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# SACRAMENTAL LANGUAGE

## RITUAL IN THE POETRY OF LOUISE ERDRICH

P. JANE HAFEN

As an intensely personal genre, poetry intimately reveals Louise Erdrich's voice as her well-known fiction does not.<sup>1</sup> Evident in that voice are elements of the mosaic of cultural experiences that comprise Erdrich's life: Catholicism, German ancestry, working class, university education, and Turtle Mountain Chippewa.<sup>2</sup> Erdrich's poetry is her first published work, her own writing without the collaborative effort and editing of her husband, Michael Dorris (Modoc). While some of Erdrich's poems garner their cultural rhetoric from differing points of view and values, most

exhibit the variety of experiences that result from marginalization inherent in the omnipresence of race in North American society.

Erdrich bears the heritage of survival and awareness of tribal sovereignty. Her poetry unmask a rhetoric of oral tradition, presents structural rituals of both the non-literate and the highly ornamented, dramatizes storytelling, and amalgamates literary genres from classical sonnets to short story. The retelling of familiar, historic, mythic, and popular images becomes ritualized itself, thus making ritual both subject and object. The complexity of Erdrich's poetry presents contemporary American Indian life, where tribal distinctions appear in ritualization and myth, yet paradoxically reveals individuals being defined within those very communities that are circumscribed through ritual.

The personal voice in Erdrich's poetry discloses intangible manifestations of communal and tribal culture. As she observes in an early interview with Joseph Bruchac:

I don't think any [theme] was very conscious. Poetry is a different process for me than writing fiction. Very little of what

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happens in poetry is conscious, it's a great surprise.<sup>3</sup>

She also remarks that the Chippewa elements are obvious because they are not part of the mainstream. Indeed, much literary criticism of Erdrich's fiction ferrets out traditional and material culture of the Chippewa as evidence or critique of Erdrich's "authentic" identity as an American Indian.<sup>4</sup> Such criticisms frequently focus on anthropological evidences in American Indian literatures, are bound in an absolute past, and fail to acknowledge contemporary peoples and their adaptive modes of cultural survival. Nevertheless, all factors of Erdrich's background, including mainstream/American/Western Civilization and Chippewa culture contribute to her source material.

*Jacklight*, Erdrich's first collection of poems, was published in 1984, the same year as the original edition of her first novel, *Love Medicine*. Most of the poems in *Jacklight* were written in 1977 and 1978 with a few additions for the final published version.<sup>5</sup> The title poem, "Jacklight," is set apart from the remaining forty poems, which are divided into the sections "Runaways," "Hunters," "The Butcher's Wife," and "Myths." The volume presents a holistic view of Erdrich's multifaceted universe. "The Butcher's Wife" section creates characters and images that will be expanded and transformed in Erdrich's 1986 novel, *The Beet Queen*.

Despite claiming in an interview that she would henceforth publish only fiction because her poetry had become too private,<sup>6</sup> Erdrich's second volume of poems, *Baptism of Desire*, was issued in 1989. This collection is passionate and intimate, more intensely confronting mysticism, religion, and ontological questions than *Jacklight*. Erdrich notes in *Baptism of Desire* that "most . . . poems in this book were written between the hours of two and four in the morning, a period of insomnia brought on by pregnancy."<sup>7</sup> The most frequent observation in reviews is that perhaps Erdrich is a better storyteller than a lyricist. A. Gettner,

however, notes the power of her poetic imagery, "Through the experience of motherhood, we suspect, the world's and God's threat may actually subside."<sup>8</sup>

*Baptism of Desire* is divided into five untitled parts. The first section contains poems of ritual and Roman Catholicism. Part Two is a continuation of narratives and characterizations from "The Butcher's Wife" section of *Jacklight*. The third section is a five-part poem titled "Hydra." Part Four continues seven short stories of Potchikoo, the trickster cycle begun in the "Myths" section of *Jacklight*. The volume concludes with a fifth section of twelve exceptionally personal and reflective poems. For the purposes of this paper, following the continuation of subject and narratives from *Jacklight* to *Baptism of Desire*, I will consider both volumes together and discuss selected poems in terms of ritual and myth.

Ritual is an enactment of myth or sacred belief.<sup>9</sup> Much of Erdrich's poetry is a performance of beliefs derived from her variegated heritage, primarily Catholic and Chippewa. Nevertheless, these poems also reveal a personal and communal voice. As ritual effaces differences in a society, it establishes community or oneness. Erdrich's poems manifest the paradox of individuation occurring within and being defined by communal and tribal relationships.

Erdrich's poetry that alludes to or imitates ritual fulfills Michel Benamou's four characteristics of ethnopoetics:

1. To reunify us with the human past . . . to salute the first shamans and the communal, ecological, and religious functions of poetry;
2. To reactualize the poem by performance;
3. To reterritorialize language; and
4. To retotalize the human community.<sup>10</sup>

The historical topics of many of Erdrich's poems take the reader into the mythic, fluid past of tribal stories and histories. She reactualizes these stories and histories by presenting them in poetic form. While Erdrich's

language of poetry is English, her world view is tribal, Chippewa. Her poems engage the reader in a manner that approaches Chippewa world view but also sees mainstream images from a new perspective. This enigma of individuality and commonality allows distinctions to exist within the totality of the human community.

Another enigma is the relationship between ritual and community.<sup>11</sup> Ritual implies structure and pattern. An apparent contradiction exists in the ritual erasing of hierarchy that can take place, making all participants equal and therefore creating *communitas*. The structure and ritualistic performance of Erdrich's poems reflect an oral or non-literate tradition that emphasizes that communal or tribal society. She relies on both European ritualistic conventions and mythic sources of the Chippewa.

Poems of *Baptism of Desire* are conspicuously Roman Catholic, but also universal/catholic. Erdrich attended parochial schools and speaks of her religious background:

I guess I have my beefs about Catholicism. Although you never change once you've raised a Catholic—you've got that. You've got that symbolism, that guilt, you've got the whole works and you can't really change that.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the title of the collection stems from Roman Catholic doctrine whereby a person with sincere desire but unable to perform the technical act of baptism may receive the blessings of that ordinance.<sup>13</sup> Erdrich melds natural human desires into the ritual structure of Catholic belief. The title, *Baptism of Desire*, also has a playful meaning, suggesting that desire could be cleansed by baptismal ritual or that one could be purified by being immersed with desire. The coexistent danger and redemption of desire becomes a *pharmakos*, with the potential to either destroy or deliver.

Erdrich injects these topics with ironic and iconoclastic tensions characteristic of twentieth century Modernism, undercutting the

institutional power and divinity of religion. However, unlike the Modernism of James Joyce, who rejects Roman Catholicism for the religious pursuit of art, Erdrich transforms the creed, infusing ritual and history with personal interpretations and Native American imagery. This amalgamation and embracing of religious tradition and modern arts, crossing the virtual natures of the plastic and literary, is evident in "Orozco's Christ" (15).

By referring to this specific painting of political artist José Orozco (1883-1949), Erdrich crosses several cultural boundaries. Orozco was deeply influenced by the traditions of Mexican Indians but painted in the medium of Western Civilization,<sup>14</sup> just as Erdrich comes from an oral tradition but writes and publishes in Western genres of poetry and novels. Also, Mexico is a deeply Roman Catholic country that has merged European practices with native beliefs. Orozco's suffering Christ—probably *Cristo destruyendo la Cruz* from the 1932-34 frescos at Dartmouth College—need not be seen to capture Erdrich's interpretation of art, religion, and ritual of crucifixion.<sup>15</sup> The Dartmouth fresco mediates public and institutional space with the privacy of a poet's response to religious faith—or challenge to that faith. The intense style of Orozco's painting is matched by the rhythm and passion of Erdrich's words. The repetition of the words "who" and "whose," beginning eleven of the eighteen lines of the poem, adds a musical incantation, further blurring the lines between the arts.

This powerful Christ is violent and destructive in the opening line "Who rips his own flesh." The brutal images are institutionalized by the painting and descriptions of vibrant colors, "blazing ochre, blazing rust," visual art remaining static in time. This Christ manages his own fate, chopping down his own cross, challenging and defying the Father, consuming the significance of Mary by "roll[ing] the stone from the entrance over his mother" with his own resurrective strength.

Erdrich's resurrected Jesus embarks on his journey to establish the savage authority of

Christianity. The Pauline image of "walking toward Damascus, toward Beirut" implies tumultuous conversion of the ancient world to radical Christianity. Beirut is a modern battlefield, a reminder that bloody conflicts are erroneously justified by religious ideologies. The particular image of Orozco's painted Christ recalls the indigenous cultures that were sacrificed to Catholicism. While there are no specifically identifiable Chippewa elements in this particular poem, the reader's knowledge of Erdrich's Native heritage invites one beyond the obvious Catholic content and reminds one of the tensions between Christian and non-Christian beliefs. Again, unlike Joyce, whose crisis of faith faced nihilism, only to be filled with art, Erdrich's crisis is tragic, knowing that Christianity is culpable for the systematic attempts at deicide for Native gods.

Erdrich struggles with the evils of Christian institutions and personal desires and faith. This inescapable predicament is personalized in "Fooling God" (3-4). The futility of trying to escape God and religious upbringing is juxtaposed against the Nicean characteristics of divinity. The speaker cannot become small enough to hide from God nor large enough to overpower and eliminate him. The poet's attempt to "lose myself" only identifies that self to God. God's knowing is intimate and sexual. Although the poet embraces self reliance—"I must become essential and file everything/ under my own system"—God is omnipresent. Doubts prevail, yet the poet longs for those who "taste everlasting life." The articulation of the poem itself acknowledges the vain effort of "Fooling God."

"Fooling God"'s confidential topic of a personal struggle with faith is more characteristic of the European influences in Erdrich's life; faith is an acquisition in Western belief but inseparable from a holistic manner of life in non-western cosmologies. Rather than assuming that a Christian/non-Christian dichotomy represents the only choices, many Native people embrace both Christianity and traditional beliefs. Minute clues in the poem

indicate the mediation of cultures. The line "I must insert myself into the bark of his apple trees" alludes both to the Edenic forbidden fruit and to the magical transformation of a doubting trickster who could enter a tree. The kneeling women "[o]n the pavement where his house begins" suggest an image of the Cathedral of Guadalupe, a fusion of Catholicism and Mexican Indian supernaturalism.

The collection of "The Sacraments" (18-24) includes the seven ceremonial practices. These Catholic sections present experiences of intimacy and nature and Native American images, characteristic of the reflective poems of Part Five. "Baptism" has ritualistic sun dancers; "Communion" has singing frogs and a wedding bed; "Confirmation" prophesies Erdrich's own three children. "Matrimony" sets the vows of "standard words" in a "landscape" of "willows," "the sun," a "tilted earth," and "snow." "Penance" expresses guilt over marital conflict. "Holy Orders" are intimate, and "Extreme Unction" uses decaying images of nature. The content of these poems invokes communal liturgical practices and the personal and particular experience of the individual, along with images derived from a culture that depends on the earth. The ritualization of the sacraments thus becomes both personal and communal.

Similarly, "Christ's Twin" (13) uses an Indian approach, suggesting that a shadow of Jesus existed. This doubling corresponds to the hero twins, common in Native American myths. Christ's twin functions as a trickster, playing pranks, manipulating miracles, "clumsy and curious." This counterpart to a pious Jesus again suggests the duplicitous forces of Christianity from Erdrich's Chippewa perspective.

Ritual in poems with an overt Indian content appears in the title poem of *Jacklight* and its "Hunters" and "Myths" sections. Many of these poems are narratives, reciting and recreating ancestral tales. The recounting of myth, although presented by Erdrich in a published and public medium, is fundamental to ritual. Storytelling is a sacred and ritual performance

and Erdrich enriches this practice with modern metaphors. Once again, the literature of Native America defies conventional categories and genres. An example of Erdrich's mythic and ritual poetry, "Whooping Cranes," is dedicated to her maternal grandmother, Mary Gourneau.<sup>16</sup> It is also narrative, telling the story of a mythic foundling, raised by the tribal community and returned to the cranes.

The reader does not need to know the full canon of Chippewa legend to discern mythological tradition in this poem. The poem begins:

Our Souls must be small as mice  
to fit through the hole of heaven.  
All the time it is shrinking over Pembina.

In many Plains origin myths a hole in the sky is an entrance for human beings into this earthly existence. The Pembina hills include the formation for which the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation in North Dakota is named. Pembina County is that part of the Red River valley immediately under the Canadian border. The mystery surrounding the birth and discovery of the child suggests the miracle birth of the monomythic hero. The reference to the Mission and the tea in a baby bottle place the poem in a recent rather than mythical time.

The young boy, however, is clearly in a mythical realm. His strangeness and supernatural strength distinguish him. The killing of the crows suggests a religious sacrifice, but the implication is unclear; the black crows may represent an evil to be eradicated or, if they are incarnations of the trickster, their deaths may represent deicide. Again, Erdrich mixes cultural references as the boy, like the Greek Narcissus, admires his own image.

The drought described in the second full stanza demonstrates the relationship between survival and the natural elements. The boy is once more distinguished as his health and well-being are preserved by the caretaking community during desperate times. The whooping

cranes that fly overhead accept the ritualized and sacrificial offering, taking him up in transformation. The white of the cranes suggests purity, another sign of appropriate designation for holy sacrifice.

This poem expresses fear of the parallel disappearance of the sacred boy and venerable traditions. As the cranes take him away, in a "last flight," they close the sky against the human world below. The "arks" of the breasts of the cranes imply the Judeo-Christianity of Noah, as the boy flees to a new world, closed to those below. The earth is split from the sky, but the boy and the cranes mediate that fragmentation. The moral sense that accompanies this poem presents a divisive world: good and evil, earth and sky, fullness and drought, abandonment and acceptance, mediated by the boy who transforms and joins a community of cranes. He is, nevertheless, not of the world, as he is transported beyond a "barred gate" and a closed sky. That the people take care of the boy, despite his differences, reflects communal values. Wholeness encompasses the natural elements, sky and earth, and the varied cultures represented in the poem through the metaphorical paradox of separation and community. The boy, born of elements of Chippewa mythology and ascending with images of Christianity, becomes the intermediary between the two cultures.

Erdrich invokes her own specific tribal traditions in the title poem, "Jacklight." The poem has this explanatory note:

The same Chippewa word is used both for flirting and hunting game, while another Chippewa word connotes both using force in intercourse and also killing a bear with one's bare hands. [R. W. Dunning, (1959) *Social and Economic Change Among the Northern Ojibwa*] (3)

This deconstructive use of language is modulated in the poem to create a dialectical meaning. The hunters and the hunted are indistinguishable as power is transformed.

Erdrich comments on this counterpoint of the poem:

I am trying to say something like this: if our relationships are ever going to be human, and not just play-by-numbers, men have to follow women into the woods and women likewise. There must be an exchange, a transformation, a power shared between them.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than eliminating meaning, the duality of the language creates a new manner of thinking about power of the hunters and the hunted. Not only is this transformation male/female but could represent any power exchange, including that of cultures; "It is their turn now,/ their turn to follow us."

The ritual of hunting is derived from historic subsistence needs. The narrative voice of the poem is the collective "We," yet the telling and the imagery are individualized. The specificity of experience, of smells, of the "first of us to step into the open" marks the paradox of individual definition within the hunting, tribal community. The ritual recounting in "Jacklight" intimates that, as cultures change, the complexity of the universe becomes both more enlightened and more shadowed.

Erdrich continues the Chippewa traditions with allusions to the mythical hero, Nana-bozho (Nanapush), in "The Woods" (23). References are made to his "headdress," a "breastplate," and the holy "mittens of blood." In this poem, however, the trickster cannot escape the speaker and must redefine his mythic purpose.

Other, seemingly mundane, practices are ritualized in Erdrich's poetry. A zoo visit in "Chahinkapa Zoo" (28) becomes "heavy with the ancient life." Card playing is ceremonialized in "The King of Owls" (29). The ritual of the buffalo hunt is memorialized in "The Red Sleep of Beasts" (80). Erdrich assumes the thoughtful and emotional voice of a transforming antelope, in "The Strange People" (68). The devilish "Windigo" of Chippewa pantheon is personified (79). The

myth of the bear and seduction is mixed with the Greek naming of stars in the four part poem, "Night Sky" (33).

Another sky image demonstrates the mixture of cultural images in the first stanza of "Turtle Mountain Reservation," dedicated to "Pat Gourneau, my grandfather":

The heron makes a cross  
flying low over the marsh.  
Its heart is an old compass  
pointing off in four directions.  
It drags the world along,  
the world it becomes. (82)

The cross is a standard symbol of Christianity, recognizing the Roman Catholic influence among the Chippewa. The sign is deconstructed, though, by identifying it with the center of the sacred compass or hoop used by many Native culture groups. The pronoun "it" is deliberately vague, obscuring whether Christianity or sacred tradition is changing the world, or, ambiguous, perhaps, because both cultures are adapting rituals and surviving.

Erdrich adapts literary structures, erasing the Western distinction between poetry and prose. This blurring is a linguistic reflection of tribal communities where sacred beliefs are expressed without regard to literary structure but with particular attention to ritual retelling and setting. Erdrich's mixture of literary genres is evident in the lyrical imagery of her novels and the prose of the Potchikoo sections of the poetry collections. This ritualistic storytelling functions in a communal sense, as tribal histories and sacred stories are recounted in collective settings. The trickster stories have specific implications for individuals as the listeners become socialized to particular moral behaviors through the antics of Potchikoo.

In *Jacklight*, "Old Man Potchikoo" has four parts relating his mortal existence: "The Birth of Potchikoo," "Potchikoo Marries," "How Potchikoo Got Old," and "The Death of Potchikoo." In *Baptism of Desire* the trickster continues his journey in the group of pieces titled "Potchikoo's Life After Death" and

containing: "How They Don't Let Potchikoo into Heaven," "Where Potchikoo Goes Next," "Potchikoo's Detour," "Potchikoo Greets Josette," "Potchikoo Restored," "Potchikoo's Mean Twin," and "How Josette Takes Care of It."

The potato boy, Potchikoo, is a trickster and his narrative enters the mythic realm. The insemination of his mother by the sun and other events and characteristics originate in sacred Chippewa origin stories. Erdrich puts a new twist on this traditional tale, blending in the various cultural influences of Catholicism and current environment, raising contemporary ethical issues. The apparent contradictions and the intermingling of the concrete world with a mythic universe in Erdrich's rendering of trickster tales lead to moral questions rather than issues of realism. Trickster's life beyond death and his returns to the natural world suggest endurance and survival.<sup>18</sup> Through humor, trickster draws attention to inappropriate morals. Trickster humor also socializes the individual about bodily functions; trickster's bawdy excesses are so fantastic that the subject is no longer embarrassing. Absurd consequences result from immoral behavior. Powerful institutions, particularly Western religions, are the butt of Potchikoo's humor.

Erdrich confronts the issue of believability as the narrative begins. A tentative verb: "Potchikoo *claims* that his father is the sun" (emphasis added) suggests that the premise is implausible. The teller admits that the story is unbelievable but still asks the audience to continue to pay attention, as if each reader were hearing the story told aloud.

You don't have to believe this, I'm not asking you to. . . .

There was a very pretty Chippewa girl working in a field once. She was digging potatoes for a farmer someplace around Pembina when suddenly the wind blew her dress up around her face and wrapped her apron so tightly around her arms that she couldn't move. She lay helplessly in the

dust with her potato sack, this poor girl, and as she lay there she felt the sun shining down very steadily upon her.

Then she felt something else. You know what. I don't have to say it. (74)

The outcome of this encounter is the birth of Potchikoo, a boy who looks "just like a potato." Trickster demonstrates that actions have consequences. The moral is verbalized: "That's what she gets for playing loose in the potato fields,' they said." The girl is not in the historical past but wears an apron and hangs clothes on a clothesline, both modern images; Erdrich ritually retells the old story in a more contemporary mode.

In the "Potchikoo Marries" section, he takes a train to Minneapolis where he falls in love with a tobacco store wooden Indian, Josette, a wonderful play with the Noble Savage stereotype. Potchikoo sets his beloved on fire, then drowns her, trying to extinguish her fire in a lake. Nevertheless, she is baptismally reborn and he marries her. This urban adventure to find a mate correlates to the archetypal hero's adventure and return home. Potchikoo's cultural ignorance of wooden incarnations and his lust for Josette, however, nearly lead to disaster.

Potchikoo gets old with the help of Josette and the social mores of the Catholic Church:

As a young man, Potchikoo sometimes embarrassed his wife by breaking wind during Holy Mass. It was for this reason that Josette whittled him a little plug out of ash wood and told him to put it in that place before he entered Saint Ann's church. (76)

During a sermon on the Ascension, Potchikoo inflates, floats up in the cathedral, and explodes.

Holy Mass was canceled for a week so the church could be aired out, but to this day a faint scent still lingers and Potchikoo, sadly enough was shriveled by his sudden collapse and flight through the air. For when



Josette picked him up to bring home, she found that he was now wrinkled and dry like an old man. (76-77)

There are several trickster morals in this episode: do not unnaturally suppress natural body functions, do not aspire to unnatural bodily functions like flying, beware of taking religion too seriously or of submitting to your spouse. The natural consequences can be disastrous. Ritualization of Catholicism is undermined by the ritualization of this trickster story.

Potchikoo dies from infidelity in a metaphor of a heart attack, but, in *Baptism of Desire*, his soul continues. St. Peter does not let Potchikoo enter heaven because he is an Indian, so he finds Indian heaven. Since there are only chokecherries and venison to eat, he begins wandering around and finds hell—where people are chained to old Sears Roebuck catalogues. He returns to Josette where in an excessive sexual episode “he found that his favorite part of himself was charred black, and thin as a burnt twig” (55). He recovers by dipping himself in wax but then becomes so large that he must carry himself in a wheelbarrow. He has an escapade with a Mrs. B (perhaps an obscure allusion to lascivious Mr. B of *Clarissa*) that restores him to normal, and he returns to Josette.

Potchikoo has a bad twin who raises a ruckus until Potchikoo is jailed and the twin exposed. Josette tempts the twin with icons and appetites. He disappears and Josette saves the remains of Potchikoo in her purse.

The trickster cycle of Potchikoo warns against sexual excess, satirizes organized religion and popular culture, addresses the duality of good and evil, and gives power and knowledge to Josette. Erdrich, playing the trickster as author, connects the mythic and natural world with images of trains, radios, catalogues, churches, and tobacco stores. She ritually redefines the trickster with these modern images, through storytelling, and by injecting individual ethics into the communal realm of such storytelling.

Erdrich's poetry raises questions of genre, meaning, culture, and language. She addresses these questions from many angles. Her personal poems are consistent with canonical expectations of lyric poetry, although incorporating her Native experience. Ritualistic poems include religious Euro-American and mythic Chippewa expressions and questions. Narrative poems tell stories, create characters, and, finally, abandon the conventional structure of poetry for the straight narrative of the trickster, Potchikoo. This flouting of traditionally defined “poetry” leads naturally to the condensed language of Erdrich's fiction while recalling the traditions of an oral culture. As a poet, Erdrich demonstrates how the individual voice presents a collective people through culture and ritual.

#### NOTES

1. Erdrich's first novel, *Love Medicine*, received the National Book Award in 1984. Her subsequent novels *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), and *The Bingo Palace* (1994) have garnered much critical attention. *Love Medicine* was re-issued in 1993 in a “New and Expanded Edition.” *Tales of Burning Love* (1996) continues the North Dakota saga. Additionally, Erdrich has published a collection of essays, *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* (1995). She is listed as co-author with Michael Dorris for *The Crown of Columbus* (1991).

2. “Anishinaabe,” “Chippewa,” and “Ojibwa” are terms that refer to the same peoples. “Anishinaabe” is more historical and traditional. Although Erdrich's more recent work has used the term “Ojibwa,” she refers to herself in her early writings as “Chippewa.” That term will be used generally in this paper.

3. Joseph Bruchac, “Whatever Is Really Yours: An Interview with Louise Erdrich,” in *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*, ed. Joseph Bruchac, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), p. 82.

4. For examples of anthropological criticisms see the following: Catherine M. Catt, “Ancient Myth in Modern America: The Trickster in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich,” *Platte Valley Review* 19 (Winter 1991): 71-81; Susan Hegeman, “Native American ‘Texts’ and the Problem of Authenticity,” *American Quarterly* 41.2 (June 1989): 265-83; Debra C. Holt, “Transformation and Continuance: Native American Tradition in the Novels of Louise Erdrich,” in *Entering the Nineties: The North Ameri-*

can Experience, ed. Thomas E. Schirer, Proceedings of The Native American Studies Conference at Lake Superior University, 27-28 October 1988 (Sault Ste. Marie: Lake Superior University Press, 1991), pp. 149-61; James McKenzie, "Lipsha's Good Road Home: The Revival of Chippewa Culture in *Love Medicine*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10.3 (1986): 53-63; David Mitchell, "A Bridge to the Past: Cultural Hegemony and the Native American Past in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*," *Entering the Nineties*, pp. 162-70; Lydia Agnes Schultz, "Fragments and Ojibwe Stories: Narrative Strategies in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*," *College Literature* 18 (October 1991): 80-95; Jennifer Sergi, "Storytelling: Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," *World Literature Today* 66 (Spring 1992): 279-82; James D. Stripes, "The Problem(s) of (Anishinaabe) History in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich: Voices and Contexts," *The Wicazo Sa Review* 7 (Fall 1991): 26-33.

5. Bruchac, "Whatever Is Really Yours" (note 3 above), p. 84.

6. Ibid.; Jan George, "An Interview with Louise Erdrich," *North Dakota Quarterly* 56 (Winter 1988): 246.

7. Louise Erdrich, *Baptism of Desire* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 48. Hereafter cited by page numbers in parentheses in the text.

8. A. Gettner, "Review of *Baptism of Desire*," *Choice* 27 (June 1990): 1824.

9. I use the word "myth" to mean sacred texts which a people believe to contain basic truths. See Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

10. Michael Benamou, "The Concept of Marginality in Ethnopoetics," in *Minority Languages and Literature*, ed. Dexter Fisher, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1977), p. 152.

11. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

12. Bruchac, "Whatever Is Really Yours" (note 3 above), p. 81.

13. Helen Jaskoski, "Review of *Baptism of Desire*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 55.

14. Robert C. Lamm and Neal M. Cross, *The Humanities in Western Culture*, vol. 2 (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1988), p. 362.

15. Erdrich attended Dartmouth 1971-76 and was creative writer-in-residence in the early 1980s.

16. Louise Erdrich, *Jacklight* (New York: Henry Holt, 1984), p. 73. Hereafter cited by page numbers in parentheses in the text.

17. George, "Interview with Louise Erdrich" (note 6 above), p. 243.

18. Catt, "Ancient Myth" (note 4 above), p. 73.