

Tricksters Characters as Strategies to Resist Marginalization In Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich

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Abstract: *The focus of this paper has been Erdrich's holistic vision and her survival and continuity's politics in incorporating both Chippewa and Western culture into Love Medicine. By studying the novel through the framework of cultural narratology and sociocriticism, we have suggested that Louis Erdrich re-establish the Trickster as a means of emphasizing the trickster's role in Indigenous literature, while also offsetting stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples in mainstream American literature. Also, we have presented the bivocality of her discourses in accord with the Native American perception of pluralism which is based on the premise that the hybridity is inevitable in the fictional world, yet rather than being a discomfoting circumstance, the blending of cultures in Love Medicine offers a reassuring epistemology.*

KEYWORDS: *Trickster, Indigenous literature, bivocality, pluralism, hybridity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Turn-of-the-century tricksters appear at moments of identity crisis in American literature. Thus, true to their role as culture builders, American writers drew on trickster traditions to forge an identity and a writing voice out of clashing cultures and contradictory worlds. Trickster strategies such as masking have always been an integral part of American culture. Recalling Benjamin Franklin's self-presentation as a self-made man, Ralph Ellison says, "America is a land of masking jokers. The motives hidden behind the mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals" (1850,55). It is also these ambiguities that open the way to question how the cathartic attitude of tricksters benefits the transformation of native's culture. Indeed, within the space of *Love Medicine*, Louise Erdrich allows traditional Chippewa myths of transformation to meet, contradict and relativize each other to resist desperation. Often considered Indigenous heroes and credited with protecting their life, Erdrich uses tricksters' characters to entertain community members as well as to transmit traditional knowledge about society, culture and morality. It is in this perspective that literary approaches such as Cultural narratology and sociocriticism appear as adequate analysis methods in this work to better understand the way Erdrich handles the role of tricksters to reach her objective. Cultural narratology will help to find out how the tricksters version we have access in *Love Medicine* is constructed through the utterances of Erdrich and analyse the system of values conveyed by these tricksters, while sociocriticism will favor the understanding of the way tricksters allow opposed cultures to interact in order to create harmonious cohabitations of these cultures. Hence, thanks to these two literary theories, we shall try to see if truly indigenous constructing tricksters in their own way could help entertain community members and transmit traditional values. The purpose of our work will therefore be to analyze the extent to which Erdrich manifest the transformation of indigenous culture through transformative characters of tricksters. Thus, the first part of our work will be to scrutinize how tricksters appear as iconic characters in the work of Erdrich. The second part will seek to ponder the

multifaceted identity of tricksters, and the third part will be of particular interest in looking over the bivocality aesthetic in *Love Medicine*.

II. ICONIC CHARACTERS

One of the most important figures in Native American tradition is the so-called "Tricksters" and it is particularly these individuals with typical traits Karen Louise Erdrich makes use of in *Love Medicine* in order to form her protagonists. The major emphasis is placed on Gerry Nanapush, Lulu Lamartine and Lipsha Morrissey although several other characters do certainly show typical aspects of a trickster as well, such as June, Old Man Nanapush, Sister Leopolda, Marie, and Moses.

Even, these majors encompass many qualities of the Native American Chippewa tribe, and are therefore iconic figures, representative of the Native Americans living on Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota. Some of the ways in which they are representative of the Native American culture are from their androgynous characteristics, trickster natures, and that they do not plan out they life. Since we almost find these traits in these main characters, then arbitrarily we chose to study them in Gerry Nanapush.

Actually, the first way that Gerry Nanapush represents the Native Cultures appears in his behaviour. There are several instances throughout the novel in which Gerry is described with very feminine qualities. Although he is a male, by possessing these additional female qualities, Gerry shows a balance in his persona that is representative of all of the Native American people in this story. In the narrative it is said that, "It was the hands I watched as Gerry filled the shack. His plump fingers looked so graceful and artistic against his smooth mass. He used them prettily" (p, 205).

Erdrich describes Gerry in this way to show that he is not just a manly-man ; Gerry has a softer feminine side which is representative of the female aspect of society as well. When Gerry was escaping from the police officers, his actions were again described in a very feminine way, despite his brave actions, "Behind him there was a wide, tall window. Gerry opened it and sent the screen into thin air with an elegant chorus-girl kick" (p, 209). If Gerry is one of the stronger men in the North Dakota Reservation, yet he has also androgynous characteristic. He inhabits a netherworld between the masculine and feminine ; his life lacks structure because he feels no connection to either tradition, nor can he blend the two. Throughout his life, he wanders into the worlds of masculine and feminine ritual inconsistently. He is a perfect icon of the Native American culture.

Secondly, Gerry has a very trickster nature that he confesses through, "I could not contain...my curious nature" (p, 74). Tricksters are commonly found in the Native American culture, and because Gerry possesses these qualities, he is representing the Native American culture. For instance, when Gerry, Lipshaw, and King were playing poker and playing for June's car, Gerry allowed Lipshaw (who is also a trickster, since he is Gerry's son) to shuffle the cards and deal them out, knowing that Lipshaw would deal the cards in a way to make a point to King about how he cannot keep June's car, because it is really June's; and because she is dead, anyone of them could be keeping it for June.

Gerry and Lipshaw are tricksters and Lipshaw had the magic touch given to him by Gerry, King was already at a disadvantage in this situation, "Gerry shoved the deck across the table to me and nodded that it was my deal. His face was cool and serene, so I shuffled carefully. I saw the patterns of it happen in my mind. I dealt the patterns out with perfect ease" (p, 358). As a result, Gerry got a straight and Lipshaw dealt himself a royal flush. Gerry allows Lipshaw to do this so that King would hand over the car is an example of Gerry's trickster nature.

Thirdly, a common theme in the Native American culture is not planning ahead for the next step on the journey in life. The Native Americans lived their lives like this because it was not possible for them to make plans in advance when everyday presented a new challenge which they had to live in the moment to overcome. This stems from the belief that they did not control their lives, instead luck and chance where the major driving forces which decide the course their life takes. Gerry is a great example of this theme in Native American culture because he served as a rebel character that was always on the run, living each day in the present moment. This idea of luck and chance controlling their lives is seen in the last chapter with King, Gerry and Lipshaw playing poker, and even using lucky charms cereal as poker chips. Gerry states a very important quote in this chapter which wraps up the idea that their lives are based on chance, "society ? Society is like this card game

here, cousin. We got dealt our hand before we were born, and as we grow we have to play as best as we can” (p, 357). Although King continues to rebuttal that, “it really ain't fair”(p,358). After Gerry makes this statement, this scene illustrates that life is not about being fair. In the Native American culture, they consider it pure luck when being dealt the hand you are given, and you just have to continue on the best you can from that point. Gerry's quote perfectly describes this theme in their culture and for that reason Gerry's character is representative of Native American culture.

Gerry is an iconic figure, representative of the Native American from his androgynous characteristics, trickster nature, and the lack of plan for his life. In these ways Gerry is an example which encompasses the themes of Native Americans. It is in this character we can better understand qualities that make up the Native American people, from the stories which are passed down that make up the Native American's history in the whole American annals. Annals which enclose a mosaic of works that discusses the dynamism of American society without, however, obscuring the role of these volatile tricksters.

III. THE MULTIFACETED IDENTITY OF TRICKSTERS

In bending the structures of Native American's society, tricksters reveal and occupy a realm in between those structures. Thereby they prove how social norms can be challenged, redefined and overturned. However, tricksters inspire Erdrich's formulation of identity may appear somewhat a risky claim when tricksters as a whole embody paradox ; their ever-shifting forms seem to negate the possibility of any “stable” identity. John Densmore asserts that, “paradox is a part of Native American conceptions of identity, and the shiftiness defines the trickster's identity” (1990, p.31). It is in this line of thought that Erdrich suggests that, if aptly directed, a trickster-inspired view of identity can be liberating and empowering. It is these traits in particular that are at the core of the comments of John Densmore when he reveals that the Chippewa trickster Nanabozho is “the master of life—the source and impersonation of the lives of all sentient things, human, faunal, and floral. . . . He was regarded as the master of ruses but also possessed great wisdom in the prolonging of life” (p.34). As the “master of ruses, ” Nanabozho wields as his chief weapon the power of transformation. Margie Towers asserts that Nanabozho could, “assume at will . . . a new form, shape, and existence”; he “could be a man, and change to a pebble in the next instant. He could be a puff of wind, a cloud fragment, a flower, a toad” (1992, 19–20). Using his transformational powers to escape from difficult situations and attack his enemies, Nanabozho's transformational ability implies control over his physical boundaries. These are the mischievous involvements of the transformational ability of the tricksters viewed through Nanabozho that is central to Erdrich's vision of identity based on connections to myth and community.

Actually, Erdrich perceives identity as “transpersonal”; it implies that a strong sense of self must be based not on isolation but on personal connections to community and to myth. Notably in *Love Medicine*, she translates the concept of transpersonal identity in concretely physical terms. Thus, in this narrative, bodies become boundaries, outer layers that limit and define individuals. Characters flow out of their bodies and open themselves up to engulf the world. Even death does not contain them. Those characters gifted with Nanabozho's ability to control, or dissolve, their own physical boundaries have the strongest identities. It is the example of Albertine Johnson.

Indeed, on the night of her homecoming at the beginning of *Love Medicine*, Albertine Johnson experiences a mystical merging with the northern lights as she lies in a field next to her cousin Lipsha. Her description by Erdrich shows how a physical connection to myth, community, and the landscape provides strength:

“Northern lights. Something in the cold, wet atmosphere brought them out. I grabbed Lipsha's arm. We floated into the field and sank down. . . . Everything seemed to be one piece. The air, our faces, all cool, moist, and dark, and the ghostly sky. . . . At times the whole sky was ringed in shooting points . . . pulsing, fading, rhythmical as breathing . . . as if the sky were a pattern of nerves and our thoughts and memories traveled across it . . . one gigantic memory for us all.” (p,37)

Albertine's vision of a vast universal brain, of which her own face forms a part, expresses what James Welch calls, “transpersonal time and space” (1986, 85). Both mentally and physically, everything in Albertine's life is connected and interrelated, even breathing patterns and rhythms are no exception.

Albertine's vision strikingly parallels one of Nanabozho, as described by the Chippewa writer Edward Benton-Banai, "As he rested in camp that night, Waynaboozhoo looked up into the sky and was overwhelmed at the beauty of the ahnung-ug (stars)" (2010, 36). They seemed to stretch away forever into the Ish-pi-ming (Universe). Edward Benton-Banai states that he became lost in the vast expanse of :

"The stars. . . . Waynaboozhoo sensed a pulse, a rhythm in the Universe of stars. He felt his own o-day (heart) beating within himself. The beat of his heart and the beat of the Universe were the same. Waynaboozhoo gazed into the stars with joy. He drifted off to sleep listening to his heart and comforted by the feeling of oneness with the rhythm of the Universe." (pp, 56–57)

The vision of Albertine is uplifting in that it reestablishes her sense of connection to her home landscape, to her family and, importantly, to Chippewa myth. Seeing the northern lights, Erdrich reports that Albertine imagines the sky as, "a dance hall. And all the world's wandering souls were dancing there. I thought of June. She would be dancing if there were a dancehall in space" (p, 37). In Chippewa myth the joyful dancing of the dead in the afterworld creates the northern lights. Albertine's vision places June within a community in a "dancehall in space," and reestablishes her own links to her culture. By reinforcing her transpersonal and mythic connections to her family, her community, and the natural universe, Albertine's physical merging into the cool, dark night intensifies her own sense of identity.

Albertine's single tricksterlike visionary experience is typical of Erdrich's technique ; rather than assign a trickster identity to one particular character who has multiple trickster attributes, she emphasizes the trickster's multifaceted identity with an array of trickster characters. Nanabozho most clearly appears in *Love Medicine* in the magically flexible form of his namesake, Gerry Nanapush. As the novel's most conspicuous embodiment of the trickster, Gerry addresses Erdrich's central concerns by challenging the notion of fixed boundaries, both physically with his transformative powers and politically with his continual escapes from imprisonment by whites. Chippewa writer and critic Gerald Vizenor describes Nanabozho as a "comic healer and liberator" (1988, 188). Gerry Nanapush fits both of these descriptions insofar as he represents Erdrich's concern with liberating and healing Chippewa culture from damaging white stereotypes. Originally imprisoned because of a bar fight with a cowboy over a racial slur, Gerry ends up in jail because, as claimed by Erdrich, Albertine Johnson dryly observes :

"White people are good witnesses to have on your side, because they have names, addresses, social security numbers, and work phones. But they are terrible witnesses to have against you, almost as bad as having Indians witness for you. Not only did Gerry's friends lack all forms of identification except their band cards, not only did they disappear, but the few he did manage to get were not interested in looking judge or jury in the eyes. . . . Gerry's friends, you see, had no confidence in the United States judicial system." (p, 201)

By placing her Nanabozho figure in such a conflict, Erdrich suggests the trickster's power to counteract and heal the wounds of racial injustice. Andrew Wiget points out that the ability to change form is an essential survival strategy against such restrictive forces, "Trickster is in the business of . . . insuring that man remains unfinished' by fossilized institutions, open and adaptable instead to changing contemporary realities" (1985, 21). For Erdrich, Gerry keeps escaping with in mind his true to his proud slogan that, "no concrete shitbarn prison's built that can hold a Chippewa" (p, 341). His face on protest buttons and the six o'clock news, he galvanizes the Chippewa community with his miraculous getaways, sailing out of three-story windows and flying up airshafts, which liberate him and by extension all Chippewas from the white world's effort to contain and define them.

The "unfinished" nature of the trickster provides an escape from essentializing definitions. However strong the mythic dimensions of Gerry's character, Erdrich carefully emphasizes his humanity as well. As Greg Sarris suggests, "pinning a trickster identity onto Gerry would be just as confining as all of the stereotypes from which he struggles to break free" (2004, 130). With a deft sleight of hand, Erdrich shatters any static image of Gerry as trickster by showing the toll Gerry's public trickster role has taken as he awaits the birth of his daughter, "All the quickness and delicacy of his movements had disappeared, and he was only a poor tired fat man in those hours, a husband worried about his wife, menaced, tired of getting caught"(p, 168). Although he escapes from prison twice, his appearance in *Love Medicine* makes over-romanticizing him impossible ; physically diminished by

years in a maximum-security prison, Gerry's much-changed image on the television screen shocks his friend Albertine. Whereas Erdrich argues that the old Gerry, "had absorbed and cushioned insults with a lopsided jolt of humor, . . . had been a man whose eyes lighted, who shed sparks, his gaze in a prison life documentary strikes her as hungry and desperate" (pp, 24–25). Erdrich's characterization of Gerry forces readers to consider both the mythic and the psychological dimensions of identity.

Given the fact that the trickster, as Vizenor explains, is a "teacher and healer in various personalities" (p, 4), Gerry's clownish, bumbling son, Lipsha, is clearly another of Love Medicine's tricksters, deriving his healing "touch" from his mythical forebear. As claimed by Erdrich, his uncle Lyman describes him as, "a wild jack . . . clever and contriving as a fox" (p, 304), and, as a trickster in the youngest Chippewa generation, Lipsha represents the hope of cultural survival.

Gerry and Lipsha outwit, if only for the moment, the internal and external forces that threaten to destroy the community. Erdrich's splitting of the trickster into two characters, the wandering Gerry and the homebound Lipsha, emphasizes the trickster's dual character as both marginal and central to the culture and underscores the trickster's multiple identity.

Fostered by their trickster mother, Lulu, the boys present a picture of a potentially competitive and explosive system of interrelationships unified and strengthened by a sense of unquestioning belongingness. In fact, as a transformer, Erdrich reports that Lulu possesses the trickster's ability to dissolve her physical boundaries and merge with and absorb her environment, "I'd open my mouth wide, my ears wide, my heart, and I'd let everything inside" (p, 276). Lulu questions even the possibility of imposing boundaries, and as with Gerry, Erdrich she maintains that her trickster qualities lead her to deliver a political message, "All through my life I never did believe in human measurement" (p, 282), and she explains:

"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. . . . If we're going to measure land, let's measure right. Every foot and inch you're standing on . . . belongs to the Indians." (p, 282)

Though her sexual escapades win her a trickster's lowly reputation, Lulu's political awareness makes her a guardian of the culture. As stated by Erdrich, she warns the tribal council of selling land to the government for a, "tomahawk factory [that] mocked us all. . . . Indian against Indian, that's how the government's money offer made us act." (pp, 284-283)

Uninhibited by social constraints, free to dissolve boundaries and break taboos, the trickster's position on the edges of culture makes her or his perspective inherently revolutionary. As an, "animate principle of disruption," according to Andrew Wiget (p, 86), the trickster questions rigid definitions and boundaries and challenges cultural assumptions. By emphasizing her characters' trickster traits, Erdrich turns stereotypically negative images into sources of strength and survival. For example, in using Gerry's trickster characteristics to turn the threatening image of an escaped federal criminal into a symbol of human vitality and possibility, Erdrich also, through the resonance of the Nanabozho legend, transforms Lipsha's maladroitness escape from home into a confirmation of personal and cultural identity. Finally, she makes us see Lulu not as the, "heartless, shameless man-chaser. . . .jabwa witch" (p, 322) that she is reputed to be, but as a woman of vibrancy and vision. Erdrich's repetition of this pattern of indoctrination and escape indicates its importance as a trickster strategy for cultural survival.

Certainly, survival depends upon adapting. Yet in Erdrich's view, adaptability can also lead to assimilation and even to a collapse of identity. Even adaptation without connection to one's home and culture undermines identity and threatens the community, as the case of Lyman Lamartine seems to show. On the report of Erdrich, reborn "out of papers" (p, 303), Lyman skillfully works his way up in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and goes on to build the very tomahawk factory that his mother, Lulu, had named a threat to traditional culture. As well, the destruction of Lyman's tomahawk factory brings about a similar result when Lyman notices Marie Kashpaw's hands have been mutilated in a machine designed to reproduce the work of "a hundred Chippewa grandmothers" (p,310). Internalized racism sharply, if comically, colors Lyman's characterization of himself as claimed by Erdrich through this comment, "the flesh-and-blood proof of Nector Kashpaw's teepee-creeping" (p, 303) and his

characterization of the activists in his community as “back-to-the-buffalo types.” If such self-contempt and loss of identity is to be avoided, then for Andrew Wiget (p, 136) the fluidity that allows the trickster to adapt to swiftly changing circumstances must spring from strong connections to community and culture.

IV. BIVOCALITY AESTHETIC

The fundamental bivocality of Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* reflects a prevalent characteristic of the postmodern era. This work being a representative novel of postcolonialism, it is governed by the combination of multiple distinct viewpoints. It is in this same perspective that E. Shelley Reid has addressed the formal duality of the novel, pointing out that the juxtaposition of Western narrative forms with Native American oral practices places the work, as she says, at “middle ground” (2000,67) between the two literary traditions.

Concentrating on the encounter of Western and Chippewa culture at the fabula and the story levels, *Love Medicine* portrays the two discourses as inseparable, permeable and their perspectives as equally valid. Many of Erdrich’s characters attempt to assimilate into mainstream culture and leave behind their Chippewa background, while others cling to their roots and endeavor to conserve ancient Chippewa rites in their everyday lives. However, neither of those routes proves to be successful. Nector Kashpaw, for instance, who leaves the reservation to star in Hollywood westerns, finds the stereotypes of those movies delimiting and intimidating ; thus, he decides to return home. Lulu Lamartine, in contrast, comes to realize that her efforts to repopulate the reservation with buffaloes and adopt the traditional Chippewa language are incongruous with reservation life in the twentieth century. The only valid solution that the novel offers to the duality of cultures is a perspective that fuses the two discourses. Only those characters who intertwine Chippewa and Western elements in their viewpoints manage to thrive.

Indeed, besides the central figure of Lipsha Morrissey, whose language, cultural references, and religious worldview is evidently grounded in the interweaving of discourses, the episodes which best bring to light the novel’s cherishing of bivocality center around the childhood of Lipsha’s adoptive grandmother, Marie Lazarre. This latter embodies one of the best examples for Erdrich’s archetypal characters. In her case, the first archetype her character evokes is the trickster, a shape-shifter figure that, according to Catherine Rainwater (2000, 121), is the governing archetype of Native American fiction to date. Within the same framework, Seema Kuru, contends that archetypes “condense or sum up the most profound spirit of a culture” (2016, 110). If archetypes indeed operate as models engrained so deeply in their cultural background, Erdrich’s use of Marie Lazarre as bicultural interfaces is all the more powerful as a statement concerning the permeability of cultural discourses: not only are the Chippewa and Western cultural codes understandable in each other’s terms, but they are actually mutually translatable to the very depth of their particular archetypes.

The object that Marie aspires to reach is a sense of identity and belonging. Her means of attaining that object, however, adjusts over time, the course of which adjustment is at the focus of Marie’s fabula. While at first Marie attempts to embrace Catholicism wholesale at the expense of discarding her Chippewa background, due to a series of disappointments connected to Catholicism, she recognizes the impossibility of her original plan. Instead of switching from the Chippewa religious code to the Western, then, it is the blending of the two discourses that ultimately provides her with a feasible epistemology.

Fourteen years old and eager to escape from the reservation by any means, Marie decides to join the Sacred Heart Convent at the beginning of the novel. In the hope of finding acknowledgment and love by passing for being non-Native and living a Catholic life, Marie decides to devote herself to living a pious life. In fact, at first Marie is so zealous in her commitment to Catholicism that she marks her ultimate goal as the achievement of sainthood. Grasping sainthood through one of its palpable manifestations, Erdrich maintains that Marie formulates her aim by envisioning herself as a golden statue, revered by the nuns at the convent, “they never thought they’d have a girl from this reservation as a saint they’d have to kneel to. But they’d have me. And I’d be carved in pure gold.” (p, 43)

The narrative shows, however, that Catholicism cannot function for Marie as a means of the elevation and appreciation she seeks. Viewing her childhood in retrospect, Marie makes it clear that her disappointment was not grounded in the nature of the religion itself, but in the distortion that it had undergone by the time it reached

the reservation. That is, in Marie's case it is due to the particular version of Catholicism presented to Native Americans that hinders the girl's identification with it. Being the focalizer of her own experience, Erdrich claims that the grown Marie relates how the Sacred Heart Convent was a home for nuns who were unwanted in other parts of the country. Surrounded by nuns who, according to the focalizer Marie, had "los[t] their mind", the young Marie's attempt to embrace Catholicism was doomed to fail." (p, 45)

Marie's perception gradually shifts, though, primarily as a result of her relationship with Sister Leopolda, the nun who takes on her mentoring. At first, Leopolda appears to fulfill the role that Bal calls helper, as her endeavors to exorcize the Devil from Marie apparently serve the girl's aim of spiritual purity. Nevertheless, before long the nun's heartless conduct prompts Marie to adjust her ideas regarding the way of obtaining sainthood, which in turn reverses Leopolda's role from helper to opponent. As Marie realizes that Leopolda's real intentions in disciplining her were not aimed towards her spiritual salvation but rather towards her subordination, she loses faith in the nun, as well as in moral virtue being the way leading to sainthood.

While Marie does not fully abandon Catholicism, her perception changes in accord with the modification of her beliefs. Having lost from her devoutness and developed, in turn, a strong desire to take revenge for what she now views as Leopolda's fraudulent and cruel behavior, Marie incorporates profane elements into her earlier design of piety. More specifically, she retains her goal of Catholic sainthood but comes to see it as serving two purposes at the same time : besides lending Marie appreciation and love, sainthood also obtains the function of retaliation against Leopolda. Envisioning the double pursuit which will then govern the remainder of the fabula, Marie explains her concrete plan, according to which she will reach sainthood earlier than the nun, thus gaining sufficient powers for excluding Leopolda from Heaven.

The unresolved conflict between the two women reaches its climax when Marie—while assisting Leopolda in baking bread—voices her conviction that the suitable occasion had come for accomplishing her design. Led by a very strong feeling that her turning into a saint had begun, Marie contemplates thrusting the nun into the open oven. As stated by Erdrich, Marie expresses her justification for that idea through the imagery of the golden statue, which she had already applied earlier as a metonymy for sainthood, "Yes, this is part of it. [...] My skin was turning to beaten gold. It was coming quicker than I thought. The oven was like the gate of a personal hell" (p, 56). Confusing her goals with her methods, Marie no longer views the defeat of Leopolda as the motivation for achieving sainthood but as the primary means thereof. It is in the belief that the nun's demise would bring Marie salvation that she finally pushes Leopolda into the flames.

Shortly afterwards, however, Leopolda escapes the fire and in her fury stabs Marie's hands with an iron shaft, resulting in the girl's loss of consciousness. From the point that Marie awakens from her stupor, the other nuns of the convent appear on the scene, worshipping Marie as a true saint. The reader finds out together with Marie that the nuns are motivated in doing so by the scars on Marie's hands, which Leopolda presented to them as the stigmata, thereby escaping charges of having harmed the girl.

In the Roman Catholic Church such marks are associated with religious ecstasy and often lead to the people experiencing them being declared saints. Relying on such Catholic practices, in order to protect herself from accusations, Leopolda successfully tricks the nuns into believing that Marie had received the stigmata and had thus become a saint.

From the nuns' viewpoint, Marie's narrative is concluded by what Mieke Bal would call "a process of improvement" (1985, 85). Marie's original goal of becoming a saint is achieved, the respect and devotion of the whole convent gained. Upon recognizing Leopolda's success in deceitfully presenting Marie's scars as being of divine origin, the girl loses her faith in the Catholic discourse, abandons the possibility of adopting Western cultural codes to replace her Chippewa background, and decides to return to the reservation. Marie also understands from her experience that the particular version of Catholicism practiced at the Sacred Heart Convent cannot provide a coherent epistemology for the Chippewa : the distorted concepts that Marie/ SHE assumes at the convent and the nuns' limited outlook indicate that Catholicism in itself does not offer Erdrich's characters a valid point of identification.

Marie's simultaneous embracing of Catholicism and Chippewa beliefs can best be seen when the focalization of the narrative likens Sister Leopolda to Marie's grandmother in their religious susceptibility. As opposed to

young Marie, who is the actor of the related episode and goes to great lengths to transcend her Chippewa background, the focalizer claims that the beliefs of the two women, one Catholic and the other Chippewa, intersect in their understandings of evil forces. On the report of Erdrich, the comparison of the two women shows that the two discourses do not contradict each other but rather embody different approaches to the same spiritual matters, in this case to Satan, "She [Leopolda] knew as much about him as my grandma, who called him by other names and was not afraid" (p, 45). That is, looking back as an adult on her earlier experience at the convent, Marie no longer emphasizes the distance between the Catholic and Chippewa discourses; instead, she demonstrates the permeability of the two understandings.

Marie's amalgamation of religions becomes the most visible in the novel through a symbolic object, namely the chain of beads that she takes from the young June Morrissey's neck upon welcoming her into her family. From the moment that Marie sees those beads, they are associated with Native American beliefs, as well as Catholicism. On the one hand, June's companions explain that the girl had received the beads from Cree Indians who wanted to protect themselves via the chain from evil spirits who had possibly possessed June. On the other hand, Marie initially calls the beads a rosary, which is also how her grandson Lipsha refers to them. As claimed by Erdrich, Marie reinforces the connection between the beads and Catholicism when claiming that the chain substitutes the act of praying for her, "I don't pray, but sometimes I do touch the beads" (1984, 96). Although that passage expresses Marie's deliberate distance from Catholic practices, it also indicates her spiritual need thereof.

Representing both the Native American and the Catholic context, the beads become the epitome of Marie's simultaneous reliance on the elements of both discourses. According to Catherine Rainwater's interpretation, the symbol of the beads bridges the two religious frames of reference which traverse in Marie's figure, revealing Marie's awareness of her own liminality(p,163). The beads thus illustrate the conclusion of Marie's entire religious experience, showing that only a bicultural identity can provide a viable perspective and a harmonious existence in the fictional world of the novel.

V. CONCLUSION

The examination of the fabula and story level of *Love Medicine* has shown that iconic characters are representative of the Native American from their androgynous characteristics and trickster nature; they also help to better understand qualities that make up the Native American people, from the stories which are passed down that make up the Native American's history in the whole American annals. In the same impetus, in bending the structures of Native American's society, tricksters reveal and occupy a realm in between those structures. Thereby they prove how social norms can be challenged, redefined and overturned surviving western subjugation. Knowing that survival depends upon adapting which can also lead to assimilation and even to a collapse of identity, who better than tricksters can cleverly juggle with these notions to balance the encounter of Western and Chippewa culture at the fabula *Love Medicine*? This work portrays the two discourses as inseparable, permeable and their perspectives as equally valid. The deep structure of the narrative, as well as its focalization is grounded in the understanding that bivocality is the defining condition of the fictional world. The narrative of characters' experience at various levels served to demonstrate that only the concurrent application of the Native American and Western perspective can provide Erdrich's characters world view. Many of Erdrich's characters attempt to assimilate into mainstream culture and leave behind their Chippewa background, while others cling to their roots and endeavor to conserve ancient Chippewa rites in their everyday lives. This observation explains why in Erdrich's construction of a bicultural narrative using tricksters, neither the Native American nor the Western reader enjoys a privileged position when reading the novel. Neither reader encounters a familiar narrative that merely reinforces their understanding of their own cultural categories. Instead, Erdrich requires the readers of both backgrounds to make an effort to grasp the twofold cultural references and thus adopt the bicultural approach that the novel is grounded in. In such a manner, the reader's world does, indeed, take the shape of the story that Erdrich tells in *Love Medicine*.

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