

Longing for Belonging in Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*

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Abstract

Apart from its predecessors Tracks and Four Souls, Louise Erdrich's Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse does not narrate the struggle and suffering of natives to preserve native lands, traditions, and culture, but the auto/biographical notes of the leading characters of the novel, their longing and belonging for/to the particular places or people. Both non-Native and native narratives of the novel critically engage this claim that Erdrich approaches indigenous values from many perspectives: the liminal, native, or western. This study claims that the contemporary tribal view of the indigenous culture cannot be restricted to pure Native American voice but is also determined by Euro-American voice because the contemporary Native American culture is the interaction of Native and non-Native elements.

Key Words:

Belonging, Erdrich, Euro-American Voice, Native American Culture, Oral Tradition.

Introduction

Native American identity is 'manufactured' by many stereotypes (Owens, 1992, p. 4). Therefore, what colonialism has pushed them to become and what their memories tell them to be are the leading dilemmas of their ways of being. Father Damien, the Euro-American protagonist of the *Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, claims: "They were shells made of loss ... made of the whispers in the oak leaves, voices of the dead" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 80). However, these 'dead' still have voices, the very voices that live on via the storytelling and memories of Father Damien, Lulu Nanapush and other native and non-Native characters. The stories and the memories that sustain these characters altogether explain their belongings to different places. These stories of Father Damien, Nanapush, Fleur and the indigenous community are based on the memories of the places once they belonged to hence are crucial for determining their individual as well as communal identity. In this regard, this study argues Father Damien's Agnes's (Euro-American) and Paulin Puyat's/Sister Leopolda's (Indigenous American) narration of the Anishinaabe reservation to understand Erdrich's perception of indigenous culture and its location in the 20th century regarding traditional families and communities and their relationship to one another and to their surrounding world.

Literature Review

In Simon Ortiz's (1992) words, Damien's/ Agnes' direct engagement with the Native American community strengthens the idea of her literal and cultural disengagement with the Euro-American community. For Ortiz (1992) Damien/ Agnes belongs to the "orphaned people" therefore, the longing for 'home culture' is crucial for her existence. However, Deirdre Keenan (2006) admits in "Unrestricted Territory: Gender, Two Spirits, and Louise Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*,": "This assertion immediately raises the question: How can a white Catholic missionary represent Native American tradition?" (p. 4). He argues that "the representation substantially depends on the ways the Anishinaabe at Little No Horse perceive him [Damien] and recognize his Two-Spirit status" (p. 4). In "The Complicated Life of Louise Erdrich," Karen Olson (2001) states: "*Last Report ...* is about somebody who survives the loss rather than being overwhelmed by it. Agnes [Damien], despite her deprivations, achieves a fantastically full life" (p 34). Damien starts constructing a home, one where she is wanted, welcomed, and at "home". In Damien's own expressions/language, she "had arrived here. The true Modeste who was supposed to arrive—none other. No one else" (p. 65). So, Damien is a character from the West and the Indian community's history, impact, and acceptance re-construct

Damien's idea of indigenous culture. "Home culture" is then re-theorized to give a person with no place a space to live and prosper.

Research Methodology

This article aims to adopt the textual analysis of the chosen female-written Native American work to argue how Louise Erdrich (2001), a renowned hybrid Native American author, has used fiction to give a real picture of the cultural as well as the historical accounts of her community, colonization of their minds and lands, the ensuing trauma and sufferings and permanent effects of torture on their existence. All this portrays the real side of their misrepresented history to the world. She, by writing her discourses about her people, traditions, culture, and great effort of her women against various kinds of discrimination and subjugation in a white-dominated society, tells the story of many decades of disgrace, slavery, and humiliation.

This present study which holds literary value and classifies under the category of cultural criticism, adopts the textual analysis approach to elucidate the literary portrayal of the Native women in a magical-realist manner of description. Concerning this, Catherine Belsey (2013, p. 157) talks about the inseparable relationship between/concerning cultural criticism and textual analysis: "textual analysis is inevitable to research in cultural criticism, where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural criticism, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artifacts." When implemented to American Indian literary works to determine whether the literary depictions are culturally informed or not, Belsey's thoughts on literary products holding cultural inscriptions confirm that these literary texts are the result of cultural forces and carry cultural inscriptions.

Longing for Belonging in *Last Report*

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse opens with the inspection of Father Damien, whether he is suitable for his position or not, as the Church has concerns over the poor proliferation of the Christian values at Little no Horse in Anishinaabe. The inspection leads to the secrets of Agnes as Father Damien and how the lady became the appointed father for the Anishinaabe community, and how she could not resist the indigenous cultural integrity. The novel, written partially in epistolary style and partially in a traditional oral style, starts with an end. It talks of Father Damien Modeste's very personal and most secured secret: he is a woman. However, the secret of Damien, while profound, is less significant than his quest and attempt to retain the top-secret. Placing into the Native American community, Damien's narrative tells how an alien develops a stable location wherein s/he later grows. Agnes DeWitt, the later Father Damien, finding a place to belong, adopts the identity of Sister Cecilia. However, this very identity is ephemeral. Finding the pleasure of music at the convent and the love of Berndt Vogel's friendship, Agnes endeavors to construct two very dissimilar identities. However, neither of those identities is long-lasting. They end up with a certain misfortune instead. On the other hand, these lives are only the initial footsteps on the path to the "home," to be "adopted" into "family" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 5).

Since losing part of her memory after a gunshot wound to the head and surviving a flood, Agnes relates, "I now believe in that river I drowned in spirit, but revived. I lost an old life and gained a new" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 41). This is the beginning of a fresh beginning. The idea of 'belonging' is re-focalized at this point in the novel: the indigenous community needs Father Damien as much as he requires them. Everyone in a community has choices to survive. So, to retrieve a 'belonging' Agnes slips into the role of a drowned priest 'Father Damien' and begins "to walk north, into the land of the Ojibwe, to the place on the reservation where he had told her he was bound" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 45). The physical setting of Little No Horse, on the other hand, is just as significant as the individuals and the culture itself. Damien is keen to highlight his past is undeniably connected to the indigenous people of the community when compared to Mary Kashpaw: "The story of her [Mary Kashpaw] existence is also my story here," said father Damien. "Her story and mine are twined up from the roots of the place. There is no telling my story without hers!" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 55). For example, in an interview with Mark Rolo (2002) Erdrich summarizes, "I think there is a more pointed, political, Native identity in *Love Medicine* (2005) and *Tracks* (1988). But now it's more about identity in a sense that includes family, gender, sexual identity—every kind of way that we label ourselves or attempt to root ourselves" (p. 38). The place(s) of the reservation and the space of actions of the characters actions are neither stable nor static. "The reservation at the time was a place still fluid of definition, appearing solid only on a map. ... It was a place of shifting allegiances, new feuds and old animosities, a place of clan teasing, jealousy, comfort, love" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 75). It is a "home" in all characteristics, but with "boundaries [that] came and went, drawn to accommodate local ventures—sawmills, farms, feed stores, and the traplines of various families" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 75). This is the location where Father Damien Modeste reaches then seeks to make sense of Native circumstances and her presence in the community.

Nanapush and Fleur became the instantaneous family Damien had never had before. As their relationship grows, "Nanapush becomes a veritable instructor of traditional ways by taking Father Damien (Agnes) under his tutelage" (Wittmier, 2002 p. 241). Damien's views of Catholicism are reviewed regarding Ojibwe's traditions and values, and he becomes the caretaker of Fleur's estranged daughter, Lulu. So, Lulu, Nanapush, and Fleur also adopted non-Native values. Damien asserts in a letter to the Vatican, "I have discovered an unlikely truth that may interest Your Holiness. The ordinary, as well as esoteric forms of worship engaged in by the Ojibwe, is sound, even compatible with the teachings of Christ" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 49). This declaration builds up the conception that 'home' is more than the Catholic or Ojibwe realm for Damien. "Rather, Father Damien's mediation reveals the limits of Christian orthodoxy, the recuperative potential of Ojibwe spirituality, and the possibility of a spirituality that arises from two traditions" (Keenan, 2006, p. 6). By Damien's admission, she lives a crossbreed survival that cannot be pigeon-holed into one perfect description of gender or spirituality. "In this context, Erdrich's novel provides a theory and practice of gender identity formations that challenge mainstream concepts and the intolerance that rises from those concepts" (Keenan, 2006 p. 1). Although Damien comes to understand that a fresh start is his arrival on the reservation, however, his former self is not completely erased. He has to face his changing identity to endeavor to outline who or what s/he is. As Damien interrogates: "Between these two [female and male identities], where was the real self?" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 76).

Peter Beidler (1997) asserts that Erdrich's ability to construct a story lies in her status as both an insider and outsider (p. 175). The priestly role of Damien displays terror and resentment. As Fleur reminisces: "The priests had brought the sickness long ago in the hems of their black gowns, in their sleeves, in the water they flung on people to make them holy but which might as well have burned holes in their skin" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 81). This leads to various degrees of hatred, assimilation, and indifference. However, Westerners and their faith could not have vanished. Damien receives a degree of respect and utility as a priest. Hence, regardless of the reaction to the presence of the Church, its influence is felt. This overview explains a deteriorated situation where belonging becomes precarious. For instance, the personal solution of Kashpaw is both resistance and submission. He admits the changing nature of the world, but he longs the choice to "go back to the old ways" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 63). Unluckily, the primary response of Kashpaw to colonization is demoted merely to blood quantum: "Leave us full-bloods alone, let us be with our Nanabozho, our sweats and shake tents, our grand medicines and bundles" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 63). Picking the term 'whipped' as compared to 'ripped' suggests that the world and 'belonging' Kashpaw had identified is not gone rather is in requisition of restoration, one that comprises the principles of Western values that have been whipped apart from the traditions, practices, and life of Natives. Observing the fluctuating nature of the relation between Native and Western values, Damien is correspondingly inclined by, or "whipped," into this reconfiguration of "belonging." However, in the sense of colonialism, the task of saving their property, lives and souls from Western interference, obstruction, and repression is nearly impossible.

John James Mauser is the embodiment of colonial opportunism, exploiting the land as well as Red Indians for monetary/economic benefit: "He went from land speculation into lumber, minerals, quarries. ... He buys the land by having the Ojibwe owners declared incompetent. ... New Legislation passes. Is reversed. Mauser prospers with every fumble. His hands are always open, ready to receive" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 106). Damien becomes one of the most dedicated leaders and representatives of the Natives to resist Mauser's acts and many others. Following the concept of authorial obligation by Erdrich, Damien took up the pen not only to reproduce but also to combat the story of Mauser's deceptive capitalist practices. Damien warns: John James Mauser is not the government, he is a single man who wants trees" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 107). Damien's battle is not one of humble priestly goodness or virtue; these are "his people" and his belonging/home he is guarding (Erdrich, 2001, p. 5).

The intermingling of Native and Western values, then, surpasses typical location, custom, and inheritance; it turns out as a combination of the divine base for both worlds that must be reconstructed and re-recognized as such, even within their religious backgrounds. However, in a world with contradictory social and cultural principles, a predominantly Western or indigenous understanding may not be relied upon. This becomes fully clear when young Father Jude opposes the "irregular ... behavior" of Damien regarding his parishioners (Erdrich, 2001, p. 134). Jude debates that Damien's lenient outlook is "somewhat appalling" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 134), but Damien does not scold his colleague; as an alternative, his reaction negotiates the inflexible Catholic world of "Black is black and white is white" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 135). As Damien places it: "The mixture is gray. ... I have never seen the truth ... without crossing my eyes. Life is crazy" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 135). Deprived of understanding what he primarily grasps, Jude identifies that there is "inhabiting the same cassock as the priest, an old woman. She was a sly, pleasant, contradictory-looking female of stark intelligence" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 139). So, 'belonging' is not something to be defined, but something that can only be redefined by understanding that it is, and can never be, fixed in certain terms.

"[E]ach name you hear on this reservation is an unfinished history. A destiny that opens like a cone pouring out a person's life" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 145). Pauline Puyat's/ Sister Leopolda's story is not dissimilar. According to

her notion, she is born in a family of mixed-bloods who are in search of a 'belonging.' While it is easy to denounce Pauline/ Leopolda's activities all over Erdrich's North Dakota saga, it would be biased to discount the situation that created her. As Damien clarifies that the consensus on the reservation is "that the Puyats were subject, as any family on the reservation, to the same great press of forces, and that their clan managed to survive at all was certainly commendable and strange" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 148). The loss of tribe, clan, and the home had impacted Pauline's people long before several other natives of the very same area; thus, her story, as well as life, is disrupted to a noteworthy degree more than even the Pillager's, Nanapush's, Lazarres', and Morrisseys.' This makes her assimilation into the competitive Native and Western worlds considerably more complicated. Instead of reinterpreting 'belonging' in a way that treads the path between the two worlds, she entirely gives herself to what she sees as the center of Western influence, change, and colonization: the Church. Since many readers and critics are eager to mention that the acts of Pauline represent her refusal of her community, place, and indigenous roots, however, it is partly accurate. In Father Damien's remembrance, "[t]his killing hatred between mother and daughter was passed down and did not die when the last Pauline became a nun. As Sister Leopolda she was known for her harsh and fearsome ways" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 157). Pauline is brought up under the exploitation of her oppressive mother and perceives no good future for Natives, merely the obnoxious life of keeping away from religion, illness, and famine. To secure her place in the modern world, Pauline then decides to adopt Western values.

Pauline, rejecting her indigenous heritage, joined the church for only one motive: to turn out to be a saint. It is not a surprise that the most important role one could get in the church is sainthood. Saints (as they are likened to Jesus himself) surpass all Church authority. Unluckily, not even the Church can refute what Allen Chavkin (1999) believes "blood memory." As Damien inquires: "What unknown capacities, what secret Old World cruelties, were thereby tangled into her simmering blood?" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 157). Since she has no sustained sense of belonging, Pauline is unable to flee her destiny. Instead, she actively seeks the "familiar place" inside the world of colonialization to ground herself (Erdrich, 1985, 23). Finding nothing but continuing desperation for herself and other Natives, Pauline's decisions are not without purpose. She claims the native world no longer does have something to offer, as other natives still lament. "Their gods had not, in recent times, served the Ojibwe well" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 238). Her confused appropriation of a place inside the Church and its values is simply the attempt within the halls and walls of the church convent to search for 'belonging.' In this sense, Pauline/ Sister Leopolda is not simply a psychotic torturer and murderer, as the reader knows, but a person who illustrates the desperate need for a place in a fragmenting world of indigenous heritage and culture. Her actions are adverse, but they are not easy. Bernadette, Pauline's substitute mother, sums up: "... it was useless to do anything but go forward, live forward, take the money in their hands, and find a new place to put their hearts and their feet" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 168). Comparing Natives to the last of the Buffalo, Nanapush sadly recollects: "The buffalo went crazy with grief to see the end of things. Like us, they saw the end of things and like many of us, many today, they did not care to live" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 158). Pauline commits suicide, metaphorically, and is then resurrected as Sister Leopolda. But the story of *Last Report* unfolds Leopolda's obedience to her deviate forms of Western philosophy.

Damien is always an outsider and always an insider, working as Nanapush and Fleur's supporter and family member, who are in jeopardy of losing John Mauser's place. He preserves a vestige of his 'family's land': "He wrote to the state senators and representatives [and] was determined to restore that land, but once it was gone, it was gone forever from Anishinaabeg hands" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 186). Whereas the result of the loss of lands of Pillager and Nanapush is the *Four Souls* (2004) tale, the effort of Damien to support the Natives is just as significant as the later decision of Fleur to leave 'home' and to claim her vengeance on John James Mauser. As *Four Souls* purposely indicates, the decision of Fleur is unfavorable to her, although she wins her land back. As her daughter, Lulu, her daughter, puts it "She chose revenge. I chose to hate her for it" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 242).

Contrariwise, the commitment of Father Damien to stay is to help the tribal community validate her place in the native world, inevitably his acts become more 'Indian' than those in the native community perceive the existence of Fleur with John James Mauser. This reality is reiterated further by the deal of Damien with the 'devil.' To commit her vengeance on John Mauser, Damien becomes Lulu's adoptive mother and guardian upon resettlement of Fleur to the cities. Damien quickly gives Lulu everything he has, entering into a contract for the exchanging of souls. Damien demands: "I will trade places with the child, with Lulu Nanapush,' she declared, "but you must not take me until I am good and ready" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 191). As a mother figure, Erdrich changes speech of Damien to the female pronoun "she." Damien at once becomes the legal father, surrogate mother, and protector of her family of the only 'belonging' she knows she is apart of, "the true Modeste who was supposed to arrive—none other. No one else" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 65).

Damien explores this identity, however, and 'belonging' is not one that comes without a cost. In different ways, giving herself up for the benefit of society is counterproductive to her. She's still grappling with who she was, who she is, and who she has to become. "This love of Christ, this love that chose Agnes and forced her to give up her nature as a woman, forced Father Damien to appear to sacrifice the pleasures of manhood, was

impossible to define in Ojibwe” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 99). The boundaries of both manhood and womanhood are crossed by Damien, who reaches a complex and conclusively chaotic climax when he is assigned an assistant: The arrival and affection of Father Gregory Wekkle shake Damien's confidence and allegiance to both position and culture. Wekkle quickly moves into Damien's tiny abode, as having no other place to stay. Suspecting that her mystery will be sought out, Damien surrounds them with a wall of books. This wall is indicative of what seems to be the words they will not say to one another as their devotion to each other grows. Erdrich shifts Damien into the female Agnes, switching to her old persona. Likewise, Father Wekkle is “disturbed at his own physical reaction to the proximity of Father Damien” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 196). Appropriately, through the unintentional destruction of the book wall between them, their need for each other comes to fruition. When Wekkle, for the first of several times, enters Agnes' bedroom, they find the words they could not say, “they spoke now, their whispers incoherent” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 200). Still, this bond is one Agnes identifies that she cannot retain.

Wekkle attempts to convince Agnes “to leave together [...] be a couple married legally and happily [...] have children, a life” (Erdrich, 1988, pp. 205-206). Unluckily for Agnes and Wekkle, Damien already has a home, one with pleasure, offspring, and life. This life is like the priest of Little No Horse. Erdrich explains in an interview with Karen Olson: “Agnes really has to live through the fact that she has an amazing drive to follow what her spirit dictates. She does follow it, and it is immensely difficult” (Olson, 2001, p. 34). Retelling this point, Nanapush concludes: “Your [Damien's] spirits must be powerful to require such a sacrifice” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 232).

True to this assessment, Damien one more time surrenders everything she intimately wants to make sure that her native ‘belonging’ does not suffer the outcomes of her acts with Father Wekkle. Damien's affection for her native belonging, however, does not make her decision to stay and relinquish Father Wekkle any simpler. After endorsing that Father Wekkle was awarded a new post, Damien imitates “the buffalo [that] went crazy with grief to see the end of things. [Damien] saw the end of things, and like many of us, many today, they did not care to live” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 158). On the other hand, a strong illness afflicts him before Damien can finish his own life. The role of Damien as an activist, parent (both as father and mother), and companion to the indigenous community is dramatically shifted at this point; Damien becomes the one that his ‘family’ must care for. He can also not escape his liminal status when Damien experiences an unconscious condition of hallucination prompted by his disease, “wandering mightily through heaven and earth. He was exploring worlds inhabited by both Ojibwe and Catholic” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 211). This quest is just as damaging as the real role of Damien between the Catholic and Ojibwe domains. Only Damien can only be saved by his Native counterparts from the devastation initiated by the “absence of all familiar place” (Erdrich, 1985, p. 23).

Whereas Mary rescued her attendant from the ‘tangled trials’ of the spirit realm, Recovery of Damien has not changed her mind about committing suicide. Now she is brought back by other people of her native home from some other point of certain/particular extinction. Damien's friend “Nanapush provides the traditions that can reconcile the priest's divided self” (Keenan, 2006, p. 5). This is in glaring divergence to “the way Damien understood it, he was to help, assist, comfort and aid, spiritually sustain, and advise the Anishinaabeg. Not the other way around” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 214). Yet, as “he [Damien] entered the familiar yard [of Nanapush's home] that afternoon, heart full, the pleasure and kindness in Nanapush's face somewhat eased his certainty [of killing himself]” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 214). It is this “familiar place” that Damien needs to rescue her, to again be whole, to again have a place—a home (Erdrich, 1985, p. 23). Damien comprehends that, like his Indian members, only the amalgamation of the Native and Western realms can protect him. “Here walled by Ojibwe men, Damien discovers peace” (Keenan, 2006 pp. 5-6). As Melanie Wittmier (2002) concludes, “Damien, who comes to the reservation to instruct the Ojibwe people in the beliefs and ethics of the Christian faith, finds himself learning from those he intended to instruct” (p. 241). In a Native sweat lodge, Damien learns that he is certainly “comforted,” singing Catholic prayers, as he first felt he was to relieve the Natives (Erdrich, 2001, p. 215).

Confessing the authority of the wildlife and this incidence, the Native population “consults [Damien] more often and trusted [him] with [more] intimate knowledge” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 220). Damien's adoption into a Native family develops into a tribal community's broader home. Damien's hybrid values and acts that negotiate the two opposing worlds rely on this incorporation into native society. The navigation of these realms is not a lesson relegated to Native Americans; for, for the greater good of the all-inclusive community (mixed-blood, full-blood, and non-native), the world must be seen in its “grey” reality (Erdrich, 2001, p. 135). Relevantly, a figure of the Madonna reaches at Little No Horse with a “too realistic” serpent that “did not look at all crushed down by her weight,” allegorically showing Damien/Agnes' Catholic views and consideration of Native religion (Erdrich, 2001, p. 226).

As Father Jude Miller, the Vatican prosecutor, confirms later, the position and acts of Damien within the community and religious community make him a worthy candidate for sainthood. This consciousness arises after learning about the psychopathic and neurotic nature of Sister Leopolda and the reality about the ‘miracles’ ascribed to her. Thus, ‘belonging’ becomes a concept that drives Leopolda into the Western Church's arms, yet at the same

point, 'belonging' becomes a place comprising the land, people, and community that Damien wants. Erdrich, set at opposite ends of the continuum, leads the characters masterfully into direct confrontation. Leopolda attempts to warn Church officials about Damien's gender after spying on Damien. True to her unselfish heart, Damien just laments what she feels may have been lost: "The married couples Father Damien had joined might have been shattered. Babies unbaptized as well as unprotected to evil powers. Deaths unblessed and sins again weighing on the poor sinners," and "there would surely be no one who would listen to the sins of the Anishinaabeg and forgive them" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 276).

The very life of Damien is positioned in much a similar perspective. Without the oral history, which he gives Father Jude, Damien would have only reminisced being a priest who had done his duty – converting as well as hearing confessions from the ignorant community of Natives where he is deployed. On the other hand, as Father Jude summarises, the lives of Damien "The life of sacrifice, the life of ordinary acts of daily kindness, the life of devotion, humility, and purpose...includ[ing] miracles and direct shows of God's love, gifts of the spirit, humorous incidents as well as tragic encounters and examples of heroic virtue [are] Saintly" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 341). Surprisingly, the content of Lulu's birth certificate convinces Father Jude that Damien is Lulu's biological father. (Erdrich, 2001, p. 333). In both matters, Lulu's birth certificate and Father Jude's report, Damien is given more than what might be accomplished by only a woman posturing like a priest. Damien is made a real father, a real priest by the texts, and the one who has been given love and respect in the community where she constructs a belonging. In terms of Jace Weaver, Damien's and Leopolda's lives carry on to live on owing to the stories being told. Louise Owens' (1992) arguments support this opinion on a bit different level. In the view of Owens, many present-day Native writers endeavor to deal with the stereotypical forms of 'Indianness' in literature. Appropriately, Leopolda and Damien simply do not fit the bill of any Native or Western stereotype. The character of Damien is far more, and exactly, categorized as Indian in both her acts and words than Leopolda's character, even though she relishes native blood. Leopolda, in contrast, completely rejects her Native inheritance to become the antithesis of apprehension for clannish problems and peoples. Setting these characters opposite to each other, Erdrich skillfully deconstructs the belief that Westerners and Natives can be effortlessly classified as one kind of person or the other and that their 'belonging' is or can be defined in either a purely Western or Native sense. As Keenan (2006) further explains: "In each of her mediations between mainstream and Ojibwe culture—in matters of spirituality, faith, conversion, language, culture, and morality— Father Damien provides not merely opposing opinions on mainstream issues but new meaning" (p. 7).

Damien does not solely refuse the trappings of Church: "Damien personally rejects Christian dogma, including its concept of evil and redemption, choosing, in the end, to enter the Ojibwe heaven" (Keenan, 2006, p. 6). To flee the Catholic sort of the Devil, Damien escapes to a location that symbolizes what Edward Said (1994) says, "The objective space of a house...what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel" (p. 55). Spirit Island is a holy Ojibwe residence feared and esteemed for its power all through the North Dakota saga. Existing in between the Western and Native worlds, Damien values the island in the same way as he values the Church. As he already struck a deal with the devil of Christianity (represented by a large black dog) to trade his life for Lulu's when the time comes, Damien optimisms the island's control will permit "her soul [to] slip past the cur's slimy teeth and sneak by the hell gates and pearly gates into that sweeter pasture, the heaven of the Ojibwe" (Erdrich, 2001, p. 346). This death scene indispensably contrasts with the melodramatic end of Sister Leopolda. Damien discovers his path into the "sweeter pasture" of the Ojibwe paradise via the acts of Mary Kashpaw. After finding out Damien's body on the island beach, Mary gives assurances that the gender Damien will not be revealed and that he gets a proper funeral by submerging his dead body in the lake. Hence, in this way, Damien turns out to be a real part of the land he loves very much. Her death's effects are then less dreadful or weird than the real occurrence: Leopolda gets a heart attack when Jack Mauser, who at that time is masked in a figure of the Virgin Mary, hands over her a bunch of sweet honeysuckles. Nevertheless, Leopolda's dead body is not given a proper burial with rites on holy ground. Her dead body gets vaporized via lightning in *Tales of Burning Love*. So, she is seemed to be destined to have an eternal life unclear by either Native or Western dogmas. As a result, Leopolda's selections and activities estrange her from both her Native beliefs as well as the Church, whereas Damien holds his hybrid status to be one with both the Church and Native community. Within the Church and Native community, the results of Leopolda, as well as Damien's deaths, are then earned and deserved via their divergent behaviors.

Conclusion

The last report leads towards conventional as well as unconventional endnotes, where thanks and acknowledgments are given to places as well as people by Louise Erdrich, instrumental in helping in the formation of her *Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. At this point, she also remarks that "the reservation depicted in this and all of

my novels is an imagined place consisting of landscapes and features similar to many Ojibwe reservations” (Erdrich, 2001, p. 357). Yet, the very word “imagined” must not be perceived as identical with false. Rather, the “imagined” is, as Ines Hernandez-Avila asserts, “... the power of the creative (writing) process itself, the inscription of our lives and our communities’ lives, the relocating of our languages in the homes of our words, and our homes in the words of our languages” (p. 493). Persistent with this evaluation, Erdrich finishes *Last Report* by mixing fiction, reality, and language into a place (a home) that does not differentiate each space like an individual position. The conflict of Damien and Leopolda is then not anti-climactic; it grounds *Last Report* in the idea that language partakes in crafting ‘belonging’ for the characters of Erdrich. Belonging is defined or constructed by the words responsible for its creation. In reality, Damien is a woman by gender who acts as if to be a priest, but the ‘belonging’ she comes to know is explained by what is supposed, dreamed, written, and spoken by Damien, Jude, Nanapush, and Leopolda.

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