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Native American Trauma and the Possibility of
Healing in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1993)

Author

María Arévalo Villalba

Supervisor

Silvia Martínez Falquina

FACULTY OF ARTS

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de Zaragoza

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Abstract

Throughout universal history, there have been a series of invasions and conquests that have had devastating consequences on the native groups that inhabited those places. In the case of the United States, since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Europeans wanted to dominate the country. They employ harsh repression against the groups of Indigenous people who were already there when they settled in the territory. These opposed the brutal measures that the newcomers demanded and went against their traditions. This caused a series of violent confrontations that led to traumatic experiences and injuries that were passed from generation to generation. Louise Erdrich is a famous writer from Minnesota who, in her best-known novel, *Love Medicine* (1993), tells the story of two native families and all the adversities and misunderstandings they suffer. The novel presents a very peculiar structure due to the number of perspectives on the events that happen to the characters and the interpretation they require. The main focus of my work, on the one hand, is to analyze the double trauma that Henry Lamartine has to face. He is a soldier returning from the Vietnam War suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and unable to readjust to life in North America. Furthermore, he is a Native in an American society, and he has deep wounds that he has inherited from previous generations. On the other hand, Liphsa Morrisey manages to overcome this Native trauma that affects her community collectively because he offers a glimpse of hope to that society since he shows that evolution and change are possible. For this, it is relevant to delve into the theoretical framework of trauma to know how a traumatic experience affects the mind and the perception of reality and specifically analyze Native trauma in North America. Next, the structure of the novel will be analyzed, the chapter in which Henry settles when he returns from Vietnam, and the relationship between the latter and two others. Mainly with the last of the novel where the possibility of change and evolution in the Native community is observed since not all endings have to be like Henry's.

Resumen

A lo largo de la historia universal, se han sucedido una serie de invasiones y conquistas que han tenido consecuencias devastadoras en los grupos Nativos que habitaban esos lugares. En el caso Estados Unidos, desde la llegada de Cristóbal Colón en 1492, los europeos quisieron dominar país y ejercieron una dura represión contra los grupos de Indígenas que se encontraron al establecerse en el territorio. Estos se oponían a las duras medidas que los recién llegados exigían e iban en contra de sus tradiciones. Esto originó una serie de enfrentamientos violentos que desembocaron en experiencias traumáticas y heridas que se pasaron de generación en generación. Louise Erdrich es una famosa escritora de Minnesota que, en su novela más reconocida, *Love Medicine* (1993), cuenta la historia de dos familias Nativas y todas las adversidades y desencuentros que sufren. La novela presenta una estructura muy peculiar por la cantidad de perspectivas sobre los eventos que les ocurren a los personajes y la interpretación que requieren. El foco principal de mi trabajo por un lado es analizar el doble trauma al que Henry Lamartine tiene que hacer frente. Es un soldado que vuelve de la Guerra de Vietnam, sufre estrés post-traumático y no consigue readaptarse a la vida en Norte América. Además, es un Nativo en la sociedad americana, y tiene profundas heridas que ha heredado de generaciones anteriores. Por el otro, Liphsa Morrisey consigue superar ese trauma Nativo que afecta a su comunidad de manera colectiva porque arroja un rayo de luz en esa sociedad puesto que demuestra que la evolución y el cambio es posible. Para ello, es relevante adentrarse en el marco teórico del trauma para saber cómo una experiencia traumática afecta a la mente y a la percepción de la realidad y analizar específicamente el trauma Nativo en Norte América. Seguidamente, se analizará la estructura de la novela, el capítulo en el que Henry se asienta cuando vuelve de Vietnam, y la relación que guarda este último con otros dos. Principalmente con el último de la novela donde se observa esa posibilidad de cambio y evolución en la comunidad Nativa puesto que no todos los finales tienen que ser como el de Henry.

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1. Introduction

Louise Erdrich is one of the most acclaimed Native American authors both by the general public and by the critics. She was born in Minnesota in 1954. She is a mixed-blood woman; her mother was Chippewa, and her father was German-American. Consequently, in her writings, the influence of American Indians is always present. She married Michael Dorris in 1981, and they were co-working and publishing together until 1995, when they divorced (Hafen 9-10). Erdrich has received many awards, such as the Pulitzer prize in 2021. Most of her novels present a connection between them because they are set in the same location and some topics and characters are recurrent. A case in point is the tetralogy composed of *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, and *The Bingo Palace*. Each represents a different natural element, cardinal point, and season (Wong 99-100).

Love Medicine is one of Erdrich's most acclaimed texts. It was published in 1984 and expanded in 1993 ending with eighteen chapters. It is related to Erdrich's life because it deals with mixed-blood families; then, she can feel identify with them. It presents a complex structure that has resulted in a lack of agreement regarding the classification of the text as a novel or as a collection of short stories (Wong 85). The chapters "Scales," "The World's Greatest Fisherman," and "Saint Marie" had already been published as short stories (Hafen 10). Consequently, each chapter in the novel can be read in isolation because they have complete meaning and build a story on themselves. However, they are also presented in the form of a novel due to their correlation. The setting is North Dakota, and the story turns around the relations and disparities between the Kashpaws and the Lamartines. There are eight different narrative voices and the omniscient narrator that offer different perspectives of the same events. There is a multi-perspective of the events, so, it demands an active reading because the readers are prompt to form their own opinions and conclusions about the incidents. There is not only one available

interpretation of the events but as many as readers. Besides, the structure is not linear because there are gaps in time and constant flashbacks and flashforwards. Through this structure, Erdrich advocates for a change from the necessity of belonging to a Native group in which it is important to fit into predetermined roles to the individual aspirations for freedom and free will.

The story deals with relevant topics such as religion, the relationships between families, or a diversity of traumatic events and their effects. In this essay I will focus on the latter, especially on the trauma of Henry Lamartine, an American soldier returning from the Vietnam War. Henry has to face two kinds of trauma: the trauma derived from his belonging to a minority group in North America and the trauma of having participated in severe combat episodes. To explain it in further detail, I will start with a brief introduction to the Vietnam war, the definition of trauma, and the different kinds of wounds that Native Americans have to face. Then, I will delve in the novel's structure and its relationship to the narrative of trauma. Next, I will analyze the chapter "The Red Convertible" as well as its position in relation to other chapters of the text, with a special focus on the character named Lipsha Morrissey, who evolves beyond what was expected from a Native. The aim of my work is to examine how despite all the adversities, represented in the figure of Henry, change is possible in a Native culture where collectivity has taken precedence over individuality. Lipsha manages to stay away from his native birthplace while following his free will. He represents a new beginning that defies convention and an evolution that future generations can emulate.

2. Theoretical Approach: The Vietnam War, Colonization and Trauma

The history of the United States has been characterized by a series of conflicts within the country between the different communities that conform to society due to its heterogeneity and other countries because of the divergent modes of thinking and acting. One of the most relevant ones in the last decades was the Vietnam war, a very violent struggle which went on from 1955 to 1975. At the roots of the conflict was the fact that the country was divided into two; the northern part defended communism, and the southern followed the Western way of life. The US army supported the latter area, but its intervention had unbearable consequences for the US and the Vietnamese soldiers (History.com Editors). Television influenced that war because people in America saw the American army's atrocities against the Vietnamese. In "The Psychological Effects of the Vietnam War" Hochgesang et al. expose that when soldiers returned from the war, they had no recognition, and people did not feel proud of them. Consequently, they felt isolated and not understood by their compatriots and families. This led to several problems in their readjustment to society. First, they were not listened to by anyone; then, they had mental and psychological obstacles to fitting in with the status quo. Besides, most of the soldiers suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is a common consequence of a traumatic experience, and it became officially recognized in the 1980s after observing the repetitive symptomatology in Vietnam veterans (Herrero and Baelo 10). Victims cannot continue with their life after the shock; there is a continuous remembrance of the facts and the impossibility of sleep or concentration ("Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder"). In the conflict of the Vietnam War, for example, William J. Cromie found in his 1990 study that almost 30,9% of the soldiers that returned from the war suffered from that disease.

As a result, the Vietnam War marked a crucial moment in the history of trauma. The treatment of trauma and its theorization became emphasized and started with the Holocaust, which affected millions of people in Europe. Before the 1940s, people who suffered from mental illnesses were considered insane, and there was neither recognition nor adequate treatment for them. To date, there has not been enough attention paid either to the effects of having lived a traumatic experience or the consequences it may cause on the victim. However, with the Vietnam conflict, as the victims' symptoms were very similar and repeated once and again, there was more interest in studying the causes and consequences of the events. Trauma is described as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster" ("Trauma and Shock"). It is not only about what happens but how the person assumes and reacts to what happens. One of the first reactions to a traumatic experience is called dissociation. It is a mechanism that the victim adopts not to look back on the actual events but to alter the reality to enter into different states of consciousness (Bloom 200). The most common representation of that state is to be "in shock". The person cannot recognize or remember any feeling associated with the appalling events in that condition. Afterwards, the traumatic experience may produce a gap in the victim's mind; it is professionally referred to as amnesia. The victim cannot remember the events. Therefore, they are unable to talk about them. It poses a problem because the traumatized will be incapable of expressing what happened and putting that experience into words (Bloom 5). That impossibility entails that the traumatic event has not been understood and assimilated by the mind. As a result, the victim only has access to the painful moment through flashbacks (Balaev 151). That capacity to express ourselves through language is very relevant because it is the condition that makes us the most developed beings in the world. Language is one of the features that makes humans different from other animals (Beorlegui 140). Then, talking is a source of healing

because it is a way to organize our thoughts and reality linearly and logically; therefore, past, present, and future become ordered (Bloom 6). Since in a shocked mind, the experience is not well ordered, then, there is confusion about the arrangement of the events. The episodes that happened in the past are continuously remembered in the present. Thus, the victim is repeatedly experiencing the hurtful episode.

In order to understand the definition of trauma that seems to be very theoretical, it is important to mention that there have been unrecognized traumatic events all along with history. For example, in the post-colonial period, when there had been extensive conflicts related to the distribution of the land and the emigration of the natives to the “mother-land,” the metropolis that ruled the small colonies. New countries emerged from the ancient colonies, and the division of the territory originated significant clashes that are even latent nowadays with the current war. So, when there is a war, there is trauma.

An example of trauma is the case of North America. From the arrival of the English in the Northern part of the American continent, they believed they were superior to any of the Native tribes that were already there and decided to impose a supremacy on them. Consequently, many Native groups in the USA suffered rejection and oppression from the mainstream culture. An example of those dreadful measures was the creation of boarding schools. They were rigorous educational institutions led by Americans. From 1890 Indians were forced to go there to learn what it was expected to know to be an American: language and cultural values (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 59). Next, there were careless measures with the Natives because they were not allowed to use their Native languages, and they were treated as enslaved and second-rated people (Lambert 40-41). Afterwards, there was a succession of Assimilation Policies where Native Americans were forced to leave their lands and move to urban places where they experienced extreme racism and rejection (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 60). Experiences like those explained

before and the cruelty and injustices that natives had to tolerate led to extensive wounds in those communities that had originated a historical trauma. Professor Joseph P. Gone defines it as “collective, cumulative and intergenerational” (390). It is collective in the sense that the compilations of similar individual traumas affect the community. It is cumulative and intergenerational because if the wounds are not healed, there might be a collection of fatal problems with corresponding consequences that would lead to serious trouble. Subsequently, it is more likely that those traumas would be inherited from generation to generation.

At present, it is too common for American Indians to have social problems such as homicides, domestic violence, and alcoholism (Lambert 42). That was the consequence of having lived an overwhelming experience, the cumulative obstacles to integration and rejection, but also disenfranchised grief. This is how we refer to the sorrow that Indians feel because they cannot openly and honestly discuss their misfortunes or losses with others (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 62). So American Indians had to repress their feelings, avoid talking about the situation they were suffering and avoid sharing with others, precisely the only solution for their traumatized minds. However, the actual situation was that North Americans did not recognize their anguish, and many people became alcohol or drug dependent. Many children saw their families struggle and become addicted to the consumption of certain substances. Then, they will inherit the original trauma that caused the problems in the family members and the effects those devastating activities are causing in the victims. They thought external healing and solution would solve their internal problems. However, as exposed before, it is not the way to recover from the disease but talking about the problem itself (Bloom 10). The solution is to admit that there is a problem, investigate the root of the discomfort, and realize that the healing process

depends on oneself rather than on someone else. If not, they will continue to suffer in silence (Herrero and Baelo 12).

The interest in trauma studies increased, especially in the 1990s, because critics tried to “explore the impact of trauma in literature and society” (Mambrol 1). There were a series of developments based on Freudian theories that explained some of the concerns on that topic (Mambrol 1). People were more and more devoted to the version of the minority groups; they became aware that the history they knew was not a universal truth but a social construction. As a result, they wanted to know the hidden perspectives to draw their conclusions. For example, a common tendency from Post-Modernity (the 1960s) onwards was rewriting the classics to obtain another view of the events.

In the case of North America, there is an attempt in Native American literature to recover what was omitted and not represented during the colonial power (Martínez-Falquina 223). However, it is exposed by Martínez-Falquina that the approach to trauma narratives “is based on Western theoretical models” (210). Therefore, we have access to a subjective interpretation of what happened, not the reality, from the oppressor’s perspective. The attempt to solve that is to start from the ancient stories because they can be beneficial narratives to unify past and present. Those stories can be a way of healing past wounds, trying to offer a better and hopeful future (Herrero and Baelo 22). However, it is risky because it may lead to the revictimization of the Natives or unreal, invented due to the political representation of the grief (Martínez-Falquina 224). Europeans have generalized stereotyped groups in America without considering their disparities but recognizing them as homogeneous communities. It should be questioned because there is no group equal to another. The individual features of the diversity of Native groups are what make them unique. Taking that into account, it is relevant, as Martínez-Falquina (212) mentions in her article, that the basis of a correct approach to Native American

Studies is offering a balance. The originality and uniqueness of Native American communities must be preserved so that literature does not become polarized. There has been a trend to divide literature into two categories: white and Native American. It is not fair to do so because there is no community more influential than the other, but different. So, it is necessary to understand that diversity of texts, mainly expressed in the wide variety of Native texts. As minority groups throughout history, Native societies have been pushed to adapt their narrative manifestations in order to fit into a culture dominated mostly by Europeans or white North Americans. Then, the objective now is to retrieve those ancient Native stories in order to explain what happened in the past and comprehend the present.

Trauma is not an easy topic to cope with. The narratives that deal with it present a complex structure because they want to simulate what trauma produces in the victim's mind. There is dissociation in the mind when a traumatic event occurs, so there is fragmentation. As a result, the basic structure of those narratives is non-linear fragmented and repetitive. It is how a victim is reminded of the events; disordered by portions and repeated once again (Mambrol 2). Due to that repetition, another key feature of the trauma narratives is the multi-perspective technique. Trauma creates contradiction in the mind and the language. As a result, the victim talks typically about the same events but exposes them from different angles trying to recap all the details to find the truth. Wrapping up the four essential features, it is worth mentioning that this type of fiction demands active readers. A series of circumstances are exposed disorderly, from different points of view, and it is their interpretation and understanding of what makes sense of the narrative. An example of that is the story the dissertation is about. *Love Medicine* presents a fragmented, disordered and unique structure that requires an exhaustive analysis, that is done below.

3. Analysis of the Complex and Unconventional Structure of *Love Medicine*

Love Medicine is a story that fits into some features explained before. The text demands attention because the reader has to build the story as there is no unique understanding of the events (Sands 37). It does not show a linear plot but circular and fragmented stories with constant flashbacks and eight different narrators. Each chapter is narrated from a different point of view, especially in the first person; as a result, it is necessary to build the story and add more information while advancing in the reading to have a complete sense of the whole story. The reader knows the same events from different perspectives. Then as Hertha W. Sweet Wong says, “the reader is forced to integrate, interpret and reinterpret the narrative(s)” (90). It is one of the features that makes that novel unique. The reader forms an opinion on one occurrence, but as he/she makes progress in the reading, there is a new viewpoint on the same situation, and it is necessary to reformulate the initial interpretation. Advancing in the study of Wong, she mentions, and it is very explicit, that Erdrich could be influenced by William Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury* (98). There is an existence of multiple narrators talking about the same events and offering their particular and subjective points of view. Then, the novel’s structure can be an analogy of the difficulties Indians faced in the past as a minority group within the North American mainstream culture, exemplifying the trauma and the mental confusion they suffered (Balaev 159). They have not been able to assimilate and overcome it yet, and the reader experiences it while reading the novel.

It has also been exposed before that there is no agreement in classifying *Love Medicine* as a novel or as a collection of short stories (Wong 85). On the one hand, the different chapters work well in isolation because they have a complete sense. On the other, the novel turns around the same characters and topics so, the chapters are closely related one to the other. Those short stories or chapters that compose the book were

published all together in the form of a novel because novels are more likely to be sold than short stories (Wong 86). As stated in the preceding paragraph, each short story has its importance in building the novel's overall meaning. The multi-perspective and diversity of chapters contribute to reconsidering and reformulating ideas of the characters and plot repeatedly. One case similar to that is *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. The book compiles a series of short stories that, at first sight, do not seem to have a connection between them, but the reader must build meaning from them.

Besides, the community is much more important than individuals, in the story under analysis. As a result, there is no specific protagonist but a collective one. That collectivity in the Native society is the main character (Wong 85). The lack of a specific protagonist is yet another aspect that distinguishes this novel. Readers are used to feeling identified with the focalizer or the protagonist of the stories. However, in this fiction, as there are many points of view, the identification does not come from a single character but from the community of Native Americans. Apart from that, there have been attempts to fit that novel into the conventions we are accustomed to read. Some researchers have tried to find the traditional protagonist and the linking element in the novel. As a result, critics have expressed a wide range of viewpoints. The majority defends that there is no a central figure and that collectivity is what matters. Some others oppose saying that June, who is the absent character in the story, is the protagonist. When reading the novel, it is noticeable that everything turns around her, and she is the linking element among the rest of the characters and the stories. Even the novel starts and ends with her. That relation between the first and last chapter, creates a circular structure in the story. However, the discord stems from the fact that the reader is denied access to her narration, even though she is the figure that brings the other characters together (Owens 57).

As a consequence of her absence, the active role of the readers is emphasized because they have to build her personality from how the others describe her. Then, it goes back to the basic idea that the novel is based on the multi-perspective technique and the requirement of the interpretation and reinterpretation of the plot. In this case, there is a gap due to the lack of voice of June, who never tells her story in her own voice, and the variety of viewpoints about her that generates uncertainty because the reader does not know what point of view should be taken as believable. This leads to another important theme that I will be dealing with, namely, the searching for the identity of the characters. In the novel under analysis, I will focus mainly on the characters of Lipsha and Henry. Henry presents the impossibility of fitting into the society again when he returns from the Vietnam War; by contrast, Lipsha shows the opportunity to evolve and change into something better within an American native community, inspiring others to follow his steps.

4. Analysis of the Traumatic Chapter “The Red Convertible”

Going deeper into the analysis of the novel, I want to focus on “The Red Convertible,” one specific chapter where Henry is the protagonist. The chapter has that name due to the importance of a red car. Besides, the episode is centered around that element and the story of Henry once he has returned from the Vietnam War. It is narrated from the point of view of Henry’s brother—Lyman Lamartine—in retrospection; then, we know the story once it has already happened.

The chapter recounts how the brothers got the car and how happy they were that summer before Henry went to Vietnam. They went to Alaska because they met a girl, Susy, and enjoyed the experience. Then, Henry went to fight in the Vietnam War with the North American army. While Henry was in there, everything changed. There was no good communication between the brothers, for according to Lyman, “he wasn’t such a

hot letter writer” (Erdrich 185). That created fragmentation, and a lack of communication, because, on the one hand, Lyman sent some letters to Henry informing him of what was going on at home, and on the other, he ignored whether the letters had reached his brother or not. Lyman wrote about the car as if it was everything they had in all of them. However, Henry hardly ever answered; maybe he experienced nostalgia for being far away from home or perhaps he could not find the words to express the terrible experience he went through in Vietnam. The car is the element that brings the brothers together, and it is the linking element between both; Lyman explicitly says: “I owned that car along with my brother Henry Junior” (181). Furthermore, the car is mentioned 31 times throughout the chapter using various terms such as "convertible," "car," and "vehicle." Then, the huge influence the car has in the chapter is noticeable. For Lyman, it seems to remind him of the happy moments the brothers lived when they could afford it, and he tries to go back to them. It is possible that Lyman wrote about the car to remind Henry where home was. For example, the chapter starts with, “I was the first one to drive a convertible on my reservation” (181). It is a very revealing beginning because the reader might deduce that they are not poor Natives but rich enough to afford the ownership of a car.

When Henry returned from combat, he was quiet and alone. There are examples like “he was eating his blood mixed in with the food” (Erdrich 187), representing his transformation and disassociation. Henry does not have words to refer to the atrocities he has seen in combat. The traumatic experience has blocked his mind, and he cannot readapt into his native society. Besides, he hurt himself “He’d bitten through his lip” (187). Sometimes, when a victim does not feel any pain or relief as a consequence of the incredible experience, the victim has to self-hurt to know he or she is alive. The family also faced the problem of the impossibility of carrying Henry to a hospital because doctors considered that people with those symptoms were out of their minds, so that, the family

avoided going with Henry to the hospital because “They don’t fix them in those places” (187). It is a direct consequence of the lack of a proper attention to trauma at the moment. Therefore, there was no possible treatment to heal and diminish the direct consequences and pain available for the victims. It was widespread for veterans who returned from the war to face the consequence of what they had seen and social rejection due to their atrocities against the Vietnamese. Then, Henry has to face Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a direct consequence of having witnessed the violence in Vietnam and the trauma of being a Native. He fought in the war to defend the United States, but he was met with disdain when he returned home since he did not belong to the “American” community but a Native population.

Lyman is always trying to keep his brother happy and entertained. Then, he broke the car to have Henry occupied and try to offer him a source of healing due to the fact that doctors could not help him. The symbolic element of the car, apart from giving the title to the chapter and being the linking element with the pleasant past, is red, and the color also has its importance because it can be linked to a premonition statement. They went to the river, and it was the “Red River because Henry wanted to see the high water” (Erdrich 190). The color of the car matches the color of the river; then, a connection can be drawn between the two. We know the convertible will be submerged in the river in the end, so the color might indicate what was going to be the destiny of the car. In connection to the flow of water, Henry is fascinated by it, which has traditionally signified the flow of life. Water does not cease flowing in a river; it is continually moving and changing, just like life. Despite being in the exact location, the circumstance never is the same. It can be seen as a metaphor for what Henry misses because he is breathing and eating, but he is disconnected from that flow and sense of life.

Lyman knew that he could not help Henry “I know it. I can’t help it. It’s no use” (Erdrich 191). He had a mental disease that could only be solved by Henry. As explained before, a traumatic experience has to be shared and understood by others so that it can be ordered and assimilated linearly. There is an attempt because Lyman says: “We start talking” (191), but it is not to talk about what happened in combat or understand what is going on in Henry’s mind. “He said he wanted to give the car to me for good now” (191). Besides, Henry adds: “Take good care of it” (192) as a kind of a farewell. After solving the damage that Lyman had done to the car, Henry wanted Lyman to own it. In addition, Lyman describes Henry’s gaze as “his eyes are full of tears” (191). The younger brother does not recognize Henry. Since he returned from the war, it seems that he has turned into ultimately another person. He is even aware of his difficulties in readapting into society, and he does not want to tie his brother to his painful and unsustainable situation. He knows he cannot continue with his life, but he wants the others to do it. The two brothers share a moment together “We drink all the rest of the beers” (192). It is another consequence of having lived a traumatic experience and suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; there is no measure when referring to alcohol or addictions such as sex or drugs. Victims of trauma look for external healing for their internal wounds.

While the two brothers are on the river shore, Henry jumps into it. The day is getting dark, and some water fills Henry’s boots. Lyman tries to rescue him, but he cannot; “He’s gone” (Erdrich 193). When the reader is immersed in the latter portion of the chapter, it is possible to imagine that Lyman abandoned Henry to die because he was aware that Henry was displaced in his life and that he had no possibility of living. Lyman does not make a great effort to rescue his brother, but it is more like he had left Henry to rest; he did not call for more help. Afterwards, Lyman throws the car into the water while

it is already dark as his brother had gone. Lyman prefers not to have the car but his brother.

Although the chapter is very short, it summarizes and represents the consequences of living a traumatic experience. The events happen very quickly. The climatic moment of the chapter is narrated in less than a page. However, it is full of symbolic elements: the sunlight, the river, and the car. First of all, the sunlight went with the events because when Henry jumped, “It’s getting dark” (Erdrich 193). Lyman stopped looking for his brother in the river, “The sun is down” (193). And when Lyman threw the car into the water, “it was all finally dark” (193). So, the events go with nature. They were together in the evening, but they ended up alone in the night. The day was over, and the night could be linked to death. The river also plays an important role because, as I have mentioned before, water flowed in a river usually means the flow of life. However, Henry got stuck, and despite life going on, he could not adapt to it and decided to put an end to his suffering. Henry died drowning, and it was the worst way to die for a Chippewa because it was believed that he would not go to heaven and the next life. Some observers believe Henry's suicide depicts society's decadence and disintegration (Stirrup 66). However, when Lyman thrown the convertible into the water can be seen as a way of evolution. Lyman did not want to have that element that joined the two brothers together, but he preferred Henry to have it with him. If Lyman had not gotten rid of the car, he would not have been able to continue with his life. This last statement is one possible explanation for the end of the chapter. However, as exposed before, *Love Medicine* is a novel that requires an active role of the reader, and more than one interpretation of an event is allowed. Indeed, there is no more information about what happened with Lyman after that chapter. Although this explanation is personal to the reader that has read the novel, there is an explicit glimpse of hope in the last chapter of the novel, that is the case of Lipsha.

5. Relations between the Chapters of the Novel

Apart from the content of the chapters, also the titles announce what is going to happen and are also connected. There is one chapter that is called “The Bridge.” It may refer to the bridge between Vietnam and America when Henry returned from war. Then, it is followed by the one analyzed before, “The Red Convertible,” when Henry commits suicide a year later of his arrival so that he could not cross that bridge and adapt to the American society again. Finally, the last chapter that is also related with the previous ones, it is called “Crossing the Water.” Crossing the river means the possibility to evolve from the traditions of the Native community and mark a new beginning. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the connections between the various chapters give an evolution in the lives of some Native characters. With the first chapter, the reader is able to know how the arrival of Henry into his homeland was; and, with the last one, an evolution is drawn through the character of Lipsha because he manages to cope with his surroundings and fight for his free will of living his own life.

In “The Bridge,” a heterodiegetic narrator recounts Henry’s arrival from the Vietnam war. He met Albertine, and they went for a walk and to have a drink. Henry presented some consequences of having lived such a shocking experience, for example, “He smoked” (Erdrich 171), and “He was drunker than she was” (174). Again, they are external factors and attempts to dissuade the intrusive thoughts that led him to Vietnam once and again. Besides, there are a few instances of Albertine’s thoughts written in italics in the chapter. One of them is “*He is out of his mind*” (175). She was afraid of him because he became very violent. In addition, later on, she also mentioned, “*He was talking to himself*” (177). So, they are representations of the real situation Henry was suffering. He is even unable to stay in the darkness, he cannot sleep without having a light on “I’m going to leave the light on if that’s okay with you” (178). He was utterly unadapted to

live in America again because his mind was blocked and dissociated from what was happening. To end this chapter, Henry and Albertine try to have a sexual encounter, but he cannot do it because any woman reminds him of a Vietnam woman. In addition, “Her fear excited him so much” (178). Then, he uses Albertine as another way of relieving his anguish. So, he constantly received flashbacks of the awful events he had in combat, and he tried to solve that situation with external elements and actions. It is narrated in a very fragmented style with short sentences and no linking words. The reader has to build the entire meaning of the encounter. Even at the end of that episode, there is a premonition of what will happen: “he thought of diving of a riverbank, a bridge. He closed his eyes and saw the water” (179). After analyzing the chapter “The Red Convertible” we know that it is what happened to Henry, so there is other evidence of the connection between the different chapters in the novel.

Finally, the last chapter of the novel is called “Crossing the Water.” Here we are presented with a glimpse of hope in the story with Lipsha, the protagonist. He marks an evolution ten years later of Henry’s event, and he represents a new generation of the Native community. He did not want to enroll in the army because he witnessed the fatal consequences the soldiers suffered when they return home “If I went in the army, and then if I got lucky enough to come out, I would be a veteran like these guys” or even he will become “drug addicts” (Erdrich 339). Furthermore, he is aware that someone is reading him because he directly addresses to the reader by using the personal pronoun “you”: “As you know, as I have told you” (341). He wants to advise the reader of the consequences of the war he witnessed so as not to repeat history. Besides, he knows Albertine, “The one girl I ever trusted, Albertine” (364), the character in the chapter mentioned before. Then, there is another connection between the chapters. Finally, in this case, Lipsha gets to know his real identity by discovering who his parents are. The mother

was June, the absent central character in the novel mentioned before that acts as a collective spirit in the story. So, this last chapter illustrates the circularity of the novel because a cycle is ended. It starts and ends with the collective quality of June but implying a progression. Lipsha is the character who can cross the water, marking an evolution of the native community and Henry because he can do so thanks to the discovery of his true identity and roots. He managed to explain his past and find some answers to his personal worries, so that, he can leave the community and start a new life as individual. The text wonderfully exemplifies it: "I stopped the car in the middle of the bridge" (366). It alludes to the figure of Henry that he could not cross the bridge and to what Lipsha is leaving behind. And the last hopeful sentence of the novel is: "There was nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home" (367). Lipsha manages to find his true identity, reorganize his past and evolve to start a new life. The questions related to his origins that chased him, are finally solved, so that, he finds a collective healing. He luckily found the way to heal his wounds, thanks to that, he realizes that he cannot be rooted in the past but to overcome that situation and evolve into something better. As he could get rid of the burden of his past, he became a free man that can fly from home to pursue his individual happiness and self-realization. Then he can serve as an example to future generations that it is permissible to deviate from established norms and traditions.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, with Henry's experience once he returned from war, I have explained the everyday situation a native must face when established in American society again. Minority groups have always been affected by discrimination. They have been suffering oppression and rejection because of their culture and traditions. The existence of the collective character in the novel helps to portray the importance of the community in

Native society. Each member had to carry out a duty so that, they could manage to live without depending on the mainstream culture. As a result, all of them were necessary to the life of the rest of the group. To do so, there were a series of traditions to fulfill and the differences between the generations were imperceptible since as they were rooted in the past the history was repeated once and again. Any deviant individual marked a disruption in the role of the society, for that reason the attention to the singular members, was not the interest of the community. However, it is noticeable by analyzing the book that individuals also matter. If traumas are not healed, they are inherited by further generations. So, putting the experience into words helps to organize the thoughts and reduce the harmful effects it may cause on the victim.

The novel's complex structure demands paying attention to what happens in the different chapters. There has been disagreement about the structure of the book, whether it is a collection of short stories or a novel with 18 chapters, but after examining it, a relationship between the events is created, allowing for a progression. There are different narrative voices that narrate the events, requiring constant reinterpretation of them. Because of this, it is a highly challenging reading experience, but it is also quite appealing. The focus of my analysis was on the traumatized mind of Henry. He was trapped in his thoughts, and he could not adapt to his life after his experience in Vietnam, so he preferred to put an end to it. Henry sought external healing for his internal wounds, but as it has been exposed all along the dissertation, it is not the solution. The first step to recover from that pain is try to understand what happened in order to organize the thoughts, try to assimilate it and continue with one's life. Lyman wanted to help Henry, but he could not. By contrast, the correlation with other chapters, show us that it is not the only possible ending for a traumatized person. Apart from knowing other consequences Henry suffered when he arrived to America in his encounter with Albertine, there is also the case of

Lipsha. He managed to cross the water, to refuse the Army proposal and to find his true identity. With all of that he was totally able to fly from the traditional community and start a new life due to his concerns about the past were solved.

The novel's progression then leads to the conclusion that love is ultimately what matters. It depicts how Natives with the strength of love and—as previously mentioned—time and having someone who listens to the victim, may recover from their collective trauma. It is not possible to change what happened in the past, but it is important to progress and avoid being trapped on in. For that reason, Lipsha represents a character to emulate due to his courage. He fought find some solutions to his internal concerns. Doing so, he grew and improved his life, fighting for what he wanted to get.

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