within itself.

This relative view of existence is a core characteristic to the aboriginal worldview. Humans and the nature around them work within this established system of relativity and interconnectedness. These notions of relativity and worldview begin as abstract concepts; however, there is real evidence of this non-linear way of life that can be seen physically. Deborah McGregor, in her article "Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future," uses constructs such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in order to physically measure the Anishinaabe people's knowledge and use cases that apply to global society. Referencing the "Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge" class that she teaches at the University of Toronto, McGregor begins by using the Anishinaabe creation story in order to showcase the Indigenous people's relationship with the Earth and Creation. This relationship is presented as not having a discernible beginning, but having always been well established in its ethics and values (386), which harkens this symbol of a circle that similarly has no discernable beginning. McGregor uses stories to teach students of

beginnings, and the Anishinaabe creation story explains how humanity is connected with nature in order to articulate the complex relativity of life (387). This Indigenous Knowledge of the Anishinaabe people uses storytelling to articulate and teach how its roots are planted within relativity and interconnectedness. McGregor comments on the values which she has learned through her own teaching on this traditional Anishinaabe knowledge, using the symbol of a circle to articulate its essential values:

> IK is a circle; it is part of the larger cycle of creation and re-creation. If we reclaim our original instructions that encourage us to think in terms of cycles, such as the Thanksgiving Address and the Anishinaabe Creation and Re-Creation stories, we are brought back full circle. That is what we have to do with our knowledge: bring it back full circle so it lives in ourselves, our communities, our nations, and our children. (403)

McGregor relates this importance of the circle to struggling students, who grapple with their own ways of linear thinking throughout the class, who then find relief once they circle back to the beginning, focusing on Anishinaabe storytelling such as the seven grandfathers' teachings. McGregor again emphasizes how a circular view is essential to understanding Indigenous Knowledge, "I always stress that IK must be viewed as a circle and as a process of re-generation and re-creation. It must not be constrained by linear thinking… TEK or IK, as Aboriginal people understand them, are not linear" (404). Through these concepts of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge, the aboriginal worldview that focuses on the symbology of the circle can be physically seen. This repetition that pervades each aspect of Ojibwe life is shown to continuously ingratiate itself into the culture through storytelling. The stories in which

the Ojibwe people share promote these themes of interconnectivity and relativity through characters such as Nanabozho and the muskrat, while the repetitious nature of storytelling in itself represents a circle in the way it has no discernable beginning or ending. The ways in which storytelling and circular symbology are able to appear as founding ideologies is further proof to the complex, circular connectivity which relates and connects each facet of Ojibwe culture together.

Contemporary Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich is extremely aware of this interconnectivity which is so closely connected to oral storytelling, as displayed through her writing. Specifically seen within her *Love Medicine* series, which contains the novels *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, *The Bingo Palace*, *Tales of Burning Love*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, *Four Souls*, and *The Painted Drum*, Erdrich's writing exemplifies the interconnected nature which traditional Ojibwe storytelling evokes. Each of the *Love Medicine* novels work on a singular, individual level, but put together as a series her narrative weaves numerous complexities between stories, characters, and events which are all woven together into a more elaborate and intricate realization. The interconnectivity which sprawls throughout Edrich's novels not only draws inspiration from, but honors that of, the traditional Ojibwe culture. In the same way that the first novel in the series, *Love Medicine*, acts essentially as a collection of stories which behave as threads woven together that culminate into a pattern by the end of the novel, the entire *Love Medicine* series relates this same idea on a larger scale which weaves those same patterns together to culminate into a multifaceted tapestry. Each individual story and detail remains as visible and important to the overall structure, while also aiding in the realization of the series' more broad and multifaceted apex.

Erdrich is able to pattern character, story, and place with her narrative strands which weave together throughout the entire series, relating to the circular symbology seen within the Ojibwe tradition. This specific experience which results from a complete reading of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series derives from the traditional Ojibwe understanding of storytelling and the complex layers which it is able to create.

The *Love Medicine* novels and the ways in which they are written strongly parallel traditional Ojibwe storytelling when held in comparison to many of the qualities analyzed thus far. Storytelling is enacted as a teaching tool while being manifested through imaginative and creative ways that relate to Ojibwe culture and techniques, as noted by Mary Magoulick "Erdrich sees her books as a continuation of a communicative tradition in Ojibwe culture (and really all cultures) of sharing stories and using art to make and enhance human connections" (97). Erdrich slowly and intricately advances the creation and identity of these fictional Northern settings, most notably the reservation of Little No Horse, through the act of storytelling. In addition, these acts of storytelling throughout the series are seen on the same kind of dualistic levels that traditional Ojibwe storytelling utilizes through the use of storytelling within Erdrich's text and plot as it is used by characters within each novel, as well as its use outside of the text in how Erdrich presents the stories to her reader by taking on the role of storyteller and forcing readers to take on the role of listener. Although the *Love Medicine* novels are fiction and Erdrich is not featured within the story herself as a character, Erdrich's presence is still felt through this lens which focuses on the Ojibwe storytelling tradition. Erdrich can be viewed as the voice which narrates each novel to the reader and operates outside of the text, working alongside the several narrators which speak inside of the text. Many traditional

storytelling narratives contain similar binary objectives, as seen through the different morals and messages that certain stories relate, as well as the multifaceted presentations of those stories as seen through varying narratives and the role of the trickster figure. These binary objectives can also be seen in how traditional Ojibwe storytelling works as a survival technique for both storyteller and listener, as one gains knowledge and experience while the other is able to safely secure generational identity.

Erdrich is able to translate the properties of traditional oral storytelling into written narratives which act in the same interconnected way. For example, readers are made familiar with the commonplace settings of the Catholic convent which overlooks the Little No Horse reservation, the bingo hall seen prominently in *The Bingo Palace*, the nursing home where main characters like Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Nanapush reside over the course of multiple novels, and the important landscape of Lake Matchimanito near the reservation, all before hearing the reservation's name of Little No Horse which is revealed in the sixth book, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. The origin of the neighboring town of Argus, which is repeatedly seen throughout the series as well, is not developed until the second book in the series, *The Beet Queen*, where readers discover the genesis of Argus as a beet farming town. This same approach of multilayered development applies to characters as well, as characters who are introduced early within the series are later revealed to have different origins than originally conveyed, such as Lipsha Morrissey and Marie Kashpaw.

Many of these techniques of Ojibwe oral storytelling that are exemplified throughout the *Love Medicine* series can be seen through the specific focal point of the character Fleur Pillager, who acts as the most recurring and prominent character through

her appearance in almost every novel in the series. Despite not appearing directly in every novel, *Tales of Burning Love* being the only novel without her direct presence, her influence can be seen on other characters and events, such as the main character of Jack Mauser, who is Fleur's grandson and who exhibits many of the same talents and traits as her. Despite her direct person being absent from one of these novels, her presence can be felt throughout each of the individual novels as her character and actions affect many facets of the Little No Horse reservation and the lives of those living there. By focusing on Fleur Pillager's character throughout the entire *Love Medicine* series, a more closely defined analysis and observation of how Edrich integrates Ojibwe storytelling traditions, specifically within the Ojibwe and Anishinaabe spheres, emerges. Through the lens of her specific character, readers can better define the ways in which these parallels within storytelling emerge, such as its dualistic nature, a relative and circular worldview, and storytelling as a teaching tool.

A discussion of these separate layers through which storytelling functions throughout both traditional Ojibwe storytelling and Erdrich's novels can be detailed in congruence with Fleur Pillager's character. On a smaller scale, there are connections concerning how storytelling is utalized within each individual novel's text. For example, how characters within one novel use storytelling between each other, how characters relate and connect with each other by telling stories, or how information is spread through the use of stories. Many of these relate to Fleur in the way that stories and rumors spread about her actions and character, which changes the ways in which the Little No Horse reservation community views her. On a larger scale, connections lie concerning how Erdrich presents the story of Fleur Pillager to the reader and takes on the role of the

storyteller by making readers take on the role of the listener. This entails how the *Love Medicine* series is told nonlinearly, how information from one novel changes how another is read and understood, and the general narrative strategies employed by Erdrich on an individual novel basis which culminate together on a metanarrative scale to provide a different reading experience. A few examples of how these pertain to Fleur can be seen through how her life story is told in a nonlinear fashion and how a knowledge of all *Love Medicine* novels develops and defines Fleur's character far more extensively than within any one novel.

In essence, Fleur Pillager's character exemplifies the ways in which Louise Erdrich integrates the oral storytelling tradition within her written narrative, and by incorporating analysis pertaining to the different narrative layers found throughout this series, that integration is illuminated. In doing so, these connections and layers that Erdrich weaves together throughout the *Love Medicine* series result in a much more complex and rewarding interpretation of these novels. A specific focus surrounding Fleur Pillager's character provides a better understanding and appreciation of these different techniques and the ways in which Erdrich combines them in order to weave those strands into a tapestry which honors the traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling tradition through Erdrich's contemporary, written narrative.

CHAPTER I: *LOVE MEDICINE*

As mentioned before, the *Love Medicine* series is told in a nonlinear fashion, as the order of publication does not match the order of chronology. Therefore, readers' first introduction to Fleur Pillager may vary depending on which book in the series they read first. Readers who wish to complete the series by publication date, starting with the novel *Love Medicine*, may also vary in their introduction to Fleur Pillager based on which edition of *Love Medicine* they read, as Erdrich has re-issued the novel twice with major revisions. The first edition, which would later be expanded upon, contains no mention or appearance of Fleur Pillager. This would change, however, in 1993 when Erdrich published the second edition of her novel, *Love Medicine, New and Expanded Edition*. This second edition was larger, containing eighteen chapters, as well as providing additions to previously established chapters. The novel's third edition, known as *Love Medicine, Newly Revised Edition*, was published in 2009 for the novel's twenty fifth anniversary, and it remains as the novel's latest version.

It is only within the second and third editions of *Love Medicine* in which readers encounter Fleur Pillager's character for the first time. The fluctuation of Fleur's appearance within Erdrich's different editions of the novel indicates the changing nature of oral storytelling that Erdrich connects with within her writing. Marta Lysik, author of *Dialogism or Interconnectedness in the Works of Louise Erdrich* notes the dynamic this has upon the interconnected nature of Erdrich's novels, as well as its similarity to the oral tradition, "The practice of revising harks back to the oral tradition when a story is told and re–told many times and always emerges in a slightly different form. In this respect the author seems to be saying that literary texts and Native American oral tradition can

enter into a dialogue" (62). Fleur Pillager's first appearance occurs within "The Island", which is the fourth chapter in the two later editions, and gives first person narration from the perspective of Lulu Lamartine that details her progressing relationship with Moses Pillager after she has traveled to his secluded island. Throughout the entire chapter Lulu expresses constant interjections towards her mother regarding their turbulent relationship, "I never grew from the curve of my mother's arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her. But she had tore herself away from the run of my life like a riverbank. She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill out alone" (68). This is the first mention of Fleur's character that readers encounter within the novel, as Lulu establishes her lamenting attitude towards Fleur regarding how Fleur abandoned her at a government school. As a result, Lulu can only connect with Fleur through childhood memories of her which consistently appear throughout the chapter. Lulu cites these memories of her mother as a source of strength and sadness, such as her memories of Fleur's voice which speaks the Ojibwe language (68-69). Fleur is presented as a mysterious being through this knowledge of the traditional Ojibwe language, as well as her dualistic representation. The memory of Fleur's voice acts as one which instills power and comfort within Lulu, as well as protecting her from harm. However, these positive attributes are paired with negative ones, such as the reminder that it was not Fleur who worked for Lulu's return home, but instead her uncle Nanapush.

Throughout the entire chapter, these dualistic sentiments regarding Fleur's representation are exacerbated through Lulu's narration. Lulu expresses pain at the thought of losing her uncle Nanapush in a similar way to how she lost her mother (71), showing that Lulu's love for her mother was potent enough to be damaged in a

substantial way. Lulu also comments on the physical traits of Fleur, as well as the Pillagers as a whole, specifically commenting on her increasing need for her mother which parallels her increasing likeness to Fleur over time, "I needed my mother the more I became like her–a Pillager kind of woman with a sudden body, fierce outright wishes, a surprising heart. I needed her when Rushes Bear's son, Nectar Kashpaw, started looking at me with an insisting glance" (71). Lulu's vague descriptions of her mother present a character who is almost impossibly handsome, as if her face were created by the Ojibwe gods (77). As the chapter ends, Lulu can detect her mother's presence and voice within her that protect her from Moses Pillager, repeating her previous memories of Fleur's words, "N'dawnis, n'dawnis, my mother still spoke to me, sang to me, keeping me in spite of him from deeper harm" (83). Lulu's depiction of her mother Fleur completes its circle, ending much in the same way as it began, with Lulu recalling her childhood memories of her mother's comforting voice to protect her. Lulu begins and ends this chapter with the specific memory of Fleur's voice which speaks through the traditional Ojibwe language which has been widely forgotten or unknown to many characters. Fleur's repetitious words of "my daughter" bookends Lulu's narration, furthering her dualistic depiction through the lens of her daughter's perspective.

This chapter provides readers with a deceptively complex introduction to Fleur's character in this regard, as her perspective is never shown, nor is her character even directly seen. Lulu, and therefore Erdrich, uses this chapter as an opportunity to create Fleur's character purely through implications and other indirect means as a secondary focus. The result creates an intriguing vision of Fleur within readers' minds, as she has only been defined through allusive, connotative means which encapsulate her character in

mystery. Fleur’s presence can be seen as an invisible force which remains continuously present throughout this chapter within Lulu’s yearning for her. As noted by Achim Hescher in their article “Remembering Lulu and Albertine: Intertextual Constellations in Louise Erdrich's ‘Love Medicine’”, Lulu’s attraction towards Moses Pillager most likely stems from her love for and intrigue surrounding her mother (309). Moses Pillager encapsulates many similar aspects of her mother, such as his striking features that correlates to Fleur’s which have lingered in Lulu’s memories from her childhood, as well as his ambivalent reputation known to other members of the community just the same as Fleur. However, Moses also contains qualities which are the opposite of Fleur, such as his protective and provisional nature, the lack thereof which has caused Lulu’s negative feelings regarding her mother. Therefore, Fleur’s character can be seen as a powerful influence in relation to Lulu’s actions and the people she is drawn to. In fact, Fleur’s presence can be seen as so powerful and evident within this chapter, that its very title could be interpreted as a reference to Fleur’s influence and presence within Lulu’s character. Though the title of “The Island” is expectantly a reference to the island on which Moses Pillager resides that Lulu travels to, the title could symbolize Lulu’s solitude through the constant and surrounding presence of her mother. Lulu’s narration begins the novel by comparing her mother to a receding riverbank, a source which acts as a constant presence but is untouchable and unapproachable. The chapter ends with a pregnant Lulu who takes comfort not within the person closest to her in Moses, but instead within Fleur’s presence which continues to surround her daughter like the water around an island.

Through this lens, the entire chapter, as well as its title, all reference Fleur Pillager in some indirect way, further cementing her character as one of power, mystery, and influence, all without her direct presence. Erdrich's depiction of this story, specifically Fleur and her presence within her daughter Lulu, correlate in a very similar way to several traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques mentioned earlier. Lulu's repeated mention of Fleur throughout the chapter correlates to the important symbol of the circle which represents repetition and interconnectedness that encapsulates the story. Lydia Schultz's concept of the "Sacred Hoop" is mirrored through this analysis concerning repetition and the interconnectivity it creates. Erdrich's decision to depict this chapter, as well as many of her novels, through the first-person perspective relates to these ideas of oral storytelling techniques as well, deciding to give Lulu's perspective specifically and create Fleur's character through that perspective. Erdrich continues this important aspect of perspective throughout her novel, and a continued reading of the novel *Love Medicine* furthers the technique of multiperspectivity, as Fleur's character continues to be woven through the perspectives of others, which work alongside Lulu's initial depiction of Fleur to give a more complete and defining depiction of her character.

It is within the second section of the chapter "The Beads" that Fleur Pillager is not only mentioned again, but also makes a direct appearance in order to help Marie Kashpaw give birth. Marie asks for Fleur's presence during birth, conjuring fear and surprise from those around her that turn silent (98), causing readers to associate Fleur Pillager's character with mystery again, as well as danger, as the established characters thus far show their familiarity with and apprehension towards Fleur. Marie's narration

develops Fleur's character immediately afterwards as a revered member of the community:

> The Pillager was living back there with spirits. Back where the woods were logged off and brush had twisted together, impassable, she kept house and cared for Nanapush. That side of the lake belonged to her. Twice she lost it, twice she got it back. Four times she returned. Now she wore moccasins, let her braids grow long, traveled into town on foot, scorned the nuns as they scorned her, visited the priest. She made no confession, though some said Father Damien Modeste confessed his sins to her. She received no forgiveness, no money, no welfare when that came about. And although Rushes Bear was furious that her own son, Eli, loved her once and was rumored to go back there still, she always had to admit Fleur knew the medicines. (98-99)

This loaded introduction to Fleur Pillager is the first time we get a definitive description about her person, outside of Lulu's fragmented memories and depiction of her in the previous chapter. Fleur is first described as living amongst the spirits and is simply called by her last name instead of her full name but with the article "the." This indicates fear and notoriety of her character since the last name of "Pillager" is alone enough to identify her. Fleur's additional description of living amongst the spirits indicates that she has some kind of spiritual power and connection. It is also interesting to note that there is a minor change in Fleur's description here between the second and third revisions which Erdrich has published. The second edition, *Love Medicine, New and Expanded Edition*, contains the additional descriptor of Fleur living "back there with no lights, she was

living with spirits" (101). However, as seen here in the current third edition, *Love Medicine, Newly Revised Edition*, this sentence was changed to exclude the mention of Fleur's home lacking any light source. This additional detail furthers Fleur's depiction as a powerful, uncanny being who resides within nature and darkness amongst spirits. The narration continues to define Fleur's residence even further by describing the surrounding woodland landscape which has become overgrown and wild, furthering the mystery around her character due to her home and presence being walled off from outsiders. Readers are also told that the certain land on the other side of the lake belongs to her. Fleur is shown to have natural obligation and ownership of the land outside of a man-made construction such as property lines or deeds, indicating that the land is inherent to her. Implication works heavily within this section, as Fleur is further described as having lost her land within the past and regained it. Fleur is understood to be a powerful figure with close ties to nature and her land, emphasizing her mysterious nature as it relates to the powers which are not fully understood.

Readers see a more definite description of Fleur's character, beginning with her clothing and hair. She is seen by others wearing moccasins and growing her hair into long braids, which conjures images of traditional Ojibwe attire. Fleur's affiliation with the traditional Ojibwe way of life indicates her strength and resilience, as she is implied to have continued within the traditional way of life which has been lost to so many. Fleur is described as walking into town on foot, further indicating her refusal to assimilate within the current American culture. Despite this taking place in 1948, as indicated by the chapter's date, Fleur does not travel by car or other more efficient means; she strictly abides by the traditional Ojibwe way of life. Fleur is also rumored to wield power over

those such as Father Damien, implied to be the priest of the reservation. It is not absolutely known if this power over Father Damien is true, and readers may call into question many of the rumors and legends surrounding Fleur, as perhaps they too are untrue gossip that has grown and morphed Fleur's character as mythological and fearful in the townspeople's eyes. Fleur is additionally described as independent through her ability to sustain herself without the aid of money or welfare from the government. Marie's narration then ends with a reference to Fleur's past in regard to her romantic relationship with Eli Kashpaw which works to humanize her in contrast with the previous descriptions of her.

Once extensively analyzed, Fleur's initial description becomes loaded with mystery. Erdrich is able to describe Fleur Pillager in a way that further defines her, while also reinforcing the unknown surrounding her character. Fleur is described by Marie from an outside point of view, which is severely limited and contains mostly implications rather than facts. Fleur's depiction in the chapter "The Island" is similar in the way that Fleur is not only defined through indirect, secondary means, but also through Lulu's specific perspective which carries inherent bias due to her turbulent relationship with Fleur. Erdrich presents readers with both facts and opinions of Fleur through outside perspective and first-person narration, and it is up to readers to combine those differing perspectives together in order to decipher who Fleur Pillager really is.

Only after Marie's initial description of Fleur do readers encounter her character in the present for the very first time. However, this brief encounter also differs depending on which version of the novel readers are using, as the second and third versions of the novel have differing details surrounding the event of Marie's labor and delivery. Both

versions depict Marie's labor through abstract visions that she has due to pain, but differences are made regarding Fleur's arrival and effect upon Marie. These changes specifically affect Marie's ability to understand the traditional Ojibwe language, as well as Fleur's ability to heal Marie with her touch. Fleur's healing aura becomes more explicit in the second version of the novel, with her presence causing Marie to physically feel and see a spiritual change in the air, giving further gravity to her identity as a being of power and mystique. Erdrich removes these explicit details in the third version of the novel, most likely to continue Fleur's description through more secondary, indirect means. Both editions of the novel end this section the same, with Marie noticing Fleur's silent exit without description. As a result of Erdrich's narrative techniques, this chapter mirrors Erdrich's earlier chapter, "The Island", in the way that Fleur's character is developed as one of mystery and power despite her lack of concrete definition.

Throughout the entire novel, readers are only able to see the effects of Fleur's actions and presence rather than her character itself. These two chapters within *Love Medicine* are also told from the changing lens of different character's viewpoints, as Lulu can only perceive Fleur through faded memories and polarizing emotions, and Marie is only able to perceive Fleur while she is half awake, in great pain, and perhaps even hallucinating. The ending result is a character who remains shrouded in ambiguity, remaining an enigma within the minds of readers thus far. The novel *Love Medicine* is therefore able to create a profoundly interesting and loaded character without their direct presence or description. Erdrich's methods in doing so recall many similar techniques found within oral Ojibwe storytelling tradition, such as the use of varying narrative voices and the cyclical patterns they invoke, "Erdrich's use of analogous situations…

works to repeat these elements of the culture, creating a cyclic pattern in the novel. These repetitions pick up on the Ojibwe tradition of telling a tale in a variety of ways…" (83). Subsequently, Fleur Pillager acts as the avenue of Erdrich's utilization of traditional Ojibwe storytelling within this novel, honoring those traditions and refining them in order to operate in modern American literature.

CHAPTER II: *THE BEET QUEEN*

Fleur Pillager's second appearance through Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series is found within the novel *The Beet Queen*. There, readers are presented with a younger Fleur Pillager who is briefly depicted within the town of Argus in 1932 at the beginning of the novel. Should readers follow the series by publication date, this beginning of *The Beet Queen*'s story would take place sixteen years before the events of Marie Kashpaws birth scene within *Love Medicine* in the winter of 1948. Since there is no previous knowledge of Fleur Pillager's whereabouts at this time, as well as *The Beet Queen*'s differing characters and location compared to *Love Medicine*, her appearance near the beginning of the novel is surprising when compared to her appearances in the other novels.

Fleur is first encountered through the perspective of one of the main characters in *The Beet Queen*, Karl Adare. The beginning of the novel details how Karl is abandoned by his mother, along with his sister Mary and their unnamed baby brother. Soon after the baby is taken from them, Karl and Mary must survive together as orphans. The siblings take a nearby train to the town of Argus where their aunt and uncle live; however, Karl is separated from his sister as well after they are attacked by a dog, causing Karl to retreat back to the train while Mary continues in the opposite direction. It is after Karl fails in his attempt to connect with a newly met stranger in the boxcar that he leaps out of the moving train, causing him to break his feet. Karl is unable to move due to these injuries, and thinks that since he had not died from the fall, he must surely be saved, and visualizes the stranger from the boxcar discovering his disappearance and coming to his

rescue. However, it is not the stranger in the boxcar which comes to Karl's aid; instead he is found by Fleur Pillager, though her identity is unknown at the time:

> My salvation dragged a cart of scavenged boards down the tracks. Its wheels were shrieking iron. The sound stopped just above me. She was massive. Her shadow fell from above. I opened my cracked throat, but no word came out of it, then a woman stumbled down the low embankment. Her head was bound in a white scarf that blazed against her dark skin. Twin silver mirrors dangled from her earlobes, flashed, dizzied me. She crouched over me, lifted my eyelids with fingers tough and flexible as pliers. Then she opened my jaw and poured raw whiskey down my throat. (48)

The Beet Queen continues Erdrich's narrative of Fleur Pillager as a mysterious and aloof figure, depicted through the eyes of Karl Adare as a massive figure of shadow. As is the case with Fleur's previous depictions, most attention is drawn towards the objects surrounding Fleur and their effect, such as the shrieking of her cart wheels, the shadows she draws, the scarf around her head, and her silver mirror earrings which seem to radiate light. The only direct descriptors seen in this paragraph pertain to Fleur's massive size and her dark skin color. Karl waits as Fleur leaves to create a shelter and fire, and soon returns to place Karl upon a mound of reeds. She ignores Karl as he questions what she plans to do, and remarks how later he would understand Fleur's tendency towards silence, "Days would pass before I realized that Fleur Pillager almost never spoke, though she had the ability. She told me only her name, but I heard her sing and talk to herself" (49). Karl alludes to how, over time, he is unable to know and understand Fleur's

character very well due to her continual silence, reinforcing her status as a mysterious figure.

Fleur goes on to display an acute knowledge of traditional medicine, as she is able to gather nearby resources in order to begin healing Karl. She first does this by massaging his feet, forcing the broken bones in place before gathering nearby resources such as a branch to create casts. Once this process is done, Fleur wraps Karl in oilskins and blankets to warm him, giving him more alcohol to aid in his relief. It is then that, Karl begins to study Fleur closely, and his perspective elaborates on more specific, concrete details concerning her appearance and way of life:

> Her face was young, broad and dark, but fine around the edges, even delicate. Her heavy mouth curved at the corners, her nose arched like the nose of a royal princess. She was an Indian, a Pillager, one of a wandering bunch that never did take hold. She made her living by peddling whatever came her way to sell. Pans hung from her cart, and bundles that held packets of needles, colored string. Calico dress lengths were piled on top. She dealt in mismatched plates, mended cups, and secondhand forks. She bought handmade white lace from the mission school and traded it for berries pounded into jerky, birch-bark picture frames. (49-50)

Karl's narration provides more definitive details regarding Fleur's physical traits, specifically her distinct facial features. Similarly to Lulu's narration which describes Fleur's face as too handsome to be real, Karl likens Fleur's features to that of a royal princess. Karl's narration also mentions previous knowledge concerning the Pillagers, indicating that the Pillagers retain no home due to their constant state of motion. This also

implies that the Pillagers are a known family even to those outside of the reservation described in *Love Medicine*. Notably as well, Karl explicitly depicts Fleur as a peddler having to salvage and trade in order to survive, living through the harsh conditions of having no shelter and manually carrying her caravan along the train tracks each day. This differs greatly from the powerful, mystical being of ambiguity and potential danger Fleur who is described as from Marie Kashpaw's narration; however Karl does encounter Fleur's extensive knowledge of healing and medicine through her ability to craft a cast via natural resources around them.

Fleur's healing powers are further developed once Karl realizes that he has pneumonia from sleeping in the cold train boxcars. Upon realizing this, Fleur creates a fire underneath her wagon box and then ties Karl onto a chair placed on the wagon box. Once she has draped Karl in blankets, he describes his nearly out of body experience due to Fleur's healing technique of sealing him "into a sweltering cone" (51) in order to warm him and break his fever. The abstract and spiritual effect which Fleur's presence and healing had upon Marie Kashpaw affects Karl in a very similar way, alluding that Fleur's healing abilities have somehow transcended beyond usual conventions. Once Karl's fever breaks, Fleur takes him down to wrap him in dry blankets and reeds, laying on top of him to press him down with her warmth. Karl begins to recover from this point on in regards to his pneumonia; however he is still immobile to due to his broken feet. Karl narrates how Fleur takes him with her as she continues to travel and trade, seating him atop the cart as she pulls their weight with an attached horse collar around her. This continuous feat of strength is what allows Fleur to survive and care for Karl as well. Karl's narration

continues to elaborate on Fleur's resourcefulness while traveling and caring for him, as well as the cautious reactions that she attracts from others (52).

Karl's journey with Fleur comes to an abrupt end once they arrive at a convent located nearby the reservation, where Fleur carries Karl to deliver him to the local nuns. While the nuns debate amongst themselves whether to foster him, Fleur is mentioned for the last time as she sets Karl down and walks away with no closing words or remarks (55). Fleur disappears suddenly and without context in the same way as she enters the novel to rescue Karl. Allowing their separation without any kind of address towards their previous journey allows Fleur to exit Karl's story and life without further revealing more about her character and person. This exit is similar to those seen in *Love Medicine* where Fleur silently rejects payment or acknowledgement of her healing from the Kashpaws, as well as her sudden and tumultuous exit from Lulu's life without explanation. Erdrich continues to solidify Fleur's character as one which is hidden and not fully understood through these sudden and inexplicable exits, as well as her integration of the repeating, cyclical patterns of Fleur's character through her inexplicable disappearances.

Fleur Pillager is seen again later within *The Beet Queen* as Mary Adare, her friend Celestine, and Celestine's daughter Dot go to visit Russell Kashpaw, a disabled korean war veteran who is cared for by Fleur, in order to gift him a new wheelchair. Mary narrates from her perspective this encounter with Fleur, specifically noting her physical appearance and her distinct facial features (199-200). Fleur is shown to have a calming and protective aura around Russell, mirroring her earlier descriptions as a healer. She is also shown to nonverbally understand Russell and becomes protective of him at Mary's arrival. Mary's narration describes Fleur's eyes and their powerful gaze in how they

"caught fire in a flash, then went cold" (200). Once Fleur and Dot try to put Russell into the new wheelchair outside while the others walk inside the house, Fleur can be heard outside commanding Dot and trying to control the child as she takes the wheelchair and rides around in it herself. Fleur is heard to command Dot "in an iron tone" (202) as she retrieves the wheelchair from Dot, who is known to never listen or take orders from others. Once the others exit the building to see what is going on, they see that Russell is in his new wheelchair, Dot is laying with her bottom in the dirt wielding a confused look, and Fleur is simply described as gone, leaving readers to believe that Fleur was able to physically remove Dot from the wheelchair using force. This humorous encounter highlights Fleur's ability to control even the most stubborn characters in her way without difficulty, even those as obstinate and argumentative as the infamous young Dot Adare.

Once readers encounter Fleur Pillager within the first two *Love Medicine* novels, many of the aforementioned techniques belonging to traditional Ojibwe storytelling begin to emerge through analysis of Erdrich's writing and tactics. Most notable of these would be the repeating connections which are beginning to weave together and link these novels in a circular fashion. Erdrich's descriptions of Fleur within *The Beet Queen* continue to expand upon Fleur's portrayal and evolution as a character of mystery and power which began in the novel *Love Medicine*. Fleur's development as a character has now presented many similarities throughout the two novels so far, such as the mystery surrounding her character's exits that repeat in a cyclical pattern, her spiritual power and abilities which evoke fear and influence in others, and her incredible healing abilities. Erdrich is able to develop these characteristics through her complex, interweaving narrative that covers different time periods and circumstances surrounding Fleur's journey through life.

Similarly to traditional Ojibwe storytelling, this journey is told through multiple different perspectives which all relate with one another in forming together to create a larger textual work. Therefore, as more instances of Fleur's character are developed, her character does become more defined through these combined narratives in a much more complex and realized way than they do within any singular narrative.

However, as Erdrich develops Fleur's character throughout the series using different perspectives and narrations, some differences between these novels in the way they portray Fleur are illuminated. Most notable here is Fleur's depiction as a peddler in *The Beet Queen* which differs from the isolated and revered medicine woman she is depicted as in *Love Medicine*. These notable differences of Fleur's character between novels may attest to how Erdrich takes inspiration from traditional oral storytelling, since stories are viewed as fluid and ever changing through their continuous retelling, with no definitive version which acts as the triumphant truth over other versions. Stories morph and change depending on setting and storyteller, and perhaps Erdrich presents to readers one of many possible depictions of Fleur within her select novels. "Hoop Dancing: Literature Circles and Native American Storytelling" by Heather E. Bruce attests that the circular nature of traditional Native American storytelling is one which encourages "multiple directions and interpretations" of stories or characters, and that these literary circles help readers "weave together varying threads of interpretation through interaction and collaboration" (55). Erdrich's evolving narrative throughout the series directly mirrors the always changing nature of Ojibwe oral storytelling. This everchanging and circular pattern of oral storytelling that Erdrich takes inspiration from could explain Fleur's different depiction in this novel as compared to *Love Medicine.*

Another possible explanation for these differences rooted in Ojibwe storytelling could be Erdrich's role as the trickster, in which she purposefully changes multiple aspects and details of stories in order to hide knowledge and accuracy. This aspect of the trickster therefore works towards inaccuracy in order to confuse readers regarding the details of past tribal events, and Erdrich does this in order to force her readers into a more active, attentive role, as Jeanne Rosier Smith writes, "Storytelling makes the reader one of the community of listeners, and trickster authors implicitly or explicitly invite and even demand reader involvement. The dialogue is not resolved in a trickster narrative, and the reader must negotiate a place within it." (23-24). In doing so, Erdrich would also be employing the dualistic nature of oral storytelling as well, considering the multifaceted role of the trickster in which she would be providing both truth and inaccuracies to the reader. This would explain these differences which Erdrich writes concerning Fleur over the course of multiple novels on a large scale, as Fleur would therefore never be fully understood by readers and reveal more of the mystery surrounding her character. This can similarly be seen on a more compact scale in regards to Erdrich's multiple revisions and publications of the *Love Medicine* novel in which she changes previously defined details regarding Fleur's character and other character's reaction to her. Some of these changes include the addition of Ojibwe words and phrases, perhaps to hide Erdrich's true meaning and give more obscurity to the text, much in the same way a trickster character would.

CHAPTER III: *TRACKS*

While *Tracks* remains Erdirch's third book within the *Love Medicine* series via publication date, its narrative takes place first chronologically as it depicts the origins of several main characters such as Fleur Pillager, Nanapush, and Margaret Kashpaw. The novel is presented as a series of letters or journal entries complete with dates that act as chapters, and these chapters alternate between Nanapush's narration and Pualine Puyat's. As the novel details events from the past, Nanapush directs his chapters and narration towards Fleur Pillager's daughter, Lulu, in an attempt to explain to her Fleur's origins and reasoning for sending Lulu away from home to the government boarding school. In doing so, Nanapush wishes to educate Lulu regarding the history of their tribe and her mother in order to provide clarity and understanding towards their tumultuous relationship previously seen in the novel *Love Medicine*.

The novel begins with Nanapush's narration during the Winter of 1912 as many of the Ojibwe people were dying as a result of the consumption epidemic. Nanapush tells Lulu about this time of survival when he accompanied the tribal policeman Edgar Pukwan near Matchimanito Lake in the late winter. Nanapush describes this area near the lake as belonging to the Pillagers, "The water there was surrounded by the highest oaks, by woods inhabited by ghosts and roamed by Pillagers, who knew the secret ways to cure or kill, until their art deserted them" (2). Here, Nanapush alludes to the legacy of the Pillagers who were known for once having a gift concerning the knowledge and power of healing and death, as well as the deterioration of that gift. This gives some context regarding Fleur's incredible healing powers shown in the previous *Love Medicine* novels, since this gift used to belong to the Pillagers. Nanapush details how he entered the home

of the Pillagers to find Fleur as the last surviving Pillager, living among her dead family members,

> Then something in the corner knocked. I flung the door wide. It was the eldest daughter, Fleur, about seventeen years old then. She was so feverish that she'd thrown off her covers, and now she huddled against the cold wood range, staring and shaking. She was wild as a filthy wolf, a big bony girl whose sudden bursts of strength and snarling cries terrified the listening Pukwan. (3)

This introduction to a young Fleur describes the aftermath of her survival concerning the disease and harsh winter that killed her family. While she is shown as huddled and shaking due to her weakened health, she still possesses strength to frighten others and defend herself, causing Nanapush to tie her down on his sled to take her to safety. Nanapush and Edgar Pukwan unsuccessfully attempt to burn the Pillager's cabin and bodies before they leave to take Fleur to safety. Once at his cabin, Nanapush frees Fleur who then attacks him, causing the tribal policeman to flee. After this initial encounter, Nanpush describes how Fleur regained her health slowly over time; however the memories of the dead soon begin to corrupt Nanpush and Fleur, causing them to deteriorate together in his cabin,

> Their names grew within us, swelled to the brink of our lips, forced our eyes open in the middle of the night. We were filled with the water of the drowned, cold and black—airless water that lapped against the seal of our tongues or leaked slowly from the corners of our eyes… We needed no food. And little warmth. Days passed, weeks, and we didn't leave the

> cabin for fear we'd crack our cold and fragile bodies. We had gone half windigo. (6)

Both Nanapush and Fleur become haunted by the dead and the power of their names, unable to move on and heal. It was not until the local priest, Father Damien, visits with news that there was one additional survivor of the Pillagers named Moses that Fleur and Nanapush become revitalized. Nanapush describes Fleur as being full of raw power and the names of the dead which fill her (7), and she soon returns to her home in order to protect her land from becoming measured and sold, despite Nanapush's wishes for her to stay with him. Rumors then begin to develop around Fleur, such as the Agent who becomes lost and crazed after asking Fleur for fee money regarding her land (8). Nanapush ends his narration remarking on the several others who met a similar fate through their attempts to profit from Fleur's land, as well as her remarkable ability to survive, "They disappear sometimes, and now there are so many betting with sticks and dice out near Matchimanito at night that you wonder how Fleur sleeps , or if she sleeps at all. Why should she? She does without so many things. The company of the living. Ammunition for her gun" (9).

Erdrich's introduction of a young Fleur Pillager who is saved by Nanapush in this novel begins rooted within oral Ojibwe storytelling techniques in several different ways. The structure of the novel is presented as several consecutive diary logs or journal entries; however readers will note that the odd numbered chapters which are narrated by Nanapush are presented in such a way that Nanapush is telling these stories orally to his granddaughter Lulu. This creates several complex frames around the novel as Nanapush acts as a storyteller to Lulu, while Louise Erdrich acts as a storyteller to the reader.

Author Jennifer Sergi explains how Nanapush's role as storyteller retains the oral storytelling traditions through Erdrich's written narrative presentation: "Nanapush's narrative style points to the novel's roots in Chippewa oral tradition. Erdrich is sensitive to the immediate difference between the printed word and the spoken, and she effects an accommodation between her printed text and her narrator's delivery" (279). Additionally, the even numbered chapters are narrated by Pauline Puyat, who Nanapush and Fleur confirm to be a notorious liar throughout the novel. Therefore, the novel is told through multiple storytellers who combine their voices together in the fabrication of this singular story.

Erdrich's changing narrative throughout the *Love Medicine* series is echoed through Pauline Puyat's untrustworthy persona and the narration provided through Nanapush, who is named after the previously mentioned Anishinaabe trickster character Nanabozho. "Once Upon a Time, Today: Hearing Fleur's Voice in *Tracks*" written by Maria DePriest analysis how this narrative format of the two narrators develops upon "Fleur's identity as a complex blend of two first-person narrators and a third-person overview and, as therefore, inseparable from the environment in which people live the stories they tell about themselves" (250). The result of these several voices which construct the story is a collaborative narrative woven through the combined experience of each storyteller. Erdrich's different layers of storytelling within this novel, as well as the series as a whole, directly correlates to the dualistic nature of storytelling previously analyzed in how storytelling is presented within the text as well as outside of the text. Erdrich is able to operate outside of the text in her presentation of these storytellers that operate within the text, filtering Fleur's story through multiple narrative layers. Erdrich

wields these voices throughout the fabrication of the novel in a similar way to how she does with the *Love Medicine* series as a whole. Therefore, *Tracks* and the several narrative frames through which its story is presented act as a microcosm of Erdrich's technique she employs in the larger narrative that the series weaves together. Just in the same way Erdrich is able to present the narrative of *Tracks* through these complex, interweaving narratives and frames, she is able to do this on a much larger scale through the several novels of the *Love Medicine* series. This storytelling technique of several, differing narratives which weave throughout each other within the text, as well as outside the text due to Erdrich's own voice, is one of the ways in which she incorporates traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques.

Further similarities between Erdrich's novels so far and the oral storytelling tradition can be found in regards to the purpose of storytelling. Due to the circular and repetitious nature of storytelling, storytellers are able to slowly teach and provide knowledge through telling stories, which in turn preserves the culture's older traditions and brings them to light for the listener. Erdrich integrates this preservation of knowledge and culture through listeners much in the same way by surrounding Fleur Pillager's story within traditional Ojibwe culture. For instance, readers become intimately familiar with the character of Nanapush through the narration of *Tracks*. As Nanapush's narration confirms in Chapter 3, his name is in reference to the trickster character Nanabozho commonly found within many traditional Ojibwe stories (33). Erdrich not only provides information and references to the traditional Nanabozho character, but pays tribute to it by naming one of her own main characters who acts as Fleur's father figure after it. In doing so, Erdrich additionally honors the important role of names within the Ojibwe

community through Nanapush. Author Lydia Schultz in her previously mentioned article asserts this importance of the naming tradition through her own analysis, as well as that of Basil Johnston's, "This idea of people's names being their reputations is clearest in Erdrich's novels in her use of the surname 'Nanapush.' The characters do not simply inherit this surname, as is usual in the dominant American culture. Rather the name is consciously given to each person who bears it" (85).

Erdrich honors the Ojibwe oral storytelling tradition through the name of Nanapush as it specifically honors the trickster figure. Erdrich continues to draw inspiration from the Ojibwe trickster figure through this novel's dualistic narrative voices; author Mary Chapman notes Nanapush's contrasting narrative voice to that of Pauline's, with Pauline's voice being "the voice of death", and Nanapush's acting as "the voice of life, rebirth, healing, and transformation" (6). Erdrich solidifies Nanapush's depiction of Fleur's story as one which is trustworthy and lifegiving, honoring her culture and the traditional character of Nanabozho. Readers must encounter storytelling traditions through Nanapush's narration of Fleur's story, since he acts as a mirror of Nanabozho through his wisdom, trickery, and antics which develop throughout Erdrich's book series.

Another way the Ojibwe culture is preserved through Erdrich's storytelling is her recounting of actual events pertaining to the Anishinaabe people, such as the tuberculosis epidemic weathered by the indigenous people, as well as the attempts to steal their native land. Erdrich describes these bleak circumstances of the 1910's and 1920's America through the characters of Nanapush and Fleur, with *Tracks*' beginning chapter standing out as a notable instance in which the horrors of consumption are illuminated. Fleur's character is described as one of the last members of her family due to this disease, and

barely survived the epidemic herself if not for Nanapush. Erdrich uses this first chapter to illustrate the harsh conditions in which many indigenous people lost their lives due to sickness, such as the struggle to find adequate food and shelter from the elements. Lawrence Gross develops upon the effects of this epidemic, effectively acting as an "Anishinaabe apocalypse" (49). The aftermath of these events continues to educate readers of the Anishinaabe's experience at that time, such as the psychological effects of these events on Nanapush and Fleur. Alongside this, Fleur must also defend her land from the American agents which attempt to claim ownership of it. Fleur's experience echoes the struggle many Ojibwe people encountered once their ownership of land was taken from them by force. Therefore, Fleur's concerns for her home and native land become one avenue by which Edrich is able to personify and visualize the experiences many Ojibwe people endured. By centering this novel and the development of Fleur Pillager's character within the real events experienced by the Ojibwe people, Erdrich preserves knowledge and education concerning the history of her people and culture.

Additional pieces of Ojibwe culture and knowledge can be found throughout the first chapter of *Tracks* within the traditional Ojibwe language that Erdrich uses while developing Fleur Pillager's character. Fleur and Nanapush are described as becoming inflicted with a heavy depression and sense of dread after the beginning events of the novel, with the thoughts and memories concerning the dead Pillagers acting as piercing shadows. Nanapush ascribes this invisible illness to becoming "half windigo" (6). Once Moses Pillager is found, he is described similarly as living partly in life and death simultaneously due to his act of starvation to survive. This notion of the windigo is repeatedly referenced throughout the entire *Love Medicine* series, and Erdrich defines this

word within the glossary of her novel *The Birchbark House*, which reads, "a giant monster of Ojibwa teachings, often made of ice and associated with the starvation and danger of deep winter" (244). Other examples of this Ojibwe language rooted in folklore can be seen within this first chapter of *Tracks*, such as the mythological Anishinaabe lake monster, Misshepeshu, that lives in Lake Matchimanito and is featured prominently within traditional Ojibwe stories (Smith and Fiore 65). Through the repeated use of these terms and their incorporation within the *Love Medicine* series, Erdrich is able to educate readers concerning the folklore and traditional tales of the Ojibwe culture. This, in turn, preserves the culture and cultivates interest in readers concerning the history of Ojibwe culture in a similar way that traditional Ojibwe storytelling educates younger generations concerning its traditions and beliefs.

In accordance with the multi perspective nature of Ojibwe storytelling, Erdrich employs the differing perspective of *Tracks* through the character of Pauline Puyat, who narrates each even numbered chapter of the novel. Her narration begins with her recounting the first time Fleur Pillager drowned in the Matchimanito lake as a child (10). Although she is saved by two men, they die soon after due to mysterious circumstances. Pauline states that the two men lost their lives because of their actions in saving Fleur from drowning. The second instance where Fleur drowns takes place when she was fifteen years old. Pauline narrates that once a man finds Fleur's body and sees her chest moving, Fleur opens her eyes and curses him to die, "'You take my place,' she hissed" (11). Pauline's narration declares that from then on Fleur develops into a dangerous and fearful figure of the community, as many people believe that the lake spirit Misshepeshu wants Fleur for himself due to his desire for young women. Because of this, Fleur is able

to avoid drowning twice, despite Pauline's assertion that no Chippewa can survive drowning. After this second instance, Pauline describes how Fleur becomes crazy in her isolation, performing supernatural acts which cannot be explained:

> She messed with evil, laughed at the old women's advice and dressed like a man. She got herself into some half-forgotten medicine, studied ways we shouldn't talk about. Some say she kept the finger of a child in her pocket and a powder of unborn rabbits in a leather thong around her neck. She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. By day her silence and the wide grin she threw to bring down our guard made us frightened. Some thought that Fleur Pillager should be driven from the reservation, but not a single person who spoke like that had the nerve. And finally, when people were just about to get together and throw her out, she left on her own and didn't come back all summer. That's what I'm telling about. (12)

This description of Fleur from Pauline's viewpoint differs greatly from the Fleur seen through Nanapush's point of view. Pauline's description of Fleur highlights the public's opinion concerning Fleur and the result of much gossip and rumor concerning her character. Because of the inexplicable events surrounding Fleur, many of the reservation people fear her and tell stories regarding her mystery and power. Fleur is also believed to

wield the power of transformation into a bear, becoming one with nature at will in order to hunt. This association with the bear is shown to be a symbol of the Pillager bloodline and indicates Fleur's unique strength and ability to survive. This also directly correlates to the Ojibwe oral storytelling that Erdrich honors through the traditional use of animals within stories. Fleur is personified through animal-like qualities throughout the series as seen here, mirroring the Ojibwe storytelling tradition. Due to her fearful powers and actions, many of the townspeople wish for her to be exiled from the community; however, Fleur travels to the town of Argus before anyone is able to take action, indicating that Fleur is aware of the public's opinion of her and would rather self-exile than be forced to leave the reservation by outside sources.

In Argus, Pauline and Fleur both find work at the Kozka's butcher shop, where Pauline is able to remain in close proximity to Fleur and observe her from afar while caring for her cousin, Russell Kashpaw. There, Fleur attracts the attention of several workers at the butcher shop due to her skill at gambling and playing cards. Pauline narrates Fleur's deceptive nature in which she enters the men's poker game, acknowledging Pauline from a distance, "I watched her closely, then she paid me a beam of notice for the first time. She turned, looked straight at me, and grinned the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims, except that she wasnt after me" (19). Fleur's signature wolf-like grin appears as a trademark of the Pillager family and signals their dominance when threatened and in pursuit of a victim. As Joni Clarke notes, Erdrich links Fleur's character to Ojibwe culture and lore through this personification, "At times, Fleur, with her 'teeth, strong and sharp and very white' (*T* 18), clearly embodies the traits of the mythic Wolf of traditional Chippewa lore" (32). Fleur's victims, in this case, are the men

she plays cards with, winning exactly one dollar every night for the next week which causes suspicion in the other men playing concerning her abilities. Fleur continues to win money slowly over the course of a month, building up distrust and anger amongst the other players. Eventually, the men's anger causes them to attack Fleur and chase her into the butcher shop's smokehouse. Pauline's narration indicates her fear and regret in her inaction, hiding and covering her ears as Fleur cries her name for help (26).

Pauline narrates how the next day Fleur disappears just before a horrible storm wreaks havoc on the town. The men enter the meat freezer for cover, and both Pauline and Russell secure the freezer's lock from the outside before finding cover of their own. Once the storm later subsides, it is revealed that the tornado has completely destroyed most of the Kozka's butchershop, as well as Argus as a whole. Only after realizing several people are missing, including Fleur and the men she played poker with, it is discovered that the meat freezer has remained intact during the storm. The townspeople rush to clear the door's debris, and Pauline enters to find the men who were trapped inside, frozen in place during their card game, "The three had hunched down around a barrel where the game was still laid out, and a dead lantern and an empty bottle too" (30). Erdrich's narrative implies that this storm was caused by and symbolizes the wrath of not only Fleur, but the nature and spirits which she is believed to be connected with. In the aftermath of the storm, Fleur is the one believed to have caused the death of the men in the freezer, but readers will know that due to Pauline's narrative voice, she is actually the one responsible for their entrapment. Because of Pauline's commonly known deceit which is remarked on between many characters, the trustworthiness of her narration concerning Fleur's story is called into question for readers, further complicating the

narrative frames through which Fleur's story is presented throughout the novel. The previously described attack upon Fleur works to humanize her in contrast to the supernatural witch that many of the townspeople depict her as; however, Erdrich's development upon Pauline Puyat's identity as a liar beckons some question regarding the validity of that story and the details surrounding it. Through Pauline's role as a possibly unreliable narrator, Erdrich is able to funnel her role as a trickster storyteller through Pauline's character and narration.

Despite her established identity as an untrustworthy storyteller, Pauline Puyat's vision of Fleur and the development of her character prove invaluable in some cases, as her narration provides many details not seen within Nanapush's perspective. Perhaps the most notable instance of this is Pauline's narration regarding her travel to the land of the dead alongside Fleur. Pauline narrates how she follows Fleur out into a snowstorm immediately after the death of Fleur's newborn child. Pauline tells how she has never seen the path Fleur walked, despite its obvious wear that indicated it had been repeatedly used before. Pauline realizes this to be the land of the dead once she sees the spirits of those she knows to be dead along this road, including her parents and others from her life,

> "Those who starved, drank, and froze, those who died of the cough, all of the people I'd blessed, washes, and wrapped, all were here. The road ended in a long plain of shallow snow. Across the waste, I saw the cold green fires of their town. We passed my mother and father walking. I hid my face." (159-160)

Pauline follows Fleur to the path's end which contains a fire and the card players from the Kozka's butchershop, before she watches Fleur play cards for the soul of her newborn

and lose, resulting in the spirits taking the child away from Fleur. Fleur then continues to play cards for the soul of her other child, Lulu, last seen traveling through the snowstorm for help. It is later revealed that at that time, Lulu had collapsed within the snowstorm and became hypothermic in her attempt to find Margaret Kashpaw and Nanapush, revealing that Fleur's actions saved Lulu's life from the snowstorm. Once Fleur wins and secures Lulu's life, Pauline grabs her and forces their return to the world of the living where help awaits them in the Pillager cabin. Pauline's narration reaffirms Erdrich's depiction of Fleur as strong and resilient through her ability to fight for her children's lives after experiencing heavy loss and physical pain from childbirth. Pauline's unique perspective allows readers to witness the metaphysical passage of death which Fleur is known to be familiar with, and fully displays Fleur's physical and spiritual strength in her ability to fight and survive against incredibly difficult circumstances.

Fleur Pillager's character is continuously developed throughout the course of *Tracks* within the differing narratives provided by Pauline and Nanapush. These developments of her character are seen through events such as her survival of drowning for a third time, her delivery of Lulu during a bear attack, her romantic relationship with Eli Kashpaw, and how the reservation people wrongfully blame her for the murder of the character Napoleon Morrissey. These developments give a much more defined vision of Fleur's character compared to the previous *Love Medicine* novels through the evolution of her sexual and feminine identity, as well as her resilience and strength through her survival. While doing so takes away from some of the mystery built around her character, several of her actions affirm that mystery and her identity as a figure connected with the supernatural elements and someone with great power. *Tracks'* ending affirms this idea in

its closing moments, which see Nanapush's description of how Fleur sends her daughter Lulu away so that she can defend her land from the lumberjacks that destroyed the trees and much of the nature by Lake Matchimanito. Once approached by these men, Fleur's strength is exemplified as readers are told how she stands her ground outside of her home defiantly, flashing her signature Pillager grin as trees begin to crash down around the workers. Nanapush, after he realizes that each of the trees had been sawed through at the base, watches the men flee in fear as the trees collapse around them and Fleur's remaining land is destroyed,

> "The limbs snapped steel saws and rammed through wagon boxes. Twigs formed webs of wood, canopies laced over groans and struggles. Then the wind settled, curled back into the clouds, moved on, and we were left standing together in a landscape level to the lake and to the road" (223).

Nanapush's narration closes the novel shortly after, as he describes his farewell from Fleur once she gathers her possessions in a wagon and leaves the reservation land behind her. Once gone, Nanapush retrieves Lulu and brings her home from the government schooling, taking special note to remark how Lulu retained a grin which "was bold as your mother's" (226), highlighting in the novel's ending moments Fleur's influence and power embodied within her daughter. Through Lulu and her nature which she retains throughout the process of leaving the reservation and her culture, readers are able to see the influence of Fleur that remains defiant and strong within her daughter. In closing the novel in such a way, Erdrich affirms that Fleur's presence and character remain evident within others even without her direct presence.

CHAPTER IV: *THE BINGO PALACE*

After the novel *Tracks*, *The Bingo Palace* then depicts a much older Fleur Pillager than seen in the previous novel, taking place towards the end of her life. This novel takes place shortly after the events in *Love Medicine* and focuses heavily on the recurring character of Lipsha Morrissey, who was one of the main characters in the very first novel. The beginning of *The Bingo Palace* describes Lipsha as drifting through life aimlessly after the events from *Love Medicine*. It is not until Lipsha is called home to the reservation by his grandmother Lulu Lamartine that he finds meaning to life through his infatuation with the character Shawnee Ray. Lipsha must compete for the love of Shawnee Ray throughout the course of the novel against his uncle Lyman Lamartine, who employs Lipsha at his bingo parlor. Through Lipsha's search for meaning in life, as well as his attempts to gain the love of Shawnee Ray, he encounters his great grandmother, Fleur Pillager, to ask her advice and wisdom.

The Bingo Palace begins with an unnamed narrator, assumed to be the combined voices of the reservation people or perhaps the souls of those passed on the reservation, remarking on the current status of the several key characters such as Lulu Lamartine and even her mother, Fleur Pillager. The unnamed narrators take special note of Fleur's avoidance of death in her old age, which could be attributed to her desire to find a successor,

> We think about the Pillager woman, Fleur, who was always half spirit anyway. A foot on the death road, a quick shuffle backwards, her dance wearies us. Yet some of us wish she'd come out of the woods. We don't fear her anymore—like death, she is an old friend who has been waiting

> quietly, a patient companion. We know she's dawdling, hanging back as long as she can, waiting for another to take her place, but in a different way from when she put her death song into other people's mouths. This time she's waiting for a young one, a successor, someone to carry on her knowledge, and since we know who that person must be, our knowledge makes us pity her. We think she's wrong. We think Fleur Pillager should settle her bones in the sun with us and take a rest, instead of wasting her last words on that medicine boy. (6-7).

Here, we see Fleur as an elderly member of the community still viewed in much the same way as an isolated figure of power and mystery. However, the narrator does note that she is no longer feared like she once used to be, but instead viewed as a constant familiar in the community who is awaiting her time to pass. The unnamed narrator goes on to lament the situation of Lipsha Morrissey, especially concerned with his laziness in wasting his potential, as well as the loss of his special gift, which is his magic touch. Through time and neglect, Lipsha's gift of healing through physical touch with his hands has atrophied and withered, parallelling his mental state and motivation which has lost its spark. Lipsha is assumed to be the successor that Fleur is waiting for; however, his wasted potential has caused the narrator to forgo this cause and decide that Lipsha is undeserving of Fleur's attention. Though it is unclear what Fleur is searching for in want of a successor, it is assumed that she is waiting to pass her power and wisdom to the younger generation, and her great grandson would be the ideal candidate.

Upon Lipsha's return to the reservation and sudden infatuation with Shawnee Ray, he then reconnects with his aunt Zelda Kashpaw who drinks and shares stories with

Lipsha concerning love. It is then that Zelda reveals to Lipsha the truth regarding his mother, June Morrissey, and how she saw June throw Lipsha into a body of water after he was born. Lipsha attempts to stop Zelda as she tells the story of how she later came to observe what June threw away, and discovered that she had tossed Lipsha into the water along with rocks to weigh the bag down. Once Zelda remarks how Lipsha was still alive after being submerged for half an hour, Lipsha angrily interrupts his aunt and uses the words of Fleur Pillager,

> '*Watch out*,' I snap my eyes at her. '*You'll take my place!*' I hiss these words into Zelda's face, using the same dangerous threat that my great grandmother, Fleur Pillager, is supposed to have said to her long-ago rescuer, who died soon and took her place on death's road. I employ the family warning, and Zelda does draw back. (51-52).

Lipsha's words carry weight in their warning to Zelda, showing that not only are their stories concerning Fleur Pillager widely known and told, but that her words and actions still carry power and significance so long after. Lipsha's narration even describes these words as "the family warning", indicating the rare use of this phrase and its underlying power.

Lipsha's response to Zelda, as well as the beginning of *The Bingo Palace*, illuminates Erdrich's employment of Ojibwe storytelling traditions in the way she creates circular connections between these different novels and stories. Previously established stories and information from the other *Love Medicine* novels begin to appear and carry significance which would be lost without having read them. Lipsha is shown to be connected with his great grandmother Fleur Pillager in multiple key ways due to readers'

knowledge of Fleur Pillager's story thus far. For example, the significance of Lipsha's gift of healing through touch signifies his relationship to Fleur, as he has inherited her Pillager gift through their shared bloodline. Readers will also remember Nanapush's words at the beginning of *Tracks* which detailed the deterioration of the Pillager clan's healing abilities, which could also be the case with Lipsha. However, his talent of healing directly correlates with the known healing abilities Fleur employs in previous novels, such as her healing of Marie Kashpaw during labor in *Love Medicine*, or healing Karl Adare's broken feet and pneumonia using natural resources in *The Beet Queen*. In addition to their healing abilities, Erdrich also links Lipsha and Fleur through their ability to survive drowning. While Fleur survives drowning multiple times within *Tracks*, many of the reservation people explain this by placing blame on her speculated relationship with the lake spirit of Misshepeshu; however, Lipsha's ability to survive submersion as a child is described as miraculous and viewed more positively. Lipsha also observes his grandmother Lulu's talent at playing cards, an attribute which also links her back to Fleur through her notorious gambling ability. Without the knowledge of the previous narratives woven through the previous *Love Medicine* novels, readers will have missed these important connections. This act of connection between novels aids in Erdrich's establishment of the repetitive, circular quality of her storytelling, similar to the same interconnected nature of traditional Ojibwe storytelling.

Lipsha's role as Fleur Pillager's successor in *The Bingo Palace* begins to form once Lipsha searches for her in order to ask her about love medicine. Lipsha finds Fleur as she walks into town and drives people away due to their fear of her: "As the Pillager passes by, men and women rush indoors to punch their time cards, swing their cars

toward parking lots. Some fade back into the bars and shadows of the post office, those who can't cross their breasts or touch the holy medal of a saint" (125). Despite the initial narration of the novel, Fleur's reputation as a powerful, mysterious, and feared figure still remains true for many people on the reservation. True to Erdrich's interconnected storytelling which has spanned the course of her novels thus far, readers will know this fear and its origins from gossip and wild speculation concerning her character from the townspeople. Lipsha notes these stories surrounding Fleur when he sees her, such as how she has replaced her spot on death road with those who have rescued her from drowning, but Lipsha also notes the good Fleur has done through her healing and the general public's tendency to forget those good deeds. Lipsha introduces himself to Fleur in the church for the first time, and helps her carry groceries to her land, struggling to keep up with Fleur despite her old age. Lipsha tells Fleur of his need for love medicine, and in response she speaks to him, as well as Lyman Lamartine psychically, in visions and dreams which Lipsha cannot fully comprehend (151). These visions are depicted through the sound of laughter, nature symbolism, and the traditional Ojibwe language, filtered through what Lipsha calls Fleur's bear thoughts, indicating her transformation into a bear while speaking to him. This transformation coincides with the rumors concerning Fleur's ability to transform into a bear in *Tracks*, symbolizing Fleur's connection to nature and her inexplicable powers. Nora Barry, author of "Fleur Pillager's Bear Identity in the Novels of Louise Erdrich" cites this as one of the main components to Fleur's importance within the *Love Medicine* series, as well as an explanation of the power passed down to her descendants (28-35). Additionally, Fleur's animalistic qualities which appear throughout the series illuminates Erdrich's employment of the Ojibwe storytelling

tradition in its use of animals. This abstract encounter with Fleur leaves Lipsha confused, and he is unable to articulate her advice in any significant or meaningful way. Lipsha's exit, as well as any definitive details regarding his encounter with Fleur, are never described, and instead Fleur's advice randomly appears throughout the rest of the novel in the form of dreams and mental snippets which speak to Lipsha and Lyman.

It is not until the very end of the novel that Fleur Pillager is definitively shown outside of an abstract vision after her encounter with Lipsha. At the novel's end, Lipsha is left stranded in a blizzard, stuck inside of a broken down vehicle alongside a baby. It is after Lipsha zips the baby inside of his jacket for warmth and protection that the ending chapter depicts Fleur Pillager's exit from her home. As the authorities approach her land in order to take her home, they find her gone, with evidence indicating her exit during the winter storm. Fleur is depicted annoyed having "took the boy's place" (272), and travels across the cold, winter landscape over the frozen Lake Matchimanito towards the spirits of the dead which appear around her. It is said by the townspeople that after Fleur's travel into the land of the dead, her tracks and their evidence of her animalistic transformation could still be found. Even after her death, the reservation people remain assured that Fleur's presence can still be felt through the sounds of her laugh and cough, and that she still continues to travel along her land near Lake Matchimanito.

Erdrich's depiction of Fleur's death acts as a significant example of her ability to faithfully recreate traditional Ojibwe storytelling on multiple layers. Fleur's death which ends the novel links back with previous scenes detailed in the *Love Medicine* series, such as Pauline Puyat's narration of her journey to the land of the dead to gamble for the souls of the living. Fleur is believed by many to have put others in her place along death road

over the course of her life, and her death at the end of the novel symbolizes her sacrifice of life in order to continue the preservation of others, indicated here to be Lipsha. In continuing the motif of her travel to the icy land of the dead, Erdrich creates more instances of connections between novels that would create a less impactful narrative with knowledge of only this select novel. Context provided by the other *Love Medicine* novels adds significance to this scene by repeating the events of death road, which honors Ojibwe storytelling through its repetition. Additionally, Erdrich is able to honor traditional Ojibwe and Anishinaabe folklore through Fleur's sacrifice of her own life in order to protect others. Her sacrifice which ends the novel bears similarity to the traditional story of creation that details the sacrifice of the muskrat in order to preserve life through one last selfless act. By framing her sacrifice as such, Erdrich is able to close Fleur Pillager's story in a way which is rooted in Ojibwe tradition and the storytelling craft.

CHAPTER V: *TALES OF BURNING LOVE*

Tales of Burning Love, Erdrich's fifth novel within the *Love Medicine* series, focuses mainly on five women who become trapped together in a blizzard after attending the funeral of their shared past love, Jack Mauser. The novel explores the women's lives as they each tell stories in order to survive their abandonment within the blizzard, as well as other various subplots such as Jack Mauser's life and narrow escape from death unbeknownst to anyone else. *Tales of Burning Love* is the only novel of the series which does not contain a direct appearance of Fleur Pillager's character. Despite this, her character and influence can be seen within the novel through certain characters and events which readers will recognize within its context of the other *Love Medicine* novels. For example, the novel's main character of Jack Mauser is known to be a descendant of Fleur through the family lineage revealed in the next novel, *Four Souls*. Jack Mauser is not the only descendant of "the Pillager" within this novel, as other characters such as Gerry Nanapush are featured prominently within *Tales of Burning Love*'s story. Additionally, events seen in this novel such as the blizzard which traps Jack Mauser's previous wives together after his funeral connect back to the same blizzard seen in *The Bingo Palace* in which Fleur sacrifices her life for Lipsha's. Therefore, Fleur Pillager's presence is felt within the novel and connects to the rest of the *Love Medicine* series in a repetitious, circular way due to the several connections which can be made with the other novels.

Jack Mauser, whose supposed death acts as the catalyst of the events within *Tales of Burning Love*, is known to be the son of "the big Mauser", son of "the original John Mauser" (179). Jack Mauser's lineage is revealed in the novel *Four Souls*, where Fleur

marries the original John James Mauser and bears their son, John James Mauser II who is also known as Amun. Therefore, this context and knowledge from the other novels allows readers to find some discernible similarities between *Tales of Burning Love*'s protagonist and Fleur Pillager. One notable similarity between the two is their ability to survive against incredible circumstances. As previously noted, Jack's ability to quietly escape death from a burning house while drunk and naked spurs the novel's plot as previous wives meet at his funeral. Despite the harsh circumstances surrounding him, Jack is able to escape death in a similar way that his grandmother Fleur is able to survive under severe circumstances in mysterious and miraculous ways, such as her survival of the tuberculosis epidemic and drowning.

Another character with heavy ties to Fleur Pillager is Gerry Nanapush, Lulu Nanapush's son and Lipsha Morrissey's father. Gerry Nanapush retains a similar incredible ability to survive the elements, such as his journey through the infamous blizzard that strands Jack Mauser's previous wives and Lipsha. Though Gerry's identity is hidden throughout most of the novel, some readers will be able to recognize his character through descriptions which note his "gleam of a wolf-white smile" (175). Additionally, as Gerry Nanapush flees from the authorities, a short segment within the chapter "Smile of the Wolf" details Gerry's daughter, Shawn, who is questioned by the police concerning his whereabouts. After she lies to the police and feigns ignorance, one police officer notes a similar distinguishing look from Shawn:

> He catches just a glimpse, then, in the shadowy hallway, of her grin. Like a wolf pup, he thinks, narrowing his eyes, stepping toward her. He peers

> closer to try and figure out what she is thinking. But her face now, dangerous and bland, is the mask of a woman. (400)

This appearance of a wolf-like grin is immediately recognizable in relation to Fleur Pillager with the context of the other *Love Medicine* novels in mind. Author Karah Stokes develops in her article how Shawn and her seemingly supernatural powers within this novel connects her to Fleur. These powers are symbolized through Shawn's grin which acts as a symbol of the Pillagers and connects Shawn, alongside other characters throughout the series, to Fleur:

> As he leaves, one of the agents, feeling he has been mysteriously eluded, absently notes that she resembles a wolf, which is the family's supernatural signature, seen in Gerry, his grandmother Fleur Pillager, and son Lipsha Morrissey, throughout Love Medicine, Tracks, and The Bingo Palace as well as this novel. (100)

Gerry and Shawn's characters and actions are then linked to Fleur, and her presence becomes acknowledged within the novel in an indirect way. In doing this, Erdrich is able to weave circular connections and link this novel with the others of the series in the way it references previously detailed characters and stories without their explicit presence, similar to the interconnected and circular nature of traditional Ojibwe storytelling.

Aside from the characters in *Tales of Burning Love* whose presence relate back to Fleur Pillager's characters, events within the novel do this as well, most notably the winter storm which causes many of the characters to become stranded together. Many of Jack Mauser's previous wives become deserted within a van alongside a mysterious character later to be revealed as Gerry Nanapush. At the same time, Jack Mauser drives a

snow plow through the blizzard in an attempt to find the car holding Lipsha Morrissey and his baby son which was stolen by Gerry Nanapush, parallelling the same events at the end of *The Bingo Palace*. As Jack Mauser drives through the blizzard and exits his vehicle, much of the descriptive language mirrors similar descriptions seen in Fleur Pillager's death sequence in *The Bingo Palace*: "He would go straight west, on into the other world of the Ojibwa dead where skeletons gambled, throwing and concealing human wristbones" (384). This description of the blizzard from Jack Mauser's section relates to the card gambling Fleur Pillager does in the land of the dead, which she is shown to travel to multiple times throughout the series, including during this same blizzard in order to save what is assumed to be Lipsha's life. *Tales of Burning Love* confirms the success of Fleur's sacrifice as it shows Jack rescuing Lipsha and his son. *Tales of Burning Love*'s illuminates the fact that the child Lipsha is stranded with is also a descendant of Fleur, as well as their rescuer Jack Mauser. The novel's ending therefore further develops the results of Fleur's sacrifice and its success, as well as provide more points of connection through the knowledge that Lipsha's actions affected multiple other descendants of Fleur. Without this knowledge of *The Bingo Palace* and Fleur's sacrifice, Lipsha's rescue could seem coincidental to readers. However, the context provided by other novels in the *Love Medicine* series show that Fleur's actions had a direct influence upon the ending of *Tales of Burning Love*.

This novel then becomes intertwined with the narrative seen in *The Bingo Palace*, as Erdrich uses these novels in order to depict different perspectives of the same event. These differing perspectives combine together in order to relate a more complex and realized version of the events during the blizzard. Roberta Rosenberg details the fact that

the cyclical, interwoven narratives that Erdrich weaves together in this novel are each equal and work together rather than providing one definitive version that is held above the others:

> For multiple narrators telling their tales in a storytelling cycle, there does not need to be one, approved final version, one view of reality which dominates the rest. The personal voice is blended into the vortex of a communal voice which balances the historic and mythic with the personal. Storytelling becomes the vocal equivalent of a sandpainting, a communal ceremony… (128)

This directly correlates to the idea that there are no superior readings within the oral storytelling traditions that Erdrich employs within the *Love Medicine* series. This equality of varying perspectives and interpretations is employed throughout the entire series regarding the depiction of Fleur Pillager's story here. Erdrich is able to use indirect means of storytelling in order to make Fleur Pillager's presence made clear throughout the novel using several characters and events which relate to Fleur in the other novels. These multiple points of connection aid in Erdrich's ability to connect these novels together and honor traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques throughout the series.

CHAPTER VI: *THE LAST REPORT ON THE MIRACLES AT LITTLE NO HORSE*

Louise Erdrich's novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* focuses primarily on the journey of Agnes DeWitt, a woman who encounters priest Father Damien who is traveling to an Ojibwe reservation. Once Father Damien is soon killed afterwards due to a flood, Agnes DeWitt secretly assumes the identity of Father Damien and journeys to the reservation as its newfound priest, revealing that the Father Damien shown so far within the *Love Medicine* series is, and always has been, Agnes DeWitt in disguise. The novel details Agnes DeWitt's struggling identity as Father Damien and their life acting as the catholic priest of the reservation where characters such as Fleur Pillager and Nanapush reside. This novel is the first time the reservation is given a name, Little No Horse, and it spans most of Father Damien's life spent at the reservation. As such, readers are able to see many of the events of Fleur Pillager's life through the focus of Father Damien, paralleling many of the events seen in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. More context surrounding Fleur's journey after her exit in *Tracks* and her ties to the Mauser family are detailed through this exploration of Father Damien's life. It is through Father Damien that Erdrich is able to use this novel as an opportunity to enact traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques through even more unique perspectives which develop Fleur Pillager's story and define her character beyond what has previously been revealed.

Shortly after Father Damien's arrival at the reservation, they are encountered with the tuberculosis epidemic that plagues the reservation. The nuns warn Father Damien of visiting Fleur Pillager and Nanapush, claiming that Fleur is "the daughter of Satan" and that both are "rumored to have special powers" (73), but Father Damien visits anyway to

find the two sick and plagued by the dead. Similar to what was described in *Tracks*, the arrival of Father Damien revives Fleur and Nanapush from this slow decay in isolation; however this scene is more fully developed to show Fleur's disdain for Father Damien at first, as well as her subsequent laughter at their butchered attempts to speak the traditional Ojibwe language (81). *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* goes into great detail regarding Father Damien's initial encounter with Fleur and Nanapush, which contrasts *Track*s' short summarization of Father Damien's arrival and effects. As noted earlier, this initial encounter serves as a prime example of how Erdrich is able to use this novel and its different perspective to tell previously told stories in a slightly different way. This method directly calls back to traditional Ojibwe storytelling in the way that stories change slightly as they are told repeatedly over time by different storytellers and their different perspectives. This change in narrative could also be attributed to Erdrich's evolving narrative which spans the series, or perhaps even her identity as a trickster storyteller.

Further on in the novel, more scenarios of Fleur's story mentioned in *Tracks* become further developed as well, such as Father Damien's secret baptism of Lulu (Little No Horse, 183), which changes slightly from the story told in *Tracks* that depicted Fleur's overhearing and resulting halt of the baptism (Tracks, 61). John James Mauser's character is also further developed as the man responsible for the destruction and acquisition of Fleur Pillager's land (Little No Horse, 185), which causes Fleur's anger and decision to find John James Mauser and kill him (187-188). While *Tracks* does detail Fleur's defense of her home and land, John James Mauser's role, as well as Fleur's desire for revenge acting as the catalyst for her exit, is never shown extensively like it is in this

novel's narration. Fleur is shown to dig up the bones of her ancestors during this pledge of revenge, a scene not detailed in the events of *Tracks*.

It is in Chapter 15, "Lulu's Passion", that readers are able to see events from the perspective of Lulu, similar to her chapter "The Island" detailed in *Love Medicine*. Alongside Lulu's memories of Fleur and how she assigned Lulu to boarding school in her absence, Lulu details more of her experience arriving at the school and her feelings of abandonment. After recording her memories of being bullied and her attempts to escape the government school, Lulu recalls Fleur's attempts to retrieve Lulu and reconnect with her. Lulu remembers Fleur's return to the reservation as an unrecognizable person due to Fleur's wearing perfume, makeup, leather shoes, and "white woman's clothes" (251). Lulu denounced Fleur as her mother, choosing to remain at the government school rather than leave with Fleur.

After Lulu's narration, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* develops on Fleur's whereabouts somewhat, as well as her return to the reservation. P. Jane Hafen's article "Louise Erdrich's Great Plains" shows that the return to her land here works to change the perception of the earlier *Love Medicine* novels, specifically how Fleur's return in this novel refutes the interpretation of Fleur's loss of land, "Some critics have seen Fleur's defeat in *Tracks* as a tragedy. However, the imperative of survival refutes that reading and Erdrich completes that part of the story thirteen years later in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*." (327). Erdrich's continuously evolving narrative is shown to change the possible interpretations of the past *Love Medicine* novels, and works to benefit Erdrich's utalization of the ever changing narratives and their multifaceted understandings from oral tradition. The novel continues to detail Father

Damien’s search for Fleur and their discovery of Fleur’s marriage to John James Mauser (259). Due to this marriage with Mauser, Fleur remained in the city and adopted a wealthy lifestyle completely different from the reservation life she left. Once Fleur returned to the reservation, she was accompanied by a young boy believed to be her son as a result of her marriage with John James Mauser. The reservation people rumored about the appearance of the boy and how they detected something wrong with Fleur’s nameless son, despite not knowing exactly what was wrong with him. This novel is the first appearance of Fleur’s son, who is later named Awun, meaning the Mist (277). Father Damien’s visits to Fleur clarify her character further such as the depiction of her regret regarding Lulu’s abandonment, her casting off of her wealthy clothes and habits from the city, and her inexplicable knowledge concerning Father Damien’s secret origin and identity (263-264). Father Damien’s friendship with Fleur allows their unique perspective to bring previously unseen scenarios such as these to light. Through Father Damien, readers are able to acknowledge Fleur's feelings of regret towards her abandonment of Lulu through her repeated attempts to visit her, despite Fleur’s absent acknowledgement of this. Father Damien is also the conduit through which readers can see Fleur’s return to the reservation and her slow change back to traditional reservation life, such as an independence from wealth and status and abandonment of her possessions gained in the city.

This novel, through the use of Father Damien, aids in Fleur Pillager’s depiction as a character of mystery and power. Throughout the novel, Fleur is shown to leave the reservation and return as an entirely different person, one which is the antithesis of her character portrayed on the reservation in other novels. Fleur is shown to dress and talk

differently due to her time in the city and her marriage. This marriage, which provided Fleur with resources she previously discarded such as money and status, is also peculiar since Fleur's objective in leaving the reservation was to kill John James Mauser for revenge. Father Damien's relationship to Fleur allows readers a more intimate view of her change upon leaving and returning to the reservation. Additionally, Fleur's ability to know of Father Damien's unspoken past as the woman Agnes DeWitt in disguise as a male priest named Father Damien shows Fleur's cunning wit and ability to perceive what others cannot. Erdrich is able to use this new, unique perspective in order to humanize Fleur through her faults and weaknesses such as her abandoning Lulu and leaving her past reservation life, as well as further develop Fleur's identity as a woman of mystery and power. This use of differing perspectives to depict Fleur aligns with the traditions of Ojibwe storytelling of differing perspectives regarding the same story.

The weight of Father Damien's friendship with Fleur, as well as her character after death, is solidified further at the novel's ending, which depicts Father Damien preparing for their approaching death to take place at Lake Matchimanito. Though anxious with despair at the thought of Father Damien's identity as Agnes DeWitt becoming discovered after their death, the thought of returning to their friends Fleur and Nanapush calms them:

> Besides, maybe once she was there Fleur would talk to her. She'd gone there to be with the last of the Pillagers, her cousin Moses. Nanapush might join them with new and outrageous stories of his life after death. She imagined their bones all mixed up together, spirits arguing and

> laughing as in the old days… she was oddly cheered at the prospect, however slight, of once again meeting up with her friend. (343)

After making the preparations to hide the evidence of their past, Father Damien rows to the spirit island while thinking of memories and songs from their past. Once at the island, they envision being surrounded by the spirits of their friends while ruminating on their death. The next day, Father Damien hacks their boat to pieces and feeds them to a fire while drinking to the spirits of the dead, becoming filled with conflicting thoughts of their death, identity, and purpose. Just as Father Damien recognizes the sky's constellations as the Ojibwe constellations which their friends taught them, they call out to Fleur's dead spirit as death approaches:

> "Nanapush, Fleur, all of you!" She cried out to the ghosts of her friends, drunk and marveling with sorrow. "Come and sit with me." When she poured just a bit of wine onto the ground, she felt Fleur approach, knew she sat just beyond the circle of firelight, in the rustling melt of shadows. (348)

Father Damien sees darkness closing in as they laugh in remembrance of their life, and in their closing moments feel hands which clasp onto theirs and become "pulled across" (350) into the afterlife. Father Damien's death recalls the presence of Fleur Pillager's spirit for comfort and strength, and it is presumably the spirit of Fleur as well as Nanapush that aids Father Damien in passing on. Fleur's influence upon Father Damien is shown through their thoughts of an Ojibwe heaven and their depiction of Ojibwe constellations which Fleur taught them. This influence rooted within the Ojibwe culture is strong enough to "lead him [Father Damien] to Ojibwe concepts of the land, reconsider

the mysteries of death and the afterlife, reject Christian beliefs in the repression of the flesh, and shift his understanding of English into Ojibwe contexts and meanings" (Krumholz 171-172). Father Damien's death honors Erdrich's Ojibwe roots through its ability to transform Father Damien's perception of life, death, and the outside world, just as traditional Ojibwe stories work to change the listener's perception of reality. Fleur acts as the conduit through which Erdrich displays this power of the Ojibwe culture; furthermore, Fleur and Nanapush's constant repetition of Ojibwe stories, language, and culture towards Father Damien throughout the novel reinforce the similarities between Erdrich's writing and that of traditional Ojibwe storytelling through its ability to act as a teaching tool for Father Damien and change their preconceived notions of life internally and externally. Erdrich uses the story of Father Damien and the influence of Fleur's Ojibwe culture on them to teach its ability to provide Father Damien internal peace within death, as well as affecting their external world through the constellations and ability to detect the presence of spirits. Father Damien's ability to feel the presence of Fleur develops the strong friendship the two characters shared, while also displaying Fleur's powers and abilities as a spirit after death. Similar to *Tracks*' ending, Fleur's legacy and character continue on beyond death to illuminate the extent of her power and connection with spirituality.

CHAPTER VII: *FOUR SOULS*

Louise Erdrich's seventh novel in the *Love Medicine* series, titled *Four Souls*, acts as the direct sequel to the novel *Tracks*. This novel follows Fleur Pillager after she leaves the reservation as depicted in *Tracks* to enact revenge on John James Mauser for stealing her land. In a similar way to *Tracks*, the novel's odd numbered chapters are narrated by Nanapush who tells the story of Fleur, while the novel's even numbered chapters are narrated partly by Polly Elizabeth Gheen, John James Mauser's sister-in-law, and partly by Margaret Kashpaw. Much of the novel covers the time period in which Fleur travels to Minneapolis, begins a relationship with John James Mauser with whom she bears a son, and returns to the reservation a seemingly different person in order to fight for her land by Lake Matchimanito. While the results of this time period are mentioned within the other *Love Medicine* novels, this novel is the first to show the specific events which transpired during Fleur's absence from the reservation. Therefore, this novel acts as a way for Erdrich to fill in a gap within Fleur Pillager's story, while also weaving in different narrative voices which develops Fleur's story in addition to other subplots.

Four Souls begins immediately after the events of *Tracks*, with Nanapush's narration of Fleur's exit from the reservation, now known to be Little No Horse, pushing a cart of her belongings east toward the city of Minneapolis as she follows the tracks of John James Mauser. Among the possessions she carries are the bones of her ancestors, which she keeps until just before reaching the city. There outside the city, Fleur buries these bones of her ancestors and changes her name from Fleur Pillager to that of her mother, Four Souls, in preparation of enacting her revenge, "That was the night she took her mother's secret name to herself, named her spirit. Four Souls, she was called. She

would need the name where she was going" (2). Although the specific reasons for Fleur's name change are not mentioned, this act is presented as significant when considering the importance of Fleur's strong connection to spirits throughout the *Love Medicine* series, as well as the importance of names within the Ojibwe culture. This directly parallels the Ojibwe people's past in their forced renaming to Chippewa, which was a "corruption of their tribal name, the very identification of their society" (Cotham, 3). Erdrich is able to incorporate traditional Ojibwe beliefs through Fleur's story once again through the importance of name and the changing of names. Despite the lack of context surrounding this act at the beginning of the novel, it is implied that Fleur's actions are significant and that the effects of this name change will arise later on. Fleur continues to travel into the foreign city, flashing her signature Pillager grin at Mauser's mansion which is made of the wood from her land. There, Fleur meets Polly Elizabeth, who hires Fleur as a laundry worker for the mansion. Polly Elizabeth narrates several even numbered chapters regarding Fleur's time at the estate and her observations of Fleur, noting her shabby appearance and bemoaning her decision to hire Fleur due to her ignorance of Fleur's identity and intentions, "Who could have known?" (12). With her place inside the mansion secure, Fleur soon discovers that John James Mauser is continuously plagued with convulsions due to seizures which leave him confined to the mansion. Fleur takes charge in aiding Mauser, secretly healing him with her touch and healing powers. Nanapush narrates that this decision to slowly heal Mauser was to secure her ability in killing him at full health, "…when Fleur saw how Mauser already suffered, she felt cheated of her revenge. She wanted the man healthy so that she could destroy him fresh" (24). Soon after Fleur begins to heal Mauser, she decides to kill him, waking him with a

knife to his throat. Fleur reveals her identity as the woman whose land Mauser stole, and he pleads for his life by dedicating his soul to Fleur in servitude and matrimony. Nanapush narrates Fleur's decision to take pity on Mauser and then begin a sexual relationship with him.

Nanapush attributes the events of Fleur's story to the name of Four Souls that she took on, as the power of the name takes over Fleur and her actions:

> When Fleur took the name Four Souls she thought she was taking a name that would build her up, protect her, and it was true, the original Four Souls was a powerful woman. What Fleur didn't know was the name would take over and have more of an effect upon her than she could have conceived. For the name was something else—it was forceful, it was old, and it had its own intentions. In the end, it was even stronger than Fleur. (46-47)

Nanapush pulls readers out of the narrative that follows Fleur in Minneapolis to discuss the importance of names and the past behind them, since this knowledge directly correlates to Fleur's change after taking on the name of Four Souls. Nanapush notes how Fleur was born with a secret name that she wears over her face aside from her French name of Fleur known to all, and that taking on the name of Four Souls was a powerful action which could have destroyed Fleur. Nanapush then tells readers the origin of the name Four Souls, belonging to the woman Anaquot after having one of her souls thrown out (56). Erdrich uses Nanapush's voice and narration to convey traditional storytelling techniques in order to educate readers not only of the origin of the name Four Souls, but also the traditional Ojibwe beliefs such as the power of names and the influence they play

underneath each person. Gerald Vizenor describes this importance of language and names specifically within the Ojibwe culture in his book *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories*:

> Individuals were given names, dream names at birth. These names were sacred and were not revealed to strangers. An individual was known in the traditional tribal world by a personal nickname; several names were given in some families and with each nickname there were stories to be told… a sacred name, a dream name, was a ceremonious event. (13).

Erdrich uses this event of Fleur's name change to honor Ojibwe storytelling in the way it preserves the traditional cultural teachings. Nanapush's storytelling narrative here which depicts Fleur's name change translates the importance of names within the Ojibwe culture and teachings regarding a name's power, therefore drawing parallels to the Ojibwe culture's name change to Chippewa. Nanapush wields storytelling to his advantage, weaving in and out of different narratives and time frames in order to provide context to readers regarding Fleur's story as well as the traditional Ojibwe beliefs.

Nanapush continues to narrate Fleur's marriage to Mauser and her assimilation into high society life in Minneapolis, resulting in Fleur's pregnancy soon afterwards. Nanapush alludes to this pregnancy and its role in Fleur's weakness to alcohol, and it is revealed through Polly Elizabeth's narration that she continuously fed Fleur whiskey in order to help with the pregnancy's pain and complications. Fleur became reliant on alcohol throughout the duration of her pregnancy, and once her baby son was born, he too required the taste of whiskey in order to calm. This unnamed child is later shown to be Awun, also known as John James Mauser II, the son Fleur brought back to the

reservation in *The Last Report on the Miracle at Little No Horse* who many townspeople found to be odd. Through this context provided by the previous novels in the *Love Medicine* series, it is heavily implied that Fleur's son had fetal alcohol syndrome due to her alcoholism during pregnancy. Fleur's struggle with alcoholism continues after the birth of her son, as Polly Elizabeth notes concern toward Fleur during her narration:

> Fleur's dullness and depletion, her sunk eye, yellowed skin, had begun to give me concern… She would not be without a decanter of whiskey in any room, and she sipped it throughout the day. Though I never saw her visibly intoxicated, though she never slurred her talk or stumbled, it was clear that she had began to rely on the liquor and was lost without its golden fire. (68-69)

Polly Elizabeth's valuable narration provides additional context needed in order to understand Fleur's time away from the reservation and what transpired in Minneapolis. Erdrich's use of these varying narrative voices allows her to create even more connections between her combined narrative of the series as a whole, as these events give explanation and context to her previous novels in the series. This novel provides the much needed context regarding events and details in the previous novels, specifically seen here through the explanation regarding Awun's depiction as ill and peculiar. Erdrich also uses Polly Elizabeth's narration in this novel in order to humanize Fleur's character, since readers are shown Fleur's pain during pregnancy and need for outside help, as well as her weakness through her alcoholism. Fleur is depicted by Polly Elizabeth as extremely reliant on the substance, and is concerned due to Fleur's inability to operate without it. Contrasting with much of the rest of the *Love Medicine* series, Fleur is shown

during her moment of weakness which develops her character beyond one of power and mystery. Erdrich is able to weave the tradition of varying narratives in oral storytelling into her own writing in order to provide more depth and weight to Fleur Pillager's character. By providing readers with a narration that develops upon Fleur's weakness and addiction rather than her identity as a mysterious medicine woman with supernatural powers, Fleur's character becomes more complex and multidimensional which therefore humanizes her and adds complexity to her identity.

Polly Elizabeth's narration continues to develop Fleur's relationship with her son, especially through the act of card playing. Despite Awun's undiagnosed illness and young age, he shows talent regarding many of the games that Fleur teaches him. Fleur's talent at gambling which appears in the previous *Love Medicine* novels is shown here through Awun's talent at playing cards and gambling before being able to recite the alphabet (89). This inherited talent at gambling Awun has is likely due to his lineage as a Pillager, similarly seen with Fleur's other child Lulu, and it provides additional interconnectedness between these novels in the way Fleur's influence and character affects her descendants. Fleur's influence and role upon the Mauser household is also developed, as Mauser becomes financially and spiritually drained over time which causes immense strain on their relationship. Mauser eventually tells Polly Elizabeth about Fleur's attempt to kill him, and her current desire to take everything he has left in retribution for the devastation he has wrought. Mauser expects Fleur's alcoholism to be the end of her, however, and remarks that his past actions of destruction which haunt him continuously wish him death. Soon after, John James Mauser flees the mansion as his

fortune collapses while Fleur takes her son, clothes, and automobile back towards the reservation to return home.

Fleur's return to the reservation is narrated by Margaret Kashpaw, who narrates the novel's even numbered chapters for the remainder of the novel. Margaret narrates the extreme change in Fleur's character upon seeing her at the reservation again, especially noting her accumulated wealth, "She came back so rich that we didn't know, at first, whether the slim woman in the white car, and the whiter suit fitted to the lean contours of her body, was the ghost of the girl we knew or Fleur herself" (182). Many of the townspeople spread rumors about the identity of the child with Fleur as well, as no one thinks Awun to be Fleur's own child due to his odd nature, dissimilar features to Fleur, and spoiled nature. Margaret's narration ponders Fleur's role in Awun's character and development, but is ultimately happy to see Fleur's return and longing for her natural home and land. Fleur then immediately dedicates herself to reclaiming her lost land which is revealed to be owned by a man named Jewett Parker Tatro, a white Indian agent who owns a local bar named the Wild Goose. Nanapush tells readers how Tatro has gained a reputation for taking the possessions of others during a never ending poker game held at his bar, where every wall has been covered in the precious, antique artifacts he has collected. Nanapush witnesses Fleur and her son's continuous arrival at Tatro's poker game every night, gaining Tatro's attention as she would lose money in the game. Fleur began to drink then, slurring her speech and embarrassing many of the townspeople concerning Fleur's downfall into alcoholism. Nanapush explains that, although Fleur has always been a feared member of the community, she symbolized the old ways of the Ojibwe people as the last Pillager, and that her drunkenness publicly displayed

disappointed everyone watching. Nanapush tries to bring Fleur away from the card game, and in response she reveals to him that she is faking her drunkenness, “Fleur reeled over to me and then stumbled into my lap. She gave a bray for a laugh, and dipped her head and spoke close to my ear. ‘Stay and watch what I have learned from you, old friend.’ Her voice was sober as a rock. I sat back to enjoy myself” (194). Fleur continues to lose the game purposefully and feign further drunkenness, eventually leading Tatro to propose a higher gamble. Once they gamble Fleur’s automobile for Tatro’s deed to her land in return, Fleur hands her cards to her son, Awun, pretending to be too intoxicated. Tatro accepts the gamble and soon realizes the Pillager’s deception as he immediately loses every hand to Fleur’s son. Awun’s relation to Fleur is acknowledged by those who watch, his Pillager roots evident once handling the cards, and it is this relation to Fleur and her gambling talents which allow the retrieval of her land. Interestingly, this scenario differs from scenes found in *Tracks* where Fleur gambles for the lives of her children in the land of the dead. In this novel, Fleur’s child Awun gambles for her instead, clearly shown to possess the same talents as his mother due to their shared bloodline and Fleur’s earlier teaching and influence of Awun. Kristan Sarvé-Gorham notes Erdrich’s use of gambling within the *Love Medicine* series in order to create complex interconnections between generations (279), as well as Erdrich’s ability to honor Anishinaabe culture through her storytelling surrounding the use of gambling, “The practice of gambling, grounded in Anishinabe myth... establishes a literary continuum as Erdrich integrates a gambling story from the oral tradition into a contemporary novel, therefore creating resonance and continuity between the two genres” (281). Erdrich can clearly be seen using Fleur as an avenue for both here, connecting Fleur to her son through this act of gambling, as well as

Fleur's continual legacy throughout the series for her talent at gambling. It is through this act of gambling that they are able to reclaim their land through that shared connection, finally showing Fleur's reclamation of her land which is referenced at the beginning of the series within *Love Medicine*. Erdrich is able to use Awun's character as a way to exemplify Fleur's power and talents, as well as the way they are transferred to her descendants.

Fleur's victory in reclaiming her land is triumphant in displaying her power and strength, contrasting Fleur's weakness depicted earlier in the novel when living with Mauser. Fleur's connection to the reservation and nature allow her strength to return, and Margaret Kashpaw narrates the novel's later chapter detailing the process of Fleur's healing through her return to her home and culture. As Margaret realizes the damage Fleur has caused herself and her spirit through alcoholism, she also discovers that Fleur has not yet named her son and has taken on the name of Four Souls. Margaret aids Fleur in the removal of her wealthy clothes and then begins the process of healing Fleur's spirit. Margaret bathes Fleur while singing to her the traditional songs of their descendants as Fleur weeps, including the song of Four Souls and the songs of Fleur's mother from her childhood. Margaret then speaks to Fleur at length regarding the love she receives from her ancestors and their spirits, highlighting Fleur's need to reconnect with the spirits in order to heal her own. She then gives Fleur the medicine dress that she crafted herself and tells Fleur that she must fast alone for eight days by the shore of Lake Matchimanito with only the medicine dress to wear. There, Fleur must remember the souls of those she knew and reflect on their loss, which will in turn force her to face her pain and weakness head-on. Doing so will break down Fleur's spirit and rebuild it, as

well as give Fleur a new name alongside her old one and the name of Four Souls, "Your name will live inside of you. Your name will help you heal. Your name will tell you how long to live and when to give up life" (207). The power of a name and the souls of those past are especially noted for their importance within the Ojibwe community, as seen through Gerald Vizenor's research shown earlier regarding the significance of Ojibwe names, and these spiritual aspects alongside nature are presented as the key to healing Fleur's lost and damaged soul. Erdrich conveys the importance of these connections through Margaret Kashpaw's voice that aids Fleur, rooting her journey of healing and rebuilding within traditional Ojibwe beliefs.

Four Souls ends with Nanapush's narration in which he acknowledges his need to know Fleur's story. He describes her later as becoming healed and known by the spirits again, as well as her possession of a new, hidden name which no one speaks. Nanapush depicts Fleur's quiet life as one removed from her past of revenge and danger, and ends the novel with a sense that Fleur has become healed and at peace in her spirit. Through Nanapush's ending narration, Erdrich ends a novel that largely depicts Fleur's downfall and weakness with that of her triumphant return and healing. This structure allows Erdrich to not only humanize Fleur Pillager, but to teach readers through the telling of her story in much the same way as traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling. The foundational beliefs and values belonging to the Ojibwe culture are represented as the key to Fleur's story, such as the abandonment of her culture and home in pursuit of revenge causing spiritual disconnect, as well as the spiritual process she must go through in order to return to balance. Erdrich can be seen teaching readers through Fleur's development throughout the novel using traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques, and many details seen here

help link this novel into the larger plot of the *Love Medicine* series due to its repeating circular and interconnected nature. Nanapush's ending narration that ends the novel could even be seen as an avenue for Erdrich to express her own voice regarding storytelling through their need to know the full story of Fleur Pillager that has been continuously woven throughout the *Love Medicine* series, "Finally, I can see the shape of all that's happened and all that is to come. Within me there has always burned an urge to see how things turn out. To know the story. Now that I know the story, I can rest" (209).

CHAPTER VIII: *THE PAINTED DRUM*

The last novel of the *Love Medicine* series, titled *The Painted Drum*, continues Erdrich's storytelling technique of the use of multiple narrators whose voices fluctuate throughout the novel. The main narrative voice within this novel belongs to Faye Travers, a one-quarter Ojibwe woman who lives in New Hampshire alongside her mother, Elsie Travers. While working together as estate sale organizers, Faye becomes fascinated by an antique drum that she discovers while taking inventory of the late Jewett Parker Tatro's estate. Faye's theft of the drum and search for its original owners act as the catalyst for the novel's plot. This leads the Travers to discover not only the origin of the drum, but also their own as descendants of the Pillagers. The Travers learn of the history of the drum and the Pillagers through the narrative voice of Bernard Shaawano, as he dictates the novel's narration while speaking directly to the Travers. It is within Bernard's narration that *The Painted Drum* is able to provide one essential development regarding Fleur Pillager's story which has remained absent from Erdrich's previous novels. Bernard tells the story of the Pillagers and the drum's origins, relating some of these events as told to him directly by Fleur Pillager previously. Therefore, through Bernard's narration Erdrich gives Fleur Pillager her own narrative voice for the only time in the *Love Medicine* series, effectively portraying Fleur Pillager's role as a storyteller to the reader and providing the final thread of her narrative which was previously missing. *The Painted Drum* provides details and context surrounding Fleur's past before the events of *Tracks* and allows her to speak directly to the reader, breaking her narrative silence which has been created throughout the series and develops her identity as a storyteller in order to provide another dimension to her character.

Following the *Love Medicine* series by order of publication will cause recognition regarding the name of Jewett Parker Tatro as the man who gained and lost ownership of Fleur Pillager's land in the latter part of the previous novel, *Four Souls*. In fact, the main subject of this novel, a traditional Ojibwe drum, can be seen from that same section in *Four Souls* which describes the many objects Tatro obtained and decorated the bar's walls with, "There were gun belts and shoulder bags that only our head men used to carry. Makizinan, old-time buckskin dresses, intricately woven purses and sashes and carrying bags. There was even a drum" (191). Erdrich's development of Fleur Pillager's story throughout the series allows readers to form connections such as this which would be lost when reading *The Painted Drum* as a singular novel. This foreshadowing of the drum is one of many instances of Erdrich's circular and repetitious development of Fleur's story. Faye Travers' discovery and obsession with the power that emanates from this drum found within Tatro's estate also harkens back to the interconnectedness found in Erdrich's storytelling which honors traditional Ojibwe storytelling through its circular shape adorned with complex details throughout:

> In spite of its size there is something delicate about the drum, though, for it is intricately decorated, with a beaded belt and skirt, hung with tassels of pulled red yarn and sewn tightly all around with small tin cones, or tinklers… The figurative detail, the red-flowered skirts, the tinklers, combined with the size of the drum, give it an unusual sense of both power and sweetness. (39-40)

Much of Faye's description of the drum and its mysterious power relate to this idea of repeating, circular ideology that represents an all-encompassing nature, in the same way

as Erdrich's interconnectedness throughout this series operates. Both the drum and the *Love Medicine* series are depicted as incredibly intricate with details woven throughout, and both remain delicate despite their large size. Erdrich is also able to reinforce her Ojibwe culture through the power of this drum within the novel, educating readers on the importance of the sacred instrument and the history behind that importance:

> The drum is the universe. The people who take their place at each side represent the spirits who sit at the four directions. A painted drum, especially, is considered a living thing and must be fed as the spirits are fed, with tobacco and a glass of water set nearby, sometimes a plate of food. A drum is never to be placed on the ground, or left alone, and it is always to be covered with a blanket or quilt. Drums are known to cure and known to kill. They become one with their keeper. They are made for serious reasons by people who dream the details of their construction. No two are alike, but every drum is related to every other drum. They speak to one another and they give their songs to humans. (42-43)

The visceral power of the drum is physically detected by Faye despite her lack of knowledge concerning the purpose and origin of the drum. However, once she is given context regarding the details and nature of such a drum, its true being becomes more illuminated and explains the powerful energy that it emanates. Similarly, the power and significance of Erdrich's singular novels in the *Love Medicine* series and her depiction of Fleur Pillager's character can be felt immediately without any outside knowledge of them. Once their details are fully examined and given context through the development of Erdrich's narrative throughout the entire series, their true nature can be more fully

understood and realized. This symbol of the drum and Erdrich's circular, interconnected storytelling techniques surrounding Fleur Pillager's character all come full circle regarding the importance of the circle within Ojibwe culture. Erdrich is therefore able to use Fleur Pillager's story and the context around it in order to weave the narrative threads of her series together in a circular, interconnected cycle throughout the complex fictional universe this series as a whole depicts.

Faye Travers' gravitation towards the drum within this novel acts as the catalyst for her to seek the origin of this drum and its power, leading her to take the drum to the reservation of Little No Horse. There, they encounter the local judge and his wife, Geraldine, who are descendants of old Nanapush and remain at his estate. Geraldine Nanapush believes that the Travers are descendants of the Pillager family through a man named Simon Jack, and calls upon Bernard Shaawano to explain the origins of the drum. It is revealed that Bernard is the only person who knows most of the story concerning the drum's creation since his grandfather, the original Shaawano, was the creator of the drum. In addition to his knowledge concerning the drum's creation and journey, Bernard is also aware of the history between the Pillager family and Shaawano family in how they correlate to the creation of the drum through Simon Jack. Bernard then replaces Faye as narrator for a sizable portion of the novel in order to explain these events from the past and how they lead to the present day. Bernard's narration begins with his being summoned to the Nanapush estate in order to relate the drum's origins to the Travers, and contains references to Nanapush as well as his knowledge of the Pillager family. These references connect to Fleur Pillager's story immediately in interesting ways, such as Bernard's narration of Geraldine Nanapush's comments concerning the discovery of

Pillager descendants, “As Geraldine says, these women who found the drum are somehow related to the Pillagers, who have mainly died out, so it is quite interesting that they’ve surfaced” (103). This comment, which references the survival of the Pillager family through the Travers, relates to Fleur Pillager and her descendants’ ability to survive. Though not directly related to Fleur, the arrival of Faye and Elsie Travers correlates to this idea of the Pillager’s strength and resilience throughout generations.

Much of Bernard’s initial storytelling narrative of the past revolves around the story of Anaquot and her husband Shaawano, as well as their son and daughter. Anaquot then bears a baby girl through her love affair with another man. Bernard narrates the story of Anaquot’s abandonment of her husband and son with her daughters on a wagon, before throwing the oldest daughter off of the wagon and to the wolves. Bernard then leaves this narrative to depict his interactions with his father, and how his father was the son of Anaquot and Shaawano who witnessed his sister's death to the wolves. Therefore, these events of Anaquot’s abandonment and throwing her daughter to the wolves are revealed to be Bernard’s father’s perspective filtered through Bernard’s own narrative voice presently speaking. Similar to Erdrich’s previous novels in the series, the events of the past that are presented to the reader are depicted through layers of perspectives and narrative voices. Erdrich wields the perspective and voice of Bernard to relate to readers and the Travers the voice of his father’s perspective of the past, revealing the origins and path of this specific version of the story that is currently being told. Just the same way Erdrich uses several narrative voices in order to present the story of Fleur Pillager, Bernard also wields the different perspectives and voices that have told stories to him.

Bernard's narration is clear in passing voice from his to another as the past is explored, and it is in this passing of voice that Bernard introduces Fleur Pillager's character to the Travers. Bernard reveals that Anaquot's newborn baby girl was in fact Fleur Pillager, and that he was eventually able to hear these events from her perspective:

> The baby who was saved that day grew up and lived a long life, and as a young man I went to sit with her sometimes. Her name was Fleur Pillager. From this old Pillager lady, I learned the next part of what I'm going to tell you. She told me things in detail, as though they happened directly to her, and in a way she had experienced them, too, even though she was tiny, and helpless, and wrapped in her mother's shawl. (121-122)

This directly contrasts the knowledge that readers will know from the previous novels such as *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, since the identity and story of Fleur's descendants differs between each novel. These inconsistencies within the larger narrative can be seen as though these different narrators misremember the past and versions of the story, as well as Erdrich's role as a trickster in her purposeful inaccuracies to the reader as she presents them. Erdrich honors traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques through the use of changes and multiple interpretations in this way, "Erdrich mocks and tricks us as readers in our attempts to ultimately understand a story or character. There are no finite readings of her characters or the stories she tells" (Thomas et al. 109). The chapter then continues first person narration briefly, as Bernard relates Fleur Pillager's voice and narration exactly to the Travers and reader, providing for the very first time Fleur Pillager's voice directly to the reader, "When a love burns too hot, it scorches everyone it touches. We old women know it is a curse to love like that. So my mother was cursed" (122). This use

of first person from the perspective of Fleur finally portrays her story through her own perspective rather than an outside source. Until now, Fleur's story has been woven by the narrative threads provided by characters such as Lulu, Nanapush, Marie Kashpaw, Pauline Puyat, Karl Adare, Lipsha, etc., and Fleur's own perspective has acted as the missing narrative thread to complete her story.

The rest of the chapter's narration, which tells the story of Anaquot after she leaves Shaawano, is presented in the third person perspective. However, this continued third person narration is still the story that Fleur Pillager directly related to Bernard in the past and provides her distinct version of Anaquot's journey. Pamela Rader expands on this narrative filtration that passes from Fleur to Bernard and then the reader:

> The "I" that appears next is not Bernard's but Fleur Pillager's "I," breaking her narrative silence in the Erdrich's preceding novels to tell the story of her mother's love for a man and her half-sister's death. Bernard's voice becomes Fleur's, catching readers unawares as we must actively bridge the interstitial gaps in the plot and in the characters' point of view. (52)

Bernard notes the impossibility of Fleur's narration before Fleur's narrative voice takes over due to her young age as well as her ability to portray these events from the past concerning Anaquot as if she accurately remembers each detail. Fleur's ability to remember and convey these events through her impossible knowledge hints at her identity as significant and knowledgeable which has been established and explored within Erdrich's previous novels. Erdrich employs dramatic irony here as Bernard's character has no knowledge of Fleur's powers and identity, while the previous novels depict Fleur's ability to perform actions and contain knowledge that cannot be explained. Fleur

herself details Anaquot's ability to forget the events upon the wagon but that the story would not forget her, living on through Fleur as Anaquot sees through her knowing eyes even as a newborn baby. Even without the context provided by the previous *Love Medicine* novels and Fleur Pillager's character, this narration illuminates Fleur's distinctive abilities that she is shown to possess as early in her life as this.

Fleur continues to narrate Anaquot's journey after abandoning her husband Shaawano in order to come live at the home of Fleur's father, revealed later to be Simon Jack Pillager. Anaquot arrives to find Simon Jack missing, and instead must live with Simon Jack's wife, named Ziigwan'aage, and her children. Anaquot is unaware of Ziigwan'aage's identity as Simon Jack's wife for a time, confusing her as to the woman's identity and her coldness towards Anaquot. After some time, Anaquot realizes that she is Simon Jack's wife alongside her silent realization that she placed poison underneath Fleur's tongue so that Anaquot would die as she nursed her daughter. Upon realizing this, Anaquot attempts to strengthen Fleur with oil to survive the poison, but must still breastfeed Fleur due to her uncontrollable hunger. While nursing, Fleur and her mother Anaquot are described as morphing together as one during an abstract scene where the two become an edgeless symbol of light, circular in its comparison to a radiant wheel (132). These images relate again to the symbol of the circle, relating to the Ojibwe culture as well as the painted drum within the novel. Anaquot confronts Ziigwan'aage regarding her poisoning of Fleur, and the two begin to focus their hatred towards Simon Jack rather than each other. Simon Jack is described as knowledgeable concerning the spirits and traditions, and is also noted to love gambling (135). Fleur's relationship to her father and her identity as a Pillager are expressed here, and hint at her own similar

abilities which will develop later in her life. Fleur's close connection with spirits, as well as her incredible talent at gambling, are shown to perhaps originate from her Pillager father. This would also coincide with how some of Fleur's talents and powers are passed down to her descendants such as Lulu and her gambling prowess, and Lipsha with his healing touch.

Fleur's identity is further developed through Anaquot's naming her, resulting in significant foreshadowing in regards to the role Fleur's character plays in the *Love Medicine* series. Anaquot becomes cautious with the amount of information she divulges to the Pillagers due to their recent animosity and attempt to poison them. Therefore, Anaquot lies about Fleur's name in order to protect her, "She did not tell her baby's name to Ziigwan'aage. Instead, she used a nickname she herself had been given by an old French trader. Fleur. So that baby was disguised before it had even spoken. Hidden by a lie. Watchful underneath" (139). Upon this lie concerning Fleur's true name, as well as its origins and significance, the novel details Fleur's destiny as a character of great importance:

> Too much had already happened to the baby, who hadn't even crawled yet or clapped her hands or eaten from a spoon. Her sister gave her life for her. Her mother ran from one husband to another man's intercepting wife. The baby was surrounded by sharp discord, jagged sorrows, and that cunning presence. Pain and truth. A spirit comes into the world and disrupts the flow of things. Changes the course of love. Takes lives. Challenges the order. So it was with this weak little baby, Anaquot saw,

> and she was more determined than ever to protect her. For it seemed the spirits had some great work in mind when they made the child. (139)

It is within this passage that Erdrich's utilization of the traditional Ojibwe symbol of a circle is evident within Fleur Pillager's character, as Fleur's origins, identity, and destiny are explicitly developed within the final *Love Medicine* novel. Only at the end of the series here do readers discover the genesis of Fleur's name, which is a lie made by her mother to protect her, originating from an unnamed French trader. Fleur's real name is hidden from all. The name Fleur, which means flower in French, suggests feminine beauty and fragility, and contrasts the last name of Pillager which suggests masculinity, violence, and destructive acts. As known from *Four Souls* and author Gerald Vizenor's work previously mentioned, names are extremely important within the Ojibwe culture, and Erdrich pairs these two contrasting names to make up Fleur's identity. Readers are also told the important role Fleur will play during the course of her life as a figure of power and change. However, this prophecy concerning Fleur's effect on the *Love Medicine* world and story has already been seen through the events of the earlier novels in the series. Fleur's creation, definition, and future are all developed at the series' conclusion, beginning where it ends similar to the format of a circle. Through this, Erdrich's connection with traditional oral storytelling and its identity within the Ojibwe's circular nature become fully realized.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the entirety of the *Love Medicine* series, Fleur Pillager's character becomes created and defined through Louise Erdrich's writing which takes inspiration from traditional Ojibwe oral storytelling techniques. Erdrich's development and presentation of Fleur Pillager's story can be seen to share many similar characteristics and methods to that of Ojibwe oral storytelling through its dualistic, interconnected nature, as well as a relative and circular aboriginal worldview which relates to the symbol of the circle. Storytelling's use as a teaching tool to preserve cultural knowledge and tradition are all seen through Erdrich's fictional universe through her use of animal traditions, the circular symbol of the drum and its significance, the importance of names within the Ojibwe community, and the trickster narrative employed throughout the text. Combined, these narratives link together to portray the circular, interconnected nature of Erdrich's series that is influenced by Ojibwe storytelling and is able to create layers of development surrounding Fleur's story on an individual novel basis, as well as the entire series as a whole. These layered complexities weave together in order to form the overall larger story of the series which is made up of each individual narrative throughout the series that each work alone, yet strengthen each other when viewed holistically. Erdrich's ability to wield different narrative voices that join each other in order to provide a complex amalgamation of the past borrows heavily from Ojibwe oral storytelling:

> Ojibwe tales often take on their meaning through repeated tellings over a series of sittings. Erdrich's use of analogous situations… works to repeat these elements of the culture, creating a cyclic pattern in the novel. These repetitions pick up on the Ojibwe tradition of telling a tale in a variety of

> ways instead of giving direct answers to questions… Erdrich's variations on a theme do more than retell the same story from multiple perspectives; they also provide an answer to her readers' implicit question of what it is like to be Native American. But rather than giving the direct answer that a dominant-culture reader might expect, Erdrich enables that reader to experience how an Ojibwe storyteller might answer the question. (Schultz 83)

Erdrich’s own voice which speaks to the reader provides its own layer through which these narratives are filtered, and her possible role as a trickster narrator which changes each story and narration is also inspired by the Ojibwe culture through characters such as Nanabozho. As such, each part of Fleur Pillager’s story and development stand on their own; all are equal without one definitive truth. However, the larger picture that these individual narratives create provide the most realized depiction of Fleur’s story. The circular nature enveloped around these narratives directly relates to these layers of connections that Erdrich has woven, accumulating at an ending where it all begins. Each avenue through which Fleur Pillager’s character and journey are developed link back to these characteristics of Ojibwe storytelling techniques, and Erdrich honors them through her ability to combine them together in a modern written form. It is through Erdrich’s ability to honor the Ojibwe culture’s storytelling techniques that she is able to weave each narrative thread together in order to provide an incredibly complex and realized depiction of the tapestry that is Fleur Pillager’s character.

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