

# I

## **Introduction: *Love Medicine*, Ojibwe, and Erdrich**

The present thesis will analyze how the writer attempts to perpetuate the Native American (particularly Ojibwe) oral tradition in employing multiple narration in *Love Medicine*. Likewise, it will also discuss the significance of the strategy in preserving the Ojibwe cultural heritage.

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) contains several conspicuous features. Her use of multiple narration in the novel, when observed in the light of Ojibwe cultural point of view, draws on the Ojibwe oral tradition of storytelling. The direct address to 'you', the use of the present tense in the narration imparts a sense of immediacy which we find in the oral narration.

Many Native American cultures share a common heritage: the oral tradition. Culture is transmitted orally from generation to generation. It often takes in the form of storytelling. The present thesis will strive to justify the various narrators from *Love Medicine* as the Native American storytellers; thereby the preservers of Native American cultural heritage and experience.

Multiple narration in writing is not, however, a Native American typicality; several writers of European descent have frequently done it. In fact, use of multiple perspectives in writing was seen as elitist and experimental in the early part of the twentieth century. The difference between them and Erdrich is that the former often use it to show how fragmented the world is, to reinforce the alienation of a self, an individual, whereas the latter uses it to demonstrate how an individual can be a microcosm of the totality of culture and how a self can convey greater cultural truths. Hence, in this thesis,

the multiple narrators in Erdrich's work have been studied in the light of the culture it has descended from, and has been written about.

The present research work, however, does not aim at distinguishing between the Native American and the Euro-American worldview. It is limited to the Ojibwe oral tradition and its reflection in *Love Medicine*. Nevertheless, the relevant comparison between them might be drawn to precisely locate the Ojibwe oral tradition.

In the narration of the novel, the multiple narrators mingle myth with reality. Past mixes up with the present in order to regulate the present life. In many Native American cultures, the tendency of formulating concept on the bases of series of binary oppositions is alien. History, for example, is not just the record of bygone events to contrast with the present. It embodies in it the potential to guide the present. In their study of traditional breast feeding practices of the Ojibwe tribe, J.E. Dodgson and R. Struthers mention that "History is a part of everyday life for many Ojibwe people, it [ . . . ] is alive and coexists with the present" (50).

The Native American tribes are mostly communal based. Family becomes a major source of identity in Ojibwe culture. Erdrich consciously reflects it in her novels. One of the prominent features in her novels is that her characters reappear in her different books. Leopolda in *Love Medicine*, for example, appears as Pauline in *Tracks*. The constant recurrence of characters in Erdrich's novels reminds the readers of the Ojibwe culture and familial pedigree. In *Love Medicine*, the narrators and characters present their existence in terms of their familial lineages. This feature proves that communal based value system is reflected in *Love Medicine*.

Use of multiple narration is a significant feature in Erdrich's novels. In *Love Medicine*, Erdrich has employed half a dozen first person narrators and a third person

omniscient narrator. The narrators are themselves the characters as well. The events and the dates related to the events are too complex to be deciphered since there is no linearity of narration. It reflects the Native American narrational structure, as Leslie Marmon Silko mentions, in which the expression resembles "something like a spider's web [. . .] with many little threads radiating from a center, crisscrossing each other" (Language, 1573).

The non- linearity of time in the novel has rendered the events in *Love Medicine* achronologically presented. The novel takes place in the narration from 1934 to 1984. The time frame, however, is not linear, a familiar concept in the mainstream American tradition. The novel opens in 1981, weaves its way back to 1934. The novel ends in earlier 1980s, thus completing a circular framework of time.

All the aforementioned traits have a close affinity with the oral tradition, a renowned phenomenon in many Native American cultures. In the first place, the narrators in the novel are themselves the storytellers. They talk about their cultural experiences in the modern /postmodern context. Likewise, they retell their own history, and familial lineages. They relate events with their experiences. There is no single protagonist or antagonist to remain at the apex. All the narrators are given equal status, and similar opportunity to expose themselves. In this sense, the multiple narrators in *Love Medicine* reflect the non- hierarchical and communal value system prevalent in the native culture.

Erdrich is a writer of Ojibwe tribe and in *Love Medicine* she draws her characters from four Ojibwe families: the Kashpaws, the Lamartines, the Pillagers, and the Morrissey's. However, Erdrich calls herself a Chippewa. The anthropologists studying Native American cultures claim that Ojibwe and Chippewa are not only the same tribe, but the same word pronounced a little differently due to accent. According to Michael Sanders, "if an 'O' is placed in front of Chippewa (O' Chippewa), the relationship

(between Chippewa and Ojibwe) becomes apparent' (18). The Ojibwe also call themselves Anishinabe, which means 'Original men'. Ottawa and Pottawatomini also call themselves Anishinabe, and at some time in the past, the three tribes were one. Ojibwe and Chippewa come from the Algonquin word "Otchipwa" (to pucker) and refer to the distinctive puckered seam of Ojibwa moccasins. Various spellings-- Achipoes, chepeway, chippeway, Ochipoy Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Odjibwa, Ojibweg, Ojibwey, Ojibwa and Otchipwe-- are used.

With the view of avoiding confusion, this researcher has used the term 'Ojibwe' almost everywhere in this research work to refer to Erdrich's tribe. If any other aforementioned nomenclature occurs while quoting, it should be understood as Ojibwe.

To understand the Ojibwe trait of oral tradition and other cultural aspects, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the Ojibwe tribe and its tension with other tribes. As the oral tradition informs us, the Ojibwe and other Algonquin speakers originally were the dwellers of up and down the east coast. Those who don't share this traditional view think it is more likely the Ojibwe lived next to Hudson's Bay and moved southward. Traditional Ojibwe leaders are creationists and don't believe in the Darwinian notion of evolution of human beings. Madeline Island in Apostle Island is significant for Ojibwe because they believe that their ancestors migrated there from the east coast of America and it was their final stopping place.

Having hunting and fishery the main occupation, the Ojibwe people scattered to different places. Due to European invasion and the native tribes' confinement within the reservation, this tradition has largely seceded today. However, Erdrich's one of the narrators in *Love Medicine*, namely Albertine Johnson mentions Eli Kashpaw as the "World's greatest fisherman", and thereby presents him as an icon of the Ojibwe tradition.

Nanapush is presented as a tribal rebel in *Love Medicine*. Many tribal rebels used to be prosecuted owing to their refusal to totally assimilate with the Euro - American policy. One among them was Louis Riel, who was executed in Canada. After his execution the Rocky Boy Ojibwe crossed into Northeast Montana and settled along the Milk River in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. After some bargaining, they were allowed to stay and given the Rocky Boy Reservation. In 1910, they were joined there by Little Bear's Cree. Back in North Dakota, the plains Cree escaped the government until 1982. Finally the Turtle Mountain Reservation was created for them by executive order.

The plain Ojibwe did not always remain on this reservation and often left on extended buffalo hunts. During one of these absences of Little Shell's group of almost 5000 Ojibwe and Metis in 1884, the authority concluded that Turtle Mountain was too large for the number of Ojibwe living there and reclaimed ninety percent of the reservation for sale to whites. This left Little Shell and his people stranded in Montana without land. The government offered to compensate the Ojibwe for the loss of ten million acres at the rate of 10 \$ per acre, which is also called the 'ten cent treaty'. Many Ojibwe received the money and returned to the crowded reservation in North Dakota.

Louise Erdrich is from Turtle Mountain band of Ojibwe. In *Love Medicine*, She makes Albertine speak of this Ojibwe history of suffering. Albertine maintains that the allotment of land to the whites was a 'joke'. Hence, Erdrich's narrators in *Love Medicine* don't tend to reflect the fragmentation of an individual; rather they advocate the common tribal joys and sufferings.

Storytelling was a powerful means of expressing their social and cultural experiences for Native Americans. The Ojibwe also passed their time entertaining each

other with stories, an art for which they are still renowned. The storytelling was not only a source of entertainment and familial pastime, but also a means to teach the younger generation their moral duties and to introduce them to their cultural life as well.

The Ojibwe took the Earth as mother, the sky as the father, the Moon as grandmother, the sun as grandfather and "great mystery" as the creator. The physical and spiritual duality is represented in the four directions--East, West, North, and South. Like other great Lakes warriors, there was cannibalism of their dead enemies. The social organization was based on 15-20 patrilineal clans which extended across band lines and provided their initial sense of tribal unity.

Though not extrovertly an urge for cultural preservation, Erdrich's novel *Love Medicine* deeply reflects the oral tradition and thereby makes room for the narrators to express their cultural values and experiences. But most of the critics have rather read *Love Medicine* through other perspectives. Some critics have even negated its existence as a novel. Commenting on the use of multiple narrators, Gene Lyons Vehemently proclaims that "no matter what the dust jacket says, it's not a novel. It's a book of short stories" (70). The fragments of several inter-related narratives, thinks Lyons, prevent it from being a novel.

Viewing Erdrich's characterization, critic Lydia A. Schultz says that Erdrich attempts to "avoid being exoticized by making her characters recognizably human above all else" (81). Schultz throws light on the fact that the human side of the characters frees them from the boundary of ethnicity.

In Karla sander's view *Love Medicine* places characters in an ambivalent situation of the two cultures where they seek for a balance of religion, identity, and community. In her own words:

*Love Medicine*[...] uncovers the resulting ambivalence experienced by her characters as they attempt to reconcile their Native American heritage with the expectations of the dominant white culture in the modern and postmodern United States. The ambivalence created in this attempted reconciliation underscores the difficulty faced by Erdrich's characters in reaching a balance between the spheres of past and present, personal and communal, private and public. (129)

Thus, Sanders thinks that the characters in *Love Medicine* are searching for a healthy balance between seemingly diametrically opposed cultures. She argues that Erdrich's effort has been to maintain the reconciliation of Native American characters with the modern/postmodern American culture.

Critic Karen Janet McKinney observes that "underlying theme in Erdrich's novels is the destructive influence of Catholicism on the Chippewa people" (152). According to her, *Love Medicine* is "microcosm of the cultural Schizophrenia that infects American life at every level" (152). Thus, McKinney views that the repercussions of acculturation can be traced in Erdrich's *Love Medicine*.

In this way, different critics have interpreted Erdrich's *Love Medicine* with different views. Only a few critics have discussed the employing of multiple narration in relation to the oral tradition and they, too, haven't done it exclusively by relating to the text in detail. Hence, this research work, which aims to justify Erdrich's multiple narration as the means to perpetuate oral tradition and thereby to preserve the Ojibwe cultural experiences, deserves considerable rationale.

To carry out this research work, the entire thesis has been divided into four chapters. Chapter one has outlined the thesis by introducing it in terms of its assumption, review of literature, and its context in the native tribal history. Chapter two will be based on the methodology of the thesis, which includes the Native American worldview, meaning of oral tradition and importance of oral tradition in Native American, particularly Ojibwe culture. In the light of the methodological aspects discussed in chapter two, chapter three will analyze *Love Medicine* on textual basis under the topic perpetuation of oral tradition through multiple narration in *Love Medicine*. Chapter four will summarize the thesis and state the findings in brief.



## II

### **Methodology: Ojibwe Worldview and the Oral Tradition**

Many Native American cultures recognize community as an integral part of an individual. The demarcation between the realms of individual and that of community is, in fact, an alien concept in Native American cultures. Rather, the Native American philosophies study the things through a holistic perception. The researchers on Ojibwe culture Benton-Benai mention that holism, balance, and harmony are three central traditional Ojibwe values (25). Likewise, Joan E. Dodgson and Roxanne Struthers also find that Ojibwe culture underscores the importance of community and strives to attach the individuals to community. In their own words:

In the Ojibwe view the individual is a whole, and no separation between mind, body, and spirit exists. Respect for others is central, [...] humans have responsibilities to family, community, other living creatures, and nature. So the Ojibwe's traditional focus, unlike western society's focus, is collectively based rather than individually driven. (56)

Hence, Dodgson and Roxanne's study shows that an individual in Ojibwe worldview is looked through holistic perception. It does not apply only in the case of individuals and community. The holistic vision of Native American cultures applies to all phenomena related to life. Vine Deloria, Jr. attributes such characteristic in part to the tribalism of Native American people: "Tribalism looks at life as an undifferentiated whole. Distinctions are not made between social and psychological, educational and historical, political and legal. The tribe is an all-purpose entity, which is expected to serve all areas of life" (264-65). Paula Gunn Allen likewise delineates in *The Sacred Hoop* some of the

tribal traits that many Native American cultures share: the concept of organizing perception in a hierarchical system, in which some elements are subordinated to or dependent upon others, is unfamiliar to most Native American cultures. Instead, Allen observes, "Those reared in traditional American Indian societies are inclined to relate events and experiences to one another" (958-59). This relational structuring, in which elements are of equal weight, holds true for Native American perceptions about time as well. As in many oral cultures, Native Americans see time as a cyclical part of repeating pattern, rather than a linear and sequential graph. Similarly, they differ from most European people in that "they do not distinguish between the material and the spiritual" (Allen, 59). In short, unlike most European-derived cultures, American Indian cultures do not "construct their worldviews out of a series of binary oppositions" (60). All these views work to form the "sacred hoop", as Allen explains:

The concept [of the sacred hoop] is one of singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life [. . .] these people acknowledge the essential harmony of all things and see all things as being of equal value in the scheme of things, denying the opposition, dualism, and isolation (separation) that characterizes the non-Indian thought.

(56)

In the light of the search for an essential unity of all things, the use of multiple narration in Native American literature conveys a trust in communally shared belief in cosmic harmony rather than serving as a comment on how chaotic the world has become.

This trust arises from the sense in Native American societies that the oral tradition serves as the repository of cultural values and beliefs. Allen finds that it "has prevented

the complete destruction of the web [of identity], the ultimate disruption of tribal ways. The oral tradition is vital, it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past" (45). Its adaptability has proven essential in preserving American Indian culture since the European colonization in North America. According to Allen:

The oral tradition [. . .] has, since contact with a white people, been a major force in Indian resistance. It has kept the people conscious of their tribal identity, the spiritual traditions and their connection to the land and her creatures' contemporary poets and writers take their cue from the oral traditions, to which they return consciously for theme, symbol, structure, and motivating impulse as well as for the philosophic bias that animates our work. (53)

By the discussions made so far, it has been clear that the Native American people traditionally transfer their tribal heritage from one generation to another orally. Hence, oral tradition in Native American sense is the practice of transferring culture orally from generation to generation. In other words, it is shared communal belief of Native American people. Such beliefs have influenced the Native American perception about language as well. Therefore, the tendency of breaking down language into isolated words for study of its components is an alien practice. Leslie Marmon Silko, a pueblo Native American writer, mentions that the Native American people don't think of "words as being isolated from the speaker, which, of course, is one element of the oral tradition" (Language 1573). Moreover, they don't think of words as being alone as "words are always with other words, and the other words are always in a story of some sort" (ibid).

Storytelling is an important phenomenon in the oral tradition of Native American cultures. During the oral transmission, there is obviously a narration of some sort. This narration can itself be called storytelling. Hence, the tendency of defining story as something fictional in opposition to the real is myopic in Native American worldviews. Rather, as Silko mentions, storytelling includes a "far wider range of telling activity" (Language 1574). The meaning of storytelling should not be limited to the narration of mythical or traditional old stories. To quote Silko again, as the original view of creation "sees that it is all part of a whole; we do not differentiate or fragment stories and experiences" (ibid).

The holistic concept of Native American cultures does not create a bifurcation between the storyteller and the listener(s). The narrator and the listeners share a communal experience which makes it easier for the listeners to understand the meaning of the stories. Such common experience plays role in the perpetuation of oral tradition, as Silko mentions:

The storytelling includes the audience and the listeners and, in fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners. This kind of shared experience grows out of a strong community base. The storytelling goes on and on and continues from generation to generation. (1574-75)

The term story then has a broad meaning in Native American cultures. It has been already mentioned that the fact and the fiction are both the constituents of the stories. The factual and fictional elements do not exist in a hierarchical structure. Silko says that the Native American people "do not make distinctions between the stories [. . .] whether

they are history, whether they are fact, whether they are gossip" (1577). Even the family stories that identify the clans of native people are as much important. The family stories are given equal recognition as the older stories (1575).

Hence, stories for Native American people are also the means to express their social life and experiences. The way a community lives its social life and gives expression to the experience plays an important role in the shaping of the reality. Susan Perez Castillo also believes that storytelling for Native American is a "discursive practice [. . .] to shape reality" (3).

Like other Native American tribes, Ojibwe people also take storytelling as an integral part of their culture. The stories embody their ways of life, experience, history, and thereby the whole culture. It is also one of the means to teach younger generation of their moral values and cultural life. It also helps the outsiders to get an account of the Ojibwe culture. Referring to the pedagogical and hermeneutical importance of storytelling, Leanne Simpson mentions:

Practitioners of the oral traditional often transfer knowledge through traditional storytelling. Anishinaabe people are recording and interpreting traditional stories to help their children and outsiders understand and appreciate the Anishinaabe principles and values. (Thus), stories remain a key component of passing on knowledge and expressing an Anishinaabe worldview. (1054-55)

Similarly, Ojibwe culture also believes past to be alive and coexistent with the present. Hence, the traditional stories, being told and retold for generations link the native people with their past and help them interpret their experience. They also make people aware of the cultural codes to interpret the stories. To quote Simpson again:

Traditional stories provide us with a lens to see the past and with a context to interpret that experience. It is therefore vital to be aware of the cultural rules regulating the oral tradition. These rules must be practiced when interpreting the stories. (1055)

To delineate a Person's familial pedigree, too, the oral tradition of storytelling is significant. Native American people tend to identify themselves in terms of their familial lineages. Hence, the practice of story telling, which incorporates the storyteller as well as the listeners, plays role in the making of an individual. It gives an individual his/her identity. Jein Ruppert quotes Silko as mentioning the same thing:

That's how you know, that's how you belong, that's how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them. There have to be stories. It's stories that make this a community. People tell those stories about you and your family or about others and they begin to create your identity. In a sense, you are told who you are, or you know who you are by the stories that are told about you. (in Ruppert 1588)

For the practitioners of oral tradition, storytelling is thus one of the most important cultural heritages. It is a major force of Indian resistance against acculturation, an exemplary of holistic outlook of native Indian cultures, a discursive practice to shape and interpret reality, a means to teach the native principles and values, a way to express personal experience, and so on. All in all, it is a life force which survives the Native American people and their culture, as Silko mentions in her 1981 book *Storyteller*: "The storyteller keeps the stories/all the escape stories/ she says, "with these stories of ours/we can escape almost anything/with the stories we will survive" (247).

Contemporary Native American writers adapt and adopt the technique of storytelling through various ways. Though traditionally they exhibit the oral tradition, the writers seem to be interested in putting them on papers. In an interview with Kim Barnes, Silko says that she writes the stories "not to save them [. . .] (nor to) put them in a stable or lasting form. I write them down because I like seeing how I can translate this sort of feeling or flavour [. . .] onto the page" (1580).

The non-linear and achronological fragments found in the writings of some of the Native American writers like Erdrich also, it can be argued, reflect the adaptation of the same technique of storytelling. When the storytellers and listeners engage themselves in the act of storytelling, there is always a shared ground based on which the story starts. In other words, there is presupposition of pre-knowledge and the shared communal experience. The absence of such presupposition in the writing might seem on the surface to the readers of alien cultural background that the world in books reflect the chaos prevalent in the characters. But the understanding of the Native American communal based worldview and the practice of oral tradition may help to modify such an initial assumption.

### III

#### **Perpetuation of Oral Tradition through Multiple Narration in *Love Medicine***

By taking a holistic outlook to study *Love Medicine*, we can justify that the presence of multiple narrators is a tool to perpetuate the oral tradition. Oral tradition of Ojibwe people refers to the shared communal values among the Ojibwe by means of oral narration.

Multiple voices better represent the worldview of a culture which seeks identity in terms of community, holism, and harmony. Erich makes use of it to reflect her rich oral tradition and thereby to preserve her cultural heritage.

Unlike the elitist modernists' use of multiple narration, Erdrich's adoption of it does not exhibit the alienation of a self, fragmentation and chaos in the world. Rather, it tries to preserve what is left in the Indian-ness of the Indians. The characters are influenced by their communal attributes and their success and failure also depends on their choice of accepting or rejecting the communal values of their culture. The 'we' based language system--rather than the 'I' based--is reflected in Erdrich's use of multiple narration. Erdrich draws on oral tradition by employing multiple narration.

The fact how the novel *Love Medicine* embodies the Native American culture, value system, philosophy also justifies how the use of multiple narration is a perpetuation of oral tradition. From the beginning to the end, such instances are ample in the novel.

The unexpected and inexplicable death of June in the opening section is the event that fires all other events in *Love Medicine*. Due to her death, June cannot be a narrator but remains a central character. She pervades in the memory and life of all other characters. In the opening section of the novel, June is returning home from city. She is not willfully going home with a purpose but



seems to be drawn by some unknown force. Her sudden and random decision of going home justifies it: "she had walked far enough to see the dull orange glow, the canopy of low, lit clouds over Williston, when she decided to walk home instead of going back there" (6).

The third person narrator does not tell us anything about June's death. Her death is only implied which is further clarified by Albertine, the first person narrator in the first chapter. In the paragraph that implies June's death, the narrator shows her relentless endeavor to return home. The description itself shows as if June were a mythical character:

Even when it started to snow she did not lose her sense of direction. Her feet grew numb, but she did not worry about the distance. The heavy winds couldn't blow off her course. she continued. Even when her heart clenched and her skin turned crackling cold it didn't matter, because the pure and naked part of her went on. The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home.

(ibid)

Ojibwe regard the earth as mother. This communal belief is expressed through Albertine when looking at earth, she remembers June. She is returning home to observe June's death rites. At this moment, June appears to her like a motherly figure: "Then after a while I saw I was staring--through the window at the level of the earth-- and I thought of her" (7).

After Albertine reaches home, she finds herself amidst family gossips. These family stories are also equally important for Ojibwe as the value-system is rather horizontal than a vertical (hierarchical) one in Ojibwe philosophy. Even though the

family story is narrated by Albertine in the first chapter, Albertine gives space to all characters that appear in the chapter. Their discussion works together to form an identity of June. Such features in novel, hence, demonstrate how the use of multiple narration helps alleviate the alienation of individual characters; how stories which are half-told, re-told and left un-told suggest a common base of knowledge that ties characters together and helps individuals and communities adapt to changing times; and how achronological; non-linear narrative structures recall the security of web of stories, all tied to one another in a representation of personal stability and cultural survival.

In this light, the opening chapter of *Love Medicine* provides a crash course in these family stories. It opens with a lyrical description of the events leading up to June Morriessey's sudden death in an Easter Snowstorm, shifts to first person narrative by June's niece Albertine, and then slides into a series of kitchen table conversations as more and more relatives arrive to reminisce about people and events familiar to the characters but entirely unfamiliar to the reader. These family stories seem to appear almost at random, skipping back and forth in time, relating events that happened both on and off the reservation to Indians, whites, and mixed bloods. But by the end of the chapter, we discover that we have been introduced to nearly all the people who were important in June's life: her adoptive parents Marie and Eli, her cousins Aurelia and Zelda, her husband Gordie, her sons King and Lipsha. By tying one narration to the other, the family members explain who June was (a loner like Eli), why she left (angry and frightened like King), and why she set off across the prairie in a snowstorm to walk home to them (like Albertine, drawn almost against her will to rejoin the family), all without mentioning more than a couple of specific facts about June herself. The multiple storytellers in the chapter do more than provide a number of points of view from which to regard June

Morrissey ; they help give us the whole complexity of June within her community, perhaps more fully than she could have told us herself in a monovocal narrative.

Both form and content in the novel provide us with plenty of instances which Erdrich has used to reflect the rich Ojibwe oral tradition and other cultural traits. The narrational structure of the novel is non linear and achronological. It is commonplace to find the narration of present and past event at the same time: "You were a career girl' I accused her. I handed her the pickles, all diced into little cubes. Mama had kept books for the priests and nuns up at Sacred Heart since I could remember. She ignored me, however , and began to poke wheels of fork marks in the tops of the pies"(14).

Since present is the outcome of past, present occurrences cannot be separated from the past. Present and past are inter-connected and co-existent. They don't make the two opposite categories as in the Euro-American perspective: "King leaned further in. He had his mother's long slim legs, and I remembered all at once, seeing him bend all the way into the car, June bending that way too. Me behind her. She had pushed a rowboat off the gravel beach of some lake we'd all gone to visit together" (15).

The characters in the novel are not the ones who are unable to make sense of anything happening around them. They have a community and the community has a history. The present on which the characters are living owes much to the history that was experienced by Ojibwe people for being Ojibwe. While going on her way to house, Albertine recalls the history related to her, her tribe, and her ancestors:

[. . .] I grew up with . . . (my mother) on the land my great-grand parents were allotted when the government decided to turn Indian into farmers. The policy of allotment was a joke. As I was driving toward the land,

looking around, I saw as usual how much of the reservation was sold to whites and lost forever. (11)

Being an Ojibwe, the stories narrated by Albertine are full of allusions that reflect the Ojibwe worldview and the culture. Recalling the experiences passed with June, she notices that the words uttered by June were never separated from her. She used to share her experiences with Albertine, for which Albertine is thankful to her: "I had adored her into telling me everything she needed to tell" (16). Though Albertine was unable to understand those adult connotations in her childhood, she understands the meaning now as "those words stayed with me"(16).

Reminiscence becomes an important phenomenon in a culture which regards past and present as the co-existent factors. Similar occurrences in the present reminds one of the past. By the same token, in the part of the present, past exists. By recalling the past in the present occurrences, Albertine relates King to his mother. The lexicons used by King reminds Albertine of his mother June. Albertine's memory has made it possible. Albertine feels as if the words spoken by King were " spoken out in June's voice" (ibid). She further says: "June had said "He used the flat of his hand. He hit me good. And now I heard her son say, ". . . flat of my hand ... but good . . ." (ibid).

By telling and retelling stories, Ojibwe traditionally transmit their culture, The practice of writing and reading was introduced to Ojibwe by the Euro-Americans. But this teaching has brought catastrophic result as well. The Native Indians are being alien to their own culture. Albrtine expresses such views when she attributes Nector's loss of memory as being the result of learning reading and writing forgetting the native oral tradition. In this sense, she gives privilege to old ways of learning and to the oral

tradition. She is assessing Marie Kashpaw's decision to send Nector to school and to hide Eli with herself:

She had let the government put Nector in school, but hidden Eli, the one she couldn't part with, in the root cellar dog beneath floor. In that way she gained a son on either side of the line. Nector came home from boarding school knowing white reading and writing, while Eli knew the woods.

Now, these many years later, . . . my great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild. (17)

Albertine has a desire to learn about part from Nector, her grandfather : "I wanted him to tell me about things that happened before my time, things I'd been too young to understand" (17). But his loss of memory deprived her of it. Naturally, it makes Albertine sad, she opines that the reason behind it is probably his complete adoption of foreign values at the stake of his own. He has lost his memory power, an important aspect in linking one to his past, which, according to Albertine, has protected him from his guilt: "perhaps his loss of memory was a protection from the past, absolving him of whatever had happened" (18). Due to his loss of memory, he was able to live "calmly now, without guilt or desolation" (18). Hence, in Albertine's story, she shows both her marvelous memory power and Nector's loss of it. Their ability and inability to locate themselves in their culture epitomizes the importance of reminiscence in Native American culture.

Eli, on the other hand, seems truly an Ojibwe, since he remained in his community and did not join the white schools. He did not learn white reading and writing as well. But, as Albertine mentions, he had a sharp mind so, he proudly says to Albertine: "Did you know your uncle Eli is the last man on the reservation that could snare himself a

deer" (27). Then he explains her what a real Ojibwe is like. He says, "only real old-time Indians know deer good enough to snare" and because he knew how to snare deer he was a "real old timer" (28).

Like Albertine, Eli is also a central character in the novel. Since he calls himself a "real old timer", it is his duty to teach young generation the Ojibwe use of politeness. Hence, when King demands for a cigarette by saying "can you gimme a cigarette, Eli?" Where he had to say "ciga swa", Eli suggests him to "ask a real old Cree like me for the right words" (30). Though Lynette, King's wife, is white by birth, expresses her concern about it. She realizes that the Ojibwe need to "learn their own heritage" because when the old-times like Eli "go, it will all be gone" (ibid). Therefore, the characters in *Love Medicine* are conscious about the loss of old ways of life and they also know how they need to preserve them.

Marie is yet another central character in the novel. She is also a prominent narrator since entire two chapters are narrated by her in the first person narrative. By the story she has narrated, her uniqueness appears in combining the family together and mothering the children. As a mother, she is the "super mother". More than any other character, she is both biological and adoptive mother. Marie, a strong character who struggles hard to hold her family together, loses son and a daughter the year they are born and starts adopting children. It is important to note the idea that biological children are somehow superior or preferred over other children in a nuclear family is a western-European; not a Native American concept. The Native American notion of "family" joins the individuals living together in one house because it includes spiritual kinship as well as clan membership. Marie uses her mothering skills on her own children as well as those discarded by others. She extends the Euro American concept of the nuclear family to a

more Native American idea of kinship. Her husband Nector describes the period following the loss of the babies:

There was a long spell of quiet, awful quiet, before the babies showed up everywhere again. They were all over in the house once they started. In the bottoms of cupboards, in the dresser, in trundles. Lift a blanket and a bundle would howl beneath it. I lost track of which were ours and which Marie had taken in. It had helped her to take them in after our two others were gone. This went on. The youngest slept between us, in the bed of our bliss, so I was crawling over them to make more of them. It seemed like there was no end. (93)

Because of their poverty, Marie hesitates to take in the nine-year-old June, but she softens when she finds out how June managed to stay alive by eating pine sap after the death of her mother (Marie's sister) in the woods. She finds it worthwhile to trace similarities between the real June and the mythical Manitous: "It was as if she really was the child of what the people called Manitous, invisible ones who live in the woods" (65). Her use of the word "Live" (present) instead of "lived" (past) also shows the Native American faith that myth and reality as well as the past and the present are co-existent. Later on, June turns down Marie's motherly love and chooses to live with Uncle Eli because she cannot trust a mother after being deserted by her own blood mother who died of tuberculosis in the woods. Nevertheless, Marie takes in Lipsa, June's illegitimate son, and cares him.

Marie had not actually intended to become a mother because she wanted to be accepted into the Sacred Heart convent and craved to "sit on the altar as saint" (45). She would remain pure and devote herself to God. With the goal of becoming a nun, Marie

would never have become a mother. When she went to the convent she was met by the sadistic and insane sister Leopolda who almost killed her trying to drive out the Satan in her. sister Leopolda poured a kettle of scalding water down her back and forked the palm of her hand. Previously sister Leopolda had told Marie she had two options: "One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog or two, you can give yourself to God" (45). In Indian (Native American) tradition, mothering and Indianness go together. Thus, being an Indian is equal to being a mother. A mother is as great as the earth. Following the cruelty of sister Leopolda, Marie ran away from the convent, but later married Nector Kashpaw, had children adopted many orphans in defiance of the nun's warnings.

Though Marie went to the Sacred Heart Convent, aiming to become a nun, She had not totally abandoned her culture. She preferred 'touch' to 'pray'. This "secret" is revealed towards the concluding paragraphs of the chapter "The Beads". Marie herself discloses the secret: "I don't pray. When I was young, I vowed I never would be caught begging God. If I want something I get it for myself. I go to church only to show the old hens they don't get me down . . . I don't pray, but sometimes I do touch the beads"(73).

Like the white and Indian conflict, the split between Marie and Sister Leopolda continued to the death. Twenty-three years later, in the chapter entitled "Flesh and Blood", Marie decides to see the dying sister Leopolda, taking her daughter with her. Marie is very proud of her achievement after leaving the convent. She wants to show Leopolda these achievements:

I would visit Leopolda not just to see her, but to let her see me. I would let her see I had not been living on wafers of God's flesh but the fruit of a man. Long ago she had tried for my devotion. Now I'd let her see where



my devotion had gone and where it had got me. For by now I was solid class Nector was tribal chairman. My children were well behaved, and they were educated too. (113)

In this way, Marie wants to brag to her about her children and her husband. She says to Leopolda, "My husband is the chairman of this tribe" (118). However, the nun is not impressed with her accomplishments and reminds her of her heritage as a "dirty Lazarre" (59), "the youngest daughter of a family of horse thieving drunks"(58), a heritage Marie tried to forget all her life. Again there is a physical struggle between the two women and sister Leopolda tries to hit Marie on the head with a spoon. The conflict between the two remains unresolved.

Lulu Lamartine, another important narrator in the novel, is also a powerful counterpart of Marie. She has her lifelong rivalry with Marie for Nector's affection. Ironically, she becomes her companion in old age. Lulu is a worthy adversary because she is as effective at complementarities as Marie is. The two characters mirror one another in their way of blending past and present, and in their wielding of power in old age. Lulu challenges the tribe when her land is in danger of being sold to a manufacturer of tomahawks, fearing the threat to the old way of life that the factory represents. "It was the stuff of dreams, I said . . . . The United States Government throws crumbs on the floor, and off the land" (223). Lulu alone seems mindful of the conflict between the old values and the influences of the white standard of economic success. It is not surprising then that Lipsha tells Lulu's son Gerry Nanapush years later that "people were starting to talk, now, about her knowledge as an old-time traditional" (228).

Lulu serves as a conduit between past and present for other characters, including Bev Lamartine, Nector, and Lipsha. When Bev returns to claim the seven-year-old boy

that he believes is his son, she helps him recapture the kind of life-renewing passion that they had enjoyed years earlier even as they grieved over her husband Henry's death. She heals the rift between past and present for Nector when she accepts his apology for abandoning her in favour of Marie. Erdrich dramatizes this healing and rekindling of their love in a scene that is comic and reminiscent of ritual at the same time, which is narrated by Nector:

"So your butter's going to melt," She says, then she is laughing outright. She reaches into the backseat and grabs a block. It is wrapped in waxed paper, squashed and soft, but still feels fresh. She smears some on my face. I'm so surprised that I just sit there for moment feeling stupid. Then I wipe the butter off my cheek. I take the block from her and I put it on the dash. When we grab each other and kiss there is butter on our hands. (98)

The healing is a kind of love medicine, mending a wound that has divided past and present, Lulu and Nector. Most significantly, Lulu reconciles past and present for Lipsha when she reveals the truth about his parentage. At this, Lulu works like a traditional storyteller; She tells Lipsha his story to let him know who actually he is. It is the storyteller's responsibility to retell stories to remind people of their past and of their identities. She recognizes both Lipsha's need to know that his mother did not try to murder him and his need to accept June as his mother rather than Marie. Lulu encourages Lipsha to enrich his present by confronting his past in the person of his father, Gerry Nanapush.

Lipsha, however, always denied that his biological mother was other than Marie. So he berates his half-brother, and implicitly his own mother not knowing the genuine affection of hers: "I was king's half brother, see, a bastard son of June's" (240). So, when

Lulu tells him the story about his lineage, he discards her mentioning: "I don't want to hear', I told Lulu flat out. ' My real mother's Grandma Kashpaw. That's how I consider her, and why not? Seeing as my blood mother wanted to lie a rock around my neck and throw me in the slough'" (242).

Meanwhile, he learns from Lulu that what he believed was not true. June actually had never done what Lipsha thought she had. It was just a rumor. "That's what you always been told" (ibid), says Lulu. He learns for sure not only that he was June's son but also Lulu's grandson. Lipsha's father is Gerry Nanapush, Lulu's son. After hearing Lulu's story about him, Lipsha tries to trace out the similarities between Lulu's appearance and his own: "I looked at her and all of a sudden here was the next old thing: I saw that Lulu Lamartine and Lipsha Morrissey had the same nose. Hers was little, semi squashed in straight and flat. Mine was bigger, flatter version of hers down to the squashed-in tip"(243). Though Lipsha's narration seems humorous, his comparison of his own physical traits with that of his grandma's suggests that he has always given privilege to his familial pedigree over other things.

After learning from Lulu that he was son of Nanapush to whom Lulu mentions as a person who cannot be held by a white prison (244), Lipsha feels proud of himself. He thinks that now he is on his way to finding his identity. "Lipsa Morrissey, who's learned so much in his short life. Who had lost and regained the touch. Lipsa Morrissey who was now on the verge of knowing who he was" (224).

In this way, Lipsa discovers his mother, father and his past. This structure of the novel also highlights Lipha's reconciliation with his mother and with the past, for June opens *Love Medicine* and her son closes it. The prose that describes Lipsha's journey home with the car, his inheritance for June, echoes Erdrich's final description of June.

"The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home" (272). June undertakes a similar journey when she walks into the blizzard. "The snow fell deeper that Easter that it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home" (6). This significant reconciliation of Lipsha with his mother has been accomplished by Lulu's effort. Earlier she tells Lipsha that "It was knowledge that could make or break you" (245). Fortunately, he comes to an understanding of himself and is able to return home. Having found out who his true parents are, the alienated Lipsha not only gains his sense of identity, but also his sense of belonging within family and community. The medicine man for his generation finds his balance by the end of the novel.

Lulu's endeavour to reconcile characters with their past emerges from her belief in holism, balance, and harmony : "I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms" (216) says Lulu. She thinks that nothing should remain in isolation with the other things. She is truly an Ojibwe who strives to achieve unity than division:

All through my life I never did believe in human measurement. Numbers, time, inches, feet. All are just ploys for cutting nature down to size. I know the grand scheme of the world is beyond our brains to fathom, so I don't try, just let it in. I don't believe numbering God's creatures. (221)

Lulu is also equally influenced by the old stories-- like other characters. Once she breaks the belief that the dead ones should not be called by their names. Her husband Henry has been dead by drowning in water. However, she calls his name deliberately and purposefully because she knew "how drowning was the worst death for a Chippewa to experience" (234). Hence, her breaking of the custom is influenced by the traditional belief that being dead by drowning is unfortunate: "There was no place for the drowned

in heaven or anywhere on earth. That is what I never found it easy to forget and that is also the reason I broke custom very often and spoke Henry Junior's name, out loud, on my tongue" (234).

In a similar case, Gordie reacts in an adversary way. By mistake, he calls the dead June by her name. June is Gordie's cousin as well as wife. Now that he called her name, he is afraid of her presence: "I love you, little cousin !" he said out loudly. 'June!' Her name burst from him. He wanted to take it back as soon as he said it. Never, never, ever call the dead by their names, Grandma said. They might answer. Gordie knew this. Now he felt very uneasy. Worse than before" (177).

Gordie has been alcoholic since June's death. When in his drunken state he calls her by her name, he is followed by her wherever he goes. Because his cultural value believes the co-existence of the natural and supernatural world, he can feel the presence of June even though she is already dead. To avoid her presence, he closes all the doors and windows and draws the curtain. To avoid her voice, he lights on the room and opens the fan. At last, he stands in the "Humming light of the refrigerator, believing the cold radiance would protect him. Nothing could stop her though" (ibid).

In such a situation, sister Mary Martin, who represents the western religion, tries to solace Gordie. But people like her, who are from within the dominant American culture, use Western religion to aid Native American in need. However, it proves to be detrimental. In the same attempt to avoid June's following of him, Gordie runs away from his house and in his drunken stupor hits a deer with his car and puts it into back seat. He metaphorically transforms the animal into June and mistakenly thinks he is a murderer. He goes to sister Mary Martin to confess his "crime". But when she sees the physical

reality of the situation -- that Gordie has killed not a person but a deer--she finds overwhelmed by its absurdity:

At the first sight of it, so strange and awful, a loud cackle came from her mouth. Her legs sagged, suddenly old, and a fainting surge of weakness spread through her [. . .] suddenly and without warning, like her chest were crackling, the weeping broke her. It came out of her with hard violence, loud in her ears, a wild burst of sounds that emptied her. (187)

Gordie runs away when he hears her reaction. Sister Mary Martin have intended to help him but cannot provide the comfort that he needs. As a member of the dominant culture, she cannot understand the relational thought process he is experiencing. For Gordie, accidentally hurting the deer is relationally the same as killing June: June and the deer-- in their woodland physicality--have become the same for him. Both are wild creatures, subject to no authority or control; both are "pure and naked" in the way they respond to the world's stimuli (6). Sister Mary Martin literally cannot see the analogy; for her, under a hierarchical European-based system, humans are inherently different from and more important than animals. She cannot comprehend why Gordie has reacted to this situation in the way that he did. And Gordie cannot find help through her for the same reasons. He needs someone who can perceive the world through his eyes, at least enough to recognize the Native American logic underlying his perceptions.

The characters and events in *Love Medicine* are not placed in a hierarchical system. They all are equally important. The narratives seem incomplete without the narration by one narrator. In the chapter "A Bridge", Henry Lamartine is introduced by an omniscient narrator as a highly disturbed veteran who has recently returned from Vietnam. In an encounter with him, Albertine is about to call him by his name, but "He

Shireked, exploded" (141). We are not informed why Henry is such a frustrated person. In the next chapter named "The Red Convertible", Henry's brother Lyman talks about their close relationship prior to Henry's joining the army and the change that has come over him leading to his suicide:

When he came home, though, Henry was very different, and I'll say this : the change was no good . . . . he was quiet, so quiet, and never comfortable sitting still anywhere but always up and moving around. I thought back to times we'd sat still for whole afternoons, never moving a muscle, just shifting our weight along the ground, talking to whoever sat with us, watching things. He always had a joke, then too, and now you couldn't get him to laugh, or when he did it was more the sound of a man choking, a sound that stopped up the throats of other people around him. (147-48)

Thus, Lyman, his brother, brings light to Henry's story. Each character or event is central to an element of the narrative.

In *Love Medicine*, then, the characters/narrators are the Native American storytellers because just like other Native American people, they live by the stories they tell. They are not the characters desperately seeking answers related to their self in an alienated world, rather the ones guided, moulded and directed by communal values. Erdrich chooses and gives them the first person narration to perpetuate the oral tradition.

The multiple narration in *Love Medicine* work to tell the story in a variety of ways, ways that can have meaning for a variety of people. Stories and the oral traditions were not merely pleasant diversions for the Ojibwe people; they were the means to regulate their life because they were the gift given to them by their forefathers. Even at present, storytelling bears pedagogical importance for Ojibwe teachers. The information

passed on through the oral traditions, then, has not been stagnant or immutable. In fact, traditional Ojibwe culture posits the need for adapting to changing conditions. Not surprisingly, Erdrich incorporates the rich legacy of Ojibwe oral traditions and teaching methods in *Love Medicine*. Her narrative strategy demands that her readers seek that knowledge by working to integrate the components of the text and to recognize the cyclic patterns in contains.

Within an Ojibwe worldview, the deaths of Henry Lamartine, his namesake (but not his biological son) Henry, Jr. and June Kashpaw do not suggest an ambiguous vision of the world, as they would in the dominant culture. Henry, his truck stopped on a railroad track, is hit by a train. Henry, Jr., a Vietnam veteran and former POW, drowns in a river that he voluntarily wades into, calmly observing that his boots are filling with water. These deaths serve merely as the physical conclusions to lives that are already spiritually dead. Lulu Lamartine recognizes that her son Henry, Jr. has "the same dead wide stare" that she had seen on a corpse in her childhood (227). Lulu believes that her husband and son kill themselves because they no longer fell alive. But rather than publicly acknowledging that these men are destroyed by their inability to cope with their situations, she maintains the sense of communal harmony and accepts the labels of "accidents" because she "knew what people needed to believe" (228). At this point, she chooses to preserve what community remains on the reservation rather than to risk its loss by exposing how it has been corrupted by the dominant culture's values.

June's death serves a different purpose. June dies in a freakish late-spring snowstorm during her long homeward trek overland, a trip she chooses to make on foot even though she has bus ticket. Although this may seem to indicate a world in which humanity and nature are at odds, her death instead becomes a mythic, connecting theme



in the novel. Her love --physical as well as emotional--shapes the lives of characters in all generations. She helps to restore a sense of unity to these people's lives. Even though she may have failed in her physical attempt to return home, by the end of the novel she has achieved a metaphorical homecoming when thoughts of her bring together the community she sought.

Another apparently chaotic element--how children in this novel are named and raised--makes sense within an Ojibwe framework. Lulu, for example, has eight sons: "The three oldest were Nanapushes. The next oldest were Morrisseys who took the name Lamartine, and then there were more assorted younger Lamartines who didn't look like one another either" (76). The names that these characters bear reflect their cultural, not biological or familial, identity. Basil Johnson has explained the traditional Ojibwe considerations in naming a child: "An elder, usually a grandparent of the infant, conferred the name at the request and invitation of the parents [ . . . ] The name was especially cherished because it was in the nature of a gift of the people, and therefore unique "(121). This idea of people's names being their reputations is clearest in Erdrich's novel in her use of the surname "Nanapush". The characters do not simply inherit this surname, as is usual in the dominant American culture. Rather the name is consciously given to each person who bears it.

"Nanapush" is derived from the name of an Ojibwe trickster, Nanabozcho or Nanabushu. In Ojibwe folktales Nanabushu is a mix between a manitou (spirit person) and a human being, a trickster who can take on various physical forms. He is credited with providing the gifts of human and storytelling to the Ojibwe people. In these tales, when Nanabushu is a human being he makes mistakes in behaviour; Johnson notes that "as an Anishinabe, Nanbushu was human, noble and strong, or ignoble and weak" (20).

As a character in Ojibwe folktales, Nanalaushu not only learns how he fits into the world with respect to other powers, but also challenges the other members of the community to recognize how they form part of the totality of their existence.

The way in which this name works into *Love Medicine*-- through Lulu and Gerry--proves that a name provides a more important heritage than "blood". Lulu has embodied the Nanabushu qualities and the name was given to her by old Nanapush. She also embodies the values that the Nanabushu of the folktales has to learn. She shares her physical love with men because for her it is a life-affirming act:

I'm going to tell you about the men. There were times I let them in just for being part of the world. I believe that angels in the body makes us foreign to ourselves when touching. In this way I'd slip my body to earth, like a heavy sack, and for a few moments I would blend in all that forced my heart. (217)

Over time, Lulu comes to rely on her sons and they on her, as when they effortlessly move her into the senior citizen's complex (228-29); she depends on their assistance and they depend on her to serve as the central feature of their world. And like Nanabushu, she must learn to reject the negative attributes of greed and overconfidence, which she discovers in Nector Kashpaw.

Lulu's role as trickster is most clear when she is being threatened with eviction by the tribe, under the leadership of Nector. She attends the tribal meeting and confronts the other members of the community with their hypocrisy--with their intention to rob her and her children of the land their ancestors have lived on for years, only to build a factory to manufacture plastic Indian souvenirs. But the confrontation on cultural grounds is not enough to win her case. She overcomes the whispers in the room, by quietly looking

around and saying, "I'll name all of them . . . the fathers. . . I'll point them out for you right here"(224). By pointing out their moral failings in calling her inaccurate names for acting on her sexuality when they were often participants, Lulu manages to make a roomful of people squirm by threatening to "name" them accurately and thereby forces the to see themselves more clearly.

This Ojibwe emphasis on community is additionally supported by the way that children are raised in this novel. Marie Kashpaw regularly takes in other people's children, even though she has many of her own to deal with. As informal adoption is common in Native American cultures, these mixed households indicate a persistent struggle to reserve the communal good by caring for future generations.

Rejecting communal Ojibwe values to accept such dominant American values as western religion causes characters to find themselves isolated and alone. Sister Leopolda personifies what goes wrong when Catholicism meets the reservation. She clearly rejects her Ojibwe upbringing, but she cannot behave in the ways that coincides with modern Catholic practices, either. While training the potential novice Marie Lazarre (later to become Marie Kashpaw), Leopolda scalds her, hits her head with a poker, and impales her hand with a sharp fork, all because she thinks that Marie has "the Devil in [her] heart" (47). Her treatment of the girl is even more terrifying given the knowledge we gain in *Tracks*--that Leopolda is Marie's biological mother. Through sister Leopolda, Erdrich satirically demonstrates how the whites folks' religion fails to make sense of the world for Ojibwes; it appeals primarily to American Indian who are already distancing themselves from their own community.

As depicted in *Love Medicine*, Western religion is primarily either detrimental or ineffectual for Native Americans. But it mostly harms only those Native Americans who

choose to embrace it wholesale. Those who accept only the aspects of the religion that reinforce their worldview, such as the adult Marie and her daughter Aurelia, manage to co-exist with Catholicism without being absorbed or rejected by it.

Other Western religious and cultural constructs that also intrude on traditional Native American culture are fidelity and monogamy. One of the central characters in *Love Medicine*, Nector Kashpaw, is trapped within the morality of the dominant culture because he loves Lulu but feels compelled to marry Marie. He lives much of his adult life torn between his need for both women. Lulu, although she marries several times, harbours a persistent love for Nector--a love that turns to bitterness when he tries to evict her from her home, but that returns when she encounters him in senility at the senior citizen's complex. To illustrate the cultural imposition inherent in this situation, Erdrich lets us see what might have been. After Nector's death, his widow Marie and his lover Lulu become friends who take over and run their housing complex, controlling the other residents with their cooperative power. Because Western religions and dominant culture demand monogamy, these women have been forced into adversarial roles. The friendships that develops after Nector's death allows us to see what might have happened if Nector had been able to marry both women, as Ojibwe culture condoned. Outside the confines and labels of western culture, these women could and do become allies who work together to build a community.

This recognition of community and its importance in Ojibue culture can also explain the individual characters in the novel who might seem to be misfits. The characters who try to assimilate, such as King and Beverly, are failures in the views of both cultures. King Kashpaw, legitimated son of Gordie and June, strives for financial success in the dominant culture, but constantly finds himself "stuck down at the bottom

with the minnows" (252). A Vietnam-era veteran, King is unable to hold a steady job and has been in and out of prison. Although these characteristics make him a failure in the eyes of the dominant culture, he also fails on Ojibwe terms because his reaction to the death of his mother seems callous and self-centered: he uses the insurance money that he receives at June's death not to do good for the community but to indulge his personal desire for a new sports car.

Beverly Lamartine, Lulu's brother-in-law and bigamist husband, also attempts to assimilate. He sells cheap school workbooks door to door in the working-class neighborhoods of Minneapolis and St. Paul by telling people how his son (although actually the photograph he uses as illustration shows his nephew) has improved upon his humble social beginnings with these workbooks: Bev's legal wife, a white woman, takes him to visit her family only in the height of summers, where they can admire this perfect "tan". Beverly fails because he assumes a falsely humble role to "succeed" in the white world, without ever gaining the success he hopes that mock humility will bring. He and King are misfits, not because they are American Indians, but because they attempt to deny that heritage. They become "apples"--"red on the outside, white and the inside" -- belonging to neither world (259).

But those who accept their heritage while still participating in the modern world, like Gerry and Lipsha, become almost militantly heroic, in spite of appearing to be misfits by Euro-American standards. Unlike King and Beverly, Gerry and Lipsha adapt without assimilating, thereby remaining true to their Ojibwe heritage. Gerry constantly escapes from prison because according to his personal code of justice, he has finished paying for his crime. He assumes the status of folk hero to the Native American Community because by escaping from prison, he is essentially eluding the confines of

dominant white Americans culture. He openly accepts his role as folk hero and trickster by becoming active in the leadership of AIM, challenging his people to seek a clear cultural identity. At the novel's close Gerry once again escapes from prison, this time to meet his wife and their daughter in Canada. In this way he exhibits his dedication to a Native American worldview-- national borders, a construct of the dominant culture, cannot modify his behavior or restrict his movement.

Lipsha too accepts his heritage. While his naiveté and malapropisms seem ridiculous, Erdrich employs this humor primarily to highlight his youth. His are the typical teenage attempts to be connected to his heritage; he is convinced that he is special, that he has the gift of being a modern-day medicine man. He pursues self-knowledge and personal identity with the vague enthusiasm only a teenager could manifest: "When you have the touch, that's where longing gets you . . . . It made me feel all inspired . . . and I wanted to go out and a find a woman who I would love until one of us died or went crazy"(193).

Although he drops out of high school, Lipsha reads widely : his "cousin" Albertine, in describing him says that he "knew surprising things. He read books about computers and volcanoes and the life cycles of salamanders. Sometimes he used the words I had to ask him the meaning of, and other time he didn't make even the simplest sense" (36). He establishes his personal connection to the Ojibwe community by using traditional methods to deal with problems--not by directly applying those methods, but by developing his own solutions within their guidelines.

Lipsha's most notorious effort as a medicine man provides the title for the novel. Marie and Lipsha independently discover that Nector has attempted to renew his relationship with Lulu, who has moved into the senior citizens complex. Because she

believes in the boy's skills, she approaches him about making a "love medicine" to make Nector love her again. Lipsha decides that Nector and Marie need to eat the hearts of a pair of geese, since the birds mate for life. When he finds hunting for the wild geese too difficult and uncomfortable, he resorts to buying frozen turkeys at the local grocery store to get the hearts for the medicine, a humorous commentary on how disrupted the transmittal of cultural knowledge has become.

Though Lipsha fails to get the results he intends from administering his medicine--Nector chokes on the raw heart Marie feeds him and dies--he does successfully heal the love between the couple. When Marie feels herself visited by Nector's spirit after his death, she is certain that only the "love medicine" brings him back. But Lipsha convinces her that his medicine was a fake. He tells her:

*Love Medicine* isn't what bring him back you, grandma. No, it's something else. He loved you over time and distance, but he went off so quick he never got chance to tell you how he loves you, how he understands. It's true felling, not no magic. No supermarket heart could have brought him back. (214)

In this way, Lipsha does have the special "touch" he claims to have; he reassures Marie that her relationship with Nectar had a strength a reality of its own. And although he seems undirected and aimless, he always focuses on contributing to the communal good, working to assuage the aches of old people and doing odd jobs around the senior citizens' housing complex. Lipsha seems to know what people need to hear, and he connects himself to the old ways by spending time with them.

As discussed in preceding pages, Lipsha learns about his biological parentage from Lulu, who again serves as the Nanabushu figure. After Nector's death, Lulu decides that the time has come for Lipsha to know that Gerry and June were his parents. In the

exchange, Lipsha at first wants to deny that Lulu is his biological grandmother, that he shares in this Nanapush heritage. But then he notices that Lulu and he had similar nose (243). After learning who he is in the physical sense, Lipsha reaches out to find himself in the metaphorical sense. His first attempt--joining the army--seems misguided even to himself. Before officially passing the physical, therefore, he flees to Minneapolis to meet up his now-known family--his half-brother King and, unexpectedly his father, Gerry.

The evening these men spend together bring Lipsha and the novel back into the Ojibwe cultured circle. In a poker game, Lipsha wins the car the King had bought with June's insurance money, symbolically establishing his relationship with the mother he never knew as his mother. When the police arrive to haul the fugitive Gerry back to jail, Gerry disappears rabbit like out of the apartment window, only to turn up hidden in the trunk of the car as Lipsha drives it away. The concluding scene of the novel picks up on the Nanabushu heritage that Gerry and Lipsha share. When Lipsha explains that he is running from the army, Gerry starts to laugh. He tells his son not to worry:

'Look here', he said. 'I didn't have to go in the army because my heart is slightly fucked. It goes something like ti-rum-ti-ti instead of ta-dum.' [. . .] 'you're a Nanapush man,' he said [. . .] 'we' all have this odd thing with our hearts' [. . .] There was a moment when the car and road stood still, and then I felt it. I felt my own heart give this little burping skip. (270-71)

Through the trickster qualities of these Nanapush men, Erdrich plays a double joke on American culture. Although declared "unfit" by the United States Army, these men gain heroic status precisely because of their "hearts". By following their hearts, Gerry and Lipsha can adapt to the modern world and remain Ojibwe, neither assimilating into the



dominant culture as King and Beverly have, nor being destroyed by its militarism like Henry Lamartine.

*Love Medicine* as a whole, then, takes on the cyclic pattern of Ojibwe culture. The novel's form become circular, with each of the narrative sections internally coherent while contributing to the cumulative power of the whole. The novel ends much as it begins: a character decides to reject the solitary approach to life that he or she has temporarily adopted, in order to return to the Ojibwe community. But with the sense of connectedness that Lipsha has gained, he has better prospects for success than June did. The use of multiple perspective does not serve as the sign of uncertain, individual solutions that it is in dominant American culture. Instead the multiple narrators are part of the repetition and variation of Ojibwe storytelling. Erdrich herself has said that she "prefers a first person narrative, for both its immediacy and its expressiveness" (Nowick, 9) - the very characteristics that connect oral narrators to their audience.

This technique also links *Love Medicine* to a long-standing tradition of Native American autobiography. Most Native American autobiographies were collected by ethnographers who listened to people relating their life stories. Erdrich's use of first person narration gives the reader a sense that her characters are telling their life stories. But rather than imposing a mediator, she encourages us as readers to find that relational viewpoint, to learn to think as her characters think.

As a result, we start to learn that non linearity of time, space, and narration does not necessarily reinforce a view of the world as disrupted, but rather it can challenge that view. The various segments in *Love Medicine* provide us with a spectrum of Native American characters, all of whom have distinctive point of view. Erdrich answers our implicit question of "what is it like to be a Native American?" by debunking the idea that

there is such a thing as Native American view, by helping us to acknowledge that there is not even a single Ojibwe view. In reading this novel we develop the ability to fit narratives together, building upon other, until we begin to see the world through a collection of Ojibwe eyes, through a communal and tribal perspective.

## IV

### Conclusion

The use of multiple narration in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* is a tool for the continuation of Native American oral tradition. In the light of Ojibwe worldview and philosophy, the fragmentary narratives work together to reflect the communal value-system, where an individual is necessarily moulded, shaped and guided by his/her tribal and familial traits. Though on the surface Erdrich's use of multiple perspectives seems to present the world as alienated and fragmentary just like the use of the same strategy by twentieth century Euro-American elitist writers, the underlying theme in the novel is to assert the Ojibwe cultural values, which were till date survived by the oral tradition.

All narrative strategies of Erdrich as well as the characters in the novel are inclined to holism, balance and harmony--three central traditional Ojibwe values. The entire novel itself requires a holistic approach for the comprehension of underlying Ojibwe traits. The form as well as the content, the storytellers (narrators) as well as the stories narrated by them are all equally important. The novel takes its form in a cyclical pattern both in terms of the time of the narrative (beginning in 1980s, moving back to 1920s and again ending in 1980s) and characters' reconciliation with their pedigree. June dies in the opening section in her attempt to return home and Lipsha, June's son, has a metaphorical reconciliation with her in the closing section as he is also returning home in a car brought with June's insurance money. Lipsha and other characters are searching for a balance by adapting to the change in situation while never relinquishing their link to the past. When they find such a balance, it creates a situation of harmony--in culture, in community, in family, in individuals--through which they can live.

By the way the characters express themselves, narrate their stories, and get influenced by their community, the narrators in *Love Medicine* appear as the Native American storytellers. They live by the stories they tell. The first person narrative, the direct address to 'you' and the use of present tense also impart a sense of immediacy which we find in the oral narration. In this sense, the characters are the microcosm of their culture. Having their own distinctive identity, they are the components of the totality of culture as well. The positions these narrators hold in the novel exhibit that they are all equally important. Not a single central character exists in the novel making the all other remaining subordinate. The untold narration of a narrator is sometimes completed by the other. Each character or event is central to an element of the narrative. Hence the relational viewpoint is presented through the multiple narratives in *Love Medicine*.

The apparently chaotic elements and ambiguous vision of the world also make sense within Ojibwe framework. June's death becomes a mythic element, connecting them in the novel whereas the deaths of Henry Lamartine and Henry Jr. are only physical conclusion to lives that are already spiritually dead. Henry and Henry Jr. are unsuccessful due to their inability to cope with their situation.

Like Henry and his namesake, the characters who totally assimilate the western values abandoning their cultural values are unsuccessful. Those who only adapt the part of culture that doesn't harm their own values remain successful.

Hence, through multiple narration Erdrich debunks the idea that there is such a thing as Native American view, by helping us to acknowledge that there is not even a single Ojibwe view. All views the characters hold are the outcome of how they perceive their environment, community, culture and tradition and how they react with a new situation. In other words, the various views of different narrators have necessitated multi-perceptivity in the novel.

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