

## QUEST FOR ETHNIC IDENTITY: LOUISE ERDRICH'S EXPLORATION OF HOME IN *LOVE MEDICINE*

Santosh L. Shinde  
Assistant Professor,  
Shri. R.R. Patil Mahavidyalaya,  
Savalaj, Sangli

### Abstract

*This paper is an attempt to explore quest for ethnic identity in Louise Erdrich's famous novel entitled Love Medicine. She redefines notions of home and place as well as its importance to identity in her novels. Louise Erdrich is recognized as the heir to American Indian literature. She deals with identity within the context of colonization and evolving hybridization of distinct groups or peoples. Love Medicine is a seminal text of Erdrich's writing. It presents the most variety of notions of home in Erdrich's novel. All the character's concept of homes differ, yet they all have one profound resemblance. They compete, intercede, backtrack, overlap, tangle, mix, and add and subtract elements that make their homes.*

**Keywords :** Ethnic identity, home, place, Native American literature

In *Love Medicine*, Natives negotiate the conflicting forces of Native and Western ideologies to ensure their cultural, social, and economic survival. As the once emotionally, physically, and culturally lost Lipsha Morrissey looks out over a bridge that fittingly connects the reservation and western world. He finds that he does have a home with 'what poetically it is endowed with, having an imaginative or figurative value. The can name and feel' (Said 55). It is simply the reality that Natives are forced to deal with.

### 1. Introduction

The present study analyses Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* in the light of 'Ethnic Identity' and interprets her concerns with the concepts of 'Home' and 'Place'. In the age of acute hybridization, acculturation and massive homogenization, the academicians, researchers and creative writers seem warred about the endangered socio-cultural entities that have been transmitted from generation to generation.. The creative writers writing in the diasporic situations or having metropolitan consciousness did not depict the issues related to the specific geographical location, did not show affiliation, intimacy towards a specific culture and are not identified with a particular ethnic group. Literature is not only the mirror of the society but also the representation of the same society. What is depicted in it is nothing but writers own experiences from the society where he/she lives. Louise Erdrich writes in her novels the landscape and about the people who live there. They are the Native Americans whose ancestral

land is Minnesota and North Dakota. They are of German, Polish and Scots immigrants migrated to the region.

## **2. *Love Medicine*: Quest for Ethnic Identity**

Erdrich redefines notions of home and place as well as its importance to identity in her novel *Love Medicine*. This re-conception of home challenges both European and traditional Native American perceptions and definitions of home. It is linked to Erdrich's status as a Native American writer. She is caught in the literal and figurative borderlands of her mixed-blood heritage: She is a contemporary writer of German-American and Chippewa heritage. Like many literary works by Native Americans, her several novels reflect the ambivalence and tension marking the lives of people, from dual cultural backgrounds, (*Rainwater* 405). The contention is epitomized through mixed-blood characters such Lipsha and Albertine. The novel begins with June Kashpaw, Lipsha's mother, who draws the other characters into the web of her life, death, and struggle to return home.

## **3. Notion of Home and Place**

June Kashpaw's ideal home is defined by her desire to return to her reservation; it is also encapsulated in what she needs. As June is beckoned into a bar by a man trying to pick her up, her attention is first drawn to her hunger and the man's money. She quickly begins to anticipate her new companion's intentions. June repeats 'You have got to be different' (*Love* 4). While these lines may seem inconsequential at first, they represent her wish for a home. It includes a better man than she is used to being with, a good-natured man who can offer safety home is redefined or reconstructed by the negotiation of heritage and American culture, but this re-conception is only possible through distinct and interrelated bonds of land and people.

One of the most interconnected characters, in both family and community, of Erdrich's North Dakota saga, is Marie Kashpaw. Lazarre by birth, Marie's difficulty in defining home stems from her biological mother, Pauline Puyat, Sister Leopolda, who attempts to abort Marie when she discovers she is pregnant and later rejects Marie upon birth. Leopolda, who successfully rejects her Native heritage, culture, and customs, is considered a most pious and strict teacher of the Church's dogma; unfortunately, her religious zeal routinely spills over into cruelty to others and atrocious acts of self-inflicted pain. In Marie, Leopolda accomplishes both sins by abusing Marie in proxy of herself. At first, this abuse is quite easy for Leopolda to exact because of Marie's ignorance of Western religion.

As Marie admits, 'I had the mail-order Catholic soul you get a girl raised out in the bush, whose only thought is getting into town' (*Love* 44). While this statement should not be considered pure innocence because Marie also concedes that her motives are to prove that she could pray as good as they could and to become a saint they would have to kneel too, she is naively misguided in her reverence for Leopolda (*Love* 44). Marie states, 'I was the girl who thought the black hem of her garment would help me rise' (*Love* 45). The home Marie wishes to construct is not solely dependent on her own design and perseverance but on the idea of Leopolda's divine ability also. As Marie retrospectively analyses, this thought lacks lucidity and truth: 'I was like those bush Indians who stole the holy black hat of a Jesuit and swallowed scraps of it to cure their fevers. But the hat itself carried smallpox and was killing them with belief' (*Love* 45)

Leopolda convinces Marie that the ‘dark one wanted most of all’ (*Love* 46). To combat what Marie believes is her main obstacles in defining home at the convent, she vehemently and blindly throws her trust behind Leopolda’s cruel and wicked ways of subduing the internal and external evils that supposedly threaten her. Marie states, ‘I was careful not to give him satan i.e. an inch. I said a rosary, two rosaries, and three underneath my breath. I said the Creed. I said every scrap of Latin I knew’ but Leopolda decides that not even this alliance to her version of Church is enough to save Marie. It is only through pain and suffering that Leopolda believes Marie’s salvation resides. Marie is the star of the sea. Leopoldasaid she will shine when we have burned off the dark corrosion’ (*Love* 54).

As a result, Leopoldapours boiling water onto Marie’s naked back, scalding as it struck to teach her how much sacrifice it takes to be one of the Lord’s followers but more importantly what it requires to enter Leopolda’s graces and, in turn, the convent’s space of belonging (*Love* 53). While Leopolda follows this incident with apparent kindness, she took a pot of salve from the bookcase and began to smooth it upon Marie’s burns the damage, literally and figuratively, is done.

Marie understands that she can never define home in a place of contradictory elements of fear, pain, belonging, and love. As she puts it, here was the thing: sometimes. She wanted Leopolda’s heart in love and admiration. And sometimes, she wanted her heart to roast on a black stick’ (*Love* 49). The latter part of this revelation comes to a climax as Marie decisively kicks Leopolda head first into the open convent oven (*Love* 57). The result is not what Marie desires: Leopolda’s outstretched poker hit the back wall first, so she rebounded, and Leopolda retaliates, stabbing Marie in the palm of her open hand (*Love* 57).

However, the result of this alteration finds Marie in a position of power after the intrusion of other convent nuns into the kitchen area. Leopolda falsely claims that Marie is struck by the stigmata, making Marie saint-like, but Leopolda’s horrific actions and willingness to lie to save her makes Marie pity her. This has two distinct effects: it releases Marie from the illusion of Leopolda and the convent’s power, and Marie’s decision to keep the true nature of her injury secret allows Leopolda to regain power. Marie’s saintly act pity results in a loss of her false saintly power. For Marie, this former mystical space becomes a place of weakness, one that she has bested through her own ability to confront and control the given situation, but she also loses much of this power because of her pity for Leopolda. This realization is instrumental in forming Marie’s further and more successful attempts to define and create a home from what she sees as her own fortitude.

Leaving the convent immediately, she literally runs into the renowned womanizer, NectorKashpaw. Fearing that ‘Marie has stolen from the convent, Nector knocks her over, and rolls on top of her and holds her pinned down underneath’ (*Love* 64). However, Marie is not the one in trouble. In fact, she is positioned previously in a place where she is able to begin erecting a new home. As Nector frantically and astonishingly concedes, ‘I am caught. I give way. I cannot help myself because somehow I have been beaten at what I started on this hill’ (*Love* 65). Eventually, however, Nector becomes Marie’s husband, allowing them to create a family and place within the larger tribal community home. However, Marie does not make the same mistake as she did with Leopolda: she does not define her home in relation to another.

Instead, throughout their lives, Marie takes charge of her home at every intersection. She transforms Nector’s personal life and plots the course of his community involvement. As

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

Nector's former girlfriend and off and on extra-marital lover, Lulu Lamartine, states, 'For all of the attention he later got for his looks, for all that I came to love him, eventually, NectorKashpaw was awkward and vain in his green youth. It took Marie to grow him up' (*Love* 73).

Eventually, Marie is victorious, receiving credit for Nector's position as Tribal Chairman and being recognized on her own as a lover and protector of children, her own and others she takes in. The latter fact is most clear when she gives the abandoned June Kashpaw a home and when she becomes a surrogate mother to Lipsha Morrissey, who is abandoned by none other than his biological mother, June Kashpaw. However, Marie's home is still far from complete at this juncture. She has a husband, child, and a defined space that she labels home, but she lacks what she desires most, yet never had a mother.

In the first grips of Marie's birthing labor of her last child, Nector has again disappeared, with the implications that his absence is due to excess drink or meeting with other women. When he finally arrives, the next day, he finds himself unwelcome by the now pain racked Marie and her only mental and physical support system. As time passes, Marie's abode remains for a majority of the North Dakota saga's characters a place to return, belong, and define themselves. Even after Nector's death and her relocation to a senior center, Marie retains the family's land and home. As Albertine Johnston, Marie's great-grandchild later concludes, the house, itself, becomes a common ground for all Kashpaws. Furthermore, the move to a retirement home only solidifies Marie's pride in Native language, heritage, culture, and customs home. The Senior Center mimics the physical design and intention of both reservations and early Native boarding schools like Carlyle Indian School. Such places are deliberately built to alienate Natives from traditional lands. It is thought that in order to assimilate them in the Western world, but these homes also served as breeding grounds for pan-Indian concerns and issues.

To a less tyrannical yet repressively similar degree, the latter consequences of those places replicate the world of Marie's Senior Center. It is here that Marie and Lulu once sworn enemies because of Nector's infidelities join behind greater community causes that not only support Native American survival in the Western world, but also work to regain traditional Native custom, culture, and lands.

With NectorKashpaw gone, the two of them were now free to concentrate their powers, and once they got together they developed strong and hotheaded followings among our local agitating group of hard eyes, a determined bunch who grew out their hair in braids or ponytails and dressed in ribbon shirts and calico to make their point (*Love* 303).

Yet, Marie and Lulu's powerful positions also allow them to exert their influence over the current state of their reservation. Even Lyman Lamartine, Lulu's son, who was fathered by Nector, bends to their wills, hiring an equal number of employees from different tribal clans, as they prescribe, for his 'Tomahawk Factory,' a place that makes for Indian artifacts for mass consumption. While the Tomahawk Factory is eventually a colossal failure, Marie and Lulu's involvement in all day-to-day decisions suggests a new type of home for both, defined by their developed sisterly relationship with each other.

Thus, Marie and Lulu's definition and construction of home become a dual entity that demands allegiance to the past but negotiates with the present to guarantee a future. However, the most distinctive aspect of Marie and Lulu's version of home is that it involves the active participation of the community at large.

Erdrich's Marie, thus, expresses an evolution of home concepts that begins with her internal need for belonging, continues with her development as a familiar icon of safety and love, and concludes with her role as a collaborative, behind the scenes tribal director. Still, throughout this evolution of home concepts, Marie holds true to herself, her family, her community, and her land.

While a similar argument, both in evolution and constructive elements, can be made for her enemy turned partner, Lulu Lamartine, Lulu's notions of home develop from dissimilar events and circumstance. Lulu is the daughter of the feared and revered Fleur Pillager, but her heritage is far from distinctively associated with Fleur's legendary actions and achievements. In her own right, Lulu, much like Marie, defines and constructs her version of home through experience and reliance on her individual power to contort the wills of others to her own.

At a young age, Lulu decides, with sexually exploratory intentions, to visit the home of her cousin, Moses Pillager. Upon her arrival, Lulu finds that her strange yet powerful cousin, Moses, lives among feral cats on the island. It is here, among these animals, that Lulu begins to form her adult identity and first realizes that she has the power to create a home. The victim of government "education" and the seeming abandonment by her mother, Fleur, Lulu comes to find a place of belonging with Moses, the island, and his cats. While each one of these elements is significant to Lulu's creation of a home, the connection between the untamed and hungry cats and Lulu becomes a comparison that reoccurs throughout Lulu's subsequent appearances in Erdrich's other novels. She is routinely described as cat-like in the context of sexual or social gratification. For example, in various instances, Lulu is said to rumble in order to get what she wants, then leave as quickly as a cat upon her satisfaction.

While Lulu's contact with men throughout the North Dakota saga clearly expresses this type of cat like quality in her sexual power over their defenseless bodies, the offspring of her numerous sexual liaisons are the building blocks of her and on a larger level the community's home. Lulu's Boys both a chapter and group label for Lulu's many sons constitutes a distinct entity made up of individuals who originate from their mother and various fathers inside the community. As Erdrich describes them, Cleary they were of one soul. Handsome, rangy, wildly various, they were bound in total loyalty, not by oath but by the simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism (Love 118). While many readers and critics have questioned the value of the character's promiscuity, Erdrich's Lulu is not just an excuse to include sensationalism. Her actions are necessary to constructing a home, which she, of course, controls.

Lulu is a powerful, independent woman, who, through her children, ties herself to a majority of tribal families, which, in turn, bestows to her the potency to control situations and events to her liking. Still, Lulu's sexual appetite, hunger for power, and ability to manipulate given instances does not germinate from pure selfishness. As Lulu attempts to explain, 'They the community used to say Lulu Lamartine was like a cat, loving no one, only purring to get what she wanted. But that's not true. She was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms (Love 276).

While both the community and Lulu's evaluations are true, to some extent, neither assessment of Lulu's motivations should be considered autonomous, but rather they should be viewed as complimentary. For example, after Nector her lover, Marie Kashpaw's husband, and tribal Chairman signs papers to remove Lulu's family from her ancestral lands to build a factory

that manufactures ‘things like bangle beads and plastic war clubs. A load of foolishness, that was’ (Love 283), Lulu refuses the tribe’s decision to relocate her family and any financial restitution for her property. She saves herself, her boys, and land the only way she knows how she threatens to reveal the paternity of each one of her boys.

The overarching implication of her rejection and intimidation draws attention to the historic and continual loss of culture, land, and custom. As she declares, ‘Indian against Indian, that is how the government’s money offer made us act. Here was the government Indians ordering their own people off the land of their forefathers to build a modern factory. It was a factory, which made equipment of false value’ (Love 283). Thus, Lulu is only utilizing the strength available to her in order ensure a home place and culture for her family and community. When the Tomahawk Factory finally gets off the ground due to her son’s efforts, Lulu and her new partner, Marie Kashpaw, accept the business as a necessary evil, but also work in tandem to make certain the employment of all tribal clans at the factory, keeping the economic proceeds of the establishment firmly within the home space of the reservation. Thus, when Lulu finally concedes to move her family to a new location, the conditions are only acceptable to Lulu because the new land is repurchased from a white farmer, with a view overlooking the town, and from there Lulu could see everything’ (Love 288). The move allows Lulu to restore previously held Native lands back to its rightful ownership, and it enables her to keep tabs on the inner-workings of the community. Furthermore, the new home also establishes the possibility of a home for her drowned son, Henry. ‘By all accounts, the drowned weren’t allowed into the next life but forced to wander forever, broken shoed, cold, sore, and ragged. There was no place for the drowned in heaven or anywhere on earth. It wanted him to know if he heard. He still had a home’ (Love 295). This home, as Lulu repeatedly assures, is on the reservation, with his brothers, with his community. As with Marie, Lulu’s concluding definition and construction differ greatly from Ojibwe roots. She is no longer disassociated from the Native community on Moses’ island. If anything, Lulu becomes an island which others in the community must hold fast to in order create or define their own notions of home. As Moses and the community later find out, Lulu’s abilities and talents demand careful, Native minded negotiation with the outside world. Unfortunately for Moses, while he willingly accepts Lulu as his lover, his perception of the home does not and cannot exist outside of his island.

Moses’ island is adjacent to Lulu’s land of birth, Fleur Pillager’s home. However, more than the weight of water disjoin Moses’ abode from the mainland. ‘When that first sickness came and thinned us out, Moses was still a nursing boy’ (Love 74). His mother did not want to lose her son, so she decided to fool the spirits by pretending that Moses was already dead, a ghost. He lived invisibly, and he survived. And yet, though the sickness spared Moses, the cure bent his mind’ (Love 75). Moses is then, in existence, a figure caught in between two defined worlds. He is neither dead nor alive; he is the undead, and the undead still needs a home. That home becomes the flora and fauna of the island and eventually Lulu. There Moses finds his place in the world, away from society.

While this is a seemingly isolated existence, one does not know if he exists or not, it is where he belongs. Even after Moses impregnates Lulu during her stay on the island, he cannot leave it. Understanding that she has no one to help her through the labor, Lulu finally exclaims, ‘I can’t stay here forever. We have to go. It was as though I cut his wind off, raked holes in his chest. For a long moment, he could not breathe. He was not able to leave. He was his island, he

was me, he was his cats, he did not exist from the inside out but from the outside in' (Love 83). Moses has no choice. He is already at home. He has no need for another, and even the thought of reconstructing or defining his current perception of home is unacceptable. Moses knows that home can be no place else, with no one else, and in no other community than his cats. Thus, *Love Medicine* offers a spectrum of home that ranges from Moses' type of selected seclusion to Marie and Lulu's active participation in both the Native and Western worlds.

However, of all the other characters presented in the novel, Albertine's life especially represents the shifting middle ground.. All I knew of him was pictures, blond, bleak, and doomed to wander, perhaps as much by Zelda i.e. Mama's rage at her downfall as by the uniform' (Love 10). This gives Albertine a mixed-blood heritage, but the location of her childhood is equally as complex, I grew up with Zelda in an aqua and silver trailer, set next to the old house on the land my great grandparents were allotted when the government decided to turn Indians into farmers' (Love 12). This juxtaposition of land and abode not only combines Native and Western themes but explains the context in which it came about, lending a historical aspect to her construction of the home. Therefore, Albertine's character represents a defined liminality that forces her to contort herself to the landscape, company, and, most of all, the demands of her estranged family situation.

Albertine Johnson seems to be equally divided between Western and Native society. Like June, Albertine also resides far from the reservation, at college studying nursing; still, she labels the reservation as her home; In reference to belated news of June's demise, Albertine states, 'Far from home, living in a white woman's basement, that letter made me feel buried, too' (Love 7). This assessment of her life is symbolic because she, indeed, is buried by Western influences. This is caustically acknowledged in her mother's letter. We knew you probably could not get away from your studies for the funeral. Zelda wrote, 'so we never bothered to call and disturb you' (Love 7). Albertine moves between worlds to create a home that recognizes her Native roots but also firmly incorporates her into a position that will afford her Western success, nursing school. As Karla Sanders argues, 'While Erdrich's fiction certainly portrays the value in cultural knowledge, *Love Medicine* uncovers the resulting ambivalence experienced by her characters as they attempt to reconcile their Native American heritage with the expectations of the dominant white culture in the modern and post-modern United States'. Western influence is then inescapable for a people who have been forcibly marginalized and assimilated. This is powerfully reflected in the family unit Albertine eventually returns to. Albertine's arrival is a homecoming to family and place, but it is far from a traditional Native reception or a Western nuclear family.

As Albertine's states, 'After two months were gone and my classes were done, and although I still had not forgiven my mother, I decided to go home. I wasn't crazy about the thought of seeing her, but our relationship was like a file we sharpened on, and necessary in that way' (Love 11). Despite this love and hate relationship, Albertine understands that this place and people are all that grounds her to Native culture. Making her way to the place she has always known, Albertine realizes 'how much of the reservation was sold to whites and lost forever, yet it is still just three miles to home' (Love 12). 'Although Aurelia kept the house now, it was like communal property for the Kashpaws. There was always someone camped out or sleeping on the fold up cots' (Love 29). Thus, the literal home is also a metaphorical space where, even in rupture, Albertine's family locates their identity that is necessary for that way. As Albertine

states, 'Between my mother and myself the abuse was slow and tedious, requiring long periods of dormancy, living in the blood like hepatitis' (*Love* 7). This troubled identity is difficult to categorize and even harder to embrace for Albertine at a young age.

At fifteen, Albertine runs away from home to find her proverbial place in the world, but after arriving in the cities, her dreams are crushed, as she realizes that the cities only offer harsh lights and sounds, rather than substance and belonging: 'She watched carefully as the dark covered all. The yard lights of farms, like warning beacons upon the sea of wide-flung constellations of stars, blinked on, deceptively close' (*Love* 167). 'No home is afforded. The wish is only confronted by the reality of un-kept promises. All the daydreams, those were useless. She had not foreseen the blind crowd or the fierce activity of the lights outside the station' (*Love* 168). Here, Albertine discovers the anti-thesis of home, and any attempt to create such a place of belonging is met with the most disastrous results. Believing that she finds a kindred spirit, or at least another Native, Albertine clings to a person who turns out to be Henry Lamartine, a distant cousin.

Unfortunately, this relation and familiarity do not keep either character safe in a location far from any other identifiable attributes of the home. This is not to claim that cities cannot be home for Natives. As John Gamber makes clear, most contemporary Natives are making their homes in urban areas, but Henry and Albertine cannot construct home at this location because there are both physically and emotionally lost. Henry suffers from obvious post-Vietnam war trauma, and Albertine is but a child, attempting to redefine home as an afterthought of escaping the confines and regulations of her mother's abode. Thus, the city only offers her loneliness, disharmony, and sexual violence at the hands of her kin. Albertine agrees to return to Henry's cheap red light district hotel room, where he pushed her over, face down, and pinned her from behind. He spread her legs with his knees and pulled her towards him. Muffled in pillows, she gripped the head bars. He pushed into her. She made a harsh sound. Her back went hard, resistant. Then she gave a cry' (*Love* 179).

While Henry's actions are deplorable, they are of secondary importance to the issue of home. The crux of the situation is that home cannot be defined or constructed without clear markers for belonging. Although Henry is a relative, this fact is only guessed at by Albertine, rather than known. No tribal community network exists to aid Albertine and Henry, and the lights and sounds of the city offer no familiar or redeemable value to them. Albertine's redeeming quality is returning to the reservation home until she can deal with or navigate the oppositional conditions of the Western world. Albertine eventually returns to the cities to pursue a Western vocational nursing school, but she always defines the reservation as her true home. Upon her arrival to the reservation, she pointedly states, 'I'm back' (*Love* 13). Thus, Albertine's character, both past, and present is useful to recognizing the complexity of home in Erdrich's novel, but her family homecoming at the beginning of *Love Medicine* also introduces Lipsha Morrissey and King, who suggest negative concepts of home or even troubling concepts of homeless.

Introduced as a much younger character than appears in Bingo Palace, Lipsha's notion of home differs from any of the other characters because he is displaced uncomfortably in both Native and Western society. As Michael Dorris explains, Lipsha's name is a French and language mix. Moreover, according to Lyman Lamartine, 'Lipsha Morrissey was a combination of the two age-old factions that had torn apart our band. His mother was a Morrissey, but Lyman



Lamartine] was his half-uncle, and that gave the two of us the same descent, the Pillager background' (Love 312). His search to find and construct home is then further complicated because he is mongrelized even among his people. As he enters what is considered his family home, he is described as a silent loner:

Even at a place labeled home, he is utterly alone and apprehensive. This is further reflected when he exits the family gathering after taking offense at his half brother's menacing stare and exaggerated comments. 'King was staring across the table at Lipsha, who suddenly got up from his chair and walked out the door. The screen door slammed' (Love 29). While the rest of the family is seen entertained with King's antics, no one follows Lipsha or questions his exit. His definition of home then lacks any basis other than a grandmother who took him in and a family that treats him as a recluse. To form an identity and create an ideal home, Lipsha must embark on a journey to uncover his heritage.

Either way, Lipsha remains without a family or home, where he is not perceived as unwanted or a waste. He has no identity because he cannot find comfort in places he is supposedly from, in, or going. This is further complicated in his struggle with competing for Native and Western religions. In an attempt to secure his selfhood within either religion, Lipsha becomes confused and unsuccessful and take holy mass. I used to go there just every so often when I got frustrated mostly, because even though I know the Higher Power dwells every place, there's something very calming about the cool greenish inside of our mission' (Love 235). Lipsha later states that the mission's power is a delusion, yet he continues to struggle between a Native or Western deity he can fully believe in (Love 235). He is caught in a time and place where the Christian God is deaf to his peoples' troubles and Native gods cannot understand their people anymore because they have lost the ability to communicate with their gods in the appropriate fashion.

As Lipsha states, 'Since the Old Testament, God's been deafening upon us, and that makes problems, because to ask Native gods proper was an art that was lost to the Chippewas once the Catholics gained ground' (Love 236). Lipsha is denied acceptance into either religious home because he cannot find his place in either. 'Instead, this inclusiveness, this multiplicity, depicts the complex nature of what it means to be both a rational and a feeling being, to be both an American and a Native American, to be schooled in both Catholicism and tribal beliefs' (Sanders 130). Despite his confusion and dissatisfaction with both religions, he again turns to them for aid.

Lipsha seeks the task of creating a Love Medicine to solidify his grandmother and grandfather's union, however, because he lacks understanding and loyalty to either type of religious home, his Love Medicine grossly malfunctions. Lipsha plans to feed the hearts to his grandparents in order for his grandfather to cease his extramarital affair. However, his grandfather chokes on the heart and dies. 'He choked badly. It didn't seem like he wanted to struggle or fight. Death came and tapped his chest, so he went just like that' (Love 250). Thus, Lipsha's only identifiable familial home, however small, is further eroded because he lacks the knowledge to use Native, Western, or the combination of cultures effectively. This is symbolic of the universe in which Lipsha lives in and must continue to live in because his construction of a home cannot be completed; he doesn't even have a model to guide him in the building process. Fortunately, Erdrich doesn't leave Lipsha stumbling through the cobwebs of his life forever. As

the novel comes to fruition, Lipsha learns the secrets that give him the past, present, future, and, most importantly, a home.

Lulu Lamartine is actually Lipsha's grandmother. She explains to him how her son, Gerry Nanapush, and his mother, June Morrissey, met conceive Lipsha: that:

My son Gerry one day he came home and told me how he had his eye set on this beautiful woman June Morrissey People talked, but those two went together and fell in love. Well, the inevitable happened pretty soon. That pretty lady started wearing a big wide tent dress. My boy left. Then I do not know what happened between them, because, not long after, a little baby Lipsha was placed in your Grandma Kashpaw's arms. (Love 335)

This revelation furnishes Lipsha with a basis to begin constructing a viable home. Unfortunately, Lipsha's mother is dead, and his father, 'Gerry Nanapush, is a famous politicking hero, dangerous criminal, judo expert, escape artist, charismatic member of the American Indian Movement, ... which does not make either parent quite accessible' (Love 341). Nevertheless, Lipsha does not despair. He begins his search with his next of kin, King.

Lipsha's home is no longer incomplete. It is not a forlorn land without a heritage. It is the place where Lipsha must return. As Lipsha puts it, 'I believe that my home is the only place I belong and was never interested in leaving it, but my circumstances forced my hand' (Love 364). These circumstances being resolved, Lipsha is free to return to where he belongs.

At the end of the novel, Lipsha stops on a bridge, that joins the outside world and the reservation. This gap between worlds will always exist. Lipsha is now confident enough to create a home from what he comprehends of both worlds. This is in stark contrast to Lipsha's initial perception of his world. 'You see how instantly the ground can shift you thought was solid' (Love 252). As he looks down upon the water below him, Lipsha concludes that 'It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land. So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home' (Love 367).. Thus, as Sanders argues, 'the novel suggests that being an American and a Native American are not diametrically opposed identities. By concluding the novel with Lipsha returning home, *Love Medicine* demonstrates that exclusive positions are not fruitful' (153).

This ending nicely returns to the beginning of the story. June coming home she, like Lipsha, must create a home that can move between worlds. Appropriately, her spirit is an iconic American sports car that can cross bridges back and forth between the reservation and Western society. 'Bringing her home is finally, in fact, resolving her life and death in balance' (Coltelli 44). This conclusion also gives the reader a retrospective look into all of *Love Medicine's* notions of home.

#### 4. Conclusion

All the character's homes differ, yet they all have one profound similarity. They compete, intercede, backtrack, overlap, tangle, mix, and add and subtract elements that make their homes. For Erdrich', home does not conform to traditional Native or Western definitions. It is created through selected attributes of community, language, family, land, past and present. These additions, omissions, and intermingling elements are difficult, painfully, comfortingly, and even humorously fit together. Home's construction is always artful and always definite. On a larger level, the tenets of the home act in a similar way. The inter-relation and connection of each

person to culture, custom, family, community, and location is significant to re-creating of defining home for indigenous populations, who at times, can only count on the absence of these elements to define them. The novel *Love Medicine*, thus explores struggle for ethnic identity as depicted in the characters' multiple reactions to the notions of place in general and of home in particular.

### **References**

1. Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
2. Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine* (1984). New York: Holt. 1993.
3. ---. *The Bingo Palace*. New York: Harper Colling. 1994
4. Rainwater, Catherine. "Reading between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *American Literature* 62.3 (1990): 405-22.
5. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
6. Sanders, Karla. "A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *MELUS* 23.2 (1998): 129-55.