The clash of religions, beliefs and spirituality in Native American culture

(based on analysis of Louise Erdrich’s novels)

Bachelor’s Thesis

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I hereby proclaim to have worked on this Bachelor’s Thesis independently
and with use of sources enlisted in References.

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the inner clash of religions and beliefs in Native American community and on an impact of rewriting life patterns of native as well as white people in connection to religion. It is based on analysis of Louise Erdrich’s novels *Tracks* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* and uncovers the tension between native spirituality and Christianity and its influence on the people living on the reservation. Further, the thesis explains the basis of Native American spirituality.

Key words

Louise Erdrich, The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, Tracks, Native American spirituality, Christianity, clash of religions, beliefs
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1. Introduction

Louise Erdrich, a fascinating Native American writer, presents the heritage of Native American culture in her work. She acquaints her readers with some of the typical features of native people’s lives and no doubts she is one of the top authors of not only native literature. In her novels Erdrich introduces world of traditions and spirituality that is completely different ours. The background of the most of her novels is a reservation of Ojibwe\(^1\) tribe in North Dakota where the author, born in 1954, also grew up. She is enrolled in the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians and the mixed-blood\(^2\) heritage is also reflected in her novels.

In years 1972 - 1976 Erdrich was studying at Dartmouth College to get a bachelor’s degree. There she also met her husband Michael Dorris, anthropologist, writer and later director of the College. In 1979 she graduated at Johns Hopkins University and received her master’s degree in creative writing.

Erdrich’s family life has not been easy. She married Dorris in 1981 and they had six children - three own and three adopted ones. One of the adopted children died at the age of 23 after being hit by a car and another one accused Erdrich and Dorris of sexual abuse. That was in 1995 and after then the couple started the divorce proceedings. Later on, in 1997 Dorris committed a suicide.

Author’s literary career started with short stories that slowly expanded in novels. After the marriage Erdrich and her husband worked together. They were creating the fiction in collaboration and the books were sometimes published under both names. Erdrich has been awarded many times not only for her novels, but also for her stories, native poetry or children’s literature. She has written thirteen novels so far among which *Tracks* and *The Last

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\(^1\) Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Chippewa or Anishinaabe terms can be used.
\(^2\) A person of mixed European and Native American ancestry.
Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, chosen for this thesis, belong to the “Argus” series.

In both novels Erdrich uncovers the tension between native spirituality and Christianity and its influence on the people living on the reservation. Because primarily it was exactly the Christianity that influenced the course of life of Native Americans after being forced to move into the reservations. All characters mentioned in the novels are important for the life there, however Nanapush, Pauline Puyat (Sister Leopolda), Fleur Pillager and Father Damien are the key ones. Their lives stand on the border between Ojibwe tradition and spirituality and Christian belief which seem to compete with each other. Nevertheless, the beliefs meet in one place and in people’s minds and hearts. They mix together to give the people a sense of life. Erdrich’s novels show the struggle of dealing with these two worlds and affecting each other.

No doubts readers of the thesis are familiar with the knowledge and principles of Christian religion and belief, but to know Native American spirituality - here the belief of Ojibwe tribe - is more complex and could be studied in greater detail. The bachelor thesis will try to explain the basis of it. Further it will focus on the difficulty of coping with completely different attitudes to life, with the inner clash of religions and beliefs in Native American community, and on an impact of rewriting life patterns of native as well as white people in connection to religion.

Argus - fictitious small town near the reservation.
2. Spirituality of Native Americans

The spirituality of native people has a long and rich history. Every tribe has its own beliefs, deity often non-gender specified, religious rituals and habits. The study of it was for a long time observed by non-native scholars and therefore expressed and described through their eyes with no deeper understanding of its complexity.

The complexity means there is no specific hierarchy in judging deity or having saints, one could also say there are no specific commandments and no needs for writing them, because “the emotional, symbolic, and spiritual content communicated through spoken, sung, and enacted words often registers a communal understanding that is not reducible to a representational text” (qtd. in Irwin 104).

The belief of native people is not static; it develops together with the tribe influenced by places where they live and people in community. To absorb the base of native spiritual traditions it is essential to understand that there is a universe and all things are unique, irreplaceable and interconnected parts of it. This implies that not only a man is the most important living individual on Earth which differs from the Christian view of life and may make the native belief a little incomprehensible for the majority of population raised on a Christian basis. That also offers an explanation for the problems of objectivity of former studies done by non-native scholars. Rollings explains that in Native American religions humans are recognized “as but one of many spiritual creatures inhabiting the universe” (122). The relationships among places, plants, animals and human beings are interdependent and cannot be perceived separately (Irwin 104).

While this could be a general definition for Native American religions, it is important to see above mentioned flexibility. As the belief is influenced by places and people, logically there must be different views, rites and knowledge for each tribe or community. The flexibility also brings a need of oral preservation rather than written. Writers cannot include
the present moment which is important just now with all the variations of nature powers and people’s feelings. Irwin further speaks about the context that is “more crucial than text for native religions. A text isolated from its performative, social, and religious context is apt to be seen as radical diminishment (and distortion) of the religious events” (104).

Variability is another very important part of native spirituality. In order to deal with the influence of Christianity indigenous people combined the religions, taking some from each. Syncretism⁴ is typical for all native communities. Forced by bad conditions, such as diseases, alcohol, moving to reservations, thus intrapersonal psychological force, natives started to accept the Christianity. Rollings points out: “When traditional ways became irrelevant to new realities, some Indians created new faiths that incorporated familiar symbols and ritual with new ideologies. Sometimes these were combined in a syncretic faith; in other cases natives followed two religions simultaneously.” (127). In Erdrich’s novels we can see this in the character of Margaret Kashpaw - mother of Eli and Nector and later wife of Nanapush. She is the one who regularly visits the church and masses, got baptized and lives in a house in the town. Yet she has the deep respect of her roots. When her son Eli starts to live with Fleur, a wild woman, she disagrees and wants him back. He refuses and Margaret sets on a way to a place where he lives together with Fleur. Even though a Christian she asks water deity for help: “Margaret pinched tobacco from a pouch in her pocket, threw it on the water and said a few distracted, imploring words . . . from then on she alternated . . . addressing different Manitous along with the Blessed Virgin and Her heart” (Tracks 51). Accepting just some parts of Christianity or an official conversion have never meant losing their own belief. As Rollings further claims that “although . . . Indians were forced to convert, there is little evidence that the conversions were genuine spiritual conversions.” (128). Most of the people maintained at least a little from their heritage. The bindings with nature and whole universe

⁴ Mixing of different religions, philosophies or ideas (OALD 1557).
cannot just disappear. They are inside to show themselves from time to time and remind us that the life patterns cannot be rewritten so easily.

Christianity spread out while colonizing and conquest of American continent made huge changes in Native American culture, way of live or spirituality. Generally said, it had a devastating influence on the race. There were efforts to resist, some of them even successful, nevertheless not lasting long. The wave of white man and his culture was enormous and no tribe could fight against it for a long time. The impact of it has not been finished yet, the communities try to recover from it and find themselves in context of today’s world and culture. That is done not only through higher involvement in politics as native people try to increase their representation in state and local posts, but also through literature, music, science or arts. In literature native authors write “their” way, introducing their world to different audiences - native or non-native. They also try to show the humour, the depth of their belief which can help non-natives to understand what had been done and what it is like today. Erdrich’s novels definitely help to understand what happens in native minds, how the patterns of Ojibwe tribe are internalized and how they can change.

It is evident that the clash between the two spiritual worlds has raised new questions, new approaches, new spiritual self-realizations and needs to cooperate in meeting the cultures. It is a real-life necessity to deal with all of these and the characters in Erdrich’s novels show us the possibilities. They show us how various people had to undergo the changes and they are great examples of spiritual potentials in every human being.
3. Characters and narrators

Readers can follow the characters in Erdrich’s novels from different points of view. Every novel illustrates them in various life events, times and seen through their own eyes or through the eyes of the others. Generally, their life stories are set in years from 1912 to 1997 which helps us to follow the gradual as well as sudden inner changes of theirs.

There are three most important families: Kashpaws, Pillagers and Morriseys. They intermingle and develop in each book, new life truths are found; new qualities and importance of the characters are revealed. Barton and Beidler even compare Erdrich’s creating and developing of the characters to the writings of William Faulkner. They both wrote about a fictive landscape and “a varied, multigenerational group of men and women of white, Indian and mixed-blood heritage” (2).

In the novel Tracks there are two narrators of the story - Nanapush and Pauline Puyat. They mostly speak about Fleur Pillager, an extraordinary person who still has the spirit of the forest and wilderness. Nanapush tells Fleur’s story to her daughter Lulu, because he wants her to understand her mother’s life and decisions. Barton and Beidler describe his motives as attempts “to convince her that she should not hate her mother . . . for apparently abandoning her and that she should not marry the Morrissey man she is planning to wed” (25). Reasons for Pauline's narrative are not clearly stated, but she reveals her mind flows and it seems she wants to justify her violent actions (Ibid.). However she does not want to show herself as being guilty; more or less she expresses her exceptionality, she feels being chosen by God to do special deeds.

In the novel The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse a third-person narrator appears, the story is sometimes interspersed with individual character’s narration. The plot revolves around Father Damien Modeste who comes to the reservation as a new priest and a
bearer of God’s message. The revelation of his life becomes known to the reader and the lives of the others, especially Pauline’s, are described as well.

The novels pervade and continue in each other. Each of them emphasizes different events; however we can see all these events in both novels either as the background or the crucial points in the characters’ lives. Thanks to them as well as the varying narrators we are able to see the characters, their feelings and behaviour from many points of view which help us to make compact life stories.

3.1. A trickster character

To understand some of the characters it is important to know what a trickster is. The trickster is a typical Native American myth personality which can be traced up throughout the stories of every native tribe. It can have different names but the common characteristics are present. It is a very complex character; roles seemingly impossible to mix mingle in him. Very often he joins the opposites of our dual-principle understanding of the world together.

Trickster is not a god, although he is not just an ordinary man either. He expresses all characters what a mankind can have and uses them, mocks them or changes them. He embodies different roles; “he is the slayer of monsters, the thief of daylight, fire, water, and the like for the benefit of man” (Ricketts 327). He follows the basic human needs to eat or to reproduce: “He is also a prankster who is grossly erotic, insatiably hungry, inordinately vain, deceitful, and cunning toward friends as well as foes.” (Ibid.). His typical feature is a sense of humour, all kinds of humour - joking about a wide range of things, especially the ones on the borders of conventions. “He plays tricks on the others, he ridicules sacred customs, he breaks taboos, he boasts when he should blush . . . and he can laugh at himself” (Ibid. 347). Whatever clown he can be, whatever fool he is considered to be, he is important for the life of other people, of the community or tribe because he is the one who pushes them forward. “He
is the teacher of cultural skills and customs” (Ricketts 327), thus also a creator of new skills and customs because they arise from the constant change of time and moods. Trickster represents one of the main components of variability in native belief; he tries to adapt his inner world to the outer one that transforms permanently. He helps to guide the others in developing and realizing themselves in a way they would never be able to see themselves; and he does it no matter whether they want it or not.

Trickster also symbolizes a spiritual or religious personality in a man, but he is neither a priest nor a shaman:

[He] is man being religious in “the other way“, the godless way of humanism. He is man, muddling through some of life’s problems, discovering his own powers of mind and body, and using them, sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly, but always enthusiastically. The trickster refuses the way of the fideists, and prefers to make his mistakes by himself and take the consequences for them. (Ricketts 346)

He expresses a kind of human religion independent of any deity or religion known. Trickster worships the world grasped by man. Sometimes he can benefit from gods or spirits, though mostly he relies on himself.

Complicated or simple, funny or serious, believer or heathen, man or woman, all and much more the trickster can be. He eludes all categorizing being all and nothing together. He lives here on earth, but also in the spiritual worlds. He joins various angles of life. That all makes him important for other people’s destinies, for living itself.

3.2. Spiritual guide

Nanapush is one of the traditional characters. He is the bearer of the tribal knowledge, he is the one who endures the influence of white people the most as he believes in old tribal deity, traditional medicine or lives the old ways. He understands the voices of the spirits and
the forests. Still Nanapush wants to get to know his rival. Knowing your enemy you can more
easily defeat him or on the other hand you can understand him better and so become friends.
Nevertheless Nanapush’s motives are slightly different. He does not intend to fight and he
does not intend to make God or white men’s habits his friends. He only wants to understand
all the changes lain on the Ojibwe community by white men and Christianity; therefore he is a
very careful spectator of all of them:

My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know. I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw
the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years’ growth.
I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers
that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I
saved the last Pillager. (Tracks 2)

Nanapush keeps the oral tradition alive and ready to be handed over. In Tracks he tries to
explain everything what he saw and experienced to Lulu – Fleur’s daughter. He wants her to
understand her mother’s life and decisions as well as prevent her from a marriage with one
from the Morriseys clan: “So take a lesson from what an old man knows and think about this
Morrisey twice!” (180). In every second chapter of Tracks he speaks to Lulu and tells her the
stories. And it is not just passing the facts of someone’s life on, “Erdrich wishes to record and
preserves not just the memories . . . but a cultural tradition, one that is oral, performed,
formulaic, and perpetuated by the storyteller” (Sergi 279). Nanapush’s character symbolises
the old ways, the wisdom of the tribe and the old Indian storytelling that preserves the living
as well as the mythical history. This is also what he emphasizes as one of the biggest
differences and reasons for difficult communication between native and white man’s culture
declaring that “the separation of experience into real and imagined events, and of time into
past, present, and future, is part of an alien and oppressive world view” (Rainwater 418). The
Native American storytelling does not distinguish dreams and reality, because they are closely
intertwined and one explains meaning of the other, they cannot exist separately. Storytelling is
a part of every human being, it is the drum of the universe that resonates through our voices and it is the source of wisdom and life energy. Storytelling gives Nanapush the power to continue: “During the year of sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on.” (Tracks 46). He is ready to advise and help the youngsters of the tribe. He advises Eli Kashpaw how to draw Fleur’s attention, he is asked for the explanation of “the old-time way to make a woman love him and [he] went into detail so [Eli] should make no disgraceful error.“ (Ibid., 45). Nevertheless, there are not many other natives ready to listen to it. Ojibwe people in the reservation are losing their roots; drinking alcohol to forget own shame and the great monster of wood companies is seizing control over land and forests. Nanapush has “never been afraid of talking” and names the troubles clearly: “[They] came from living, from liquor and the dollar bill.” (Ibid., 4). He finds other listeners in Fleur and surprisingly in Catholic Church priest Damien Modeste.

Nanapush is a wise man, but still a trickster. He challenges and advises in once all other characters. He is a father for Fleur, a lover for Margaret Kashpaw, a man friend and advisor for Eli Kashpaw, a devil for Pauline and companion and trickster for Father Damien whose Christian belief is being constantly tempted by Nanapush.

In Nanapush’s behaviour we can follow the strength of native belief. When he saved Fleur from death and buried her family, he performed the traditional Ojibwe burial, he spoke to the dead and “asked those Pillagers . . . to leave now and never come back. [He] offered tobacco, smoked a pipe of red willow for the old man.” (Tracks 5). He is very careful and attentive to different signs in nature or people. When Fleur was giving a birth, he recognized “the Manitous all through the woods . . . Turtle’s quavering scratch, the Eagle’s high shriek, Loon’s crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear’s low rasp.” (Ibid., 59). He practices different rituals to help him or the others, uses old knowledge to come to spiritual world: “I
placed my otter bag upon my chest, my rattle near. I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli’s snowshoes clearly.” (Tracks 101). He led Eli to hunt the moose this way and used his powers to gather energy for him: “Without opening my eyes on the world around me, I took the drum from beneath my bed and beat out footsteps for Eli to hear and follow.” (Ibid., 104).

Nanapush represents not only the strength of traditional belief, but also the openness to inevitable changes. Typical trickster character is the one who pushes the tribe forward according to the situations and life around. Therefore also Nanapush understands that the changes are not good but inevitable. He was brought up in a Jesuit school and he has the advantage of knowing the “enemy”, which he fully uses. He and Fleur are almost starved to death and reconciled to die when Father Damien comes to his house for the first time. Suddenly the conversation gives him the energy to live and he understands he should continue in his existence even though it is not pleasant - starvation and illnesses are all over, old times have disappeared. “The priest had yanked him from the calm world of the dead to thrust him into the strife of the living . . .” (The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse\(^5\) 83). He comes to the solution he should take an advantage of the priest.

Such as all trickster characters he feels he must benefit from the priest for himself - the priest made him come back and therefore becomes the object of Nanapush’s tongue. He is happy to make fun of the priest, ready to tell him stories about his wives, about making love or some stories about Nanabozho\(^6\) and his sexual life. Nanapush tells the priest a story how Nanabozho Converts the Wolves. It speaks about the spirit who needed furs to sell. He cheated wolves by telling them he converted to Christianity and he promised them that if they “take on this religion [too], no one can kill them.” (Last Report 84) He poisoned a fat and told

\(^5\) All references to this novel will be cited parenthetically as Last Report in the text.
\(^6\) Nanabozho is an Ojibwe spirit and also a trickster character in storytelling.
them to eat it if they want to live forever. “Nanabozho placed the fat in their mouths . . . and blessed all the wolves.” (Last Report 84-85). They died and he sold their skins. “Truly, he said, I have converted them - to money.” (Ibid., 85). The ridicule to Christian religion is obvious; the parallel to Eucharist rite, but ending with death and the word conversion used in ambiguous and ironical meaning are very intentional there.

The story shows us the traditional native world with spirits and nature, but it is also fitted to the real and actual state of things. The words such as conversion, money trade are similar to those things that were happening in native community in real. And there the trickster characteristics appear again in pushing traditional spirituality forward and adapting new facts into myths, which is also an example of syncretism in native belief. Religion of native people is full of syncretic signs, which makes it difficult to grasp. There is no specific system in it, just the ability and readiness to perceive nature, people and all creatures. The belief lives from what you have, what is here and what all spiritual or natural signs around tell you and this ability is in accordance with trickster’s personality. Hence it can lead us to a conclusion that the trickster figure fully meets the role of the religious authority in native culture. As Ricketts claims:

The trickster . . . established the world as-it-is, this world . . . becomes the sphere of sacred reality. Not the transcendent realm, but this world; not the confined space of the dance ground or temple, but the whole earth, is holy . . . [Trickster] ridicules the shaman and the priest, and he mocks the gods they serve, yet he is not punished for his impiety. For what can the gods do to the man who does not fear them and who knows that they exist, not to be served, but to be conquered? (348, 350)

Also Nanapush is one of the highest spiritual authorities in the novels. He is a traditional wise man spiced with humour which challenges all truths, but also a truthful spectator and man who tries to understand the white people’s habits and belief.
Nanapush’s complexity raises unpleasant feelings in other Catholic Church representatives - the nuns:

The older man is a stubborn, crafty, talkative sort, much resistant to conversion. The vile things he says, the reprobate! He had a big old toot with my communion wine two years ago. Sneaked it from my cellar cask. He’s too tricky to die, him. And the other, that Fleur. Truly the daughter of Satan, so they say. The two of them, . . . are rumoured to have special powers. *(Last Report 73)*

The nuns attribute supernatural powers to him, which can make us laugh and this is again what a trickster does - makes laugh. The nuns should believe only in sacred powers of saints and God, but he makes them admit there are other powers and believe in some powers of Satan.

Not by coincidence death turns around Nanapush’s life. He sometimes recalls his wives and children who died mostly of illnesses brought by white men. It is usually the trickster who openly speaks about death and justifies its presence; nevertheless it is often him who loses his relatives. He grieves over them, but after some time he is ready for new life experience and having fun *(Ricketts 349)*. Nanapush also mocks the death while his own dying. His own death is an object of laughter and absurdity. He dies of painful and irresistible gas in his guts caused by bad cooking of his wife Margaret. She wants to punish him for very poor moose hunt and so he dies comically on animal skins at his door exploding all night until his body is not able to deal with it. Nevertheless, he comes back from the spiritual world twice during his funeral. The second time he comes to please his wife, to make love to her and to “make things smooth between [them]“ *(Last Report 294)*. We can just wonder this death. Nanapush seems to be a wise and big man and he dies in such a ridiculous way? But he follows his ancestors and he fully meets the trickster character in this.

Nanapush is the one who resists the Christianity the most, he criticises it, although he does not judge it or those who try to adopt the white man’s living. He seems to be the one
whose life was influenced the least, but provided that we interpret Christian belief as a universal love full of respect and understanding, Nanapush is the one who stands both opposite as well as in the Christian belief. Even though he decides that “the old gods were better [than Christian God]” he is still a trickster, who relies on himself and considers these old gods, these “Anishinabe characters . . . not exactly perfect [too]” (Tracks 110).

As a trickster Nanapush teases God, mocks those who believe in him or tempts them to find out the truth and follow it. Not intentionally, he manages to convert Father Damien to syncretic native belief. He observes all the changes brought by Christianity and white men, he sees they are not positive for his community, but he understands he cannot do anything, just to stay open to all what is around.

3.3. Mad nun?

Pauline Puyat represents a former Ojibwa (mixed-blood) woman lost in the world of Christianity as she sees and understands it. She is the last of the Puyat family, according to the others on the reservation, a problematic family. Her mother belonged to the tribe, but her father left his light skin and Polish origin to her. She is depicted as the one who is rootless or not accepted by her community because of her origin - she is rather regretted by the others. Pauline’s mother was not really a mother, she killed her own mother and Pauline was born into hatred and unfulfilled desires, hunger for life and love that she was never able to have. All this throws her into desperate, cruel and mad behaviour as she wants to find her place in the world. Pauline is driven by an insatiable desire to be special, to be important and appreciated by the others, which leads to the opposite extreme - rejecting her Ojibwa ancestors and tradition. Nevertheless, this complete rejection and disdain is in the very heart of it a desire to be part of the traditions, to be a part of the Ojibwa spiritual world. She is not
accepted by the community in the way she would like to be, therefore she despise it. She is proud of her white ancestors, trying to forget all about her Ojibwa past.

In Tracks Pauline rivals Fleur, a feared woman with supernatural powers fighting for and living the old ways of life. She envies her her beauty and strength, at the same time she is scared of her. However, Pauline did not help Fleur when she needed it and this can be seen as the beginning of her madness. Pauline knows now she is not part of anything, neither white community nor the native one admits her. Fleur was raped by three men - employers of the butcher shop where Pauline and Fleur worked. Pauline watched it, did not do anything. Emptiness filled her. “That is when I should have gone to Fleur, saved her . . . I closed my eyes and put my hands on my ears, so there is nothing more to describe but what I couldn’t block out: those yells from Russell, Fleur`s hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language and our names repeated over and over among the words.” (Tracks 26). Afterwards she feels guilty and to relieve her burden she kills the men locking them in a freezer during a tornado. Anyway Pauline acts only to help her own concerns; she did not kill them because they did something bad, but because she did by not helping Fleur.

Pauline desperately wants to be useful, to be strong as Fleur, but as she does not understand what love and humility really is, she behaves selfishly with attempts to harm the others. It is not by a coincidence she followed the Catholic Church to become a nun. This was her idea of making herself important for the others on the reservation and finally she could look down on them; because now they need her.

After coming back from Argus where she worked with Fleur, Pauline joins a Catholic mixed-blood woman in her work of accompanying the dead and handling them. She finds a perverted joy in it. She is obsessed by death and thinks the death is her redemption from her nightmares of Fleur`s rape and her guilt. As Hessler points out “Pauline [becomes] a harbinger of death... inviting death into others` houses, handling the cold skin of the
deceased, and then passing death onto the living by touching them after dressing the dead.” (41). Also Nanapush comments on this: “She was the crow of the reservation, she lived off our scraps, and she knew us best because the scraps told our story.” (Tracks 54). He sees her as a parasite living on the others´ lives. Pauline was not popular, but she was there and always eager to offer her services as a Death co-worker. She was possessed with people´s last breath, the last-moment revelations; she took all these sacred moments for herself and felt extraordinary.

Pauline seemingly converted to the Christianity, later even becoming a nun Sister Leopolda, but despite that she still feels the spirit of her nativeness. She cannot deny her roots and she is also an example of a syncretic belief, even though a kind of confused and mad belief. Her first experience with handling the dead brought her peace from the nightmares and she felt herself “devious and holy” (Tracks 69). But on her way to the dead, native spirits appear: “And then Kokoko, the owl, floated off a branch like smoke and called.” (Ibid., 67). She also believes in Fleur´s powers supported by the lake deity Misshepeshu whom she fears, but wants to defeat. Because then it would mean the end of old times and her victory. If she cannot have others´ appreciation, she wants their end. Through her confused native feelings and visions, belief in Jesus and Satan Pauline develops her own belief in her unwavering martyrdom. She enters the convent. That gives her the feeling of her exceptionality, because it was not common to accept natives, although mixed-bloods, in the convent. And she is lucky as “she reminds the Superior of “The Little Flower”, otherwise known as “Lily of the Mohawks,” the Mohawk saint . . . who is still honoured by the Catholic Church as an exemplary female Native American Christian.” (Hessler 42). It seems she wants to be better than Fleur again, becoming a nun she feels personal responsibility for gathering souls to God: “What shall I do now? . . . I´ve brought You so many souls! . . . And he said to me, gently: Fetch more!” (Tracks 140). The most noticeable difference here is her perverted pleasure in
gathering dead souls while Fleur has always fought for all living creatures. When Pauline cannot be liked by any of native deity, she will have Christian God, she will be the same for him what Fleur is for Misshepeshu. She experiences “His visit” and claims herself to be “wholly white” (Tracks 137). She persuades herself He has chosen her to serve and be special for Him. “He had an important plan for me, for which I must prepare, that I should find out the habits and hiding places of His enemy.” (Ibid.). For Pauline enemy becomes everything that is connected to native traditions, her roots, to Fleur:

[Fleur] was the one who closed the door or swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge. It was like that with Him, too, Our Lord, who had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank. It was clear that Indians were not protected by the thing in the lake or by the other Manitous who lived in trees, the bush, or spirits of animals that were hunted so scarce they became discouraged and did not mate. There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus lockers. Not Fleur Pillager. (Tracks 139)

Pauline perceives herself a kind of a new messiah. She will be the one who will destroy the old gods, who will stand on the top and will achieve victory over the dull crowd of Indians whom are weak and do not resist the collision with white man´s culture.

Sexuality is another thing Pauline struggles with. She tries to deny it as well as all native and thus natural parts of her. Obviously she cannot and her only solution is to punish the others for their joy of accepting their love and bodies. She watches Fleur and Eli, their body gestures expressing lust and desire and is not able to deal with it. She tries another man, but it is not like what she saw at Fleur and Eli. Pauline wants more and greedily visits them “to warm [her] hands at the fire between them“ (Tracks 75). After she tries to approach Eli, but is refused and takes revenge on him. Even though regarding herself as a Christian and purely
white person she asks for help old medicine man. She uses old and traditional medicine to manipulate Eli and makes a young girl seduce him.

Pauline’s belief is neither Christian nor native; she is driven only by her desperate desires, mad ego that wants to be the best in the most inconceivable way. Pauline just sails through her life with no deeper direction or sense. She uses and perverts Christian belief to suit her demands and defends herself that she is the true believer and maybe the only right one. There are some moments where we can see her disclosure, her cold calculation. Either mad or treacherous she confesses to Father Damien to the murder of Napoleon Morrissey whom she said she believed to be “the devil in the shape of the man” (Last Report 273). Damien advises her to confess in the harmony with law, but she rejects it with a ridiculous reason: “If I am locked up for my crime, I will not be able to pursue my work among people. I cannot serve God as well in jail.” (Ibid.). Later on she changes her devotion into blackmailing by threatening Father Damien she will reveal his - her true identity: “I know what you are. And if you banish me or write to the bishop, Sister Damien, I will write to him too.” (Ibid.). This is definitely not the behaviour one would expect from a nun or a true Christian. She uses the belief as a protection from her own mistakes; nevertheless she usually turns it in her own truth. Such as when she was pregnant with Napoleon, the man she later murdered. She had sex with him wilfully; she needed to fulfil her lust. After getting to know she is going to have a baby, she wanted to destroy the baby in her belly by pushing an axe against it or falling upon the wooden pole. Is this something that the faithful would do? As Hessler points out: “Pauline deviates from traditional Catholic beliefs which states that abortion constitutes a mortal sin and that a mother, like the Virgin Mary, should lovingly care for her children. Instead, Pauline rejects her child as a dark thing.” (42).

Pauline deflects the Catholicism to its dark side. She blames God that he does not help her; that he does not support her enough. “Christ was weak . . . I knew God had no foothold or
sway in this land, or no mercy for the just, or that perhaps, for all my sufferings and faith, I was still insignificant . . . I knew there never was a martyr like me.” (Tracks 192). After then she claims herself a kind of a new saviour, because “Christ had turned his face from me for other reasons than my insignificance. Christ had hidden out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature’s unwinding length and luxury. New devils require new gods.” (Ibid., 195). Her only goal becomes to destroy her enemy - the lake monster that means Fleur and all Indian.

Pauline tries to find her place in the world, but without her twisted Christianity she is just ordinary, which does not suit her. She wants to be important and special, exactly like Fleur. She realises her potential in a perverted way of Catholicism and practises medieval punishment for her sins, “such as wearing chafing underwear made of potato sack, walking with her shoes on the wrong feet, [etc.]” (Hessler 42). Torturing herself seems to be an obsession that compensates the lack of self-esteem.

Pauline wants to form a new saint and she is quite successful among the other nuns (even though they do not agree with such a cruel penance) or other people. Still, in comparison with Father Damien’s life she performs “a travesty of a saint” (Chapman 152). She needs to execute pretentious miracles to prove her rarity and sainthood while Damien’s life is spent in “devoted, loving service to the Ojibwe” (Ibid.). Leopolda’s (Pauline’s) possible canonization is the key fact that the novel The Last Report of the Miracles at Little No Horse is build around. But eventually it comes out that it was Father Damien who really should be the candidate for canonization as Leopolda abuses Christianity to fulfil her selfish needs.

We do not wonder that in her effort to prove saint Pauline does not succeed at the ones she would like to beat - Fleur as well as Nanapush. The more we reject something, the more we are attracted to it. Pauline denied her origin, repudiated Fleur and her manners, but still was eager to know about her and her family. They aroused weird feelings in her. She was
ridiculous coming there all the time with the God´s message and Nanapush made use of every opportunity he had to tease her and her false devotion to “true” belief. And most of the times he was successful, which made her furious and demonstrated her hatred. While Erdrich describes Pauline as a selfish and rude person, Fleur’s family shows humanity and kindness. They have never treated Pauline badly although she had done a lot of evil things.

From all characters chosen for this thesis Pauline is the one who turns to Christianity for help. She regards it highly such as all things brought by white men. She characterizes a foolish and harsh attempt of creating a new saint. But her conversion is a lot paradoxical, because finally she does not represent the Catholic faith at all. She lacks all qualities propagated by Christianity - gentleness, compassion, thoughtfulness or helpfulness. Her story gives the impression of standing on the opposite side of all these. Basically her life demonstrates a way how any religions can be misused easily and it shows how people can commit violent acts intentionally “in the name of any gods”. Besides she is an example of people’s need for love and their family or community’s appreciation that helps to form their self-respect. And from that self-respect it is close to balanced inner world and spirituality. Finally she reflects difficult position of all mixed-bloods as they have always stood on the borders of being rootless, of decisions about which culture to choose and be proud of.

3.4. Priest or priestess?

Father Damien Modeste is a very complex character. In novel Tracks we can see him as a sensitive person, who does not disturb any of the other people, who visits natives in peace and tries to understand them. We do not think about him much. However, in The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse he is the key person. This novel is mainly a story about his life and decisions. All events that happened in Tracks are mentioned again, but from different points of view, generally from Damien’s ones. He is a complicated and for readers surprising
person, because at first it is she, who becomes he and her gender changes throughout the novel. And then also because he starts as a priest, Christian believer, but ends as a trickster and native spirituality believer.

At the beginning Father Damien is a young woman Agnes DeWitt who became a nun, Sister Cecilia. She loves playing the piano, in convent she finds God in that. Her gift to play is astounding, she experiences spiritual world in it: “At the piano keyboard . . . she existed in her essence, a manifestation of compelling sound.” (Last Report 14). She can play whatever; nevertheless she is absorbed by Chopin, playing him once she experiences an orgasm. As it influences all the nuns in convent, as they sink into their own worlds, Mother Superior lets her play just Bach. But Cecilia feels the pressure and while playing him again, she understands she must leave because “just in the depth of her playing the virgin had become the woman, so the woman in the habit became a woman to the bone.” (Ibid., 16).

After Agnes left the convent she met Berndt, a man to love. They lived together and she played her music. But there are very inexplicable and mysterious events happening in her life.

At first she went to bank, she was kidnapped by a thief and trying to rescue her, Berndt is shot and she is wounded by a bullet, too. Afterwards, she forgets about Berndt, she plays the piano until memory fragments comes back again and she suffers the sorrow, she cannot find any other comfort than music: “Chopin had stolen her from Christ to give to Berndt. Christ had stolen Berndt from her to take for himself. Now she had only her Chopin, his music, for Christ was preoccupied with introducing Berndt to all other farmers in heaven and for Agnes he seemed to have no time. She prayed. He did not answer. Chopin was more reliable.” (Last Report 37-38).

Then a big flood came, took all her possessions and almost herself, too. She was miraculously saved under unusual circumstances and her new life began:
Before she woke, she was one who believed without seeing, felt spiritual emotion without the deepest marks of conviction. Creation had spoken to her in ways she could encompass . . . yet her God had never sent a spirit, never spoken to her directly, never employed a visible shape or touched Agnes with a divine hand, unless you believe that God´s hand was Berndt´s and nudged wrist of [thief], causing the bullet to plow a shallow groove instead of to burrow deep. She had believed in her music. Now she was to lose that. But that loss would be replaced. *(Last Report 42)*

Agnes lost her music and her previous life in that flood to start a new life as a man - Father Damien Modeste. Already here we can follow a kind of syncretic belief. Agnes´s life seems to be full of Christian belief, nevertheless filled with human love and natural strikes that changes course of life. And what is more, she listens to all of them and follows them such as a native would do. A trickstery is slowly coming to her life - accepting things that are happening, using them for her own benefit - transformation from a woman into a man. She was placed in front of a situation and she accepted it fully. When she found dead body of real Father Damien whom she had known after Berndt´s death, she reacted naturally and with no doubts. She buried his body and her hair in order to completely let her old life leave. She put on his clothes and started a new life and identity as a priest on an Ojibwe reservation. “Every after that day, Agnes was to mark St. Dismas upon her calendar because it was the first day of her existence as Father Damien, the first day of the great lie that was her life - the true lie, she considered it, the most sincere lie a person could ever tell.” *(Last Report 61)*

Damien struggles with his new identity when coming to a new place on the reservation, but believes she has done the right thing. He meets his first Ojibwe and some of the first words he hears are about the white people´s religion: “Leave us full-bloods alone, let us be with our Nanabozho, our sweats and shake tents, our grand medicines and bundles. We don´t hurt nobody. Your [half-bloods], they can use your God as backup to these things. Our world is already whipped apart by the white man. Why do you black gowns care if we pray to your
God?” (Last Report 63). His main task is to convert people, to persuade them that belief in God is the only right thing and he sees the Ojibwe people does not want it, they feel whipped apart. Damien thinks about it a lot, especially after he meets Nanapush who never lets him stop thinking. Nanapush teases his belief, mocks the religious rules, but still Damien feels he is a good man and himself starts meditate about what belief and love is. He is not a common priest, he is open to all and not only thanks to his identity secret. That also pushes him into the trickster character and forward to native belief. He listens to people, watches them as well as the changes carefully. At first Damien can seem to stand on the opposite side from Nanapush, but we come to the realization that they always stand together. They become friends and Damien “finds himself learning from those he intended to instruct” (Wittmier 241).

Damien is explained lots of new things about native people by his nuns: “They’ll lose all the land, of course, being unused to the owning of land. Incredibly, it makes no sense to them. They avow, in their own peculiar way, that the earth is only on loan. . . .” (Last Report 72). He feels distracted by the way wood companies behave, but has to admit he cannot do much. Even though the nuns also do not agree with the “bad business deal” (Ibid.), they still feel the natives low-status people. They just want to do what their religion tells them without thinking about the natives as people with culture. It seems they do not treat them well as they want to make use of the illnesses spread out: “Father . . . you must go visiting with the sacrament. The poor Indians are dying out. Now is a good time to convert them! . . . They just sit patiently, singing, drumming, and prepare to get sick. You could easily baptize them while they’re tranced.” (Ibid., 71).

However, this is not the case of Father Damien. He tries to know the people on the reservation and talks to them. He is asked and teased by many questions: “I am still interested in this god who kills off his favorites, wipes them from the earth. I would like to know . . .
what makes you walk behind this Jesus?” (Last Report 99). He tries to explain the base of his own belief in God by simple saying “It is love.” (Ibid.). But in a moment he realises that in the Ojibwe language the word does not exist in the same sense - there is love out of pity, love out of kindness, love that is specific to situations or to the world of stones, which are alive and called our grandfathers. There is also the stingy and greedy love that white people call romantic love. 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. (Ibid.)

In the novel we see not only the beginnings of Damien’s life on the reservation, but also his retirement. The chapters are not chronological; they are mixed as in Tracks. Being retired, he is interviewed by a younger priest Father Jude Miller to give testimony about Sister Leopolda’s (Pauline’s) life and her miracles and possible saintliness. This gives Damien an opportunity to revise his life and show the younger colleague that not everything is as we see it or as we are taught to see it. “I prefer to call such incidents . . . profound exchanges of human love. Mary Kashpaw was one . . . whom love did call. She acted upon her passion. After all, we live on earth. We are created of the earth. The Ojibwe word for the human vagina is derived from the word for earth. A profound connection, don’t you think?” (Last Report 134). Gradually he reveals his inner switch from a Catholic priest to an open human being with great respect to native culture. He explains to Father Jude that the world is not just bipolar and that “life is crazy [and priest’s] job is to understand it” not to make it less crazy (Ibid., 135).

Damien realises that God and Manitous can live together without disturbing each other. Their coexistence depends only on mutual respect, openness and willingness to listen to and learn from each other. He fully meets native syncretic belief when following these two simultaneously. After some time spent with Ojibwe people and especially Nanapush and his wisdom he starts praying in English as well as Ojibwe language, addressing not only God, but
also spirits of nature: “Agnes’s struggle with the Ojibwe language, the influence of it, had an effect on her prayers. For she preferred the Ojibwe word for praying, anama´ay, with its sense of a great motion upward. She began to address the trinity as four and to include the spirit of each direction - those who sat at the four corners of the earth.” (Last Report 182).

It is also remarkable that when Erdrich writes about Damien’s conversion and forming his own belief, she speaks about Agnes, she uses feminine case to describe the feelings. It may be the native openness and respect to all within the universe compared to male-gender orientated Catholic Church.

Soon Damien also starts experiencing dreams that is traditional for native spirituality, “the manito lend their aid through dreams” (qtd. in Hessler 41). Thanks to it he saves a girl Mary Kashpaw who is later his guardian. “The answer would come slow and only by degrees over days, until it was entirely explained in a dream: . . . Fetch my daughter, Quill said to Agnes, for the man hurts her. Agnes woke knowing that Napoleon had done something terrible to [Mary Kashpaw] . . .” (Last Report 117).

On the other hand he experiences visits from the dark side of Christian religion - visits of a black dog, Satan’s servant. Damien’s life is full of tests of humanity. He is not presented as a holy traditional priest with no doubts about God and belief. He is constantly tempted, placed in front of difficult decisions and he learns that Christian belief does not offer all answers, that it is not enough for good and moral life; that being a human is much more than following religious advice. He gambles his own life with the black dog in exchange for saving Lulu’s life and the dog - Satan sends him a temptation in the shape of another priest Father Gregory Wekkle. They love each other and it is a very strange situation. A priest who is not a priest, he is a woman; another priest who decides to love a man when he finds out it is a woman. The love is very intense and according to the Church principles they have committed a lot of sins. Nevertheless a question is asked there: “If we are cut off from God by sinning . . . why do I
feel so close to God when I touch you . . . ?” (Last Report 205). Even though Erdrich does not criticize the Church, rather it seems she tries to find mutual understanding; the above mentioned question is an important thing to consider. Are the Catholic bans about physical love really necessary? Isn’t love something that every Christian should feel and practice in everyday life? Love that respects all creatures, that is humble and genuine, love that just is. Damien’s example shows it in a broad way. He tries his best to be honest to his Church, but there are moments he feels being human is not always in accordance with the religious rules, that the heart says something else: “We’ve sinned against the Holy Church . . . I feel deliberate resistance to the known truth because, Agnes, I know the truth. It is in me and tells me to love.” (Ibid., 204).

It is also the native wisdom, not the Christian belief that helps Father Damien to fight the dog when it visits him for the second time to take his life. The dog blames Damien that “[his] forgiveness has opened many doors to [it].” (Last Report 309). He realizes that he had forgiven everyone who asked for it and he feels it right, but there was one who never needed to ask for it, over whom the dog had no power; who never lived in the limits of heaven and hell - Nanapush. The thought of him gives Damien the strength to fight the dog and death it brought:

The old man was my teacher, my confidant, my priest’s priest, my confessor, my friend. Plus, he was funny and you don’t get funny much in this life . . . there is no one I want to visit except in the Ojibwe heaven, and so at this late age I’m going to convert, stupid dog, and become at long last the pagan that I always was at heart before I was Cecilia, when I was just Agnes, until I was seduced and diverted by the music of Chopin. (Ibid., 310)

Here Damien openly confesses what he felt long before. That even though he should be the one who converts natives to Christianity, it was him who was converted to native spirituality:
Father Damien had been converted by the good Nanapush. He now practiced a mixture of faiths, kept the pipe, translated hymns or brought in the drum, and had placed in the nave of his church a statue of the Virgin . . . He was welcomed where no other white man was allowed. It was apparent, to the people, that the priest was in the service of the spirit of goodness, wherever that might evidence itself. *(Last Report 276)*

It is obvious that Father Damien becomes worshipper of the best in every human being. His behaviour proves true kindness and meekness to all things. He stands for understanding “his” people on the reservation. He is the one who struggles with the inner clash of beliefs in the others as well as in himself.

### 3.5. Spirit(ed) woman

The ancestral times and traditions, connections to the past and to the nature, self-esteem and pride of own origin and roots, all these are mirrored in Fleur Pillager. She comes from the feared family of Pillagers who lived the old ways and “who knew the secret ways to cure or kill” *(Tracks 2)*. At the age of seventeen Nanapush saved her from feverish sickness and took her to his home because all members of her family died of this sickness.

Fleur has never agreed with white men coming. She was deeply the daughter of native spirits and saw that everything brought and given to Indians by white men was bad. Nature and forests were slowly disappearing as lumber companies were expanding their power, natives were dying of illnesses brought with white men or were becoming winos and losing their roots, their culture and identities. She hated white men’s religion and God: “[Fleur] hated priests. The priests had brought 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. All these things, and more.” *(Last Report 81)*. Therefore she
never visited church or even was interested in it. She considered God her enemy and despised it.

Fleur’s connection to the old spirits is represented by a relationship to Misshepeshu, Matchimanito lake monster. He is the protector of Pillager family and land and other people on reservation fear him. And that is why they also fear Fleur. They believe she is in touch with him and can use his powers to harm them such as when some men that tried to approach her died. The other Indians lost their old ways and avoid meeting her. Only some people among which Nanapush, whom she considers her father, and later on Eli Kashpaw, her lover, are allowed to get closer to her. Undoubtedly, she is endowed with some supernatural powers; some of them come from a spirit world, but some of them are just examples of strength of her moral and sense of fairness. Her aim is to preserve her world, the land and the traditions for her children and she fights for it. In *Tracks* we follow her life story from being saved by Nanapush to leaving the reservation and land around Matchimanito.

Fleur is an enormously strong character. She is supported by forest spirits in various ways. When she is giving birth to her daughter Lulu, a bear spirit appears to help her to deliver the child. She also uses old medicine to cure or to punish. After Nanapush and Eli’s mother Margaret were attacked by Lazzares and Morriseys, she took her revenge on them and bewitched them using bad medicine.

Once, Fleur’s soul travels to Ojibwe afterlife to save her second child. She meets the men that Pauline killed after they raped Fleur and gambles her children lives in the game of cards with the men. She loses the first game and so the newborn’s life, but wins back Lulu’s life. Nevertheless, the loss followed by the necessity to pay for their land weakened her. She feels tired and her dreams do not lead her correctly, her power disappears. Nanapush tries to help and guide her: “Power dies, power goes under and gutters out . . . as soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns.” (*Tracks* 177). But she was not
able to accept this. “In her mind she was huge, she was endless. There was no room for the failures of anyone else. At the same time, she was the funnel of our history. As the lone survivor of the Pillagers, she staggered now beneath the burden of a life she was failing to deserve.” (Tracks 178).

After Nanapush’s healing ritual Fleur recovers from her misery. But only to find out the lumber companies are taking the land around the lake. She found out she had been cheated by Margaret Kashpaw, Eli’s mother, who used the money they earned for Fleur’s allotment for her own land. Margaret had the idea of them all living at Kashpaw land. Fleur cannot bear this and throws herself into the waters of Matchimanito. Although it may seem as a harsh act of entering the only safe world inhabited by her protector’s spirit, she gains the powers again. She is rescued by Eli and since then she is never the same for him and just gathers her energy for the last struck. In her despair and anger we still see a sense of fairness. Fleur remembers that “[Margaret] saved [her] life twice”, with this deception “she’s taken it twice back, so there are no more debts” (Tracks 214) and with respect to Nanapush she decides not to harm her: “You, whom I consider my father, I still owe. I will not harm your wife. But I never will go to Kashpaw land.” (Ibid.).

Fleur leaves the reservation, but before she demonstrates her powers in her last deed to show her superiority over the companies. She uses the power of wind and saws all trees to their base so that when the men from the lumber company come, they experience her power themselves. It is like a spectacular theatre of human abilities and strength, the trees falling down, the men who did not take her seriously scared and shocked with fear. Fleur destroys the forest surrounding her cabin to make it useless for the lumber company and to manifest that they cannot destroy her.

Realizing she has no place to stay Fleur sends Lulu to government school and Nanapush tries to explain her reasons to Lulu: “There would be no place for you, no safety on this
reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys who shaved heads or the Turcot Company, leveller of a whole forest. There was also no predicting what would happen to Fleur herself.” (Tracks 219).

When leaving, Fleur shows respect to her origin. Even though she is forced to abandon the land she maintains her spirituality unchanged, even though she is forced to meet and live in the white world, in her heart she remains the same. She takes her parents’ grave markers with her to come back one day and arrange them the old way again. And that is what we can find out in The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse. Fleur has never stopped thinking about her return to Matchimanito, she decided to wreak vengeance on the owner of the lumber company and needs parents and other spirits’ support: “It had come to her as the shape of something, not all at once, but by suggestion. She would find the ghost man, the thief, and be nothing around him. She would watch him, learn everything about him, and from the knowledge ascertain just how she could destroy him and restore her land.” (187). The man’s name was John James Mauser, he was a very prominent person and Fleur married him.

One can just wonder Fleur’s deep belonging to her roots. She gave up her daughter; she married a man she maybe never loved just to settle accounts with the influence of a white man. She seemed to change her manners when she married him. She dressed like a white woman living in the city; she wore make-up and was seen in the society of highly regarded people. But all of this was just temporary, a revenge on the man that destroyed her world. John James Mauser was enchanted by her: “He would kill for her. . . . the poor man suffers a wrenching passion.” (Last Report 260). One day, Fleur returned to the reservation with her son, Mauser’s son and it appeared he was her revenge upon the man that had stolen her land. They went back to Matchimanito and she could live the old way again, but without her daughter. “Here was Fleur again - her fate to chase one thing to lose another. She had regained her land, but lost her daughter.” (Ibid., 265). Lulu had never forgiven her mother that
she left her. Although Fleur, being already married to Mauser, tried many times to take her back from the government school Lulu refused. It was not her mother anymore, she hurt her and it could not be taken back.

Fleur won her fight, but she had to lose something. In her absence, new fresh trees have grown on the land around Matchimanito as the symbols of hope. She restored her cabin there and she got her land back. Nevertheless, in this fight she lost her daughter who was as proud as her mother and could not forget harms done to her.

Fleur’s story is like a book full of fights for life and truth. She is the only character that fully rejects Christianity and keeps her native spirituality active. She wants to preserve the traditions, but she must accept that it cannot be done without some losses. Just as native belief has always been open, Fleur has to learn that personal losses happen. Readers cannot judge her behaviour as being bad mother. Sometimes there emerges an idea if all what she had done was not useless. She got her land back, but lost her child. But what Erdrich tries to say is that the ties to the past, to our roots are important and especially for the native community. They cannot forget who they were to be able to learn who they are now.
4. Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate how influential religions can be in every man’s life and especially how white men’s society and Christianity have been influential in Native American community.

When two different cultures meet, they can influence each other a lot. Nevertheless there is usually one that is more dominant and it is the culture of the majority. What happens after this meeting can be called as a clash of these two cultures - rewriting life patterns, inner fights for own identities and dealing with own roots. It is the same with meeting different religions.

Through characters in Erdrich’s novels we can see this clash. All of them had to find themselves dealing with new situations, thinking about new facts, comparing the old and the new. They had to choose their way, find their inner calm in the changing world. Some natives have never managed. They drowned their confusion in the bottle and tried to forget who they were. Some of them rejected their origin as they were already half white, but some have never forgotten, just tried to adapt their culture to the new one.

In Tracks and The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse we can follow all examples. Nanapush as well as Father Damien have always stood for the good and human no matter what religious name you give to it, no matter what god you pray to. Both did not feel comfortable in the new changes, but both observed them carefully and tried not to judge them, but understand them. While Nanapush has never converted to Christianity, Father Damien found himself feeling fine in native belief. Moreover Damien’s inner clash was amplified with his decision to live as a man, a priest, not a woman. They appear to be winners over all religious struggles. They stay humble and respectful to all that surrounds them and they retain their conscience clear. Damien also shows that if the basis of every religion is humanity then all religions can agree with each other. It is just up to a man how he or she grasps it: “My hand is a human hand. My heart is a human heart. My feet walk the earth to which our bones
return. Directed by His voice, His hand, by the prompting and guidance of His spirit, what else was I to do?” (*Last Report* 232).

As far as Pauline is concerned, she represents a person who has never figured out her own identity. She suffered under the inner clash the most. She was not accepted by her own family, therefore even her community and she tried to find herself in devotion to Christian God. But the inner anger has always been there and she never accomplished calmness. There was always an enemy she needed to destroy, her past that chased her. She could still feel signs of her native roots, her native spirituality even though she tried hard to deny it. She wanted to be special, better than native spirits, better than Christian saints. No one could endure such pressure for a long time and therefore also Pauline turned insane.

When we take into account the last character described in the thesis, Fleur, we can conclude that the resistance to the changes is not good as well as eager desire for them. Fleur is a defiant character that wants to save what he loves and comes from. However, saving her land she sacrifices her only daughter Lulu for whom it is difficult to be proud of own roots after all. That can be seen as a big paradox in Fleur’s fight for traditions. Anyway, Erdrich’s attempt to show that our roots are important for what we are now sounds positively.

It is not important whether the written stories are real facts and it is not even the aim of this work to judge it. The only thing which needs to be emphasized is humanity and goodness. Native authors often deal with their violent history and they try to revive their culture and spirituality. Erdrich’s picture of sins committed by white men and Christianity in the past still seems very gentle, understanding that it is important to take the best from everything. That Ojibwe people have proved great endurance and effort to synchronize their lives with the white civilization even though they had to undergo such losses in lives, souls and identities.
Thanks to the picture of Father Damien Christian society can also open its dogmas, taboos and rigid system of rules. It can enrich itself through cultures that it conquered in past, but now can see them as partners and co-workers in creating the world a better place.

In conclusion, we can say that every human being undergoes his or her own inner clash of faiths, but there is one thing that we should bear in minds and that can also be learnt from Erdrich’s characters - it is necessary to stay open, get over the stereotypes and endeavour to understand different cultures and their beliefs.
**List of References**


