

Tracks Study Guide

Tracks by Louise Erdrich

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Plot Summary

Nanapush, an older Native American, is sharing the past with Lulu, also Native American, in hopes of preventing her from making mistakes. He begins talking about 1912, and how natives are dying, and whites are trying to buy their land. After her parents die, He and Pukwan rescue a sick Fleur Pillager from her family's cabin. Nanapush helps her bury her family. They mourn for their lost families, but Father Damian, a priest on the reservation, revives them. Even though Nanapush asks her to stay with him, Fleur wants to go home, despite knowing the land is in danger. Having lost her mother and sisters, mixed-blood Pauline lives with her aunt Regina and Dutch. Pauline, who is suspicious of Fleur and her magical powers, works with Fleur in a butcher shop in Argus. Fleur keeps winning card games with men who work there, and they attack her. In retaliation, Fleur causes a storm that destroys the areas associated with her. The men are found dead in a locker, but Pauline reveals she locked the door.

After Argus, Fleur comes back pregnant. She meets and lives with Eli Kashpaw, much to her mother Margaret's dismay. Fleur gives birth to a girl named Lulu. Nanapush gives her his name and names her after his dead daughter. Nanapush tells adult Lulu how they try to fight starvation and losing their land. After Argus, Pauline hates living with Regina and Dutch who is sick because of Argus. She lies to Bernadette Morrissey and gets to stay with her and her family on their farm. She helps Bernadette with the dead. She starts going to Mass where she sees Margaret and Lulu. She is obsessed with Eli and Fleur, but after they pay her no attention, she turns to Napoleon, Bernadette's brother. With Fleur's cousin Moses' help, she bewitches Eli and Bernadette's daughter Sophie to get together. As a result, Sophie has a breakdown in Fleur's yard, and Fleur is distant from Eli for a while until Nanapush tells him how to win her back. The statue of the Virgin appears at Sophie's breakdown, and Pauline has a religious transformation. Nanapush and Margaret grow closer, and they are attacked by Clarence, Bernadette's son, and Lazarre for the Eli-Sophie incident and other matters. Fleur gets her own revenge on Clarence and Lazarre. Nanapush and Nector, Margaret's son, try to snare Clarence, but they have mercy on him.

Pauline learns she is pregnant by Napoleon, and Bernadette stops her from getting rid of the baby. Bernadette has to force the child out of Pauline and agrees to keep the baby who is named Marie. Pauline goes to the convent and punishes herself in the name of religion. She tries to convert those at Fleur's, but is unsuccessful. Fleur become pregnant again, and the baby's father is a mystery. Pauline is there when Fleur loses the baby and is involved with Fleur's magic. Nanapush helps heal Lulu after she gets frostbite from running to get help while Fleur is losing the baby. Those at Fleur's are starving and behind in their land payments. Fleur's cousin Moses helps Nanapush to cure a despondent Fleur, but Pauline interferes with trying to save them. Pauline is burned. She recovers from her injuries at the convent and has a religious struggle. She has a breakdown as she floats in Nanapush's boat on Lake Matchimanito. After coming back to shore, she thinks she is confronting the lake monster, who she thinks has always helped Fleur and may have been the father of her second child. It turns out she murdered Napoleon, and she runs back to the convent. After recuperating from her



breakdown, she becomes a nun and gets a new name, Leopolda, and is going to teach at a Catholic school in Argus.

Nanapush thinks Nector and Margaret paid for all their land but learns there was enough money for only Margaret's land. Eli tries to get Fleur to marry him and live at his mother's, but Fleur refuses. She is accused of murdering Napoleon, and it is a certainty she will lose her home. Before she leaves, Fleur gets revenge on the men from the lumber company with her magic. She sends Lulu to boarding school to protect her. Nanapush finally gets involved with the government and is able to take Lulu away from the school with Margaret.



Chapter 1, Nanapush

Chapter 1, Nanapush Summary

Nanapush talks about the conditions of his Native American tribe in North Dakota. He is considered an elder although he is only fifty years old. Nanapush is talking to someone he calls Granddaughter about how he saves her mother, Fleur Pillager. Fleur recuperates and bonds with Nanapush over their dead families. When the weather permits, Fleur and Nanapush bury the dead Pillagers. Nanapush makes the clan markers, which is the symbol of a bear. Back at Nanapush's place, Nanapush and Fleur suffer from their losses. The new priest, Father Damian, interrupts them. He says that Fleur's cousin Moses has been found alive in the woods. Fleur and Nanapush are startled by his visit, but they are hospitable to their guest. The food and drink energizes Nanapush, and he talks nonstop with the priest in both of his languages. While he talks, Fleur leaves. Nanapush notes the foolish actions of those who sold their land for food. Others are determined to keep their land. Despite opposition, outsiders measure the lake where the lake monster Misshepesu lives. Nanapush tries to get Fleur to stay with him, but she will not. She lives in her family's cabin. Agents from the government, who visit her to collect money, are banished to the woods and gamble with ghosts. Being by herself, Fleur's survival is a mystery. He notes with regret that those wagons, which make it back from Fleur's, are loaded with logs taken from her land.

Chapter 1, Nanapush Analysis

Nanapush introduces the plight of his Native American tribe. Nanapush and his tribe are fighting for their land. Nanapush is an elder even though he is only fifty. Back then, people did not live as long. He has lost his family, and he connects with Fleur because she has also lost hers. She is like a daughter to him, and he does not want her staying in her family's cabin. The themes of magic, religion, and Native American traditions appear. The fate of the government agents is a magical event that cannot be explained. Fleur is set up as a mysterious character who may have extraordinary powers. Nanapush is speaking to someone he calls granddaughter whose mother is Fleur. Nanapush has disdain for those who work for the government, including people from his tribe.

Nanapush believes in spirits and the lake monster, but he is knowledgeable about the real reasons for the tribe's downfall. Windigo, a Native American ghost, is mentioned a couple of times. Nanapush is trying to hold on to his heritage through using his language, making the offering and markers, and lamenting about the destruction of the land. By saving the last Pillager, he is trying to hold on to his people. The appearance of Father Damian is a foreshadowing of the influence the Catholic Church tries to have over the tribe.



Chapter 2, Pauline

Chapter 2, Pauline Summary

Pauline says that Fleur drowns for the first time when she is a child. Another time, Fleur washes up from the lake when she is fifteen. The men that are there die soon after. After these incidents, men are wary of Fleur. People think the lake monster Misshepesu desires her. It is hoped Fleur will be good, but after her recuperation with Nanapush, she becomes strange. Pauline is intimidated by her mysticism, which includes her tracks turning into animal paws. Pauline thinks the tall steeple of the Catholic Church in the town of Argus attracts Fleur, who gets work in the butcher shop. Pete Kozka is the owner, and Lily Vedder, Tor Grunewald, and Dutch James, are the employees. Pauline says she met Dutch through her Aunt Regina Puyat Kashpaw, who has a son named Russell. Pauline lives with them while working at the butcher shop. She says the Puyats are mixed-bloods. Pauline discusses how she tries to embrace her white roots by not speaking the native language and asking her father if she can go to the white town. She talks about how she and Russell work in the shop, and how he, unlike her, is not jealous of white girls. Pauline lost her mother and sisters and dreams about them. She goes to Fleur for female company. Fleur would not talk about what happened. Pauline describes herself as being plain-looking and being by herself at fifteen. Her invisibility allows her to know what happens. Pauline describes how Fleur and another woman named Fritzie work together. She discusses how she and Russell spend their time in the lockers. The men from work play cards there.

Fleur wears an old, green dress and has braids. Pauline says they are only "half-tamed" and that others do not see how dangerous Fleur is with her sharp teeth. Nobody except Pauline knows about her drowning. How Fleur plays cards makes her attractive to the men. Women did not usually play cards with men. Lily questions her after she approaches them. He has an angry dog. Pauline and Russell are hiding. Pauline notices how expertly Fleur handles the cards. Fleur wants Pauline to give her money for the game. Pauline gives her eight cents and again notices how invisible she is. Fleur starts to win more money. Pauline falls asleep on the floor and wakes up to find Fleur placing her and Russell in a closet where they can be more comfortable while the games continue. Pauline wins her money back along with extra. They play for seven days, and Fleur wins a dollar in every game, which is strange to Pauline. The men become serious, and Pete joins the game. Fleur loses hands, but she always wins a dollar. Lily wants to break her dollar-winning streak. Fritzie gives Fleur a black umbrella and lets her stay in the smokehouse on the property. Pauline feels closer to Fleur after Fleur took her to the closet and she stays close to Fleur so she can be protected.

Pete and Fritzie leave to escape the heat. During the next month, Fleur wins thirty dollars, and Pete protects her from Lily. One hot day, after Pete leaves, Lily starts a game and wants to up the ante. Fleur has five dollars, and the men have money from their pay. Later, Lily wants everybody to show their cards. When Lily sees Fleur's cards, he is mad. Fleur collects the money with her "wolf grin." She puts the bills in her dress



and the coins in paper. Lily says in a harsh voice that he wants to play again. Fleur leaves to feed the hog. Lily takes a drink of whiskey and gives the bottle to the other men. Pauline and Russell are hiding behind the stock pen where the men are. Fleur is tending to the pig when Lily attacks her. With her coins falling out of the paper, she gets away as the pig attacks Lily. After Lily gets away from the pig, the rest of the men join him chasing Fleur. All Pauline can hear is Fleur talking in the old language and saying their names repeatedly. The next morning, Fleur is no longer there. Pauline goes outside to look for Russell. It is windy, cold, and raining. Russell comes to her. The men have left the building, which begins shaking. Pauline thinks everyone is in the lockers for safety. Russell cries out, and a dog barks from inside the lockers. There is silence and then a loud cry. Russell struggles with putting the bar down on the door. Pauline cannot remember if she helps. Russell and Pauline are blown away. The town of Argus is destroyed.

There is property damage; the church steeple has been torn off and the butcher shop destroyed, but everyone appears all right. Pete and Fritzie return to devastation; the rooms where they live are fine. Fleur's smokehouse and stock pen have been destroyed. Fritzie asks about Fleur, but no one knows her whereabouts. Then Fritzie asks about the men, and the search begins. Pauline, Russell, Pete, and Fritzie go inside the meat locker and find the three men and dog, frozen in place while they were playing cards. They are taken outside to thaw. Someone asks if they are dead, and they find Dutch has a heartbeat. Pauline leaves Russell, Regina, and Dutch in Argus. She is at home keeping to herself. Fleur is keeping to herself, too. It is rumored she marries the lake monster Misshepeshu, lives in sin with white men, or windigos, or she has murdered them. Pauline says she is Fleur's only visitor. She helps Fleur deliver her child. The baby has green eyes and brown skin. People wonder if the child is mixed, conceived in the smokehouse, or fathered by the lake monster.

Chapter 2, Pauline Analysis

The reader gets a different view with Pauline. She and Nanapush have different perspectives on Fleur. While Nanapush thinks of her as a daughter, Pauline is afraid of her and her mysterious ways. Also, Pauline wants to be white while Nanapush is proud of his heritage. Pauline rebuffs their ways while Nanapush feels he is losing everything. Pauline thinks of herself as plain while she sees Fleur as sinister. Pauline does try to connect with Fleur; they both have lost family members. However, Fleur's reluctance and her reputation get in the way.

Pauline believes in Fleur's mystical qualities, which is a theme. She thinks she has drowned and died and associates with the water monster. Pauline thinks Fleur is responsible for other people's deaths such as the men involved with her drowning, and the men at the butcher shop. Pauline believes Fleur uses animals in her rituals. The title of the novel refers to Fleur's animal-like hunting ability and leaving tracks. The Catholic Church is emphasized throughout the book. The destruction of the steeple is noted. This is part of the theme of religion as the Catholic Church tries to take over the reservation and ignores the native beliefs such as burying the dead in trees.



Because of Pauline's invisibility, she is able to be an observer of the events. Fleur seems to have performed magic on the card game, the pig, and the weather; she is speaking their names when she leaves. The storm only destroys what is negatively associated with Fleur. Pauline concentrates on the physical aspects of Fleur and the Pillagers. She mentions they are the bear clan, which is what Nanapush put on their grave markers. Fleur has a "bear cough." She grins like a wolf. Pauline does associate with Fleur after they go back home. Although she believes the stories about Fleur, she helps to deliver Fleur's baby who has her own mysterious qualities. Pauline may want to be in the white culture, but the native culture still holds her.



Chapter 3, Nanapush

Chapter 3, Nanapush Summary

Nanapush recalls that before the surveying and sickness, an elder like him had family members to help him. He was assured his name would be carried on. Nanapush refuses to tell his name to Father Damian, and the government agent for their records. The Captain, lumber president, tribal members, and the Agent try to get Nanapush to sell his land, but he will not. In not selling his land, he compares himself to the Pillagers. Nanapush says he was educated by the Jesuits; he can speak good English and write in script. He says his father gave him the name Nanapush because it is about "trickery and living in the bush." Although he is close to Fleur, she rebels against him. Fleur comes back wearing a green dress and hiding a secret. Nanapush notices the dress is tight. She has a black umbrella she uses for shade. Until Pauline comes back, they do not know about the bad things in the white town. Fleur's cousin Moses buys his and Fleur's supplies from the trading store. When Moses has money to spend, everyone knows Fleur is home. She pays the fee on the land. Nanapush says the Pillagers always traded with goods so he wonders how she got the money, which is more than summer earnings.

Fleur visits with Nanapush. He asks her what is wrong. She says she should not have left there. He says Pauline is saying things. Fleur tells him that Pauline is lying. Nanapush notes that Pauline is different from the other Puyats, who always kept to themselves. Nanapush says Pauline can talk as much as him, but he tries to be honest while she embellishes. He thinks her plainness makes her tell hurtful stories. People think there might be something wrong with her mentally. He mentions that Regina sent her back when she acted strangely. People are prepared to wait nine months for Fleur's rumored baby, but with the arrival of Eli Kashpaw things change. Eli does not have much in common with his father and younger brother, Nector, because he does not get involved in business, politics, or religion. Eli makes money by outdoor activities. He asked Nanapush to teach him how to hunt because Nanapush feels a connection to animals and is a good tracker. Eli learned how to hunt when he was little, and at fifteen, he feels at home in the woods. He is not comfortable around people, especially women. Eli wants Nanapush to teach him about women since Nanapush had three wives. Eli talks about Fleur and how she lures him with a deer. Nanapush is skeptical. Eli describes Fleur as having a ragged dress that showed no curves except for her chest.

Nanapush wonders about this and confirms with Eli that she did not look pregnant. Nanapush says he is protected from Fleur because of his ties to her family and that she is like a daughter to him. Eli frowns and says she did not seem so bad. Nanapush asks what he wants since he came away unharmed. Eli says he wants her. He tells Eli he has to control his urges or go to town and get a nice woman. Eli disagrees. Nanapush notices how grown-up Eli seems and thinks Fleur does need taming even though he doubts Eli. Nanapush decides to instruct him about love by talking about his own experiences with his wives. He cannot talk about his dead daughter whose nickname is



Lulu, but he does give Eli a doll and other items of hers. Eli goes to Fleur and gives her some of Nanapush's things. Margaret, Eli's mother, is worried about her son, with Fleur. An older woman with braids, Margaret visits Nanapush. She asks him if he wants to know what he has gotten her son into. Nanapush tries to read the newspaper. She hits at the paper but does not touch it because she has never learned to read and does not want the tracks on her skin. She wants to know how Eli learned to have sex standing up. Nanapush interrupts and wants to know how she knows about that. She says that Boy Lazarre told her. He smiles and wants to know how much she paid him. They argue, and she leaves.

Nanapush wonders if Fleur uses her own magic to attract Eli. Boy Lazarre's speech becomes muddled. It is thought that Fleur hexed him. Margaret comes back and wants Nanapush to take her to Fleur's by boat. She walks into the Pillager woods and returns, throwing a little tobacco in the water and says a few words. As they go back in the boat, Margaret must bail water constantly and is heard talking to Manitou and the Heart of the Blessed Virgin. Nanapush remembers Margaret has a bad picture of the Blessed Virgin. They go to his house. Margaret has determined Fleur is pregnant, due in the spring. Margaret has to take action to get her son back. She has to find dirt, and she sets out food and dishes. Pauline comes to Margaret's. Nanapush is there too, eating. As Pauline eats and drinks, she talks. She tells about how she knows Fleur. She tells about the butcher shop, cards, and the smokehouse. Nanapush does not think she is telling the truth. Margaret is surprised about how Fleur got the money. After Pauline's revelations, Margaret says Pauline was right to talk about Fleur. Pauline seems happier after telling the story. She is seen leaving Communion with a relieved look. Her burden is on Margaret now.

Margaret does not view it as a burden but as a puzzle. Margaret counts the months of Fleur's pregnancy and remembers she had been home a month before attracting Eli with her magic. Margaret is sure Eli is not the father and waits for the baby's birth for confirmation. Margaret thinks the baby will have pig hooves and other marks. Fleur seduced the men and then killed them for fun. This should make a man stay away from her. Margaret thinks she can bring Eli back, but Nanapush is skeptical. Nanapush explains to the listener that Margaret is not going to surrender. Her older children had moved away, and Nector is going to school, so she has to rely on Eli. Fleur needs Margaret's help and sends Pauline to Margaret's door. She tells her Fleur is about to deliver. Nanapush tells the listener to listen because this part concerns her. Fleur is having trouble with the delivery. On the boat to Fleur's, Margaret says she is helping, not because Fleur is family, but because she wants to see if baby looks like she thought. Nanapush tells her she will not look like Margaret thought.

While in labor, Fleur sees a mysterious bear come into the house. Fear and power make her give birth. The bear was never found and left no trail so it could have been a spirit. Fleur is doing poorly after the birth, but thanks to Margaret's help, she revives and nurses the baby. Nanapush tells his listener how she got to be a Nanapush. Margaret has Father Damian baptize the baby outside, without Fleur's knowing. When she hears Fleur, she takes the baby inside. The priest wants to know the father's name for the records. Nanapush gives the priest his name, and names the girl Lulu.



Chapter 3, Nanapush Analysis

Nanapush begins and ends the chapter talking about his name. At the beginning, he conceals his name from white men and laments about having no one to carry his name on. At the end, he gives his dead daughter's name and his name to Fleur's baby because of the mystery of her paternity and his need to continue his name. Fleur's daughter Lulu is the listener to Nanapush's story. Nanapush is giving her the history of her mother, their tribe, and the story of her birth. The reader sees Fleur after the events in Argus. She has the umbrella Fritzie gave her, which shows up throughout the book. As Pauline told the reader about the events in Argus, she tells Margaret and Nanapush about them. These events make Margaret speculate about the baby's paternity and appearance. The money is also a mystery. Nanapush is wary of Pauline because of how she acts and her story about Fleur.

Fleur's magic, which is a theme, shows up in several instances. She is thought to control the lake man. She uses a deer to attract Eli. The appearance of the bear represents Fleur's clan marker. A reminder of her family prompts her to give birth and to continue the family bloodline. Nanapush again shows his pride for his traditions, which is another theme by revering land over money. Besides hiding his name from the white man and his love for the land, Nanapush displays his native pride in other ways. He teaches Eli how to hunt. He shares with Eli the native tokens of his past. Even his storytelling is a Native American tradition.

With the secret baptism of the baby, a third theme, religious conflict, is introduced. Margaret, who believes in the native religion and the Catholic one, wants the baptism, while Fleur does not. From Fleur's personality and the damage to the Catholic Church steeple during the storm, she seems to be devoted to her native roots. Pauline is becoming more involved with the Catholics by participating in Communion. Even Nanapush, when the baby is about to be born, hears Manitous, a native belief. Although Nanapush loves Fleur like a daughter, he is unsure about her and when Eli shows an interest in her, at first he resists. Eli and his brother are contrasted with Eli sticking more to his roots, like Fleur, and Nector becoming involved in activities outside the tribe. Moses is like Fleur and Eli by holding on to the native ways.

Although Nanapush wants to hold on to his heritage, he is set apart by his education and ability to write. One of the conflicts of his relationship with Margaret is that he can read and she cannot. She does not like the tracks of the newspaper, which is a reference to the title. They are in disagreement about Fleur and tease each other about sex-related subjects, but their age and quick wit are bonding them. Margaret is uneasy about Fleur and opposes her union with Eli, but at the baby's delivery, with native remedies she helps Fleur.



Chapter 4, Pauline

Chapter 4, Pauline Summary

In her dreams, Pauline is haunted by the men in Argus. Since Regina has Dutch, Pauline is anxious to escape. She gets her chance with the arrival of Bernadette Morrissey, a widow, and her brother Napoleon. Pauline notes that they are well off, mixed-bloods who have acquired land. Napoleon is single, but has a drinking problem; however, he is admired as a good Catholic for taking in his sister and her three children, Clarence, Sophie, and Philomena. Pauline lies to Bernadette and tells them she is abused at Regina's and has to do rough chores. Bernadette tells her that she will have to work hard in her home, but she will not be abused. Pauline thinks God will reward Bernadette.

Bernadette knows how to handle finances which she does while dealing with the dead. Napoleon flirts with Pauline, but she ignores him because he is older and does not seem to offer much because of his drinking and she does not want to upset Bernadette. She says the dreams had stopped until she tells her story to Margaret Kashpaw. Her dreams include Fleur and the storm, putting the bar on the door, and the men's attack on Fleur. Pauline dreads sleep because the dreams make her kick in bed, which hurt Sophie and Philomena. Bernadette puts Pauline in the corner so she can sleep alone. Bernadette feels sorry for Pauline so she gives her a dream catcher. Pauline hangs it up with her cross, but the dreams still come. She does not sleep until after Mary Pepewas dies. On the way to Mary's, the call of Kokoko, an owl, makes Bernadette and Pauline cross themselves. At the Pepewas house, Mary has lung sickness. Pauline sits with Mary as Bernadette is elsewhere. Pauline is half-asleep until she notices the change in Mary. Pauline compares her dying to being in a boat, roped to shore. Pauline sees that she wants to die, and cuts the rope with her fingers. Mary lets go. Pauline lets the others know about her death. The death makes her feel free like a bird in a tree. After this, Pauline feels different. She wears the nun's old clothes and follows in "Bernadette's tracks." She learns how to prepare the dead. The dead are put into the ground, praying if they are Christians, and on the death road of the Old Ones, with extras shoes, if they are unconverted.

Pauline describes Fleur's daughter, Lulu. She compares her eyes to the monster's, but admits she has the Kashpaw nose. Pauline says she is pretty, with Fleur's thick black hair and sharp teeth, which she got early. After fighting with Eli about staying with Fleur, Margaret concedes because of her granddaughter. She and Nector stay there for days, and Nanapush tells them the town news. Pauline says they are like a family with the old and new including the old religion and the new religion. Margaret goes to Mass with Lulu. Pauline visits Fleur's cabin, and yet feels unwelcome by them. Pauline notices Fleur and Eli stay apart more when she is there as if she has lied about them. Pauline says they do not have to touch for her to see the chemistry between them. She becomes preoccupied with them. This arouses Fleur and she realizes she needs a husband. Pauline sees Napoleon in a new light. They try to make love, but nothing



happens. After he leaves, she fantasizes about what she wants to happen. She thinks about them having sex like wild animals. Clarence tells her Napoleon has gone to the south to sell horses. She tells him he will be back. Clarence is unbelieving, and Pauline thinks she should have gone after him, but she thinks she is too plain. She wants to tell Clarence that she could get Napoleon back, but she finds she is indifferent. A year goes by, and she is still helping Bernadette. She does jobs on her own. Wearing black clothes, she goes before priests. She does think about

Napoleon and goes to the Pillager place, hoping to see Eli and Fleur. One day, Fleur dismisses Pauline after a game of cards. Pauline is attracted to Eli. She tries to touch him, but he resists. Angrily, she leaves, wanting him.

Pauline is sleeping with Bernadette's daughters again because she does not dream anymore. She does dream of Eli, and how they almost connected. She notices how nice fourteen-year-old Sophie looks with her good body. Pauline starts observing Sophie during the day and formulates a plan. Pauline wonders what it would be like to be in Sophie's body. Pauline buys material with her own money and makes a clingy dress for Sophie, which pleases her. Bernadette does not notice Pauline and Sophie because she runs the farm and is supervising Napoleon, who is back. She gets Bernadette to agree to hire Eli for the farm. She goes to Fleur who is at the lake with Lulu. Fleur is holding the umbrella. She casually asks Fleur about Eli and says how he can work at the Morrisseys. Fleur is on to her though. Fleur tells Eli and he goes to the Morrissey house. Pauline gets medicine from Moses. The medicine is made of roots, crane's bill, Sophie's nails, and something else, which Pauline will put it in Eli's lunch.

One afternoon, she sees Eli walk into the yard. His look makes Sophie turn away and leave. Eli looks at her and does not see Pauline. After he leaves, Pauline tells Sophie about Eli's look. She notes that it is simple because Sophie is so gullible. Every day, Pauline makes Eli's food with the medicine that causes desire. Pauline is happy with how everything is going, and Sophie is prepared when the time comes. Only Eli, Sophie, and Pauline are on the farm. Pauline puts some medicine in Eli's food. Sophie sees him coming and he leaves with the food. Pauline follows her and hides in the woods. She sees Eli eating and Sophie flirting. Pauline concentrates on Sophie and takes over her. Sophie sits on his chest, pulling up her skirt under which she wears nothing. He licks his lips and shakes his head. Pauline fears the medicine does not work.

However, Sophie puts candy in his mouth, and he runs his hands beneath her skirt. She trembles, and Pauline feels Sophie's emotions. They join together in the water. Pauline feels like she is controlling dolls. Pauline lets them stop later in the day. Eli goes for his pants and leaves, passing by Pauline. Sophie is dazed and gets out of the water. She calls after him, but Pauline responds by telling her she will get in trouble and to go to the house. Pauline has to pull her back home.

Pauline lies and tells Bernadette what she thinks happened, and Sophie confirms it. She later tells Bernadette she followed Sophie, but was too late. Acting ashamed, she says when she called from the woods, Eli left. Later, Pauline hears her beating Sophie with a



strap. Pauline can feel it like she felt Sophie and Eli's coupling and Fleur's experiences in Argus. Bernadette wants to send Sophie to live with a childless and religious aunt who lives next to a church. This is what Pauline wants. When Sophie leaves, she does not acknowledge them. Ten minutes from the house, Sophie jumps off the cart and goes to the Pillagers. Pauline thinks Fleur lured her there. She finds Sophie kneeling in Fleur's yard. She does not move or speak despite Pauline calling her name. Pauline pokes her, but Fleur tells her she does not have to do that. Pauline did not hear Fleur approach them. Fleur smiles, showing her teeth, and Pauline remembers her as the wolf from Argus, who took money from the men. Pauline convinces herself Sophie is partly at fault. She was an empty vessel for the devil, ready for temptation. Fleur tells Pauline, Eli is on the trap line. Pauline tells Fleur she saw Eli leaving the woods holding his pants and running away from Sophie. Fleur gives her a wide smile. Pauline does not think Fleur can hurt her despite what people say. Pauline tells her Eli is hiding. After trying to feed Sophie and putting a blanket over her, they go inside.

Sophie is on her knees again in the morning. Sophie does not move throughout the day even when Eli comes home. He is puzzled and goes inside to talk to Fleur. He tries to touch her, but she resists. He realizes what is happening and leaves. When Pauline arrives at the Morrisseys, she tells Clarence and Napoleon about Sophie, and they leave. Pauline later goes to Matchimanito. When the men see Sophie, they try to lift her. They are unable to, and they leave, passing by Pauline without speaking. Sophie is the same, and Pauline takes care of her. When Napoleon and Clarence go for the priest's help at church, Clarence sees the Virgin's statue and takes it. Pauline is close to Sophie when Clarence comes holding the statue. Clarence puts down the Virgin until the statue looks down at Pauline kneeling with Sophie. Pauline says she witnesses something along with Sophie. Pauline cannot remember what she prayed or what she felt. Pauline shares that she sees the first tear on the statue. More tears come even though her face stays the same. Sophie tries to get up, but she falls on the snow. Clarence picks her up. Pauline is kneeling, and she and the statue are looking at each other. Pauline picks up the hardened tears at her feet. She puts them in her pocket, but they melt on the way home. Pauline thinks about this for months.

Chapter 4, Pauline Analysis

The reader sees changes in Pauline in this chapter. As she initiates dangerous events, she is no longer the invisible observer. Fleur said in a previous chapter that Pauline lies, and her lies land her a place at the Morrissey farm and lead to Sophie's breakdown. Pauline reveals more about the events in Argus, with the men attacking Fleur and the mystery of who latched the door. The theme of Native American tradition appears in this chapter with the dream catcher and the love medicine. Pauline uses Catholicism as comfort, but she also uses death. It fulfills her to help Mary die. The job of helping the dead gives her a purpose. In learning about the job, she follows Bernadette's tracks, which refers to the title. However, her romantic life is lacking, and her feelings about this make her lash out at Fleur, Eli, and Sophie.



The religious theme is very strong in this chapter. Pauline undergoes a religious transformation as she is mesmerized by the statue and its tears. Pauline has been connected to Catholicism at the beginning of the book, and in this chapter, it is revealed she has a cross and nun's clothes, and she deals with the priest because of her job. Pauline has objected to native beliefs previously, but she still uses the dream catcher and love medicine. The preparing of the dead involves religious rituals such as burial in the praying stance. The dead Native Americans who are not Catholic are on the "death road of the Old Ones." They have shoes for the journey. Pauline describes Fleur's household as a mix of old and new religion. Margaret, who believes in both, takes Lulu to Mass.

Margaret's resentment of Fleur and Lulu is obvious, and she remarks about Lulu's teeth, which are like Fleur's. In a previous chapter, Pauline has talked about Fleur's sharp teeth, which are like a wolf's, and she says the same in this chapter. Her actions with Sophie and Eli are revenge against Fleur and Eli, who reject her. She attributes more magic to Fleur by saying she lured Sophie to her cabin. Yet Pauline practices her own magic on Eli and Sophie, by taking over Sophie's body, which she covets, and exerting her powers over them and believing she has power over Napoleon.



Chapter 5, Nanapush

Chapter 5, Nanapush Summary

Eli shows up at Nanapush's house. Eli wants Nanapush to feel sorry for him, but Nanapush refuses. Eli and Nanapush argue about Fleur. Nanapush has his own worries about the land. His people are losing it because of illiteracy. Nanapush remembers being a government interpreter until he tried to get another Indian not to give up his land. Nanapush lets Eli stay there. Nanapush asks how Fleur will get food. Eli says she can hunt. Six days go by, and Nanapush is tired of Eli. Nanapush gives him a gun on the seventh day. Eli leaves. After the snares appear useless, Nanapush lies down in his home. He darkens his face with charcoal. He slowly sings to his helpers until he unknowingly chants. Nanapush sees the tracks of Eli's snowshoes. He helps Eli kill a moose.

Eli butchers like Nanapush instructs him and attaches the meat to himself. He has a long walk ahead. With closed eyes, Nanapush gets his drum and pounds out footsteps for Eli to follow. When Eli returns, Nanapush cuts off the meat and stores it in the lean-to outside. Nanapush pulls Eli inside, warms him up, and they eat. Nanapush feels better after eating, and he can think clearly. Fleur ignores Eli for three days, and Eli desires her like the first time he saw her. Eli follows Fleur to the lake one night and sees her go into the water. He tries to save her but cannot find her. As he rests outside, he sees her walk past. Eli and Nanapush argue about what Fleur does at the lake. He and Fleur last coupled before he went to work for the Morrisseys. Nanapush asks if she is pregnant. Eli does not know, but it would not be his. Nanapush berates him about Sophie, especially after Nanapush teaches him how to woo Fleur.

Eli has dreamed the baby will look odd, scary with big eyes, and a split, black tail. Nanapush laughs and says Eli and his mother have wild imaginations. Nanapush says Fleur is trying to make him jealous and that Eli has to lower himself to win her back. He gives some meat to Nanapush and leaves some at Fleur's door. When at Fleur's, Eli does as Nanapush tells him by falling down, as if saddened. Eli reports Fleur laughed and called for him. After Mass, Margaret, Nanapush, and young Lulu go outside into the night and walk to Margaret's. They are aware of someone else on the road. The footsteps indicate two men, one a mixed-blood with his boots and an Indian, who walks quietly. The two are talking behind them.

The Indian is speaking gibberish, and Nanapush realizes it is Boy Lazarre, who spied on Fleur. He thinks the mixed-blood is Clarence Morrissey. The two had joined over selling land to a lumber company, and they want everybody else to sell too. Nanapush tells Margaret they should go to his house, which is closer, yet Margaret ignores him. The two men accost them. Lulu gets away while the men struggle with Margaret and Nanapush. He says they are old but fight as hard as they can. Margaret screams a battle cry of the old days and bites Boy Lazarre's hand and gives him an injury. Clarence knocks Nanapush out. When Nanapush awakens, he is tied to a pole in the



Morrissey barn. Margaret is tied to the stall. Nanapush tries to make a deal with the two men by asking them to let them go and promises they will not tell anyone about this. Nanapush understands the situation when Clarence says this concerns everything, selling the land, politics, Eli and Sophie. He knows Clarence will get revenge by hurting Margaret. Nanapush can tell by Lazarre that they will be hurt, so he tries again. He says hurting Margaret will be like hurting Fleur, and Fleur has powers to kill them. Lazarre points at his tongue, gets mad and takes out a razor. Clarence hits Nanapush, and he sees Lazarre go for Margaret with the blade before he passes out.

A few minutes later, he awakens to see Lazarre cutting Margaret's braids and shaving her head. Nanapush is unable to speak because her braids are tied around his mouth. Margaret and Nanapush leave later. Margaret has her shawl around her ears and calls for Lulu. Nanapush and Margaret go inside her home and find Lulu and Nector. After Margaret takes off her shawl, Nector asks about her hair. Nanapush takes her braids out of his pocket and says he got them when they let him go. Nanapush is embarrassed about not being able to fight. Margaret is happy he saved them. Nector wants to know who shaved her head. Nanapush tells him, and Nector vows revenge. Nanapush is grateful to Margaret for not saying anything about his weakness. She puts her braids in a box and tells Nector to bury them with her. Nanapush tells Nector they will have to fight together.

Nanapush has an idea for revenge when they take Lulu back to Fleur's. After Fleur finds out what happened to Margaret's head, she shaves off her own hair. She goes out to hunt and does not wait for night to conceal her tracks. Nanapush finds himself attracted to Margaret. He decides to teach Nector how to make snares. He and Nector take a wire from the priest's piano for the snare. Fleur puts bad-smelling powders in the Morrissey house, which terrorize Clarence and Lazarre. Lazzare speaks gibberish and cries for days. Fleur is killing him. He shows how bad Margaret's bite is on his hand. Nector and Nanapush set up the trap and watch from a tree. Clarence steps into the noose, but he is able to straddle the hole. Nanapush shows mercy for Clarence by not finishing the job and leaves. Nanapush is glad Clarence's mouth is misshapen because of the trouble Lazarre has getting him out of the snare. Lazarre's injury gets worse. Nanapush sees him when he buys Margaret a black bonnet. Nanapush and Margaret grow closer and develop a romance around the time of Lent. At church, Father Damian makes Nanapush go to confession after he makes an off-color remark about him and Margaret. Nanapush confesses about he and Margaret coupling, the snare, and the wire.

In town, Nanapush and Fleur see Lazarre. When he sees Fleur, he falls back. Fleur has drawn Lazarre in bark and made a red stain go to his heart. Nanapush can get nothing in his traps. He and Margaret eat until the moose gives out. Margaret wants Nanapush to live at her house where there is food. They argue and wind up insulting each other. She leaves, and he does not see her for a few weeks. He goes into a depression and does not eat. It takes Margaret an hour to wake Nanapush. She feeds him, and he feels better. Lulu is watching him and has patent leather dance shoes tied to her belt. Margaret says Eli gave them to her. Margaret says they are on her belt because they are too nice. He notices Lulu's and Margaret's faces are thin. Feeling sympathy, he



compliments Margaret. Until they go to Matchimanito, Margaret and Lulu stay with him. What Eli did with Fleur was successful, and things are better. Despite the lake monster, people ice fish, and they watch Fleur and Eli as a distraction.

Chapter 5, Nanapush Analysis

The results of Pauline's actions affect Nanapush when Eli shows up at his door. Eli tries to make Nanapush sorry for him, but Nanapush is disgusted and has other things on his mind. The Native American theme is pervasive as it is revealed that the white men are encroaching with the help of Indians like Clarence and Lazarre. Indians who want to keep their land are not only fighting the whites, but each other, as the conflict between the Pillagers and Morrisseys show. Of course, Pauline only increased the animosity by starting the Eli and Sophie incident. The cutting off of Margaret's braids is an insult to her heritage. Nanapush gets revenge using snares, which are normally used for hunting.

The natives are starving because of lack of food to hunt. Nanapush reveals he used to work for the government until he opposed a land sale. Nanapush fights starvation by sending Eli out to hunt. Earlier in the book, Nanapush says he taught Eli how to hunt. Nanapush further helps Eli by chanting and playing the drums to guide him to a successful kill. A title reference, tracks, is mentioned as part of Eli's hunting trip. Following tracks keeps him and Nanapush from starving. Fleur and Eli's reconciliation give the starving natives hope. Edrich uses the characters and their situations to show the plight of the natives at that time in history.

Margaret and Nanapush have been flirting with each other throughout the book, by joking and arguing and in this chapter, they get together. The religious theme of old religion versus new religion is shown in their relationship. Nanapush goes to Mass because of Margaret, even though he is not as religious. He is bold with the priest and even steals from him. The ups and downs of their relationship are shown. Nanapush is protective of Margaret when Clarence and Lazarre kidnap them. He gives her the bonnet to cover her head. Nanapush's lack of food and refusal to leave his home makes them argue, but they reconcile.

Fleur's magic is present in this chapter. Eli tries to minimize his mistake with Sophie by telling Nanapush about Fleur's dealings with the lake monster and how she might be pregnant by him. He gives an odd description of the baby like Margaret did with Lulu, and Nanapush notes this. Fleur uses magic to get back at Clarence and Lazarre by burning the house, taking things from their bodies, and etching Lazzare on wood, which kills him, with the help of Margaret's bite. Aside from the magic, the reader learns more about Fleur. She is a good hunter. She is very stubborn with Eli, until he humbles himself at Nanapush's request. She cuts off her hair to show solidarity with Margaret; their relationship has grown closer after a rocky start.



Chapter 6, Pauline

Chapter 6, Pauline Summary

Pauline's starvation makes her unsure when her baby is due. Bernadette keeps her from getting rid of the child. Bernadette and Pauline agree that Pauline should stay on the farm and wear concealing clothes. Pauline still thinks about terminating the pregnancy. Pauline says she knows her baby is a girl, and she will name her Marie, after the Virgin, even though the pregnancy was caused by the devil. The noise of the armistice bells makes her scream, and this noise signals the beginning of the birth. Pauline does not want to push for fear of being ostracized. A scared Bernadette calls her a fool and leaves the room and returns with makeshift forceps. She forces the child out of Pauline with the forceps. Pauline sees a dark being, which came from her and Napoleon's union. The spoons made bruises on both sides of Marie's head. Pauline says they are the "devil's thumbs." Pauline tells her to keep Marie. Bernadette does that, and Pauline leaves the house after she recovers.

Pauline gets up before everybody else at the convent. God appears to her at night, while she is by the stove. He tells her she is not Indian but fully white. As He leaves, He wipes her tears and tells her she is to serve. Pauline is absolved of her child and wants to forget her. God's plan is revealed as she works with the dead. She has to act because God is not able to occupy the Indians' minds. She waits for God's next instruction about Fleur. The whites, who own cars, are smarter as they grow in population. The Indians are drinking more and dying out. The lake monster, other Manitous, who live in trees and bushes, and the spirits of animals who were hunted to extinction, do not help the Indians. She sees Christ telling her to get more souls. Pauline says to do this; she has to become nothing. She goes to the Pillager cabin. When Fleur opens the door and sees her dressed as a novice, she laughs. Fleur tells her she became holy. Pauline looks at Fleur's clothes and notices she is pregnant. Pauline asks to come in. Fleur looks inside the house and tells someone that a Morrissey is there. Pauline denies being a Morrissey and steps inside.

She asks Fleur for a little food. She tries to be humble for Him. She sees Eli. Pauline wonders what they know about her. Pauline says she has no family and no land, so she had to go to the nuns. Lulu is asleep on the bed. Pauline says she hopes Lulu is never in her situation, and that they were the only ones who treated her well. Fleur says the Morrissey's helped her and takes off her scarf to show her scalp. Pauline realizes they blame her for the shaving. Pauline says she is through with the Morrissey's except for Bernadette. She went to the convent to get away from the men. Pauline says the drunk Napoleon, tried to attack her. Fleur looks at her and smiles at Eli. Pauline wants to know what is funny. Fleur says she is thinking about the child of a relative Bernadette keeps. Fleur says the child does not look like a Christian. Pauline says she knows nothing about her and asks Fleur for details. Fleur smiles and says Pauline knows she is a girl. Fleur says she has a Puyat mouth, except her mouth does not lie. Pauline shares that Fleur forgives her and decides to stop attacking her for now.



Pauline says Nanapush aggravates her about religion when she visits the Pillager cabin. Pauline acts like she does not understand his dirty talk. Margaret eats little and gives most of her food to Fleur and Lulu. Pauline and Nanapush argue over her wearing shoes on the wrong feet, to feel Christ's suffering. Nanapush says He must not call Pauline to relieve herself. She is shocked because he spoke in the old language then. He says she never goes to the outhouse. Pauline is mad that Nanapush has seen this about her. She only goes twice a day, at dawn and dusk. She tells Nanapush that the devil should get him.

One afternoon, Pauline is leaving a sickbed; not having drank anything all day. Nanapush fools her because he makes sassafras tea. Pauline drinks the tea and is on her third cup. Dusk is still a couple of hours away. Nanapush tells a dirty story that involves talking a lot about water. Nanapush is talking in the old language and using all the words for water. She realizes what he meant with the tea and the story. She thinks Satan has sent Nanapush to test her. Pauline thinks of dryness and God. He fills a condom with tea as he tells the story. Pauline is in tears and she thinks about eternal life. The condom breaks and the water flows on the table. Pauline runs for the door. She does not care about the test or the devil as long as she can leave. He asks her to come back and listen to him.

After urinating at the convent, she breaks up ice in the bucket with her hand. She puts sharp plants on her body to chafe her. She still has her goal of saving the Indians. Pauline punishes herself by putting up with Nanapush's embarrassment. She is trying to save his soul. She smells, and at Fleur's, Nanapush lets her know. He gives Pauline a look and leaves with his hand on his face. Margaret, Eli, and Nector are away selling wood to pay the family land fees. Fleur struggles getting Pauline's clothes off for a bath. She puts water into the washtub, along with snow. Pauline accepts Fleur's generosity. She compares it to the night Fleur put her in the closet. Pauline is confused about enjoying it. She thinks she goes to sleep while Fleur and Lulu wash her all over. Dusk arrives. After Pauline dries, she goes to the outhouse, empties herself and then goes back. Pauline sees blood that goes from the yard and into the house. Fleur is in bed wrapped up, with Lulu beside her.

Fleur says the baby is too early and tells Pauline to get alder out of the lean-to and boil it. Pauline accidentally breaks things and cannot figure out where the alder is. She asks the Lord to help her, and she grabs something. Fleur is trying to control her breathing. Blood is everywhere. Fleur confirms Pauline has the plant. Lulu puts on her coat and says she is going to Grandma's to get help. Lulu puts on her nice shoes and goes outside. Fleur's eyes are shut, and her face is pale. She gives instructions on the plants. Fleur says everything is happening too quickly. Pauline knocks the water over and has to boil some more. Pauline says God must want her to be clumsy. She has never acted this way before, during sickness. Fleur wants to know when help is coming and tells Pauline to come to her. Pauline does, and Fleur grabs her arms and digs in her fingers like a bear. She keeps shouting no, as the baby comes.

Pauline watches as Fleur tries to save the child. Fleur makes something that she drinks and tries to give the medicine to the baby. Pauline is praying. Fleur is standing over her.



Pauline says a prayer. She thinks Fleur and the baby are dying and that Fleur will kill her. Pauline cannot move. Fleur holds the baby closer and raises her arm. Pauline cannot see the knife but hears it. She separates her legs, and the blade hits the wooden table. Pauline is stuck in the material. Pauline says they are trapped. Pauline sees Fleur go through the door. The knife falls when she moves. She follows Fleur unwillingly, like she did in Argus. Pauline thinks of going back, but she hears the baby's cries, and goes to see if the baby will survive. Even though she knows the reservation, Pauline had never been here before. Other Indians who are starving are there. They walk by grazing buffalo. There are no fences, poles, lines, or tracks. Pauline sees the dead she has prepared. She sees her mother and father but hides her face. She wants to get Fleur to go back, but Fleur stops at a fire.

A ring of people is watching three men play a card game. Pauline recognizes Lily, Dutch, and Tor. They still appear half-frozen. Fleur goes through the crowd and tells them to deal her in. The angry dog is on Lily's lap. Fleur has a fair hand. Lily points to her baby. Pauline says she watches like she did in Argus and concentrates so hard she feels invisible. They show their cards, and Fleur loses the first round. She falls forward. A woman takes the baby from Fleur, whose face goes blank. Fleur is still until Lily pulls out of his vest a curl of black hair and a patent leather shoe, which is Lulu's. Pauline is shocked because she remembers Lulu wearing the shoes when she went for help. Lily puts the hair and shoe on the table. Fleur is alert and plays. Desperate, she goes through her cards, bent like an old witch and skinny as a starved wolf. Fleur wins the game. She puts the lock of hair in her shirt. The men see Pauline in the crowd. She can tell by their eyes they know she put the beam down in Argus. She takes Fleur by the sleeve, and they run back to the empty cabin.

Margaret goes to Fleur and heats the medicine Fleur made. Seeing the blood and ashes, Margaret blames Pauline. Pauline prays at Fleur's side. Pauline goes for the baby to baptize it. Fleur hits her across the throat with her arm. She sees Margaret wrap the "unsaved" in material then put it in a box. When Eli comes, she gives it to him. It is said he ties the box in a tree with his hair. Pauline thinks this is a mistake. She has heard it crying to its father, the lake monster. She tells Margaret she is going. Margaret spits on her shoe. When Pauline bends over to wipe off the spit, Margaret spits on her veil. Pauline readies herself for more punishment for Christ. She holds out her hands and tells Margaret to spit there too. She realizes Margaret is holding a knife. Margaret goes for her hands and almost gives her "Christ's stigmata," but Pauline leaves. Pauline goes to the convent. She scrapes her hand raw, knocking the ice out of the buckets. She continues until the water turns red with blood. The Mother Superior cleans Pauline's hand and wraps it in cloth. She tells Pauline to go to sleep.

Chapter 6, Pauline Analysis

Pauline grows further apart from the Indian culture in this chapter. Edrich explores the old and new religious conflict here. After her religious transformation in the last chapter, Pauline wants to devote herself to God, but the pregnancy is an obstacle. Pauline does



not want to give birth because she thinks it will ostracize her. Erdrich adds a historic touch as the armistice bells rings, signaling the end of World War I.

After the baby is born, Pauline does not bond with her, and even though she names her Marie after the Virgin, she thinks the baby is dirty because of her union with Napoleon. Pauline calls the marks the makeshift forceps make on the baby's head the "devil's thumbs," but Bernadette disagrees with this. Pauline sees the pregnancy and birth as something sinful, she wants to put behind her, so she lives at the convent. As a novice, Pauline experiences a religious mania by seeing God, who tells her she is white, which is what Pauline has always wanted to be. She undergoes extreme hardship the other nuns do not approve of. One wonders if this is a postpartum illness. In her mania, Pauline thinks she should save the Indians' souls by exposing them to Christianity, and not their native religion. The reader knows Nanapush goes to Mass because of Margaret, but he is not that religious. She and Nanapush disagree about her extreme devotion, and he makes jokes and plays tricks on her. She wants to be in control instead of Fleur.

Pauline has had different reactions to Fleur throughout the book. She has felt close to her, and is in awe of her magic, but Pauline also fears and hates her. Like when she put Pauline and Russell in the closet, Fleur shows a tender side as she bathes Pauline and washes away Pauline's self-inflicted punishments. Pauline is there when Fleur loses her baby. Pauline is helpless while Fleur tries to help herself, and in her anger, pins down Pauline with a knife. They go to the land of the dead, where the men from Argus are playing cards. The land of the dead is like how the reservation used to be, with buffaloes and no fences, and no tracks, a title reference. Pauline sees her parents, but she does not want them to see her, as she feels separated from her heritage. It is like *dyja vu* for the reader, as Fleur plays cards with the men, but this time, Fleur loses her baby and gets Lulu. The reader learns that Pauline locked the door in Argus, so she is responsible for the men's deaths. Pauline continues her pattern of lying with Fleur. Fleur knows Pauline, and points out that it is her lying, along with the unchristian baby Bernadette, she got from a relative.

Like Nanapush, Fleur can see through Pauline. Although Margaret is religious, she is mad at Pauline for not helping Fleur and shows her displeasure by spitting, and almost stabbing her. Fleur, who has always disliked Catholics, does not allow Pauline to baptize the dead baby; Lulu was baptized without Fleur's knowledge. Pauline thinks the baby is the lake monster's child and is doomed. Erdrich shows the conditions of the Indians. They are still starving, which is obvious when Margaret eats so little. Pauline shares that they die through "cough and drink." This reinforces Pauline's respect for whites as they take over the reservation. When Nanapush tries to shock and aggravate Pauline, he speaks the Indian language, while she favors English. Eli treats the dead baby to an Indian burial, which Pauline does not like.



Chapter 7, Nanapush

Chapter 7, Nanapush Summary

Nanapush sees a cold, sleepy Lulu at the door and brings her inside. She is shaking but manages to say that something is wrong at home. Margaret tries to warm her up. Nanapush is disgusted seeing her wear her nice shoes. Margaret curses Eli for buying them and throws them in the fire, but they don't burn she tosses them into the snow. Margaret tells him to hold her. She leaves him some food and drink and goes to Fleur's. Lulu resists as Nanapush holds her. He sings cure songs. He says his children went into death, not life, which was backwards. With Lulu, he has a chance to set things right. Father Damian visits later, after hearing about their situation. He brings an off-reservation doctor who Nanapush does not like. Nanapush refuses the doctor's treatment and even Father Damian cannot persuade him. After the doctor leaves, Nanapush almost has second thoughts. Lulu opens her eyes in a daze and gives Nanapush a "secret look."

For days, Nanapush nurses her. Although Lulu has to stay with him, Fleur wants her back home because she fears she is dead. Nanapush sends a piece of Lulu's hair with Margaret, but this upsets Fleur who wants her daughter back. Nanapush will live at Matchimanito until the spring thaw. He wants to persuade Margaret she needs him more than she does the Kashpaw house. Nanapush says Fleur is frightening. People lose children in different ways, like when they go to white towns like Nector or when they become stubborn and vain, like Lulu. When it is sleeting, Fleur goes outside with the black umbrella and puts the umbrella in the tree to shade the dead child. Lulu keeps Fleur going. Fleur dreams Eli can find deer, but he does not. There are no tracks in the snow. The next morning, Fleur tries to fish, but she is too weak. Fleur sings strangely and cannot sleep. They get food from the government, brought to them in wagons.

The day the food comes, the family knows they have to go to town and register with the Agent. Margaret finally leaves and later, returns with Father Damian. Fleur takes the food. The priest brings out the list that shows fees and foreclosures. He points out how many families are behind in their fees, and how some have lost their land. They look up the names of Pillager, Kashpaw, and Nanapush and are shocked at the money due before summer. The family eats in silence. They look at the map. They determine the Morrisseys are taking over.

Fleur speaks against the map and everyone involved. She says no one will try to get money for the land where Pillagers are buried. Margaret says Fleur is living in the past when people had respect. Nanapush agrees with Margaret. He envisions the markers and death houses on the Pillager burial grounds in disarray. Nector says that if they do not pay, the land will be auctioned. Damian nods and says Edgar Pukwan, Jr. and the Agent control the buying. Nanapush thinks that Pillager land is not normal land, to go up for sale. He thinks about how the family was forced there from the East, and how the



lake monster had come because of the Old Man. Nanapush says they will have to get the money, but he is doubtful.

Nanapush says that a tonic dealer comes to get cranberry bark. The family starts providing him with bark, which they get from the bushes. Eli goes to town to get the rest of the food. Nanapush notices the changes in Fleur. Her magic is not working; she has lost a child, and has no money. Nanapush gives her charcoal and tells her to blacken her face and call for her helpers. She refuses. He says Fleur was a good listener, unlike adult Lulu who fidgets and looks out the window. He tells Fleur it is not her fault if they lose the land and tells her she could not have saved her premature baby. At this, Fleur leaves with her hands on her ears.

The family hears what happened to their enemies. Pauline has taken her vows. Both Sophie and Clarence Morrissey marry Lazarres' and move back to the Morrissey farm. Bernadette moves to town with Marie and Philomena. With her financial knowledge, she saves her land. She is sick, but she works for the Agent. Napoleon, whose sister has left and is aggravated by his new relatives, drinks more. Nanapush warns adult Lulu about this Morrissey. Nanapush goes to the Morrisseys. Nanapush is owed Napoleon's last cow. Napoleon is about to kill the skinny animal when Nanapush arrives. Clarence does not want to give Nanapush his share, but Nanapush threatens to tell the snare story. Clarence cuts Nanapush's share. Nanapush notices how bad the house looks. Nanapush tells adult Lulu that her marriage in this clan will not last. He tells her to marry well like he did.

Margaret is optimistic about saving everyone's land. Nanapush thinks they will only have enough for Matchimanito. His property is vacant and foreclosed on for less than a month when the Lazarres' move in. He says the Lazarres' seem to be multiplying through stolen food. One day, the priest visits Nanapush. Because of a child's tragedy, he wants Nanapush to be an Indian leader for the government. Nanapush appreciates his effort, but he sees a snare in his words. Damian continues to argue, and Nanapush, giving in, tells him to write a recommendation letter. He writes the letter, but Bernadette, the Agent's secretary, does not answer. Nanapush remembers that Lulu's feet had healed. A scared Fleur is overprotective of her. Margaret urges Fleur to let Lulu go. Nanapush says he understands Fleur's pain at losing a child, but Margaret does not because her twelve children luckily survive. Margaret is sure the bark and money will save all the land. Nanapush wants a cure for Fleur, and he goes to Moses. Nanapush makes offerings, and Moses agrees to help.

A couple of days later, Moses comes with two drums. After they fix everything, Pauline arrives. They wait for her to leave, but she stays. He has Fleur come into the tent to breathe leaves, but Pauline catches her attention. She laughs at Pauline praying, making a cross in the air. Nanapush builds the fire and hopes the heat runs Pauline off. Moses sings. Fleur eats special meat. She is affected by the singing, and she does not notice anyone. Pauline says she is there to prove Christ's ways.

Pauline prays in Catholic Latin. She puts her hands in the boiling water, then screams and jumps. She hits at the tent walls, which fall around them. She runs with burnt arms



to town. Nanapush is not sure if the cure or money helps Fleur. They gather money together. The priest adds a quarter of his own. There is enough, as Margaret said, for the Pillager and Kashpaw land. Nanapush tells Lulu she might be living at Matchimanito if Fleur had given the money to the Agent. She is caught up in her own happiness. Eli is trapping. Nanapush's hip hurts. Nector wants the job of delivering the money. When he returns, everyone is happy, but no one asks for a receipt. Nanapush misses Margaret. She is fixing up her house. She has to coax Nanapush to stay with her. He is lonely without her and when alone, he thinks of the past when the animals were abundant and the reservation was large.

Chapter 7, Nanapush Analysis

Nanapush saves Lulu after Fleur loses the baby. He thinks this makes up for losing his children. He refuses the white doctor who wants to amputate Lulu's feet. Nanapush uses native remedies to treat her. The fancy shoes, Lulu takes pride in, are destroyed because they are inadequate to protect her feet. She finds that moccasins the Indian's wear, are better. Fleur undergoes changes after losing the baby and the threat of losing her land. Once confident and powerful, she becomes depressed and fearful. She is not able to use her magic. Even the lake monster is silent. Fleur refuses to call for her helpers despite Nanapush's urging. The lock of hair Nanapush sends just reminds Fleur of the harrowing card game in the land of the dead. The black umbrella Fleur got from Argus is used to shelter her baby. Both Fleur and Pauline have reactions after losing their children in different ways. Nanapush, Margaret, Eli, Fleur and Lulu are becoming a family unit. They struggle with starvation and money problems. The government sends the family food, but the government's land fees are a hardship.

Although they raise the money and Nector is supposed to deliver it, something goes wrong. Nanapush fears the Pillager burial ground, which he and Fleur work on at the beginning, will be destroyed. He shares the history of the Pillager land by remembering how they came from the East, and how the patriarch brings the lake monster.

The reader gets an update on the Morrisseys. Nanapush blackmails Clarence about the snare to get what is owed to him. Bernadette, who has always seemed to be a sympathetic character and who is driven to town and works for the Agent, blocks Nanapush when he is willing to take more of a role with the government. Lulu is getting ready to marry someone in the Morrissey family, and Nanapush is telling the story to talk her out of it. The character of Father Damian is more defined in this chapter. He brings the doctor Nanapush does not want and gives them the bad news about what they owe on the land, but he gives them money to complete their fee. Nanapush compares his words to a snare that he used on Clarence. Damian is white and Catholic, but Nanapush likes him, and the priest wants to help the Indians, as opposed to the nun, Pauline, who interferes with Nanapush's native cure for Fleur. Pauline's opposition to Fleur and blind religious devotion only serve to hurt her. Nanapush and Margaret continue to grow close, and he reveals she helps him to forget what he is losing.



Chapter 8, Pauline

Chapter 8, Pauline Summary

Pauline is lamenting about the devils in the "boiling-over kettles." The Mother Superior has wrapped Pauline's burned hands. Pauline feels sorry for herself and thinks God has no pity for her. She sees a man carrying a bag of forks, scissors, and needles. He sticks them in her skin. She asks if he is the Christ. He laughs and says he is the "Light of the World." She remembers the devil can recite the Bible. She is weak in bed and cannot make him go out the window, or even see if he has a tail. When he hears someone outside the room, he flies away. He tells her they will meet in the desert.

Sister Saint Anne feeds her. Pauline spits the food out. Pauline figures it must have been Satan sticking things in her and poisoning her because Pauline insults the nun. The sister tells her to open. Pauline refuses and feels victorious as Sister Saint Anne is impatient which is a sin she must confess to Father Damian. The sister makes her eat. Pauline notes that if she holds her breath, she will die, and Sister Saint Anne will have to pay for it. Pauline shuts her eyes and wanders. She is made to go to Lake Matchimanito. She is on the shore. Light shines off the lake monster that has scales, horns, iron in his skin, and stone in his lips. Pauline realizes she is swallowing the broth. Sister Saint Anne tells her she is so sick she does not know what she is talking about. Pauline fakes sleep. She has a religious struggle and feels the power of Christ. After this, she sleeps without dreams. She eats and drinks with the sister's assistance. When her gauze is changed, she loses skin.

She leaves the convent and leaves tracks in the mud with her shoes on wrong. She prays as she is in pain, but she talks to God as someone powerful. She tells the Mother Superior this is her last trip to Matchimanito before she becomes a novice, and she will leave her old life behind. She will no longer see Pillagers, Kashpaws, or Nanapush anymore. She has something to do, and after it is done, she will no longer need "this lost tribe of Israel." Nanapush has embarrassed her. She does not feel guilt as a voice tells her where to steal his boat. She is on the boat. People she knows, including Marie, look at her from the shore, but she is detached from them. Nanapush tries to save her, but she calls him Satan and gets away. She sees Fleur and tries to get her attention, but Fleur leaves. She is able to "suffer in the desert forty days, forty nights" or as long as the boat lasts. She is waiting for her "tempter." She is going to "transfix him with the cross." The lake monster cuts her rope with his tail and takes her back to shore. She wants freedom so she takes off her clothes. She has on nothing but a rosary. She stands firmly on shore and tells him to show himself. He does, leaving the water. He is the size of a man. She holds out the beads "like a noose" and walks to him. She attacks him and chokes him with the beads. She does not stop until he goes down with his tongue out. It grows light, and she sees a human body, Napoleon. She is horrified until she understands there is no sin. She is not guilty because she did not know how the devil would appear. He had tempted her and looked like the water thing. She drags him into the woods and does not care if he is found.



On the way back to the convent, she realizes she is naked. She covers herself in mud. She tosses the beads into the woods. God wants her to be a "lily of the field." When she gets to the convent, she is not herself but part of the woods.

She is now ready to become a nun. The sisters helped her mind to recover. She learns the Morrisseys find Napoleon behind Fleur's cabin and blame Fleur. Pauline thinks the monster settles in the lake because of her. She thinks it is because of Christ that the surveyors go to Matchimanito. She predicts the land will be sold and divided. Pauline is going to teach math at an Argus Catholic school. She is going to win the girls' souls. She feels Christ's call as she puts on the nun's clothes and has her hair cut. She prays to forget Pauline and considers a name like shedding skin. Her new name is Leopolda. The name sounds to her like a hand hitting ice.

Chapter 8, Pauline Analysis

Pauline's religious mania drives her to a nervous breakdown and a separation from her old life. Her discouragement about her unsuccessful intervention in Fleur's cure and her injuries from the boiling water make her act badly to Sister Saint Anne and embroils her in religious conflict. She had a vision of God earlier in the book. Now she has a vision of the devil, who is really a doctor and is caught between him and God. She is preoccupied with the lake monster in this chapter. She thinks she is choking the lake monster with her rosary when she really strangles Napoleon. The rosary is a religious symbol, and this murder is Pauline's attempt to use religion to erase her old life. Fleur is blamed for his death, and Pauline is finally able to hurt Fleur.

Before getting on the boat, Pauline leaves tracks in the mud with her shoes worn on the wrong feet. These are Pauline's last tracks at Matchimanito. Pauline makes many religious references in this chapter. The devil quotes the Bible. She treats Nanapush as the devil as she says "Get thee behind me." She feels she is in the desert suffering for forty days and forty nights. She calls Nanapush and the Indians, the "lost tribe of Israel." She talks about being a lily of the field. She wants to stun what she thinks is the lake monster with the cross.

Her breakdown occurs on Nanapush's boat. When she saw Mary die earlier in the book, she compares her death to letting a boat go. The old Pauline dies while on the boat. She is removed from reality as she watches the people on shore and is barely aware of her own daughter. Despite his feelings about Pauline, Nanapush tries to save her. She is threatened by Fleur when she is on the boat, but her connection to Fleur ends when Fleur leaves. Pauline goes from an insecure mixed-blood who wants to deny her heritage, to a Catholic fanatic who thinks she is white, to a nun with a new name. She says the name sounds like a fist hitting ice, which refers to her punching the ice after the incident with Fleur losing the baby. The burns make her shed skin, and when she becomes a nun, she "sheds skin" for her new life. Pauline has to immerse herself in nature to complete her transformation. She is happy about the Indians losing their land and heritage. This is consistent with her hatred toward Indian traditions throughout the

book. She hopes as a teacher she can influence the girls with Catholicism and make them forget their roots.



Chapter 9, Nanapush

Chapter 9, Nanapush Summary

Nanapush says something is wrong when animals act differently. Kokoko, the owl, comes out during the day and hoots one note. One day, they hear men from the lumber company. Fleur is armed, but Nanapush asks her to let him find out what is happening. He goes to the Agent's office, and the Agent says a lumber company bought the land for a good price. The government had to allow the sale because of unpaid taxes. Nanapush tells the Agent that the fees were paid by Nector, Margaret, and the priest. He tells Nanapush that Nector and his mother used the money to pay for the Kashpaw land. Nanapush is shocked. The Agent tells him they had to charge a late payment fee. Margaret argued, but ended up paying for the Kashpaw land. The Agent calls Nanapush Grandpa, but he tells the Agent he is not his real grandfather. Nanapush wants to know how much of the illegal late fee went to the Agent, the Lazarres, and Bernadette. Bernadette calls him an "old longhair" and tells him to leave.

Nanapush goes back to Matchimanito. He now wishes he had taken Father Damian's advice about being a leader. He thinks the noises of the men are closer to Fleur's cabin. Fleur seems to know what is happening. She wants to know what he found out. Eli returns and waits for Nanapush to explain what he already knows. He has not seen the three of them together since. He tells adult Lulu she would make him happy if she got her parents to visit him. He would teach them history and reconnect them with native medicine. He hopes when he tells her why Fleur sent her away, she will be a good daughter. He tells Lulu when she understands, maybe she will wear his boots and visit Fleur and forgive her. He tells Lulu she needs forgiveness, and she will need a mother when Morrissey impregnates her and leaves.

After he explains to Fleur, he is afraid of her reaction. They hear a tree falling in the distance. Fleur picks up stones and puts them in her pockets. Eli tries to get her to marry him and live on the Kashpaw land. He promises to work and buy back her land. Nanapush tries to grab Fleur's dress, but she walks into the water. The rocks cause her to go under the water. Eli dives in. He tries to pull Fleur up, but she fights him. Eli drags Fleur to land. He and Nanapush roll her over, but she has drowned and her color has turned gray. Nanapush says that this is the third time she has drowned. Nanapush and Eli jostle her awake. Her eyes are black, and Nanapush steps back. Fleur spits water and tells them not to touch her. Nanapush tries to get Eli to leave. Nanapush feels the ground move, and it is not the men but the thing in the water. Eli tries to comfort Fleur, but she grabs him and tells him that Nector will take her place. Fleur is ready to curse him again, and Eli starts to leave. When she has the Pillager smile, Eli goes into the woods.

Nanapush learns he went to a lumber camp and started working there to make money to buy back the land. He hears the lumber company coming. Nanapush thinks Fleur has left her body because she will not answer when he asks if she will curse him next. She



says no. She will curse the lumber bankers, officials, and the Morrisseys, but never Nanapush. Fleur tells him to go to Margaret and that Margaret has saved her life twice, and she has taken it back twice so they are even. She says she is indebted to Nanapush. She says she will not hurt Margaret, but she will not go to Kashpaw land.

Nanapush says he did live with Margaret on Kashpaw land. He finds out how the surveyors found Napoleon. Acorns and twigs are around him, and Nanapush thinks Lulu put them there. The Morrisseys and Lazarres accuse Fleur of killing him. It is said Fleur drowned Napoleon. She threw him away and stole his tongue. She wraps his tongue up and wears it. This lets her walk without leaving tracks. Her medicine is all over the scene. A drunk Clarence talks to the ghost Napoleon, who says Fleur murdered him. People say Fleur has her dead child guard Matchimanito. Napoleon went beyond the umbrella. The tribe's policeman, Edgar Pukwan Junior, is investigating.

Accidents happen to men who work for the lumber company. Despite the men that are gone, more come with equipment, ready to work. Nanapush thinks Fleur will be disheartened by the absence of Eli and the actions of the lumber crew and will live at the Kashpaw place and wait for Eli. However, she grows stronger. He admits he did not look after her enough. He remembers the axe she stole, the saw tooth metal beneath the house. When he goes to see her, she is leaving the woods. When he asks her what she is doing, she just says something about building a cart.

Nanapush tells adult Lulu he knows she thinks Fleur happily gave her up and told her to leave because she played around a dead man in the woods. Nanapush chastises her for turning her face, not listening, and covering her ears. Before she marries the bad Morrissey and ruins her life, he is going to tell Lulu the reason Fleur puts her on the wagon with Nector. Fleur sends Lulu to the government school because she has no place to live. The reservation is unsafe for her. Government papers will dog her. The Morrisseys are bent on revenge, and the lumber company destroys the woods. Also, Fleur's future is uncertain. It breaks Nanapush's heart to send Lulu away. After Lulu is safe, Fleur goes back to Matchimanito to live alone as she did as a girl.

Pauline destroyed Nanapush's boat so he walks to Fleur's. It is thundering far off, and the smell of the storm makes him go to the woods. The woods have been hurt by the lumber company. There are big oaks around Fleur's cabin. He hears spirit voices of people he loved that are dead. He would have joined them but wants to stay alive. He passes by wagons and lumber company men. Fleur is by the door. Nanapush smells cats and knows Moses is concealing himself. Eli is talking to a group of men and having trouble persuading Fleur to leave the cabin. His hair is still long, but he is wearing different clothes and shoes. He tells her to come to the wagon that he will pack. She is silent and looks up at the sky and shuts her eyes. Nanapush feels the wind picking up. He hears the water growing choppy. He tells the men to leave. Fleur gets Nanapush and takes him to her yard. The first tree crashing startles the men.

A second big tree falls close to them. The earth moves, and this agitates the complaining men. They look at Fleur who gives the Pillager smile, which is scary even to those who do not understand the smile. A man walks away until a tree falls and



blocks him. Another tree falls. Nanapush finally understands. Every tree is cut through the bottom. A man laughs and leans against a tree, which falls down on a wagon. The wind is heavy, and Fleur holds onto Nanapush. At the sound of thunder, the trees around Fleur's fall in a circle and land on the men and horses and destroys the equipment. The wind stops, and they are standing where the ground has been cleared to the lake and the road. The men and animals are startled into silence. Eli is sitting on the ground with an empty look. Moses is coming from shore.

Fleur easily pulls a cart from behind the cabin. He sees lake stones, roots, rags, grave markers, and the umbrella in the cart. He helps her push the cart until they get to the turnoff. Fleur wants his blessing, and he has to give it to her. He does not want her to leave. As she buckles herself into the cart, he asks her to stay. She does not answer. She has extra moccasins and burnt patent leather shoes over her shoulder. She has the fan from Eli, which was Nanapush's wife's. She looks at him then leaves. He watches her on the road to government school, depots, stores, and farms. When he and Margaret know Fleur is gone and do not know when or if she will come back, they go to the officials, wanting to get Lulu.

After he finished eighth grade, Nector moved to Oklahoma. Nanapush writes letters and learns not to send them through Bernadette because they never get mailed. Nanapush realizes the government has made the Indians a bureaucracy. Nanapush says he beat Pukwan for tribal chairman. He has to join the system to find her. Margaret and Nanapush go to town. A government vehicle comes. Children leave the vehicle. Lulu is last to come out. Her braids are gone, and she has a bowl cut. She wears a tight, orange dress that boarding school children, who try to run away, have to wear. Her knees have marks from the punishments of cleaning sidewalks and kneeling on broomsticks for hours. Her smile is like Fleur's, but the anger leaves when she sees Margaret and Nanapush. She tries to walk properly, but she breaks into a run. Margaret and Nanapush receive her.

Chapter 9, Nanapush Analysis

Through the weather and animals, Nanapush knows something is wrong. He sees Kokoko, the owl, who Pauline and Bernadette saw on the way to Mary's deathbed. The owl oddly appears during the day. The lumbermen are getting close to Fleur's land. Nanapush finds out what happened when Nector went to pay the land fees. Nanapush is angry with the Agent and Bernadette who treat him like an old man. Bernadette, a mixed-blood like Pauline, has forgotten the natives and is committed to the government. She and Pauline have forsaken their roots for white men's institutions. On the way to Fleur's, a depressed Nanapush sees the spirits of people from his past and is almost ready to join them but decides against it. Fleur refuses to marry Eli and live on Kashpaw land so she drowns for a third time. Pauline told the reader about the other times.

Her Pillager smile, which Pauline has emphasized, drives away Eli and scares the lumbermen before the trees fall. In the previous Nanapush chapter, Fleur's magic had been dormant, but it comes back to hurt the lumbermen and clear the trees. Moses and



tree-cutting tools help. Fleur cannot stay on the Pillager land so she goes off on her own. Her cart has sentimental items that remind her of happier times and her family. Fleur and Margaret had been close, but Fleur has to separate from her after the land deal. She promises not to hurt Margaret and Nanapush. The land deal affects Nanapush and Margaret, but they remain together.

Although Pauline killed Napoleon, his death is blamed on Fleur. With her rumored magic on his dead body, she can walk without leaving tracks, a title reference. Pauline shared how she could do this earlier in the book. Nanapush beats Pukwan to become tribal leader. Nanapush regrets not being involved with the government before, after the loss of Fleur's land, and joins the government to find Lulu who is in a government boarding school. Her dress and knees show she has rebelled at the school. Her braids have been cut off like Margaret's were, which is an insult to their heritage. Young Lulu's Pillager smile softens when she sees Margaret and Nanapush. With Margaret and Nanapush, she will be in touch with her roots.

In the end, Nanapush accepts losing his land and living with Margaret. He accepts involvement with the government to further his purposes. However, Fleur does not concede. She goes back to Matchimanito to live alone after Lulu is settled and refuses to leave. The grown Lulu, Nanapush is talking to, is resistant and he hopes the story he told will persuade her not to marry into the Morrissey clan, and to reconnect with her mother who she blames for abandoning her. Fleur thinks letting her go is best for her because of reservation troubles and hostility towards Fleur. Nanapush misses his old family at Fleur's, and wishes they were reunited. Nanapush compares he and Margaret to the old oaks at Fleur's. Unlike Fleur's oaks, they are still standing.



Characters

Fleur Pillager

Fleur is a Native American woman with magical powers who lives on an Indian reservation on her family's land by Lake Matchimanito. According to local legend, she has drowned twice and caused the deaths of men. After her family dies from illness, she is a teenager, alone and sick in the cabin when Nanapush, another Native American, saves her. He invites her to stay at his home, but she goes back to her cabin. She does leave to work in the nearby town of Argus, at a butcher shop. She mysteriously wins card games with men there, and they attack her, which makes her bring a storm down on the town. All but one of the men die, and he is sickly. She goes back pregnant, to her home at the lake where the lake monster lives, which she is rumored to consort with.

The paternity of her child is in question, but she lives with Eli Kashpaw, and has a baby girl named Lulu. Later, Fleur gets pregnant again, and the paternity is in question. The baby is stillborn, and between that and the impending loss of her land, she is depressed. With Nanapush's help, she is determined to keep her land, but money problems make her lose it. She will not marry Eli and live at his mother's. She is also blamed for Napoleon Morrissey's death. With her land gone and the community against her, she leaves, but not before practicing magic against the lumber company. She sends Lulu to boarding school to protect her. After she knows Lulu is safe, she comes back to her land to live alone.

Fleur is a Native American who is true to her roots; her family is revealed to have a magical history. She has nothing to do with white people and refuses their Catholic religion. She is devoted to her family's land and Indian ways. She is always in control until she loses the baby. Her magic no longer works, and she will lose her land. She takes back control by refusing to live on Eli's land, puts her daughter in boarding school for her own protection, and carries a cart of her memories to a unknown place. She even gets her magic back. Later, she returns to live on her land alone. Although she loses the family unit she has built for herself, she does not bow down to the government and goes back to her homeplace.

Nanapush

Nanapush is an older Native American who is telling his adopted granddaughter Lulu about her mother Fleur to explain why Fleur let her go. He also wants to stop her from marrying into a family he dislikes. Nanapush remembers the old days of the Indians with a large reservation and buffalo hunts. He loses his family in the sickness, and he lives by himself. He saves Fleur from sickness. He thinks of Fleur as a daughter but is in awe of her magic. The government is trying to persuade him to sell his land, but he refuses. Although he is close to Father Damian, a white priest at the Catholic Church, he does not like the white men taking over their land. Nanapush is very smart and can read,



which is rare among the Indians. He torments Pauline over her religious fanaticism. He practices Native American rituals by chanting to his helpers and beating the drum. He is forced to attend Mass by Margaret, an older woman who is his love interest. Fleur lives with Margaret's son Eli, and after the birth of her baby Lulu, Nanapush, Margaret, Fleur, Eli, and Lulu become a family of sorts.

Nanapush gives Lulu his name and names her after his dead daughter. They spend most of their time at Fleur's cabin. Nanapush's land is foreclosed on, and he is forced to move to Margaret's place. Throughout the book, he resists the government but starts working for them in order to find Lulu who has been sent to school. He and Margaret end up with custody of Lulu after Fleur leaves when she loses her land. Nanapush does not want her to leave. Talking to the adult Lulu, he wishes their family could be reunited.

Nanapush is not only educating Lulu, but he is educating the reader as well. Because of his age and wisdom, he can explain their tribe's history and the issues that face them. Nanapush is a mentor to various people including Eli, whom he teaches to woo Fleur and to hunt. Although Nanapush is proud of his heritage and against the whites taking over, he has to make concessions to find happiness. After losing his own land and Pillager land, he has to go to Margaret's. He has to become involved with the government to help Lulu and his people. He has to let Fleur go. This is in contrast to Fleur who refuses to surrender. He wants Lulu to embrace her heritage and not to marry a Morrissey because of a family feud. Although he has given up a great deal, his storytelling allows him to be a proud Native American.

Pauline Puyat

Pauline is a mixed-blood who is left with her father after her mother and sisters die. She does not like her father's Indian ways and moves to Argus to work in a butcher shop. She works there with Fleur Pillager who Pauline believes deals with a lake monster and has drowned twice. Pauline wishes she is white. She is not able to get close to Fleur so she observes her actions in Argus. Pauline is haunted by the events in Argus. She lives with her aunt for a while and then lies her way to Bernadette Morrissey's farm. She helps Bernadette with the dead, and this makes Pauline feel better, able to put Argus behind her. She attends Mass. She is with Napoleon, Bernadette's brother. She cannot get close to Fleur and Eli Kashpaw so she uses love medicine to bewitch Eli and Sophie, Bernadette's daughter. After being exposed to the Virgin at Sophie's breakdown, Pauline has a religious transformation.

However, she gets pregnant by Napoleon and is persuaded by Bernadette to keep the pregnancy. Pauline gives her baby Marie to Bernadette and goes to live in a convent. God tells her she is white. She suffers for Christ with various self-inflicted punishments and wants to convert the Indians, especially Fleur's family. Nanapush teases her, and the rest of the family does not take her seriously either. She is there when Fleur loses her baby, and she and Fleur go to the land of the dead where Fleur plays cards with the dead men from Argus. Pauline reveals she locked the door to the lockers where the men died. She tries to convert Fleur again but burns her hands. She goes through a



religious struggle and has a breakdown on Nanapush's boat on Fleur's lake. Although she knows the people on the shore, which even includes her daughter, she is mentally detached from them. She thinks the lake monster is attacking her, but she finds out it is Napoleon who she has killed. She leaves him and goes back to the convent. She becomes a nun named Leopolda who will teach in a Catholic school.

Unlike Fleur and Nanapush, Pauline does not like Indian things and convinces herself she is white. She disdains native beliefs. She embraces Catholicism fully by the end of the book. Pauline is mentally troubled though. She takes her beliefs beyond what the nuns consider normal. She has an obsession with Fleur. She lies, and she causes trouble in many ways by tricking Eli and Sophie. She closes the door on the men in Argus. She murders the father of her child, thinking he is the lake monster. She is happy the reservation is being controlled by whites and hopes she can influence the Indian girls she will teach with Catholicism. She gets away with things that Fleur is blamed for because of her magic. She may have punished herself for what she did, but by the end of the book, she has no remorse.

Eli Kashpaw

Eli is a Native American who believes in the old ways and becomes involved with Fleur. Despite his mother Margaret's objections, he lives with Fleur and eventually Fleur's baby Lulu. He is a good hunter because of Nanapush, and Nanapush helps him with Fleur. He has a brother, Nector, who likes the newer ways. Although it is not clear about the father of Fleur's two children, he is devoted to his family. He does make a mistake with Sophie but is able to get Fleur back. After Fleur loses her land, he wants her to marry him and live at his mother's. Fleur refuses him and leaves. Eli works with the lumber company and stops wearing Indian clothes. He hopes to buy back Fleur's land.

Eli is a younger person who is devoted to his tribe. He hunts and observes Indian rituals such as putting the stillborn baby in the tree. Nanapush is like a father figure to him since his own father is dead. Because of Fleur's independence, he cannot be with her. He loses some of his native identity by working for the lumber company and wearing regular clothes.

Margaret Kashpaw

Margaret is a short, feisty, older, Native American widow. She is devoted to her children especially Eli and Nector. She is appalled when Eli lives with Fleur, but after Fleur gives birth to Lulu, she accepts their situation, and she and Fleur grow close. Margaret is a Catholic who also believes in the Indian ways. She has Lulu secretly baptized and takes her to Mass. She and Nanapush flirt and argue, but they eventually get together. Clarence and Lazzare, who cut off her braids, attack her and Nanapush. She wears a black bonnet Nanapush gives her before her hair grows back. She uses the money, meant for the Pillager and Kashpaw land, for only the Kashpaw land when an extra fee



is charged. This makes Fleur sever ties with her. Nanapush is shocked, but he stays with her. With Nanapush, she gets Lulu back.

Margaret is an example of a Native American who wants to hold on to the old beliefs and the Catholic beliefs. The cutting of her braids is an insult, and she is temporarily willing to suspend her beliefs to get revenge. She is not as devout as Pauline and has a sense of humor. She gets to keep her land, but she loses Fleur. Family is important to her, and she wants to keep Eli close to her because her other children have left.

Lulu Nanapush

Lulu is Fleur's daughter. Although her paternity is a mystery, Eli acts as her father and Margaret like her grandmother. Nanapush acts as her grandfather. He is telling the adult Lulu his story so she will contact her mother and not marry the wrong man. The adult Lulu has forsaken the tribal ways by dressing in a modern fashion. The reader sees Lulu as a child through the eyes of Nanapush and Pauline. She is a happy child who loves the woods. She prizes the leather shoes Eli gives her, but they are ruined when she goes for help. Because of this, she has frostbite, and Nanapush nurses her back to health. He saves her because he could not save his other children. She is named after his late daughter and has his name. After Fleur loses her land, she goes to boarding school, which she does not like and reunites with Nanapush and Margaret.

Nector Kashpaw

Nector is Margaret's son and Eli's younger brother. He is smart and likes to talk about land deals and education. He is not devoted to the Indian ways like Eli. He and Nanapush set up the snare for Clarence. At the end, he goes away to school. Nanapush says he has qualities like a politician.

Father Damien

Father Damien is the white priest of the Catholic Church on the reservation. Although he and Nanapush have religious disagreements, they are close, and the priest encourages him to work with the government. He brings the doctor for Lulu, who Nanapush does not like. He gives a quarter to complete the land fee.

Bernadette Morrissey

Bernadette is a widow with four children, Clarence, Sophie, Philomena, and Marie. She lives on a farm with them and her brother Napoleon. She is good with numbers and works with the dead. She feels sorry for Pauline and lets her live with them. She teaches Pauline how to work with the dead. When Pauline becomes pregnant, Bernadette keeps her from getting rid of the baby. Bernadette has to forcibly deliver the baby from Pauline who is named Marie. Bernadette keeps Marie, at the request of



Pauline. She beats Sophie after she is with Eli. She tries to send Sophie away to an aunt. After Clarence and Sophie marry and bring home their spouses and children, Bernadette moves to town with Philomena and Marie. She becomes the Agent's secretary and sides with the government and disrespects Nanapush. She is a mixed-blood like Pauline, and they both reject Indian ways.

Clarence Morrissey

Clarence is Bernadette's only son. He is angry after he learns about Eli and Sophie. He and Napoleon go to the church for help, and Clarence grabs the statue of the Virgin, which influences Pauline. He and Lazarre grab Nanapush and Margaret in revenge for what happened between Eli and Sophie and other disagreements. He knocks out Nanapush. Nanapush retaliates by setting a snare for him but does not go through with it. Clarence's lip is damaged in getting out of the snare. He is blackmailed by Nanapush about the snare. Clarence marries a Lazarre and takes over the farm with his family and Sophie's. The house and farm go downhill.

Sophie Morrissey Lazarre

Sophie is Bernadette's oldest daughter. She is lovely young girl who loves candy. Because of Pauline's love medicine, she couples with Eli. She is punished by her mother and sent to her aunt. On the way, she jumps off the wagon and goes to Fleur's yard and will not leave. Later, she marries a Lazarre and lives at her mother's farm. She has stepchildren and one on the way. After marrying, she loses her looks.

Napoleon Morrissey

Napoleon is Bernadette's brother who lives with her and her family on the farm. He has a drinking problem. He impregnates Pauline, and Bernadette makes him live in the barn. As Pauline is having her breakdown at the lake, she kills Napoleon, thinking he is the lake monster. Fleur is blamed for his death.

Boy Lazarre

Margaret bribes him to spy on Fleur and Eli. After that, his speech is garbled, and people say Fleur did it. He and his family are cousins to the Morrisseys, and they are in agreement about the land deals. In revenge for the Eli-Sophie incident, he and Clarence kidnap Nanapush and Margaret. He cuts off her braids and ties them over Nanapush's mouth. Fleur sketches him on a piece of wood and hurts his heart. He dies soon after.



Moses Pillager

Moses is Fleur's cousin. Nanapush gives him a white man's name and tells his family to hide his identity to save him from the sickness. Moses becomes strange and lives on an island full of cats. He makes "medicine" and is into Native American rituals. He helps Nanapush and Fleur set up their own rituals.

Marie Morrissey

Marie is the daughter of Pauline and Napoleon. Pauline tries to get rid of her before she is born. Bernadette stops her. She delivers the baby and offers to take Marie. Pauline names her after the Virgin but thinks the child is unholy.



Objects/Places

Argus

This is the town where Fleur and Pauline work at the butcher shop. Fleur destroys parts of the town with a tornado after a bad experience there. Pauline will teach school there.

Matchimanito

This is the lake at the Pillager homeplace. It is rumored a monster named Misshepesu, who Fleur's ancestor conjured, lives there. Fleur drowns in the lake several times and has a bond with the monster. Pauline has her breakdown and commits murder there.

Fleur's Cabin

Fleur's cabin is part of her family homeplace. Nanapush rescues a sick Fleur from there. She lives there with Eli with frequent visits from Margaret and Nanapush. Her children are born there. After losing her land, she leaves it but later returns.

Nanapush's Place

Nanapush lives alone there. He lets Eli live there for a while. He does not want to leave, but the house is foreclosed on and occupied by Lazarres.

Margaret's Place

This is where Margaret lives. It is the Kashpaw place as it belonged to her late husband. Margaret is able to hold on to her land and lives there with Nanapush.

Black Umbrella

Fritzie who works at the butcher shop in Argus gives Fleur a black umbrella. She uses it when she goes back to her cabin. It eventually shelters her dead baby. It is one of the things she takes with her.

Land of the Dead

Fleur and Pauline go there as Fleur is losing her baby. Fleur plays cards there with the dead men from Argus. Pauline realizes they know her secret and gets Fleur to leave.



Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is presided over by Father Damian. Pauline attends as well as Margaret, Lulu, and Nanapush. Nanapush makes irreverent remarks there.

Convent

This is where Pauline goes after having her baby. Pauline has visions and a religious crisis there.

Morrissey Farm

Bernadette and her children and their families and her brother Napoleon live there. Pauline lives there for a while. This is where she gets pregnant and has Marie.



Social Concerns And Themes

In *Tracks* Erdrich deals not only with individual American Indian lives but the loss of a tribe's land and identity during a crucial period from 1912 to 1924. In the novel Native Americans are attacked by illnesses and hunger, and annual land fees and taxes cause many to lose their land and homes.

Their ties to their ancestors are severed, and the mythic significance of the land is destroyed when loggers change its face.

While whites show ugly faces in *Tracks*, particularly in the rape of Fleur Pillager and her loss of home and land, the face of economic and governmental dispossession of the tribe is more Indian than white. Erdrich chooses to dramatize Native Americans undoing the lives of their kinsmen. Pauline Puyat, a mixed breed and one of the novel's two narrators, shows the terrible effects of white influence on her life, particularly that of the Catholic Church, which Pauline has absorbed along with the native American myths of place. Her tormented version of Christianity is more life-denying than the tribe's myths which focus on the land. To become a nun, Pauline denies her heritage, her language, her daughter, and her lover. Instead of a God of love we see a God of sexual torment, vindictiveness, envy, sadism, and pride. Other Native Americans betray their trust in exchange for white favors as Bernadette does with the Agent; Nector and Margaret use money that others helped to raise to pay taxes on their land.

Probably even more pernicious is the corruption of love Erdrich presents in the novel. Fleur Pillager and Eli are the soul of the tribe. When their love is warped by the threat to the land, Fleur takes up a wandering existence. Even Nanapush, an old tribal leader and the other narrator of the novel, is betrayed by a longtime friend, Margaret, a woman he loves.

With so many victims it might seem as if *Tracks* is a reformist melodrama of innocent victims and evil victimizers.

The losses here, however, are irreversible, and *Tracks* is more a tragedy than a political tract.



Techniques/Literary Precedents

As in much of Erdrich's work, the literary influence of Faulkner is evident. The friendly and hostile narrators of *Tracks* are reminiscent of the narrators that present a picture of Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Since the tribal vision of Nanapush and the jealous vision of Pauline both magnify Fleur's importance, the significance of her life becomes much greater as a result.

As Nanapush says, Fleur is the "funnel of our history," so what happens to her happens to the tribe. This substitution of character for tribe allows Erdrich to simplify and compress her story; Fleur's personal story translates into the tribe's story.



Themes

Magic

Magical realism is in this book. The story is not a fantasy, but things happen that cannot be explained by science or religion. Fleur Pillager is the cause of the majority of the magical events although her cousin Moses Pillager has magical abilities too. Nanapush explains that the Pillagers have a magical history, which goes back to ancestors settling on the North Dakota reservation. The Old Man summoned the Lake Matchimanito monster, Misshepeshu, which Fleur befriends. Even the Pillager smile has a strange effect on people. The people on the reservation, especially Pauline, gossip about Fleur and her magic. After Pukwan is reluctant about helping with Fleur's rescue, he is soon dead. Fleur drowns in the lake three times. Men that rescue her soon die. Her daughter and stillborn baby are rumored to have been fathered by the monster.

Fleur can take a body part from a body and leave her body and not leave tracks, the title of the book. After the attack by the men in Argus, Fleur runs away saying words, and a terrible storm results. It is implied she magically lured Eli with a deer. She is thought to hex Lazarre's talking, after he spies on her and Eli. After the attack on Margaret and Nanapush, she goes to the Morrissey farm to spread powders around the house and clip hair and nails from the men. She carves a drawing of Lazarre and stains his heart; he later falls dead. She takes Pauline to the land of the dead during her second birth to play for her children. The death of Napoleon is blamed on Fleur's magic. As the lumber company gets closer to her land, accidents happen to the workers. Moses is thought to help with that. Before Fleur leaves her home, she and Moses make the trees fall on the workers.

Religion

Religious conflict is central to the actions of the book. The arrival of the white men means the arrival of the Catholic Church. Father Damian is the priest of the reservation. Indians, like Nanapush and Fleur, are wary of the Catholics. The Indians have their own beliefs. The Catholics disagree with Indian burial in trees. Converted Indians are buried in a praying position while unconverted Indians are put on the death road of the Old Ones with shoes for the journey. Nanapush goes to Mass for Margaret, but he likes to tease Father Damian and especially Pauline about religious matters. Fleur has nothing to do with Catholics, and the Catholic steeple is damaged during her storm. Nanapush hears Manitous, an Indian belief, as Lulu is born. Margaret believes in both the Manitous and Catholicism and has the priest baptize Lulu without Fleur's knowledge. She takes Lulu to Mass.

Pauline is the character with the most religious conflict. As she forsakes her Indian ways, she turns to the Catholic Church. After seeing the statue of the Virgin crying during Sophie's breakdown, she has a religious transformation. After she delivers her



child, she thinks the child has the "devil's thumbs" on her head and considers the child unholy. After giving up her child, she lives in a convent and punishes herself in various ways. She sees God in a vision. She tries to convert Fleur and Nanapush, but she is ridiculed. After not helping Fleur with her dead baby, Pauline wants to baptize the dead child, but Fleur will not allow it. She makes a final attempt to convert Fleur, but her hands are burned. As she recuperates, she struggles between God and the Devil. She goes to the lake on Nanapush's boat and has a breakdown as she prays and becomes detached from the people she knows on shore. She thinks the lake monster takes her to shore, and she tries to convert it and ends up fighting with it. She strangles it with a rosary, and the monster turns out to be Napoleon. She runs from him back to the convent. After recovering, she becomes a nun with a new name who will teach at a Catholic school. She feels the Indian beliefs are useless and wants to spread Catholicism.

Native American Traditions

Nanapush shares Native American traditions with Lulu so she can know her heritage. However, the arrival of white men threatens the traditions so Nanapush engages in the Native American art of storytelling to ensure the traditions pass on. As an elder, Nanapush remembers when the reservation was large and wild with buffaloes and other animals. Nanapush is proud of his Indian name and refuses to give it to the white men. After he saves Fleur, he ensures her relatives have a proper burial and makes their clan markers, which are crosshatched bears and a marten. He talks to the dead and offers tobacco. He gives Lulu his name because his children are dead. He shares that Fleur, Eli, and Moses are devoted to the traditions. Drawing on his history, Nanapush teaches Eli how to hunt and how to woo Fleur. Nanapush shares how, while starving, he blackens his face with charcoal, gets an otter bag and a rattle, and sings to his helpers. He beats the drum and guides Eli back from a hunting trip.

The cutting of Margaret's and Lulu's braids takes away their heritage. Nanapush and Nector devise a snare to get revenge on the Morrisseys. Nanapush uses Indian remedies to cure Lulu and rejects the white doctor. Lulu gives up her fancy patent leather shoes for moccasins. When Fleur goes into a depression after losing her baby, Nanapush urges her to call on her helpers, but she refuses. Moses and Nanapush attempt a native cure for a depressed Fleur. Nanapush loses his house to foreclosure but thinks both Fleur and Margaret's land are saved from the government. However, Fleur loses hers, and he moves in Margaret. He joins the government to better his people and to keep Lulu with her people. Pauline and Bernadette are examples of those of Indian heritage who shun their roots. Pauline thinks her father's Indian ways are silly and wants to be white. During her religious mania, she thinks she is white. She thinks the growing population of whites and the dying out of Indians means white traditions, such as Catholicism, should be followed. Bernadette sides with the government over the Indians.



Style

Points of View

The story is told from the first-person point of view of the characters, Pauline and Nanapush. Their perspectives show the reader the plight of the Native Americans from two opposing viewpoints. Nanapush's views about religion, land, and whites are totally different from Pauline's. He is casual about religion while she is a fanatic. He wants the reservation to stay the same while she does not care about the whites buying land. He has problems with certain white people, while she prefers whites to Indians and even wants to be white. Nanapush tells about wanting to hold on to the Indian traditions, while Pauline shows a breaking away from traditions.

The reader also sees their different reactions to Fleur, a major character. He wants to help Fleur, while she wants to change her and ultimately harms her. However, Nanapush stays levelheaded throughout his narration while Pauline's mental health deteriorates to the point where she commits murder. Nanapush is telling a story to a listener, while Pauline is not. At the end of her narration, Pauline is speaking as a totally new person. At the end of his, he is the same, but loss has made him adapt to new circumstances. Pauline and Nanapush have both lost their families, but they have different reactions.

Setting

The book is set mainly on a reservation in North Dakota. Other settings are the butcher shop in the town of Argus, and a convent. Settings on the reservation are Fleur's cabin, Nanapush's place, Margaret's place, Lake Matchimanito, the Catholic Church, and the Morrissey farm. The reservation is important because there are land disputes among Indians and whites. The government is dividing the land into parcels, and the Indians have to pay a land fee. Traditional Indians like Nanapush and Fleur refuse to surrender to the government while Indians like the Morrisseys work for the government. The Morrisseys have enough money to keep their land while Nanapush and Fleur do not. This is a great loss for Fleur because it is her family home and burial grounds. Surveyors and lumber companies are coming in to divide and clear the land.

The events in Argus propel Fleur and Pauline on their journeys. The Catholic Church and convent are signs of the introduction of Catholicism to the Indians. Pauline embraces these places, and their influence makes her want to convert the Indians. She is obsessed with Lake Matchimanito, which is near Fleur's place. She has a breakdown on the lake and thinks she is fighting the lake monster that is Fleur's ally. Pauline's actions at the Morrissey farm and the lake harm Fleur, which is a reason for Fleur leaving the reservation. Fleur's daughter Lulu has to leave her family place on the reservation to go to boarding school, but Nanapush and Margaret take her to Margaret's



place, which is paid for. Nanapush thinks the reservation is shrinking. It is not apparent where Nanapush is talking to adult Lulu.

Language and Meaning

Language plays an important part in this novel because there is both English and the Indian language. The Indian language is the native language of the tribe that lives on the reservation. English is what the whites introduce. Nanapush speaks both, even though most of his Indian language is not shown. Nanapush can also read and write both languages, and he feels illiteracy puts the Indians at a disadvantage, especially in land deals. Nanapush uses language in his storytelling; when Pauline is in the audience, he uses the old language to irritate her. Words are important to Nanapush, especially his name and meaning. He uses language as part of his native ritual of singing. Language is used to insult Nanapush because of his age. Nanapush and Margaret use dirty talk to spar with each other. Napoleon calls the Pillagers "blanket Indians." Indian terms are used, such as windigo and odjiib. Fleur uses native language when she curses the men in Argus.

Pauline only uses English and does not speak the native language with her father. Fleur, Margaret, and Eli speak to Pauline in English. When trying to convert Fleur, Pauline prays in Latin, which is common in Catholicism. Religious language supports Pauline's fanaticism. Erdrich uses language to show the divide between the Indians and the whites and among the Indians themselves.

Structure

There are nine long chapters. Each title is labeled by the date and the Native American season, which is in the native language and English. The dates are important because they are critical in historically understanding the novel. The seasons show the Native American pride and conflict in the novel. The chapters are also labeled by whatever character is speaking, Nanapush or Pauline.

Nanapush is telling a listener his story from rescuing Fleur to Fleur leaving. Nanapush occasionally speaks to his listener. Pauline is telling her story from working with Fleur to becoming a nun. Nanapush and Pauline are in each other stories' at various points. They do not talk about the same events. One character will tell about an event, and the other character will react to the event. They both have their own stories, and they end up in totally different places.



Quotes

"Fleur, the one you will not call mother." Chapter 1, pg. 2

"I weakened into an old man as one oak went down, another and another was lost, as a gap formed here, a clearing there, and plain daylight entered." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"By saving Fleur Pillager, those two had lost themselves." Chapter 2, pg. 10

"No Name, I told Father Damien when he came to take the church census. No Name, I told the Agent when he made up the tribal roll." Chapter 3, pg. 32

"Uncle, the Puyat lies." Chapter 3, pg. 38

"Nanapush, I said. "And her name is Lulu." Chapter 3, pg. 61

"I was pitiless. They were mechanical things, toys, dolls wound past their limits." Chapter 4, pg. 84

"For pressing my jaw down, thick above my tongue, her braids, never cut in this life before, were tied to silence me." Chapter 5, pg. 115.

"Look," I said. "She's marked by the devil's thumbs." Chapter 6, pg. 136

"You will not be to blame if the land is lost," I told her, "or if the oaks and the pines fall, the lake dries, and the lake man does not return. You could not have saved the child that came so early." Chapter 7, pg. 178

"Leopolda. I tried out the unfamiliar syllables. They fit. They cracked in my ears like a fist through ice." Chapter 8, pg. 205

"Lulu. We gave against your rush like creaking oaks, held on, braced ourselves together in the fierce, dry wind." Chapter 9, pg. 226

Key Questions

Erdrich had great difficulty writing *Tracks*. She let the 400-page manuscript sit for ten years, publishing *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen* first, before she returned to the novel. What was probably difficult for her was that in *Tracks* she was establishing the origin or beginning of the dissolution of the tribe, the atomizing of its life. Since the novel explores how and why this happened, small wonder that Erdrich had such difficulty with the book. Politics and history compose the action of the novel; artistry sees that these are given imaginative human representation. A good discussion needs to examine the causes of trouble the Chippewa experience and how Erdrich presents them.

1. While Native Americans participate in their own undoing in *Tracks*, whites are the originating cause. What acts by whites, either by contact or law, seem most pernicious in the imagined world of this novel?
2. Fleur Pillager does not have a voice in the narration of this novel, but she is certainly important to the tribe, in part through fear, in part through admiration. What do members of the tribe fear and admire about Fleur?

How does her character seem to represent the tribe?
3. Nanapush's narrative is primarily oral; it is told to Lulu. Pauline's narrative is written. What is the effect of the continued juxtaposition of these narratives?
4. What is the effect of Pauline's Christianity on her? How does race connect to religion in this novel?
5. What does land seem to mean to the different Native Americans in this book?
6. Erdrich dramatizes many Native Americans aiding in their own destruction in *Tracks*. Why does she focus more on them than the originating white cause?



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Nanapush and Pauline give their perspectives and not another important character like Fleur?

Why do you think Pauline is attracted to the job of preparing the dead?

Discuss Fleur and Pauline's actions after their pregnancies. Did the pregnancies' outcomes affect their actions?

Discuss how the lake is important in Fleur and Pauline's lives. How does it affect the course of their lives?

How do the loss of their families affect Nanapush, Pauline, and Fleur?

Look for the title word "tracks" throughout the book. How do "tracks" relate to the characters associated with the use of the word?

Explain the various ways the white men's interference breaks up relationships between the characters.

Related Titles

Tracks is part of a tetralogy that includes Love Medicine (1984), linked short stories; The Beet Queen (1986), novel; and The Bingo Palace (1994), novel.

While Tracks stands as an independent work, the novel gains in resonance when seen in the context of Love Medicine and The Beet Queen. The butcher shop and its owners, the Kozkas, and other characters, such as Russell Kashpaw, were introduced in The Beet Queen. The sadistic nun, Sister Leopolda of Love Medicine, who tortures Marie Lazarre, is none other than Pauline, one of the narrators of Tracks, and the girl she is torturing in Love Medicine is her own illegitimate daughter, the girl she tries to abort and unwillingly gives birth to in Tracks. Erdrich's newer novels seem to enlarge previous ones, deepening the texture of her fictional world.

In Tracks Erdrich has simplified her narrative perspective and her story line, creating a novel more symbolically compressed and unified than her earlier works. Tracks is a more painful book than its predecessors, and possibly more powerful.



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