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The Beautiful Madwoman in the Forest--A Study of *Tracks*

＜蹤跡＞林中美麗瘋女之主題探討

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摘要

不論在美國社會或美國文學裡，美國原住民印地安人向來是被忽略的一群，而印地安女性尤其被邊緣化。本文主要在提供一個欣賞美國原住民弱勢文學之角度，取材鎖定露薏思•厄翠琪的＜蹤跡＞。由於作者本身具有印地安血統，且深諳印地安文化，因此能深入剖析印地安女性所面臨之種種困境與層層剝削，並給予高度之關懷。＜蹤跡＞之女主角芙蘿是位個性堅強且極力維護傳統之『女戰士』，由於其特殊能力及特異行徑，白人及其族人皆與其保持相當之距離，並視其為『林中狂女』，可是綜觀其一生之表現，不卑不亢，洵為女中豪傑，值得歌功頌德。

關鍵字：美國原住民、印地安女性、弱勢文學、＜蹤跡＞、『林中狂女』、女中豪傑

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Abstract

Native Americans, the Indians, have long been marginalized in American society and literature, and the female Natives are even more neglected in the already meager works.[1] The main goal of this study is to offer an appreciative perspective of the minority's writing—the Native American's literature, focusing on Lourise Erdrich's third novel, *Tracks.*[2] Erdrich, German-American and Chippewa descent, knows well about the people she writes about, and her female characters are especially rich for feminist study. Fleur, the "Madwoman" in *Track*, will be analyzed to shed light on the steadfast perseverance with which she has tried to survive in a world most unfavorable, even hostile, to the female Native Americans.[3] In the end we will come to appreciate her as the beautiful woman fighting for survival with admirable recalcitrance and dignity.

Keyword: Native Americans, marginalized literature, the female Native, *Tracks*, "Madwoman," forest, the female "tricksters"

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[1] Jennifer Shaddock points out that women, "perhaps more than any other oppressed group, have internalized the cultural narratives that legitimize [their] oppression . . . women continued to be defined by the very patriarchal narratives of women as object/other " (106).

[2] *Tracks* is the third novel of the tetralogy: *Love Medicine* (1984), *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), and *The Bingo Palace* (1994).

[3] The idea of the "madwoman" comes from *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, New York and London: Yale UP, 1979), in which the long-neglected great 19th-century women novelists were brought to light with bold new interpretation. With similar spirit, this paper aims to shed fresh new light on Fleur, the protagonist in *Tracks*, whose madness is in fact her pecularity and uniqueness which makes her so different and distinct from any other characters.

The Beautiful Madwoman in the Forest--A Study of *Tracks*

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I. Introduction

Thanks to famous critics such as Foucault and Lyotard, marginalized literatures have been moving onto the center screen of critical concerns since the sixties, which is often lumped together under the umbrella term postmodernism (0wens 19). And one of the major interests of study is "the fragmented sense of self," which is conspicuous in much Indian fiction since the integrated Indian self has almost become obsolete. Nevertheless, there remain a minority of value-keeping Indians, fighting for "the integrated self," upholding the Indian spirit and lifestyle at all cost. Out of these admirable few of the true Indians, the women fighters are, without doubt, the most admirable. The main interest of this study is to analyze "the possibility of recovering a centered sense of personal identity and significance," which is "beyond identity politics," focusing on the heroine Fleur in Erdrich's *Tracks* (Owens 19; Freidman117).

Lourise Erdrich is most admirable in her accomplishment in creating an Indian saga novel similar to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, and her fiction deserves to be appreciated more widely and thoroughly. The essence of Erdrich's works can be summed up with the phrase, "the survival humor," which, in Erdrich's own words means, "To live with what you have to live with. You have to have a world view, you can just laugh at some of the—there's a dark side to humor. And you have to be able to poke fun at people who are dominating your life and your family . . . . And to poke fun at yourself in being dominated, I mean, it's both" (qtd. in Lincoln 1993, 209). So, with her outstanding works, Erdrich "has lyricized a renewed native canon," celebrating the beautiful and noble spirit of her fighting female—"the madwoman"—with her unique sense of humor for survival (Lincoln 1993, 209).

Truly, survival for the fittest is a natural law that has never been attenuating with the passing of the time and the development of human civilization. However, each group of people tends to formulate a code of survival for the fittest at different age. With the accelerating speed of globalization, exploitation and deforestation of the green land has become so formidable that survival for the Native Americans, whose fragile and only link to the world is the good earth which belongs to them naturally by birth before the whites' presence, has become an ever more difficult task and an urgent need because the white culture has been encroaching on every inch of their native land and every aspect of their culture. Consequently, the integrated Indian has almost become obsolete. Yet, the ideal is nevertheless always there. Erdrich's novels depict a beguiling family saga, a captivating jigsaw puzzle of longing and loss whose pieces form an unforgettable image of contemporary Native American life, succeeding especially in creating unforgettable characters, especially the female ones.

Distinctive from other writers, Erdrich's novels depict the dilemma of her Indian people and has offered her peculiar version of the survival strategy. Instead of using "the two opposing and distancing stereotypes, the 'brutish savage' and the 'noble

savage,' each serving underlying psychic needs of Western culture,"[4] critics have proposed "the trickster" as the survival strategy for Erdrich's characters. The tribal trickster, "a liberator and healer in a narrative, a coming sign, communal significance and a discourse with imagination," is "a language game in a comic narrative" (Vizenor 187). Being androgynous, the trickster is a comic healer and liberator in literature, whose whole figuration ties the unconscious to social experiences (Vizenor 188). While most critical writings about Louise Erdrich's works have focused on the male characters as the tricksters, this study chooses to focus on the female "tricksters," compared with whom, the male counterparts become rather bland.[5]

If we look more closely, it is not hard to find the trickster provides an analytical pattern more applicable to the female characters than to the male ones in Erdrich's novels. Actually the female characters are the most wonderful people, genuinely surviving in the white/patriarchal world courageously, stubbornly and cunningly. Erdrich's female characters have actually been ignored at least doubly—first they are marginal characters for being in the marginal literature, and then they are further marginalized as female/secondly characters. They deserve to be brought forth in the limelight and their admirable strength be applauded. Silence doesn't necessarily mean non-existence; more often than not, it is a protest against the unjust world. In such cases, deeds often speak louder than words. Verily, when reading Erdrich's works, it is important to attend to the texts' silences and to their postmodern use of "representation itself to subvert representation, problematizing and pluralizing the real" (McHale 292). Indeed, the play of absence and presence imbues Erdrich's texts in multiple ways, one of which is to see the "invisibility" signifying not only "cultural oppression" but also "access to the transcendent when invisibility inverts and expands into vision"[6]

Tracks, which begins with "We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall. It was surprising there were so many of us left to die . . ," tells of America's disposed, her Indian forefathers, the Chippewas of North Dakota. The direct fierce narrative of *Tracks*, which fabricates a wild world of imagination and sensation, tells strange stories about Fleur Pillager, who has drowned and returned to life to bedevil her enemies three times. Using the strength of the black underwaters as a resource against the tribesmen, who are decimated by disease, demoralized by drink, and selling off their forest reserves for a few dollars, together with her other peculiarity, Fleur is considered by the whites as well as some of her own tribesmen a "madwoman," at once admired and feared.

As the protagonist in *Tracks*, Fleur is a genuine woman fighter, never budging an

[4] Michael Castro, Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth-Century Poets and the native American (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1983) xiv.

[5] To know more about trickster aesthetics, see *Narrative Chance*, edited by Gerald Vizenor, which starts with a clear definition of what Bakhtinian dialogics are, and why they help when reading Native American authors.

[6] Rita Ferrari,"'Where the Maps Stopped': The Aesthetics of Borders in Louis Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*." *Style* (Spring, 1999). 10 November 2006 <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi-m2342/is-1-33/ai-58055909>.

inch. Her noble/savage spirit exemplifies fully in her acts, defying almost any value set by the whites. Pauline, the opposite of Fleur, considers herself Fleur's shadow and envies whatever she owns. Pursuing the exact opposite value of her life, she finally enters the convent and becomes a nun. In a sense, both women are fighters, fighting in her own fashion: Fleur is the fighter in the forest, fighting for her "Indian" land; while Pauline, the fighter in the convent, fighting for her "white"soul. Despite the stark discrepancy between them, it's their fighting spirit and their perseverance that sustain their existence and make them braver than their male counterparts.

In brief, *Tracks* poignantly portrays the history of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa's struggle to keep their land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Peterson 984). Despite much effort from the Indians like Nanapush, a tribal elder, to change the course of events so that the contestation over land tenure between the tribe and white settlers, which culminates in the battle over Fleur Pillager's land, will not destroy the tribe, the odds for winning is dismal. Fleur, one of the few unassimilated full-bloods among the Anishinabeg (Chippewa), has been allotted a valuable tract of timber-filled land adjoining Matchimanito Lake. Although Nanapush does his best to retain Fleur's claim to the land, with which Native Americans share a "culturally-historical relationship," white lumber interests turn the government's policy to their advantages, and in the end, Fleur's land is lost (Watkins 41).

Structurally, *Tracks* is narrated through two storytellers alternating chapters in separate, very distinct voices: Pauline, a young mix-blood who is confused and psychologically damaged by her unbalanced commitment to Catholic martyrdom and Chippewa tradition; Nanapush, a wise old tribal leader gifted in the ancient art of telling. Both Nanapush and Pauline are "consummate storytellers, gripping readers into a spellbinding succession of stories about birth, death, love, passion, loyalty, betrayal, spirits, struggle, and tenacious survival" (Friedman 109). While most critics consider Nanapush's version more reliable and regard Pauline's as being "megalomanic, telling stories of her own power and martyrdom that the reader is invited to interpret ironically," it is the combination of both narratives that the touching story pivoting around the central figure, Fleur Pillager, is woven more objectively.[7] Thus, both narrators' version will be analyzed to piece together a more or less ideal whole of Fleur, the genuine Indian, not yet lost to the world.

Of the two narrators in *Tracks*, Nanapush acts like the father-figure to Fleur, and

[7] For other discussions of the novel's double narration, see Joni Adamson Clarke ("Why Bears Are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to Be Murder: Transformation and Oral Tradition in Louise Erdrick's *Tracks*," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 4.1 (Spring 1992): 28-48); Victoria Walker ("A Note on Narrative Perspective in *Tracks*," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 37-40); Jennifer Sergi (Storytelling: Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," *World Literature Today* 66 (Spring 1992): 279-82); Catherine Rainwater ("Reading between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich," *American Literature* 62.3 (1990): 405-22); James Flavin ("The Novel as Performance: Communication in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," *Studies in American Literature* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 1-12), and Daniel Cornell ("Woman Looking: Revis(ion)ing Pauline's Subject Position in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, *Studies in American Indian Literature* 4.1 (Spring 1992): 49-64), who is the only critic who defends Pauline as an authoritative narrator. Although some critics (e.g. Clarke, Walker) suggest that Nanapush may not be an entirely reliable narrator, Nanapush's narrative authority is generally privileged.

Pauline, against whom Fleur's uniqueness is highlighted, considers herself as the shadow of Fleur. In the eyes of the white society, or even her own tribesmen, including Pauline, Fleur is seen as a witch, for she has done several mad things, especially the four ones as follows: her relationship with Missehepeshu; her rape and revenge; her relationship with Eli; her final endeavor to save the family land.

The structural arrangement of *Tracks* is divided into nine chapters, with two narrators taking turns narrating Fleur's story—Nanapush takes up chapter 1, 3, 5, 7, 9; Pauline, chapter 2, 4, 6, 8. Nanapush's part is mostly the positive and dearly side of Fleur; Pauline's is the negative--and the reader's job is to digest both narratives to bring his/her own picture of Fleur.

II. Nanapush's Version

Nanapush, the first narrator, is the intelligent and wise Indian leader, who knows about the white's language and laws to a great extent, which makes him a reliable and objective narrator; furthermore, he has lived long enough to witness and experience personally the ordeals and disasters, both natural and man-made, befalling on his people, his families and himself.

Nanapush's listener is Lulu, Fleur's daughter, who once was Fleur's precious pearl but now feels much rejected by her mother. Nanapush's narration of Fleur's story is to educate Lulu about "the value of Indian heritage," which is the reason why she is not surrounded by her dear mother anymore. It begins with the terrible disaster, consumption, sweeping through the Indian territory in the winter of 1912, killing so many people, including Fleur's. Fleur is the sole survival of her family, the Pillagers, whose cabin is near Matchimanito Lake, in which the terrible water monster Missepeshu is believed to inhabit.[8] At that time, the white dedicate themselves to moving Indians to certain reservation areas by "stealing" the Indians' land through their "ignorance" or "mindless delinquency."[9] Nanapush is the wise one, but even he cannot defend the white power. Fleur's fighting spirit is brought out through Nanapush's narration.

[8] The main setting of *Tracks* is the fictional Matchimanto Lake. It may not be a real geographic location, but Matchi Manito is an evil manito in modern Ojibwa myth (Vecsey 82)—Chippewa is a comparatively modern and English term for the tribe; an older term is Ojibway (Sergi 280). The name of the lake is not the only reminder of Chippewa myth in *Tracks*. There is talk of windigos and manitous, burying the dead in trees, dreamcatchers. One of the most prevalent and important "signs" of Chippewa myth in *Tracks* is Misshepeshu, the water monster. In the novel Misshepeshu's origin is tied to the arrival of the Pillager clan on Mitchimanto Lake. The monster was thought to be responsible for Fleur's powers and the demise of her enemies (Sergi 280).

[9] Jeffrey Denton, examining the land policy of the U.S. government toward the Native American, opines that Native American couldn't take care of themselves and were "lazy," and that the idea that "Native Americans have held onto to their cultural ways, and therefore their original identities, however popular in contemporary thought and literature, is wrong (11). In contrast, the U.S. culture and identity, on the other hand was reinforced as one of hard work and progress" (112). "The U.S. expansion and the resulting deterioration of Native American culture and identity" are inevitable from the perspective of cultural materialism.

Choosing to live near Matchimanito Lake in her family's cabin far away from others, Fleur is firstly depicted as someone wild, obstinate, or even witching; some even believe she is the water monster Missepeshu's mistress. Even though she can't swim, she has drowned three times and she has survived each time miraculously and unbelievably. However, the most peculiar feature about her is her practice of witchery by cursing anyone getting close to her, staring at her, or forcing her in whatever way against her will--it turns out that whoever does any of these either dies mysteriously or has some kind of misfortune.

However, despite her various oddness, Fleur does live a very "colorful" and rich life, which is always the envy of Pauline. Indeed, juxtaposed with Pauline, Fleur's character comes to light more brilliantly. Before coming to that part, however, let's focus here on what Nanapush has to tell Lulu about her mother so that she wouldn't bear any grudge against Fleur's sudden leaving, abandoning her to live in this unfriendly world alone like an orphan—indeed she never knows who her natural father is.

In Nanapush's version, Fleur is on the one hand, a woman with strong determination, a tough woman to her enemies; on the other, she is kind and considerate to the ones she loves. To save her ancestor's land, she goes down to Argus and works as a hired laborer; in addition, she steadily wins three men's money through card playing. But the men who lose card games with her manage to rape her; consequently, two of them died for being locked up in the meat freezer, and the third ends up miserably with amputation.

The whole person of Fleur is the representative of the nature in appearance and in spirit, with Nanpush focusing on the spiritual, while Pauline, the second narrator, on the physical description. Nanapush's close relation with Fleur begins when she is 17 years old and the last Pillager of the attack of the consumption. Nanapush rescued her and he described her as "wild as a filthy wolf, a bony girl whose sudden bursts of strength and snarling cries terrified Pukwan," the listening tribal policeman and the other person on the rescue team (*Tracks* 3). Pukwan dared not approach too closely to the Pillagers sick or dead because the Pillages were known for their "secret way to cure and to kill" (*Tracks* 2).

From Nanpush's mouth, we know that he "guided the last buffalo hunt," "saw the last bear shot," "trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth," and now he presents us the last Pillage Fleur--the incarnation of the Indian spirit (*Tracks* 2). So, what exactly are Fleur's characteristics that make her so special and heroic and tragic/triumphant?

After nursing her back to health, Nanapush asks Fleur to stay with him as the rest of her families have all perished, telling her, "The land will go. The land will be sold and measured" (*Tracks* 8). But Fleur "tossed back her hair and walked off, down the path, with nothing to eat till thaw but a bag of onions and a sack of oats" (*Tracks* 8). She returned to Matchimanito, staying there alone in the cabin that even the fire did not want; this is something that no young girl had ever done before. What comes after is mainly about how Fleur managed to keep her land. We are told that the Agent who went there to collect fee money on the allotments ended up "living in the woods and

eating roots, gambling with ghosts" (*Tracks* 9). Thus, Fleur is much feared because the company of the living becomes "ammunition for her gun" (*Tracks* 9). Almost any man who tries to take hold of her land or who bears mean intention of her all ends up miserably in a mysterious way.

People are curious about the source of Fleur's peculiar power. Matchimanito Lake in which the water monster Missepeshu inhabits is one guess. Pauline has a rather elaborate description about the relationship between Missepeshu and Fleur, which we'll deal with later. In Nanapush's narration, the focus is on the problem of the land, "the only thing that lasts life to life;" while money "burns like tinder, flows off like water," and "the wind is steadier" than "government promise" (*Tracks* 33). While "trickery" is means used by the male Indians to fight against the white men's power working through language and laws, what Fleur has is her strong will and her love for the land and nature. Reading *Tracks*, we feel deeply for Fleur's plight and struggle. And her unceasing fighting spirit is the most admirable quality about her. Physically, Fleur is not strong, but she possesses the wolflike character with her smile and white teeth, which is emphasized again and again. Her black and rough hair also indicates her tough character.

After Fleur is raped, she returns back to the Matchimanito, pregnant. She then chooses Eli as her child's father-to-be. Eli is infatuated by her, but he doesn't know how to win her heart, so he asks Nanapush for advise, and is told to take initiative, "keeping Fleur off balance" (*Tracks* 44). It works, and they are seen making love "standing up," "against a tree in clear daylight," against "the wall of the cabin," "down beside it," in "grass and up in trees"--just "like animals in their season!" without "sense of shame!" (*Tracks* 48). Their sexual behavior becomes bolder until "the whole reservation gossiped" (*Tracks* 49). Margaret, Eli's mother, said Fleur was "like all types of animals" disapprovingly; she wanted "a simpleminded daughter-in-law she could boss, a girl who would take advice and not bar her from her house," but Fleur Pillage, as everyone knew, "wasn't like that, did not need a second mother" (*Tracks* 56).

The wild love between Fleur and Elis was sabotaged through Pauline's scheming—she instigates Sophia the brainless young girl to seduce Eli. As could be expected, Eli was so miserable after Fleur knew about his betrayal. Again, he comes to Nanapush for advice to win back Fleur's love for him, which proves very hard as Fleur can surely do without a man, a husband, especially an unfaithful one. But again, Nanapush's advice works, "you have to cut yourself down in her eyes until you're nothing, a dog, so low it won't matter if she lets you crawl back" (*Tracks* 108). So, even in matters of love, Fleur can be tougher than a man.

Another event occurred, which provides an even stronger proof of Fleur's toughness. One day Nanapush and Margaret were tied up by two bums, Lazarre and Clarence, and humiliated; they even shaved Margaret to baldness. After Fleur knew about this humiliation, she cut off her braids, and shaved her own head clean, then she went out hunting, "didn't even bother to wait for night to cover her tracks" (*Tracks* 117). Fleur let her baldness be seen and known in town and got even with Clarence and Lazarre in her way--"murdering by the use of bad medicine," in Lazarre's words (*Tracks* 120). Once more, whoever hurts Fleur or the people she cares will surely get

something bad in return.

As time goes by, life becomes harsher and harsher for the remaining Indians. Food supplies become more meager and the weather colder; worst of all, the lands are gone out of the tribe piece by piece and to keep the remaining ones, annual fees have to be paid soon. Looking at the map (of the Indian lands), marked by "lines and circles of the homesteads paid up," Eli made an angry sound and bit his lip, but Fleur "laid her hand" on Nanapush's shoulder and "let the silence gather around her before she spoke with contempt for the map, for those who drew it, for the money required," saying "the paper had no bearing or sense, as one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried" (*Tracks* 174). Fluer was "dangerous" (*Tracks* 170). As Nanapush observed, "Pillager land was not ordinary land to buy and sell" (*Tracks* 175).

Ironically, when finally enough money was collected to pay for the annual fee, Fleur was betrayed by her brother-in-law and mother-in-law because the money is only sufficient to pay for one piece of land; and the Pillagers' was sacrificed. However, Fleur keeps her "obstinate pride,' and remains "huge" and "endless" in Nanapush's admiration (*Tracks* 178). Nanapush regards Fleur as his daughter and even has his name on a church paper for her daughter Lulu, whom he regards as his granddaughter.

Fleur's final defeat/victory is exemplified in a very dramatic way. Knowing she could no longer keep her precious land and the trees surrounding her cabin, she had had all the tree trunks sewed through at the base in advance, but let them still stand upright, so "a forest was suspended, lighted held" (*Tracks* 223). Then right before the lumbermen started to cut the trees down, the dramatic moment came: one man laughed and leaned against a tree, and suddenly the whole world changed.

With one thunderstroke the trees surrounding Fleur's cabin crack off and fell away from us in a circle, pinning beneath their steel branches the roaring men, the horses. The limbs snapped steel saws and rammed through wagon boxes. Twigs formed webs of wood, canopies laced over groans and struggles. Then the wind settled, curled back into the clouds, moved on, and we left standing together in a landscape level to the lake and to the road. The men and animals were quiet with shock. Fearing a second blow, they lay mute in the huge embrace of the oaks. (*Tracks* 223)

Viewed with the trickster speculum, this event "epitomizes the power of Native American humor to ridicule fate to transcend sorrow."[10] Through her device Fleur alchemizes "her suffering toward ironic perception and comic possibility" (Lincoln 1993, 166). The last, ironic laugh is hers. As the trees fall one after another, closer and closer to where the loggers are standing, Fleur has "bared her teeth in a wide smile that frightened even those who did not understand the smiles of Pillagers" (*Tracks* 223).

Triumphant in her fashion, Fleur lost her last piece of land nevertheless. Wheeling a small cart, "a wagon that one person could pull, constructed of the green wood of Matchimanito oaks," Fleur was finally getting ready to leave her land (*Tracks*

[10] Leslie Gregory, "Native American Humor: Powerful Medicine in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." 13 January, 1998. Florida Gulf Coast University. 19 Oct. 2006. <http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/voll/issue2/erdrich.htm.>

224). When Nanapush looked inside the box of the cart, expecting to see Fleur's possession, he only saw "weed-wrapped stones from the lake bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rags, and the umbrella that had shaded her baby," and the grave markers of her dead families fastened on the side of the cart (*Tracks* 224). Fleur asked Nanapush's blessing, and he gave it o her, wishing her not to go. However, Fleur had made up her mind to keep Nature's company.

Taking away only the few precious objects with her, Fleur sets out to self-exiling into the deepest woods, "no telling when and if she would ever return" (*Tracks* 225). Then Nanapush decides to bring Lulu back from the government school. At first, due to lack of the sufficient document to prove Lulu is Nanspush's daughter, Lulu is not allowed to return. However, Nanapush manages to "reach the loophole" and produces papers from the church records to prove that he is Lulu's father. So, finally Lulu is able to come home, only to find her mother gone into the deep woods. Through narrating Fleur's story, Nanapush comments pathetically that what is left of his tribe is anything but hope: "a tribe of files cabins 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 a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match" (*Tracks* 225). Thus, Fleur is doomed to exile as the "madwoman in the forest;" however, "through her ironic act of defiance," she "has drawn the strength she will need to survive."[11]

III. Pauline's Version

The young mixed-blood Pauline is the other narrator in contrast to the grandfatherly Nanapush; both "vie for creative authority, foregrounding language as the site of cultural survival," and both "invoke their rhetorical skills to control the representation of Fleur Pillager, whom Nanapush honors as 'the funnel of our history' (*Tracks* 178) and Pauline fears as the wife of Missepeshu, water monster and devil" (Shaddock 108-109). So, depending on whom you are listening to, "Fleur can be either a culture hero or a pawn of the Devil, the last member of an important family or a stubborn hold-out, living in the past." [12]

As a male narrator, a wise tribal man and basically a "talker," Nanapush admires the man-ness inherent in Fleur, exuding unceasingly; his depiction of her is mainly the positive heroic/tragic deeds of saving her family's land with admiring dignity; and his relationship with Fleur is father/daughter in nature—Fleur is harsh or even vindictive to many people but she is always a dear daughter to Nanapush, which is something that Pauline, Fleur's shadow, can never have accomplished. In contrast, Pauline's narration of Fleur is full of wild imagination and superstitious beliefs. She is also a tough character, but in a very different way. Like Fleur, Pauline lost her families the Puyarts during the consumption attack. Being of mixed-blood, Pauline looked deceivingly like a white woman, and she wanted to be like her grandfather, "pure Canadian;" moreover,

[11] Leslie Gregory, "Native American Humor: Powerful Medicine in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." 13 January 1998. Florida Gulf Coast University. 10 November 2006. <http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/voll/issue2/erdrich.htm.>

[12] James D. Stripes, "The Problem(s) of (Anishinaabe) History in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich: Voices and Contexts." *Wicazo Sa Review* 7(1991): 29.

she would not speak the Indian language, so people speak English to her. She was fifteen then and, unlike Fleur, she was "invisible" to most people around her (*Tracks* 15).

Pauline's narrative of Fleur begins with Chapter 2, which is primarily an introduction of Fleur's character in an action, a retrospective exposition showing why she is thought to have supernatural powers, especially the power to destroy men. Pauline begins her narration with Fleur's first drowning "in the cold and glassy waters of Mitchimanito" while only a child (*Tracks* 10). As Mitchimanito is regarded as a lake of evil spirits, Fleur's constant closeness to it without being able to swim at once appalls and fascinates Pauline. The description of Fleur's first drowning revealed that the two men who happened to be nearby and saved Fleur from drowning "lost themselves" later, suggesting getting close to Fleur was dangerous (*Tracks* 10). The second time Fleur fell into the lake, she was 15 years old and no one dared to touch her this time. She was washed on shore, and the man bending to look at her later also "changed, grew afraid, wouldn't leave his house and would not be forced to go near water or guide the mappers back into the bush;" however, despite all the precaution, he slipped into a new tin bathtub and died breathing water (*Tracks* 11). Thus, although Fleur was attractive, men stayed clear of her after the second drowning because "nobody dared to court her." The idea spread that Misshepeshu--"the water man, the monster," "a devil, that one, love hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur"--"wanted her for himself" (*Tracks* 11). Pauline goes on to elaborate more on Misshepeshu, which only adds more peculiarity to Fleur, the monster's girl.

> Our mother warn us that we'll think he's handsome, for he appears with green eyes, copper skin, a mouth tender as a child's. But if you fall into his arms, he sprouts horns, fangs, claws, fins. His feet are joined as one and his skin, brass scales, rings to the touch. You're fascinated, cannot move. He casts a shell necklace at your feet, weeps gleaming chips that harden into mica on your breasts. He holds you under. Then he takes the body of a lion, a fat brown worm, of a familiar man. He's made of gold. He's made of beach moss. He's a thing of dry foam, a thing of death by drowning, the death a Chippewa cannot survive. Unless you are Fleur Pillager. (*Tracks* 11)

The fabrication of Misshepeshu is very probably only a fiction existing only in Pauline's mind, but to her, it is one hundred percent real, and Fleur's constant closeness to "him" puzzled and scared Pauline. More oddities about Fleur are revealed one by one. Messing with the evil, laughing at the old women's advice and dressing like a man, getting herself into some half-forgotten medicine, keeping the finger of a child in her pocket and a powder of unborn rabbits in a leather thong around her necks, laying a heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, going out hunting, not even in her own body, Fleur simply went "haywire, out of control" (*Tracks* 12). All of these things are just foreign to Pauline, but she is involuntarily attracted to Fleur. When Fleur went to Argus to work, Pauline was there during those few months, and according her, Fleur "almost destroyed that town" (*Tracks* 12).

What happened in Argus is a good example of Fleur's tragedy as a woman, the second sex, but Fleur's strong character eventually gets it over and get even with those who treat her meanly. In the first place, it is due to the desperate need of money to pay the annual fee for her family's allotment of land that Fleur went down to Argus and found a job working at a butcher shop because of her strength, being able to "lift a haunch or carry a pole of sausages without stumbling" (*Tracks* 16). Fleur was also quick to learn other skills. Another thing about Fleur, which Pauline also admires/envies much, is that she was attractive to men around her, married or not. Rather envious of Fleur, Pauline gave a rather vivid description of her physical appearances negatively:

> Her cheeks were wide and flat, her hands large, chapped, muscular. Fleur's shoulders were broad and curved as a yoke, her hips fishlike, slippery, narrow. An old green dress clung to her waist, worn thin where she sat. Her glossy braids were like the tails of animals. And swung against her when she moved, deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed. But only half. I could tell, but the others never noticed. They never looked into her sly brown eyes or noticed her teeth, strong and sharp and very white. Her legs were bare, and since she padded in beadworked moccasins they never saw her fifth toes were missing. They never knew she'd drowned. They were blind, they were stupid, they only saw her in the flesh. (*Tracks* 18)

But at Argus it is not that Fleur was a Chippewa, a woman, good-looking, or alone, but how Fleur plays cards that made the men's brains hum. Fleur outwits every man playing cards with her, and this is the cause of her subsequent rape. Pauline described how Fleur plays cards: "I watched her closely, then she paid me a beam of notice for the first time. She turned, looked straight at me, and grinned the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims, except that she wasn't after me" (*Tracks* 19). More than once, Fleur is compared to "a wolf"—wolf grin, wolf teeth—suggesting her wolf-like quality.

Fleur wins the men's money steadily for one dollar each time. The men suspected that she might have cheated them, but could not find enough proof. One night they raped her, but soon after they were locked into the meat freezer somehow from outside during a storm and lost their lives inside. Pauline hinted a couple times that actually she was the one who locked them, but people believed that Fleur did it anyway. The pattern can also be found in other instances—Pauline is the actual "murderer" but Fleur "was convicted" in people's general view. It is interesting to note that Fleur never tries to exempt herself from those groundless accusation. She just keeps on living in her own fashion, knowing exactly what are the things that really matter to her. And if she does take her revenge, she does it openly. In contrast, Pauline plots her revenge by dark means, framing the unlawful misdeeds on Fleur or others.

While Fleur tries to save everything Indian, Pauline can't wait to throw everything Indian away. Fleur expresses herself naturally as an Indian woman; Pauline has to try hard to become a white woman. Through her own narrative construction, Pauline progressively reveals herself as ever more masochistic in her identification with Anglo culture—and "so ultimately sabotages her narrative credibility" (Shaddock 109). Her

smearing of Fleur Pillager, "the repository of Native American culture" and her "surrogate mother," tells "the historical destruction of Native American culture by a rapacious Anglo ideology," which is "an annihilating force working through Anglo dominance," "so greedy and voracious that it is destined not only to eradicate Native American culture but also, finally, to consume its own means of substance, Anglo culture" (Shaddock 109). And Pauline's almost hysterical narrative only indicates the intensity of the sweeping power of the white ideology, which is working on her, nibbling away her already fragile Indian identity, which would help her to "fix" or "figure out" who she really is as a Native American (Kidd 7).

While Nanapush's narrative is meant to ensure the continuity of the Pillagers and, more generally, of the tribal community; Pauline's is set to destroy all that Fleur comes to represent (Shaddock 109). Pauline's narrative of Fleur, the metaphoric site of traditional Native American culture within the novel, begins before the two women even meet. In essence it begins with Pauline's choice to reject her native heritage and identify fully with her mother, "who showed her half-white" (*Tracks* 14). She convinces her father to send her south to the white town, ignoring his warning that "you'll fade out there." She consents to speak English only, and she refuses to bead like other Indian women, desiring instead to learn lace-making from the nuns. "I was made for better," she tells her father. She perceives identification with the Indians as death: "I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us" *(Tracks* 14). Later, since the order will not admit Indian girls, Pauline explicitly denies her Indian blood, creating a fictitious story about her background in order to be accepted. In so doing, she commits her final psychological separation from her native community (Shaddock 110). She has a vision of God in which "He said that I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (*Tracks* 137).

Not only does Pauline deny her own heritage when she becomes a novice but, by embracing the narrative perspective of Christianity, she also threatens through the Anglo witchery/ideology she embraces to "devalue and destroy the integrity of the entire tribal culture" (Shaddock 110). Even before she joins the Church, she had already figuratively aligned herself with the destruction of the native community by moving in with Bernadette Morrissey and her brother Napoleon, who were "well-off people, mixed-bloods who profited from acquiring allotments that many old Chippewa did not know how to keep" (*Tracks* 63). In fact, the Morrisseys later contribute directly to the loss of Fleur's land. More literally, Pauline inherits from Bernadette the tribal role of easing Indian souls into death. She becomes Bernadette's helper in washing and laying out the dead. She is maligned as "death's bony whore," and indeed she "passed death on" among the Indians, viewing it as a Christian sacrament: "I alone, watching, filled with breath, knew death as a form of grace" (*Tracks* 86, 69, 68).

Throughout the novel, Pauline is associated with death, and Fleur with life (Shaddock 110). Although Fleur almost drowns three times in Lake Matchimanito at the hands of the water monster Misshepeshu, each time she miraculously lives, becoming an increasingly awesome symbol of survival: "as always Fleur lived" (*Tracks*

13). Pauline, on the other hand, is "good at easing souls into death but bad at breathing them to life. Afraid of life in fact. Afraid of death, and afraid of Fleur Pillager" (*Tracks* 57).

In fabricating Fleur's story, Pauline is also weaving her own story, which is an entirely different one from Fleur's. Pauline's identification with Catholicism's salvation--a salvation in exchange for Indian acceptance of Anglo racism and dominion--- eventually takes the form of full-fledged martyrdom. In her quest to destroy the Indian devil, Pauline not only plans to "save" the Indians by eradicating their "pagan" culture, but she herself, as part Indian, must logically fade out in the process. She says of her alliance with Christ, "he gave me the mission to name and baptize, to gather souls. Only I must give myself away in return, I must dissolve" (*Tracks* 141). For Pauline, who describes herself as a "shadow," who perceives herself as "not wanted" and "invisible," and who relates that even a dog "never smelled me or noticed me above Fleur's smoky skin" (*Tracks* 22), "her self-dissolution is an all-too-natural consequence of a self-image corroded by internalized racism" (Shaddock 111).

In essence, Pauline disdains her mix-blood heritage: "I was cleft down the middle by my sin" (*Tracks* 195). Feeling she must choose between her two backgrounds, she struggles to deny her Indian identity, seeing it as the "new devil," an enemy with "copper scales"—the lake monster, Missepeshu (*Tracks* 195). The "true," "blue-eyed" God must destroy this Indian devil. "I must hate one, the other adore," she claims of her two "masters" (*Tracks* 193). Pauline "shed a skin. . . . Every few days I shed another, yet another. . . . Fraction by fraction I increased in the Lord's eyes. New flesh grew upon my hands, smooth and pink as a baby's only tighter, with no give to it, a stiff and shrunken fabric" (*Tracks* 195-96). By repudiating her tribal life, Pauline prepares the way for her final sacrifice for Christ: "I was pledged to a task, and when it was accomplished I would have no further use, or quarter, for this lost tribe of Israel" (*Tracks* 196). In her mission to annihilate the Indian devil in the name of salvation, Pauline begins to embody a mummylike mockery of the renewal of life (Shaddock 111).

Fleur represents traditional Chippewa life and the power of the feminine in its connection to nature, birth, and the survival of the people (Shaddock 112). Ineffectual in her life, Pauline resorts to the speech to bring down Fleur's "nobleness"—"her concerted effort to challenge and destroy Fleur through her narrative is her most audacious threat to native culture" (Shaddock 112). Actually, both narrators invest Fleur with fearful powers; however, for Pauline these powers are awesome, but unnatural and perverse. After Fleur recuperates from an illness that kills her entire family, Pauline describes what she perceives as Fleur's transformation into a witch (*Tracks* 12). Despite her need to diminish Fleur, Pauline's narrative invests Fleur with extraordinary shifting powers. In addition to describing Fleur as a bear, she frequently attributes wolf-like characteristics to Fleur, depicting her smile as "steady and hungry, teeth glinting" (*Tracks* 80), "the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims" (*Tracks* 19). In the scene while Fleur is being raped, Pauline watches, describing Fleur in her struggle as a powerful sow snorting and trampling her adversaries. She suggests that Fleur embodies the horrifying storm that snouts out,

sowlike, her rapists and demands a terrible retribution. However, despite all the negative portrait of Fleur, Pauline admires Fleur in her heart, and she even regards Fleur as her surrogate mother. So, Fleur's status and value cannot be denied.

From Pauline's version, we readers come to see Pauline as being possibly demented or dishonest, but her depiction of Fleur as a complex and powerful protagonist makes Fleur important "not only as representative of the struggle of the traditional native American values against the materialistic ravages of modern Euro-American culture, but of what we might see as universal human values of love and family ties as well as female nature and power" (Ferguson 549). Culturally speaking, Fleur's story "explicates and foregrounds the conflict between masculine/white and feminine/Indian forces" (Ferguson 549).

IV. Fluer—The Beautiful Amazonian Fighter

If Nanapush's version of Fleur is the thesis, Pauline's, the antithesis, what is the synthesis of the final Fleur? Viewed retrospectively, it is true that Fleur's powers cannot ward off the whites and government Indians' greedy for land, money, and power. *Tracks* portrays Fleur's loss in this sociocultural war as tragic: it is because traditional Anishinabegs like Fleur and Nanapush are dispossessed and because Native American clans and tribes are consequently fragmented that the tracks of Native American history and culture are so difficult to discern. At the end of the novel Fleur is said to walk "without leaving tracks," a foreboding development since she is described by Pauline as "the hinge" between the Chippewa people and their manitous and by Nanapush as "the funnel of our history" (*Tracks* 215, 139, 178). However, as Nance Peterson concludes, "Fleur's disappearance and tracklessness at the end of the novel function as a presence absence—her absence becomes a haunting presence in the narrative, signifying the need for a reconceptualization of history, for a new historicity that both refers to the past and makes a space for what can never be known of it" (987).

What makes Fleur such an admirable heroine is her effort to construct "a recalcitrant subjectivity" in keeping with her unwavering identity (Shaddock 116). In Nanapush's narrative version (and he has the last word in the novel), Fleur survives. She lives on with dignity and complete assurance of her own value, which is in sharp contrast to Pauline's violent attempt to gain a "whole identity, to heal the schism inside her, by destroying one racial identity in favor of another" (Shaddock 117-118).

One unique quality about Fleur worth emphasizing is her intense focus "on enacting her own story, on living her own narrative reality, barely heeding others' constraints upon her" (Shaddock 118). Early in the novel, when Eli stumbles upon Fleur's woodland camp, for example, and taps her on the shoulder as she concentrates upon skinning a deer wounded by Eli, Fleur

> Never noticed him. . . . She never even twitched. He walked around her, watched the knife cut, trespassed into her line of vision. At last she saw him . . . but then scorned him as though he were nothing. 'Little fly.' She straightened her back, the knife loose and casual in her hand. 'Quit buzzing.' (*Tracks* 43)

Fluer is similarly oblivious when Pauline disrupted her healing ceremony, "Fleur's eyes closed, she leaned into the folded robes behind her. Her breath was shallow and her

attention was directed within, so she did not witness Pauline's dreadful proof" (*Tracks* 190). Fleur's inner directedness demands that others accept her defining terms.

Fleur's determined refusal to accept Pauline's adversarial narrative perspective forces Pauline's "witchery" to turn back on itself. Like the self-consumptive Anglo society, Pauline becomes increasingly masochistic, and finally, in *Love Medicine*, she is confined in a convent specifically for the troubled nuns. Fleur, on the other hand, leaves a vital, if erratic, trail, which Nanapush the storyteller "tracks," "re-creates, to persuade Fleur's daughter, Lulu, of the value of her mother's love." Although exiling herself into woods and alienated from her daughter, Fleur survives, living deep in "the tough bush" (*Tracks* 10). She has become wilder than in her wayward youth, more powerfully ephemeral than her shaman cousin, Moses. Uprooted from the responsibilities and privileges of the material world, now a landless nomad, Fleur is a spare and mobile symbol of Native American endurance and power in the face of long persecution (Shaddock 118). She survives Pauline's betrayals through a self-conscious engagement in and reconstruction of the old ways, the myths and stories of her past.

Tracks suggests that academic feminists cannot afford to ignore the agency of language in creating cultural history as we speak. We need to develop in our own narratives a sustained dialogic voice, a voice that asserts women's power even as we expose the systems of our disempowerment. In all of our various "stories" of woman and her oppressions, feminists must self-consciously create through oral and written images "recalcitrant women subjects" that, like Fleur, can survive beyond the realization of their oppression (Shaddock 120).

That in *Tracks* Fleur seldom utters her voice, compared either with Nanapush and Pauline, but leaves her "tracks," visible or invisible, here and there in the woods, is significant as it functions as the silent protest against the "savage" outside/white world encroaching every inch of the Indian land; that she eventually loses every piece of her inherited land and lake is tragically inevitable, leaving ineffaceable traces and tracks in each reader's mind. Even Pauline, the character whom we might not like or trust, succeeds to elevate herself to the state of (pseudo)sainthood.[13] They are madwomen in the forest/convent; they are also brave women, each fighting for the right to exist with her own sense of dignity and with her own means.

V. Conclusion

Eventually, Fleur Pillager, fierce and unassimilated, exiles herself as a "nomadic subject," wandering in her deep forest (Grossberg 388). Significantly, her "voluntary self-exclusion" from the degenerating world exemplified by the ruthless deforestation of the woods doesn't sentence the end of her people; instead the Pillagers continue even more vigorously through her only illegitimate child, Lulu. *Tracks* begins with Nanapush narrating Fleur's heroic/tragic life story to Lulu, and ends with Nanapush the (grand)father-surrogate welcoming the homecoming Lulu the daughter, whose grin was

[13] Pauline's "sainthood" is clearly depicted in *Love*, the first novel of the tetralogy, in which Lulu's grown-up life with 8 boys and three husbands forms a sharp contrast to Marie's (Pauline's daughter), another pair of contrast in the second generation, which continues the family lines more prosperously and unceasingly.

"bold" as her mother's, "white with anger" (*Tacks* 226). The very last scene presents Lulu rushing to the waiting Nanapush and Margaret, who gave against her "rush like creaking oaks, held on, braced [themselves] together in the fierce dry wind" (*Tracks* 226).

Similar to Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man," Fleur, though trackless, makes her presence manifested through her daughter Lulu.[14] In *Love Medicine*, the stunning first novel in Lourise Erdrich's Native American series, Lulu is one of the major characters, and she has accomplished amazingly in raising eight boys, some of whom do not even know who their natural father is. Most of her life Lulu had been known as "a flirt" (*Love Medicine* 108). But even with eight boys her house was "neat as a pin" (*Love Medicine* 114).

> The candy bowl on the table sat precisely on its doily. All her furniture was brushed and straightened. Her coffee table held a neat stack of fate and *True Adventure* magazines. On her walls she'd hung matching framed portraits of poodles, kittens, and an elaborate embroidered portrait of Chief. Her windowsills were decorated with pincushions in the shapes of plump little hats and shoes. (*Love Medicine* 114)

On the surface, Lulu is leading a "wild" domestic life in sharp contrast to her mother's ascetically simple one. However, scrutinized more closely, Lulu is leading a life similar to her mother's in that they both defy the social convention of the time. Having one affair after another, and raising one brilliant son after another, Lulu succeeds in continuing the Pillagers' blood line, multiplying rapidly.

For Erdrich, a part-Chippewa woman, the history of America has often been exclusionary—a monologic narrative of male Anglo-American progress that constructs others as people without history. Writing history has thus become one way for marginalized peoples to counter their invisibility (Perterson 983). Verily, Louise Erdrich is the rarest kind of writer, as compassionate as she is sharp-sighted.

To sum up, Erdrich's imagination is sacred and sacrilegious at once; the deepest feeling and wisdom leap out life fireworks from the most hilarious, or blasphemous, scenes; her language is magnificent, endearing, and full of vitality. Few American authors write with more lyrical tenderness and magical power. The most worth noticing quality is her bittersweet world, in which humor often undercuts the most serious moment, and by knowing when to laugh her characters are able to survive. It is a fact that Indian culture/tradition has already been marginalized, and the female Indians are further diminished; however, with Erdrich's works, the female characters have succeeded in creating their own world with more dignity and gust than the male tricksters, white or nonwhite. They are the beautiful women.

[14] Sheila Hassell Hughes, "Tongue-Tied: Rhetoric and Relation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *MELUS* Fall-Winter 2000. 10 Novemver 2006 <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi-m2278/is-2000-Fall-Winter/ai-74483361>

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