

IDENTITY AND THE ETHOS OF SURVIVANCE IN

SELECTED NOVELS OF LOUISE ERDRICH

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DEDICATION

For my dad, Charles Kirkpatrick,
who made an honest effort to read this dissertation,
even though I'm sure it was torture.

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ABSTRACT

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The word “survivance” is a portmanteau of the words “survival” and “defiance.” Gerald Vizenor coined the term for the rhetorical theory he created in the 1970s to encourage the preservation of Native American culture, particularly through literature, while resisting colonial dominance. Contemporary Native American authors often create literature of survivance by reimagining traditional storytelling techniques, incorporating their native languages into their writing, and participating in their unique tribal communities, all of which are entwined with the concept of identity.

This dissertation offers with an explanation of Survivance Theory and its applications. Through this theoretical lens, the following chapters explore Louise Erdrich’s use of storytelling techniques, subversion and subterfuge, and religion in three of her novels: *Tracks*, *Four Souls*, and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. The final chapter centers on contemporary tribal writers and their responsibility to the Native American community.

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CHAPTER I

A RHETORICAL CIRCLE:

GERALD VIZENOR, LOUISE ERDRICH, AND THE THEORY OF SURVIVANCE

In late August of 1911, Butte County authorities captured what locals believed to be a “wild man” near the foothills of Lassen Peak in Northern California. The man, approximately fifty years old and clearly starving, was found alone, huddled in a slaughterhouse in the aftermath of recent wildfires. He spoke no English and knew nothing of twentieth-century life. Knowing he could not release the man back into the wild, yet not knowing what else to do with him, the local sheriff kept the man in a jail cell “for his own protection.” When anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and T.T. Waterman from the University of California learned of the “discovery,” they identified the man as the last of a remnant band of Yahi people native to the nearby Deer Creek region and immediately took custody of the stranger. For the next five years, the man dubbed “Ishi,” meaning “man” in the Yahi language, lived in the anthropological museum on campus—a living exhibit, of sorts.

Ishi became an overnight journalistic sensation. Newspapers, billing him as “The Last Wild Indian” and “The Last of His Tribe,” filled pages upon pages with anecdotes referring to Ishi’s reactions to twentieth-century technologies like streetcars and airplanes. He was photographed so many times that he became something of an expert on lighting, exposure, and posing. Until his death from tuberculosis in March of 1916, fans of Ishi’s story flocked to the UC Parnassus

campus in San Francisco every weekend to watch Ishi demonstrate arrow-making and tell Yahi folktales and original trickster stories.

In the September 6, 1911 edition of the *San Francisco Call*, Mary Ashe Miller innocently referred to Ishi as a “nameless Indian” and “the unknown” when describing the inexplicable sway he held over the crowds that came to visit the museum. In reality, Ishi must have had many names. In addition to the moniker bestowed upon him by well-meaning, but clueless, white anthropologists, Ishi would have had multiple tribal nicknames as well as a secret, sacred tribal name; but in the five years he spent living and working at the museum, he never revealed any of them. It is at the intersection of Ishi’s willingness to be a living exhibit for white patrons and his unwillingness to reveal his true identity that we find what Ojibwe rhetor Gerald Vizenor calls “postindian survivance,” and in light of Vizenor’s theory, Ishi’s real-life example becomes the backdrop for postmodern discourse on contemporary tribal culture and literature. In fact, Ishi’s story had a profound influence on Vizenor’s theoretical foundation for the concept of survivance, one that he would return to over and over throughout his career.

The concept of survivance emerged in the 1970s from the work of Gerald Vizenor, who at the time was teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, where he was inspired by Ishi’s story. The term itself is a portmanteau of “survival” and “defiance,” and it denotes acts of cultural preservation through the rejection of colonial dominance and assimilation. In the introduction to his collection of essays, *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic*, Ernest

Stromberg asks the question, “Why ‘survivance’ rather than ‘survival’?” (1) While the terms are loosely related, they are not at all the same thing. Stromberg goes on to answer his own question by saying, “survivance goes beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of Indigenous rhetoric” (1).

As a general rule, tribal literatures place white culture in the role of the aggressor. For Vizenor, this “literature of dominance” has created an image of tribal people called *indians*. It is important to note here that Vizenor does not capitalize the word because he does not recognize it as an accurate descriptor of Indigenous people. He almost always writes the word in italics. In fact, in the preface to *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, he calls the *indian* an “occidental misnomer, an overseas enactment that has no referent to real native cultures or communities” (vii). Vizenor also coined the term *manifest manners* to denote “the course of dominance, the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as ‘authentic’ representations of *indian* cultures” (*Manifest Manners* vii). Any time Vizenor uses the word *indian*, he is referring to the dominant culture’s constructed image of the tribal person and not an authentic Native presence.

For tribal people, stories of survivance renounce dominance, tragedy, and what Vizenor calls *victimry*, or the tendency of colonial dominance to remove agency from tribal people and romanticize them as victims of tragedy. At the heart of victimry are the stereotypes of the noble savage and the vanishing Indian, both harmful constructions of well-meaning white anthropologists and sociologists.

Vizenor calls these stereotypical views of tribal people *terminal creeds* because they fix Native Americans in a certain cultural pose from which they cannot escape without destroying their identities. So, in defiance of labels emerging from the dominant culture, Vizenor advances the theory that modern *postindian warriors* establish Native presence, rather than absence, through their “tricky” use of manifest manners and other creative acts of survivance. These people establish authentic ethos, rather than perpetuating the ethos of terminal creeds forced on them by romanticizing audiences.

Understanding the origins of survivance is nearly as important as understanding the concept itself because all the elements of survivance theory are based in real world experience, not only Vizenor’s own but also that of Ishi and several other Native Americans who had significant impacts on Vizenor. Vizenor’s roots are what he refers to as *mixedblood* or *crossblood*. These terms are interchangeable, and they refer to the combination of his French, Swedish, and Ojibwe (also called Chippewa or Anishinaabe) heritages. Much of the family history on his father’s side is tied to the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota, where his father was born and grew up. It is there that the seeds of survivance theory were planted.

According to Deborah Madsen, Gerald Robert Vizenor was born in 1934 to a Swedish-American mother and French-Anishinaabe father. Though he was born in Minneapolis and spent considerable time there during his childhood, he is an enrolled member of the White Earth Reservation, located in the northwestern part

of Minnesota. His father, Clement Vizenor, was murdered when Gerald was almost two years old; the case was never solved. His mother, LaVerne Lydia Peterson, was very young, poor, and uneducated; she found herself unable to care for her son. After his father's death, young Gerald was mainly raised in the tribal tradition by his paternal grandmother Alice Beaulieu and a handful of paternal uncles, with sporadic appearances by his mother and her partner. When his informal stepfather died in 1950, Vizenor lied about his age and joined the Minnesota National Guard and later the army, where he was stationed in occupied Japan. This military assignment proved to be pivotal in Vizenor's development as a writer as well as a scholar. He learned several forms of Japanese poetry and drama; but he was most enamored with haiku, a form he has practiced and published over the past several decades. For Vizenor, haiku's spiritual connection to the natural world was reminiscent of the tribal tradition he knew so well.

Upon returning to the United States in 1953, Vizenor studied at New York University, Harvard, and the University of Minnesota, where he also entered the teaching profession as a graduate assistant; but it is his work as a community advocate for the American Indian Employment and Guidance Center that had the most profound effect on his political and cultural beliefs. From 1964-1968, Vizenor worked with poor and homeless reservation Indians who struggled with racism and alcoholism. At the same time, American Indian activists Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt were garnering national attention through their newly formed American Indian Movement (AIM). Vizenor was skeptical of AIM's motives because its

founders seemed to be more concerned with personal publicity than with addressing real Indian problems. His disapproval of Banks and Bellecourt is a running metaphorical theme in his critical works as well as in his fiction.

Later, as a staff reporter and editorial contributor for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, Vizenor covered the murder trial of Thomas White Hawk, an experience that caused him to revisit the nature of justice where colonized people are concerned. After White Hawk was convicted and sentenced to death, Vizenor's tireless advocacy on his behalf resulted in a commuted life sentence. As a result of his work in investigative journalism, he also drew personal threats from many of AIM's leaders, whom Vizenor exposed as drug dealers, frauds, and extortionists.

After his time in the journalism business, Vizenor returned to teaching. He served as professor at Lake Forest College, Bemidji State University--where he laid the foundation for the Native American Studies department--and the University of Minnesota. He has also served as Provost of Kresge College at the University of California, Santa Cruz and held an endowed chair at the University of Oklahoma. Most recently, Vizenor is a Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley and a Professor of American Studies at the University of New Mexico. It was during his service at Berkeley that he encountered Ishi's story and even became embroiled in a legal suit involving a memorial sculpture to Ishi, whose story began this chapter.

Vizenor's connection to Ishi is a profound one, the result of a clarifying chance encounter, almost serendipitous. Ishi was the culmination of all the life

experience and tribal work Vizenor had done up to that point. Ishi was the actual embodiment of survivance, and thus he became the central living figure of Vizenor's theory. The essay titled "Ishi Obscura" in Vizenor's most notable theoretical work *Manifest Manners* explains the importance of the Native's experience in a culture of dominance. When the wildfires drove him out of his ancestral lands, the entirety of Ishi's small Yahai tribe had been long gone. This fact made it easy for anthropologists, sociologists, and journalists to paint him as the quintessential "Vanishing Indian." In fact, Ishi's photograph appeared in Joseph Kossuth Dixon's photo compilation *The Vanishing Race*, based on Rodman Wannamaker's photographic expedition into the tribal people of North American in 1913.

The concept of the Vanishing Indian is rooted in the silence of tribal people in the face of physical and cultural genocide. Here, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* is helpful in understanding Vizenor's original vocabulary. De Certeau explores the usage of "tactics" in opposition to "strategies" within a culture of dominance. Tactics are used covertly by the Other within the dominant system. In other words, they allow Others to "maintain their differences in the very space that the occupier has organized" (Certeau 32). Strategies are the opposite of tactics. They are used by the oppressor in the system of dominance. They are overt and seek to define the Other by the terms of that dominant system. In the dedication of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau writes:

To the ordinary man. To a common hero...This hero is very ancient. He is the murmuring voice of societies. In all ages, he comes before the texts. He does not expect representations... (i)

In addition, de Certeau notes in the introduction that “operational logic” goes as far back as the “age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive, and which has in any case been concealed by the form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture” (ix).

Vizenor’s work, whether academic or literary, is demanding. It is replete with tricky metaphors, complex characters, original vocabulary made up of neologisms, and a blurring of the lines between fantasy and reality. Deborah Madsen, author of *Understanding Gerald Vizenor*, acknowledges these traits and justifies Vizenor’s neologisms: “...old words cannot express an original view of the world” (2). Several of de Certeau’s terms have direct correlations in Vizenor’s survivance theory. Vizenor’s “manifest manners” and “terminal creeds” are fundamentally the same as de Certeau’s “strategies,” whereas “tactics” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* resemble acts of survivance in Vizenor’s theory. De Certeau’s “operational logic” is Vizenor’s “natural reason,” and “representations” to de Certeau are the same as “simulations” to Vizenor. So, when Vizenor claims it is a trickster move to use dominant discourse to situate oneself within the dominant culture, not just as a victim subject to it, he is referring to the covert tactics tribal people use to preserve and protect their own culture under the guise of participating willingly in the dominant one.

To illustrate that point, one can consider the following: as European culture and religion systematically dismantled the outward trappings of Native life, the deep seated sacred elements of tribal tradition remained very much alive and protected. A good example is Ishi's experience as a living exhibit. Crowds flocked to the museum to hear Ishi's stories, but these were not the true tribal stories of his ancestors. They were only variations of them, meant to satisfy white people's desire to experience the romanticized Native culture on display. Like his true name, Ishi never revealed the sacred traditional knowledge of his people. Many Native Americans believed that to speak sacred names or knowledge aloud diminished their power; therefore, they often changed the names of things and substituted elements of ancient stories when dealing with white people.

Another example of Ishi's survivance tactics is the watch he wore. The watch was a gift, and Ishi wore it every day and kept it wound, but he refused to set it because he took his time from the position of the sun and other means. He recognized the watch as a thing of beauty and value but not as one of function. The watch itself was a symbol of dominant culture, what Vizenor would call "manifest manners" and de Certeau would call "strategy." Ishi's accepting the watch but refusing to set it is an act of survivance to Vizenor, or what de Certeau would call a tactic. The same is true of Ishi's storytelling. The trickster tales he told were original to Ishi, not the Yahi people. Vizenor calls the persona Ishi presented to the public "the obscure" because his true name and nature were hidden from the gawking crowd. Native American rhetorician Malea Powell likens this tactic to the

tribal practice of counting coup in which a warrior would steal close enough to touch an enemy without his presence being detected (430). The more times a warrior was able to do this, the greater his reputation and power in the tribe.

Acts of survivance like those previously discussed are rhetorical moves, most closely related to the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*. The establishment of trust between a speaker or writer and an audience has long been acknowledged as a key component of good rhetorical practice. This relationship lies at the heart of what Aristotle called *ethos*. Over two millennia ago, Aristotle wrote in his *Art of Rhetoric* that “the orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence” (I. ii. 3-7). Aristotle also gives three “proofs,” or ways of establishing *ethos*: “The first depends on the moral character of the speaker, the second upon putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind, the third upon the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove” (I. ii. 3-7). For Aristotle, *ethos* is the catalyst and vehicle for the reciprocity of good will between the speaker and the audience. Ishi’s stories and cultural demonstrations drew crowds who wanted to know what “real Indians” were like. The crowds trusted Ishi’s experience and authority, even though the knowledge they obtained was somewhat incomplete. Ishi was in control of the information he conveyed and was well aware of what his audience expected of him.

Historically speaking, Native American rhetoric remained largely the same for millennia. Tribal histories, folklore, and tradition were passed orally from generation to generation. After European contact, tribal people began to use written

as well as spoken rhetoric, through the use of letters, speeches in English, and autobiographical accounts. This change is called transitional literature, and it did not begin to supplant the oral culture until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when anthropologists, missionaries, and proponents of Manifest Destiny started to impose white civilization on a grander scale. During this period, Native American authors such as Zitkala Sa, Charles Eastman, Sarah Winnemucca, and William Warren wrote on the lives and cultures of Native people in the hopes of lending credibility to their people. Native fiction emerged with John Oskison and Mourning Dove in the early twentieth century and often dealt with the difficulties facing what Vizenor calls “mixedbloods” or “crossbloods.” For example, Mourning Dove’s novel *Cogewea, the Half Blood* contains a scene in which Cogewea, a mixedblood Sioux girl, entered and won both the “Ladies Race” for white girls and the “Squaw Race” for Indian girls during the local round-up festivities but is derided by her competitors in both horse races for not meeting the racial criteria to join either competition. This event and many others in the novel contribute to Cogewea’s need to define her identity, and this need has manifested itself continuously in Native fiction since; that search is at the heart of this project.

By the late 1970s, at the height of the American Indian Movement and Gerald Vizenor’s work in *Survivance Theory*, a young Chippewa author named Louise Erdrich was beginning her career in writing introspective identity narratives as well as compelling fiction that followed traditional tribal structures and explored the meaning of modern Native culture. By the mid-1980s, she had made a name for

herself among American Indian writers with her first novel *Love Medicine*. Like Vizenor, her experience with tribal tradition has shaped her life and work.

Karen Louise Erdrich was born the first of seven children in 1954 to a German-American father and French-Anishinaabe mother in Little Falls, Minnesota. Though she was not born there, Erdrich is enrolled as a member of the Turtle Mountain Reservation in the northern part of North Dakota, which is only about 270 miles from the White Earth Reservation where Vizenor is enrolled. Both her parents taught at a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Wahpeton, North Dakota; and both parents strongly encouraged young Louise's writing. Her father paid her a nickel for every story she wrote.

After high school, Erdrich attended Dartmouth as part of the university's first coed class. She earned her bachelor's degree in English in 1976. While at Dartmouth, she met her future husband, anthropologist Michael Dorris, who directed the Native American Studies program. The couple married in 1981, two years after Erdrich earned a master's degree in writing from Johns Hopkins University. Together, they raised three biological children and three adopted children until their separation in 1995. Dorris, who was already prone to depression and alcoholism, committed suicide in 1997, amid allegations that he had abused three of his daughters. In 2009, Erdrich returned to Dartmouth to accept an honorary Doctorate of Letters.

In her career as a novelist, Erdrich has published fifteen novels, one with Michael Dorris. She has also written six children's books and three volumes of

poetry. Her awards include the O. Henry Award for her short story "Fleur" (1987), a National Book Award nod for *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), a National Book Award win for *The Round House* (2012), and the Library of Congress Award for American Fiction (2015), among many others. She currently lives in Minnesota and operates Birchbark Books where she highlights Native writers and artists through readings, lectures, and the sale of Native medicines, jewelry, and art.

Critics have often noted Erdrich's complex characters and plotlines on the Little No Horse Reservation as similar to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha stories. When *The Painted Drum* was published in 2005, the *Chicago Tribune* published the following review:

Classic Erdrich...The Snopeses and the Kashpaws should get to know each other, and perhaps someone should introduce Dilsey to Fleur Pillager too, for Faulkner's people and the Native Americans of Louise Erdrich's books are going to be neighbors for a long time in American literature. (Winslow)

Furthermore, during the South Central Modern Language Association's 2015 conference, English professors at the University of Mississippi held a special session exploring the connections between the two authors. Though she claims only ever to have read *Absalom, Absalom!* from Faulkner's works, Erdrich's characters and families recur throughout her body of work, even if only briefly or indirectly, like those in Faulkner's greatest works. She also often overlaps events in her plotlines so

that, in true Native (and Faulknerian) fashion, her stories are interwoven and circular in structure.

In addition to Erdrich's treatment of tribal identity issues, Gerald Vizenor's rhetorical theory of *survivance* provides the theoretical framework for the examination of Erdrich's establishment of ethos. Vizenor is a natural choice to pair with Erdrich in this study because each is an enrolled member of the Ojibwe (Chippewa) tribe with some Western European roots, and both claim a large influence from their mixedblood heritages. Most importantly, however, they both rely on their experiences as mixedblood authors to explore the issues of tribal and mixedblood identities while establishing their own ethos in the field of Native American Studies.

For authors of fiction, ethos is especially important because they require cooperation from their audiences. Readers are often expected to suspend disbelief, accepting things as possible which may not be possible in reality. Both Vizenor and Erdrich blur the lines between fantasy and reality often, so readers must be willing to trust that their experiences as tribal people gives them the ability to do that properly. They must believe that the author's experience and depth of knowledge are extensive enough to create meaningful commentary on the subject of the text. Rhetorician Wayne Booth argued that the author could not be removed from a text. In his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, he wrote,

...the author's presence will be obvious on every occasion when he moves into or out of a character's mind—when he 'shifts his point of view' ...The

author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability” (17-18).

In Booth’s view, an author’s ethos becomes an inextricable part of every text.

Audience cooperation in the establishment of ethos is especially important in multicultural literature. An author who is unfamiliar with the culture about which she writes creates skepticism in readers, which leads to the erosion of trust. This project focuses on the establishment of ethos in Louise Erdrich’s fiction, particularly in one of her early novels, *Tracks* (1988), and two of her later novels, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001) and *Four Souls* (2004). Although these novels span two decades in Erdrich’s career, the use over time of recurring characters, trickster figures, tribal storytelling techniques, and the integration of European and Catholic influences demonstrate a consistency that resonates with her readers and encourages confidence in her credibility as a Native American writer of mixed descent.

Because Erdrich embraces both her Ojibwe and European heritages, she is able to create realistic characters who struggle with their own cultural identities. This includes characters like Pauline Puyat, who strives to shed her Indian identity, and Fleur Pillager, who seeks to protect hers. In addition, some characters make judgments of others based on blood quantum, a concept that was completely foreign to most tribal people before the imposition of government regulations. Several of the Ojibwe narrators mention the “no-good Morrisseys” and make a point of connecting their mixedblood heritage to their dubious behavior.

Richard Weaver understands culture, not as a collection of material goods, but as defined by “the imagination, the spirit, and inward tendencies” (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 162). For Weaver, culture entailed “crystallizing around...feelings which determine a common attitude toward large phases of experience...” (*Ideas* 117). This view is much closer to the aboriginal idea of what it meant to belong to a tribe. For Vizenor, and many other tribal writers, a person’s tribal affiliation has nothing to do with genealogy and everything to do with the acceptance of and participation in tribal life. Erdrich’s Father Damien Modeste embodies this view as a white outsider whose life as a priest among the Ojibwe people of Little No Horse impacts him so that he participates in traditional Ojibwe rituals; and at the moment of his death, it is the Ojibwe afterlife he seeks, not the Catholic one.

Erdrich’s effortless integration of fluent Ojibwe and her use of tribal storytelling techniques also help establish her ethos as what Vizenor would call a *postindian warrior* of survivance; the term “postindian” refers to the modern tribal person, rather than the romanticized portrait the dominant culture has painted of *indians*. Several of Erdrich’s characters slip in and out of the traditional Ojibwe language, often without any translation for the reader. Vizenor would call this refusal to bend to the language of the dominant culture an act of survivance. Each of Erdrich’s novels examined here also utilizes the non-linear nature of tribal time as well as the Native American practice of looping stories together using different narrators and repetition. This technique is evident in the different variations of Sister Leopolda’s religious devotion. Multiple characters tell the story of Leopolda’s

passion, but each telling reflects a different perspective, some more reliable than others.

Erdrich exhibits tribal ethos by balancing her use of reliable and unreliable narrators within novels and over the course of the saga. For instance, *Tracks* is told largely by Nanapush, a good-natured trickster with a penchant for embellishment for the sake of a good story, and Pauline Puyat, a sadistic and malicious liar who seeks to denigrate the culture of her own people. Father Damien Modeste of *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is an ambiguously reliable narrator, at times presenting logical interpretations of events, but all the time hiding the fact that he is really a woman. It is important to note Erdrich's desire to let most of her major characters speak as a rhetorical act of survivance. Vizenor is adamant that tribal culture is not vanishing, as the dominant culture would argue; and allowing multiple characters to speak establishes a clear Native presence by refusing to give any one person or culture control of the narrative.

It is also important to consider Vizenor's survivance theory as a lens for viewing tribal fiction as rhetoric. Contemporary Native American authors are greatly concerned with what it means to respect traditional tribal culture while at the same time creating awareness of modern tribal culture. The essence of this conundrum lies in the issue of identity. Vizenor argues that tribal narratives have long been overburdened by structuralist analyses and social science. Native writers continue to struggle under the weight of terminal creeds. It is time to reconsider

Native American fiction as rhetorical acts of cultural preservation, presence, and defiance.

In order to begin this reconsideration, identity and survivance must be considered as reciprocal partners because one cannot exist without the other. For instance, in order to perform an act of survivance, one must have a foundational awareness of the culture represented. In return, that act of survivance informs and strengthens one's sense of cultural identity. Any definitive statement on Erdrich's ethos as a tribal writer requires weaving the two concepts together.

A good example of the reciprocal nature of identity and survivance is Erdrich's use of folkloric elements throughout all three novels as a means of maintaining Ojibwe presence in the face of a dominant colonial power. For instance, when Father Damien suffers a great personal tragedy in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Catholic rituals do not save him from succumbing to his depressive state. Only when Nanapush puts Damien through a vision-inducing sweat lodge ceremony does Damien begin to return to normal. When Lulu's feet are frozen to the point of impending amputation, it is traditional Ojibwe medicine and Nanapush's song that save her, not modern medical knowledge. Erdrich also makes much of the folkloric aspect of Ojibwe names. The Ojibwe believe that names have power; and when sacred names are spoken, they lose their power. Fleur takes her mother's secret sacred name Four Souls; Pauline Puyat experiences divinity in the name "Sister Leopolda;" and no wise Ojibwe speaks the names of the dead for fear

they will return from the beyond; but Nanapush's refusal to reveal his name to white land agents is the most telling act of survivance where names are concerned.

However, it is not only Erdrich's characters who perform acts of survivance. Erdrich's writing is an act of tribal preservation and defiance in and of itself. Using traditional Ojibwe storytelling techniques like repetition, non-linear time, looping, and multiple narrators, Erdrich creates narratives not only *about* Ojibwe people but also *as* an Ojibwe person, a device which further strengthens the argument that Erdrich creates ethos through acts of survivance. Tribal scholars and artists like Gerald Vizenor, Paula Gunn Allen, and Sherman Alexie place a high importance on trickster figures in stories as well. Modern Native Americans use tricksters to subvert the culture of dominance and stamp out the "Vanishing Indian" stereotype. For Erdrich, this means using charming or morally good trickster characters like Nanapush and Fleur to establish a strong connection to traditional Ojibwe culture. Other trickster figures like Pauline/Leopolda and the Black Dog are demonic in nature and serve to vilify the culture of dominance, on Erdrich's behalf, through their devotion to it.

Perhaps Erdrich's most striking act of survivance is her use of the Ojibwe language, which is precious to her. The dedications in each novel are written in Ojibwe without translation. In addition, much of the Ojibwe in each story is untranslated, and Erdrich does not always rephrase the Ojibwe in a way that the reader knows what the words mean. Modern Native Americans are preserving traditional tribal stories in writing by integrating them into updated narratives, but

clearly there are physical elements in oral storytelling that get lost in written translations. Oral tradition held a performative aspect that written stories do not have. These are the stories that are lost or held in secret by people like Ishi, who have sought and still seek to protect ancient tribal wisdom from the eroding effects of modernity. This does not mean, however, that authors like Erdrich and Vizenor cannot operate in traditional ways on the page. Their texts are the living words of tribal people—their ancient culture, preserved and protected through trickster moves and acts of survivance on the page.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF SURVIVANCE THEORY

The practice of what Gerald Vizenor calls *manifest manners* is well documented over the history of the United States, beginning with the first contact between European settlers and Indigenous people. In a relatively short amount of time, elements of European culture and technology filtered into the everyday lives of the Indians who interacted with the colonists. While some new conveniences and weapons were welcome in tribal villages, others were not. Through mass conversion and assimilation efforts, colonists attempted to stamp out the traditional cultures of the tribal people in the area as epidemics of smallpox and tuberculosis nearly depleted the physical population. By the time the Native Americans realized the consequences of dealing with the newcomers, it was too late to alter the course. The Europeans had established the dominant culture; they now controlled the narrative history of the New World. White people began to create rhetoric about Native American culture from an injurious perspective.

Vizenor defines manifest manners specifically as “the course of dominance, the racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as ‘authentic’ representations of *indian* cultures” (*Manifest Manners* vii). An excellent example of this practice is the original sigil of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (right). This



seal, used from 1629 to 1686 and again from 1689 to 1692, depicts a Native American man holding an arrow upside down (a gesture of peace) and speaking the words "Come over and help us" (Galvin). The seal conveys the colonists' original intention of mission work combined with commercial gain, but the visual is problematic in that the local tribes were not asking for help from the colonists, nor were they always peaceful in the face of advancing colonization. In this case, those who hoped to create a dominant culture created a false version of life among the Indians as a means of recruiting more colonists to their cause. It is colonial propaganda. When Gerald Vizenor discusses this type of representation, he refuses to use the word "Indian," opting instead to use "*indian*" to show there is no reality in the race of people Europeans attempted to create for their own gain.

Once there was a steady influx of colonists to increase and replenish the numbers already in the New World, it was only a matter of time before they needed more land, more resources, more technology, and more luxury. As European culture spread throughout the colonies and westward, it was clear that Indigenous people stood no chance of resisting it. From the settlers' perspective, the only options for tribal people were to assimilate or die. This attitude led to the increasing tendency of non-native writers and chroniclers to refer to Indian culture in the past tense, like an obituary, memorializing only the acceptable parts of the "Red Man" without perpetuating his living truth.

In his study of the relationship between literature and society during the formative years of the United States, Larzer Ziff says of writers like Thomas

Jefferson and James Fenimore Cooper, “Treating living Indians as sources for a literary construction of a vanished way of life rather than as members of a vital continuing culture, such writers used words to replace rather than to represent Indian reality” (qtd. *Manifest Manners* 8). In this way, writers who meant to chronicle Indian life and history in North America unconsciously contributed to the rhetoric of those who called for physical extermination. After all, cultural genocide is one of the first steps in physically eliminating an entire race of people, and what better way to invalidate a living culture than for a conqueror to refuse to acknowledge its relevance? One should consider the vast numbers of Indian children who were separated from their families and sent to American boarding schools, where their hair was cut; their clothes were tailored; they were forbidden to speak, write, or worship in their native languages; and they were taught to behave like “civilized” people, which, of course, meant to act like white people.

The idea that Europeans “discovered” North America is understandably controversial and outright offensive to tribal people whose ancestors lived here for thousands of years before European contact. Places and landmarks had tribal names before Europeans renamed them in English, Spanish, Dutch, German, and French; oral tradition told the stories of creation and the afterlife, and natural reason governed the way people interacted with the land. Vizenor claims in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* that, “Tribal imagination, experience, and remembrance are the real landscapes in the literature of this nation; discoveries and dominance are silence” (10). Unfortunately for the originators of

life and culture in North America, however, the culture and literature of dominance fixes them in what Vizenor calls “terminal creeds.” This means that, like the Indian depicted in the Massachusetts Bay Colony seal, tribal people are continually portrayed not in truth but as a simulation of the dominant culture’s perception of what is true. For this reason, Vizenor’s Survivance Theory is crucial to the study of modern Native American literature.

Vizenor’s *Manifest Manners* introduces the theoretical foundation of survivance, but the author does not explicitly discuss rhetoric in this book. Certain vocabulary specific to Vizenor’s critical work has been adopted into rhetorical studies, however. For instance, *survivance*, *manifest manners*, and *postindian* have all become ubiquitous for scholars working in the fields of Indigenous literature and composition. In Vizenor’s view, creating an entirely new vocabulary is crucial for studying Native literature and language because it removes the colonial language of dominance from the conversation. In other words, the theoretical vocabulary was created by a Native scholar for Native discourse.

The most important philosophical and critical influences on Vizenor’s Survivance Theory are poststructuralism and postmodernism. Vizenor’s own fiction is prone to absurdities, crude humor, and various forms of exaggeration, all characteristics of postmodernism, while poststructuralist elements appear when Vizenor blurs distinctions between or outright shatters the traditional binaries so popular with the structuralists who preceded him. In the introduction to *Narrative*

Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures, Vizenor

identifies four postmodern conditions that govern critical response to tribal texts:

...the first is heard in aural performances; the second is seen in translations; the third pose is a trickster signature, an uncertain humor that denies translation and tribal representations; and the last postmodern condition is narrative chance in the novel (A Postmodern Introduction ix).

“Narrative Chance” is a sort of umbrella term that encompasses the idea that literature of survivance emerges from the right combination of traditional tribal elements and postmodern discourse. Vizenor argues that postmodernism is not a new concept but an ancient one “opened in tribal imagination” (A Postmodern Introduction x). Furthermore, he believes postmodernism to be a condition rather than an idea, which eliminates the need to assign a temporal marker to the term. Anyone at any time in history could be considered postmodern if it is in fact a condition; this approach opens a channel that allows for true intertextuality between contemporary and ancient texts. Louise Erdrich’s *Nanapush* is a fitting example because he is a modern iteration of Nanabozho, the trickster figure in traditional Anishinaabe stories. He is the quintessential Anishinaabe storyteller and trickster, often finding himself in predicaments where he looks clownish at turns and at others bears the wisdom of thousands of years of tribal culture.

Although many poststructural elements appear in traditional Native American stories and modern fiction, Vizenor primarily concerns himself with the treatment of humor, particularly in trickster discourse, and liminality, which allows

modern tribal writers to destroy the ordered system of binaries imposed by the dominant culture under structuralism. For instance, Nanabozho, is both good and evil, intelligent and ignorant, powerful and weak, divine and human, corporeal and ethereal, fixed in time and timeless, everywhere and nowhere.

Vizenor's own fiction centers on the experiences of the mixedblood, or Metis, person attempting to navigate the pitfalls of government bureaucracy and colonial impositions in order to create a new turtle island in the face of urban sprawl. These characters defy the colonial binary of white versus Indian. They seek to find their ancestors in both cultures and attempt to forge something new from their discoveries. In contrast, Erdrich's mixedblood characters are typically held in low regard on the reservation because they embrace modern technology, government treaties, white culture, and champion the desecration of the land and tradition.

In order to accommodate a truly unique approach to tribal literature, Vizenor took a decidedly postmodern approach in creating the theoretical vocabulary for Survivance Theory, creating such terms as *manifest manners*, *victimry*, *terminal creed*, *natural reason*, *narrative chance*, *post-indian*, and even *survivance* itself. All of these terms are part of a pastiche of ideas existing in other contexts. By adopting this practice, Vizenor has created a language unencumbered by colonial influence for the expressed purpose of discussing indigenous texts. Vizenor defends his language play as a means of going beyond the circumstances of a story to create a liberating story experience for the reader. In his view, the author is always in control of the reader's experience because the author is always in control of

language, which can be both a positive and a negative force. The paradox lies in the necessity for people to use language to liberate themselves from the oppressors of the world, while the words that define us are oppressors themselves, yet another shattered binary.

Understanding the most common terms in Vizenor's language can be difficult, but it is unavoidable for anyone who wants to join the conversation on Native American literature and rhetoric. Comprehending the definitions, however, is also very different from applying the concepts to actual indigenous texts. Vizenor created his lexicon with intentional complexity and layers of meaning, mainly because he believes himself to be a trickster figure. Much of the language he uses in his critical works and scholarship is labyrinthine and dense; it often doubles back on itself and defies definition in lay terms. This is a diversionary tactic, common in trickster tales around the globe. The trickster often finds himself in situations where he has to talk his way out of some dire consequence. The actual trick is to use language to either confuse his opponent or to talk for such a long time his opponent gives up and lets him go.

Vizenor, in his trickster role, does not believe in the absolute meanings of words. To accept language as unconditional is to submit to what he calls *terminal creeds*, which are sets of beliefs that seek to end conflict through the triumph of an absolute. A good example of this concept is a story traditionally attributed to the Tsalagi (Cherokee), although source attribution for oral tradition is always problematic. In this tale, an old grandfather explains to a young boy that everyone is

plagued by an internal fight between two wolves. One wolf is all that is evil in the human character; the other is all that is good. The wolves are always at odds with each other, fighting for control. When the boy asks the old man which wolf will win, the old man answers, “the one you feed.”

The important thing to note here is that both wolves exist within every person. One wolf cannot stamp out the other wolf; he can only become more powerful. In the Native American experience, this parable represents the way of all things. There is no seeking to annihilate or eliminate things, only to manage or balance them. In contrast, the Europeans who brought Christianity to the Americas taught that good must annihilate evil; conflict can only end when there is a definitive victory of an absolute. Where Indigenous people might have believed that evil is integral to the natural order of things, the European missionaries who encountered them taught that evil is unnatural and must be conquered.

Native American rhetors, including Gerald Vizenor, have adopted the practice of combating manifest manners by replacing simulations of the *indian* with their own simulations. In other words, new representations of tribal culture created by tribal people themselves attempt to reestablish the dominant narrative from a place of authenticity, or at least from a place of authority. The distinction between authenticity and authority is critical here because simulations offered by tribal people are still simulations. Are they authentic? Yes, but only insofar as they were created by someone from within the culture. Do they accurately represent the foundational culture? That is another matter.

For Vizenor, survivance exists because dominance exists. The term *survivance* is a portmanteau made up of the words *survival* and *defiance*. Vizenor defines the term thus:

Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy. (*Manifest Manners* vii)

Survivance is the act of cultural preservation through defiance.

When Vizenor claims that survivance stories are meant to reject *victimry*, he is referring to the tendency of the dominant culture to paint Indigenous people as victims to be pitied. Early government communications with tribal nations demonstrate a strong paternalistic, and often patronizing, tone. Some of this rhetoric persists in the twenty-first century. Vizenor calls for postindian warriors, tribal people writing in the aftermath of European misrepresentation, to refuse the position of the victim and embrace the power of survivance through stories. If survivance stories are rejections of dominance, they must counter all misrepresentations and simulations; but survivance stories are also meant to preserve culture, which can be a challenge when the most sacred parts of it are exposed to an outsider's gaze. Here is where the difference between *authenticity* and *authority* matters most.

LaVonne Brown Ruoff explains that tribal people have sought to stave off cultural genocide by creating the practices of pan-Indianism, including the creation of new creeds, ceremonies, and customs (36). After all, there is safety in numbers; and when all tribes are working together, they present a unified front. For Vizenor and other postindian warriors, including Erdrich, pan-Indianism is an unfortunate delusion. It blurs the lines between practices that are unique to individual tribes, which removes the true cultural heritages of Native Americans and gives tacit permission for non-Natives to assume all Indians are alike; this allowance defeats the purpose of survivance.

Although the foundational tenets of Survivance Theory can be complex, they offer a clear path to the heuristic understanding of post-modern Native American literature. In Vizenor's estimation, "the Indian became the other of manifest manners, the absence of the real tribes, the inventions in the literature of dominance. The postindian simulations of survivance, on the other hand, arose with a resistance literature" (*Manifest Manners* 55). Throughout Vizenor's work, both fictional and scholarly, certain patterns emerge, like a checklist of theoretical criteria. Mining tribal texts for these patterns allows readers to determine if the writing qualifies as resistance literature.

Scholars studying Survivance Theory should look for Native characters who play an active role in their tribal experiences. They act *in* history, rather than having history act *upon* them. While the literature of dominance "maintains the scientific models and tragic simulations of a consumer culture," (*Manifest Manners* 67), the

literature of survivance derides Indians who willingly sell their land and culture in an effort to make money or possess what Louise Erdrich calls *chimookomanaag*, or white people “stuff.” Postindian warriors often invent creative and harsh consequences for those who disrespect their ancestors in such a way. On the other hand, those who live close to the land and keep their ancient cultures are often portrayed as happy, fortunate, and powerful. Characters like Erdrich’s Nanapush and Fleur Pillager refuse to yield to the timber corporation encroaching on their land. Although she eventually loses her land on a technicality, Fleur conjures a violent windstorm that topples the trees on her land, injuring many of the lumberjacks and destroying expensive equipment before she heads off to Minneapolis to exact revenge on the man who stole her trees.

Postindian writers also emphasize the role of humor in survivance stories, especially when trickster figures are involved. Alan Velie points out that in Ojibwe stories, the trickster Nanabozho is “a figure of insatiable appetites, and no moral constraints when it comes to filling them. He is fond of playing tricks, but more often than not he is a buffoon who ends up as the butt of the joke” (79). Nanabozho violates sacred tribal taboos and goes out of his way to be as offensive as possible for the sake of a laugh. In a comic reimagining of Nanabozho’s antics, Gerald Vizenor created Captain Shammer, the hilariously unqualified appointee to be the seventh Chair of the Department of American Indian Studies at an unnamed university in his book *Earthdivers*. As his name suggests, Shammer is a mixedblood conman who immediately begins selling off the Department of American Indian

Studies to the highest bidder, right down to the office furniture. He also roams campus dressed as a resurrected General Custer and holds a series of farcical press conferences over the three weeks he is in charge. On his fourth day as Chair, he announces to the press that he will be ordering ribbon shirts and star blankets for all “skins and mixedbloods” in the department “so as to distinguish the tribal students and teachers from the rest of the academic world” (*Earthdivers* 15). When a reporter challenges this decision, Captain Shammer replies, “Mister reporter, it is better that a white man be trapped in a ribbon shirt than a tribal person captured in a dark suit and tie” (*Earthdivers* 15).

Like Erdrich’s Nanapush and Fleur, Vizenor’s Shammer survives by his own wit. Rather than acting as an agent of moral instruction, Shammer, much like Nanapush, simply exists. While tricksters do occasionally adhere to a moral code, through the fun of language games and slapstick antics, these characters more often challenge the Euro-centric notion that trickster stories must always contain some sort of lesson for the audience. A good example of this principle is Nanapush’s comical encounter with a lone moose in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. In an effort to bring moose meat home to his starving family, Nanapush captures the animal only to be dragged, bouncing and scraping over the forest floor when the bull moose takes off after a female. The scene is described in great detail, right down to the animals mating, from Nanapush’s perspective for no purpose other than to amuse his audience.

Vizenor also claims that “natural reason and a reflexive nature are virtues of the literature of survivance” (*Manifest Manners* 69). Natural reason refers to the multiplicity and relative nature of existence. To be in tune with natural reason is to set aside the desire for static relationships and definitions and to be willing to acknowledge the role of nature, not formal logic, in creating and developing those relationships. Having a “reflexive nature” simply means possessing the instinct to recognize natural reason and react appropriately, or in other words, knowing better than to interfere with nature’s course. Shamans demonstrate this kind of reason as well as the reflexive nature Vizenor mentions.

A good example of this belief is the concept of gender fluidity in some tribes, manifested in the use of the pan-Indian term “Two-Spirit.” Two-Spirits are not simply LGBTQ Indians, however; they are identified by the tribal elders or shamans and hold a sacred ceremonial place in the culture because being born with both a masculine and feminine soul is something to be honored. It is important to note here that, while the Two-Spirit moniker has been accepted by many as a substitute for the offensive French label *berdache*, it is not a universal term and should be used with caution. Tribal people typically have their own names and significance for people who espouse non-binary gender roles. For instance, the Ojibwe call male-bodied Two-Spirits *ikwekaazo* and female-bodied Two-Spirits *ininiikaazo*. During Father Damien’s history of the Puyat family, readers are introduced to another term, *winkte*, used by the enemy Sioux during the foot race to describe the feminine young man who competed against Pauline’s mother. Erdrich also includes the character

Wishkob, a beloved Ojibwe ikwekaazo who possessed both male and female spirits and lived among the wives of an elder as his spouse.

When Anglo priests and ministers began converting Native Americans to Christianity, they discouraged the practice of elevating non-binary or homosexual people to places of honor, teaching that gender is assigned to sex and that behaving in a manner unbecoming to one's natural born sex is a sin against God. Those who converted forgot their reflexive natures and denied Nature's role in creating people with both male and female spirits, opting instead to assign the powers once belonging to Nature to an omnipotent God who would never have created Two-Spirits in the first place. By creating characters who embrace the ceremonial importance of Two-Spirits, Erdrich demonstrates her own reflexive nature and a desire to honor and preserve Ojibwe traditionalism.

Despite its complex vocabulary, survivance as a rhetorical theory is practical and basic. John D. Miles reframes the idea from the perspective of Aristotle's *Topoi*. When examining manifest manners as any set of beliefs and ideas, it is clear that there are certain foundational elements that necessarily become the driving forces conserving those beliefs and dictating what types of discourse are acceptable within the topic (Miles 37). Vizenor refers mainly to the manifest manners non-Natives exercise against tribal people, and those beliefs become the available means of persuasion. Because the manifest manners of the dominant culture are simulations of reality, they are thus vulnerable to change. This means when Native artists, scholars, and rhetors use them to manipulate meaning, they are

using the available means to change the available means (Miles 37). A good example of this principle is Polly Elizabeth Gheen's initial assessment of Fleur when she arrives at the Mauser estate asking for a job in *Four Souls*.

Polly Elizabeth holds many mistaken beliefs about the people she casually refers to as "savages." All of them seem to be confirmed, however, when Fleur initially presents herself. To Polly Elizabeth, Fleur is a "deep black figure layered in shawls...more an absence, a slot for a coin, an invitation for the curious, than a woman come to plead for menial work" (*Four Souls* 12). Later, Polly Elizabeth makes this observation about Indians' intelligence: "Perhaps it is true that Indians are unintelligible, to the civilized mind I mean, as far removed in habit of thought and behavior as wild wolves from bred hounds" (*Four Souls* 14-15). She believes Fleur is too stupid to pull off any duplicitous behavior successfully; so she hires her, having no idea how cunning and dangerous Fleur actually is.

In this case, Fleur was presented with the means of persuasion available to Polly Elizabeth. Polly Elizabeth could use Fleur's perceived lack of intelligence as a way of controlling Fleur's behavior. Fleur, presented with the same available means of persuasion, is able to use that mistaken belief as a means of gaining control over the whole house. For instance, when Polly Elizabeth discusses with Fleur what she is to be called, she stresses her title is "Miss Gheen, not Elizabeth" (*Four Souls* 14). Fleur can speak English and understands the instructions perfectly, but responds by calling her new supervisor "Not Elizabeth" from that moment on. Fleur has not only resisted Polly Elizabeth's attempts to control her, but she has falsely reinforced the

power dynamic by “playing dumb” to get the job as laundress. Before Fleur leaves the Mauser estate, she will have married John James Mauser, given birth to his son, and participated in his social and financial ruin.

Miles also suggests that survivance “can be seen as a kind of agency that emerges around the *topoi* of the specific act” (41). Working from this cause/effect relationship, it becomes clear that Erdrich intends for Fleur to espouse and exercise the agency the Ojibwe lacked at the turn of the twentieth century. In Miles’ discussion of survivance, he defines two ways agency emerges: 1) through the circulation of beliefs and ideas about Natives for the purpose of invention, and 2) through the interpretational relationship between the rhetor and audience. In other words, Erdrich establishes the reader’s beliefs about Ojibwe people at the turn of the twentieth century; those beliefs then become the only means for interpreting her novels (Miles 41) because they are so tightly bound in her characters.

Finally, it is important to discuss the role of survivance as it applies to the notion of rhetorical sovereignty. Traditionally, sovereignty refers to the authority an entity has to govern itself and its possessions. When tribal nations are involved, legal sovereignty can be incredibly complex and dynamic, even boiling down to disagreement over what constitutes a *people*. Scott Richard Lyons expands the definition a bit to “the right of a people to conduct its own affairs, in its own place, in its own way” (450). Stepping away from the idea that sovereignty refers mostly to land and governance, but remaining within Lyons’ broader definition of the term, allows for a discussion of what it means to have *rhetorical* sovereignty.

Rhetorical sovereignty as a principal does not exist in the law. Lyons claims that sovereignty for Native Americans reaches far beyond the ability to claim tax-exempt status or to operate casinos on tribal land. Sovereignty for tribal people is an “attempt to survive and flourish as a people” (Lyons 449). Removing all legalese from this discussion, rhetorical sovereignty can be defined as the “inherent right of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires,...to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons 449-50). Under this definition, any expression of tribal culture can be considered a rhetorical act, including pottery, paintings, beadwork, textiles, architecture, storytelling events, and dances. In short, rhetorical sovereignty can be invoked in any act performed with the intention of education in or the preservation of one’s culture.

John D. Miles hopes to expand Lyons’ discussion of rhetorical sovereignty by linking it to Vizenor’s concept of *transmotion*. If a culture is in constant motion, then it defies stagnation. One way tribal people exercise rhetorical sovereignty is through this sort of cultural movement. Art and literature produced by Native people will thus remain in flux, not adhering to any particular rules or characteristics. In other words, it resists static representation, and therefore cannot stagnate. For example, competition pow wow dancing is highly individualistic, varying greatly from dancer to dancer in their interpretations of the music. Dances such as the men’s fancy or the women’s fancy shawl are not traditional ceremonial dances, but they have become popular and important expressions of Native culture.

Erdrich also creates transmotion in her novels when Fleur learns to drive a car and Margaret has linoleum installed over the dirt and clay floor of her house. In fact, any time one of Erdrich's characters presents an image other than *indian*, she upsets the preconceived notions her audience may have about what it means to be Native American. Is Fleur still Ojibwe when she learns to drive a car? Of course. Is Margaret still Ojibwe when she puts linoleum in her house? Most definitely. The important thing is that these characters are able to oscillate between traditional and contemporary cultural expressions. Margaret stands on her linoleum covered floor as she cooks traditional Ojibwe food, and Fleur drives her car around on the reservation.

Understanding and applying Survivance Theory is critical in understanding Native American literature. While the theory can be applied broadly, reaching texts in other genres and cultures, it was specifically created for use in the discussion of Indigenous literature. No other critical theory is so beautifully tailored to the unique elements of tribal writing and respects the volatile history between Native people and the written word so well, allowing for performative elements and nuance that is so crucial to the rhetorical sovereignty of these cultures. When applied to Louise Erdrich's novels, Survivance Theory exposes a post-indian warrior intent on preserving her Ojibwe culture through the use of traditional trickster moves, an appreciation for natural reason and humor, and the demonstration of rhetorical agency.

CHAPTER III

DEATH TRAVELLED ON: TRIBAL STORYTELLING AS RHETORICAL SURVIVANCE

*I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.*

*You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.*

*Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then...*

~Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (2)

The poem above was not composed by Louise Erdrich; but its message rings true for all Indigenous writers: stories are *everything*. Although the term has been controversial among Native scholars, it is not unreasonable to say here that the storyteller figure in tribal culture and in Native fiction falls under the umbrella concept of “Pan-Indianness,” meaning that cultural elements appear, with some reasonable variation, across all tribal affiliations. Stories are the lifeblood of Native

people, and storytellers are tasked with the responsibility of keeping that lifeblood flowing. When they pass away or “travel on,” someone must continue telling the stories, or the tribe fades away, just like the stories no one ever tells.

Jennifer Sergi writes in “Storytelling: Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*” that without stories there is “no articulation of experience: people would be unable to understand and celebrate the experiences of self, community, and world. And so cultures value the tellers of stories” (279). While this statement is an accurate assessment of storytelling traditions in all cultures, it is especially valid in the Native American tradition. Facing the continuous, unstoppable force of acculturation from Anglo-European influences, tribal people have developed a strong cultural presence by adapting traditional oral storytelling elements for their modern writing. In so doing, they have taken the rhetorical position that the past, present, and future of Indigenous people are important, even crucial, to the development of society as a whole. Stories anchor and connect tribal people to their landscapes now as they have always done, but those landscapes that once were natural plains, forest, or mountains may be dotted with urban structures, wind turbines, or rusted hulls of machinery or automobiles.

Before delving into Erdrich’s specific modern storytelling techniques and the ethos she adopts in order to convey storytelling traditions, it is important to examine the practice of storytelling in general, as it relates to the earliest, and some might say purest, notions of rhetoric. Tribal storytelling clearly lines up with the classical Greek and Roman models of oratory and persuasion. To Aristotle, rhetoric

is simple. It is mostly invention--finding the best words to move the audience.

Cicero, however, posited in *De Inventione* that invention is merely the beginning of a complex process involving finding the right order of words (arrangement); knowing the right way to speak to the audience (style); committing the words to memory and making them memorable for the audience (memory); and using the most effective physical and vocal gestures (delivery).

Invention is the element most closely related to logic. If a question exists, it needs an answer that makes sense. Once an answer is formulated, someone has to deliver the information to the people at large. For Native Americans, that person is a storyteller, or Word Sender. Ojibwe stories are intended to teach or explain; and they all exhibit metaphor, myth, reality, didacticism, and spirituality. The tribe reveres elders who keep and tell the stories, and it relies on them to relate the history and beliefs of their people to the young, ensuring the sacred communal knowledge of the tribe is not lost. Because the original stories were not written down, storytellers often incorporated several oratorical techniques to engage their audiences and make a memorable impression.

The first of these techniques actually has nothing at all to do with the storytelling event and everything to do with the *exigence* of a story, or the situation from whence a story arises. Although not one of the classical canons itself, the Greek concept of *kairos*--saying the right words to the right people at the right time--is a good guideline to consider when comparing Native storytelling practices with classical oratorical ones, and it is tied closely to both Aristotle's and Cicero's

concepts of invention. Contemporary British storyteller and scholar Patrick Ryan notes that genuine storytelling is spontaneous and unrehearsed. It arises out of a particular occasion and suits that occasion for both teller and listener. In other words, everything about the storytelling event unfolds organically, but that does not mean the event is unintentional. In fact, the opposite is true. The development of stories is an intentional act that adds to the performance repertoire of the storyteller. Ryan also posits, "Causality leads to effective choice of texts, words, and gestures and use of vocalizations and other para-performance elements" (68). Much like the orators of ancient Greece and Rome, tribal storytellers must have these things prepared in advance and committed to memory to use at the most opportune time, which "creates a chain of tradition that passes on a happening from generation to generation" (Sergi 279). Any of the texts, gestures, and vocalizations can be employed during a storytelling event, which not only ensures audience engagement but also the assurance that every event is one of a kind.

The uniqueness of the storytelling event is further emphasized by the role of the audience. Louis Owens, a key contributor in the developmental stages of the Native American Studies field, often stressed the importance of the audience as active participants in tribal storytelling events. The Word Sender speaks directly to listeners, and they react with their own vocalizations and gestures in return. In this way, messages between speaker and audience are in a constant state of flux. In a rhetorical situation of this type, the speaker must always be alert and quick-witted, adjusting tone, gestures, and even words to convey the most appropriate message

for the occasion. This is no easy feat. It takes years of practice and a keen ability to “read the room.”

The ideas of audience participation and one-of-a-kind performances are also crucial to the concept of authorship in Indigenous storytelling. Within oral tradition, literature is simply authorless. The stories always have been, and they always will be. Much like Kenneth Burke’s parlor metaphor, the storyteller acts as one link in a centuries-long chain, passing on variations of stories to an audience that already knows the outcome of each one but listens intently anyway, knowing those stories must be retold for the tribe to survive. The tribe, not any specific person, therefore, is the author of all stories. Owens states quite aptly that the concept of a single author “...would have made as little sense to pre-Columbian Native Americans as the notion of selling real estate” (9). Each story defines the people as a whole, as a community. Considering each performance of a story, however many hundreds or thousands there may have been or may be in the future, is completely unique and influenced by fluid factors, this makes sense.

Contemporary tribal novelists, however, do not attribute their work to their communities, so how does one square the traditional elements of community invention with more modern literary expectations, where authors are creative individuals with the power of legal copyright? Owens addresses this question in his book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Indigenous novelists such as Louise Erdrich “work in a medium for which no close Indian prototype exists” (Owens 10). As a result, the American Indian novel has carved out

a unique niche in the literary canon. There is no way one can maintain the performative elements of traditional storytelling on the page, but converting to an entirely Anglo-European form of novel writing is entirely unacceptable if one is trying to eschew what Vizenor calls the literature of dominance. In other words, Indigenous authors work to avoid colonial impositions on their contributions to their unique tribal cultures. The product, therefore, has emerged as a hybrid of the traditional and the modern, forcing the Native writer to walk a very fine line between honoring tradition and “selling out” to assimilationist rhetoric. As storytelling moved from an oral performance to a written record, the sacred nature of traditional materials became secular. Tribal people managed to protect the most sacred of stories through clever thinking, but Erdrich must be very careful to avoid “desacralizing” the ancient knowledge of her Ojibwe ancestors in her craft. As an end note to her 2005 novel *The Painted Drum*, Erdrich wrote a disclaimer stating that in writing the novel, she took special care not to reveal any sacred, secret knowledge and that she only relied on information that had already been written down. She makes no such statement in any of her other books, but there are few things quite as important to the Ojibwe people as the ceremonial drum, a powerful symbol located at the center of her novel. It is present at storytelling events and is said to hold the memories and experience of the tribe, so she would necessarily make such a disclaimer when writing about it.

After European contact, the storytelling process began to change. Gerald Vizenor claims the divine became separated from Nature sometime in the 14th

century, so before the earliest missionaries came, creation stories were very different. The presence of European audiences forced a new exigence upon Indigenous people in that never before were any of the traditional stories written down for the purpose of preservation. Storytellers often did not trust the written word because of its ability to trap and fix language, causing the oral utterances to lose power. The best way for Word Senders to protect the sacred, therefore, was to create new stories for the missionaries to write down. These stories, based loosely on sacred oral tales, then were recorded for posterity as bona fide belief, and the civilized world accepted them as such. Vizenor refers to these stories as “tricky” because they are meant to maintain the sacred and the traditional by masking them (*Manifest Manners* xiii). While the intent behind this choice was pure and reasonable for the time, an unfortunate by product was the romanticized and inaccurate construction of Native existence in Euro-American communities. The “created Indian” thus dominated white imagery well into the twentieth century, and even continues to some extent into the twenty-first, despite the efforts of modern Word Senders like Louise Erdrich.

Vizenor refers to contemporary Native writers as “postindian warriors,” a term arising from the idea that *indian*, intentionally lower case and italicized by Vizenor, is a construct without any referent in the material world. In other words, indian is a simulation: “the absence of real natives--the contrivance of the Other in the course of dominance,” which Vizenor calls “manifest manners” (*Manifest Manners* viii). As modern tribal writers defy manifest manners and the literature of

dominance, they push past the false cultural construct to create something distinctly Indigenous, not *indian*. They strive to create something with what Vizenor calls ontic significance, the impact of the real. Louise Erdrich is one such Postindian warrior.

The best place to begin examining Erdrich's role as a Postindian storyteller is actually at the beginning of the Anishinaabe people, as the story is related in the recorded version of the Ojibwe creation myth. Much of Erdrich's writing incorporates elements from traditional stories, but the creation story is where readers first meet Nanabozho, the trickster who is the prototype for Nanapush, the main storyteller in *Tracks, Four Souls*, and a significant presence in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*.

Depending on the version and the storyteller, Gitchi-Manitou, or Great Spirit, created a race of people who possessed the form of Gitchi-Manitou but none of his benevolence. These people were evil and fought with each other constantly until the Great Spirit destroyed them in a flood, leaving only Nanabozho and the animals to rebuild the earth. Another, cosmogonic version claims there was only ever a vast expanse of water until Nanabozho, a spiritual being himself, builds the earth. Sometimes, Nanabozho is a humanoid creature; other times he is a hare, and still other times he is a compilation of many animals, such as the wolf and rabbit, who have reputations for being tricksters. In some versions, he creates the earth out of boredom; in others, he has a divine mandate from Gitchi-Manitou; and in others, he creates the earth as a way to escape from his own feces, floating in the water. No

matter the version, the description of Nanabozho's appearance, or his reason for creating the earth, the stories agree that Nanabozho is responsible for creating the world as we know it. From that point of agreement forward, the details tend to be remarkably similar across versions.

Nanabozho and the animals were floating on a raft or log in the vast sea when Nanabozho decided to create a firmament where they could all live. He announced to the animals that he would dive to the bottom of the water and bring up a bit of dirt that he would then expand into a continent, but his attempt ends in failure. He could not dive deep enough without running out of air. Next, one of the water birds offered to try, since he must dive deep in the water to catch his food, but he, too, was unable to reach the bottom. After a series of other attempts by various animals, the meek and humble muskrat quietly offered to try. The other animals ridiculed the muskrat because he was so small and so weak, but Nanabozho silenced them all and said the muskrat should be allowed to try because all others had their chances. The muskrat was gone longer than any of the other animals, and everyone assumed he must have drowned in his attempt; but just when they had all given up hope, someone noticed the muskrat surfacing next to the raft. Nanabozho pulled the muskrat onto the raft and realized he was not breathing. He had, in fact, drowned in his attempt to gather earth from the bottom of the water. As Nanabozho and all the animals sang a song of mourning over their friend, one of the animals noticed the muskrat was holding something in his paw. Nanabozho pried the paw open to find the muskrat had managed to reach the bottom of the water and gather a bit of earth

before he died. In honor of the muskrat's sacrifice, the turtle offered his own back as a solid foundation for the new land; and, with that, Nanabozho was able to expand the small piece of earth from the muskrat's sacrifice into what we now know as North America. To this day, the turtle is sacred in Ojibwe culture, and the descendants of the first muskrat honor his sacrifice by building their homes in the shape of the little ball of earth their ancestor brought from the bottom of the great sea.

In a traditional storytelling event, a version of the preceding story would have been told aloud to an audience. There would have been sound effects, of sorts, and physical illustrations. Perhaps the storyteller would have imitated the sound of the wind moving across the face of the water while making "waves" with his hands. The storyteller might have stepped up on a platform representing the raft and asked the audience to help him row over the water by moving their arms with him in unison. He may have pantomimed the meeting of the animals and used different voices to represent each one while the audience reacted with vocalizations, echoes, and physical movements as well. Telling the story here on the page obviously removes those crucial elements, but that does not mean some of those elements cannot be created artificially through the use of rhetorical devices and strategic language.

From the creation story forward, Nanabozho operates as a central figure in Ojibwe storytelling, and his influence is present any time Nanapush appears in one of Erdrich's novels. In fact, Erdrich created Nanapush as a modern Nanabozho. His

function in each of the novels where he appears is to tell the stories of the Ojibwe people. Nanapush, like Nanabozho, creates a world. Only the world Nanapush creates is for the reader and exists only in his narration. Through him, we learn what life was like at Little No Horse and who the most important people were across the decades. Nanapush's history of the Ojibwe tribe is often interrupted by humorous anecdotal accounts of his own antics, which are very Nanabozho-like in nature. Vizenor claims characters like Nanapush are hallmarks of Postindian warrior writers in that they create something new from the old without losing the characteristic humor of the traditional trickster tales. Although Nanapush is known among the other characters as one who never takes life seriously, he is capable of great gravitas when the occasion calls for it.

When we first meet Nanapush, he is telling a new origin story of sorts. The first chapter of Erdrich's *Tracks* describes not a race metaphorically vanishing through increasing marginalization and cultural assimilation, but an actual apocalyptic event, much like the flood in the previous version of the Ojibwe origin story. This time, however, it is not a flood that destroys the Ojibwe people. Nanapush illustrates this modern apocalypse in the first spoken words of his story: "We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall" (*Tracks* 1). The Ojibwe reservation where Nanapush has lived most of his life has been afflicted by what he calls "the sickness," a disease that most often ends in a particularly painful and gruesome death. Of the few who survive the epidemic, Nanapush is among the eldest. Because the ceremonial time of tribal people and

linear time used by Anglos are completely different concepts, Nanapush never reveals his true age, but we know he is near 50, still relatively young for an Ojibwe elder. He is also one of the few full-blood Ojibwe survivors among a handful of mixedblood families like the Morrisseys, who we are to assume survived the epidemic because of the hardiness bred into them through the hybridization of Anglo and Ojibwe DNA.

With so few traditionalists left after the catastrophe, Nanapush must assume the role of Story Keeper and storyteller; but when the sickness took the old people, it also took many of the old ways. His primary purpose in this role is to keep the Ojibwe from becoming “Vanishing Indians” in a new Anishinaabe world, a world that is largely assimilated, dominated by outsiders, and represented by the “wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers” (*Tracks* 1). Like his namesake, Nanapush must rebuild his world from scraps. For Erdrich, Nanapush is a conduit for the traditional act of storytelling. Nanapush begins chapter seven of *Four Souls* thus:

The coughball of an owl is a packed lump of everything the bird can't digest-- bones, fur, teeth, claws, and nails. An owl tears apart its catch, gulps it down whole, and nourishes itself on blood and flesh. The residue, the undissolvable, fuses. In the small, light solid pellet, the frail skull of a finch, femur of a mouse, cleft necklace of vertebrae, seed-fine teeth, gray gopher and rabbit fur. A perfect compression of being. What is the essence, the soul? my Jesuit teachers used to ask of their students. What is the

irreducible? I answer, what the owl pukes. That is also the story--what is left after the events in all their juices and chaos are reduced to the essence. The story--all that time does not digest. (71)

Through this metaphor, Nanapush explains that living beings are temporary. Eventually life is devoured by time, leaving only what time is unable to digest--stories, memories, traditions, and legacies. This is part of living the "Indian way," and since Erdrich wants to tell stories the "Indian way," she must make the Ojibwe experience a reality for the reader as well. Although the words are on paper, Nanapush can keep the oral tradition alive through Erdrich's careful and considerate characterization. *How* Nanapush tells stories is just as important as what he says, so she had to get the details just right in order to blend the traditional with the contemporary smoothly.

Jennifer Sergi separates Erdrich's approach to preserving traditional storytelling elements into three facets:

1. Capturing the form and purpose of storytelling,
2. Including the contents of Chippewa myth and legend, and
3. Preserving cultural traditions in a voice that recalls the old as it creates anew. (Sergi 279)

Erdrich's method of storytelling is a direct reflection of Chippewa tradition in that she creates multiple narrators who are part of the circular form of the storytelling process. Narratives like Erdrich's exhibit cohesion and individuality, meaning that each narrator offers something unique to the reader while

contributing to the cohesive structure of the master narrative. In the storytelling event, all the tales told are *versions* of an original story subject to interpretation; when a story is finished, the storyteller might indicate the end of the story and ask someone else to tie another to it. Thus, the stories all share some sort of common thread. The common threads in *Tracks*, *Four Souls*, and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* are Nanapush, Fleur, Pauline Puyat (Sister Leopolda), and Father Damien Modeste. Of those four characters, Nanapush, Pauline, and Father Damien are the major narrators in the novels, and all form a web of sorts with interconnecting parts. Polly Elizabeth Gheen is an outlier, an incidental narrator, for *Four Souls*. Her purpose is to fill in the gaps in Nanapush's second-hand stories. On occasion, every narrator tells different versions of the same story with each version bearing differences in details, emphasis, and perspective. For instance, in *Love Medicine*, Marie Kashpaw tells a story of the horrors Sister Leopolda visited on her as a girl, but she never mentions that Pauline Puyat, who later becomes Sister Leopolda, is actually her mother. We learn that fact in *Tracks* during one of Pauline's narratives. This circular or serpentine structure is also evident in several other Indian tribes' mythologies and storytelling structures where many stories are based on the same people or entities.

Nanapush also employs rhetorical strategies like repetition, anaphora, and parallelism in his storytelling. All of these techniques have been used for centuries as means for remembering lines in orations, but they also lend emphasis to the most important parts of stories. A good example of Nanapush's use of these devices

comes early on in *Tracks* as he tries to convince Lulu, Fleur's daughter, that his life experience warrants her respect and attention:

My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know. I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager. Fleur, the one you will not call mother. (2)

In addition, Nanapush maintains a certain cadence in his speech that readers do not feel in either Pauline's, Polly Elizabeth's, or Father Damien's narratives in other sections of the novels. When Nanapush mentions people or places in his stories, he often gives them multiple names or makes a point of explaining them further through the use of appositives. For instance, in the passage above, Nanapush calls Fleur "the one you will not call mother," which tells us much about Lulu's relationship with Fleur as well as sets up the exigence for the current storytelling event (2). Nanapush is clearly making an effort to reconcile the two, and he believes telling Lulu the story of her mother will lead to success.

During Nanapush's first story in *Tracks*, he also conveys changes in the tone and pitch of his voice, implying whispers or pauses without mentioning them directly. As Fleur's sickness fades and her memory returns, Nanapush mentions that the memory of the ones he lost to the sickness also returned, and they spoke of the dead carefully, "without letting their names loose in the wind that would reach

their ears" (*Tracks* 5). There is a tension in his voice, created by asyndeton, as he speaks of what happens when the living speak the names of the dead:

We feared 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. We would all be together on the journey then, our destination the village at the end of the road where people gamble day and night but never lose their money, eat but never fill their stomachs, drink but never leave their minds. (5)

For traditional Ojibwe people like Nanapush, to speak the names of the dead is to invite death into one's world, to put oneself at the mercy of the spirits. As Nanapush continues telling Lulu the story of how he buried her grandparents, aunts, and uncles by the lake, his tone darkens. He speaks of the spirits, "thin as needles, shadows piercing shadows," flickering just out of sight. Nanapush tells Lulu, "We felt the spirits of the dead so near that at length we just stopped talking" (*Tracks* 6). Then, Nanapush says, "This made it worse," which appears on a line by itself on the page, creating a dramatic pause in the exact place it would be in an oral version of the story (*Tracks* 6). When Nanapush tells the story of Fleur's birth in *Four Souls*, he emphasizes the spiritual nature of names again, and says in a whisper:

For she was born with a spirit face on her face and that face was laid away in the woods for the Gizhe Manito to love and to name. That face had a name but we don't know it. We would never understand it. That face was named in the spirit language. (48)

Nanapush's role as an incarnation of the trickster Nanabozho is every bit as important as his role as tribal historian. Nanabozho is also a master storyteller in Ojibwe lore, and oftentimes, his stories serve no purpose aside from tormenting others. A perfect example of Nanapush's tendency toward the same appears in chapter six of *Tracks* during one of Pauline's narratives. By this point in the novel, Pauline has already become a zealous postulant nun, but she has not yet become Sister Leopolda. Pauline, who feels drawn to Fleur Pillager, is still coming to Fleur's cabin in the woods regularly, which also puts her in regular contact with Nanapush, who hates her. In the spring of 1918 into the winter of 1919, Pauline was experimenting with various forms of self-harm intended to bring her closer to sanctification, including denying herself urination and excretion. Nanapush, who rejects Catholicism and believes Pauline's pursuit to be futile and ridiculous, crafts a story one evening about a girl who is caught in a flood. Nanapush emphasizes the motion of the water as it rises up the girl's body slowly, knowing he is tormenting Pauline, who has had two cups of diuretic sassafras tea and is clearly in agony. Eventually, Nanapush pulls out a condom and begins filling it with the tea, expanding the condom and mimicking the way Pauline's bladder must be filling. Finally, Pauline bursts from the cabin unable to avoid elimination any longer. As she runs from the room, everyone in the cabin roars with laughter. Nanapush uses a similar raunchy sense of humor to shock and embarrass Father Damien in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, and his banter with his wife Margaret routinely make other characters blush.

Nanapush's storytelling techniques, both serious and humorous, are similar across all three novels where he appears as a primary narrator. When juxtaposed against other primary narrators, however, the traditionalism in his style stands out in relief. Pauline Puyat's narrative is the most natural place to begin a comparison. After all, she is Ojibwe, although she refuses to acknowledge it, and she grew up on the reservation, so she is well acquainted with the stories and customs of her ancestry. It might stand to reason that her storytelling style would be similar to Nanapush's; but as an act of defiance, Pauline separates herself from all things Indian, including the stories of her ancestors.

Pauline's role as a storyteller in *Tracks* is a dark and often predatory one. The stories she gathers fuel reservation gossip and discord. Nanapush makes clear from the beginning that Pauline Puyat has been a liar her whole life. Nanapush himself is not exactly a reliable narrator. He often embellishes the details of the stories he tells for the benefit of his audience. Pauline is unreliable for more sinister reasons, however; and while Nanapush tells stories to entertain, heal the sick, stave off death, and preserve Ojibwe history, Pauline hoards stories and uses them as curses. Her stories are the "heavy" ones, and she takes them from the dying as a way to ease their passing. Pauline's stories are death stories: the deaths of people, the death of traditionalism, and the death of the Ojibwe.

Pauline's initial narration in *Tracks* sets the tone for her subsequent stories. Each of Pauline's four narratives in *Tracks* centers on death, usually physical but occasionally metaphorical. She introduces herself by telling the story of the times

Fleur Pillager drowned in Lake Matchimanito and traded death with the men who attempted to save her. Pauline tells the reader, "The first time she drowned in the cold and glassy waters of Matchimanito, Fleur Pillager was only a child" (*Tracks* 10). Jean Hat and his unnamed companion pulled her from the water and revived her only to die themselves shortly after. The second time Fleur drowned, she was fifteen, and George Many Women came upon her lifeless body on the shore. As he leaned close to her to check for breath, Fleur hissed and said, "You take my place" (*Tracks* 11). Again, shortly after the encounter, Many Women became afraid, refusing to leave his house and avoiding water at all costs until the day he slipped in the bathtub and drowned, just as Fleur commanded.

According to Chippewa belief, drowning is the one death from which no one can overcome. There is no afterlife for the drowned, only endless wandering. Since Fleur had managed to drown twice and come back, Pauline assumes it must be because of her illicit relationship with Misshepeshu, the lake monster of Matchimanito. Clearly, she says, Misshepeshu wants Fleur for himself because he is "love hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur" (*Tracks* 11). Nanapush mentions all of these rumors in the first chapter of *Tracks*, but he dismisses them all as the gossip of those "who fattened in the shade of the new Agent's storehouse" (*Tracks* 9). Pauline's dramatic exaggerations are not the stories Nanapush values as part of Ojibwe history.

Because Pauline has not yet developed her pathological obsession with Catholicism and whiteness, readers see in her early stories glimmers of her upbringing on the reservation during this introductory narration. She peppers her speech with phrases like “the people said,” “we all knew,” and “Our mothers warn us.” At this point she has not separated herself completely from her Ojibwe roots, so one can see acceptance of and belief in “the water man, the monster...a thing of death by drowning, the death a Chippewa cannot survive” (*Tracks* 11). Her detailed description of Misshepeshu’s physical appearance and her indirect warning to the reader is further proof that Catholicism has not yet supplanted her traditional upbringing. By the summer of 1913, when Fleur disappears from the reservation, Pauline has already begun to show signs of change. She has stopped speaking Ojibwe, opting instead to speak English exclusively; and she refuses to do beadwork. Her attachment to Fleur Pillager is the only thing keeping her tied to Indian tradition.

Like many who live on the Little No Horse Reservation, Pauline is fascinated by and afraid of Fleur’s shamanic power. She is also jealous of Fleur’s beauty and sexuality, and this awestruck bitterness leads Pauline to paint Fleur as a thing not entirely human. After Nanapush saves Fleur from the sickness, Pauline is convinced that she cannot be killed and that once Fleur moved to the shores of the lake, she “messed with evil, laughed at the old women’s half-forgotten medicine, studied ways we shouldn’t talk about” (*Tracks* 12). Pauline even goes so far as to suggest Fleur is a shapeshifter who goes out hunting at night as a bear with an owl’s heart on her

tongue to give her the power to see in the dark. Nanapush tells us in his second narrative that the people of Little No Horse never quite knew what to call Pauline or where she fit in among the tribe. Pauline was “unnoticeable, homely if it must be said” and that she “schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage” (*Tracks* 39). He even mentions that she may not be entirely mentally stable. Applying Nanapush’s estimation, Pauline shares all of these rumors with the reader in an attempt to garner some favor, as if sharing secrets with her audience will engage them and endear her to them.

Pauline’s jealousy and desire to be accepted into a family or social group also leads her to engage in extremely risky and dangerously zealous behavior throughout the novel. Later in her first narration, she tells the story of Fleur’s disappearance from the reservation during the summer of 1913. During those few months, Fleur spent time in Argus, a small grain town just south of Little No Horse. Pauline tells us there, “things happened. [Fleur] almost destroyed that town” (*Tracks* 12).

Pauline follows Fleur to Argus in order to learn how to make lace from the nuns there, which is the first glimpse of the changes to come in her character. While there, Pauline watches Fleur, a natural and accomplished gambler, hustle a group of white men out of a large sum of money in poker. Angry at losing to a woman, an Indian woman at that, the men trap Fleur outside the smokehouse one night and gang rape her. The next morning, a tornado threatens the town, and the rapists take cover inside a large freezer. In the midst of the storm, Pauline and her cousin

Russell lock the freezer from the outside, trapping the men inside to die for what they did to Fleur. Days later, as the townsfolk were cleaning up the debris of the demolished town, they found the men frozen solid. Only one had a faint heartbeat, but he lives out his life suffering from gangrene and the consequences of hypothermia.

Given that Pauline is a sinister, selfish, and unreliable storyteller, readers must consider that the tale is not entirely true, but they really have no choice but to believe her; she is the only witness who is willing to tell the story. Fleur never speaks to the reader. She does speak to Nanapush, however, and when he asks her about what happened in Argus, Fleur simply replies, "Uncle, the Puyat lies" (*Tracks* 38). Pauline's gossip has already spread throughout the reservation, however; and since Fleur's pregnancy is soon discovered, suddenly Pauline seems a little more credible. Eventually, Pauline ceases her involvement with the Ojibwe community altogether and dedicates herself completely to Catholicism--and whiteness--as Sister Leopolda, a sadistic nun who manages to deceive those around her so well and for so long that the Church is considering bestowing sainthood upon her. Once she has done so, she ceases all storytelling and becomes a character, sometimes protagonist, other times antagonist, in Nanapush and Father Damien's stories.

Though Nanapush warns us about Pauline's tendency toward untruth, the extent of Sister Leopolda's many deceptions are not completely uncovered until 1996 when Father Jude Miller comes to Little No Horse to interview Father Damien as the first step in Leopolda's canonization. Father Jude's mission is to gather

evidence of Leopolda's heroic virtue. Instead, he learns the practical truths behind all the reported "miracles at Little No Horse." Until the mid-1980s, the Catholic Church appointed a person called the "Devil's Advocate" as part of the canonization process. This person would make every attempt to expose flaws in the evidence presented in favor of canonization in order to eliminate any doubt that the candidate was worthy of sainthood. Although Pope John Paul II eliminated the Devil's Advocate rule thirteen years before Father Jude visits the reservation, Father Damien takes on the responsibility of attacking all of Jude's evidence in favor of Leopolda's sainthood. *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is largely a series of confessions related to the secrets of not just Leopolda but of the reservation in general.

Since his arrival at Little No Horse in 1912, Father Damien Modeste has been writing memoirs of life on the reservation. Nothing has escaped his attention, and his daily involvement in the lives of the Ojibwe people there has given him a unique perspective. It is important to note that, in contrast to Nanapush's tales, all of Damien's stories are written down. Nanapush does not trust the written word, especially when tradition is involved. Damien, however, sees the histories and memoirs he writes as his legacy. Damien's writing is academic, matter-of-fact, and devoid of the humor Nanapush employs in his oral storytelling. Damien's writing is also missing the mystical and ominous darkness of Pauline's oral storytelling. His writing is more than anthropological record keeping, however. What Damien calls "reports" are actually stories, family histories; but there is a depth of understanding

and a keen sense of humanity involved in writing these reports. Damien tells Father Jude, “Each name you hear on this reservation is an unfinished history. A destiny that opens like a cone pouring out a person’s life” (*The Last Report* 145). In Leopolda’s case, this means uncovering her lies and placing her deceitful nature in the context of her family history. In other words, Damien uses a “she-comes-by-it-honestly” approach. Damien knew Pauline before she became Leopolda, and his insight into her presence on the reservation leads him to correct Father Jude’s misinformed views on her life. Jude tries unsuccessfully to focus Damien’s attention on Sister Leopolda, ignoring her Puyat history, but Damien will not be deterred and insists that Jude can only understand Leopolda if he understands “the depth of what being a Puyat implies” (*The Last Report* 145).

Before handing over his text on the Puyat history, which is based largely on Nanapush’s memory of one of the last buffalo hunts, Damien warns Father Jude that “Nanapush is not entirely to be trusted where the Puyats were concerned” and that “He had his motive for spinning a tale to his own ends” (*The Last Report* 148). Considering Damien has no other, more reliable source, however, he is forced to take Nanapush at his word because he was an eye-witness after all.

“History of the Puyats by Father Damien Modeste” is a one-off chapter in the novel. It is unlike any other chapter in the book in that it is an independent text incorporated into the larger plot as a means of adding some academic legitimacy to Damien’s objection to Leopolda’s sainthood. While Damien’s intent in writing the history is clearly for academic purposes, his diction is dotted with descriptive flair

and Nanapush's own bias. For example, in describing the back-breaking labor that went into processing the buffalo carcasses, Damien mentions the wooden carts that "screamed and groaned as they moved across the violently flat plains" (*The Last Report* 149) and riding atop one of those carts was Leopolda's mother Pauline, known as the first Pauline, in whom was concentrated "the bitterness of seven generations of peasant French and an equal seven of enemy-harassed Ojibwe ancestors" (*The Last Report* 149). Damien says the girl "seethed" as she considered "the tedium of their slow and inevitable progress" (*The Last Report* 150). These are not the descriptive tendencies of a completely objective narrator, but again, what was Damien to do when he only had the word of Nanapush to form the foundation of the history?

As the history continues, Damien relates the tale of a war of words between the first Pauline's Ojibwe hunting band and an enemy band of Bwaanag, also returning from a successful hunt. Here, the story departs from the matter-of-fact, even mundane details of the hunt and processing of carcasses to the resolution of this conflict. As a solution, each band agrees to pit its fastest woman against the other's in a race to the death, and despite her renowned speed and near-perfect record of winning races, the first Pauline's mother forced herself to lose in a stab at her husband. She hated the French trader she had married; but she knew that despite their hatred for each other, he would step in to offer his life for hers as a matter of tradition. A second race took place then, and although the first Pauline's father won by a toe, a Bwaan woman stepped forth and gutted him with her

skinning knife, leaving the first Pauline scrambling to put his intestines back inside her father's body to no avail. With his dying breath, the French trader begged his daughter to kill her mother.

The first Pauline's mother's torturous actions following this climactic moment serve as Damien's proof that Leopolda's cruelty and deceit were forged in the hunger her grandmother forced upon her mother, the stench of the tribe's latrine where her grandmother shoved her mother's face, and the hot coals her grandmother used to burn her mother's skin as a warning. As the first Pauline grew, she became inexplicably irresistible to men, but her ability to love or be loved was long gone. She had four unsuccessful marriages and bore two children: Shesheeb, who became Nanapush's mortal enemy in the novel *Four Souls* and the last Pauline, who became Sister Leopolda, a cruel and merciless zealot.

Like Nanapush's stories, there is a moral in Damien's history of the Puyats, and the moral brings the story full-circle, like most traditional tribal stories. His story ends with Nanapush's memory of the strange behavior of the buffalo herd after the hunt on the day of the battle with the Bwaanag. The remaining members of the herd became crazed with grief and charged the carcasses of their dead brothers and trampled their own calves in their frenzy. According to Damien, the old chiefs believed the buffalo were mourning the end of their way of life, and this grief parallels the burden of Leopolda, who as the last Pauline became "the residue of what occurred when some of our grief-mad people trampled their children" (*Love Medicine* 158).

In drawing parallels between a traditional oral storyteller and a contemporary writer, Patrick Ryan claims, "Even the literary writer...must continue a vital connection to individuals and communities who shaped her or his narratives and narrative abilities; otherwise...the quality of narration suffers" (64). As the master storyteller in the world of *Little No Horse*, Louise Erdrich follows the same traditional rules she imposes on her storytelling characters. Just as Nanapush, Pauline, and Father Damien Modeste participate in the culture of the reservation, Erdrich continues to involve herself in Ojibwe culture through her membership at the Turtle Mountain Reservation and her bookstore Birchbark Books, which promotes Indigenous writing and art. She also speaks Ojibwe and participates in ceremonial rituals. In her fictional world, Erdrich has created a balance between traditional oral techniques and modern literary storytelling through the relationship Damien has with Nanapush. Since Nanapush does not trust the written word, he tells Damien a version of his stories, which Damien then turns into a modern literary rendering. Ryan also claims that storytellers become an elite group when they form communities with other storytellers (64). This may explain the ubiquitous presence of Nanapush, Pauline/Leopolda, and Damien in Erdrich's novels. They make up a core community of storytellers for a certain section of the reservation's timeline.

Erdrich also places an emphasis on the symbiotic relationship between the Ojibwe people at *Little No Horse* and the Catholic priests and nuns who live there. While traditional tribal storytelling is informal and conversational, like Nanapush's style, Erdrich knows that non-Native audiences will expect her to explain the Ojibwe

culture. This is especially true for the “pretty parts,” or the parts of Ojibwe culture most likely to be romanticized or appropriated.

Creating a balance between the two storytelling styles is a delicate undertaking. Traditional storytelling has communal values, but modern practices are not easily combined with those, so the genuine teller is forced to adopt a corporate form of storytelling while simultaneously resisting it. One of Louis Owens’ main arguments in his treatise on the American Indian novel frames the discussion on the rhetoric of Erdrich’s storytelling thus:

Regardless of how effectively a novel may incorporate the cyclical, ordered, ritual-centered, and paradigmatic world of traditional oral literatures...the Native American novelist can never step back into the collective anonymity of the tribal storyteller. (10-11)

Too much of one style alienates an entire audience, so Erdrich, as a modern storyteller herself, ascribes traditional storytelling techniques to Nanapush, the Ojibwe elder, and contemporary ones to Damien, the white Catholic outsider. In this manner, Erdrich herself can participate in both traditional and contemporary styles of storytelling. Her ability to do this successfully, and without exposing sacred knowledge, means the old stories and storytelling ways are kept alive through her novels, ensuring the strength and continued relevance of the Ojibwe people.

CHAPTER IV

DOUBLE IDENTITIES:

ERDRICH'S USE OF SUBVERSION AND SUBTERFUGE AS SURVIVANCE

At dusk on December 16, 1773, the *Dartmouth* lay moored in Boston Harbor. She was heavy in the water with her cargo of British tea from the East India Company, which had arrived in Boston with an unsavory import tax. The Bostonian protest group known as the Sons of Liberty had successfully prevented the offloading of the cargo for nearly three weeks; and Francis Rotch, the captain of the *Dartmouth*, was nearing his wit's end. Despite repeated entreaties to Thomas Hutchinson, Boston's provincial governor, he had yet again been denied permission to return to England. Hutchinson had ordered the Royal Navy to fire on any ship attempting to depart the harbor. Rotch was facing a failed voyage either way. If he remained in the harbor, Bostonian customs agents would be legally allowed to seize his cargo the very next day; but if he tried to leave, he risked losing his ship and maybe even his life.

Rotch's state of limbo did not sit well with Bostonian protesters, who saw the tea tax as an affront to their rights as British citizens to refuse taxation without representation in Parliament and continued to boycott the product. Their peaceful sabotage efforts had been reasonably effective in other colonies, but Thomas Hutchinson's staunch refusal to make concessions was a difficult obstacle to overcome. If the Sons of Liberty wanted to be effective in this fight, they were going

to have to do something more drastic, something that would make a stronger impression.

A short distance from the harbor, a group of men unconvincingly dressed as Mohawk Indians and emitting war whoops sprinted through the streets of Boston and down to the harbor. They boarded the *Dartmouth* and two other tea ships, and for the next three hours, dumped case after case of tea into the water. There was no one to stop them. The spectators on the wharf silently cheered them on, and the guards were sympathetic to the cause. At the end of the spectacle, these “Indians” cleaned up their mess, apologized to the guards, and went home. This act of civil disobedience, of course, became known as the Boston Tea Party; and for nearly 250 years, Americans have recognized it as an integral part of the opening salvo of the Revolutionary War.

The Boston Tea Party is certainly a compelling story. It has all the hallmarks of a truly American tale: grit, courage, struggle, a fight for freedom, and a refusal to conform to oppressive ideals. From another perspective, however, this bit of what Philip Deloria calls “street theater” also became one of the first, and most certainly the most famous, documented cases of non-Indians appropriating elements of tribal culture, however misguided, in order to justify behavior deemed “uncivilized” by European standards.

In the previous example, the unconvincing dress and behavior of the non-Native participants is significant. Clearly, the men wanted to conceal their identities, but authenticity was not paramount to the success of the raids. Not all instances of

“playing Indian” were as flimsily constructed, however. One occasion turned deadly for a group of emigrants from Arkansas passing through southern Utah to California in 1857. As the Baker-Fancher wagon train paused to rest at Mountain Meadows, they were besieged by a large group of the Utah Territorial Militia who were awaiting federal troops sent by President James Buchanan. Rumors that the troops were coming to march against the Mormon community for their extreme religious practices heightened fears in the territory, and Brigham Young had recently issued an order of martial law. On September 7, disguised authentically as Paiute Indians, and in conjunction with some actual Paiute Indians, the militia surrounded the wagon train and prevented their exit. Over the next three days, militiamen began to worry that members of the Baker-Fancher party had seen through the Indian disguises and would be able to bear witness to the event later. In an effort to prevent any testimony against the militia, the commander ordered the massacre of anyone over the age of seven in the party. Children under the age of seven were considered too young to remember the details of the attack and were adopted by local Mormon families. By the end of the day on September 11, 1857, around 120 men, women, and children had been murdered in total.

After the slaughter, the Utah Territorial Militia and the Mormon Church leader Brigham Young claimed the Paiutes acted alone in the violence. The plan from the beginning was to give the impression that the attack was just another Indian raid. After all, raids by nomadic Plains Indians were common in the area, so scapegoating the Paiutes would be easy. Federal investigations through 1859,

however, concluded the Paiutes could not possibly have acted alone; and several of the militia leaders and participants were brought to justice. The militia commanders who orchestrated the massacre and gave the orders were executed.

From the fairly mild civil disruption of the Boston Tea Party to the controversial modern adoption of Native Americans as sports team mascots, non-Native Americans have often donned Native American disguises in one form or another when they felt the need to distance themselves from the strict constraints of traditional Euro-American social codes and laws. Over time, the cathartic or subversive effects of “playing Indian” grew into a sincere fascination with Native tradition and culture. Much of this admiration, however well-intentioned, often manifested itself through the unfortunate misrepresentation of tribal people.

As James Monroe’s Manifest Destiny policy pushed the borders of the United States westward, settlers along and west of the frontier encountered a different type of Native than the relatively civilized agrarian tribes of the East. Plains Indians, like the Paiutes at Mountain Meadow, were nomadic hunters and warriors. They lived in the harshest regions of the continent and were often brutal in their dealings with outsiders. While these traits spelled danger for the pioneers, they made for riveting conversation back home. Stories of Indian “War Dances,” ritual brutality, and stunning feats of horsemanship on the frontier spread quickly east of the Mississippi, fueling romanticized characterizations of “savage” people who desperately needed saving from their barbarism through a combination of religious mission work and assimilation tactics meant to impart European civilization. These

misrepresentations would become foundational plot points in Western-themed novels, television, and films decades later.

Buffalo Bill Cody saw an opportunity to capitalize on America's fascination with Indians, and his Wild West Show put tribal culture on display for a price. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and other exhibitions of the sort are responsible for many of the modern stereotypical images of Native Americans. Cody himself had a great deal of authentic experience with Indians and knew their true nature as well as the meanings behind many of their customs. Unfortunately, the sacred meanings and messages behind these customs were not what drew audiences; and Buffalo Bill was, above all else, a showman.

Jean Baudrillard, in examining the idea of simulacra and simulation, claims that simulation is not the same as fake. Instead, simulation involves producing some actual symptoms or characteristics that are authentic, so it threatens the difference between what is real and what is imaginary. The simulation then becomes the real (Baudrillard 31-34). Using these simulations, there was money to be made through what Vizenor calls "racialist notions and misnomers sustained...as 'authentic' representations of 'indian' cultures" (*Manifest Manners* 1). In presenting Indians as warlike savages, contorting themselves in strange ways and conveying violent images during their performances, these shows perpetuated all the fantasies non-Indians had about tribal traditions.

Despite Buffalo Bill's recruitment tactics stating the contrary, performances in Wild West shows were not ever intended to preserve the native culture they

supposedly portrayed, although some show Indians did see the opportunity to exhibit their dances as an act of resistance, since many of their dances had been banned by the government; and they would often intentionally drag them out for hours on end. Other tribal performers saw an opportunity to make the truths of reservation life a topic of conversation.

Nicholas Black Elk is a good example of someone who brought an element of legitimacy to the Wild West Show. He lamented to his biographer, John G. Neihardt, that his people were sick and starving because much of what the government had sent in aid was stolen by “Wasichus [white people] who were crazy to get money” (165). In his biography *Black Elk Speaks*, Nicholas Black Elk tells Neihardt:

There came to us some Wasichus who wanted a band of Ogalalas for a big show that the other Pahuska had...I thought I ought to go, because I might learn some secret of the Wasichu that would help my people somehow...Maybe if I could see the great world of the Wasichu, I could understand how to bring the sacred hoop together and make the tree to bloom again at the center of it (165).

Black Elk’s journey was largely disappointing. He realized there was nothing helpful he could learn from the white people:

I felt dead and my people seemed lost and I thought I might never find them again...I could see the Wasichus did not care for each other the way our people did before the nation’s hoop was broken...They had forgotten that the

earth was their mother. This could not be better than the old ways of my people (167).

Show promoters blatantly ignored the neglect, poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, and squalid conditions on Indian reservations, favoring instead the “pretty parts” of Indian life. These romanticized or grotesquely exaggerated notions of Indian life have survived in modern contest dancing and Native tourism. In fact, dances such as the men’s fancy, women’s fancy shawl, and jingle dress were invented as pure spectacle, devoid of any aboriginal meaning. To this day, it is these flashy, colorful displays that draw the biggest crowds at contest powwows, and it is in these displays that we find a deep-seated tension in the Native American community, especially where survivance is concerned. Many dancers and spectators enjoy the more modern, non-symbolic dancing, while others find it to be a remnant of exploitation and cultural genocide. Those who support the performance of these controversial dances claim they have become part of tribal history and should not be ignored, no matter how they came to be.

Given these historical examples, which are only a few among many, it is clear that Native Americans have played an important role in the use of subterfuge and subversive behavior throughout American history. Why Indians, though? What is it about Native Americans that appealed to the Bostonians, the Utah Territorial Militia, and the thousands who flocked to see *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*? And what is it that continues to draw modern Americans into “playing Indian” through the incorporation of Native American culture at Thanksgiving or at high school, college,

and professional sports stadiums across the nation? Philip Deloria posits that our desire to appropriate tribal culture is rooted in our need to “articulate a revolutionary identity, drawing on the deeply rooted power of familiar ideologies surrounding Native Americans” (20). The Sons of Liberty did not choose to dress as Mohawks because they honored tribal culture or cared about the Mohawks as indigenous people. The Mohawk costumes were a political statement of a familiar origin. The Native was the embodiment of the New World, and by dressing as Indians, the Sons of Liberty were subverting the law, saying the New World rejected the sovereignty of Great Britain in the colonies. In the example of the Massacre of Mountain Meadows, Indian disguise was used as subterfuge for committing violence. The aggressors used Indian disguise to mask their true identities and shift culpability to the Native people in the area; but the Sons of Liberty made no attempt to hide who they were while dumping tea into the harbor. They simply dressed as Mohawks to emphasize their displeasure as citizens of the New World. The many Wild West shows that operated in the second half of the nineteenth century fed the curiosity of people who craved sensationalism and adventure. Each instance of appropriation and misrepresentation served a distinct purpose for the dominant culture.

A century and a half after that notorious evening in Boston, and less than a decade after Buffalo Bill Cody’s death, author D.H. Lawrence was living near Taos, New Mexico observing Native American culture first hand. During the two-year period of self-exile he called his “savage pilgrimage,” the British author developed a

fascination with Native American culture; but to an even greater degree, he developed a fascination for America's fascination with Native American culture. In his discussion of Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Lawrence notes:

There must be in their (the Indians') social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us; for thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those Aborigines having from choice become Europeans...(33).

What was it that made Americans embrace Indian culture so robustly, yet stop short of a full conversion to the Indian Way? Lawrence believed he knew. Americans had been separated from Great Britain for a short time, relatively speaking, and like rebellious teenagers who leave home to "find themselves," they did not know who they were. They only knew they were not British. Over time, Americans developed a means of defining themselves not by what they were, but by what they were *not* (Lawrence 6). Understandably, this practice led to a sort of identity crisis.

In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence argues American consciousness is incomplete in that we are torn between the desire to have civilized order and savage freedom, binary oppositions that cannot balance (8). The Boston Tea Party is a perfect example. The men who dressed as Mohawks and dumped tea into the harbor were only able to adopt Native American behavior to an extent. They were comfortable with Indian costume, war whoops, and some minor level of disturbing the peace in Boston; but they stopped short of taking prisoners, damaging personal property, or performing any actual Indian war rituals. One

should consider the fact that the men cleaned up their mess and apologized to the guards before returning home. It was the political and symbolic nature of the Indian that the Sons of Liberty wanted, not the real culture of tribal people.

Philip Deloria claims that America can never fully become Native because it cannot let go of its European tendencies toward social order. There is a simultaneous desire and repulsion present in Americans' treatment of tribal culture. Throughout American history, "the Indian has skulked in and out of the most important stories various Americans have told about themselves" (Deloria 5). Sometimes, the Indian is the villain in these stories as evidenced in the many captivity narratives and pulp fiction novels set in the "Wild West." Other times the Indian is the noble hero, saving the white man and teaching him his ways, like Squanto did for the Plymouth colony in 1621. Either way, social and political policy toward Indians in the United States has been a "two-hundred-year back-and-forth between assimilation and destruction," (Deloria 5) and out of this cultural tug of war has emerged what Euro-Americans have deemed an acceptable compromise: the concept of the Noble Savage. This folkloric red man embodies all the symbolic elements of American ideals. He is free; he is natural; he is spiritual; he is proud; but he never existed.

As the fledgling United States began to come into its own, the image of the Noble Savage continued to influence American culture in various ways. The Indian became something of a sympathetic figure over time, and the idea of the Noble Savage took on an additional facet: the Vanishing Indian. The Vanishing Indian is a

literary, historical, and cultural construct that lies at the nexus between “civilized” colonists and “savage” Indians. The idea is rooted in the belief that in the face of advancing civilization and industrial progress, tribal people must necessarily disappear through assimilation into the dominant culture while those who refuse to assimilate gradually die out.

The concept of the Vanishing Indian is extremely complex and problematic. While ever-advancing US civilization sought to destroy tribal culture in the name of progress, it also strove to preserve what European colonists saw as the most redeeming qualities of the Indian. The elements of this constructed image always existed within the Noble Savage trope, but they became far more pronounced when the collective conscious of the American people required an attempt to atone for the many broken treaties and removals they had imposed on tribal people. In Louise Erdrich’s writing, characters often embody the public stereotypes they are expected to present; while on the reservation, they return to all that is messy, complicated, mundane, and beautiful in real Ojibwe life. Nector Kashpaw, one of Erdrich’s central characters in *Love Medicine*, is hired to “play Indian” on the big screen. His primary role? Falling backward off a horse after being shot by some heroic cowboy. Nector tells the reader that “death was the extent of Indian acting in the movie theater” (*Love Medicine* 89-90). The irony, of course, is that Nector Kashpaw *is* Indian, but rather than offer an authentic portrayal of tribal people, studio executives hired him and other Native Americans to act out stereotypes for largely white audiences.

Just as many of the tribal performers did a century before her, Louise Erdrich has sought to preserve her Ojibwe heritage through her craft. Erdrich is also keenly aware of the role subversion and subterfuge have played in US dealings with Ojibwe people as well as in Ojibwe culture, and as a result, *Tracks*, *The Last Report of the Miracles at Little No Horse*, and *Four Souls* all feature at least one main character whose way of life, even whose survival, depends on disguise and deception. In fact, throughout Erdrich's Little No Horse timeline, there are three recurring characters who seek to conceal some part of their true natures in order to fit in with their cultural surroundings. Fleur Pillager (*Four Souls*), Pauline Puyat (*Sister Leopolda*), and Agnes DeWitt (*Father Damien Modeste*) move around in tribal and white society when necessary; and in this way, they help Erdrich illuminate the complex modern relationship between two very different worlds that necessitate the secrecy of subterfuge. In fact, each character creates a completely separate identity in order to hide something about themselves.

Fleur Pillager is Erdrich's most enigmatic character. She moves in and out of Erdrich's narratives seamlessly, whether she functions as a central character or just a wisp in the corner of the reader's mind. Her presence in novels such as *The Beet Queen* and *Love Medicine* is ghost-like, but impactful nonetheless. This ability to approach on silent feet and leave just as quietly is valuable among many tribal people, and Fleur functions as Erdrich's quintessential Native character. She is powerful, mystical, loyal to tradition, and quite possibly, not entirely human. Most importantly, however, she is a master of subterfuge and subversion.

Readers of *Tracks* are well-acquainted with Fleur's power by the time they get to Nanapush and Polly Elizabeth Gheen's patchwork narratives of Fleur's time in Minneapolis. Her final act before heading off the reservation toward Minneapolis is punishing John James Mauser's men for cutting down the trees on her land. Leaving a scene of death and destruction behind her, and with all her possessions and the bones of her youngest child piled in an old cart, she sets out to kill Mauser himself. In order to do so, however, she has to be an expert at the long con, by first being accepted into Mauser's house and then into his family. Fortunately for Fleur, she has hustled white people before and knows exactly how to do it.

Although Nanapush and Father Damien have mostly speculated at the details of Fleur's journey to Minneapolis through the casual conversations they have in her absence, they are convinced she followed her trees as they were transported away from her land. She later confirms their suspicions when she returns to Little No Horse years later. The most significant moment in her journey comes one night when she stops to rest under a tree while snow falls around her. Here, she buries her baby's bones in a traditional Ojibwe death ritual and takes her mother's secret name, *Four Souls* (*Four Souls 2*).

Throughout Louise Erdrich's Little No Horse novels, readers learn that speaking the names of the dead calls them back and writing one's name causes it to lose its power. Nanapush explains the power of names in his narrative of Fleur's family history:

There are names that go on through the generations with calm persistence. Names that heal a person just for taking them, and names that destroy. Names that travel, names that bring you home, names you only mutter in the deep water of your sleep. Names that bring memory of painful attachments and names lost to time and the reckonings of chance. Names are throwaway treasures. Names hold the sweetness of youth, bring back faces and unsettling resemblances. Names acquire their own life and drag the person on their own path for their own reasons, which we can't know. There are names that gutter out and die and then spring back, distinguished. Names that go on through time and trouble, names to hold on your tongue for luck. Names to fear. Such a name was Four Souls. (*Four Souls* 47)

In Fleur's case, taking her mother's secret name gives her an immense amount of power--so much, in fact, that it became stronger than Fleur herself. Nanapush tells the reader that Pillagers never did anything without a reason; and when Fleur took the name Four Souls, she did so thinking the name would build her up and protect her. The name, however, "was forceful, it was old, and it had its own intentions" (*Four Souls* 47).

In Fleur's case, her mother's name was almost a separate spiritual entity, one capable of controlling and humbling its user but also capable of saving its owner's life. Fleur's mother, Anaquot, literally had four souls she could send out in the form of a bird or an animal to gather knowledge when she knew she was meant to die. Nanapush tells the listener that everyone has an original essence "living under the

shadow of our daily lives" (*Four Souls* 57). For Fleur, *Four Souls* is that original, telling Fleur what to do. This is the reason that Fleur, bearing the name *Four Souls*, was too powerful to contain. When Fleur was born, she was given a secret name of her own in the spirit language because she was born with a spirit face over her own, and that name could not be spoken. It is possible that Fleur did not know the name herself, and that is why she chose her mother's, but in so doing she brought all the good and bad of the original owner with it. The success of her murderous plan in the house of John James Mauser, however, requires the power and secrecy of the name.

By the time Fleur gets to Minneapolis, she is no longer the Fleur Pillager readers knew in *Tracks*. "Fleur Pillager" is now the double identity, rather than the original. She hides her power and her dedication to Ojibwe tradition. Fleur must keep up the pretense that she is uneducated, unintelligent, and uncivilized in order to fool Mauser and his sister-in-law into trusting her. According to Polly Elizabeth Gheen, she is a "sorry-looking piece of flotsam" (*Four Souls* 12) in her ragged dress and stolen boots as she stood dripping on the expensive Persian rug. Polly Elizabeth's tone as she describes the Indian standing before her is one full of pity and condescension. Nanapush has already given readers enough information about Fleur to know that if anyone needs to be pitied, it is most certainly *not* Fleur Pillager; but looking pitiful gets Fleur in the door of the mansion, which is the first step in the plan to destroy the man who took her trees.

Polly Elizabeth's retrospective of her first meeting with Fleur leaves the reader with the impression that the Gheen sisters are self-righteous, spoiled, and snobbish people; so it is easy to feel contempt for them and root for Fleur, who would, "come into the house, and before a day was over...would unbow her shoulders and stand up straight" (*Four Souls* 13). This admission is the reader's first notion that Fleur is not who Polly Elizabeth thinks she is; and while Fleur never truly is the person Polly Elizabeth thinks she is on that first day, Fleur becomes something completely foreign to everyone, even herself.

Under deep cover as one of Polly Elizabeth's house staff, Fleur is able to learn all the inner workings of the great house, from everyone's comings and goings to which floorboards creak. She is quiet and hardworking, so Polly Elizabeth has no reason to complain or be concerned that Fleur may be dangerous until she watches Fleur tend to Mauser in the throes of a seizure. Polly Elizabeth prides herself on the level of care and attention she gives to her brother-in-law in his ill health, but the truth is she relishes the drama of Mauser's fits and enjoys being privy to his most private afflictions. As a reporter of facts, Polly Elizabeth is fairly reliable; but readers can clearly see her motives are not entirely above-board. When she arrives to the scene of Mauser's violent seizure, she is shocked to find Fleur working out the contortions of his muscles and calming his mind in so skillful a manner that there is no way she is as simple-minded as Polly Elizabeth first believed. At this point, she realizes she has been hoaxed, but there is no way she can ask Fleur to leave the

house with good help so hard to find, so she simply watches as Fleur cures Mauser of his ailments methodically and through traditional Ojibwe medicine.

Once Mauser can stand on his own, the direction of the house changes. He begins to take control of the day-to-day activity. Polly Elizabeth does not tell the reader how she feels about this, other than to say he moves things and does not put them back. Nanapush, however, tells us the general feeling from the Gheen sisters was that “It had been much easier for everyone, of course, when he was a paralyzed lump” (*Four Souls* 25). It certainly would have been easier for Fleur to murder Mauser in his invalid state, but it would be so much more satisfying to torture and kill him when he is healthy. She refused to let his disability do the torturing for her. By the time Mauser was ripe for killing, though, Fleur was forced to reconsider. As Fleur held the knife to Mauser’s throat, she whispers viciously into his ear:

“When I walk through your hallway I walk through myself. When I touch the walls of your house I touch my own face. You know me...I’m going to slice you open and take out your guts and hang them on the walls. Then I’m going back home to live on the land you took.” (*Four Souls* 45)

Mauser’s only way out is to tell Fleur what he had been keeping a secret for weeks: he wants to marry her and give her all of his possessions. When she hears this information, she lowers the knife but not because her resolve has failed her. She knows exactly what she is doing by letting Mauser live. As his wife, Fleur will drain his life slowly, methodically until he is in ruin. Within a year, the two are married, and before long, Mauser is destitute. He is forced to leave the country to

escape his creditors, but Fleur does not leave with him. She does exactly as she promised in the moment of Mauser's greatest terror: she goes back home to live in the woods.

Living only in her second identity, being away from her home and traditions, took a dangerous toll on Fleur. By the time she returns to Little No Horse, wearing her expensive white suit, driving an expensive white Pierce-Arrow, and toting a son behind her, the facade of Fleur has replaced Four Souls. She could not get back her trees; Mauser had destroyed them all, but she wanted some kind of justice for her loss. She did not love Mauser. She did not love anything in the world but her daughter Lulu, whom she sent away to the Catholic boarding school and who refused to call Fleur mother, and the tiny pile of bones she buried under the tree the night before she wandered into Minneapolis. The son she bore Mauser was the justice she craved, but Nanapush warns the listener that it is wrong to bear a child "for any reason but to surrender your body to life," and Fleur and her son suffered for her greed through their dependence on alcohol (*Four Souls* 72).

Another consequence of Fleur's devotion to her disguise was her acquired desire for what Erdrich calls "*chimoookomaanag* doings," which refers to anything particular to the white man. Fleur became fascinated with Minneapolis high-society, and she learned to move in the circles of the upper crust effortlessly. Once she married Mauser, she began to wear expensive clothes and eat gourmet food at society parties. Even after she returns to Little No Horse, she admits to Nanapush that she misses the food. There are consequences for Fleur's departure from her

Ojibwe traditions, though. The Fleur Pillager of Minneapolis, like the whiskey upon which she has become dependent, is addictive, and the Fleur Pillager of Little No Horse further disappears under the gilded lifestyle she begins to crave.

By the time Fleur makes it back to Little No Horse, she is nearly unrecognizable. Nanapush claims, “She came back so rich that we didn’t know, at first, whether the slim woman in the white car, and the whiter suit fitted to the lean contours of her body, was the ghost of the girl we knew or Fleur herself” (*Four Souls* 182). The signs of her alcoholism were starting to show on her once beautiful face, and Margaret notices Fleur never calls her son anything other than “My Son,” meaning Fleur has not given him a spirit name, a grave violation of tradition. Although Fleur claims there was no way to give him a spirit name in the city with no one to dream one for him or introduce his spirit to the name, Margaret refuses to allow that excuse. Fleur, with all her power, had the ability, Margaret claims; it is at that point Fleur begins to show signs of shame (*Four Souls* 200-01).

Killing the persona Fleur has been presenting for years is no easy task; but for her to return truly to her land, her people, and her name, she must atone for neglecting her ancestors’ spirits and cleanse herself of all *chimookomaanag* trappings and habits. Margaret, who has always treated Fleur as her own daughter, takes on the responsibility of Fleur’s detoxification. She strips Fleur of her white lady stockings and her expensive white suit and bathes her in white cedar water to purify Fleur’s body. As she works over Fleur, Margaret sings Four Souls’ song to her. Once cleansed, Fleur puts on Margaret’s sacred medicine dress and follows

Margaret to a rock at the side of Lake Matchimanito to fast for eight days and eight nights. Only then will Fleur Pillager of Minneapolis die so Fleur Pillager of Little No Horse--Four Souls--can return to her land to live in harmony with Nature and her ancestors' spirits (*Four Souls* 202-07).

As Fleur's story unfolds in Minneapolis, Pauline Puyat's story unfolds at Little No Horse. Pauline, mainly as Sister Leopolda, appears throughout many of Erdrich's narratives as well. She functions as a foil to Fleur. She is none of the things Fleur is, except for possibly not being entirely human. Pauline is ugly, dull, annoying, disdainful of her traditional Ojibwe heritage, and once she becomes Sister Leopolda, she is sadistic and cruel. The one thing trait she has in common with Fleur is exceptional intelligence. Pauline realizes that to be Indian in America in the early years of the twentieth century is to be forever disadvantaged. Because she is mixedblood, she hopes to use a double identity in an attempt to subvert her Indianness, but her real ruse is the one she perpetrates for the sake of sainthood (McCafferty 741).

Pauline first appears in the Little No Horse narrative in the summer of 1913 as an adolescent. She tells a version of Fleur's story separate from Nanapush's, but because she wants to suppress her Indianness in favor of aligning herself with the Catholic colonizers in the area, she cannot be trusted, according to Nanapush. In line with D.H. Lawrence's assessment of American culture, however, Pauline is fascinated by Fleur's traditionalism and seeks to be close to her while at the same time being repulsed by her. Pauline is the descendant of Chippewa women and

French-Canadian and Polish men. Using the government's formula for determining blood quantum, she would only be a quarter Chippewa; but because she was brought up on the reservation and taught a traditional way of life, she was considered Chippewa. Pauline admits to her audience that she was lighter-skinned than her sisters, which is a point of pride for her. She wants to be like her mother, who "showed her half-white" or her grandfather who was pure Canadian (*Tracks* 14). Pauline's ability to pass as white gave her an arrogance that eventually turns to cruelty when she finally assumes her second identity, Sister Leopolda. It also gave her opportunities within white culture that other Ojibwe did not have.

In the years leading up to her transformation into Leopolda, Pauline teeters on the border between traditional Ojibwe and white cultures. While she chooses to leave the reservation and travel to Argus to learn lace-making from the nuns there, she never stops dreaming in Ojibwe. She eventually returns to Little No Horse and continues to participate in Ojibwe rituals, speak the Ojibwe language, and share Ojibwe stories. She resents the expectation that she behave like an Indian, and as a way of thumbing her nose at her upbringing, she begins a working relationship with Bernadette Morrissey, whose reputation on the reservation is an undesirable one. The Morrisseys are mixedbloods who have lost their connection to the land and the Ojibwe side of their heritage. They adopt modern white ways of living and seem to care most about the luxuries they can buy with white people's money, which they obtain by selling their tribal allotments and engaging in various other shady business deals. Pauline's association with the Morrisseys prevents her from being

accepted into the community, which is a terrible punishment for an Ojibwe person. Exclusion from the community causes a loss of personal identity and loss of direction, both of which take their toll on Pauline.

From Bernadette Morrissey, Pauline learns elements of the mortuary profession, or Wa'Bano, the medicine path of death and disease (McCafferty 740). Through her experiences tending to the dying and the dead, Pauline develops the strange morbidity and a zealous religious fervor that eventually becomes the center of her second identity. Nanapush describes Pauline as "the crow of the reservation" who "lived off our scraps" (*Tracks* 54) and claims she has eyes "so like a scavenger, a bird that lands only for its purpose" (*Tracks* 189). Eventually, Pauline begins to participate in the death watch; she is there when last words are spoken. These words are the scraps Nanapush mentions, and Pauline does relish in the fact that she has access to such intimate moments, but her presence at a person's most vulnerable time holds a deeper importance. McCafferty equates Pauline's participation in death rituals with the characteristics of an evil shaman, more specifically the *windigo* (743). To be *windigo* is to have gone insane from communing with the cannibal spirits. Acting as a sort of confessor for the dying, Pauline consumes the heaviest stories, a cannibal act of sorts. Though Pauline draws strength from "eating" the last words of the dying, this practice ultimately takes a terrible physical toll on her while at the same time legitimizing her role in the community.

The first major turning point in Pauline's eventual conversion into fanaticism comes late one night when, already sleep deprived, she experiences her first solo death watch. Alone in the room with the dying Mary Pepewas, Pauline envisions Mary as a boat, drifting from the shore but moored loosely by a frayed rope. She believes she can pull Mary back to the shore, but it is clear Mary wants to go, so Pauline raises her fingers into the air between them like scissors and made a cutting motion, symbolically severing Mary's tie to the living world. At that moment, Mary drifts peacefully into death, and Pauline feels such profound relief that she is able to sleep from that point forward, and a new iteration of Pauline is born. She becomes the Merciful Scavenger, or in Catholic lore, the Angel of Death (*Tracks* 66-69).

Pauline's association with the Morrissey family has dire consequences for several people. First, she uses love medicine on Fleur's husband Eli, causing him to have a sexual encounter with Bernadette's daughter Sophie. Then, she begins a not-quite-consensual sexual relationship with Napoleon Morrissey, who fathers her child somewhere around the time Pauline experiences a religious epiphany in the presence of Father Damien's Virgin Mary statue. She claims the statue wept in her presence. Believing she has witnessed a miracle, Pauline immediately gives herself over to God, not realizing that she is in the very early stages of pregnancy (*Tracks* 94).

As her pregnancy advances, Pauline makes a concerted effort to cause a miscarriage by ramming the handle of an axe into her abdomen until she is bruised. Although Bernadette catches her and convinces her to carry the child to term and

leave the baby with her, Pauline continues to think of ways to kill the fetus because the baby is an affront to the identity Pauline wishes to assume permanently. When her labor finally begins, Pauline resolves to do everything in her power to prevent the baby from being born in order to kill herself and the child. This is her last act as the Angel of Death, but she is unsuccessful. Bernadette, knowing Pauline's plan, ties her to the bed rails and pulls the baby out with forceps she fashioned from two kitchen spoons. Naturally, the spoons leave small bruises on the baby's temples, and Pauline claims they are the marks of Satan's thumbs. She refuses to nurse the child, whom Bernadette names Marie after the Virgin Mary. As soon as she is able to walk, Pauline, no longer capable of being the Merciful Scavenger, leaves Bernadette to raise her daughter and heads straight for the convent where she will adopt the persona she will maintain until her death: Sister Leopolda (*Tracks* 135-36).

As a novice in the convent, Pauline quickly established herself as one of the most devout among the sisters. She woke before them, knelt longer in prayer than they could, did the most work, and endured the most discomfort. Each time she suffered, she offered the suffering to the Lord until late one night, He appears to her as a corporeal manifestation sitting atop the stove near where Pauline slept. It is during one of these late-night visits that He tells her the truth of her birth: she was an orphan whose white parents died in grace, and that she "was not one speck of Indian, but wholly white" (*Tracks* 137).

It is difficult to doubt Pauline's sincerity in her devotion, but it is also well-documented on the reservation that she is a liar, so her descriptions of these

meetings with Jesus Christ ride a thin line between truth and embellishment. Her timely use of the visits from Jesus to get things she wants is an important clue. For instance, Pauline's first encounter with Him conveniently coincides with the news that the convent will accept no Indian girls, prompting her to share her true parentage with Mother Superior, who praises Pauline for her seriousness, humbleness, and devotion. Later, when asked whether the Lord speaks to her when she prays, she tells Mother Superior that He comes to her at night, but He does not stay long because of the bitter cold. This is one step too far, however, because Mother Superior recognizes Pauline's attempt to get more wood to stoke the fire at night and sets her to gathering sticks and dead wood in the freezing forest for a week as atonement for Pauline's impudence (*Tracks* 138).

Another important element of Pauline's visits with Christ is the mandate He gives her regarding the souls of the Indians at Little No Horse. Her instructions are to go among the Indians and listen to them. In doing so, she will gather intelligence on where His enemy is hiding and what his habits are. She must then defeat His enemy and gather more souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. Of course, Jesus is referring to Misshepesu, the Water Monster of Matchimanito, who inhabits the Indians' brains and hearts so completely that there is no room for Him. The problem, of course, is that someone very powerful stands between Pauline and the destruction of Misshepesu: Fleur Pillager. According to Pauline, Fleur is the one who "closed the door or swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply

had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge" (*Tracks* 139). As the Lord's spy, Pauline must figure out a way to stop Fleur from allowing the barrier between Misshepesu and the Ojibwe to open.

When Fleur's second child is ready to be born, Pauline is presented with an opportunity to ruin Fleur by using her love for her children against her. Fleur knows the baby is coming too fast and too soon for it to survive, so she sends Pauline to the lean-to where the medicinal herbs are dried and stored to fetch alder, which will stop the premature labor. Pauline claims she is so flustered by the chaos of the moment that she cannot remember what alder looks like, and she breaks nearly every jar of food in the shack in her search for it. By the time she finishes boiling the alder, the baby has come; and Fleur and the child are both on the verge of death. Angry and bitter at Pauline's uselessness, Fleur is able to drag herself to the place where Pauline sits praying and mocks her:

*Oh God who has seen fit to prove Thyself through the vessel of a woman,
through me, Oh God who bound my wrists, who tripped me, Lord and Author of
all Lies, hear Pauline (Tracks 158).*

Pauline can do nothing else in this moment but continue to pray as Fleur hurls a knife into the floor between Pauline's legs, pinning her down. Shortly after its birth, the baby dies; and Fleur is so weakened and distraught over the death of her child, she no longer stands in between Pauline and the Lake Monster. This battle for the souls of the Chippewa, Pauline believes, will make her the saint she longs to be, completing her conversion to what she believes is her true identity.

From her first exposure to Catholicism, Pauline is attracted to martyrdom and sainthood. She believes that her physical discomfort brings her closer to God and sanctification. She also believes her complete devotion to God, manifested through self-harm, serves as an example to the pagans on the reservation. She begins with simple acts like exposing her hands and feet to the dangerous winter temperatures while she works outside at the convent and wearing her shoes on the wrong feet to cause blisters. She then progresses to wearing burlap underwear because the chafing reminds her of Christ's suffering. She ceases to wash herself or her undergarments, causing those around her to become nauseated by her odor. When Nanapush torments her over these silly and pointless acts, she responds, "Suffering is a gift to God! I have given away everything I owned. All that I have left is my body's comfort and pleasure, and I give that last pearl to Him now" (*Tracks* 144). The final straw between Nanapush and Pauline, however, comes when she adopts the practice of allowing herself to use the restroom only twice a day, once when she wakes and once before bed. Nanapush, relishing the opportunity to break Pauline's resolve, offers her cup after cup of tea while he tells a long, extremely descriptive story about a girl's encounter with water. By the end of the story, Pauline's bladder is full to bursting; and she races from the house to relieve herself (*Tracks* 147-51).

Each of Pauline's acts of suffering builds her strength and faith in God and brings her closer to her showdown with Misshepeshu, and thus her final identity as Saint Leopolda, until her faith in Christ is tested beyond its bounds during a sweat

ritual Nanapush performs to heal Fleur. Even though Pauline's presence in the sweat lodge is a distraction, it is not the way of the Chippewa to banish guests, so she is allowed to stay. This decision is a mistake. As the ritual progresses, Pauline begins to insist she is there to convert them all to Christianity and "prove Christ's ways" (*Tracks* 190). Since Fleur's attention is directed inward, Nanapush and Margaret see no harm in letting Pauline demonstrate the power of Christ to them. Praying loudly in Latin, Pauline plunges her hands into the boiling mixture of herbs and medicines Nanapush prepared for the ritual, assuming Christ would prevent them from burning. It does not work; and as Pauline recovers from her debilitating burns in the convent, she experiences a crisis of faith. At this moment, she realizes God has "no foothold or sway in this land" (*Tracks* 192). She has made no progress in her mission to save souls for Him; no matter how hard she tries, she remains insignificant, a fact she refuses to accept. She tells the audience, "I knew there never was a martyr like me" (*Tracks* 192).

In a hallucinatory state, Pauline envisions that Christ has turned away from her out of weakness and frailty, unable to face the pagan god Misshepesu. She is the only one who can step forward and defeat this devil, thus becoming the savior of her Savior. Once she has taken this action, God would have no choice but to offer her sanctification. As her hands recover and she regains her strength, Pauline strategizes, and once she is well enough, she heads out on Matchimanito in Nanapush's leaky boat to confront Misshepesu. Despite the efforts of Father Damien and Nanapush to rescue her from the freezing water rising around her,

Pauline remains in the lake, challenging Misshepesu to show himself. The Kashpaws, the Morrisseys, and her fellow nuns come and go along the shore, curious at first, then uninterested. Pauline makes no headway in her quest, however, until Fleur Pillager appears. Clearly still not well after the death of her baby and the failed sweat ceremony, Fleur is gaunt and dark in her black clothing. Pauline sees her as the gatekeeper for Misshepesu; and as Fleur turns slowly toward Pauline, it is as if the gate opens. Suddenly, the boat begins to move quickly toward the shore, and Pauline sheds her heavy clothing in preparation for the battle ahead. Standing naked on the shore of the lake, she waits for the monster to drag himself from the waves. When he does, she attacks, eventually strangling him to death with her barbed rosary. Triumphant, Pauline looks down at the dead god to see that he has taken the form of Napoleon Morrissey. Of course, Pauline has actually committed murder; but she is completely convinced that she has conquered the god Misshepesu and claimed the souls he governed for God. Now that she has completed Christ's mission and achieved sanctification, Pauline is prepared to shed her identity once more. She becomes Sister Leopolda, cruel tormentor of young schoolgirls and manufacturer of false miracles (*Tracks* 197-203).

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse begins in 1996, nearly eight decades after Pauline becomes Sister Leopolda. Father Jude Miller has come to Little No Horse to gather evidence in favor of her upcoming sainthood, but since Leopolda has died, her legacy is left in the hands of Father Damien Modeste, who is certainly no fan of Leopolda but who also holds sinful secrets of his own.

Damien's own story begins in 1910 when he was actually Sister Cecilia, a nun who struggled to place her love and devotion to God above her love and devotion to Chopin, a relationship Erdrich imagines as intensely sexual. When her desire for Chopin's music becomes so overwhelming that she can no longer stay at the convent, she reassumes the identity given to her at birth: Agnes DeWitt. As Agnes, she wanders until she reaches the farmhouse of Berndt Vogel. Berndt quickly falls in love with her; and the two share a happy, passionate, relationship. The love affair is short-lived, however, and Berndt is killed by a murderous gang of bank robbers while he attempts to save Agnes from them. Agnes herself is shot in the head, an injury that would forever plague her with headaches and memory loss. She can no longer recall any of the music she so loved, and in what seems to be a merciful turn of events, she cannot remember Berndt.

Agnes is unsure what to do. She has no one and belongs nowhere. Her answer comes when seasonal floods wash away the farm and sweep her and her beloved piano down river toward Little No Horse. When she finally stumbles onto the riverbank, she realizes she is lost, geographically and spiritually. No one knows who she is, where she is, and she is not entirely sure how to explain it herself. Exhausted, she collapses in a small shack where she encounters a man she believes to be Christ. He feeds her and warms her before she continues her journey. Mangled debris from the town and farms surrounding it lay scattered along the riverbank as she wanders, disoriented, in search of some kind of sign. When she comes upon the drowned body of Father Damien Modeste, she takes the discovery

as divine intervention. The Indians at the reservation are expecting him, but they have never met him before and know nothing about him. She is a devout Catholic with convent experience, more than enough knowledge to pass as a priest. She honestly believes in that moment that God has given her the mission to minister to the Ojibwe at Little No Horse, and thus, Agnes DeWitt lives the rest of her life as a man, except in the most secret of times and places. J. James Iovannone points out that the grief Agnes has felt to this point is tied to her sexuality. She has lost Chopin; she has lost Berndt. When she sheds the “superficiality of the feminine, Agnes transfigures heterosexuality, as well as the grief linked directly to it” (Iovannone 58).

When the new Father Damien, arrives on the reservation, he immediately notices young Pauline’s presence. She laughs during communion and brings strange punishments on herself. Father Damien struggles with his vow of confidentiality as Pauline’s, later Leopolda’s, confessor, but he has amassed a large amount of discrediting evidence against her through his observations of her behavior and her own confessions. Knowing his own death is near, however, he must clear his own conscience by exposing Leopolda’s true nature. He must be very careful, however, because exposing Leopolda’s secrets could put his own secrets in danger. Louise Erdrich entwines Father Damien’s double identity with Leopolda’s, making their stories inextricable from each other for the duration of the book.

Early on, Pauline suspects Damien is not who he claims to be; and she is not the only one. Old Kashpaw, who picks Agnes up on the road and brings her to Little

No Horse in his wagon notices something “too womanly” about the priest. As part of her efforts to be more convincing as a priest, Agnes makes the following list:

Some Rules to Assist in My Transformation

1. *Make requests in the form of orders.*
2. *Give compliments in the form of concessions.*
3. *Ask questions in the form of statements.*
4. *Exercises to enhance the muscles of the neck?*
5. *Admire women’s handiwork with copious amazement.*
6. *Stride, swing arms, stop abruptly, stroke chin.*
7. *Sharpen razor daily.*
8. *Advance no explanations.*
9. *Accept no explanations.*
10. *Hum an occasional resolute march. (The Last Report 74)*

Agnes’ notes here offer insight into her observations of men in her past, including priests at the convent she left and her own lover Berndt. Her list focuses on both masculine social behaviors and physical details, but she can only truly adopt changes in the way she speaks and treats those around her. Iovannone notes that Agnes’ ability to identify masculine traits that will help her be more convincing in her role as a man proves that masculinity is a construction, not something a person receives at birth (59). The physical details can only ever be clever, well-timed tricks that she must practice and make into habitual routines. She cannot permanently acquire the permanent, biological traits of a male human being. In addition to taking

on the mannerisms of a man, she must cease any gestures that might remain of her life before the transformation. For instance, she must not walk with her eyes downcast anymore the way she did as a nun, nor can she use her hip as a brace for the things she carried. She must nod her head up and down now, rather than tipping it to the side when she listened to others, and she could no longer glance at herself in mirrors as she passed.

Each morning, Agnes transforms herself into Father Damien in a ritual that she defines as the “loss of Agnes” (*The Last Report* 76). Agnes only exists in the privacy of Damien’s chamber, at night under the bedclothes or in the bath. She begins to wonder about this loss and what it means for her own character. She sees herself as neither wholly Agnes nor wholly Damien, a situation which creates in her a crisis of identity.

Agnes does not speak for herself in the novel, and the only time she speaks as Father Damien is through the volumes of reports meant for the Vatican. Instead, Erdrich creates an omniscient narrator, who reveals the questions in Damien’s heart. Was he not endangering his own soul by perpetrating such an elaborate deception on those around him? Is it not shameful to steal the trust of people he is meant to save? These questions do not disturb Agnes, though, and her crisis of identity does not cause her as much grief as she expected. On the contrary, she feels satisfied that God would have sent her guilt if she had been intended to feel sorry for what she was doing. In the end, Damien resolves to miss Agnes as if she were a lost relative and continues creating himself as something separate from Agnes while

remaining remotely tethered to her the way a brother would be. Agnes wonders, as she transforms herself into Damien:

Between these two, where was the real self? It came to her that both Sister Cecilia and then Agnes were as heavily manufactured of gesture and pose as was Father Damien. And within this, what sifting of identity was she? What mote? What nothing? (*The Last Report* 76)

It may be tempting to view Agnes DeWitt or Sister Cecilia as more authentic “selves”; however, Erdrich makes the point that Damien is just as authentic by allowing Agnes to be satisfied that she is not violating God’s law and accepting Damien as a natural extension of her true self (Iovannone 60).

Despite the care and upkeep involved in Agnes’ transformation into Father Damien Modeste, Pauline remains suspicious. She seems to seek out opportunities to expose Damien’s secret, and her intuition that Damien is living a lie leads her to confess lies to him. For example, Pauline confesses her sexual relationship with Napoleon Morrissey; but rather than admit that most of their encounters were consensual, she claims Napoleon raped her, which led to the birth of her daughter. When Damien asks where the child is now, Pauline cannot answer at first. When asked again, however, she responds, “Dead, Father Damien. I did not touch it. Born dead!” (*The Last Report* 126). Of course this answer is also a lie, and readers who have encountered *Tracks* know the baby was christened Marie and grew up as a Morrissey. Pauline knows her lies are safe with Father Damien, though, because a liar cannot expose another liar without repercussions. After Pauline confesses,

Damien begins to usher her quickly out the door, but Pauline pretends to trip and reaches for Damien's chest as she falls. Agnes thinks quickly and sidesteps Pauline's grasp. Though she has carefully bound her breasts to flatten them, it would be obvious to Pauline that they were there had she been successful in her endeavor. The incident only strengthens Pauline's conviction that Damien is lying about his identity. Why would he not catch her if he were not trying to hide something? (*The Last Report* 126-27)

Shortly after this incident, Pauline is found at the altar, naked, raving, covered in mud, and with a severe infection beginning in the injuries to her hands. No one knows how she has ended up in this state, and she is certainly not giving any clues. In fact, she claims that she does not know herself, only that she has committed a terrible sin and must atone through a restitutorial fast. It is important to take note of this event because it becomes the first step in Pauline's journey to sainthood. She would become less and less insignificant afterward. The truth, of course, is that she ended up that way because she had murdered Napoleon Morrissey the night before thinking he was Misshepesu, and the injuries on her hands were caused by the barbed metal rosary she used to strangle him. Whether she has blocked out the memory or simply lied about what she has done is unclear at this moment, however. (*The Last Report* 127)

The day after she is found in such a state, Sister Hildegard finds Pauline in her room bent at the waist "in a kind of permanent V shape" (*The Last Report* 129). As the stiffening of Pauline's body gets worse and worse, word spreads on the

reservation that she is “seized by spirits” (*The Last Report* 129), and people begin to gather and bring their own sick and injured to the door of this obviously holy woman. The word “saint” is whispered in the crowds, and though Sister Hildegarde insists that Pauline is not going to die from her condition, the crowd has already decided they have their very own holy martyr. In the face of their own starvation, sickness, and loss, they created a saint out of a murderer suffering from tetanus.

Pauline is not only able to fool the Ojibwe Catholics on the reservation but also the other nuns who serve with her, day in and day out. Father Jude relates the testimony of Sister Dympna Evangelica, who claims that she witnessed an instance of stigmata Leopolda bestowed upon a postulant nun. This novice is in fact Pauline’s own daughter Marie, who had come to the convent to join the order and ended up unknowingly becoming a protégé to her own biological mother. Leopolda never lets on that she knows the girl and uses the benefit of her proximity to visit horrible tortures on Marie, whom Pauline believes from the beginning is the child of Satan.

Under the guise of purifying Marie of Satan’s influence, Leopolda is known to have poured scalding water on her back and threatened to “boil him from [her] mind if [she] made a peep” (*The Last Report* 138). Leopolda is also fond of beating Marie with an iron poker. The final time she does this, however, she does so following an argument where Marie lashes out against Leopolda’s cruelty. Just before knocking the girl unconscious, Leopolda stabs her with a fork, leaving puncture wounds on the palm of her hand. Sister Dympna enters the room just after this altercation while Marie is still unconscious, and Leopolda is able to convince her

that she has prayed for Marie to receive the holy stigmata. Again, Leopolda's holiness seems to be confirmed, although the truth about the torture of her daughter is far more sinister (*The Last Report* 136).

There are other "miracles" in Jude's file on Leopolda, some from Argus where she had been teaching and others on the reservation; but none detailed any kindness or compassionate act toward others. The more Jude listens to Father Damien, the more he doubts Leopolda's validity as a saint; and after an unsuccessful search for any evidence of her Christian love for others, Jude decides he cannot stand in her favor. Through her denial of traditional Chippewa culture and her complete embrace of all things Catholic, Pauline crafts a careful facade in order to bring her the positive attention she always craved and could never garner from those around her. Erdrich is not one for allowing characters who deny their Native heritage to get away with it, though. Eventually, Pauline Puyat is laid bare for what Nanapush warned his audience she always was: a liar.

Father Damien is always aware of Leopolda's lies; but given the fact he is hiding his own true identity, it is not difficult to see why he allows Leopolda to continue to perpetrate her ruse on the community. There is no way to condemn her falsehood without condemning his own. The difference, of course, is that Agnes DeWitt, as Father Damien, does do good work on the reservation. He has an especially meaningful impact on Mary Kashpaw, the autistic woman who works at the convent. Mary does not speak, so it is through her actions that readers can see

the bond between them deepening. Mary also acts as a sort of ersatz confessor, not for Father Damien, but for Agnes.

There are two significant moments in the relationship between Mary and Agnes that show Erdrich's unconditional support for her character's double identity. In both instances, the fact that Mary knows Damien's truth is crucial to unravelling Erdrich's use of transgendered performance. Throughout the novel, Erdrich effortlessly shifts between Agnes DeWitt and Father Damien; but instead of causing confusion in the reader, these shifts become attached to certain moments where the character slips in and out of her double identities. For instance, any time Father Damien is concerned for the safety of his ruse, Erdrich calls him Agnes. It is not the alter-ego who is concerned, after all; it is the woman behind it. In interactions with Father Jude, the nuns, or any of the Ojibwe people, Erdrich uses "Father Damien." When Father Damien retires to his chambers, he becomes Agnes; but he is never Agnes outside of the privacy of his own room.

Although there are several times in the first half of the novel in which Erdrich mentions Damien's feminine mannerisms or the possibility that Leopolda knows the truth about him, the first true test of Agnes' double identity comes when Father Gregory Wekkle is sent to the reservation to train under Father Damien in the early 1920s. Agnes panics at first, unsure of how she will be able to share quarters with a man without giving her true identity away, but she has no choice; and when Father Gregory arrives, it is clear from the beginning that Agnes will fail in her attempts to maintain Father Damien's persona. There is something very sweet and attractive

about Father Gregory, but Agnes underestimates his intelligence and misjudges the sway Gregory will eventually hold over her.

Erdich makes a point of belaboring the transition between Agnes and Damien during the time Father Gregory is at the convent. This point is clearly an attempt to show the reader how difficult it is for Agnes to turn off her feminine side and adopt the “stern and kindly formality of Father Damien” (*The Last Report* 194). Unlike Fleur, who unwillingly gives herself over to her persona, or Pauline, who dedicates her life to hers, Agnes never really completely gives into Damien. Perhaps it is her daily transformation routine that serves as a reminder that she is a biological woman or the fact that her mind never truly understands what it is to be a man. Either way, Agnes and Damien never truly fuse into one person, though her affair with Gregory Wekkle brings her to a tipping point between the two.

It is clear from their first meeting that Agnes and Gregory are on a trajectory that would lead them into a sexual relationship; but by the time Gregory comes to Little No Horse, Agnes has become well-practiced as Father Damien. She believes in her mission to save the souls of the pagans on the reservation and to perform works of faith as their priest. When Gregory receives his new assignment from the bishop, it is because Father Damien, not Agnes, requests that he be transferred to another parish. Well aware that he can no longer pursue the life of a priest after his affair with Agnes, Gregory begs her to leave the Church with him, to be married and have children and be happy; but she refuses. When Gregory reminds her that she is a woman, Agnes simply replies, “I am a priest...I am nothing but a priest” (*The Last*

Report 206-207). She knows this assertion is not true, though. For the weeks immediately following Gregory's departure, Agnes suffers in silence as Father Damien's masses become duller and duller. She cannot sleep or eat, and she is completely distracted by thoughts of her time with her lover. Again, Iovannone's point is relevant: all the grief Agnes experiences is tied to her sexuality. This time, however, there is no new identity for Agnes to adopt in order to escape the pain, so she sinks deeper and deeper into her despondency.

Throughout this ordeal, Mary Kashpaw sits quietly outside Father Damien's door or sleeps in a nearby sleigh, listening to the thrashing and the crying from within the cabin. Though Mary never really shows any sign of understanding the truth about her beloved priest, it is clear that something draws her. When Agnes attempts suicide by drinking a cocktail of various pharmaceuticals and chemicals she finds in the convent, it is Mary who sits watch the entire month Father Damien is comatose. Each day, Sister Hildegard visits, not understanding why the priest was in such a deep sleep for so long, but Mary Kashpaw never leaves.

Erdrich explains Mary's devotion to Father Damien during his coma as a way of guiding him through the spirit world, where he was wandering during his deep sleep. She serves as a sort of anchor for him to prevent his being lost on one of the many pathways in these dreams within dreams. It is also during her vigil that she realizes, to the extent that she is able, that Father Damien is not like other white men. He does not grow whiskers. Whether she realizes the complexity of her discovery is not completely clear; but from the moment Mary realizes this anomaly,

she begins to shave Father Damien's face every morning, just as Sister Hildegarde shows up (*The Last Report* 212). In this act, Mary becomes complicit in the ruse, and it is Mary Kashpaw who appears in Damien's dream to bring him back to consciousness. When Father Damien awakens, he finds that Agnes has faded even further from him, and he has a renewed devotion to his calling as a priest.

Mary Kashpaw remains a link between Agnes and Damien until Damien's death in 1996. Damien has come to the end of his life, but his Catholic faith has blended so completely with Ojibwe traditionalism that he chooses to end his own life on his own terms, rather than wait for God to take him. Throughout the final moments, Erdrich revives Agnes. She is the one who rows out to Spirit Island and gets drunk on wine; she is the one who hacks holes in the bottom of the rowboat so it will sink with her in it; she is the one who suffers a deadly stroke just as she loses her nerve to drown herself in Matchimanito. When Mary Kashpaw finds her body the next day, though, it is Father Damien she poses and dresses; it is Father Damien she tows out to the perfect spot in the lake; it is Father Damien she weighs down with rocks; and it is Father Damien whose body "wavered for a time between the surface, and the feminine depth below" (*The Last Report* 351). Erdrich's choice of words to end her novel, and Father Damien's life, are especially fitting. Father Damien was the surface persona in life, while Agnes always lay in that "feminine depth;" and the fact that the body wavered between the two for some time is reflective of the constant struggle Agnes and Father Damien had with each other

over which identity would eventually win. While in life, Father Damien edged out Agnes, it is ultimately Agnes who triumphs in death.

In each of the characters' narratives examined here, there is a clear message from Erdrich: to remain true to oneself and one's community is to survive. Fleur Pillager learned this lesson the hard way. Because her desire for revenge is so strong and the subterfuge she adopts to exact that revenge is so complete, Fleur nearly loses everything in the process. It is not until she returns to her people and her land that she is cured of her alcoholism and finds peace in Ojibwe traditionalism. For Pauline, her departure from traditionalism is a foregone conclusion. She is a social exile all her life; any attempts at finding a place in the Ojibwe community fail, and even the Catholic community never quite accepts her. In death, she is exposed as a fraud, her legacy proven to be nothing more than a series of dumb luck, lies, and elaborate hoaxes. In removing herself from her Ojibwe heritage and remaining disdainful of her people, she brings this disgrace on herself. Finally, Agnes DeWitt, in adopting the persona of Father Damien Modeste, is able to shed her grief and find peace in the Ojibwe way of life. Once Father Damien begins to incorporate traditional rituals into his Catholic masses, the internal conflict between Agnes and Damien fades, leaving only contentment. When Father Damien dies and is reunited with Agnes in Lake Matchimanito, it is as an Ojibwe, not a Catholic priest. Clearly, Erdrich favors those who favor the Ojibwe, and any subversion of their traditional way of life is met with potentially dire consequences.

CHAPTER V
CHRISTIANITY, CAPITALISM, AND COLONIALISM:
SURVIVANCE AFTER CONTACT

As winter approached, Nanabozho the hare decided he should travel with a pack of wolves as they hunted. This way, he would be able to bring food home for himself and for his grandmother Nokomis. Maybe, because the wolves were such good hunters, he would not even have to do much of his own hunting. The wolves did not want Nanabozho to travel with them because they knew he was lazy, and they did not want him to know where they hide their food; but Nanabozho, always good with words, persuaded them to let him come along as a brother to them.

In the course of their hunt, Nanabozho and the wolves had many disagreements. Eventually, things got so bad that the wolves expelled Nanabozho from the pack. Before he left, Nanabozho asked for a wolf brother to come with him to help him hunt and be his protection. The pack agreed, sending with him their youngest member.

All winter Nanabozho and his little wolf brother hunted. They were incredibly successful as a team, but the little wolf brother did most of the killing. The pair began killing so many animals, however, that the underwater manitos became angry that they were using up so many resources needlessly. Micipijiu and his guarding manitos plotted to capture and kill the little wolf brother to prevent the inevitable shortage of food he would cause. Nanabozho saw this plan in a dream;

and although he warned the little wolf brother not to cross any bodies of water for any reason whatsoever, the little wolf brother did not listen. While crossing the lake to get home one day, the little wolf brother fell through the ice and drowned.

Angry and grief-stricken at the loss of his companion, Nanabozho vowed revenge on the underwater manitos, especially Micipijiu, the leader. After consulting with a wise bird, Nanabozho was able to find the hiding place of his enemy. In preparation for his revenge, he disguised himself as a stump and waited for the manitos to surface. Creatures of the earth know every rock, tree, and grain of sand, so when the manitos saw the strange stump, they suspected it was actually Nanabozho. Holding perfectly still as the bear clawed at him and a serpent coiled around and squeezed him, Nanabozho waited for them to be satisfied and wander off to sleep so he could kill them all. In his haste to carry out the murders, Nanabozho completely forgot the bird's instructions to shoot the manitos' shadows, where their travelling souls lived. Instead, he shot them through the body, which only wounded them. They all crawled back into the water to wait for healing.

On his way back home, Nanabozho came across an old woman toad, the grandmother of all the water manitos. He hid as she moved slowly down the path, carrying supplies and singing her medicine songs. She was on her way to cure the manitos. Nanabozho listened carefully and learned her medicine songs. Once he knew them, he killed the old woman toad, wrapped himself up in her skin, and went the rest of the way to the underwater home of the wounded manitos. Once there, he killed the ones responsible for the death of the little wolf brother. Death for a

manito is only temporary, however. Once they woke up, the manitos caused a great flood in order to drown Nanabozho for his bad behavior, but this plan failed because Nanabozho was clever enough to grab onto a floating log and survive. From this log, he orchestrated the rebuilding of the earth on the back of the turtle.

The story above, of course, can only be a variation of an original Ojibwe tale; but it contains the most foundational religious beliefs of the culture as well as highlights an important element of day-to-day life for the Ojibwe: hunting. Christopher Vecsey stresses the crucial nature of hunting for these people in his study on traditional Ojibwe religion:

Obtaining food by hunting represented the primary concern of the Ojibwa family, especially in winter when sources of nourishment were relatively limited. Ojibwa cultural continuities revolved around their hunting pursuits, for example, their use of deadfalls and snares, their family hunting grounds (developed in the historical period), and their reliance on animal bone divination and charms for luck in hunting. Their social relationships were colored by hunting concerns also. (10)

From this description, one can see that hunting is much more than the act of capturing and killing food. The mention of animal bone divination implies the importance of hunting in religious rituals as well. Europeans who spent time with the Ojibwe also noted that skill in hunting was a source of pride and accomplishment, even the seat of personal identity for some.

The use of the underwater manitos in the story is also important, particularly the mention of Micipijiu, whom Louise Erdrich refers to as Misshepeshu. In pottery, rock and wood paintings, and copper trinkets discovered in the ancestral home of the Ojibwe near Lake Superior, Micipijiu resembles a big cat, like a lynx or a mountain lion, both of which are common in the area. Micipijiu, however, also has great horns that wrap around his ears and sharp spines that stretch from his neck to the tip of his tail, which swishes and drags the ground as he walks.

In Ojibwe cosmology, the world is divided into three levels: the upper world where the Thunderers live, the middle world where humans and land animals live, and the water where Micipijiu rules over the monsters. Micipijiu is the most fearsome of all the manitos because he likes to steal children and drown people who have not met him in a dream state or anyone who has dreamed of the *Animikeeg* (Thunderers), his mortal enemies.

Victoria Brehm notes that the highest status originally went to the most feared manitos because they were uncontrollably powerful and evil, but to be good was to be “at most powerfully protective” (680). Anyone who seeks out Micipijiu in a dream can be imbued with special powers, both good and bad, but one of the most valuable powers available to a *pawagan* of Micipijiu is the ability to travel by water without being attacked.

Those who dream of the Thunderers receive the power to protect themselves from Micipijiu. Brehm mentions a fairly common story variation called “Now Great-Lynx” that demonstrates how these powers work (685). A version of this story, in

both Ojibwe and English, can be found in *Ojibwe Texts, Volume VII, Part II* by Dr. William Jones. Dr. Jones collected volumes of stories from Ojibwe people who lived in the Great Lakes region at the turn of the twentieth century. “Now Great-Lynx” came to him as part of a series of stories gathered at Fort William and narrated by an Ojibwe named Penesi.

In this story, two women were paddling a boat over a body of water when suddenly a swift current rose up. Out of the water came the giant tail of a Great-Lynx, and the frightened women knew he would sink the canoe. One woman remembered that the Thunderers had given her the power of their war club as a reward for her devout and dutiful fasting as a child. She swung the canoe’s paddle at the Great-Lynx’s tail and broke it in two. In Brehm’s version of the story, the broken piece of tail falls into the canoe as a solid lump of copper, which holds powerful medicine (685), but Jones records no such detail (259). In almost every recorded version of this story, however, Micipijiu steals and kills a child from the tribe as revenge for his broken tail.

In both the story of Nanabozho and Micipijiu and “Now Great-Lynx,” there is a delicate balance between the three zones of the world, or at least between the upper and lower zones. The zone where humans and animals live seems to be the middle ground on which the balance beam rests or tilts. When Nanabozho and the little wolf brother were indiscriminately hunting and killing off animals, Micipijiu steps in to prevent a food shortage. When Micipijiu attacks innocent women, the Thunderers step in to save them, but only by way of a woman who has dreamed of

them and fasted regularly. Here lies the limits of the Thunderers' power. The Thunderers can only help people who meet them in a dream, while Micipijiu had the power to attack and kill anyone who had *not* met him in a dream, which is a considerably larger number.

Such was the religion of the Ojibwe until the seventeenth century when the over-trapping of beavers in the east forced French fur traders into the Great Lakes region. With them came not only disease and death, but also firearms, modern cooking implements, farming, capitalism, and Christianity.

Because Erdrich focuses solely on the influence of Catholicism at Little No Horse, it is unnecessary to include an in-depth discussion of Protestant missions to the area here, but it is worth mentioning that over the past two centuries, there have been many, covering a wide range of denominations. None, however, were quite as successful as those sent by the Catholic Church. The first wave of Christian contact for the Ojibwe people came in the early part of the sixteenth century when a group of Franciscan and Jesuit priests visited the area. They were quickly deported by the British Crown, though. Once France regained control of Canada in 1632, the French monarchy granted the Jesuits exclusive control of missionary work in the area, which lasted for a little over a century until the papacy disbanded the Jesuit order in 1773. Vestiges of the order remained in the Great Lakes region through the turn of the 19th Century as the second wave of Catholic missions began (Vecsey 26-27).

By the time *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* begins in 1910, a third wave of Catholic missions had been in the area for about three decades.

Unlike the Jesuits who had “approached the Ojibwa and other Indians with a greater degree of cultural relativity” (Vecsey 40), the Benedictines who settled in the area around 1880 worked under the specific missions of civilization and conversion. Protestant missions shared these objectives in their own work. The result was a concerted, and often aggressive, effort to make Ojibwa people as white as possible. Perhaps the outward expression of their DNA was unchangeable, but it was possible, through the schools they built with the help of government subsidies and contracts, to teach them how to dress, read, garden, speak, and in all ways behave like white people. Furthermore, because the government paid the schools per enrolled Indian student, it was in the best interest of the mission to have as many students as possible. The government did not pay, however, unless the student stayed the whole year, which is one reason the schools were built so far from the students’ homes. Commissioners claimed the students must be removed from their Native culture in order to be assimilated faster. One Benedictine wrote that it was not a good idea to teach children on the reservation because “parents interfere too much and cause great irregularities” (Vecsey 42). One example of this attitude comes from a 1948 letter sent to Indian parents whose children were kept at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia regarding home visits during the Christmas holidays. The following excerpt outlines one of the rules for allowing children to come home:

It will be your privilege this year to have your children spend Christmas at home with you...This is a privilege which is being granted if you observe the

following regulations of the Indian Department...2. THE PARENTS MUST BRING THE CHILDREN BACK TO THE SCHOOL STRICTLY ON TIME. If the children are not returned to the School on time they will not be allowed to go home for Christmas next year...I ask you to observe the above regulations in order that this privilege of going home for Christmas may be continued from year to year... (Reneau)

Father Fergus O'Grady, Principal, used the word "privilege" three times in the letter in order to emphasize the gracious nature of the school's administration in allowing parents to spend the holiday with their children and to remind parents that privileges given may also be taken away.

Another reason the schools were built so far from reservations was to keep the students from going home for weekend or holiday visits and not coming back. The distance also made it less likely for Indian children to run away from school, or so the Church believed. Students did regularly escape and try to return to their families; but in most cases, they were caught and returned to school to face terrible punishments including physical, mental, and sexual abuse.

One of the most famous of these government boarding schools was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Carlisle was founded in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, the man famous for the 1892 speech containing the following passage:

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian

massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man (Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center).

At Carlisle, and many other government boarding schools, it was common practice to pay reward money to anyone who found and returned a runaway student. The public records available at the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center (CISDRC) contain chains of correspondence addressing this practice. One such conversation originated in 1915 with M.A. Davis, a special officer for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. In the initial letter addressed to J.D. Huff, Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Davis claims the following:

...my records shows that I have arrested eight run aways and have received payment for two, I have talked this matter over with my brother officers and they inform me that they have received three to five dollars for each and ever run-away Indian pupil they arrested, All I ask for is fair treatment and will welcome a letter from you stating where you stand on this matter (CISDRC).

O.H. Lipps, Superintendent, forwarded the letter to E.B. Merritt, Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, along with the following statement: "Since I have been in charge of Carlisle, I do not recall having paid any such fees" (CISDRC).

Merritt responded:

...with reference to run-a-way boys, you are advised that it is customary to pay reasonable fees or charges to persons or officials not connected with the Service for returning or apprehending run-a-way pupils (CISDRC).

While Louise Erdrich does not put the at-large boarding school issue at the center of *Tracks*, *Four Souls*, or *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, she does make multiple references to it. Nanapush, Nector, Marie, and Lulu are all products of government-funded parochial boarding schools. Lulu's experiences, however, are integral to the plot of both *Tracks* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* because they fuel Lulu's resentment of her mother and provide the rhetorical exigence for Nanapush's narratives. The story of Lulu's first escape ends in her being forced to wear "the punishment dress," which Lulu describes as being "shapeless and embarrassing" (*The Last Report* 250). Lulu is also made to scrub sidewalks on her hands and knees for days on end and kneel painfully on a broomstick for hours in chapel as penance. She does not stop breaking rules, however, because when Nanapush succeeds in having her returned to the reservation after an intense letter writing campaign, she is in a much worse state. He describes to Lulu her appearance on the day she returned:

Your braids were cut, your hair in a thick ragged bowl, and your dress was a shabby and smoldering orange, a shameful color like a half-doused flame, visible for miles, that any child who tried to run away from the boarding school was forced to wear. The dress was tight, too small, straining across your shoulders. Your knees were scabbed from the punishment of scrubbing long sidewalks and knobbed from kneeling hours on broomsticks (*Tracks* 226).

Erdrich's depiction of Lulu's experiences at the boarding school has solid foundations. There are hundreds of stories from Native Americans who endured similar treatment. Zitkala Sa wrote of having her braids cut off, a shameful state for a Sioux woman, and being punished for refusing to speak English. Luther Standing Bear recounted the day the Indian children in his class had to choose new white men's names. A 1910 article in the *Waterbury Republican* juxtaposed before and after pictures of "savage" Hopi boys as they entered the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and five years later as they emerged clean-cut and wearing suits under the headline "Savage Hopi Indians Are Transformed Into Model Students."

Because the United States government had funded the Church's efforts to assimilate and reform the Ojibwe through mission work and boarding schools, and perhaps because there had always been some measure of entanglement of Church and State, Ojibwe people also learned from the Benedictines the importance of and ways of accumulating private property. One of the few truly pan-Indian statements one can make is that Native Americans did not have the concept of private property. Tribal people lived in communal societies, so anything gathered, built, hunted, worked for, or grown was for the good of the community. The vague "Indian question," or more often "Indian problem," that so concerned the Catholic missionaries and the government could be solved if the Natives would simply be Christians; but in order to become Christians, they would have to "live in a European-type dwelling, perform European-type work (farming), and amass personal savings" (Vecsey 41).

This corporate style of religion also benefited business entities whose interests lay in the fur, timber, and fishing industries growing in the Great Lakes region. It was easy for a wealthy and shrewd business owner to fund a special religious mission in which Indians, who were often believed to be simple-minded or downright stupid, would be counseled by specially-selected clergy sympathetic to the business owner's interests to trap more, fish more, trade more, or sell their private property to corporations because God valued productive followers. Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa) of the Great Lakes Sioux reflected on this corporate style of religion in his text *From Deep Woods to Civilization*, calling Euro-American Christianity a "machine-made religion...supported by money, and more money...too many of the workers [are] after quantity rather than quality of religious experiences" (141). Eastman expounds further on this sentiment in *The Soul of the Indian*:

...the moneyed church was an unspiritual and unedifying thing, and it was not until his spirit was broken and his moral and physical constitution undermined by trade, conquest, and strong drink, that Christian missionaries obtained any real hold upon him (7).

The Morrissey and Lazarre families exemplify Eastman's sentiment. Although Nanapush and Fleur never considered either family "real" Indians, they nevertheless lived on the reservation, so Nanapush knew they must band together as the starving time came on and the taxes on their land grew higher and higher. Whiskey traders set up posts along the reservation borders, and Nanapush watched

as the Morrisseys and Lazarres fell into alcoholism and despondency. It is at this low point that Father Damien approaches Nanapush about stepping into a leadership position to keep alcohol off the reservations and to prevent the ever-growing Lazarre family from taking over the land left vacant by families who could no longer pay their taxes. Nanapush knows Damien is luring him into a trap, but he sees no other way to remedy the problem.

The blending of religious beliefs and the introduction of monetized religion in the Great Lakes region gave birth to a movement among the Ojibwe called Midewiwin, also called the Grand Medicine Society or the Grand Medicine Lodge. Arising sometime in the late eighteenth century or very early in the nineteenth century, Midewiwin was rooted in traditionalism but incorporated Christian elements where they made sense. For instance, practitioners worshipped a single Supreme Being while also showing devotion to the manitos. Ceremonies were markedly traditional in nature, using paraphernalia sacred to the Ojibwe, but they were performed by a hierarchical priesthood who stressed the relationship between one's morality and the quality of one's afterlife.

Stories involving Nanabozho still played a prominent role in Midewiwin ceremonies as well. The creation story was especially important, although it evolved over time to include many new, and often contradictory, details. Members also continued teaching hunting medicine, making tobacco offerings, sacrificing dogs to the old manitos, participating in sweat lodges, and holding ceremonial dances and feasts. The traditional practices of cultivating, gathering, and mixing medicinal

herbs was also important to the Midewiwin because practitioners believed that ill health was punishment for sin (Vecsey 177-82).

Eventually, the Christian God, Kitche Manito, overtook Nanabozho as the Supreme Being, but Nanabozho remained part of the culture as an intermediary between Kitche Manito and the people of the Mide. Over time as their exposure to Catholic religious and political influences increased, the Midewiwin adopted diligent, albeit primitive, record-keeping practices. Birchbark scrolls held doctrines, moral guides, descriptions of ceremonies, historical records of migrations, maps to heaven, and sacred scriptures (Vecsey 180). The Midewiwin were particularly fond of the Golden Rule, and many Mides incorporated it into their own literature and practices. Other Mides adopted the Christian symbol of the cross as a signifier for someone in the order who could communicate with Kitche Manito directly, like a Catholic priest.

Eventually, the Midewiwin organizational structure came to include a secret society made up of Mides whose members held the highest degrees of training. These master Mides operated in secret apart from the Ojibwe mainstream religious culture, which understandably caused suspicion and tension among people who were excluded from those ranks. Some “commoners” went so far as to accuse the priestly class of witchcraft because of their secrecy (Vecsey 182).

The introduction of capital wealth through the fur trade is partly to blame for the separation of the secret Mide society. Only those who could afford the high cost of instruction and initiation were admitted, which logically created a capitalistic

class system within the tribe. According to Victoria Brehm, initiation into the lowest order in the society was fairly affordable; after that, however, the “have-nots” were unable to afford promotions (691). In order to justify, and to some extent mitigate the high cost of instruction, the Mides charged fees for their medical and religious services. In addition, since people could buy their way into the Midewiwin, they no longer relied on visions to make contact with the manitos (691). One could still seek out visions, but failing in that endeavor was by no means the end of the road for anyone who had enough money to pay for the education and initiation process. The services offered by the Mide were often cost prohibitive for those Ojibwe who did not prosper from the fur trade, further widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Brehm mentions that during the late stages of the Midewiwin, some priests had become so wealthy by tending to private clients that they no longer had to work, which is quite a turn from the values traditional Ojibwe exhibited (691).

While Midewiwin did exhibit some traits resembling Christianity, it is important to remember that the sect formed as a means of maintaining the traditions of the Ojibwe people; therefore, Mides encouraged the Ojibwe to reject the missionaries’ Christian message. Vecsey quotes one Mide’s plea to his people as such:

Whereupon, my children, do not join the faith of those living men who are in black clothes and preach the Cross, but faithfully guard your household gods, as did your fathers, so that our tribe will not be scattered among other nations or utterly broken up or exterminated (187).

By the early nineteenth century, Midewiwin had largely supplanted the original religious system of the Ojibwe using the message that joining the Medicine Society was the only way for people to communicate with the manitos, but the creation of Midewiwin had another purpose: unifying the tribe. Before its inception, the Ojibwe lived in disparate clans represented by a totemic symbol. By bringing the Ojibwe together under a religion that stressed communal ceremonies and medicine, the tribe stood a better chance of preserving its traditions (Vecsey 177).

The outbreaks of smallpox and tuberculosis originating in the trading posts and spreading to the reservations also provided a fertile environment for the new Midewiwin religion to grow. Because the Ojibwe did not originally have the concept of sin, they equated physical health with morality. Morally good people were physically healthy, so when people got sick, it meant they had violated the moral code (Vecsey 78, 177). Nanapush and his family took food from the government agents in the starving time, but the consequences were dire. They grew weak and sick anyway, a condition Nanapush attributed to the spiritual disconnect between the Ojibwe and their sacred hunting practices. As winter fades into spring, and his family starts eating food they catch themselves, however, Nanapush tells Lulu, "...my bad dreams stopped. The nights were peaceful and black...We ate in the morning, at midday, after sundown" (*Tracks* 182).

Some totemic authority remained after Midewiwin became widely accepted, but only in places where clans did not come together for ceremonies (Vecsey 185). Erdrich's Pillager clan is a good example. As far back as anyone at Little No Horse

can remember, the Pillagers have lived on the fringes of Ojibwe society as outcasts. They still recognize the totemic authority of the bear, and they dare to communicate with the manitos directly, rather than through a Mide or Catholic intercessor. Even after most of the Pillagers have died off and Fleur is adopted into Nanapush's family, the stigma of isolationist behavior remains with Fleur.

Victoria Brehm claims the Pillagers are associated with ancient power and the "uncorrupted Mide," meaning they represent the original purpose of the Mide before its evolution into a for-hire institution (693). Fleur's "marriage" to Misshepeshu in *Tracks* is a way for Erdrich to make a strong statement about the future of American Indian culture, despite the encroachment of capitalism, Christianity, and the government. Brehm further argues that "the persistence of mythology is an indication of long-term cultural stability" (693). If Fleur is the embodiment of Ojibwe culture, then Erdrich's mention of her rumored immortality makes sense as a way to manifest the message that Native culture, too, is immortal. Fleur's immortality, however, is predicated on her partnership with Misshepeshu, who represents traditionalism. In other words, as long as the Ojibwe people are connected to their old ways, the tribe survives and thrives.

Just as Fleur Pillager is the representative of aboriginal Ojibwe religion, Pauline Puyat is Catholic Church's colonizing mission. Her desire is to stamp out all pagan influences on the reservation through the imposition of Christianity. From an early age, Pauline equates Catholicism with whiteness. To embrace Jesus Christ completely is to kill the Indian part of herself, allowing only the white half to

continue living. The first time Pauline speaks in chapter two of *Tracks*, she explains her desire to be like her mother, “who showed her half-white” or like her grandfather, “pure Canadian” (14). As a child she pestered her father into sending her to Argus where she could learn lace making from the nuns, but instead she spent her time working in a butcher shop for her aunt and uncle while sickness and death all but wiped out Little No Horse. Pauline could not find a foothold in the white world, however, and she explains a recurring dream in which her mother and sisters are “swaying in the branches, buried too high to reach, wrapped in lace [she] never hooked” (*Tracks* 15). Neither the dreamcatcher nor the crucifix she keeps near her at night prevent that dream and other similar visions from coming to her, and the mixed symbols of her Indian and white lives cause discomfort and confusion in her mind.

Pauline continues to waiver between devout Catholicism and traditionalism until the day her baby is born. While she had previously experienced a sort of epiphany in the presence of the Virgin Mary’s statue, Pauline continues to have sex with Napoleon Morrissey in secret, a flagrant violation of her Catholic beliefs. Despite her extreme behavior in the pursuit of sanctification, her devotion to God is not complete until Marie is born and she leaves for the convent. There, she claims, Christ came to her one evening to tell her she is not who she thinks she is. She is the orphaned child of parents who died in grace, meaning she could not be “one speck of Indian but wholly white” (*Tracks* 137). Furthermore, she had been called to serve God by going out among the Indians to find and vanquish what Christ called “a devil

in the land, a shadow in the water, and apparition that filled their sight” and kept Him from dwelling in their minds” (*Tracks* 137). In other words, Pauline’s mission was to seek out and destroy Misshepesu, and by extension, the Midewiwin. This vision completes the conversion of Pauline and Erdrich’s plan to have Pauline represent the aggressive colonial arm of the Catholic Church. From this point forward, Pauline would refer to the Ojibwe to whom she once belonged as *them*, never *us*.

The final showdown between Pauline and Misshepesu is the result of Pauline’s many delusions, most likely the fevered consequences of her continued self-torture. Her work as a missionary seems to be failing; and by the spring of 1919, she is experiencing a test of her faith, which leads her to doubt Christ’s power over Misshepesu. Instead of returning to her traditional Ojibwe faith, however, she takes on the role of savior; “New devils require new gods,” she tells her listener (*Tracks* 195). It is in this role of “new god” that Pauline, naked and hysterical, strangles Napoleon Morrissey with a rosary chain because she believes he is Misshepesu. After the murder, Pauline is sanctified; and Fleur leaves the reservation to wander in search of her trees.

While Pauline claims it is her miraculous act that banishes Misshepesu from Lake Matchimanito, it is Fleur’s exit that more likely sends him away. When Fleur leaves to find the man who took her trees, she takes with her the shamanic power of the Mide, signaling the end of traditionalism at Little No Horse and the triumph of

white colonization. In Nanapush's final narration in *Tracks*, he admits that in Fleur's absence, the Ojibwe had become:

A tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match (*Tracks* 225).

Nanapush gives into Damien's pressure to become a tribal chairman not only because he knew the whiskey traders must be stopped, but also because he could see no other way to bring Lulu home from the Catholic boarding school where Fleur had sent her to save her from the decimation of the tribe.

While Nanapush and Margaret work to resist assimilation on the reservation, and Fleur is away in Minneapolis losing her own sense of self in search of revenge, Father Damien Modeste undergoes a spiritual transition himself. About a year into his tenure at Little No Horse, Damien begins to show signs of reverse assimilation. Rather than solely converting Ojibwe people to Catholicism, Damien (as Agnes) begins to incorporate Ojibwe traditionalism into his own prayer rituals. Erdrich's anonymous narrator explains that each day Damien prayed "uneasily, for the conversion of Nanapush, then prayed for his own enlightenment in case converting Nanapush was a mistake" (*The Last Report* 182). The reader also learns that Agnes (as Damien), struggles with the influence of the Ojibwe language on her prayers. She prefers the Ojibwe word for praying, *anama'ay*, because it implies an upward motion; she also begins to include the directional spirits in what would normally be the Holy Trinity.

Erdrich's intention in creating the Damien/Agnes dichotomy here is to highlight the inner conflict in the character. Both Damien and Agnes are spiritual beings, but Damien adheres more strictly to the Euro-American Catholic model, whereas Agnes explores Ojibwe traditionalism. The use of both Damien and Agnes as interchangeable names for the priest's character allows readers to differentiate between the two identities. Throughout the novel, readers see the back and forth relationship Damien and Agnes have, but it is also important to note the inevitable reconciliation of the two either under one faith or some syncretic version of both Catholicism and Midewiwin.

Sheila Hassell Hughes explored Erdrich's use of religious syncretism as "a kind of border practice engaged in by those who situate themselves in multiple traditions and/or in the margins between them" (59). Given Erdrich's own mixed-blood heritage and her own upbringing in a household that honored both Catholic and Ojibwe rituals, the Damien/Agnes character is perhaps the closest in religious practice to Erdrich herself. In studying the poetry of both Louise Erdrich and Joy Harjo, Hughes notes that each poet "reveals the inherent conflicts in the Christian system she engages and, in the syncretic process, transforms that dichotomy into a productive and reciprocal relationship" (60). In other words, Erdrich weaves in tribal religion as a way to resolve the conflicts in Christianity.

When Damien prays "uneasily" for the conversion of Nanapush, he is admitting there is some value to Nanapush's worldview and traditionalist religion, but he prays for conversion nonetheless. Agnes is not entirely convinced that

Nanapush is meant to be converted, so she prays for enlightenment, or at least the ability to reconcile the two belief systems. When Father Gregory Wekkle arrives at Little No Horse for instruction, the Damien/Agnes character reaches a point of crisis. Agnes falls in love with Gregory as they begin a sexual relationship, but all the while, Father Damien's admonishments and sense of Christian duty nag at her. When it is time for Gregory to leave Little No Horse, and the priesthood, Agnes refuses to join him, leaving her in an intense state of mental and physical turmoil. She admits in a letter to the Diocese that she is becoming one with the Ojibwe "so as to better lead them into the great Corpus Christi" (*The Last Report* 209); but becoming part of the culture at Little No Horse also allows her to feel the pain of the people for whom she cares. This pain, coupled with the pain of her own inner conflict over her love for Gregory, is too much for Agnes to bear; she sinks into such a desperate state that she ingests a cocktail of medicines that puts her into a month-long coma. During that month, Damien traveled on the dream path through places inhabited by both Ojibwe and Catholics looking for peace but only getting lost. When Mary Kashpaw brings him back to reality, Damien is no better. The medicine cocktail he took neither brought him clarity nor death, either of which would have been acceptable to him.

Erdrich does not release Damien from his pain until he visits Nanapush, who builds a sweat lodge for him. "This is our church," says Nanapush as Damien enters the tent and becomes Agnes again. While Nanapush prays in Ojibwemowin, Agnes struggles to understand him all the while knowing what she is doing is a violation of

Church doctrine. Eventually, however, she surrenders to the peace and comfort she feels in the sweat lodge from which she will emerge wholly healed.

Hughes claims the balancing of Catholicism and traditionalism in Erdrich's work opens the door to a more tribal view of the "regenerative power of the earth and the body" (60). It is not pharmaceutical medicine that cures Damien/Agnes; it is a tribal ritual intended to reunite the spirit and the body with Nature. Damien returns to being a priest, but he has now discovered the Native values of balance and mutual connection and can live content in his Catholic faith that is now tinged with tribal traditionalism. After years of living this way, Erdrich's narrator explains the ways in which "Father Damien had been converted by the good Nanapush" (*The Last Report* 276):

He now practiced a mixture of faiths, kept the pipe, translated hymn or brought in the drum, and had placed in the nave of his church a statue of the Virgin...He was welcome where no other white man was allowed. It was apparent, to the people that the priest was in the service of the spirit of goodness, wherever that might evidence itself (*The Last Report* 276).

Agnes makes her peace with this idea in her old age as she prepares to die. Though she is dressed as Father Damien when she rows the little boat out to the spirit island in the middle of Matchimanito, Agnes hopes her soul might "sneak by the hell gates and pearly gates into that sweeter pasture, the heaven of the Ojibwe" (*The Last Report* 346). In her last moments, Agnes calls out to the spirits of her friends who had gone on before her, and they join her as she dies from a massive stroke.

Erdrich's statement here is clear: Catholicism and Midewiwin can exist side-by-side so long as the underlying purpose of both religions is goodness. Damien and Agnes worked together to strike a balance between both religions. Damien said mass, converted and baptized Ojibwe people, performed marriages, and offered absolution while Agnes learned the Ojibwe language, honored the religious rituals of the Mide, and assimilated into the culture at Little No Horse. In the end, however, it is Agnes as her true self who dies on the spirit island.

CHAPTER VI

A MATTER OF RESPONSIBILITY:

CONTEMPORARY TRIBAL WRITERS AND THEIR RHETORICAL COMMUNITIES

“When you hear stories from people like you, you feel less alone. When you feel less alone, and like you have a community of people behind you, alongside you, I believe you can live a better life.”

~Tommy Orange (Cheyenne, Arapaho), *There There*

On June 19, 2019, Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden named Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek) the United States’ 23rd Poet Laureate. She is the first ever Native American Poet Laureate. In response to her appointment, Harjo told Lynn Neary of *NPR*, “It’s such an honoring for Native people in this country when we’ve been so disappeared and disregarded...I bear that honor on behalf of the people and my ancestors...” Harjo’s appointment has since been celebrated throughout Indian Country as a long overdue acknowledgement of the Native voice. Nick Martin (Sappony) wrote in an editorial for *CNN*, “To wait on the various American literary communities to decide to promote and highlight authentic voices of Indigenous people, whose ancestors its government displaced and segregated not so long ago, is to wait for the sun to rise in the west.” Later in his editorial, Martin alludes to a burgeoning second wave of the Native American Renaissance, which began in the late 1960s following the critical success of Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, and

now includes writers such as Tommy Orange (Arapaho/Cheyenne), LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), and Brandon Hobson (Cherokee), among others.

Just like ocean swells, waves in literary movements draw on the energy, power, and momentum of those that came before them. Second-generation Native American Renaissance writers are exploring, incorporating, and expanding on the themes introduced by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Vine Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux), and Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe) decades before. Native writers such as Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, and Sherman Alexie lie mostly in the short ebb between the first and second waves of the movement and function as a sort of bridge between those who worked to establish an authentic Native voice in literature and those who are currently working to place that voice in a contemporary context without losing traditional values. This reinvention of the Native voice relies heavily on the principles of Vizenor's Survivance Theory, within which the ancient and sacred is resurrected in twenty-first Century America through the use of urban landscapes and modern technology. At the heart of this new wave of the Native American Renaissance, however, lies the same exigence the previous generation of American Tribal writers wrestled with: the problem of identity.

Identity, for Native American writers, is tricky because it has been so difficult to define Native American literature. Does one have to have a certain blood quantum of Native blood to join the literary community? If so, who gets to decide

where to draw the line? Does literature written by Natives about non-Native subjects count? Should work that favors Western literary conventions over Tribal methods of storytelling be considered, or must there be a strong traditional presence? Will the work Joy Harjo produces in her official role as Poet Laureate still be considered Native American poetry if it lacks a certain amount of “Indianness?” Louis Owens discusses these expectations in his book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. According to Owens, so many people continue to hold onto an ages-old concrete sense of what “real” Indians should be that the power to define the Native literary community has been removed, at least to some extent, from Native authors (3). Owens’ somewhat tongue-in-cheek commentary on the 1976 land claim of the Mashpee Wampanoag, whose case was harmed by the fact that the tribe’s representation in court did not look “Indian enough,” applies just as well to the plight of Native authors: “woe to him or her who identifies as Indian or mixedblood but does not bear a recognizably ‘Indian’ name or physiognomy or lifestyle...” (3).

While the practice of having their work defined by non-Natives has galvanized many Native American artists in their quest for greater autonomy in defining their communities, the course has not necessarily been a smooth one. The word “community” is somewhat loaded with expectations of harmony and shared social experience. Scott Richard Lyons (Cherokee) refers to this sort of group dynamic when he defines the term *people*:

A people is a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein--a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself (454).

In Lyons' view, understanding themselves as *a people* is how Indian tribes have constructed their *nations*. Jace Weaver seems to agree, to an extent, with Lyons' implication that communities are generally harmonious; but Weaver's definition comes more from the concept of worldview than from politics. Drawing heavily on the ideas of Vine Deloria, Weaver claims that the importance of community among Indigenous peoples derives from the need for collective survival in harsh physical environments (50).

In contrast to the somewhat idealistic views of Lyons, Nedra Reynolds points out, "it is risky to assume, in a view of *ethos* as a social act, a speaker who is a unified, moral individual or a community of like minds where opposition is never an issue" (329). It is unrealistic, and perhaps irresponsible, to ignore the discord that naturally occurs within communities, especially when that discord breeds new communities, whether they be helpful or harmful.

A recent dispute over an Oklahoma law regarding the marketing of Native American artwork demonstrates Reynolds' point. According to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) of 1990, it is illegal to "offer or display for sale, or sell any art or craft product in a manner that falsely suggests it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian or Indian tribe or Indian arts and crafts organization, resident within the United States" (U.S. Department of the

Interior). Under this federal statute, an Indian is defined as “a member of any federally or officially State recognized tribe of the United States, or an individual certified as an Indian artisan by an Indian tribe” (*The Indian Arts and Crafts Act*). The IACA mirrors a similar law that has been on Oklahoma’s legislative books since 1974 but was updated in 2016 when State Representative Chuck Hoskin, D-Vinita and Chief of Staff for the Cherokee Nation under Chief Bill John Baker, amended the law to narrow the definition of an Indian artist as only those who are citizens of a federally recognized tribe, excluding anyone who claims citizenship in a state recognized tribe. In March 2019, a federal judge ruled that Hoskin’s amendment violated the United States IACA because it is too restrictive (Associated Press). Hoskin defended his changes on the grounds that too many artists have falsely claimed tribal heritage as a way to market their work as Native American and that his narrower definition of “Native American” protects artists as well as consumers (Associated Press). As one might assume, the majority of the opposition to Hoskin’s amended law came from citizens of state-recognized tribes who were operating in Oklahoma. They felt attacked by Hoskin’s position and claimed his amendments removed their access to equal protection and freedom of speech.

The changes Hoskin made to the Oklahoma law can be, and clearly was by some, construed as a means of stratifying the legitimacy of Native artwork. In this instance, the amended law appears to delegitimize art produced by citizens of state-recognized tribes, which further marginalizes those artists within the Oklahoma Native arts community whose ethos has been questioned and creates discord among

its members. According to Reynolds, however, this argument is not unusual and accuses communities of “too often [proceeding] as if differences among their members are either nonexistent or negligible...” (329). She also cautions that communities have histories, functions, agendas, and margins or borders that should not be overlooked. Nevertheless, Reynolds argues that ethos can exist without completely harmonious communities (329). If it is true, as Owens suggests, that Native literature is written by Native Americans about the Native American experience, then one may assume authenticity; but Native American experiences are not necessarily universal, especially in the author-centered world of mainstream fiction; thus, there must exist some degree of disunity among the work of Native writers.

Jace Weaver believes that the one thing that unites Native literature is its sense of commitment to the community, or at least a community. It is conceivable that an artist or author can belong to many communities, moving in and out of them seamlessly adjusting behavior and language to meet the expectations of the group. The ability to adjust in this manner is often referred to as code switching, and it is particularly useful for members of ethnic groups who must learn to adapt to the dominant culture when necessary. Reynolds assumes a poststructuralist position, however, where writers “do not simply or even consciously move in and out of separate, discrete communities, adjusting their language perfectly each time” (329). Instead, one is constantly and simultaneously participating in multiple relevant communities. This view of the author’s function in communities is especially

important when discussing contemporary Native American literature through the lens of Survivance Theory. Because Vizenor's rhetorical theory incorporates elements of poststructuralism, particularly the elimination of binaries, one must assume that Native artists, writers, and speakers are participating in all of their communities at once. Using this approach can help explain the combination of Tribal traditionalism and Western conventions in Native American works of art and literature. Refusing to accept the idea that one can only participate in a single community at any given time also helps those who have been relegated to the margins of their communities to claim power and voice.

For many Native American writers, the margins of the literary community at large have become a permanent residence. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn explains that tribal writing has struggled to gain traction with readers among work produced by the dominant culture because tribal writing is "always being focused toward a contrived 'mainstream' (a function of 'colonialism'), not only in publishing and editing but in critical analysis as well" (27). Native writers are often asked to make their work more accessible to the general public, which could involve reconfiguring the narrative structure, removing imagery or humor characteristic of the author's tribe, or refraining from the "overuse" of the author's tribal language. While all of these requests illustrate the attempts of the publishing industry to force Native American authors to toe the commercial line, the most disturbing are suggested edits involving the curtailing or altogether elimination of Native American language. John Phillip Santos often incorporates Spanish into his writing without offering the

reader any translation or explanation. Haruki Murakami does the same with Japanese. Why, then, should the use of Native American language be cause for concern among editors? The answer is simple: accessibility. When Louise Erdrich writes the words “*Kiiwashkwe biishki indigo anishaa dash indigo*” from an old Ojibwe song in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (38), readers cannot open the Google Translate app on their mobile devices and find the meaning of the phrase. Translating Native American tribal languages involves meticulous research, time, and patience, especially when the languages have not been well-preserved or have evolved significantly.

Cook-Lynn notes that Native American writers who have given into editorial pressures to make their work more accessible in order to have their manuscripts accepted may feel that “their own efforts toward the recovery of memory through writing seem thwarted, selective and narrowly interpreted within the imposed memory of western knowledge and aesthetics” (27). She also acknowledges that this type of scrutiny may occur in all cross-cultural dialogues; but for Native American writers, the obscurity of their tribal perspective “either seems to be of little interest to the mainstream or too strident” (Cook-Lynn 27). There is an interesting difference in Louise Erdrich’s use of the Ojibwe language in her fiction and her poetry or her non-fiction work. In her novels, Erdrich tends to clarify for the reader the Ojibwe words and symbols her characters use either through overt translation or obvious context clues. The same reader would find in Erdrich’s memoir *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* a slightly different approach. Although

some of the language is explained, Erdrich leaves much of it untranslated, especially when she is discussing tribal songs or sacred knowledge of the Ojibwe. In this way, she can claim authority as an author with mainstream appeal as well as one who speaks from the margins of the literary community.

While critical acclaim and commercial success may await writers who can meet the expectations of the mainstream market, it has historically done little to advance the decolonization efforts of Native writers who have either been denied the spotlight or have chosen to remain in the shadows of their peers for the sake of authenticity. This reality means the margins of communities are ripe for the growth of activism. Jace Weaver coined the term *communitism*, a combination of the words *community* and *activism*, to define literature written by Native Americans that

has a proactive commitment to Native community, including the wider community...to promote communitist values means to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them. (52).

In a similar vein, Nedra Reynolds noted that feminist writers in the early 1990s began to alter the way the literary community distributed power, however, in order to allow women and other oppressed groups, including Native Americans, to find a voice. Rather than encouraging marginalized people to move to the center, these writers argued for a restructuring of the community altogether so that writers on the outskirts could claim authority. Reynolds places a higher value on marginal positions as well, claiming that “margins are productive sites for knowledge and

vision” and “Individuals can see differently when they are on the margins or borders of particular groups; it is easier to observe from the outside, where the perception is broader, keener, or productively different” (331). The new, more inclusive restructuring has been beneficial to Native writers, especially in recent years as Native American literature has enjoyed its second renaissance. For example, Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House* won the National Book Award in 2012, followed by the nomination of Brandon Hobson’s *Where the Dead Sit Talking* in 2014. Tommy Orange’s *There There* (2018) has generated a substantial number of positive critical responses for its portrayal of Native Americans trying to navigate the urban culture of present-day Los Angeles without losing sight of their ancient values.

For now, Native American writers seem to have the attention of the literary community. The question now becomes: what will they do with the spotlight? This uptick in success comes with extra responsibilities. Reynolds warns that writers who have been marginalized for their differences must still earn their rhetorical authority by “stating explicitly their identities, positions or locations, and political goals” (330). If one considers ethos as a sort of social contract, created in the space between the writer and the reader, then it stands to reason that both must agree to seek understanding through the text. Finding this understanding requires both the writer and the reader to be willing to compromise. For instance, non-Native readers must be willing to open their minds to and be respectful of the Native American worldview while Native American writers must be prepared to have that worldview questioned and challenged. It is a delicate balance.

Rhetors “must take responsibility for their ways of knowing” (Reynolds 334). Native American writing is inherently political, with its recurring themes of displacement, exploitation, oppression, and cultural genocide. Writers addressing these themes must position themselves within them to establish authority. Erdrich and other contemporary Native American writers achieve this position by acknowledging their tribal affiliations, utilizing their distinct tribal languages in their writing, and explicitly addressing the social and political conflicts facing their tribes. For instance, Erdrich writes mainly of the conflict between the Ojibwe people and the intrusion of white culture and what happens when Native people lose their traditions. This overarching theme is ubiquitous in Native American literature, of course, if one substitutes “Ojibwe people” for just about any other tribe; but Erdrich confronts this conflict specifically through the impact, both direct and indirect, of John James Mauser’s lumber company in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Not only does the timber industry destroy the land at Little No Horse, but Fleur Pillager loses her connection to Ojibwe culture in the pursuit of revenge. It takes Ojibwe medicine rituals to heal her when she returns. Leslie Marmon Silko confronts the same conflict in *Ceremony*, but instead of a lumber company antagonist, Tayo struggles to heal himself, his friends, and his community after World War II through the use of an ancient Laguna Pueblo ceremony. Frank Waters (Cheyenne) uses a similar conflict in *The Man Who Killed the Deer*. Martiniano, who has adopted white ways, must reconnect with his Native heritage in order to remove a curse he brought upon himself after killing a deer without performing the required tribal

ritual. Tommy Orange uses an attempted robbery and mass shooting at a powwow to comment on the current state of American and Native American cultures in *There There*. All of the narrators are faced with the struggle to find their tribal roots in an urban landscape as they move closer to the day of the powwow, the ultimate expression of tribal values which ends in tragedy at the hands of non-Natives.

With the exception of Tommy Orange, all the authors in the preceding examples tied their stories to their own ancestral lands; Orange's plot requires the displacement of his Native narrators in order to make his point. In addition, all the authors in the preceding examples write from the perspective of their distinctive tribes. It would be irresponsible, not to mention disingenuous, to write from the perspective of a tribe to which one does not belong or even from a position of pan-Indianism, which would ignore individual tribal cultures and remove one's authority as a Native writer.

Finally, it is the responsibility of the Native literary community to establish and protect its rhetorical sovereignty. Sovereignty, in the legal sense, is a complex and highly contested concept. Scott Richard Lyons, however, simplifies the broad idea of sovereignty as "the right of a people to conduct its own affairs, in its own place, in its own way" (450). He goes a step further to define *rhetorical* sovereignty as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires" (450). In Lyons' view, rhetorical sovereignty is gained and lost at what he calls the "colonized scene of writing: a site of contact-zone rhetoric in its fullest sense" (453). Whereas American Indians of the past approached this zone to

argue over treaties, motives, power imbalances, and cultural (mis)understanding, contemporary Native writers use this space to reassert the presence of their people in American culture after generations of imposed invisibility.

Emerance Baker points out that “the production and representation of Native identity and ideology in academia, writing, and the media is always about power and control” (112). She also agrees with Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Scott Richard Lyons on the political nature of Native identity texts, claiming that Native people are “forced to reconcile others’ ideas of who ‘Indians’ are” (113). Baker’s solution is for Native American writers and artists, women especially, to love being Indian so much that they cannot help but exercise their voices. In other words, they should unashamedly embrace all that makes Indians what they are, including their painful histories and attempts by the dominant culture to paint them in an inauthentic pose or vanish them. In Vizenor’s vision of survivance, this accepting and utilization of the negative by Indigenous people to assert their presence is characteristic of the trickster, who in many stories used his cunning, language, and clever rhetoric to outsmart Death.

On the surface, it seems that claiming rhetorical sovereignty can silence any disagreement over whether agents and editors should encourage Native writers and artists to be more marketable through the elimination or alteration of their tribal languages, symbols, and rituals. Claiming control over one’s communicative needs in an increasingly competitive publishing market, however, remains risky, even with the recent interest in Indigenous work. In 2009, Kateri Akiwenzie Damm (Nawash

Chippewa), an outspoken advocate for Indigenous causes, told Mark Anthony Rolo of *Indian Country News*,

I am very aware that mainstream publishers are not willing to take on what they consider 'risks'...They have a very narrow area of interest in what they seek in manuscripts. They don't understand First Nations people or culture, aesthetics, or artistic traditions. They wouldn't appreciate the work, or bother trying.

Although some Native novelists like Louise Erdrich have had long standing relationships with large publishing houses like HarperCollins and Penguin Random House, many have been unable to gain traction among readers. To encourage Indigenous writers to continue contributing to the Native literary community, Damm founded Kegedonce Press in 1993 to highlight the work of Native writers. In addition, organizations such as the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums and the American Indian Library Association have also been instrumental in advocating for the Native literary community by keeping lists of reputable Native publishing companies and offering resources for anyone who is interested in researching, teaching, or simply enjoying Native American literature and art. Tribal cultural centers have always featured artwork and written work by and about Native Americans. Birchbark Books, Louise Erdrich's independent bookstore in Minneapolis, features Native literature, artwork, jewelry, and community storytelling events.

Scott Richard Lyons' discussion of rhetorical sovereignty and its relationship to the Native writing brings to light a crucial point of understanding. For Native American authors, claiming rhetorical sovereignty means survival not only of the author, but of the whole community. Lyons claims:

Sovereignty is the guiding story in our pursuit of self-determination, the general strategy by which we aim to best recover our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect (449).

It is the responsibility of all Native writers to use the values of communitism and survivance to resist efforts by the dominant culture to mold their living communities into either whitewashed relics of the past or commercialized visions of editors, agents, and publishers. Writers like Louise Erdrich, who have achieved commercial success have a responsibility to use their platforms to bring attention to the issues facing Native Americans in all communities. After all, writing is healing. In his examination of Native writers and their communities, Jace Weaver states, "Native writers speak to that part of us that the colonial power and the dominant culture cannot reach, cannot touch. They help Indians imagine themselves as Indians" (53). There is no greater contribution to the Native community at large than to lead its members to a greater understanding of their value, their strength, and their identity.

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