

I. Contextualizing Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

This present thesis is based on Louise Erdrich's third novel *Tracks*. The novel presents the struggle of the Native Americans during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was an era marked by natural obstacles, including plague and famine, and by encroaching progress, the white man's euphemism for a dwindling Indian share of land and for political and economic servitude for all but the craftiest and strongest of Native Americans.

Tracks is a brilliant example of evocations of the many of the Native Americans issues, including political, social and economic status of the people of the local people and their culture. Erdrich's presents the sense of history mingled with fiction in a fascinating manner that it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between the two. She thereby creates a counter history to dig the real history by putting the academic documentation of Anishinabe, the tribal Indian people against the historical documentation.

Louise Erdrich was born in Little Falls, Minnesota in 1954. She was Erdrich was the daughter of a German American father and a Chippewa mother. Her works are focused on the portrayal of Native American characters. Her writing is distinguished by a lyrical prose and the recurring theme of magic. Her early schooling was in a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school. She began writing as a child and majored in creative writing in college. She was educated at Dartmouth College. However, she earned a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University in 1979, and then went to Dartmouth as writer-in-residence.

After corresponding with Michael Dorris, her former anthropology professor, who was also of Native American descent, she began to collaborate with him on short fiction. They married in 1981. In 1982 they won the Nelson Algren fiction award for their short story "The World's Greatest Fisherman," Erdrich expanded the story into her first novel, *Love Medicine* (1984), the first book of a tetra logy that focuses on Native American characters.

The subsequent volumes are *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), and *The Bingo Palace* (1994). Her fifth novel, *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), also portrays Native Americans, focusing on five women who are connected by their love for the same man. *The Antelope Wife* (1998) portrays members of an extended Native American family, blending descriptions of the harsh realities of their everyday lives, including the divorce of the narrative's central couple, with more mystical elements of Native American beliefs, customs, and history.

Erdrich spent a year with her husband researching fatal alcohol syndrome, from which his adopted son suffered, and collaborated with him on a book on the subject, *The Broken Cord* (1989). In addition, they co-authored the novel *The Crown of Columbus* (1991). Erdrich has also written several volumes of poetry, including *Jacklight* (1984) and *Baptism of Desire* (1991).

Erdrich is a contemporary writer of German American and Chippewa heritage. Her novels feature Americans, mixed-bloods and other culturally and socially displaced characters whose marginal status is simultaneously an advantage and disadvantage. Catherine Rainwater views, "*Tracks* reflects the ambivalence and tension marking the lives of people from the dual cultural backgrounds" (405).

In *Tracks* two narratives likewise struggle with liminality in their efforts to leave behind early lives in favour of others they have chosen. Nanapush, one of the main characters in the novel grows up in a Jesuit school but later chooses life in the wood and Chippewa traditions. The other narrator, Pauline, is a mixed blood raised in the Native American tradition, but she wishes to be white and eventually becomes a fanatical nun, constantly at war with the "pagan" who had once been her relatives. E. Shelly Reid believes, "*Tracks* captures the multiple voices of Native American individuals" (67).

Reid is of the opinion that *Tracks* is a complete novel that seeks accolades as it is a brilliant portrayal of human desired encroached by development and modernization. She observes the novel as:

Tracks is one of the most exciting and surprising novelists writing in English. Erdrich tells of America's dispossessed, her Indian forefathers, in a compassion untainted by sentimentality. Her magic lies in her great gift for displaying the extraordinary hidden depth in an ordinary humdrum and all too frequently debased life. She finds the core of gold behind the dull facade. And she has given the Chippewa people of North Dakota a lasting place in fiction.

(39)

Her presentation of the Chippewa people, the aborigines of the North Dakota in America, who enjoy their own unique culture and traditions, excels any other literary presentation of the people in the United States. Her success lies in the magical depiction of even a minor tradition of the people in the most subtle manner.

Other critics opine that *Tracks* is nothing more than the glorification of Native American history and its tradition. Rita Ferran remarks, "Erdrich engage the paradox of employing and glorifying the oral tradition and its culturally cohesive function by inscribing the tradition" (144). Ferran is of the opinion that she is one the best literary figure to employ oral tradition of the Chippewa people in the American Literature. Besides, highlighting the oral tradition of the Chippewa people, Erdrich also glorifies it to the normal readers, further adding to their knowledge on the people.

Critics like Sheila Hassell Hughes see identity issue in the novel. The Chippewa people have been like a myth to the main stream of literature in their own country. *Tracks*, probably for the first time highlighted the issue of the Chippewa people in the limelight. She writes:

The rhetorical construction identity, authority and community, in the midst of complex relations between dominating and subaltern tradition is a central concern in Louise' *Tracks*. Besides, *Tracks* it is a resonance of the lost voice of the Chippewa people, who in *Trakcs* find an escape to their age old desire to express and communicate. (88)

Identity crisis is one of the most burning issues amongst the aborigine's people all over the world. It is not different in the case concerning the Chippewa people. In North Dakota, they still prefer to live in the forest area and their activities are limited, which has raised serious concerns on their existence itself. The situation of this people becomes terrible, especially during the summer and monsoon.

In the context, the publication of *Tracks* is beyond doubt a search for identity, as the writer, too belongs of the same clan. However, the present research is not based on identity search issue but deals of the study of historiography. It precisely studies *Tracks* as a novel that dismantles the boundary of history as fiction.

Tracks is largely a work of imagination based on the study of native American tribe called *Ojibwa*, along with its variations, means "puckered up" and probably refers to a puckered seam in the style of moccasins tribal members wore. Their natives are commonly termed *Anishinabe* meaning "first people."

A historical meta-fiction like Erdrich's *Tracks* espouses a postmodern ideology of pluralism and recognition of difference; "type" has little significance here, except as a something to be ironically undercut. Nanapush, the protagonist is a culturally and familiarly conditioned by his response to history. The narrative form of *Tracks* enacts that Nanapush is not a typed character as he, unlike Fleur Pillager, adapts himself to the fast changing situations. Seen from this perspective, *Tracks* implicitly uses irony to deflate the diehard attitude of Fleur, her refusal to adapt to the changing scenario around Lake Matchimanito.

Pitted against her and Nanapush is the villain, Pauline. Both Pauline and Nanapush vie for 'creative authority, foregrounding language as the site of cultural survival. Both invoke their rhetorical skills to control the representation of Fleur Pillager as 'the funeral of our history.'

Even the focus of Fleur Pillager in *Tracks* is ironic. Fleur belongs to the Pillager family, members of the bear clan who were possessors of both the power, which "travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth" and a powerful knowledge of herbal remedies and an inexplicable ability to control nature" (31). "Even though she was good looking," Pauline says, "nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Missehepesu, the waterman, the monster, wanted her for himself" (11). Fleur is looked upon as a predator because of these things. Although, Nanapush believes in the supernatural powers of Fleur, he does not quite agree with the community's view, in particular Pauline's and the ironically comments on the community' fear of Fleur, "You know how old chickens scratch and gabble. That's how the tales started, all the gossip, the wandering, all the things the people said without knowing and then believed, since they heard it, with their own ears from their own lips, each word" (9).

Nonetheless, the community believes that Jean Hat and George, including many women died for having dared Missehepesu's claim on Fleur. The irony, however, is that these persons died not for having challenged Missehepesu but for being involved in the usurpation of the tribal land. All deaths, diseases, disappearances and disabilities are ascribed to Fleur even when she is not responsible. Fleur, however, does not represent death; instead, she is an extension of nature depicted as tending a garden that "flourished madly, almost in defiance" (218). She is rooted to the earth, appearing to Pauline as "great and dark as fixed tree" (158) and to Nanapush as a "rain dark young tree" (200).

Fleur's identification with nature, however, leads towards a master stroke of irony in the scene that describes the destruction of her forest, not by the men hired to do the job but ironically, by Fleur herself, whose supernatural powers have been diluted by the continuing

presence of the rapacious Euro-Americans around Lake Matchimanito. Sawing through the trees herself in the last rebellious act she can perform, but her rebellion ironically does the aggressor's work for it. The effect of the irony is enhanced all the more when readers realise the symbolic significance of Fleur's forest: "The moment when the trees fall, marks the end of worldview that has included all highs, natural and supernatural, within the net of essential experience" (Hughes 247).

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Irony in *Tracks* is presented in three ways. Critical irony is directed at the full blood Fleur and more particularly at the mixed blood Pauline, who espouses the Euro Americans perspective to a considerable extent, historiography irony deconstructs the historical documentation itself. Erdrich plays upon the truth and lies of the academic documentation of the Anishinabe dispossession.

Further *Tracks* goes to vindicate the line of history and fiction, as the narrator of Salman Rushdie's *Shame* puts it:

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance, new species of fact arise, and old saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutation of the strong survives, the weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks. History loves only those who dominate her. (124)

By thus, underscoring the need for meta-fictional rethinking of the epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction, *Tracks* politicises the historical through ironic under cuttings.

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Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, is a remarkably spun tale of psychosis, sorcery, and love within the traditional realm of the Chippewa people. Throughout the novel, there are several references to love, relationship triangles, and suspiciously magical couplings. Erdrich

adheres closely to known Chippewa myth and lore in portraying her characters. She calls love medicine and Christianity, in constructing her two female characters, Fleur and Pauline.

Through these varying characters set up in a factual setting, Erdrich is successful to create a tension between history and fiction. She cleverly creates a mythical line between fact and fiction, as the Chippewa people are real but the mysticism associated with them is more like fantasy. The readers are bound to believe that history is fiction, as things mingle up so much so, that there remains no demarcation between the reality and fantasy.

II. Dismantling History and Fiction through Historiography

History, in its broadest sense, is the totality of all past events, although a more realistic definition would limit it to the known past. History and historiography terms are used, often in conjunction, to denote the study and recording of past events. Historiography is the written record of what is known of human lives and societies in the past and how historians have attempted to understand them. Of all the fields of serious study and literary effort, history may be the hardest to define precisely, because the attempt to uncover past events and formulate an intelligible account of them necessarily involves the use and influence of many auxiliary disciplines and literary forms. The concern of all serious historians has been to collect and record facts about the human past and often to discover new facts. They have known that the information they have is incomplete, partly incorrect, or biased and requires careful attention. All have tried to discover in the facts patterns of meaning that illuminate the human past.

A general belief about history is that it is a science of *res gestae* (Latin word), meaning, it tells story of the past most objectively, unlike the works of fiction that is deliberately imaginative. What is, however, generally missed is that absolute truth is not only elusive for the historian but also unrealizable, bound as it is to the vicissitudes of the literary imagination. As, Thomas B. Macaulay believes, the historians, unlike the scientist, is condemned to inadequacy by the very nature of his task. The historian must strive for an end, which is in the end unattainable, that of combining in a single forum the diametrically opposed powers of creativity and analysis, imagination and control. As Macaulay terms it as, “Perfectly and absolutely true” (72).

The purpose of history as a serious endeavour to understanding human life is never fulfilled by the mere sifting of evidence for facts. Fact-finding is only the foundation for the selection, arrangement, and explanation that constitutes historical interpretation. The process

of interpretation informs all aspects of historical inquiry, beginning with the selection of a subject for investigation, because the very choice of a particular event or society or institution is itself an act of judgment that asserts the importance of the subject. Once chosen, the subject itself suggests a provisional model or hypothesis that guides research and helps the historian to assess and classify the available evidence and to present a detailed and coherent account of the subject. The historian must respect the facts, avoid ignorance and error as far as possible, and create a convincing, intellectually satisfying interpretation.

Until modern times, history was regarded primarily as a special kind of literature that shared many techniques and effects with fictional narrative. Historians were committed to factual materials and personal truthfulness, but like writers of fiction they wrote detailed narratives of events and vivid character sketches with great attention to language and style. The complex relations between literary art and historiography have been and continue to be a subject of serious debate.

Macaulay commenting on the concept of history of Hayden White writes:

Hayden White strikes a similar chord. In fact, more forcefully in his writing on historiography, wherein he repeatedly draws our attention to the historian's ideology, colouring his representation of the past. The issue of ideology points to the fact that there is no value neutral description of any field of events, whether imaginative or real; not only in all representation but in all languages is politically contaminated. (129)

Hence, the concept of history is politically explicit, and cannot remain so, without being so. Even the issue of ideology cannot remain aloof from political subjugation.

White makes explicit definition of Historiography in his essay on *Historiography as Narration*, as:

Historical stories, the product of 'narrativisations' 'cannot be said to

correspond to anything other than the general story types of which they are instantiations. The story told is an allegory of how real events can be said to replicate the structural pattern of generic story types: fables, epic, romance tragedy, comedy and farce, etc. (3)

Since any set of events can be variously employed, it is the imagination that ascertains the precise contours they will finally take on. Their production, however is, not exclusively a matter of individual predilection but an aspect of the way culture determine the boundaries of the thinkable or follow able. This is what Whites makes clear in *The Content of the Form*: “In the historical narrative the systems of meaning-production peculiar to a culture or society are tested against the real events to yield to such systems” (45). This removes narrative from the fact versus fiction impasse and retrieves it as part of the cognitive process of fixing the limits between the fictive and the factual of which fiction is an indivisible constituent.

On the other hand, fiction is narration of unreal acts and incidents that are creation out of fantasy and imagination. According to *Oxford Learners Dictionary* fiction is "works of imagination." As such fiction can be of any subject matter, and is a sheer work of an individual's fantasy. Robert Scholes and Carl H. Klaus in *Elements of Literature* opine that fiction, "begins in the creative possibilities of human language in the desire of human beings to use their language creativity" (1).

Here lies the basic difference between history and fiction; the first is based on reality and the second is sheer imagination. History is created to narrated the past happenings into present but fiction, is of no limitation. Clearing the concept of fiction, Scholes and Klaus writes:

[. . .] Fiction has its origin in the joy of creation, literature can be intensely serious. It can use its formal beauty as a way of enabling us to contemplate the most painful and terrible aspects of existence, or as a way of celebrating those

things we value most highly in life. In the end, fiction enriches our lives

because it increases our capacities for understanding and communication. (1)

As such, any fiction and history are two separate parts of literary creations. However, when it comes to citation of factual events, a historian has to depend on historiography, a way of interpreting and analyzing the historical facts and data, whose history goes as back as to Western Roman Empire.

With the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century ad, the traditions of classical education and literary culture, of which historiography was part, were disrupt and attenuated. Literacy became one of the professional skills of the clergy, which carried on the task of preserving and expanding a learned, religious culture. Many monasteries kept chronicles or annals, often the anonymous work of generations of monks, which simply recorded whatever the author knew of events, year by year, without any attempt at artistic or intellectual elaboration. The achievements of past historians, however, preserved in monastic libraries, kept alive the idea of a more ambitious standard, and early medieval writers, such as Gregory of Tours, struggled to meet it. Similarly, *The Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 731) by the Venerable Bede, an English monk, achieved the integration of secular and ecclesiastical history, natural and supernatural events, in a forceful and intelligent narrative.

The revived vigour of intellectual and literary life in the High Middle Ages is reflected in the historical works of the English monk William of Malmesbury, the German Otto of Freising, and the Norman Orderic Vitalis. Although most of the later medieval historians were clerics and wrote in Latin, the traditions of secular historiography were also revived by chroniclers who wrote in the vernacular languages. Jean de Joinville recorded the deeds of his king, Louis IX of France, on crusade; Jean Froissart wrote of the exploits of French and English chivalry during the Hundred Years War.

Nineteenth-century historians transformed the intellectual and professional standing of the subject. The cultural circumstances were propitious, since rapid industrialization and urbanization kindled a new popular interest in the past, founded on nostalgia for a vanishing order, and expressed in a desire to recreate the past imaginatively. This outlook was reflected in the rise of the historical novel, and in important innovations in archaeology and the study of art and architecture. The leading historians of the day, like Leopold von Ranke in Germany, combined powers of empathy with a close critical attention to the surviving documents of the past. In a formidable sequence of works beginning with *Histories of the Latin and German Nations from 1494 to 1514* (1825), Ranke moved well beyond the documentary techniques of the 18th-century erudits. His method combined a close reading of the text with a careful reconstruction of the historical circumstances in which it was composed; only by these means, he maintained, could unreliable documents be detected and the essential meaning of the text be recovered. Training in these methods was the hallmark of a new breed of academic historians, who were trained under Ranke's supervision and who came to dominate German universities. It went hand-in-hand with proper provision for the conservation of state records.

The intellectual standing of historians was also enhanced by their claim to write history in a dispassionate, objective way: historians should not take sides, nor should they seek to make propaganda out of the past; their task was essentially one of reconstruction. "Historicism" is the label that refers to this somewhat austere approach to the past: it means a respect for the otherness of the past, and for the gulf that separates us from it. Ranke and his followers were opposed to the association of history writing with state propaganda. They also coveted "scientific status in an academic world in which the natural sciences enjoyed unrivalled prestige. On the strength of these claims, history became an academic discipline in

its own right, and a key subject within the German university curriculum. Its senior practitioners enjoyed considerable cultural authority.

Many modern historians trace the intellectual foundations of their discipline to this development of the 19th-century German universities, which influenced historical scholarship throughout Europe and America. French interest in the history of civilization was sustained by François Guizot, and the new scientific methods were applied to medieval history by Fustel de Coulanges. In England, the brilliant style of Thomas Macaulay continued the Enlightenment mode of a personal, essay-like history, but more exacting methods were applied in the universities. With colleagues and students at the University of Oxford, William Stubbs established English history on foundations of a thorough examination of sources, a movement carried forward by Samuel R. Gardiner and Frederick W. Maitland. George Bancroft was the first notable writer of United States history, and American universities in his time increasingly accepted the influence of German methods. By the end of the 19th century, history was firmly established in European and American universities as a professional field, resting on exact methods and making productive use of archival collections and new sources of evidence.

However, the professionalization of history was achieved at considerable cost to its social relevance. Whereas the philosophic historians of the Enlightenment had aimed to understand the entire development of mankind and to instruct their audience in the ways of progress, the new breed of academic historians in the 19th century was less ambitious. The effect of prioritizing the analysis of primary sources was to make the narrow monograph and the editing of texts the most respected forms of publication. Newly founded academic journals, like the *English Historical Review* (1886) and the *American Historical Review* (1895) confirmed the trend. The writing of history became associated with the demonstration of technical skills rather than the illumination of large problems.

The major exception to this narrowing of focus was the preoccupation of many historians with nationalism. The 19th century was the first age in which mass nationalism became a political and cultural force to be reckoned with. This was true both of those nations that were struggling to achieve statehood at the expense of great empires like the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman, and of well-established countries like France where the introduction of representative democracy placed a premium on national consensus-building. History, which defined the nation in terms of past achievements or past sufferings, came to be regarded as one of the most powerful ingredients of popular nationalism. All European countries produced history in this vein – from the urbane Lord Macaulay in England to the impassioned romantic Frantisek Palacky in the Czech lands. In Germany much of the neutrality that had characterized Ranke's best work was lost during the next generation as historians placed their labours in the cause of the German Second Empire. In the United States historians celebrated the virtues of the Founding Fathers of the American Revolution, and traced the unfolding of the "manifest destiny" of the American people. For these writers history was the handmaiden of nationalism, and they were not too scrupulous about the balance or objectivity of their accounts.

The first half of the 20th century was characterized by political extremism, as both Fascist and Communist states strove to achieve complete uniformity of thought by totalitarian methods. In Hitler's Germany many historians trained in the nationalist historiography before World War I colluded in the production of a Nazi version of the past. Stalin imposed a comparable agenda on historians in Communist Russia. Grave damage was done to the integrity of the historical profession in both countries.

In the western democracies of Britain, France, and the United States, on the other hand, these extremes were avoided. Nationalist history was already in discredit because of its association with the pointless slaughter of World War I. G. M. Trevelyan, one of the most

widely read historians in the English-speaking world in this period, showed a profound respect for the English past in almost everything he wrote, but *English Social History* (1944) was an exercise in nostalgia rather than a nationalist charter. More broadly, there was a retreat from ideologically committed history, and much soul-searching about the epistemological standing of historical knowledge. Carl Becker in America and R. G. Collingwood in Britain gave currency to historical relativism – the belief that historical truth is unattainable and that all history writing is moulded by the individuality of the writer. L. B. Namier, a Polish refugee working in Britain, established a new school of political history that dealt with power and patronage rather than ideas and ideals.

In the long run, however, the first half of the 20th century proved to be significant primarily with regard to experiments in the enlargement of the scope of history writing, which would transform the discipline after 1945. Around the turn of the century it became apparent to a growing number of historians that the industrial and urban transformation through which Western societies had been living over the past two generations required a new approach to history, in which economic and social change would be brought to the forefront. For some historians, the lead taken by other disciplines like economics and sociology in addressing such questions acted as a further spur. The theories and techniques of the social sciences became increasingly relevant. Here was the beginning of the inter-disciplinary movement that has proved so fruitful in historical practice in recent decades.

Annales, a popular journal from the west follows approach that became very influential after 1945 was the use of quantitative methods. This was the inevitable consequence of harnessing history to the social sciences, since quantitative method was at the heart of subjects like economics and sociology. A new field of quantitative history came into being, based on the collections of numerical data made by Western states since the 18th century in order to calculate their tax revenues or their populations or their rates of mortality.

French historians of the Annales School were pioneers in sophisticated demographic history and in the serious analysis of long sequences of economic data like prices and volumes of trade. But it was in the United States that quantitative history was taken up with the greatest commitment. At a time when the prestige of the natural sciences was unprecedented, quantitative methods lent a strongly scientific cast to historical research. The increasing use of computer analysis from the 1960s confirmed this impression. A high-profile branch of quantitative history, known as *Cliometrics*, advanced the claim that statistics could not only yield more precise descriptive statements about the past, but could also solve major issues of historical explanation – at least in economic history: Robert W. Fogel's *Railways and Economic Growth* (1964) was a striking example. Economic historians relying on quantitative methods were among the most vociferous proponents of the view that history was – or ought to become – a science. But they were not the only ones. In Britain E. H. Carr in *What Is History?* (1961) firmly placed history in the scientific camp, not because of its methods (which he took much delight in demystifying) but because he regarded it as part of the scientific endeavour to increase mankind's understanding and mastery of the environment.

These debates were conducted within academia, with little resonance outside. They were soon overtaken by changes in the scope and tone of history writing that reflected a transformation in the relationship between university and society. The historiographical developments in the first half of the 20th century had been achieved in an academic environment that would still have been recognizable to the founders of the discipline two generations earlier. Universities were small and often somewhat removed from the society around them; their students came from comparatively privileged backgrounds and went on to fill influential positions in politics, administration, and education. Historians were respected luminaries in intellectual elite. By the 1970s the picture had completely changed. The era of

mass higher education had arrived; between 1960 and 1980 a threefold increase in university students was the least that European countries experienced. The composition of the new student body was also markedly different. With the growing inclusion of women students, working-class students, and students from ethnic minorities, it was far less homogeneous and potentially much more radical. Meanwhile teachers in universities, including historians, grew in number and declined in status.

Many, perhaps most, academic historians confronted these changes with a determination to maintain the traditions of the discipline, either from motives of self-preservation, or because they genuinely believed that the new students should not be palmed off with an inferior product. But the running was increasingly made by younger historians who responded to the fertile atmosphere of political dissent which marked the Western world during the 1960s and 1970s: the peace movement, black power, the women's movement, the beginning of green politics. Dissent even defiance became the hallmark of campus life, and the study of history was deeply affected. Historians in increasing numbers turned their attention to groups previously absent from the historical record especially women, blacks, and sexual minorities. The exclusion of these groups from scholarly work had been based on a belief that they had contributed little or nothing to history, and that primary documentation was lacking. The radical historians of the 1960s and 1970s constructed new historical narratives that enlarged the range of historical actors. They also uncovered many sources of relevance to the new agenda, and for recent history they made systematic use of interviewed informants, a practice that quickly came to be known as oral history.

One major beneficiary of the radical climate was Marxism. Karl Marx had elaborated his theory of history between the 1840s and the 1860s, but for a long time it was much better known among revolutionary socialists than among historians. After 1917 it became the official view of history in the Soviet Union, and it was taken up between the wars by a small

group of Western historians, mainly as an intellectual resource against Fascism. Only in the new atmosphere of the 1960s did Marxism become a major influence on historians, which is why it makes sense to consider it as a contribution to 20th-century historiography. Marxism was an effective means of advertising identification with the workers or the underdog more generally, and it immediately suggested that history was politically relevant. But Marxism was more than a radical talisman. Its influence on the writing of history proved to be enduring because of the purchase it offered on some of the most intractable problems of historical explanation.

Perhaps the most difficult of these problems is how to conceive of historical societies as wholes, particularly in view of the fissiparous tendencies of specialist research. Marxist historians start from the materialist premise that the character of all societies is determined by the way in which people fulfil their material needs (hence the term “historical materialism”) a society based on the factory will be very different from one based on the plough. The outcome in each case will be a distinctive pattern of economic relationships or mode of production. This is the economic base, upon which is constructed the institutions of law and the state, with their supporting ideology. Hence, the labelling of particular societies as “feudal” or “industrial capitalist,” without assuming a total coherence in every particular, Marx nevertheless provided a powerful organising model. The extent of its influence can be measured by the fact that today it is habitual to begin a historical survey work with an account of the economy, on the assumption that this sets significant limits to what we can expect to find in the sphere of politics or culture.

But Marx himself was centrally preoccupied with historical change – with understanding it in the past, and with predicting its trajectory in the future. His theory of social structure was, in a sense, merely the preliminary to uncovering the dynamics of human development. This Marx did by identifying the contradictions that make any social structure

to a greater or lesser degree unstable. Given human creativity, technological advance and its appropriate relations of production have a tendency to run ahead of the political system, which is likely to reinforce the existing outmoded economic structure rather than facilitate the emergence of the new one. These are the preconditions for acute class conflict between the protagonists of the old order and the new – between the feudal class and the bourgeoisie in the transition to mercantile capitalism, and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the transition to socialism. Ultimately therefore, social change comes about as a result of the growth of human productive power: Marx's theory of social change is no less materialist than his view of social structure.

During the 1960s and 1970s Marxism was taken up enthusiastically by many historians. Part of its appeal lay in its promise of "total history." The call for a history that transcends the conventional demarcations of sub-disciplines had been made by the Annales School as early as the 1930s, but the Annales historians had failed to develop a practicable model. On the other hand, Marx's materialist premise and his theorization of the mode of production lent themselves well to a history that encompasses elites and masses, and considers politics and culture in relation to production. The potential of this approach can be gauged from the distinguished works of E. J. Hobsbawm, ranging from *The Age of Revolution* (1962) covering the period of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, to *The Age of Extremes* (1994), which surveys the short 20th century from 1914 to 1991.

Marxism also appealed as an effective means of writing emancipatory history, or history from the perspective of marginalized groups. It emphasized trajectories of progressive change in history, it located the forward march of history with subordinate classes instead of the controlling elites, and it articulated the structural significance of these classes. Eugene Genovese's work on the 19th-century slave plantations of the American south and E. P.

Thompson's on the emerging working class of the Industrial Revolution in Britain were two of the more remarkable achievements in this genre. That both of these were essentially social historians highlights the fact that by the 1970s Marxism was the most dynamic strand of social history. While political history continued to account for a majority of academic historians, social history was by this time the principal site of innovation.

By the 1980s an increasingly significant innovation was the application of gender to historical work. The women's liberation movement had demanded a shift of perspective in history, as in all other disciplines. Initially this had produced studies of notable women in the past and of women's historical experience that had no obvious bearing on mainstream history and could easily be ignored by the majority of male historians. But women's historians who worked in academia aimed to transform the discipline of history as well as furnish their sisters with a usable past. The most effective means of doing so proved to be gender history.

The concept of gender is premised on the notion that sexual difference is historically constructed rather than a biological given, and that it permeates much more than the immediate relations between men and women. Beginning in the United States, and spreading quickly to Western Europe, feminist historians demonstrated that gender is a structuring principle historically that is as significant as class, and one that has marked the lives of men as well as women. This perspective has been fruitfully applied to fields as diverse as the history of the family, of political movements, and of poverty. A broad survey such as Olwen Hufton's *The Prospect before Her: a History of Western Women 1500 to 1800* (1995) is not just a women's history but a contribution to our knowledge of early modern Europe.

Meanwhile the Annales School, the principal locus of new ideas between the wars, continued to contribute important new perspectives. The members of the school carried light ideological baggage: most were avowedly non-Marxist and few acknowledged the influence of feminism. But the fundamental commitment of the Annalistes to inter-disciplinary work

continued to pay rich dividends. In dialogue with the social sciences, Fernand Braudel in the 1950s elaborated an influential concept of historical time as divided into three planes: the history of events, the history of conjunctures (e.g. economic cycles), and the almost motionless history of the landscape and of deep mental structures (*la longue duree*).

Another group within the Annales School, led by the medievalist Jacques Le Goff, drew on the findings of anthropology to develop the study of collective mentality in past societies, focusing on the instinctual and emotional aspects of everyday life, rather than the intellectual achievements of the elite. This blend of anthropology and history has now become characteristic of the large and popular field of cultural history, which studies representation and discourse, rather than events and developments *per se*. Cultural historians have produced an exciting body of work, but its aim of reconstructing the mental world of the past still keeps it firmly attached to the original program of historicism in the 19th century.

Historiography as a Post-Modern Approach to dismantle History as Fiction

Historiography is the method of historical research. It is based on the available data, and hence is accepted as genuine source of studying of data, preferred by many. But the development of different kinds of history during the 20th century raises the question of whether there is still a unified, coherent field in historiography. It is no longer possible to speak of a hierarchy of histories, with political narrative at the pinnacle, because the counter claims of other branches, particularly social history are too strong. But until recently there did exist, a broad consensus about the methods of historical enquiry and the status of historical explanation. Historians generally took the view that they employed an empirical method, in which the ultimate test of their findings was whether they were supported by validated evidence. It was accepted that historians quite often differed sharply over large-scale questions of interpretation, sometimes for reasons that were extraneous to the issue in hand, but the evidence placed a limit on how widely interpretations could diverge. Epistemological

debate among historians was muted, with only an occasional flurry caused by books like E. H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961) and Howard Zinn's *The Politics of History* (1970).

The position is very different today. Postmodernism has undermined the truth claims of all humanities and social sciences. Historiography has been exposed to strong criticism. This is partly because it is a textual subject, and postmodernism rejects the notion of an authoritative or authentic reading. But Postmodernists also attack history because they maintain that the great trajectories that historiography has built around nation, class, and religion are fictions – as grand narratives conferring an illusory sense of direction on people who think they know about the past. Both as a mode of enquiry and as a map of knowledge, history is more exposed position than at any time since the 17th century. A small minority of historians have embraced at least some Postmodernist arguments in the hope of writing history that is proof against attack. The majority regard Postmodernism as a misconceived critique and hope that intellectual fashions will change. At the turn of the 21st century there are signs that this is the case. The extreme relativism implicit in Postmodernism is now less often heard, while the popular appeal of well-crafted historical interpretations of topics of current concern shows no sign of diminishing. Most important of all, historians can point with confidence to the extraordinary variety of knowledge about the human condition that their disciplined enquiries have uncovered over the past 150 years.

During the 1960s the working-class or lower-middle class realism of writers such as Kingsley Amis, John Braine, and Alan Sillitoe, with their emphasis on city life and restrictive provincialism, gave way somewhat to more international influences. This change invited in desire and will of people to explore their own identity and culture, which helped gain them international influence. *Tracks* is an similar attempt to explore the possibilities and difficulties faced by the people of Obijwa tribe residing in the forest of North Dakota. Louise, in *Tracks* makes an sincere attempt to expose the history of her people of to the forefront but

ends up in creating more confusing. Her narration of the tribal culture and mysticism has ended up in creation of a vague concept of fiction and history, mingled with each other.

History is natural selection, mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance, new species of fact arise, and old saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutation of the strong survives the weak, the anonymous, and the defeated leave few weeks. History loves only those who dominate her, and it is fiction that can handle and distort history, as Louise displays in *Tracks*.

Thus, by underscoring the need for meta-fictional rethinking of the epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction, *Tracks* politicises the history through ironic under cuttings and make us believe that history is fiction and fiction is history.

III. Dismantling the Boundary between History and Fiction in Louise's *Tracks*

Louise Erdrich's novel, *Tracks*, is a remarkably spun tale of psychosis, sorcery, and love within the traditional realm of the Chippewa people. Throughout the novel, there are several references to love, relationship triangles, and suspiciously magical couplings. Erdrich adheres closely to known Chippewa myth and lore in portraying her characters. She calls upon many legends to enhance them. Erdrich utilizes traces of animal folklore, evil forces, love medicine and Christianity, in constructing her two female characters, Fleur and Pauline.

Fleur portrays the traditional 'long hair', or hold-out, for the Indian nation. She does not conform to colonization. She is the bear in this story. In fact, her clan marker contains four crosshatched bears (Erdrich 5). This "*dodem*, or totem, is a mythical and psychobiological symbol of the ancestral life forces" (Grim 62). In Chippewa myth, the bear symbolizes strength and courage (Johnston 53). The Chippewa also reveal, during the midewiwin ceremony, that "Bear established the cosmic axis along which he brings their ceremony to flat-earth [. . .] from this the tribe understood that Bear had established manitou at the interface between the layers of power and human need" (Grim 84-5). This indicates that the bear is similar to a conductor between worlds, and that leads us to believe that those clans with his marker are also a conduit for this power.

This infusion of the bear and power is introduced early in the story during the description of Fleur's clan as follows:

Power travels in bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, with the Pillagers (Fleur's clan) are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person. (Erdrich 31)

The reference to the bear is also seen during the birth of her first child, later named Lulu.

At the time of this birth, Fleur has already been in labour for two days. She begins calling to the animals, which is traditional folklore for someone who is powerful. Nanapush can hear Fleur and the animals as he remarks about their presence and personality. He hears and thinks, "Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp. Perhaps the bear heard Fleur calling, and answered" (Erdrich 59). When the bear lumbers into the yard, all were dumbstruck, especially since it takes a strong and powerful creature to kill a bear. The tale continues as such:

I [Nanapush] am a man, so I don't know exactly what happened when the bear came into the birth house, but they talk among themselves, the women, and sometimes they forget I'm listening. So I know that when Fleur saw the bear in the house she was filled with such fear and power that she raised herself on the mound of blankets and gave birth. The Pauline took down the gun and shot point-blank, filling the bear's heart. She says so anyway. But she says that the lead only gave the bear strength, and I'll support that . . . It barrelled past me, crashed through the brush into the woods, and was not seen after. It left no trails either, so it could have been a spirit bear. (Erdrich 60)

Knowing her tribes belief in the bear spirit, it is odd that Pauline attempted to kill such a powerful *dodem* with the modern tool, a gun. She is a good example of the colonized Indian.

Here she represents the colonized half-breed to Fleur's traditional 'long-hair'. She comes from unknown origin, in that "she was different from the Puyats [her clan] I [Nanapush] remembered, who were always an uncertain people, shy, never leaders in our dances and cures. She was, to my mind, and unknown mixture of ingredients" (Erdrich 39). She truly embraces the European culture, including its religion of Catholicism. This causes many problems throughout the novel, particularly in her relation to Fleur. As Fleur is linked with the spirit bear, Pauline is unfavourably represented by the spirit owl.

The owl is often regarded with fear and is associated with sorcery and death and generally seemed to be rather uncanny. This is seen overtly in Pauline's own vision after her first official aid in death.

I [Pauline] hooked my hands on a chair, just to hold steady. If I took off my shoes I would rise into the air . . . And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below . . . They say, or Bernadette does, that when they found me in the tree later that morning, everyone was shot with fear at the way I hung, precarious, above the ground. . . I knew that after I circled, studied, saw all, I touched down on my favourite branch and tucked my head beneath the shelter of my wing. (68-9)

There are many more inferences about Pauline's aquiline features. When she strips down to have sex with Napoleon, for instance, she remarks, "I hadn't like seeing myself naked, plucked and skinned" (74). There is another overt reference to her bird-like qualities when they take the bandages off of her severely burned hands, "new flesh grew upon my hands, smooth and pink as a baby's, only tighter, with not give to it, a stiff and shrunken fabric, so that my fingers webbed and doubled over like a hatchling's claws" (196). Pauline may appear weak, yet she is more powerful than most, and should not be dismissed lightly. Her power seems to swell and grow with each soul she assists into death and as her belief in Christianity grows.

Her conversion is suspect as well, for the Chippewa were highly suspicious of converted Indians, and the reciprocal was true for "persons who were not members of the Midewiwin, especially Catholicized Indians, [who] often looked, with suspicion and fear, upon the Midewiwin, suspecting it of being a school for sorcery" (Barnouw 10). The Midewiwin is a general reference that can be applied to all of the following three beliefs. It is the Ojibway (the term for Chippewa religion) shamanic society, the description of the

ceremony of the Mide Society, and/or Ojibway tradition taught by the Mide Society (Grim 67-8). The Midewiwin is the core of Ojibway religion and Pauline's suspicion of these ceremonies is strongly evident when she calls upon her Catholic God as she interrupts a curing ceremony for Fleur. Pauline becomes a crazy woman in this instance, "I'm sent to prove Christ's ways, 'she [Pauline] said. . .She prayed loudly in Catholic Latin, she plunged her hands, unprepared by the crushed roots and marrows of plant, into the boiling water. She lowered them farther, and kept them there (Erdrich 190). She then leaves screaming from the tent, as the others watch on in astounded horror. Pauline is sceptical of the ceremony, and ruins it to prove her point. She is consistent in this destruction. Pauline is not a very likable character, but a pivotal character in the story with her obsession with sexuality, satisfaction, and her twisted notion of love.

At the onset, it appears that Fleur brings the overt sexuality to the story. Erdrich uses all of the connotations of the bear myth in constructing Fleur and her spirit animal. In the tradition of the Chippewa peoples, the bear is associated with menstruating girls and upon the first menses, she is known as:

Wemukowe – *literally*, "going to the bear" --and during her seclusion she is known as *mukowe* – "she is a bear." Contributing to this identification was a curious equation between hunting and courting. The same Chippewa term was used for both flirting and hunting game, while another Chippewa term connotes both using force in intercourse and also killing a bear with one's bare hands. (Barnouw 248)

This idea, which mixes courting with hunting, is also documented by Ruth Landes who states, "Romantic sex was prized, seen as a hunt and a game, by men especially" (65). Thus it is no surprise that Eli consults with Nanapush, his teacher in the art of hunting, to learn how to court Fleur.

An old adage claims that laughter is the best medicine to cure human ailments. Although this treatment might sound somewhat unorthodox, its value as a remedy can be traced back to ancient times when Hypocrites, in his medical treatise, stressed the importance of "a gay and cheerful mood on the part of the physician and patient fighting disease" (Churchill 67). Aristotle viewed laughter as man's quintessential privilege: "Of all living creatures only man is endowed with laughter" (Churchill 68). In the Middle Ages, laughter was an integral part of folk culture. "Carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and ritual connected with them had an important place in the life of medieval man" (Churchill 5). During the trauma and devastation of German bombing raids on London during World War II, the stubborn resilience of British humour emerged to sustain the spirit of the people and the courage of the nation. To laugh, even in the face of death, is a compelling force in the human condition. Humour, then, has a profound impact on the way human beings experience life. In Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, humour provides powerful medicine as the Chippewa tribe struggles for their physical, spiritual, and cultural survival at the beginning of the twentieth century.

While the ability to approach life with a sense of humour is not unique to any one society, it is an intrinsic quality of Native American life. "There is, and always has been, humour among Indians" (Ferrari 22). In deference to their history, this can best be described as survival humour, one which "transcends the void, questions fatalism, and outlasts suffering" (Ferrari 45). Through their capacity to draw common strength from shared humour, Native Americans demonstrate how "kinship interconnects comically in a kind of personal tribalism that begins with two people, configures around families, composes itself in extended kin and clan, and ends up defining a culture" (Ferrari 63). In *Tracks*, the power of Native American humour to profoundly affect human experience is portrayed through the characters of Nanapush and Fleur.

In his role as “Nanapush” the trickster, a central figure in Chippewa (Ojibwa) storytelling, Nanapush demonstrates the power of Native American humour in his own life, when he challenges the gods and cheats death by playing a trick on them: “During the year of the sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story. I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and travelled on” (Erdrich 46). The trickster figure is characterized as a man of many guises, dualistic in nature good and bad and often considered quite a lover. He is a survivor, physically and psychologically. As one who endures, he transcends the temporal and functions as an affirmation of the self. The trickster is also “central to the tribe’s worldview,” with power that extends beyond himself, guiding his people toward a view of themselves and of *possibility* that they might not have seen otherwise. To fulfil his role as trickster, Nanapush uses humour as powerful medicine not only for himself, but also for his tribe.

Nanapush purposefully directs his own special brand of humour – raucous bantering Margaret, guiding her away from her hardened widow-view of life toward the possibility of a romantic relationship with him. He goads her by boasting of his sexual prowess, to which she is less than receptive. Nanapush describes her as “headlong, bossy, scared of nobody and full of vinegar” (Erdrich 47), while she calls him an old man, with two wrinkled berries and a twig. When he replies, “A twig can grow” Margaret retorts, “But only in the spring” (Erdrich 48). Through humour, each comes to view the other with new possibility. Out of their bantering evolves a deeper, more meaningful relationship, one that binds them together in strength, companionship, and love.

Through a more subtle, as Nanapush guides Eli Kashpaw, who is like a son, toward a successful romantic union with Fleur Pillager, a union that is both an uninhibited celebration of life between two lovers and a symbol of hope for the people of their tribes? When Eli pleads for advice on how to woo Fleur, Nanapush imparts the humorous wisdom of a man

who has had three wives: "I told him what he wanted to know. He asked me the old-time way to make a woman love him and I went into detail so he should make no disgraceful error" (Erdrich 45). He also gave him "a few things from the French trunk my third wife left [. . .] to help him in the courting process" (Erdrich 45). Nanapush is pleased when he hears nothing more from Eli after he returns to Fleur, interpreting this, "as a sign she [Fleur] liked the fan, the bead leggings, and maybe the rest of Eli, the part where he was on his own" (Erdrich 46).

A powerful, sensuous relationship develops between Eli and Fleur that provides solace to themselves and inspiration to their tribe during a bitter winter, when there was no food and little hope, and the people of the tribe chopped holes in Lake Matchimanito to fish. They "stood on the ice for hours, waiting, slapping themselves, with nothing to occupy them but their hunger and their children's hunger" (Erdrich 130). From Fleur's cabin across the frozen lake, the people could hear faint calls uncontained by the thick walls of the cabin. These cries were full of pleasure, strange and wonderful to hear, sweet as the taste of last summer's fruit. Bundled in strips of blanket, coats stuffed with leaves and straw, they pushed the scarves away from their ears to hear the sounds of pleasure that "carried so well through the hollow air, even laughing whispers" (Erdrich 130). The people listened "until they heard the satisfaction of silence. Then they turned away and crept back with hope. Faintly warmed, they leaned down to gather in their icy line" (Erdrich 130). The celebration of life between two lovers, born from the humorous wisdom of Nanapush in his advice to Eli, was transferred to the tribe as spiritual nourishment and the possibility of hope.

Native American humour challenges fate, nourishes the human spirit, and gives strength and hope for survival. "The powers to heal and to hurt, to bond and to exorcise, to renew and to purge remain the contrary powers of Indian humour" (Ferrari 5). For the

Chippewa, this humour provides powerful medicine for the physical, cultural, and spiritual preservation of their tribe.

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The reference to the bear is also seen during the birth of her first child, later named Lulu.

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Knowing her tribes belief in the bear spirit, it is odd that Pauline attempted to kill such a powerful *dodem* with the modern tool, a gun. She is a good example of the colonized Indian.

Here she represents the colonized half-breed to Fleur's traditional long-hair. She comes from unknown origin, in that "she was different from the Puyats, her clan; I (Nanapush) remembered, who were always an uncertain people, shy, never leaders in our dances and cures. She was, to my mind, and unknown mixture of ingredients" (Erdrich 39). She truly embraces the European culture, including its religion of Catholicism. This causes many problems throughout the novel, particularly in her relation to Fleur. As Fleur is linked with the spirit bear, Pauline is unfavourably represented by the spirit owl.

Erdrich pushes the courting and hunting metaphor even further by placing Eli and Fleur's first encounter at the scene of a hunt:

But the doe was real enough; he (Eli) told me (Nanapush), gunshot and speaking. The blood dropped fresher, darker, until he thought he heard her just ahead and bent to the ground, desperate to see it in the falling sky, and looked

ahead to catch a glimpse, and instead saw the glow of a fire. He started toward it, stopped just outside the circle of light. The deer hung, already split, turning back and forth on a rope. When he saw the woman gutting with long quick movements, arms bloody and bare, he stepped into the clearing. (Erdrich 42)

In the previous passage, the male and female roles have been blurred. Erdrich does this frequently in her characterization of Fleur. After the death of Fleur's family, "she returned to Matchimanito and stayed there alone in the cabin that even fire did not want. A young girl had never done such a thing before," (8). This gender role confusion is important to note because it is her sexuality that keeps the town's tongues wagging.

Fleur is somewhat expected to have used sorcery to evoke Eli's passion. Nanapush wonders if she has trapped Eli by "winding her private hairs around the buttons of Eli's shirt, if she had stirred smoky powders or crushed snakeroot into his tea. Perhaps she had bitten his nails in sleep, swallowed the ends, snipped treads from his clothing and made a doll to war between her legs" (49). This passage is particularly interesting because in Chippewa myth there is a love medicine ritual documented as:

Next the prepared dolls were wrapped in a small piece of buckskin and the power-wish was muttered over them: that even as the dolls were bound together within this hide, so should the reluctant girl or man in question desire to be close to the body of the magician, under his blanket. The magician carried this fetish somewhere on his body, often in the armpit; he stole a hair from the head of the desired one and wrapped it in the little bundle where it too got soaked in his sweat; he rubbed the bundle on his hands along with a love powder (prepared with the same invocations to the spirits) and passed his hands over some part of the desired one's body, via the doll--and the victim was secured. (Landes 66)

The idea the Fleur might use witchery on Eli is suspicious, since she is self-sufficient. It causes the reader to wonder if the rumours come merely from her open sexuality, her absence of shame, and from their open displays of passion. This passion is what the townsfolk seem to object to the most, that “they're (Eli and Fleur) like animals in their season! No sense of shame! Against the wall of the cabin down beside it. In grass and up in trees” (48). Again, Fleur challenges the taboos, but does not break the law. Challenging taboos is never without reproach and Fleur's sexuality is often in question. Pauline remarks that “some say she married the water man, Misshepeshu, or that she lives in shame with white men or windigos, or that she's killed them all.

Pauline, an unreliable narrator, brings up the names of the evil supernatural spirits with whom Fleur is accused of coupling. The Chippewa believe the following about these forces of evil:

The many evil Manitou is not located in the earth or sky regions but in the cosmic waters that separate our flat-earth from the earth below us. The principal malevolent force, personified as Michibissy or Matchi manitou, is a great underwater lion or feline being with horns and an encircling tail. Maatchimanitou not only assails the human order with disease, storms, and other intrusions, but also takes possession of certain shamans, who then claim this manitou as their patron spirit. (Grim 78)

In Chippewa myth, these “Evil supernatural’s were windigo and underwater creatures. Water monsters were the perpetual and recurrently defeated enemies of sky supernatural especially of Thunderbirds. The battle, eternally resumed, is analogous to the conflict between God and Satan in Christianity. The conflicted one, however consistently appears to be Pauline, no Fleur, throughout the text.

Pauline's suspicious battles suggest that she is the one coupled with Misshepeshu and windigos. Her relationship is introduced when she shows her knowledge of the beast's form as she describes it:

Our mothers 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 [. . .]. Then he takes the body of a lion, a fat brown worm, or a familiar man. (11)

Pauline's belief in the Windigo is maintained in the text when she rows out into the lake and calls upon the monster to take her life. When the water pours into her boat, she refuses to bail it out. When the waves threaten to overtake the boat, it holds itself together. Unlike previous attempts to contact the water monster, she survives. She does not offer any sacrifice to Misshepeshu, such as tobacco as others did, yet he does not take her life.

We can see the ravenous tendencies of Misshepeshu. When Fleur encountered peril on the lake, she survived and three men died in her rescue. And when Napoleon, the father of Pauline's illegitimate child, attempts to save Pauline, he succumbs to Misshepeshu with some help from Pauline's rosary. By teaming with Misshepeshu, Pauline enters a marriage pact with the monster. This marriage is supported by Landes' 'finding of the folklore regarding "water monsters [that] represented a sexually romantic obsession and turned their proteges into celibates, should the visionary have children, they risked being killed by the jealous water spouse [. . .] the visionary endured a miserable life, which the tcisaki, or divining doctor, could diving, but not even a midewiwin (curing ceremony) could cure" (32). Pauline's entrance to her miserable life occurs after her encounter. Her "monogamy" toward Misshepeshu is seen on land by her conversion to Christianity and entrance into the convent. Her only child becomes estranged and "as good as dead" to her. She is conflicted by her

sexually romantic obsessions with Eli and Fleur, and does everything in her power to retaliate and absolve her miserable life.

Pauline's distaste for Fleur is evident throughout the book. She despises Fleur and attempts to spread unflattering rumours about her. Pauline's description of Fleur includes her pendulum of emotions from hatred to respect and envy. Pauline senses that Fleur's spirit animal--the bear--is stronger and more powerful than her own, and never misses an opportunity to dispel any mystery regarding Fleur's shape shifting. Although Pauline views Fleur's spirit Bear powers as detrimental, the irony remains that for the non-colonized Native American, the bear remains a very powerful animal. Pauline's ignorance is seen here:

She (Fleur) messed with evil, laughed at the old women's advice and dressed like a man and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. (12)

Singularly significant is Fleur's rebellion toward colonization and gender roles. She dresses like a man and hunts like as a bear.

Yet Pauline is drawn to observe Fleur's insurgence out of morbid curiosity and affection. Pauline states, "I tried to stop myself from remembering what it was like to have companions [. . .] But when Fleur came to us that June, I remembered. I made excuses to work next to her, I questioned her. She touched my face one, as if by accident, or to quiet me" (Erdrich 15). Pauline also recalls fondly when Fleur puts her to bed, "I was lifted, soothed, cradled in a woman's arms and rocked so quiet that I kept my eyes shut while Fleur rolled first me, then Russell, into a closet of grimy ledgers, oiled paper, balls of string, and thick files that fit beneath us like a mattress" (Erdrich 20). Pauline cannot help herself from

observing Fleur. She is drawn to Fleur and her habits. Pauline notes that "Every night, Fleur bathed in the slaughtering tub, then slept in the unused brick smokehouse behind the lockers, [. . .] when I brushed against her skin I noticed that she smelled of the walls, rich and woody, slightly burnt" (22). Pauline becomes obsessed.

In her obsession, she wants to be capable of attracting men like Eli as Fleur does, but is ashamed of her sexual desires. Guided by her spirit marriage to Misshepesu, she tests the waters of her own sorcery. In conducting love medicine, she breaks a Chippewa moray that saw love medicine as a great affront against the culture because it is a sneak attack on human will. Furthermore, poorly executed love medicine "was considered the ugliest sorcery and the explanation of rape" (Landes 65). Considering Fleur and Pauline's respective powers, weak love medicine concocted by Pauline results in the gang rape of Fleur. Pauline is aware that she remains responsible for the rape because she is riddled with guilt about the terrible thing she did in Argus. What is left for the reader to discern is if Pauline is talking about locking the group up in the meat locker with Fleur, or watching her own rape fantasies to be enacted upon Fleur as she watched. Her voyeurism proposes an interesting problem, primarily because she did nothing to halt the rape. The witnessing of the rape and her reaction is intriguing because the reader does not ever know if Pauline wished for the rape out of sexual obsession with Fleur, thus by watching she is aligning herself with one of the male rapists, or out of hatred, witnessing pain inflicted upon Fleur.

Pauline's detached disposition is reinforced through her own self-mutilation and delusions. Her marriage to Misshepesu doesn't fit into her converted Catholicism paradigm, so she reinvents him as Satan. Pauline explains that "he comes in the dark. He sits on the stove and talks to me" (Erdrich 138). Furthermore, while she is gathering more wood for the fire, she "notices that my own shadow moves when I do not, which is often how Satan reveals himself, pressing so close" (Erdrich 139). He, like Misshepesu, feeds on death. As Pauline's

tribe lay dying of influenza and consumption, she simply asks him, "What I shall do now, I asked? I've brought you so many souls! And he said to me, gently: Fetch more" (140). Both spirit monsters, Misshepesu and Satan, are believed to be evil incarnate. Pauline becomes a disciple of Evil.

The second half of *Tracks* involves a symbolism shift from Chippawa to Christian, as Pauline – a narrator – eschews the "hold out" for the traditional ways mentality and moves toward a more conventional and Christian approach, her perception invokes parables rather than traditional myth. Yet throughout the text her sexual obsession with Fleur never ceases. And in the following seductive scene, Fleur takes on a Christ-like aura as Pauline retells the account as:

“We're all skinny this year,” said Fleur, tugging at my shield. I tried holding it around me, made her pull harder, till she jerked at me in annoyance and struggled to put me in the water. She ripped off my homemade underwear, threw my shift and knickers in a steaming iron cauldron. I stepped into the warmth . . . for I gave myself up then, closed my eyes and decided not to question Fleur's habit of sudden tenderness. It was like that night she carried me to Fritzie's closet and lay me among the ledgers. I gave in. [. . .] Then Fleur washed me, but I warned myself not to experience any pleasure. I sat down in the water, felt its heat as a sharp danger, but then I forgot. (153-55)

As Fleur pampers her enemy, Pauline, we see two things happen. First, Fleur takes on a Christ-like quality. Especially in washing Pauline's feet because Christ is said to have washed his own disciple's feet. Second, Pauline is baptized. Unfortunately for Fleur, Pauline's conversion isn't permanent and later when asked to assist Fleur in giving birth, she realigns with Satan/Misshepesu, and causes Fleur to miscarry. As Fleur feels she is going into premature labour, she employs Pauline to retrieve the Alder to stop the labour.

But Pauline is unable to complete this task. She notes that she went into the tiny tacked on room hung with wrapped leaves and roots, small packets of park, as well as several packages of ground wheat, acorns, lake rice in tight birch bark containers. That was the food they had left for the winter, I know. In the haste she knocks the containers to the floor and they broke for mice. Pauline is unable to retrieve the Alder and destroys Fleur's winter stores in the process. Later Pauline remarks that she “moved away from her, fumbled in the wood box, down in corners, tipped the water over, scalding my own leg, and had to boil it again. I do not know why the Lord overtook my limbs and made them clumsy, but it must have been His terrible will” (Erdrich 157). Here she is again working with her monster lover. His powers of Evil run through her as she fetches him more souls.

Throughout this whole text, Fleur and Pauline are juxtaposed to one another in many instances. Their mythical vision are clearly characterized in the traits and powers associated with the animals. Fleur is a bear and Pauline is an owl. Although most of the villagers believed Fleur to be the mistress of the lake monster, Misshepeshu, Pauline is the character who most embodies the traditional Chippewa consequence for pairing with the water creature. They are also sexually contradictory, where Fleur prizes monogamy, Pauline plays with the power of sex to fulfil her master's sinister tastes. Erdrich masterfully weaves a tale of many tales, which she states “comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning” (31).

Thus, the novel is a blend of fiction and reality. In the process of this blend, the reality blurs and dismantles into fiction. In turn, fiction becomes reality, and thus the boundary between history and fiction collapses to be associated with each other in Erdrich's *Tracks*. Histories are representations structured by the various different forms in which it is possible to tell stories. The historian fashion historical stories out of the repository of bare facts – facts which he or she processes and to which he or she grants meaning through employment. Here,

the histories are like fiction, as it is impossible for a sane to justify, how a human being possess the features of an animal and, how can a normal woman possess animal like power.

The hardships of the Chipawa people, the shift of these characters from their age old tradition and culture towards Christianity all are juxtaposed as fiction out of reality. This blend is further marred by famine, plague, modernization and encroachment of their natural habitat by the white people. In the process, mythical features of the Chippawa aborigine turn into fiction. It becomes almost impossible for a normal man to believe that, once a Chippawa tribe existed who were possessing mystical power in reality. Thus, reality becomes mere fiction and the thin line separating the history from fiction is dismantled.

IV. Conclusion

Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* is a brilliant depiction of life and culture of the *Ojibwa*, the aborigines of North Dakota, the U.S.A. The novel revolves around the struggle and hardships faced by *Ojibwa* – also known as the first people, dwelling in the forests of North Dakota in the course of safeguarding their culture and tradition.

The story takes place during the first two decades of twentieth century, when the whites of America wanted to seize the forest from the hands of *Ojibwa* tribe. Nanapush, the senior and the headman of the tribe is educated from a missionary school. Still, he is determined to protect his tribe and its culture from the whites' encroachment. In his attempt he faces threats from two sectors; internal and external. Internally, he faces challenge from his own people, but of different tribe – Pillager. His external challenge is from the whites, who want encroachment of the forest and plant machineries for the deforestation and ultimately use the land for cultivation.

Further more, the novel depicts two most interesting characters – Fleur and Pauline. According to the Chippawa belief, Fleur is a bear and Pauline an owl. Fleur possess supernatural power, similar to that of a bear. She drinks, gambles and fights like a wild bear with the men folk. There is a never ending enmity between Fleur and Pauline, and in the process both are indulged in a war to demoralize and surpass each other. In the process they practice sorcery and black magic, which is part of their natural gift. Nanapush, despite his entire attempt to reconcile between the girls fails, which is a further proof that the uniqueness of the society is failing.

Erdrich in the process of depiction of conflict for existence of the aboriginal people blends history as fiction and fiction as history. As such the thin line separating history and fiction, as history becomes fiction as soon as it is written, blurs and dismantles. It is partially, also due to the fact that Erdrich belongs to German American father and Chippewa mother. In

the course of narrating the history of her people, she blends reality into fiction and fiction into reality, as sometime she becomes Pauline and at other time Fleur.

Thus, *Tracks* is a chronological record of problems faced by the native people due to the encroachment invited by modernization and internal conflict existent among the tribe men. In the course of this struggle for existence, they fall trap to fictionalize their history, and it becomes difficult to separate between history and fiction.

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