CHAPTER IV
Exploring Native Heritage
(Love Medicine and Tracks)

Award-winning author Louise Erdrich is one of the most important Native American writers. Erdrich has created her own landscape which is centered in a fictional North Dakota Ojibwa Reservation. Her characters are men and women of white, Indian and mixed blood heritage. She writes about Native American life in the twentieth century. She published her first two books, Jacklight, a volume of poetry, and Love Medicine, a novel when she was thirty years old. She was the daughter of a Chippewa Indian mother and a German-American father. Her major characters represent both sides of her heritage. In her novels, she explores the stories of several Native American families, building their creative tales from quests for identity, the influence of religion and Native American traditions. She incorporates the influences of her mixed-blood background and sense of humor. She describes the world that resembles the environment and people in and around Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. In Louis Erdrich’s Chippewa Community we find families arguing within themselves drawing lines and maintaining old boundaries. Louis Erdrich’s Love Medicine (1984) depicts violence against women and child abuse along with the aforesaid things as they are part of experience of Native Americans living today. Thomas Matchie says: “Love Medicine is different from so much of Native American literature in that it is not polemic- there is no axe to grind, no major indictment of white society. It is simply a story about Indian life- its politics, humor, emptiness, and occasional
triumphs. If Erdrich has a gift, it is the ability to capture the inner life and language of her people” (Thomas Matchie 139).

Erdrich’s first book *Jacklight* is a striking and entertaining volume of poetry which describes everyday situations with mythic qualities. “Rugaroo” is the best poem of this volume which has the images that are pointed, striking, revealing both of personality and plot. This poem ends mythically. The character of this poem is absorbed at his death into the surrounding environment. The poem is lively and it invests the ordinary world with the magic of received mythology:

He was the man who couldn’t sleep.  
He went down into the cellar  
And ate raw potatoes.  
He blew up with gas.  
And now he is the green light floating over the slough.  
He is the one in the cattails at the edge of your dream.  
He is the man who will not let you sleep. (Peter Stitt 132)

Erdrich and her husband Dorris published their co-authored novel *The Crown of Columbus* in 1991. The book is a complicated 400-page story about the historical figure Columbus. It also gives a complicated story of love affair between two writers and intellectuals, Erdrich and Dorris who are trying to define their relationship, and also are grappling with in their research and writing. *The Crown of Columbus* appeared, exploring Native American issues from the standpoint of the authors' own experience rather than that of their
ancestors. Marking the quincentennial anniversary of Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus's voyage in a not-so-celebratory fashion, Erdrich and Dorris raise important questions about the meaning of that voyage for both Europeans and Native Americans today. The story is narrated by the two central characters, both Dartmouth professors involved in projects concerning Columbus. Vivian Twostar is a Native-American single mother with eclectic tastes and a teenage son, Nash. Vivian is asked to write an academic article on Columbus from a Native-American perspective. She is researching Columbus's diaries to gather information. Roger Williams, a stuffy New England Protestant poet, is writing an epic work about the explorer's voyage. Vivian and Roger become lovers, parenting a girl named Violet, but have little in common. Ultimately acknowledging the destructive impact of Columbus's voyage on the Native American people, they each vow to redress the political wrongs symbolically by changing the power structure in their relationship. In the end, as Vivian and Roger rediscover themselves and rediscover America. In, The Crown of Columbus Husband and wife collaborate on this philosophical thriller exploring the significance of Columbus's arrival in the New World, particularly for Native Americans. Though the novel is a popular success, critical reviewers judge it inferior to the writers' solo efforts.

The titles Erdrich chose for her novels, Love Medicine and A Yellow Raft in Blue Water contain rich poetic and visual images. These titles were often the initial inspiration from which their novels were drawn. Erdrich’s The Beet Queen, Tracks, and Bingo Palace interweaves self-contained short stories.
These stories are told by different narrators and they cover three generations of Native-American and European immigrant families. The fictionalized region is North Dakota and the time span covered is from 1912 to contemporary period. The novels are interrelated through characters and themes. Erdrich further continues the series with her next novels such as *Tales of Burning Love*, *The Antelope Wife* and *The Last Report on Miracles at Little No Horse*. The characters of Erdrich are either victims of fate or the victims of traditional and cultural patterns set by their elders. These characters are usually structured like intricate puzzles. Bits of information about individuals and their relationship to one another are slowly released in a random order. These characters are three-dimensional and their future as well as past is revealed along with the present. Erdrich explored universal family life-cycles through the antics of her characters. She also communicates a sense of the change and loss involved in the twentieth-century Native American experience.

Erdrich's covers a 40-year span beginning in 1932 in her second novel *The Beet Queen*. It deals with whites, half-breeds and American Indians exploring the interactions between these worlds. Erdrich here writes about a family who live in Argus, North Dakota, near an Indian reservation. The Beet Queen of the title Dot is a mixed-blood child fathered by Karl. Her marriage with Gerry Nanapush, makes the worlds of the town and the reservation converge and confront each other. Erdrich in her novels covers a tetralogy focusing on life near the same reservation and *The Beet Queen* is a part of it. The story begins in 1932, during the Depression. A recently widowed mother
of three children flies off with a carnival pilot, Karl Adare, abandoning her children including her newborn son. The baby is taken by a young couple who have just lost their child, while Karl and eleven-year-old Mary ride a freight train to Argus, seeking refuge with their aunt and uncle. On their arrival to Argus, Karl is frightened by a dog. He runs back onto the train and unfortunately winds up at an orphanage. Erdrich explores the negotiated interactions between the worlds of white, half breeds and Native Americans through her characters. The life of Mary, her jealous, self-centered cousin Sita and their part-Chippewa friend Celestine James is followed for the next forty years, tracing the themes of separation and loss that began with Mary's father's death and her mother's grand departure.

Erdrich followed this with her third novel *Tracks*. Gleaned from the manuscript of the first novel she had ever started, *Tracks* explores the tensions between Native American spirituality and Catholicism. Erdrich’s novels, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, *The Bingo Palace*, and *Tales of Burning Love*, are related through recurring characters and themes. Erdrich continued the series with *The Antelope Wife*, and *The Last Report on Miracles at Little No Horse*.

*The Bingo Palace* is the fourth novel in the series that began with *Love Medicine*. *The Bingo Palace* weaves together a story of spiritual pursuit with elements of modern reservation life. It portrays contemporary life on a Chippewa reservation in North Dakota. Erdrich provides continuity to the series by having the novel primarily narrated by Lipsha Morrisey, the illegitimate son of June Kashpaw and Gerry Nanapush from *Love Medicine*. 
After working at a Fargo sugar beet factory, Lipsha has returned home to the reservation in search of his life's meaning. He finds work at his Uncle Lyman Lamartine's bingo parlor and love with his uncle's girlfriend, Shawnee Ray Toose. Magic bingo tickets are provided to him by the spirit of his dead mother, June with the help of which he finds modest wealth. The character of Fleur Pillager returns from *Tracks* as Lipsha's great-grandmother. After visiting her, Lipsha embarks on a spiritual quest in order to impress Shawnee and learn more about his own tribal religious rites. Family members past and present are brought together in his pursuit, which comprises the final pages of the novel.

*Tales of Burning Love*, Erdrich's sixth novel, set in her customary North Dakota landscape, concerns the miraculous powers of love in the tale of four widows comparing notes at the funeral of the man they each had once married. Erdrich returns to the character of June Kashpaw in this novel. More accurately, it is the story of June's husband, Jack Mauser, and his five ex-wives including June. To begin the tale, Jack meets June while they are both inebriated and marries her that night. In reaction to his inability to consummate their marriage, she walks off into a blizzard and is found dead the next day. His four subsequent marriages share the same elements of tragedy and comedy, culminating in Jack's death in a fire in a house he has built. The story of each marriage is told by the four ex-wives as they are stranded together in Jack's car during a blizzard after his funeral. Again, Erdrich references her previous work in the characters of Gerry and Dot Nanapush, Dot as one of Jack's ex-wives and Gerry as Dot's imprisoned husband.
The Antelope Wife is the novel which chronicles the lives of two Ojibwa families living in contemporary Minneapolis. It also circles back into the past in a series of magical, dreamlike sequences of mythical continuities and cultural dislocations. The Antelope Wife focuses on new families, the Roys and the Shawanos, living in contemporary Minneapolis. Erdrich follows these families through failed marriages and forced weddings, as well as tragic deaths. As with all of her novels, the plot here also manages to loop back a century to an attack on an Ojibwa village and a child carried off on the back of a dog. Employing techniques of magical realism, Erdrich tells a tale of the saving power of love. In the opening of the book, Private Scranton Roy follows a runaway dog carrying a baby after his cavalry troops have raided the village. Roy literally nurses the baby back to health and raises her as his own until the baby's mother retrieves her. When her mother dies the girl spends time with a herd of antelope and returns to her village with mysterious powers. Now the Antelope Wife of the title, she is enticed to the city where she becomes the link between several generations of white and Native American families.

In 2001 she finished writing The Last Report on Miracles at Little No Horse. In the novel Erdrich reprises a character encountered earlier in her cycle of novels, Father Damien, a Catholic priest. This priest has served the Ojibwa on the remote reservation of Little No Horse, for over half a century, making enormous sacrifices, but also experiencing real joy and contentment. Now, near the end of his life, Father Damien has only one fear: that his true identity will be uncovered. In truth, Father Damien is a woman name Agnes
DeWitt who encountered the Father on route to his Indian mission. When he drowned in a flood, Agnes had a mystical experience and decided to assume the priest's identity. She has kept this secret all these years, and now is threatened when a colleague comes to investigate another member of the church, Sister Leopolda, whose piety is under scrutiny. Agnes alone knows Sister Leopolda's secret, but revealing that might in turn reveal her own secret. So she remains silent.

Thus we very clearly get an idea that in almost all her works Erdrich writes about the aspect of Native Americans trying to establish false identity. They try to mingle with mainstream Americas giving up their religion, tradition and beliefs. They adopt Christianity to gain respect from white world. Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, a collection of interrelated short stories, features characters and speakers from four families, the Kashpaws, the Lamartines, the Pillagers, and the Morrisseys. The families are represented in non-hierarchical terms by employing speakers of various ages and stations within the community. This novel depicts the aspects of families struggling to regain their nearly forgotten cultural heritage. An important part of the Native American tradition is the importance of the land. The relationship that Native Americans had with the land was the basis for survival. They got everything they needed from the land, and, in return, would give back everything they could to the land. Erdrich demonstrates this relationship with the land in *Love Medicine*. Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* is a novel made up of several stories about the people on a Chippewa reservation in North Dakota. The stories cover three
generations, fifty years, and several families, and there are eight narrators. The characters tell their own stories. They present fourteen stories about themselves and their relationships. The novel explores the bounds of family and faith that preserve both the Chippewa tribal community and the individuals that comprise it. Love Medicine begins with a short account, told in third person, of the death of June Kashpah in 1981 in the boomtown of Williston North Dakota. There is a family gathering following the death of June Kashpah who is a prostitute. Though June dies in the very beginning of the novel her presence is felt throughout the novel. The characters introduce one another, sharing stories about June that reveal their family history and their cultural beliefs. The novel covers the period 1934 to 1983. This novel is all about the families who arise from two traditions. One is the Chippewa culture of their ancestors. Another one is the Western traditions brought by Catholic missionaries who wanted to civilize the tribe. These differing mythologies present contradictory messages of power and place for Native American people and their struggle to regain their nearly forgotten cultural heritage. The feelings of Native American people are very clearly depicted. Erdrich also depicts, what it is meant to be both a rational and a feeling being, to be both an American and a Native American, to be both in catholic and tribal beliefs.

Love Medicine begins with the scene depicting the last hours of June Kashpaw’s life on Easter weekend. June is an important character in the novel. The novel is narrated in third person. It is about the journey towards a sense of subjectivity and self knowledge. This journey becomes the process of healing.
June’s lost son, Lipsha, grows up psychologically and spiritually. He wanders and discovers the meaning of his universe. He finds out that June is his true mother. Knowing his mother's identity helps Lipsha find his own: "I could not help but dwell on the subject of myself. Lipsha Morrissey, who’d, learned so much in his short life. Who had lost and regained the touch. Lipsha Morrissey who was now on the verge of knowing who he was" (*Love Medicine* 337).

Many Native American codes and values are found in *Love Medicine.* There is the family saga code following which Nector Kashpaw literally connects the various Indian families on the reservation. He marries Marie Lazarre Morrissey, but never loses his passion for Lulu Lamartine. Lulu was a promiscuous mother of a girl and at least nineteen boys. Nector was the father of one of the boys. Nector was a member of a most respected family and the chairman of the tribe. But Nector becomes the victim of his sexual passions, falling for Marie as she escapes from the Sacred Heart Convent. He is equally possessed with the beautiful and lustful Lulu, into whose waters he continually sails to satisfy his fantasies. He finally concludes: “I try to think of anything but Lulu or Marie or my children. I think back to the mad captain in Moby Dick and how his leg was bit off. Perhaps I was wrong, about Ismael I mean, for now I see signs of the captain in myself” (Thomas Matchie141).

The values of Native American family are contrary to the values associated with Western nuclear family. In Western European concept, the real status of biological children is superior to the outcast status of adoptee. But in Native American concept the status of adopted children is superior. Thus in
*Love Medicine* we see that Marie Kashpaw’s biological children’s status is inferior to the status of her adopted children June and Lipsha. The Native American family ties together the spiritual kinship and clan membership. The individuals living together in one house are joined. The characters, who try to adopt dominant culture, giving up their own are seen struggling to establish their identity. They fail both as Native American and as white. They are neither accepted by dominant people nor by their own community. June for example tries to find identity in the dominant culture but fails. She tries to retain her ties with her reservation community. But her attempt to succeed in the Oil Boomtown of Williston makes her family experience the separation of June which is a great loss to them. June leaves her family denying responsibilities, rejecting family ties to achieve identity but fails. Similarly King Kashpaw and Beverly Lamartine live in city but they maintain the community ties to the reservation. King, though an Indian, is unable to fit either into the old ways of the reservation or the hurried ways of the city. King tries to impress the people by saying that he is the World’s Greatest Fisherman. On the reservation he tries to impress his family with success in a place where they would be deficient. King always tries to fit in wherever he is by being a successful outsider. Apart from this throughout the novel we have many conflicting codes involving Christianity versus semantic religion, mechanical time versus ceremonial time, the nuclear family versus tribal kinship systems and main characters versus characters of equal status.
The important characters Marie and Leopalda have a never ending conflict in the novel. Marie becomes a major figure in the unfolding family saga. Marie’s attraction to the church as a means of gaining power and prestige reflects her later actions in becoming a political leader of her tribe. According to Christianity the spirit goes to heaven after death. But Native Americans believe that the spirit mingles with the living and carries out unfinished business. June’s spirit in the shape of a wounded deer troubles her husband, Gordie. Gordie kills the deer thinking it is June and then returns to the convent to confess his deed, before ending in an open field howling as if he were drowned. The Biblical perceptions are juxtaposed with American Indian Shamanic tradition. June’s death depicts partially Christian resurrection and partly Native American religious belief that the place of spirits is among their families and tribes.

Erdrich later writes about establishing one’s identity. Mother motif also plays a vital role in *Love Medicine*. She uses her characters to explore the idea of searching for one’s identity, a motif that is present in her own life. She uses the concepts of a connection with the land, and the family, particularly the role and relationship of a mother figure in an individual’s life, as concepts that shape the identity of her characters. The definition of identity that Erdrich uses is a typical Native America definition of identity. If a character is successful in finding a meaningful connection of these concepts in his or her life, then he or she has been successful in finding an identity. The quest for identity and the importance of motherhood are significant themes in Erdrich’s life as they are in
her novel. In Erdrich’s novels mothers of all sorts appear. We see the mothers who have abandoned their children; those who are extremely possessive and those who are abusive. Though mothers abandon their children they are very important. They exert tremendous power over their children. Lulu is the mother of eight sons. They are with different fathers still they adore Lulu. June, the mother of Lipsha dies in the very beginning of *Love Medicine* but her presence is felt throughout the book. She guides her son in Erdrich’s next novel, *The Bingo Palace*. Erdrich presents many mothers, but Marie Kashpaw is the “Super mother”. She is both biological and adoptive mother. Marie becomes a mother to the other mothers at some point in their lives. Marie has a sense of motherhood about her that draws people to her. Marie is a very strong character in the novel. She struggles hard to hold her family together. Marie’s one son and one daughter die within the year they are born so she starts adopting children. Marie uses her mothering skills on both her children and the discarded children of others. Leopalda is Marie’s mother. But previously she had rejected her daughter Marie and later advises Marie never to have children. But Marie becomes a good mother and loves all the children she mothers. She doesn’t wish that her children should lack the motherly love which she had lacked. Nurturing was what she did. Marie takes care of her unfaithful husband in his prime and in his old age, though she was well aware of his affair. She takes care of her husband’s mother, Rushes Bear, in her old age. She not only adopts the children but also loves them as her own children. She tries at the same time to put love in their hearts too. Marie says, “I took care of the old
woman every day of her life because we shared the loneliness that was one shape, because I knew that she was in that boat, where I had labored” (*Love Medicine* 104-105). After Nector’s death Marie and Lulu become close with each other. Their grief connects them and a new relationship is born between them. We find the mother motif in their relationship. In her treatment of June, Marie took on the Native American view while her biological children often took on the western European view.

*Love Medicine* begins with June and ends with her son Lipsha Morrisay. Lipsha was born to June and Gerry Nanapush. As a little girl, June was found alone in the woods. Her mother, Lucille, had died and left her there alone. Marie adopted June, as she was known for doing, and she loved June. But June could never learn to see Marie as a mother figure. This is seen in the text in one particular scene where June denies the love Marie has been giving to her, and denies Marie as a mother. In this scene Marie says to June, “‘June Morrissey’ I said, ‘your mama was my sister.’ She looked at me, still not speaking. ‘Your mama died,’ I said. There was a flicker of a lash. ‘You can be my girl and live here.’ She spoke finally, with no expression. ‘I don’t care’” (91). With these words, “I don’t care” June denies Marie. It is shortly after this conversation that June leaves Marie for good, going instead to live with her Uncle Eli. Perhaps June thought she might find the mother figure that she was searching for with him, since she was not finding it with Marie (85-96). June never found this with Eli either, or with anyone else throughout her life, evidently, because June never found her place of belongingness. Though she
did have the presence of a mother figure, it was not the “right” mother. That is to say, it was not the biological mother that June always craved to complete her equation of identity. June’s equation of identity combined the Native American definition with the western European definition. June believed that biological mother representing the western European view plus connection to the land representing the Native American view equals identity. But June never found her identity until death. At the end of her life and at the beginning of the novel, June crosses water. June crossed water (the field of snow) (7) to go to the only place where she could find herself; death. Because of the lack of June’s biological mother in her life, she could never grasp her identity, and in the end, this leaves her no choice but death. Her death was a complete connection with the land. She was walking through a field toward the reservation, feeling the land in her bones. June lacked the motherhood part of the equation, so she tried to fill her entire identity with connection to the land, connecting in the most physical way, sensing the land until she dropped to her death, physical body against physical land.

We are first given Marie’s Native American view when she says (referring to June), “So I took the girl. I kept her. It wasn’t long before I would want to hold her against me tighter than the others” (65). This is a glimpse of the love Marie feels for June. She treats her as one of her own children throughout their relationship, loving her and providing for her as best she can. Speaking of June, Marie says, “She hardly spoke two words to anyone and never fought back when Aurelia pinches her arm or Gordie sneaked a bun
off her plate.” Marie’s children never accepted June into their circle, into their family. The western European point of view is played out by Marie’s biological children, who hate June. They always treated her as an outsider, and she was often the subject of their mean tricks or teasing. Marie could be called the central mother figure of the novel, because, although there are other mother figures present, Marie becomes a mother to the other mothers at some point in their lives. Marie has a sense of motherhood about her that draws people to her. Marie was the biological mother to Zelda, Gordie, Aurelia, and most likely others. She was the adoptive mother to June and Lipsha. Nurturing was what she did, from taking care of her unfaithful husband in his prime and in his old age, even though she was well aware of his affair, to taking care of his mother, Rushes Bear, in her old age, to putting food in the mouth of every orphaned child she could find while at the same time trying to put love in their hearts. One time when Marie does this in the case of June, Marie takes June in after she is found in the woods, cleans her up, feeds the skinny little girl, gives her a place to sleep and, most importantly, love her. In the *Beads* episode of *Love Medicine*, Marie refers to bathing June, putting ointment on her sores, getting the knots out of her hair, and holding her. This is an excellent example of the way Marie mothered. She was always giving of herself, and loving fiercely. We see Marie in this role with Rushes Bear at the end of the *Beads* episode. Marie says, “I took care of the old woman every day of her life because we shared the loneliness that was one shape, because I knew that she was in that boat, where I had labored” (104-105).
Marie became a mother figure to Lulu Lamartine, Marie’s husband’s lover. In their old age, after Marie’s husband had died, she went to Lulu’s room to take care of her, since Lulu was almost completely blind at the time. One day when Marie was leaning over Lulu, putting eye drops in her eyes that were healing from surgery, Lulu noticed, “she swayed down like a dim mountain, huge and blurred, the way a mother must look to her just-born child” (297). Marie and Lulu give birth to a new relationship as they discover the strength and comfort available in a woman to woman connection. Their silent communication recalls the pre-symbolic language used between an infant and her mother. Motherhood in *Love Medicine* is always present, and sometimes fierce. There is sometimes conflict between biological children and adopted children. This conflict seems to loom in Marie Kashpaw’s home frequently. There was always tension between Marie’s biological children and June. This was also the case with King and Lipsha. King was not Marie’s child, but he knew who his parents were, whereas Lipsha does not learn about his own parents until the end of the novel. This struggle can be seen as the struggle between the western European world and the Native American world, as was explained earlier. As Erdrich was of mixed descent, the struggle was always alive in her life between these two worlds, and it is always alive in the lives of her characters as well.

Another motif in *Love Medicine* is twin motif. According to Native American motif, twins are complements and competitors. Erdrich shows this motif through the Kashpaw twins Eli and Nector. They represent the
chronotope of the tribal community versus the dominant chronotope of progress and individualism. When government people come to take Native American tribal children to city their mother sends only Nector with the government and hides Eli. As a result the twins were separated. Nector appears to be the more intelligent and future-thinking brother, but ultimately, he must come back to his people and his heritage to be healthy. This reliance on white patriarchal language and his disdain for his own heritage and language is shown in *Love Medicine* where Nector has lost touch with reality, and is deserted by his facility with language. Albertine explains Nector's failing, "Now, these many years later, hard to tell why or how, my Great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while Grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild. When I walked with him I could feel how strange it was. His thoughts swam between us, hidden under rocks, disappearing in weeds, and I was fishing for them, dangling my own words like baits and lures" (19). Although as a boy Eli "couldn't rub two words together and get a spark" (*Tracks* 45), he fares better than Nector in the long run. Nector's early facility with written and spoken English deserts him as he ages, and with this desertion, the knowledge that he could have related to Albertine is also lost. Through Nector and Eli, Erdrich shows the complex interrelated nature of language-knowledge-power. This power is not stable but changes. Nector lacks an inner strength, an assured sense of who he is. His identity is based on ephemeral things like physical prowess. As a young man, Nector's subjectivity is connected to his belief that physical force is his only recourse in dealing with the powerful women in his
life. But Eli was sharp in old age whereas Nector was losing his memory. Eli is the rightful heir to leadership in a traditional educational sense but Nector takes his place. Eli possesses the traditional education and skill necessary to the hunter-provider whereas Nector is a failed hunter. Eli prefers the woods while Nector goes into town to speak the girl. Eli and Nector never looked like twins. Eli is a real old-timer but Nector is a Euro-American educated who knows white reading and writing. Nector remembers “dates with no events to go with them, names without faces, things that happened out of place and time” (18) as a result of his loss of memory. Nector is isolated in time and moved by it rather than being a natural part of all time and space like his brother American Literature. Nector always displays his physical strength, but Marie’s strong will saves him and gives him back his identity as her husband. Nector also needs to rely on Lulu for support and guidance: “I need Lulu to show me what this fearful thing is I need her hand to pull me and lead me back into her bedroom, and her voice to tell me how we were meant for each other by fate. I need her to tell me I am doing right” (142). Here Erdrich very clearly depicts that despite his show of physical superiority, emotionally his will is weak. He forces Marie to the ground in their first sexual encounter, and years later, he attempts to control Lulu by forcing her to have sex with him: "I got desperate with the thought, but I was helpless to sway her anvil mind. I laid her down. I pinned her arms back. I pulled her hair so her chin tipped up. Then I tried my best to make her into my own private puppet that I could dance up and down any way I moved her. That's what I did. Her body sweat and twisted. I made
her take my pleasure" (137). These forcible sexual encounters stand out in stark contrast to Eli's gentle wooing of Fleur in Tracks. In order to feel confident in himself and his masculinity, Nector desperately needs to control Lulu, but his only weapon is physical strength. Ultimately, Nector needs to rely on Lulu for support and guidance just as he has relied on Marie: "I need Lulu to show me what this fearful thing is. I need her hand to pull me in and lead me back into her bedroom, and her voice to tell me how we were meant for each other by fate. I need her to tell me I am doing right" (142). Despite his show of physical superiority, emotionally his will is weak. Nector achieves a sense of who he is based on the woman he is with; it is her strength of will, her assurance that he is right, her words, which sustain his tenuous sense of self. Nector achieves his desires when he goes home to Marie, who offers him the succor he requires: "So I did for Nector Kashpaw what I learned from the nun. I put my hand through what scared him. I held it out there for him. And when he took it with all the strength of his arms, I pulled him in" (166). Although Nector displays physical strength, Marie's strong will saves him and gives him back his identity as her husband. In trying to burn a letter he’s written to Lulu saying he is leaving Marie, he actually sets fire to Lulu’s house returning sheepishly to Marie. In the end he dies a pathetic old man, one who has literally lost his mind. He chokes to death on turkey hearts, the ironic symbol of his erotic needs and manipulative ways. Thus we see how Erdrich is trying to prove through these twins that if they stick to the traditional culture they can be successful and
if they adopt foreign culture they totally fail in life. As a result of his negligence Nector has to face death as punishment.

Erdrich uses natural elements such as air, earth, fire and water to define her characters. Marie’s personality is depicted through references to fire. Water code is used to define June Lipsha and Nector. In the opening section, June walks on water and in the closing section Lipsha travels across the water covering his ancestral lands. Nector’s life is compared to a river which sometimes rushes on, sometimes pools and is still and sometimes takes a fateful change of course. Here we see that the water code plays an important role. Another important aspect is this novel is about establishing identity. Marie wants to embrace a beautiful and powerful identity. Marie was actually attracted to the Church as a means of gaining power and prestige. She fails to do so and thus she becomes a political leader of her tribe. But as female power is no longer viable in the Native American culture, her identity comes through Nector. Marie yearns to become a saint because she associates martyrdom with power. Marie is unable to establish her identity as a nun which is borrowed from the colonizer’s culture. But Marie’s power is transitory and false so she bolts out from the convent. She realizes that life in convent with sister Leopalda is dust. She leaves in search of health and identity. Marie meets Nector and loses her virginity which shows her loss of any positive validation of herself in the convent. She loses her power and accepts man’s privileged position. Later she marries Nector and becomes Mrs.Kashpaw, wife the tribal chairman. Marie tries to empower herself. As a young girl, she attempts to gain
power through Catholicism, as a young woman, she uses here position as wife and mother to empower herself. Marie visits Leopolda and tells her about Nector’s position in the community. When Leopolda remains unimpressed, Marie begins self exploration. She returns from convent and finds Nector’s letter which says that he is leaving her for Lulu’s sake. Marie feels that she should not depend on Nector and says “I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa Tribe. I’d still be Marie. Marie star of the sea! I’d shine when they stripped off the wax!” (165) Now Marie has started forming her own identity. She is proud of her cultural heritage.

Lipsha discovers his mother’s identity and later thinks about his father Gerry. June and her actions play a significant role in Lipsha’s development and identity. Lipsha finds his own identity after knowing his mother’s identity. Lulu, Lipsha’s grandmother tells him about his biological parents: “you never knew who you were… I thought it was a knowledge that could make or break you” (245). Lulu’s revealing his parentage to Lipsha sets him on path to healing. This also helps Lipsha to familial connection. Lipsha reconciles with his father Gerry and it gives him the security and self-identity. He thus brings June home both symbolically and literally. Lipsha returns home after finding out the truth about his true parents. He gains his sense of identity and also his sense of belonging within family and community. He is the medicine man for his generation. He is a healer. He has sense of personal value and power. He says: “I know the tricks of mind and body inside out without ever having
trained for it, because I got the touch. It’s a thing you got to be born with. I got secrets in my hands that nobody ever knew to ask… The medicine flows out of me” (230-32). Lipsha tries to help Marie win back Nector from Lulu using his Love medicine. He fails because he takes a shortcut. He is afraid to ask advice of Old Lady Pillager and as a result Nector dies. Lipsha says: And here is what I did that made the medicine backfire. I took an evil shortcut I looked at birds that was dead and froze… Faith might be stupid but it gets us through. So what I’m heading at is this. I finally convinced myself that the real actual power to the love medicine was not the goose heart itself but the faith in the cure, I didn’t believe it, I knew it was wrong…(245-46).

Lipsha later realizes that real magic comes from love, not with medicinal herbs. He tells Grandma Kashpaw, “Love medicine ain’t what brings him back to you, Grandma … He loved you over time and distance… It’s true feeling not no magic” (257). Nector dies but later he returns to the family as a ghost. Lipsha realizes that real power is achieved from love and community connection. The title of the novel, Love Medicine is drawn from the unsuccessful efforts of the clownish Lipsha Morrisey, to unravel a kinship mystery by concocting a love potion for Nector. King buys a car with June’s insurance money Lipsha wins the car and brings it back home. Lipsha feels that he is not driving the car back to the Reservation, but is laying his mother to rest. Thus he helps June to heal, even after death. June’s spirit atlast can be put to rest as her son has accepted her. It is time for rebirth to occur in Lipsha and June. Lipsha is ready to be born into what he was intended to be all along:
Lipsha Morrissey, medicine man. The final page of *Love Medicine* says, “I’d heard that this river was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, which once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast, unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land. I got inside. The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home” (367).

Different critics have criticized *Love Medicine* in a different way. Ursula Le Guin, a novelist describes the novel’s technique as “oneness and manyness” which offers “passion and compassion, desolation and humor all center in a perception of what it is to belong and not to belong, to be a person, to be one of the people”. Anthropologist Ruth Landes explains the public/community nature of Ojibwa culture: “Public mide teachings stressed neighborliness, forbearance, concern for sick, respect for all, paternalism …, honesty, and homage to patron monitos” (quoted by Karla Sanders in *Melus*, Summer 1998) William Bevis has shown that Native American well-being a sense of self, is based on the “transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place… tribal rather than an individual definition of ‘being’”. Lissa Schneider suggests that forgiveness is the true ‘love medicine’ in *Love Medicine*: “With the exception of Nector, the many first person narrators describe a movement toward forgiveness and transformation through the act of sharing their stories with one another, a movement that influences the entire community”.

Portales, "Louise Erdrich enters the company of America's better novelists." *Love Medicine* was named for the belief in love potions which is a part of Chippewa folklore. The novel explores the bonds of family and faith which preserve both the Chippewa tribal community and the individuals that comprise it.

Reviewers responded positively to Erdrich's debut novel, citing its lyrical qualities as well as the rich characters who inhabit it. *New York Times* contributor D. J. R. Bruckner was impressed with Erdrich's "mastery of words," as well as the "vividly drawn" characters who "will not leave the mind once they are let in." Portales, who called *Love Medicine* "an engrossing book," applauded the unique narration technique which produces what he termed "a wondrous prose song."

*Love Medicine* is also about Marie Lazarre’s character in detail. Marie Lazarre, an important character in the novel adopts June, her niece. June grows up along with Maire’s biological children, Gordie, Aurelia and Zelda. Marie speaking of June says, “She hardly spoke two words to anyone and never fought back when Aurelia pinches her arm or Gordie sneaked a bun off her plate.” Marie’s children never accepted June into their family. They always treated her as an outsider, and she was often the subject of their mean tricks or teasing. June prefers to stay with her uncle Eli, who is an old bachelor in the family. June was very pretty. Her uncle called her “Miss Indian America”. June marries her cousin Gordie, running away from home. Gordie Kashpaw and June are accepted by Marie, after one year. King is the child born to them.
Later when things go bad with Gordie, June runs off alone leaving Gordie and

ing. After leaving Gordie June spends her life as a prostitute. Gerry Nanapush

loves her and intends to marry her. They have an illegitimate son, Lipsha, who

is raised by Marie Kashpaw. Lulu, Lipsha’s paternal grandma informs him

about his parentage. Lipsha runs away from Marie, taking her money. He

enlists his name in army. But he has a vision which saves him from army. He

decides to meet his father Gerry Nanapush. Lipsha finds Gerry, his father, who

is an escaped criminal. The two meet, and Gerry figures out the identity of

Lipsha without Lipsha having to tell him. Gerry tells his son things about June

that may help Lipsha to forgive her. And then Gerry admits his own lack of

identity to his son, telling him “I won’t ever really have what you’d call a

home” (268). This suggests that Gerry has been wandering, with no connection

to the physical place, not really knowing who he is, but it offers Lipsha hope.

Gerry is famous politicking hero, dangerous armed criminal, judo expert,

escape artist, charismatic member of the American Indian Movement and

smoker of many pipes involved in the most radical groups. Gerry plays card

game with King and Lipsha. Lipsha is ready to play not for money, but for car.

The car is bought by King with June’s insurance money. Lipsha wants the car

because he wants to gamble for his just inheritance. Lipsha is in search of his

identity. Lipsha and Gerry co-operate to cheat King out of his inheritance by

using Lulu’s crimping system. Gerry launches his son Lipsha into the world.

He gives him a new start. Lipsha is reborn as well as integrated with the

universe because Lipsha is aware of his identity. Gerry wins the car, but he is
forced for leaving the place immediately hearing the knock of police. Lipsha drives Gerry in the car and lets him off near the border of Canada, where Gerry’s wife and his little daughter live. Lipsha forgives his mother June. He is driving the car bought by her insurance money. He has achieved an identity and hence forgives June. Lipsha knows who his parents are now. He knows who he is. After this meeting, and after Lipsha drops his father off at the Canadian border and the two say their good-byes, he drives in the car he won in a gamble from his half brother King, and which King bought with money left to him from June. It is in this car that Lipsha forgives June and has his own crossing of water experience. Driving in his brother’s car, bought with his mother’s money, Lipsha finds forgiveness for his mother. Lipsha says, “I tell you, there was good in what she did for me, I know now” (366). In the realization that Lipsha comes to in recognizing the good June did, he is forgiving the hurt she caused him. He realizes who he is; he has achieved an identity. It is at this point that Lipsha knows what he must do. He must go to the water. It is time for rebirth to occur in Lipsha and June. Lipsha is ready to be born into what he was intended to be all along: Lipsha Morrissey, medicine man. The final page of *Love Medicine* says, “I’d heard that this river was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast, unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land. I got inside. The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home” (367).
It is at this place, at Lipsha’s crossing of water, that he lets go of all the resentment he had toward June and lets forgiveness and love take its place so that he can become complete. It is in the words “bring her home” that Lipsha takes ownership of June as his mother, completely forgiving her of the pain she caused. Owens sums it up best when he says, “When, at the end of the novel, Lipsha Morrissey crosses the water to ‘bring her home’ we know that Lipsha has finally arrived at a coherent sense of his place within the community (including the land itself) from which identity springs” (57). Lipsha has completed his equation. He has found a way to combine the love of an adoptive mother with the knowledge of a biological mother. He ties this all to the land by the image of crossing water, and by learning to use the medicines.

Marie Kashpaw Lazarre narrated her story in the chapter titled “St. Marie”. She is by then a teenager. Marie is a mixed blood girl who prides herself on the lightness of her skin. She narrates her experiences in attempting to become a “Saint” among the nuns of the Sacred Heart Convent in a small North Western American town with a substantial Indian population, at an unspecified time apparently early in the twentieth century. Marie’s “Mentor”, sister Leopolda is a tyrant and sadist nun. She terrorizes Marie and classmates in the convent school. This story is compared to a German Folk tale, “Hansel and Gretel”. Suzanne Ferguson in “The short stories of Louise Erdrich's novels” (Suzanne Ferguson; Studies in Short Fiction, Vol. 33, 1996) shows how Erdrich compares the oral paradigm in “St. Marie” with the Geman Folk tale. Erdrich uses figures and narrative elements from Ojibway/Chippewa oral
tradition, but here she uses German folk tale. Marie’s arrival at the convent is compared to that of the children at the witch’s house in the tale. In the chapter “St. Marie” Sister Leopalda tempts Marie with exotic foods. She is preparing to bake bread. Meanwhile Leopalda scalds Marie and Marie is nearly defeated – Marie tries to go away but Sister Leopalda tries to stop her. Weakened by the scalding Marie is unable to get farther than the kitchen, where in another allusion to “Hansel and Gretel”, she pushes Leopalda into the oven. But the oven is too small for Leopalda. Leopalda in a rage stabs Marie’s hand with fork. Here the folk tale “Hansel and Gretel” is suddenly metamorphosed into a warped “Saint’s Legend”. Stepping firmly on the back of Marie's neck, Leopolda pins her to the floor, takes up a steaming kettle and begins to pour: I heard the water as it came, tipped from the spout, cooling as it fell but still scalding as it struck. I must have twitched beneath her foot, because she steadied me . . . I felt how patient she would be. The water came. My mind went dead. Again . . . I could not stand it. I bit my lip so as not to satisfy her with a sound. She gave me more reason to keep still. "I will boil him from your mind if you make a peep," she said, "by filling up your ear." (52-53). But all of a sudden Marie has a vision. This vision gives her enormous power. While Marie has this vision sister Leopalda asks her to stop dreaming and to follow her. Leopaldar’s appeal suggests that she has sexual seduction in mind. But, Marie takes it as a plea, not to leave the convent. She thinks Leopalda wants Marie to remain and have the “evil” of her rebelliousness expunged from her. Marie believes that sister Leopalda will be the vehicle of her “rise”, for where
the other nuns have “long ago gone blank and given up on satan”. The scalding has weakened Marie and she is unable to walk farther than the Kitchen, she pushes Leopalda, unluckily for Marie. In a rage Leopalda stabs Maire’s hand with a fork. Leopolda's wrath is terrible to behold, but Marie is not cowed: She was fearfully silent. She whirled. Her veil had cutting edges. She had the poker in one hand. In the other she held that long sharp fork she used to tap the delicate crusts of loaves. Her face turned upside down on her shoulders. Her face turned blue. But saints are used to miracles. I felt no trace of fear. If I was going to be lost, let the diamonds cut! Let her eat ground glass! "Bitch of Jesus Christ!" I shouted. "Kneel and beg! Lick the floor!" That was when she stabbed me through the hand with the fork, then took the poker up alongside my head, and knocked me out. (53).

Marie loses her conscious and half of an hour later when she awakes she is surprised to see that she is worshipped by nuns. . True to form, Leopolda once again tries to erase the truth of the day’s events: "I have told my Sisters of your passion." she manages to choke out. "How the stigmata . . . the marks of the nails . . . appeared in your palm and you swooned at the holy vision . . ." (59). All of a sudden the situation is changed. Marie smartly plays her role as a “saint”, Marie, in order to save herself from exposure, tells others of the “Miracle” Marie savors her triumph as Leopalda must “worship” her, in scalding Marie is transmogrified. She is “saved” and her “saintliness” is manifested in pity for her vengeful or holy joy, however, but to “dust”. This story ends with Marie, telling herself, “Rise up and walk! There is no limit to
This story not only depicts the destructive relation between the church and the Indians but also provides a general portrait of the deadly conflict between oppressors and oppressed. The oppressed becomes as cruel as the tyrant but only temporarily. Marie in the end is free of her illusions. The characters have played out their roles, served their purposes in the larger myth, as do Gretel and the witch.

Marie leaves the convent and meets Nectro Kashpaw, who is on his way to court Lulu Pillager. Marie seduces Nector Kashpaw. In their middle age Marie and Nector get married. Mary has numerous children both adopted children and her biological children Aurelia, Zelda and Gordie. Nector is prone to indolence and to a certain tendency to drink more than is good for him. Marie decides to use her *power*, however, to propel Nector into a position of *authority*:

I had plans, and there was no use him trying to get out of them. I'd known from the beginning I had married a man with brains. But the brains wouldn't matter unless I kept him from the bottle. He would pour them down the drain, where his liquor went, unless I stopped the holes, wore him out, dragged him back each time he drank, and tied him to the bed with strong ropes. I had decided I was going to make him into something big on the reservation (66). Indeed she does: Nector ends up as tribal chairman. Significantly, though Marie is by far the stronger figure of the two, she does not aspire to a position of authority on her own behalf. Marie helps her husband Nector Kashpaw to rise to the position of tribal chairman. Marie’s attraction to
the Church as a means of gaining power and prestige prefigures her later action in becoming a political leader of her tribe. Marie's daughter Zelda, when she appears in the novel *Love Medicine*, is similar to her mother and grandmother Leopolda in that she is fascinated by the all-female world of the convent, a realm in which women exercise both power and authority. In one unforgettable scene, Marie takes Zelda up to the convent to meet Sister Leopolda. Marie flaunts her respectability and social clout on the reservation before Leopolda. Regarding Nector's position as tribal chairman, she states baldly, "He is what he is because I made him" (118). When they return home, Zelda finds a note on the kitchen table which reveals her father's plans to leave Marie for the seductive Lulu Nanapush. As Marie contemplates a life without Nector, she regains a sense of herself: "I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa Tribe. I'd still be Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! I'd shine when they stripped off the wax!" (165) Nector lusts after Lulu, who is already married. Lulu bears numerous children by her husband, his brother, and a variety of lovers. Lulu revitalizes the reservation population by bearing numerous children. Nector, in a coincidence meets Lulu Lamartine and starts physical relations with her. Nector is Lulu’s first love. Lulu’s husband, Henry is killed on the railroad tracks. Nector continues his affair with Lulu for five years. Later Lulu marries her brother-in-law, Beverly. Nector in a fury burns her house. Gerry is the son born to Lulu through Beverly and Lyman is born to her through Nector Kashpaw. Henry and Lulu’s son is Junior Henry. Old Rushes Bear is Nector Kashpaw’s mother and Eli is
his twin brother. Rushes Bear allows the government to take away Nector to a government school. She hides her, another son Eli and he grows up in her care. Eli is the old bachelor in the family, who has risen June. Eli represents the old way, the Native American who never integrated into white culture. Eli Kashpaw is confident, secure and is respected by the members of his family. He is a memorial to the past. He lives traditionally in his old age, ignoring modern influences that have threatened and distracted Nector, Henry, Goodie, and king. He remembers the old Cree language and oral traditions.

The story of Marie and Nector brings together many of the important images in the novel, including the notion of “Love Medicine”. Nector loves his wife and also his mistress Lulu. Nector is the center of a love triangle. Despite his physical desire for Lulu, Nector allows himself to be trapped into marriage by Marie Lazarre, to whom he is also attracted. The trio is in an old people’s home and Marie is jealous seeing Lulu. Lulu’s children Junior Henry, Gerry Nanapush and Lyman Lamartine are related to the Kashpaw family in one way or the other. Gerry Nanapush’s illegitimate son Lipsha is born to June, who is Marie’s niece. Lyman is the son of Lulu and Nector Kashpaw. Junior Henry is related to the family with his physical relation with Albertine, Nector’s grand daughter. Albertine is the daughter of Zelda whose father is Swede Johnson. Zelda, Albertine's mother, affirms her daughter's membership in the community, something we sense Albertine, "a breed" (23), has long awaited: "]\"My girl's an Indian,' Zelda emphasized. 'I raised her an Indian, and that's what she is'" (23). Swede Johnson is Zelda’s first husband, from off-
reservation. Zelda, Marie’s daughter is married twice. She lives just on the edge of the reservation with her new husband, Bjornson. Albertine is not informed about her Aunt June’s death and funeral by her mother Zelda but she eventually goes home to visit, saying, "I wasn't crazy about the thought of seeing her, but our relationship was like a file we sharpened on, and necessary in that way" (10). Hence Albertaine is furious with her mother. She feels that, Zelda should have become a nun instead of marrying her father and giving birth to her. Zelda in her teenage was taken to the convent by her mother Marie. Marie goes there to meet the dying nun. She takes her daughter Zelda to be “blessed” by the aged Leopald a. Meeting Leopald a and seeing the atmosphere of the convent, Zelda thinks of becoming nun someday. But Marie warns her not to take any hasty decision about her life. Albertaine runs away from the reservation to study nursing. She is interested in white studies. She has always been independent. She is just fifteen years old when she runs away. In 1973, at the age of fifteen, running away from Fargo, Albertaine meets Junior Henry Lamartine and she sleeps with him. In 1980, trying to decide about her life, she meets Gerry Nanapush, Henry’s brother and his girl friend Dot. Albertaine narrates the story of Gerry Nanapush and Dot in the chapter, titled, “Scales”. Gerry, who is thirty five years old, spends most of his time in prison. He is in prison, or out of prison and on the run all his life. Albertaine meets Gerry and Dot in a bar. She works with Dot during the last months of Dot’s pregnancy. They work in a truck weighing station for a large construction site in North Dakota. Gerry is re-arrested for breaking out of Jail.
He has been imprisoned for killing a Federal Agent during the arrest. Albertaine becomes Dot’s friend and helper after the birth of her child in Gerry’s absence. Albertaine comes back home upon hearing about her favorite Aunt June’s death. She tries to understand more of her heritage from her grandpa. She introduces her grandma Marie, her grandpa, Nector and Nector’s brother Eli. Albertaine learns about Lipsha’s birth secret over hearing the conversation of her aunt Aurelia and her mother Zelda. She even tries to reveal the truth to Lipsha Kashpaw, who is not at all ready to accept it. Lipsha begins life, much as June did, as an orphan. He was told that his mother tried to throw him in a ditch to get rid of him, and he was found and taken in by Marie. Lipsha knows nothing about who his parents are for most of the book. He just says that he is not interested to know about his mother, as he considers Nector Kashpaw and Marie to be his parents. Lipsha says, “I consider Grandma Kashpaw my mother, even though she took me in like any old stray” (39).

Lipsha tells us three things very clearly. First, he tells us that he has no forgiveness for his mother because he denies her as mother here. Second, he tells us that he does have someone in his life trying to fulfill that mother role (Marie), and third, he tells us that Marie is not being completely successful, because Lipsha still feels like “any old stray”. We later see that it is only through Marie that Lipsha can forgive his mother; therefore Marie is essential to his equation for identity. A large theme in the writing of Erdrich, particularly in Love Medicine, is the theme of a search for identity. Lipsha is grateful to his grandma for saving him and raising him. So, when Lipsha sees grandma
worrying about Nector and Lulu’s affair he is sad. Lipsha is ready to do anything to help grandma and hence when grandma asks him to meet old man Pillager regarding Love Medicine, he readily agrees. But Lipsha finds difficulty in getting the gooses. Lipsha believes that old suppurations are just strange beliefs. So, instead of gooses’ hearts, he takes shortcut and brings the hearts of two turkey birds that are dead and frozen. He informs about this later to grandma. Love Medicine is something of an old Chippewa specialty. Grandma Marie tries to make Nector Kashpaw to swallow the hearts. When, Nector feels uneasy to swallow the heart, she hops up quickly and sledges him between the shoulder blades to make him swallow the hearts. Nector gets chocked badly. Grandma’s mad fury chokes grandpa choke to death. Hence the “Love Medicine” which Lipsha prepares to rekindle Nector and Marie’s passion actually kills Nector. Lipsha’s medicine fails because he takes a shortcut. And here is what I did that made the medicine backfire. I took an evil shortcut. I looked at birds that was dead and froze.... Faith might be stupid, but it gets us through. So what I'm heading at is this. I finally convinced myself that the real actual power to the love medicine was not the goose heart itself but the faith in the cure. I didn't believe it, I knew it was wrong.... (245-46). After Nector dies and returns to the family as a ghost, Lipsha realizes that real magic comes from love, not potions, that the family power has less to do with a facility with medicinal herbs than it does with human connection. Lipsha tells Grandma Kashpaw, "'Love medicine ain't what brings him back to you, Grandma.... He loved you over time and distance ....It's true feeling, not no magic" (257).
The Chippewa Indians, on whose stories Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* is based, suffered European and Euro-American domination too. Erdrich’s characters manifested the symptoms of oppression. Marie Lazarre Kashpaw, continually wants acceptance in terms of other’s definitions. When Nector Kashpaw says of her: “Marie Lazarre is the youngest daughter of a family of horse-thieving drunks… she is just a skinny white girl from a family so low you cannot even think they are in same class as Kashpaws” (58-59), Marie readily accepts this view. She wants to gain self worth. She determines to go “up there to play as good as they could” (40). Marie is light skinned, a mixed blood so fair that Nector in his first encounter with her calls a “skinny white girl” (40) as an insult. Marie doesn’t take it as insult as other Indians do. She knows that white physical attributes are values among her Indian people. She says “Lemme go, you damn Indian… you stink to hell” (59). Nector is an amiable weakling, a man who is clever and charming. He plaintively expresses his feelings for Marie (and indeed for Lulu) in the following terms: "Her taste was bitter. I craved the difference after all those years of easy sweetness. But I still had a taste for candy. I could never have enough of both . . ." (92). The characters in *Love Medicine* at times both judge themselves and others in terms of the oppressor’s values which they have internalized, and hate the oppressor and any sign of the oppressor in their own rank. Racism and hatred are at once directed outward and inward.

In the end we see that everything is set right. Marie’s life includes risk, transformation, house holding and medicine, as well as integration of past and
Present. In her old age Marie helps Lulu, her rival, regain her sight. Her encounter with Leopolda makes her forgive Nector’s attempt at dissertation and to accept him back. Leopolda who seems to be Marie’s antagonist is actually her essential spiritual guide who pulls her up from darkness and death.

Once Lulu identifies June as his mother, Lipsha begins to wonder about his father, Gerry Nanapush. June’s death, her absence, compels him to seek out his half-brother and eventually to find his father. Gordie’s alcoholism follows June’s death. He has nearly drunk himself to death when one night he thinks he sees June’s ghost. He goes to the car not thinking about how drunk he is and subsequently runs into a deer. He decides to put the deer in the backseat but forgets this and hallucinates that he has in fact killed June. He panics and goes to the convent where he drunkenly confesses to a nun. The police are called and Gordie runs away.

Lipsha has to find that his brother is King, his boyhood tormentor, disrupted by Vietnam War and is wild and torn. Lipsha goes to visit King (his half-brother) to learn more about his Gerry, who does escape prison that very night and meets Lipsha: “So many things in the world have happened before. But it’s like they never did. Every new thing that happens to a person, it’s a first. To be a son to a father was like that. In that night I felt expansion, as if the world was branching out in shoots and growing faster than the eye could see.” Lipsha drives Gerry to Canada.

As a Native American author, Erdrich has also been compared to Richard Wright and James Baldwin for what those writers achieved on behalf
of African Americans, as well as to Philip Roth due to his Jewish narratives. Erdrich is credited with bringing Native Americans into mainstream fiction and inspiring an entire generation of new voices in Native-American literature. Louis Erdrich’s *Tracks* (1988), deals with the years between 1912 and 1919, when the North Dakota Chippewa, or Anishinabe, were coping with the effects of the General Allotment Act of 1887. Its purpose was to divide tribally allotted lands among individual Indians so that these Indians could leave their nomadic communal cultures behind and become settled as farmers. After the Indian Allotment Act of 1904, each enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa born before 1909 received one quarter section of land, with single members of the tribe receiving various lesser amounts depending on their age. This was part of the transformation of Indian land into Euro-American property; more significantly. As Mary Jane Schneider has noted in her book, *North Dakota Indians*, allotment had the immediate effect of reducing the total acres of Indians land by 65 percent. *Tracks* is in part an autopsy of this process, whereby place becomes property, and an analysis of how the process affects innocent bystanders. Erdrich in this novel represents an ancient community threatened with eradication by the forces of white society and industry. Erdrich points out how the circumstances made life felicitous for her ancestors have been disrupted and distorted in contemporary Native culture. In all her novels, women are isolated. In *Tracks*, Erdrich not only chronicles the story of the Chippewa struggle to preserve their land and culture but also gives stories of these stories and their tellers.
After Erdrich completed *The Beet Queen*, she was uncertain as to what her next project should be. The four-hundred-page manuscript eventually became *Tracks*. It had remained untouched for ten years; the author referred to it as her "burden." Erdrich and Dorris took a fresh look at it and decided to relate it to *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*. While more political than her previous novels, *Tracks* also deals with spiritual themes, exploring the tension between ancient Native American beliefs and Christian notions held by Europeans. The novel takes place between 1912 and 1924, before the settings of Erdrich's other novels, and reveals the roots of *Love Medicine*'s characters and their hardships. Erdrich's novel *Tracks* is dialogical in many ways, but perhaps most obviously in that it unfolds by means of two alternating narrators. The aging Chippewa, Nanapush, predeceased by his wives and children and the lone-survivor of his family line, delivers the odd chapters. Narrating the even chapters is Pauline Puyat, a light-skinned young woman isolated from her mixed-blood family. She, too, remains as "the only trace of those who died and scattered" (39). In a community ravaged by illness, poverty, and white-instituted dependence, familial disconnection is a growing reality. Responding to such loss, both speakers use their lives and stories to establish alternative spiritual families and ritual-oriented communities. One of the narrators, Nanapush, is the leader of a tribe that is suffering on account of the white government's exploitation. He feels pressured to give up tribal land in order to avoid starvation. While Nanapush represents the old way, Pauline, the other narrator, represents change. The future mother of *Love Medicine*'s Marie
Lazarre, Pauline is a young half-breed from a mixed-blood tribe "for which the name was lost." She feels torn between her Indian faith and the white people's religion, and is considering leaving the reservation. At the center of Tracks is Fleur. Nanapush discovers this young woman--the last survivor of a family killed by consumption--in a cabin in the woods, starving and mad. Nanapush adopts Fleur and nurses her back to health.

Tracks, is the story of Fleur and a Native American tribe in the early 20th century. The lifestyle of the tribe is ending and the story is presented by the aging Chippewa, Nanapush the lone survivor of his family line who delivers the odd chapters. He is a wise old tribal leader gifted in the ancient art of storytelling. Nanapush narrates Tracks in the form of a story to Lulu, also a Native American. Lulu is his adopted daughter and spiritual granddaughter. His narrative flows like natural speech with a very informal tone. He is self-confident and sees himself as an important figure in his own life as well as in the history of his people. He shares the past with her, in hopes of preventing her from making mistakes. The time frame of the story stretches between 1912 and 1924. "Nanapush" is a secret he guards against white appropriation, taking on "No Name" in official records in order to preserve and pass on its oral and spiritual power (32). His identity is thus doubled and elusive, sacredly conferred upon him by his family and earned by his own practices of oral and earthy play and healing: "My father said, 'Nanapush. That's what you'll be called. Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush. Because it's got to do with something a girl can't resist. The first Nanapush stole fire. You
will steal hearts" (33). The aging narrator does, indeed, exhibit key traits of the mythical figure: amoral trickery, creativity, woodland know-how, healing and liberation, androgyny, bawdy humor, and strong sexual appetite. (4)

"Stealing hearts" is certainly one of Nanapush's goals in telling stories. His "sweet talk" (34) is first spent on the orphaned Fleur Pillager, the initial link in the chain of surrogate family he works to weld. Further, in so far as all of his stories are recounted to Fleur's daughter Lulu, they are attempts to steal her heart and win her back into his world of relations. An old adage claims that laughter is the best medicine to cure human ailments. Humor, then, has a profound impact on the way human beings experience life. In Louise Erdrich’s novel *Tracks*, humor provides powerful medicine as the Chippewa tribe struggles for their physical, spiritual, and cultural survival at the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Tracks*, the power of Native American humor to profoundly affect human experience is portrayed through the characters of Nanapush and Fleur.

In his role as “Nanabush” the trickster, a central figure in Chippewa (Ojibwa) storytelling, Nanapush demonstrates the power of Native American humor in his own life, when he challenges the gods and cheats death by playing a trick on them: “During the year of the sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story . . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on” (46). To fulfill his role as trickster, Nanapush uses humor as powerful medicine not only for himself, but also for his tribe.
In 1912 Nanapush saves Fleur and in 1924 Lulu returns from boarding school. It is also extended back to 1862 when Nanapush is born at Lake Matchimanito and forward to around 1940 when the story is actually told to Lulu. He begins talking about 1912, and how natives are dying and whites are trying to buy their land. Nanapush views himself as the voice of his culture. He says “My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know.” He knows the old ways. He says to Lulu “I guided the last buffalo hunt, I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two year’s growth. I spoke aloud to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake” (2). He knows his people's stories, cures and songs: and he knows not to mention the names of the dead, out of fear that "they would hear us and never rest, come back out of pity for the loneliness we felt. They would sit in the snow outside the door, waiting until from longing we joined them."

Nanapush is proud of his heritage and believes that the good times are well in the past. Nanapush is telling the story to teach a lesson to Fluer’s daughter Lulu. When Lulu was born Father Damien comes, expecting to deliver last rites for the infant and is pleased to baptize her instead. Without the knowledge of Fleur or Margaret, Nanapush claims the opportunity and the "right" to name the child. Faced with "so many tales, so many possibilities, so many lies," the trickster names her Lulu Nanapush, asserting paternity himself and casting her in the role of his own dead daughter, the first Lulu. Throughout the story, Nanapush addresses Lulu directly, attempting to hold her attention: "Grandaughter, you are the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared . .
Lulu is angry that her mother has abandoned her, and Nanapush hopes that his narrative will bring mother and daughter together again, or if that is not possible, that his narrative will allow Lulu to understand the importance of the culture which she seems destined to abandon for the white culture. As a wise elder, Nanapush offers advice to Lulu, hoping he can prevent her from making a mistake and marrying a Morrissey: "Granddaughter, if you join this clan, I predict the union will not last. Listen to experience and marry wisely. I always did" (182). He convinces her to not to marry a Morrissey and asks her never to resent her mother for abandoning her as a child. He says Lulu had a good reason and possibly no other choice. The older Nanapush, speaking to the child Lulu, must make her understand truths that might seem on one level too deep for a child to understand, for Lulu must see beyond the fact that her mother has abandoned her and has separated from Eli Kashpaw. Late in the novel, Nanapush is explicit about his motives for having told the story of the loss of the Pillager land: And so, with the three of you [Lulu, Fleur Pillager, and Eli Kashpaw] standing there I told the story. I have seen each one of you since then, in your separate lives, never together, never the way it should be. If you wanted to make an old man's last days happy, Lulu, you would convince your mother and your father to visit me. I'd bring old times back, force them to reckon, make them look into one another's eyes again. I'd work a medicine. But you, heartless one, won't even call Fleur mother or take off your pointy shoes, walk through brush, and visit her. Maybe once I tell you the reason she had to send you away, you will start acting like a
daughter should. She saved you from worse, as you'll see. Perhaps when you finally understand, you'll borrow my boots and go out there, forgive her, though it's you that needs forgiveness. . . . (210-11)

Lulu’s mother, Fluer Pillager, a Native American woman has magical powers. She is a central figure in both Nanapush’s and Pauline’s stories. She is the heroine of Nanapush’s story. Nanapush loves her as his daughter and she too loves him. She represents the ancient ways of their people. She lives on an Indian reservation on her family’s land by Lake Matchimanito. After her parents die from illness, Nanapush and Puckwan rescue sick Fluer from her family’s cabin. Twice saved from drowning, Fleur is thought to be a witch, a mistress of the "Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster" who dwells at the bottom of the lake. "She messed with evil," say some of her neighbors, "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." She bewitches men, beats them at poker, and works spells in the dark of the night. Eventually, she settles down in a passionate but uneasy marriage with the shy Eli Kashpaw. Nanapush helps her bury her family. The spirits of the pillagers come for them, but using his voice he overcomes every obstacle. Nanapush and Fluer mourn for their lost families, but Father Damian, a priest on the reservation revives them. Even though Nanapush asks Fluer to stay with him,
she wants to go home despite knowing, the land is in danger. At first Fleur lives at Lake Matchimanito but later she goes to Argus, a white town where she meets Pauline and works in Kozka’s meat cutting and packing company. According to a local legend, Fleur had drowned twice and caused the death of men who either did or did not rescue her to take her place in the world of the dead. She is an exemplification of traditional Chippewa power, and she owes her power to some spirit guardian, Misshepeshu, the water spirit man. This monster was thought to be responsible for Fleur’s powers and the demise of her enemies. “Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself. He’s a devil, that one, hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur” *(Tracks 11)*. This is both a comment on Fleur and Eli. Pauline is again describing Fleur how she sees her and why people at Lake Matchimanito want to avoid her. At the same time, Eli is still willing to pursue Fleur and is not afraid to love her despite the fates of the other men who have been associated with Fleur. This shows that Eli is brave, daring and truly in love with Fleur. Nanapush guides Eli Kashpaw, who is like a son, toward a successful romantic union with Fleur Pillager, a union that is both an uninhibited celebration of life between two lovers and a symbol of hope for the people of their tribe. When Eli pleads for advice on how to woo Fleur, Nanapush imparts the humorous wisdom of a man who has had three wives: “I told him what he wanted to know. He asked me the old-time way to make a woman love him and I went
into detail so he should make no disgraceful error” (45). He also gave him “a few things from the French trunk my third wife left . . .” to help him in the courting process (45). Nanapush is pleased when he hears nothing more from Eli after he returns to Fleur, interpreting this “as a sign she [Fleur] liked the fan, the bead leggings, and maybe the rest of Eli, the part where he was on his own” (46). A powerful, sensuous relationship develops between Eli and Fleur that provides solace to themselves and inspiration to their tribe during a bitter winter, when there was no food and little hope, and the people of the tribe chopped holes in Lake Matchimanito to fish. They “stood on the ice for hours, waiting, slapping themselves, with nothing to occupy them but their hunger and their children’s hunger” (130).

Nanapush has taken three young people under his wing and taught them traditional ways. He knows many medicines and tricks to make life easier for those he cares about. When Fleur is sick, he holds a ritual in the Pillage house that revitalizes Fleur. He comes to the rescue of the family and is a source of strength for those who need it. The source of Nanapush's visionary strength and of his power to cure lies in the fact that he refuses to elevate himself above others, thus remaining true to the communal nature of tribal society. He says: Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength that was my secret (177).
Nanapush is an excellent hunter and he tells Eli Kashpaw how to hunt even though he is far away from him. He can control the pace of his step with only a song and a dream. Eli has become a hunter able to survive in the woods. Fleur is also a complete hunter who embraces Nanapush’s spirituality more fully. Nanapush warns that Fleur is dangerous for men but Eli insists that he help him with Fleur. Fleur is suspected of having very intimate contact and humans, between the everyday reality and the spiritual reality. Eventually Fleur comes to feel the same about Eli and the two live together. They have their daughter Lulu together. Pauline is jealous of Fleur, desires Eli, and counteracts her feelings of displacement from both Indian and white culture by exerting destructive power. Pauline manipulates Sophie into thinking of Eli as a sexual partner, and Sophie, who is young and pretty, is certainly capable of attracting Eli. Pauline, however, also buys love medicine from Moses Pillager and has Sophie put it in Eli’s food. Eli himself will later blame the incident on love medicine. Eli is bewitched by Pauline into having sex with Sophie and when Fleur finds out the relationship between Eli and Fleur is never the same. A powerful sensuous relationship develops between Eli and Fleur that provides solace to themselves and inspiration to their tribe during a bitter winter, when there was no food and little hope. Fleur is a good hunter better than most men on the reservation. She is big and strong, capable of lifting sides of beef and pork by herself and of hauling her community. She has great luck in cards. She has won enough in her stay in Argus to pay taxes on her land for two or three years. Years later, she won the land back in a game of cards with Jewette
Parker Tatro, the former Indian agent who had acquired her land in her absence. She lives alone until Eli falls in love with her and comes to join her. Fleur is also a healer, collecting medicines and distributing them. She saves Maries life in childbirth. Fleur's children are born in her own cabin. She lives there with Eli with frequent visits from Margaret and Nanapush. Fleur's daughter Lulu and her stillborn baby are rumored to have been fathered by the lake monster. Fleur is deeply harmed in obviously material ways by Anglo encroachment her parents and siblings are decimated by disease, her land is lost and her forest leveled, she and her family are starved, killing her second child. Still Fleur Pillager maintains her will to fight, crushing the wagons of the loggers when they come to throw her off her land. To keep Lulu safe from these circumstances Fleur has sent her to a boarding school, an act for which Lulu cannot forgive Fleur. At the end of Louis Erdrich’s *Tracks*, the fearsome, fetching, dangerously divine Fleur Pillager a Chippewa earth so idolized by the author as to seem a form of creative self caricature finally walks away from her beloved patch of Dakota forest abandoning it to the whim and destruction of white loggers and tribal sellouts. At the end of the novel, Eli tries to earn enough money to buy back the Pillager land for Fleur by getting a job with the lumber company. We never learn what finally happens to Eli but we know that he is not reunited with Fleur.

Nector Kashpaw is the younger brother of Eli, Nector does not have the same respect for his Native American heritage that Eli does. He gets caught up in the modern world and is susceptible to vices such as drinking. Nector
symbolizes the side opposite Eli and Nanapush in the symbolic struggle between the two factions of the Ojibwa tribe. “I know he paid the money down on Kashpaw land from foresight, shrewdness, greed, all that would make him a good politician. As he grew older, he resembled Eli more in face and less in spirit. Whereas the elder brother never lost his tie to the past, the younger alreadylooked ahead” (209). This reflects the struggle between the new and old generations of Native American culture. Nanapush comments that Nector now is looking ahead to the future and has lost his ties with the past that his brother Eli still has and respects. The two brothers now only look like one another and doesn’t act like each other.

The sadistic nun, Sister Leopolda of Love Medicine, who tortures Marie Lazarre, is none other than Pauline, another narrator of Tracks, and the girl she is torturing in Love Medicine is her own illegitimate daughter, the girl she tries to abort and unwillingly gives birth to in Tracks. Pauline is a discontented young woman who is a one quarter white blood, Pauline Puyat. Puyats were known as a quiet family with little to say. They were mixed-bloods, skinners in the clan for which the name was lost. Pauline, on the other hand, has no pride in her people, in fact seems to detest everything that is not "white." When she first leaves the reservation to go into the town of Argus, she leaves her past selfbehind and tries to forget to what culture she belongs to. However, once she is involved with the "white" world, she seems to loathe the people she becomes acquainted with as much as the people she has left behind. Once her narrative continues, she seems to have a distaste for everyone who is not herself. Her
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tone is haughty, and some time into her narrative she begins to view herself as a martyr. She is not sure of herself, however, and in some cases is conflicted in her memory as to whether or not she even performed actions she is remembering.

"It was Russell, I am sure, who first put his arms on the bar, thick iron that was made to slide along the wall and fall across the hasp and lock. He strained and shoved, too slight to move it into place, but he did not look to me for help. Sometimes, thinking back, I see my arms lift, my hands grasp, see myself dropping the beam into the metal grip. At other times, the moment is erased. But always I see Russell's face the moment after, as he turned, as he ran for the door -- a peaceful look of complicity satisfaction." (28)

In her dream, Pauline is haunted by the men in Argus. Pauline is anxious to escape and she gets her chance with the arrival of Bernadette Morrissey, a widow, and her brother Napolean. Pauline notes that they are well off, mixed – bloods who have acquired land. Though Napolean had a weakness for drink, he was a good Catholic and a dutiful brother to take in his sister and her three children Clarence, Sophie and Philomen. Pauline becomes pregnant by Napolean. But he leaves her and goes away. She wants to force miscarriage. But Bernardette keeps her from getting rid of the child and they both agree that Pauline should stay on the farm and wear concealing clothes. Pauline says she knows her baby is a girl and she will name her Marie. She later forgets her illegitimate daughter who is born with the help of spoons instead of forceps. Pauline leaves Marie to be raised by her grandmother Bernardette and then
enters a convent. She represents all the pain, rage, and frustration of a person forced to live in two different cultures while being rejected to a large degree by both. In her confusion she wanders between white and Indian worlds. Initially she assumes a role of keeper of the dead, and then increasingly turns to religion. She teaches at Saint Catherine’s and she blinds and deafens children to their native culture. She is renamed and reborn as Leopolda. Nanapush wants the reservation to stay the same while Pauline does not care about the whites buying land. He has problems with certain white people, while she prefers whites to Indians and even wants to be white. Nanapush wants to hold on to the Indian tradition while Pauline breaks away from traditions. Thus we see that Nanapush’s views about religion, land, and whites are totally different from Pauline’s. Pauline's main dream is to not be Pauline. In one scene, she has a vision that God appears before her and tells her that she is not really Native American, but white, and that she has been chosen to do His work. Pauline resists all of the watery aspects of her Indian heritage, though, and so as she moves further and further into white and Christian identification, she invents disciplines of liquid denial. First, she forgoes daytime urination and restricts her intake of liquids to facilitate this. Later, she ceases bathing. In the sixth chapter, narrated by Pauline herself, these two practices of saintly self-mortification are counteracted by Nanapush and Fleur. (6) The first intervention is accomplished, most suitably, by Nanapush's storytelling in the midst of this intimate community.
"One night of deepest cold He sat in the moonlight, on the stove, and looked down at me and smiled in the spill of His radiance and explained. He said that I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white. He Himself had dark hair although His eyes were blue as bottleglass, so I believed. I wept. When he came off the stove, his breath was warm against my cheeks. He pressed the tears away and told me I was chosen to serve. Other things. I was forgiven of my daughter. I should forget her. He had an important plan for me, for which I must prepare, that I should find out the habits and hiding places of His enemy. It was only very slowly that this idea was revealed. Over time, as winter cut down more people and I was called from the convent to house after house where I prepared the newly dead, the details of His great need were given. I should not turn my back on Indians. I should go out among them, be still, and listen. There was a devil in the land, a shadow in the water, an apparition that filled their sight. There was no room for Him to dwell in so much as a crevice of their minds." (137)

One of the most striking characteristics of Pauline Puyat is her devout Catholicism and her desire to be disconnected from the Ojibwa people. Throughout Tracks, she openly chooses Catholicism over her native religion and abandons her native ways almost completely. When Pauline tries to help Fleur prevent a miscarriage, she is literally held back by her conscious separation from the Ojibwa culture. Pauline justifies her own hatred of her heritage by dreaming that God believes she is white, and puts off her
responsibility toward her past actions on Fleur, and believes that if she converts Indians to Christianity, she will be absolved of all her own sins. Pauline narrates her story. She works with Fleur in Argus. They both work at the butcher shop. Fleur destroys parts of the town with a tornado after a bad experience there. Fleur is raped by the butchermen of Argus, North Dakota, after her victory at Poker. Margaret, Eli’s mother is raped by Clarence Morrissey and Boy Lazarre, who shaves her head out of vengeance. Fleur causes the tornado in Argus that maims and kills the butchermen. She reduces Boy Lazarre’s speech to babbling because of his voyeurism and she asks the Manitou of Matchimantio Lake to drown men who cross her. But her powers cannot ward off the whites and government Indians greedy for land, money and power. Just before Pauline takes her vows and becomes Sister Leopolda, she tells the story of her entanglement with the Lake Monster. She also tells the story of Margaret. Margaret solicits to use against her son’s interest in Fleur Pillager. Warning to Eli and Fleur’s sexual relationship, she tries to use Sophie Morrissey to get Eli for herself. She forces Fleur's husband Eli and young Sophie to have intercourse in the slough in broad daylight with "love medicine" which she procures from Fleur's cousin, Moses: "And then, I turned my thoughts on the girl and entered her and made her do what she could never have dreamed of herself. I stood her in the broken straws and she stepped over Eli, one leg on either side of his chest. Standing there she slowly hiked her skirt" (83). Moreover when Nanapush tries to cure Fleur waning powers in a sweat lodge ceremony, Pauline tries her best to interrupt by preaching
Christianity. She thus exposes a darker side of her character. In her attempt to sustain a controlling influence on the lives of those around her, she finds herself further isolated from the local Native community. One of the most striking characteristics of Pauline Puyat is her devout Catholicism and her desire to be disconnected from the Ojibwa people. Throughout Tracks, she openly chooses Catholicism over her native religion and abandons her native ways almost completely. When Pauline tries to help Fleur prevent a miscarriage, she is literally held back by her conscious separation from the Ojibwa culture. She is confused and psychologically damaged by her unbalanced commitment to catholic martyrdom and Chippewa tradition. There are many things that Pauline fails to do to effectively prevent Fleur from miscarrying. The most obvious is her failure to efficiently put together the herbal steep made of Alder: “And I could not remember the plant’s configuration, even though its use was common enough for bleeding problems” (156). Although Pauline could be nervously forgetting the properties of Alder, this forgetfulness of a basic remedy stresses her abandonment of Ojibwa society and its practices.

To gain forgiveness from Fleur for his affair with Sophie, Eli leaves Fleur’s home and seeks counsel from Nanapush. During this time, Sophie seeking forgiveness kneels outside Fleur’s cabin, refusing to leave. Finally Clarance and Napoleon carry over a statue of the Blessed Virgin in an attempt to get Sophie to move. At this moment, Pauline observes a miracle; tears rolling from the statue’s eyes. Still not opening herself to others, however, she
decides to keep the information to herself as her own. By remaining silent Pauline rejects the possibility of sharing a significant experience in the formation of herself and accordingly participating in ongoing communal activity. She proceeds to try to live as a nun and recalls returning to the Pillager’s cabin. Thinking of only of herself, she asks for food. Declaring that she has abandoned her body and soul to Him, she proceeds to quickly consume the stew given to her before noticing that Eli, Fleur, Margaret and Nanapush themselves eat hardly anything. By ignoring their plight, Pauline misses another opportunity to gain an insight into both herself and the local community. Instead she continues to promote her own spiritual duty and piety, a belief system that encourages a sense of superiority over those around her.

As Pauline becomes increasingly absorbed in her absolutism, she refuses to accept the invitations of the other around her to re-enter the community. Pauline decides to destroy Misshepeshu. She returns to the lake and taking Nanapush’s leaky boat, she drifts off-shore in the foggy, freezing water. When Nanapush attempts to save her she pushes him away. In Pauline’s mind she has now triumphantly returned to her community and can destroy Misshepeshu and begin to gather Chippewa souls to lead them to the Christian heaven. Pauline kills Napoleon Morrisey thinking him to be the devil creature. From this point she strives less to tell stories with her own voice and more to fulfill her visionary consciousness. Later in the story when Fleur give birth to a premature infant. Pauline is unable or unwilling to find the medicinal herbs that Fleur had stored in the lean-to, and the infant dies.
After the death of the infant, Pauline and Fleur skate on bark shoes along an "iced pathway along with other Indians" (159) to the heaven of the Chippewa. It is here that the reader meets the dead souls who "starved, drank and froze, those who died of the cough" (159-60). In the heaven of the Chippewa there is gambling and jars of potent whiskey. "They play for drunkenness, or sorrow, or loss of mind. They play for ease, they play for penitence, and sometimes for living souls" (160). In this sorrowful place, Pauline meets the souls of those she has betrayed or destroyed. She hides to avoid the gaze of her parents and looks away from the men she abandoned in the meat locker in Argus. However, she must finally admit what the reader has known all along. "I was visible. They [the men] saw me, and it was clear from their eyes they knew my arms had fixed the beam in the cradle back in Argus. I had sent them to this place"(162). Pauline's admission of guilt is short lived, for as she and Fleur return to the living, she resumes her quest for "whiteness."

Once Pauline returns to the living, she remains unwilling to accept the reality and the consequences of her actions. After the murder of Napoleon Morrissey, her last link to the past, she can finally repudiate her Chippewa heritage and be "white." She exits the novel believing she is "sanctified and recovered" as she becomes the bride of Christ. She leaves Pauline behind and becomes Sister Leopolda. *Tracks* ends with Fleur pushing a "small cart, a wagon that one person could pull, constructed of the green wood of Matchimanito oaks" (224). The cart contained only "weed wrapped stones from the lake-bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rags, and the umbrella that had
shaded her baby” (224). She was last seen throwing her weight against the yoke, heading into the unknown. As Pauline has turned away from her heritage, Fleur holds fast to hers in the only way she knows.

After the Lake Matchimanito incident, she sanctifies herself, “marrying” her absolutism. She becomes a “bride” for Christ who, she declares, will take her as wife. Finally she changes her name to Leopolda. Pauline thus fulfils her goal to “dissolve”, to become one with providence. In doing so, however, she also finalizes her separation from her community. At the end of the novel, she coldly envisions the demolition of Fleur’s cabin and the selling and dividing of the land.

The first purpose of Erdrich’s novel is to provide commentary on Native American society, the importance of oral tradition for example. A second purpose is to analyze the rift between Native Americans who respect and try to hold onto the honor and traditions of their past and those Native Americans who have forgotten their rich history and are now trying to live in a white man’s world. Erdrich uses the relationship between Eli and his brother Nector to highlight her point. Eli still tries to live a native life whereas Nector seems to have abandoned his heritage and is trying to live a new, modern life. The third purpose of the novel is to show the incursion of white people into Native American’s lives. Throughout the novel, Nanapush refers to “the Agent” who works in the town and is always laying taxes on lands that are not his and that have been owned by Indians for centuries. And then at the end of the novel, the
lumber company destroys the Pillager land and causes the family to split up for good.

Erdrich is a medium for the concerns and problems of Native Americans and presents problems to the reader so that they may analyze the situation and come to their own conclusions. There are many themes of this book depending upon a reader’s perception of what Nanapush and Pauline say. Traditional Native American lifestyles are impossible in the modern world. No matter how hard one tries to hold onto his heritage it will eventually be taken from him by the advances and demands of a modern civilization. The only thing that will be left over of the Native American way of life will be the tracks of the forgotten people. Rifts between Native Americans within the tribe are more detrimental than conflict with white men. United, a band of Native Americans can stand together and defy white men but this is impossible when the Native Americans cannot even agree with one another. The title of the novel is *Tracks*. Wherever a character goes, they will inevitably leave tracks, whether it is in the dirt or in the snow. These literal tracks are the tangible representation of the figurative tracks that each character leaves. A character’s tracks are determined by how they live their life. Eli would have much different tracks than his brother Nector because Eli remembers his heritage whereas Nector is looking towards the future. The tracks of the Native American tribe are becoming more and more faint and indistinguishable from the tracks of the white man. Nanapush and Fleur leave very distinct tracks because they honor their family’s history. At one point in the novel Margaret comments that she does not want
Nanapush’s newspaper to touch her because she does not want the tracks of the white man’s newspaper to get on her skin. She is wary of the White man’s influence. Whatever tracks the characters leave will remain as their legacy. Nanapush purposefully directs his own special brand of humor—raucous bantering—at Margaret, guiding her away from her hardened widow-view of life toward the possibility of a romantic relationship with him. He goads her by boasting of his sexual prowess, to which she is less than receptive. Nanapush describes her as “headlong, bossy, scared of nobody and full of vinegar” (47), while she calls him an “old man . . . . [with] two wrinkled berries and a twig.” When he replies, “A twig can grow,” Margaret retorts, “But only in the spring” (48). Through humor, each comes to view the other with new possibility. Out of their bantering evolves a deeper, more meaningful relationship, one that binds them together in strength, companionship, and love. Soon after a mutual humiliation which destabilizes the gender difference between them (her head is shaved and his tongue is tied down with her braids), Margaret returns his loyalty by backing up his false claims to heroism. Attracted by her "interesting kindness" and intrigued by her "bald head, smooth as an egg," Nanapush begins actually to take a sexual interest in the old woman (117-18), an interest which she eventually returns. In lying about his relationship with Margaret to save them both from violence, Nanapush has thus unwittingly prophesied both his own attraction to her and their future intimacy.

In the novel nature and things that are tied to the land are symbols of the Native Americans. For instance, when Fleur is giving birth to Lulu, a bear goes
into the Pillager cabin. The bear is a symbol for the Ojibwa tribe and Fleur in general. On the other hand, technology and modern things are symbols of the white men and those Native Americans who have left their heritage behind. The tractors that come to cut down the trees on the Pillager land are symbols of the invading white men who push Fleur off of her land and drive the family apart. Misshepeshu is a symbol for the fantastic elements of Native American culture and storytelling. No one ever sees Misshepeshu in the novel; he is just a symbol of the Native American willingness and ability to believe in things that aren’t necessarily right in front of them or obvious.

Reviewers found *Tracks* distinctly different from Erdrich's earlier novels, and some felt that it lacks the characteristics that made *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen* so outstanding. *Washington Post Book World* critic Jonathan Yardley wrote that, on account of its more political focus, the work has a "labored quality," while Robert Towers stated in *New York Review of Books* that he found the characters melodramatic and the tone overly intense. Katherine Dieckmann, writing in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, affirmed that she "missed [Erdrich's] skilled multiplications of voice," and called the relationship between Pauline and Nanapush "symptomatic of the overall lack of grand orchestration and perspectival interplay that made Erdrich's first two novels polyphonic masterpieces." According to *Commonweal* contributor, Christopher Vecsey, however, although "a reviewer might find some of the prose overwrought, and the two narrative voices indistinguishable . . . readers will appreciate and applaud the vigor and inventiveness of the author." Some
reviewers enjoyed *Tracks* even more than the earlier novels. Williams stated that Erdrich's writing "has never appeared more polished and grounded," and added, *Tracks* may be the story of our time." Thomas M. Disch lauded the novel's plot, with its surprising twists and turns, in the *Chicago Tribune*. The critic added, "Louise Erdrich is like one of those rumored drugs that are instantly and forever addictive. Fortunately in her case you can just say yes."

*Tracks* was the last new North Dakota novel for six years.

A strong sense of uneasiness and foreboding drives Nanapush to Fleur’s cabin. As he passes through the desecrated remnants of the woods, he sees that all that remains is “the square mile of towering oaks, a circle around Fleur’s cabin” (220). When he reaches her cabin, Fleur is standing at the front door, surrounded by wagons and logging men, “waiting for the signal, for the word, to take down the last of the trees.” Nanapush expects to see sorrow and defeat on Fleur’s face, but “[h]er face was warm with excitement and her look was chilling in its clear amusement. She said nothing, just glanced into the sky and let her eyes drop shut,” drawing silent strength from the ironic triumph of her secret (222). Nanapush realizes what Fleur has done when “along the edge of the last high woods, a low breeze moaned out of the stumps” and he hears the sound of the first tree crashing down beyond his sight (222). As other trees fall, closer and closer to where the loggers are standing, Fleur has “bared her teeth in a wide smile that frightened even those who did not understand the smiles of Pillagers” (223). A final gust of wind topples the remaining trees, and they fall away from her cabin “in a circle, pinning beneath their branches the roaring men, the horses . . . Twigs formed webs of wood, canopies laced
over groans and struggles. Then the wind settled, curled back into the clouds, moved on” (223). In the quiet shock of the aftermath, Nanapush and Fleur “were left standing together in a landscape level to the lake and to the road” (223). Although Nanapush urges Fleur to remain with the tribe, she rejects his offer. “[W]ith her face alight,” she buckles herself to a small cart that holds no possessions, “only weed-wrapped stones from the lake-bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rags, and the umbrella that had shaded her [dead] baby,” and sets out alone (224). No force is powerful enough to reconcile the desecration of her land, but through her ironic act of defiance, Fleur has drawn the strength she will need to survive.

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