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Using Sociolinguistics and Literary Studies to Understand
Code-Switching within Works by Louise Erdrich

by

Bruno Santic

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of Bellarmine University Honors Program

Advisor: Dr. Kathryn West

Reader: Dr. Dominique Clayton

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Abstract

There exists a multitude of definitions and concepts that describe the movement between and from one linguistic code to the next, commonly referred to as code-switching. Each definition given differs not only between fields of research but also within said fields of research, making it incredibly difficult to create one unified definition for code-switching. The two most popular fields of research that have extensively studied code-switching are sociolinguistics and literature/literary studies, with both fields having basic tenets of study that create different nuances in how code-switching is described by researchers in each respective field of study. One of the key differences between how both fields of study define code-switching is that literature/literary studies attempt to show mental representations of linguistic purpose in code-switching, meaning that the speaker's intent is centered within literary conversations as opposed to sociolinguistic conversations. This proposed difference is used to examine how indigenous writers, like Louise Erdrich, use literature to display the purpose behind their code-switching and other linguistic choices. This paper primarily explores how Erdrich's use of the Ojibwe language displays the evolving purpose behind her code-switching within three of her major works: *Love Medicine*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, and *The Plague of Doves*. By using a literary understanding to explore Erdrich's use of code-switching, it becomes clear how Erdrich enacts linguistic agency within said works to provide a deeper meaning to her linguistic choices and her overall narratives.

Introduction

Examining concepts and realities that exist between the intersections of two or more cultures often becomes a difficult and delicate process. Here exists what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the “Borderlands,” where identities and practices blend together, creating a situation that inherently denies any “either/or” sense of categorization. As Anzaldúa defines it, the “Borderlands” are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 19). Within these “Borderlands,” identity exists in a liminal space, with social, economic, and cultural pressures pushing those who occupy space here to assimilate into a singular category. However, those who exist between cultures cannot fully divorce themselves from either category, whether that be from internal motivations, like one’s sense of duty to heritage, or external forces, like the othering of those dissimilar from the majority. This becomes quite evident when one looks at manifestations of cross-cultural identities, where hybrid and hyphenated identities are indexed by visible tells. One of the most important, and unquestionably one of the most widely studied, forms of these manifestations can be found in the concept of “language.”

Within these “Borderlands,” languages mix between cultures, specifically for those who are forced to cross these boundaries and who exist with an inherent relationship to both sides. In many cases, those who “straddle” these lines do not belong to just one group of people, but rather they exist in many forms of identity, ranging from immigrant peoples, especially for first

and second generation nationalities, and for those who inherit historic legacies of displacement and systemic abuse and oppression within colonized nations, like the United States. This mixing of languages for those identities that exist between cultures is referred to by multiple names, with nuances found in each definition, such as “code-meshing” and “code mixing”; however, it is most commonly referred to and seen within the concept of “code-switching.” The multiplicity of names, and the multiplicity of the experiences of those aforementioned hybrid identities, in terms of the mixing of languages in multicultural contexts, points to the lack of a unified field of study/studies or an entirely definitive definition for the concept of “code-switching.” Here, every field of study, whether it be sociolinguistics, literary studies, or psychology, defines code-switching differently within the lines established by their disciplines, and within every field exists a multitude of dissenting and dissimilar definitions and opinions of and on what code-switching is defined as, especially as one moves from one context to the next or even one language to another.

What does seem to be held as a baseline of understanding between different researchers and different disciplines is the simple idea that “code-switching” involves the movement between one or more “codes,” with the basic understanding of codes suggesting different modes of speech and dialogue, such as languages and dialects. As will be further explored, code-switching can be used as a tool on multiple fronts, often reacting to and redefining the social contexts that “codes” appear in. What is quite unique about this mode of speech is that it allows for those who exist between cultures to reclaim identities that have been suppressed or taken from them in one form or another. Within the context of migrant identities, code-switching can be a process that allows one to maintain both cultural and inherited identities that they hold within their adoptive countries. For example, within my experiences, using the Croatian

language I inherited from my parents allows for me to reconnect with my family, even in settings where my family are not present. By mixing in words like “jok” instead of “nope” or by saying “Gospa moja” instead of “Mother Mary” I can reclaim, in whatever small ways it may be, my heritage within my daily life of Anglo realities. This allows for me to keep a close connection with my family, even when I’m miles apart from them and cannot talk directly to them. Heritage exists here in the mixing of inherited and adopted languages in foreign lands.

Now, code-switching does not hold a unified purpose across different cultures and groups of people, and as often is the case, a hierarchy of impediments exists for some that do not exist for others. Many, specifically native/indigenous people and people of color, have faced historic systems of abuse that have utilized violent assimilationist tactics to erase the validity of marginalized groups’ languages and cultures. Code-switching for these marginalized groups can often be a way of fighting back against these systems of abuse, while also pointing to the new realities that emerge out of a post-colonial world. For the past couple of decades, new movements championing language revitalization and reclamation have emerged, shifting the status quo to be more supportive of the mixing of languages, although not fully eradicating the bigotry that still stands against them. The work being done by indigenous peoples and people of color to make code-switching a valid mode of language within many societies, specifically in the United States, has opened up opportunities for people of all multicultural backgrounds to reconnect with their heritages and their languages within an Anglo majority that historically has not been kind to such practices.

One such writer who has followed this trajectory of language revitalization, and who has through their career sought to create an equal playing field for the code-switching of indigenous languages, is none other than Louise Erdrich. Since the mid 80s into the early part of the 21st

century, Erdrich has used her novels to help solidify the validity of indigenous languages by increasingly using more and more Ojibwe words within her works, without translating those words for the audience. Although not all of her works have employed the code-switching of Ojibwe and English languages to the same degree, her works that do include this code-switching have nonetheless shown the importance behind this process of language revitalization. Part of this lies in the fact that, as previously mentioned, her works stand in stark contrast to the expectations of the monolingual audiences who read her novels, while also pointing to the realities that exist in a post-contact society. As a small example, in her novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Louise Erdrich writes, “Around the front of the crowd, I now saw four big audoomobiig, as Grandpa Nanapush called them, waasamoowidaabaanag, the wagons that moved by themselves. The first one, audoomobii, was the white word” (*Last Report* 243). Here, Erdrich shows the differences between code-switching and translation, as she uses “audoomobiig”/“audoomobii” without giving us a translation, while also translating “waasamoowidaabaanag.” She shows readers how the processes of colonization and assimilation have left an indelible mark on the Ojibwe language, by introducing an adapted form of the word “automobile” into their vocabulary. This allows her to point out how her and her character’s identities and language exist within the “Borderlands” where “white” words and Ojibwe words mix together, and the line between the two becomes blurred for those who exist in between the two cultures. This example is only a fraction of what Louise Erdrich uses codeswitching in her novels to do, showing the range she has over her literary use of the Ojibwe language.

When looking at Erdrich’s literary use of code-switching in the face of the variety of definitions that exist between disciplines and within disciplines, it becomes important to settle on an understanding within the two major disciplines that claim ownership to code-switching,

sociolinguistics and literary studies. These disciplines vary on the context, modes of delivery, and reasons behind code-switching. By examining the variety of definitions that exist within sociolinguistics and literary studies, and by using common elements within the separate fields to synthesize new respective understandings, it will become easier to see what literary code-switching has to offer. From there, we can come to a more fruitful understanding of Louise Erdrich's use of code-switching, and by extension the use of literary code-switching by multicultural and marginalized groups. And by applying these understandings to three major works of Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, and *Plague of Doves*, one will be able to gather how her development of code-switching changes in each context of its use, shining a light on the validity of the mixing of the Ojibwe language and the English language that Erdrich offers audiences.

Defining “Code-Switching”

Looking across disciplines, the term “code-switching” is used by many different scholars with variations in meaning depending on the scholar in question. This of course makes it incredibly easy to get lost in the maze of definitions, especially if one is not familiar with sociolinguistics or other cultural studies in language. However, it becomes marginally easier to ground oneself in finding what is needed in each definition by understanding the basics of language itself, specifically as it relates to language socialization. Essentially, what language socialization means is the understanding of language as a tool for acclimating individuals to behaviors favored or frowned upon within a specific group or culture. Linguistic anthropologist Laura Ahearn explains this idea, saying, “It is virtually impossible for a child to learn a language without also becoming socialized into a particular cultural group, and conversely, a child cannot become a competent member of such a group without mastering the appropriate linguistic practices” (54). Language itself is inherently tied to cultural identity and other forms of socialization, presenting itself not just as a tool that can help one better understand a cultural group, but rather something that is integral to know if one wants to be a fully enmeshed member in said culture. For example, within Serbo-Croatian, the term “mašala” is a popular colloquial term representing an exclamation to the understanding of “great” or “fantastic.” Its origins lie in the influence of the Ottoman Empire, which occupied Bosnia for centuries, disseminating many cultural customs, specifically through religion and language. The word “mašala” itself comes directly from the Arabic word “Masha’Allah” meaning “what God has willed”; however over the

years it has lost its specific ties to its religious meaning and has come to be used by both Muslim Bosnians and other non-Muslim ethnic groups in Bosnia, such as Croatians and Serbians. By using the word, one cannot help but invoke the history of the region and the mixing of cultures that came through this occupation. It presents the land itself, and the identities using the word, as being multiethnic products of multiple forms of cultural dissemination and influence. Not only would using this word be a way to help one better understand the cultural heritage of the land, but it would also make it easier for one to participate in the cultural norms and values of the land by using it among local people.

This example of the word “mašala,” and other instances like it, illustrate a fluidity to socialization. It suggests that language can serve multiple functions in the process of acculturation, not just within broader societal groups, but within smaller settings. One could use the word to strengthen a bond to their religious heritage or simply to blend in with the colloquial phrasing of city life in Central Bosnia. Laura Ahearn reinforces this idea of fluidity, saying, “Every time a child, adolescent, or adult enters a new school, region of the country, religious community, profession, or other social group, the general process of becoming socialized into that community is accomplished largely through linguistic interactions and is often accompanied by the learning of new words or usages” (Ahearn 60). Here the process of learning about or becoming a part of a new group, whether that be a new cultural group or simply a friend group, involves the role of language in orienting the person to the customs of that group. Language itself is one of the first things one has to learn before being entered into a new social group. This lies partially in the idea of the “indexicality of language,” and how language often defines identity. Mesthrie et al. defines the “indexicality of language” as “the idea that language varieties are meaningful: they index, or point to a speaker’s origin or aspects of their social identity (for

instance, their social class or ethnic group), but they also carry certain social values related to the speakers who use them and the contexts in which they are habitually used” (146). This inherently shows that one's choice in language, and even in a smaller sense, one's simple word choice, points directly to the identity of the speaker, and the identity of the interlocutor in question. The way a person speaks or the language they choose to speak defines how that person sees themselves, especially in the social contexts of the conversations being had.

The context of a conversation, and the interlocutors, or rather the people on the other end of the conversation, become incredibly important when examining how people wish to socialize and present themselves. In the lens of speech accommodation theory, people often choose to either present themselves in favor with or against their interlocutor. Speech accommodation theory, or sometimes known as communication accommodation theory, presents the idea that language can be used to either “converge” with the interlocutor or “diverge” from the interlocutor. Convergence in this sense simply means to “adopt similar styles of speaking” while divergence simply means to “speak differently” (Mesthrie et al. 150). One would choose to “converge” if they wished to reduce a sense of distance within a social context from their interlocutors, while on the other hand, one would choose to “diverge” if they wanted to create more distance in a social context from their interlocutors. The underlying idea is that the interlocutor would view convergence as a favorable characteristic of the speaker, seeing that the speaker wishes to cater to the rules established in speech style by the interlocutor. Of course, the opposite is held true for divergence, with the idea that making oneself more distinct in speech patterns and styles is an attempt to encourage a negative appraisal of a speaker by the interlocutor. Mesthrie et al. makes an important distinction here saying that “Speakers do not necessarily accommodate to how their interlocutor actually speaks... speakers sometimes

converge towards how they expect their interlocutors to speak, rather than towards their actual speech” (151). This distinction makes it important to validate that the experience here is not only based in the reality of how the interlocutor will act, but more specifically, it is based in the perception of how the speaker thinks the interlocutor might act. What this creates is an array of language choices that allow for the speaker to choose how they wish to be perceived or seen as based on their own cognitive models of what the context of their conversations require.

This idea of the speech accommodation theory becomes quite influential within “code-switching” studies, especially when it is viewed with the context of Susan Gal’s idea of unmarked and marked language choices. What she essentially points out here is that there are two major language choices: marked and unmarked language choices. Unmarked language choices are those that are expected given the social context of the conversation, while marked language choices are those that are not expected within a specific social context. As speech accommodation theory points out, these language choices can be used to index an identity that a speaker wishes for an interlocutor to see themselves as having. It allows for them to establish what their roles are within the conversation. As Mesthrie et al. puts it, “Marked choices may function as attempts to redefine aspects of the context, or the relationship between speakers” (166). By choosing to use marked language choices, a speaker may diverge from their interlocutor and redefine their social position, placing themselves in a position as being more distinct from their interlocutor. This helps create a great amount of agency within a speaker's role of socialization, allowing for them to make specific language choices, whether it be consciously or unconsciously made, that establishes how they wished to be seen within a conversation. These language choices become incredibly important in defining “code-switching” itself and its uses. To begin with, before delineating what the major definitions are behind code-switching, it

is important to simply explain what “code” itself means. In general, as linguist Erman Boztepe defines it, “code” is a “relatively neutral conceptualization of a linguistic variety – be it a language or a dialect” (4). It is a stand-in for language variety, allowing for any individual persons’ conception of what language means to fit within its broad borders. The problem with having an open and generalized term such as “code” is that many people could be defining it within their specific boundaries of how they understand what language means without ever making that distinction explicit, thus, obfuscating the conversation surrounding “code-switching.” As linguist Chad Nilep points out, “By defining code simply as a language (or variety of language) without first defining these basic terms, scholars have essentially put off what should be a foundational question” (16). This makes it impossible for anybody or any definition to be on the same page. However, this might simply just be an indefinite and necessary fact of life behind the term itself and of code-switching in general. As Nilep later points out, following the works of Alvarez-Caccamo, “Languages have codes; they do not comprise codes. A language user thus makes use of a code or codes when speaking, listening, etc. The precise nature of any language user’s codes cannot be ascertained by an analyst nor by fellow speakers” (16). What this points to is the fact that “codes” themselves are individualized to a particular person, and that although there might be some commonalities within social groups on what “codes” are consistently used, it does not mean that the “code” itself is determined on a systematic level by any language or group of people. This suggests that a big aspect to “code-switching” is that it is inherently a personal mode of dialogue, and that to restrict what can be considered “code” takes away the agency of the speakers who utilize such a skill. It also suggests that only a speaker can ever truly know why a specific “code” was used in a conversation because of this personal level of autonomy that places intent squarely in the hands of the speaker.

When examining the necessity of code-switching to be a personal act and decision, the question that arises within sociolinguistics is then how can it be systematically studied. How can something like sociolinguistics define code-switching without taking some level of autonomy away from the individual? How can code-switching be studied in a systematic way if the only person who knows its intent is the speaker? For the most part, this seems to suggest that this level of individualism within code-switching must be accounted for to provide exceptions to any rule placed on the practice of “code-switching.” Some people have made attempts at answering such dilemmas in “code-switching,” with one person being Nilep, who suggests that “it will be preferable to observe actual interaction, rather than starting from assumptions about the general effects of code-switching” in order to define “code-switching” and its functions (10). This relays much of the need for strict systematic observations within social sciences, pushing the idea that unless the conversation is seen on a case-by-case basis, a function of code-switching cannot be determined with simple generalities at hand. However, this makes it incredibly hard to impose any sort of limit to how code-switching works and how it can be defined. One possible way of providing some sort of structure to the concept of “code-switching” could be found perhaps in providing some sort of backbone that people could work from. For example, Susan Gal suggests that one should look at “code-switching” as “norms associating codes with general spheres of activity as ‘not rules to be obeyed, but requisite knowledge to build on in conveying one’s communicative intents’” (Boztepe 13). This slightly pushes back against Nilep’s claim and suggests that a generality is an acceptable place to start; however, as Nilep suggested, looking at the individual use and how it builds off of previous uses of “code-switching” provides a much more holistic view on how “code-switching” actually functions within a specific instance. Examining “code-switching” in terms of a personal choice, built upon traditions and general

forms that are found commonly in one's group makes it much easier to solidify what code-switching functions as without taking a person's autonomy away from them in their interactions. Yet, the problem still remains, can an observer, or even an interlocutor, ever truly extrapolate intent from the speaker in any turn of a conversation?

The answer to this question of intent seems to be answered primarily through societal lenses. In general, there are two perspectives to sociolinguistics answering this question, that being "micro-sociolinguistics" and "macro-sociolinguistics." "Micro-sociolinguistics" as Mesthrie et al. defines it is a field of studies that focuses on "language in society for the light that social contexts throw(s) upon language" (5). Essentially, it focuses on the finer grains of language itself, utilizing social contexts to help develop why people make the linguistic choices they end up making. It focuses almost on an individual level, trying to see how society explains the individual and their linguistic choices. On the other hand of this exists macro-sociolinguistics. Mesthrie et al. defines it as "a sub-part of sociology, which examines language use for its ultimate illumination of the nature of societies" (5). This macro lens attempts to switch the perspective, viewing how society is built and affected by larger movements and trends in language. It requires much broader generalizations attempting to see how smaller groups and their language choices affect society at large. The main problem with the division between these two perspectives is that they are not mutually exclusive, and more importantly, they are, in a way, inseparable features of language. Both perspectives can exist at the same time because when language relates to society, it is not a one-way street. As language affects society, society affects language back. This is primarily why many, like Mesthrie et al., consider them to be "alter egos" rather than "dichotomized pair(ings)" because they are simply examining the same phenomenon, but from different points of view. To have a holistic perspective, on something like

code-switching, one must have both a macro and micro level of analysis in order to see the reciprocal interactions between society and language.

In terms of code-switching and the autonomy one has over the “codes” they use, these micro- and macro- perspectives attempt to define intent through broader methods of observation. Although they might be different perspectives, they utilize similar techniques of systematic observation that is required of all sciences like sociolinguistics. For example, Boztepe, in laying out the differences between micro-sociolinguistics and macro-sociolinguistics, writes, “The basic premise of the macro - perspective is that there are societal norms of code choice, which, in turn, are associated with certain types of activity. From the micro- perspective, code-switching is seen as a strategic tool at the disposal of speakers through which social reality is created, and conversational functions ranging from signaling dual membership in the two communities to simply emphasizing a message are conveyed” (21). Here, Boztepe shows the macro-perspective as being one that relies on correlations. It does not give definitive explanations of causation, but rather, it points out how specific societal norms of code-switching are associated with certain broader activities. With the case of micro-perspectives on code-switching, Boztepe points to the use of inference and extrapolation. Abstract ideas or theories are applied to observed conversations and the code choices made within said conversations. Within both cases, intent is never directly seen or stated by the speaker, but instead the spectator uses scientific methods of observation to theorize about how code choices are made and how they relate to society at large. It’s a practical way of studying “code-switching” and examining how it works; however, it seems to be limited in what it can truly observe.

This limitation in what sociolinguistics can actually extrapolate from observation becomes quite important when it is realized that many of the decisions made exist within one’s

cognitions, and that many sociolinguistic methods of observing this rely solely on behavior. Methods like matched-guise tests, surveys, and participant observations, used commonly within sociolinguistic studies, do not often provide enough room for the participant/speaker to explain their language choices. More often than not, these methods rely heavily on observing language behavior and the observed effect it has on the conversations at hand and the relationships involved. It seeks to explain “code-switching” only in what is observed between participants within a conversation, not necessarily the thoughts of these participants. However, if, as the famous linguist Carol Myers-Scotton suggests, “speakers hold in their minds metarepresentations of the likely social consequences of their linguistic enactments of their personal goals” it would hold that one should hear what these metarepresentations actually are from the speakers themselves (Mesthrie et al. 172). Yet, this seems to be rarely done, perhaps because the point again in sociolinguistics is to observe language in a scientific way, relying on what is seen and not what one believes. Some like Chad Nilep define this as the fundamental goal in studying code-switching, writing, “Code switching is a practice of parties in discourse to signal changes in context by using alternate grammatical systems or subsystems, or codes. The mental representation of these codes cannot be directly observed, either by analysts or by parties in interaction. Rather, the analyst must observe discourse itself, and recover the salience of a linguistic form as code from its effect on discourse interaction” (Nilep 17). This explanation points to the idea that the only concrete way to define code-switching and its functions is to take record of the discourse itself and of any interaction that emerges between participants because mental representations of code-switching, and thus, the speaker’s intent, are impossible to observe in a scientific way. It’s important to note though that this view does not necessarily constitute the whole view of sociolinguistics as a field, since it varies so much in it all its

definitions; however, it does, at the very least, create an understanding stemming from the trend of linguistic theorists using observational methods of behavior as a primary method of analysis within studies of code-switching.

This limitation of the sociolinguistic conception of code-switching, as seen only through the eyes of observation, seems to limit a speaker's autonomy, or at least their communicative ability to convey intent. Within sociolinguistics, emphasis is placed on the effects of behavior rather than a person's mental reasoning behind their language choices. Here, individuals cannot necessarily give voice to what they believe to be the intent behind their choices, at least not when sociolinguistics is involved. However, other possible perspectives and fields of study might be able to help fill in the gap and account for intent. One of these of course is the field of literature and literary studies. Here, literary understandings of code-switching seem to account for this personal level of autonomy within code-switching, directly speaking to the intent of the author or the characters in employing code-switching. This is not to say that literary understandings of code-switching do not also look at the behaviors involved in code-switching and the social context through more objective means of observation seen within sociolinguistics, but rather, that through different means, an author is able to build on these objective behaviors and provide a window into the intended meaning of using any one specific code in a text.

To begin with, it is important to note that literature and its use of code-switching parallels sociolinguistics and its development of the field and its linguistic purposes. It uses similar methods of observation to portray code-switching as it is seen in the real world by the multilingual communities that utilize it as a mode of discourse. Holly Martin, a literary professor on ethnic American fiction, supports this idea by writing, "Ethnic minorities and their languages are part of the social stratification of the United States, and therefore, a mixture of languages

within literary works – and varieties within those languages – reflects the dialogue that occurs regularly within the US” (404). She essentially maps out the fact that literature uses a form of mimetic or reflective code-switching that attempts to show the diversity of language that exists within our real world, while also trying to show us how it functions in the real world. For the most part, this mimetic quality looks quite a bit like what sociolinguistics does with code-switching, in that it uses observation to show how code-switching as a behavior affects discourse. This point is further boosted by the studies of Alexandra Alexandrovna Gamalinskaya, who explored the ability of Gregory David Roberts’ novel *Shantaram* to effectively reflect the models of discourse functions that code-switching can accomplish within a turn of speech. For example, Gamalinskaya notes how within code-switching John Gumperz lists “addressee specification” as one of the accomplishments and functions of code-switching, wherein by switching from one code to another, a speaker can exclude or include a member in a conversation based on their understanding of the languages used. She writes that in the novel the “heroine [switches] to a language that only the referent could understand in order to hide the information,” exemplifying how literary code-switching serves as a reflection of what is seen in real life, and subsequently what is theorized within sociolinguistics (Gamalinskaya 476). This method of observation within literature is not inherently the same type of systematic and scientific observation found in sociolinguistic studies of code-switching. It is a more personal form of observation that relies on the speaker’s own interpretation of observed linguistic practices, meaning that the speaker can come to the same conclusions that sociolinguists come to; however, the process in doing so is not designed to be inherently objective in its observation. Again, the literary study of code-switching in this sense follows some of the same principles of observation that sociolinguistics does as it studies how code-switching operates in a

conversation, yet it becomes personalized in the process and allows room for a greater degree of informed interpretation.

As noted, although literary code-switching serves a mimetic function, it is important to note that it is not only a device that serves to act as a mere copy of sociolinguistic definitions and methods of analysis within code-switching studies, but rather, it builds upon what observations are made of the real world and adds an introspective and personal level of reflection that complicates the depictions of code-switching within literature. Domnita Dumitrescu, in exploring Garry Keller's views on Chicane literary bilingualism, states that literary code-switching "pursues other goals of aesthetic nature" other than just mirroring what is seen in society (357). This points to the idea that when code-switching is used within literature, it can serve as a tool within an author's repertoire to add to the narrative style, and thus effectively build upon the atmosphere of the novel, fitting form to function. The only problem with this view is that, although true to a certain extent, it makes literary uses of code-switching seem quite surface level, as if its only function is to be a useful tool in boosting the author's credibility through their mixed styling of languages. However, literary code-switching is much more meaningful and effective than just a stylistic flourish. It serves a deeper purpose of adding to the perspectives depicted within the novel. As Martin writes, "For multilingual authors, switching between two or more languages is not an arbitrary act, nor is it simply an attempt to mimic the speech of their communities; code-switching results from a conscious decision to create a desired effect and to promote the validity of authors' heritage languages. Literary code-switching ... create(s) a multiple perspective and enhances the author's ability to express their subjects" (403-4). Here, Martin depicts literary code-switching as one with profound intent and effect, tying its use not just to stylistic forms, but rather to a deeper tradition of heritage that depicts a character in a

fuller bodied way. Essentially, literary code-switching exists to validate an author's culture and/or their characters' heritages by using code-switching to help express themselves in the fullest capacity.

This sense of heritage within literary code-switching is not just something discussed by scholars alone, but also by authors themselves. Specifically, writers including Gloria Anzaldúa and Amy Tan reflect on their use of literary code-switching and of code-switching in general, pointing to its role within their works, and to a larger extent, most of literature itself. To begin with, Gloria Anzaldúa within her seminal work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, writes about the power of her language choices within her life, noting its ties to her heritage and her identity. She writes, "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (Anzaldúa 81). This depicts the importance that language choices have in depicting one's own identity. It makes language something that does not just exist within the abstracts of theory, but rather, something that exists within the practical world of the people that make such language choices. Code-switching serves to show mixed identities, and to show one's relationship to their heritage through their relationship to their language choices. This becomes especially important to note for Anzaldúa as one looks at the preface to her book. Here she writes, "But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture – to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurring out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you from the new *mestizas*" (20). Anzaldúa clearly states the intent of her literary use of code-switching in her book. She shows with an immense amount of clarity that the use of code-switching in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is to gain legitimacy and respect for

her “ethnic identity” through her “linguistic identity.” She wishes to be met halfway in her Chicane identity by Anglos and Mexicans alike through her code-switching, so that she no longer has to feel inferior in embodying the mix of cultures that are inherent to her identity. This shows how clearly she can show intent in her code-switching through her literary body of works, especially as she employs code-switching in her statement of intent.

Much like Gloria Anzaldúa, Amy Tan develops this sense of entwined heritage in literary uses of code-switching, while also exploring the legitimacy of literature to show intent in code-switching. Within Amy Tan’s famous article, “Mother Tongue,” in which she discusses her use of language throughout her life and her works, she parallels many of Anzaldúa’s comments on language identity and intent. To begin with, Tan explores her different uses of English within her life, making a distinction between the forms of “standard English” and the forms of English she used at home with her mother, referring to a form of Chinese and English code-switching. She writes, in respect to the English she used with her mother, “It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with.” As with Anzaldúa, she depicts language as being intimate with one’s heritage. However, she expands upon Anzaldúa’s description, making a more explicit connection not just to her ethnic identity but to her familial identity as well. For her, code-switching can be equivalent to the language of sentimentality and emotional ties, indicating that one’s heritage is important in their emotional expression. Continuing on with this, Tan explicitly states, “Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all – all the Englishes I grew up with.” This creates an explicit connection between code-switching and literature. Code-switching in all of its forms is something reflected upon and used to the writer’s benefit; yet, Tan describes going beyond stylistic tools. She writes, “And the reader I decided upon was my mother ... So with this reader in mind ... I began to

write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with ... I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.” To finally drive the nail in the coffin, Tan shows that when she writes she keeps her mother in mind as her reader. She keeps in mind a person who uses the same “Englishes” as her, and thus, understands her code-switching. In doing this, she can reveal the “intent” and “nature of thoughts” of a person who uses these codes in alternation. She is essentially telling people that literary code-switching can delve directly into her mind, her characters’ mind, and the minds of people who use these same codes like her mother, revealing a deeper intent to their deliberate actions.

Using Tan’s and Anzaldúa’s understandings of literary code-switching, in conjunction with literary scholars’ explorations of code-switching in ethnic American literature, it becomes quite clear what the defining difference is between literary code-switching and sociolinguistic code-switching. Literary code-switching is a way of accounting for sociolinguistics’ inability to, or rather its indifference of, understanding a speaker’s intent in code-switching. Literary code-switching mimics much of the same observations that sociolinguistics notes of code-switching’s behavioral manifestations; however, it takes into account the mental representations of the purposes a speaker might have behind their code-switching. It reveals the intent of the author’s code-switching, while also revealing the intent behind their character’s code-switching. This allows for a person, whether it be the author in mind or their characters, to have a greater amount of autonomy in choosing to code-switch in ways that fall in line with their intent. It takes explorations of code-switching out of the hands of social scientists and places them directly into the hands of those “code-switching.” Having this understanding of what code-switching within literature can do, allows for one to better understand instances of code-switching within a

specific text. It allows people to look for the purpose, whether it is directly stated or alluded to within the narrative and its themes. This can help explore the works of those like Louise Erdrich, who uses code-switching with varying intents in most of her works.

Love Medicine: Code-Switching as Signage in “Ojibwe Country”

The development of code-switching within Louise Erdrich’s works understandably coincides with the development of Louise Erdrich’s own personal journey in learning the Ojibwe language¹. Erdrich shares her development as a speaker of Ojibwe within quite a few of her own nonfiction works, with *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country: Traveling Through the Land of My Ancestors* and “Two Languages in Mind, but Just One in the Heart” being her most significant ruminations on her own language acquisition as it relates to the Ojibwe language. Within these works she points to the fact that she did not grow up having Ojibwe as her first language. She writes, “My grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, was the last person in our family who spoke his native language, Ojibwemowin, with any fluency. When he went off into the Turtle Mountain woods to pray with his pipe, I stood apart at a short distance, listening and wondering. Growing up in an ordinary small North Dakota town, I thought Ojibwemowin was a language for prayers, like the solemn Latin sung at High Mass” (*Books and Islands* 68). Growing up, she revered the language and saw it as an important medium for her family’s spiritual identity; however, she herself did not possess the knowledge to speak the language fluently. Eventually, over time, her growing curiosity about the language pushed her to gain a deeper understanding of Ojibwe. Erdrich writes, “I wanted to get the jokes, to understand the prayers and the *aadizookaanag*, the

¹ Elizabeth Wilber also explores the use of code-switching within Louise Erdrich’s works in her MA thesis, *Persevering Through Preservation...*, in order to create a dialogue between Erdrich and Patricia Grace, examining how indigenous languages shift power dynamics in global Anglophone literatures.

sacred stories, and most of all, Ojibwe irony. As most speakers are now bilingual, the language is spiked with puns on both English and Ojibwemowin, most playing on the oddness of *gichi-mookomaan*, that is ‘big knife’ or American, habits and behavior” (*Books and Islands* 68). Here Erdrich points to the spiritual, transmissible, and humorous nature of the Ojibwe language, showing readers why she took up her education in the language. For her, learning Ojibwe gave her a greater amount of autonomy over her ability to engage with her heritage, both in a serious manner and in a more playful examination.

Erdrich’s education in the Ojibwe language has been a long journey, one in which the complexities of the Ojibwe language became quite apparent. Ruminating on the nature of the language, Erdrich writes,

Ojibwemowin is a language of action which makes sense to me. The Ojibwe have never been all that materialistic, and from the beginning they were always on the move. How many things, nouns, could anyone carry around? Ojibwemowin is also a language of human relationships. Two-thirds of the words are verbs, and for each verb, there are countless forms. This sounds impossible, until you realize that the verb forms not only have to do with the relationships among the people conducting the action, but the precise way the action is conducted and even under what physical conditions. (*Books and Islands* 69)

Here she notes how fluid the language is and how detailed it is in describing the particularities of Ojibwe life. There is less of an emphasis on material and individualistic possession of things through the occupation of nouns and more of an emphasis on the communal identities that exist through interactive relationships seen in verbs. She later points out that although there are nouns

within the language, they express themselves in a different way compared to many other languages. Erdrich writes,

When it comes to nouns, there are blessedly fewer of them and no designations of gender, no feminine or masculine possessives or articles. Nouns are mainly designated as animate or inanimate, though what is alive and dead doesn't correspond at all to what an English speaker might imagine. For instance, the word for stone, *asin*, is animate ... Once I began to think of the stones as animate, I started to wonder whether I was picking up a stone or it was putting itself into my hand. Stones are no longer the same as they were to me in English. (*Books and Islands* 72-73)

Nouns within the Ojibwe language exist in a genderless space and with an imbued liveliness of animation in objects often considered “dead” or “inanimate” in the English language. This becomes quite a complex concept because as Erdrich points out, it changes the relationships between human interactions with what is considered traditionally “dead” objects in English. Agency is given to objects like rocks, and instead of Erdrich picking up a stone, the *asin* is jumping alive into her hand. All in all, this adds to a particularly unique and complex counterpoint to many Western cultures and languages, in which the Ojibwe language becomes a new viewpoint in how the world is perceived. Erdrich herself notes this, writing, “Anyone who attempts Ojibwemowin is engaged in something more than learning tongue twisters. However awkward my nouns, unstable my verbs, however stumbling my delivery, to engage in the language is to engage the spirit of the words. And as the words are everything around us, and all that we are, learning Ojibwemowin is a lifetime pursuit that might be described as living a religion” (*Books and Islands* 73-74). There exists a spiritual dimension to using the Ojibwe language. Learning, reading, writing, and speaking the language requires a sort of reverence and

respect that English perhaps cannot demand of its speakers and readers. For Erdrich, to engage in the Ojibwe language is to engage in her heritage and with the world around her. As presented earlier by the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, language itself becomes “twin skin to ethnic identity.” When using the language, it understandably shapes her identity and how she views the world, displacing English-dominated viewpoints while adding in traditionally Ojibwe perspectives.

Erdrich, having learned this language within her own personal life, has throughout her parallel development as a writer sought to include her indigenous language within her written works. She makes note many times of the need for the language and its use within her works and within American works in general. Erdrich writes, “Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. The intelligence of this language is adapted as no other to the philosophy bound up in northern land, lakes, rivers, forests arid plains; to the animals and their particular habits; to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones. As a North American writer it is essential to me that I try to understand our human relationship to place in the deepest way possible, using my favorite tool, language” (“Two Languages”). For her, it seems as if it is almost impossible to write the great American novel without using the language and perspective of the indigenous communities that have lived within these lands since time immemorial. The Ojibwe language is specifically tied to the land of North America and in writing about that land, a precision of language must be had that relies quite heavily on the use of Ojibwe customs and philosophy, and subsequently the language associated with said customs and philosophy. Furthermore, Erdrich notes that in keeping with this sentiment, she has slowly begun to increase the amount of Ojibwe words within her works. She writes, “Slowly the language has crept into my writing, replacing a word here, a concept there, beginning to carry weight. I've thought of course of writing stories in Ojibwe, like a reverse

Nabokov. With my Ojibwe at the level of a dreamy 4-year-old child's, I probably won't" ("Two Languages"). She shows readers her desire to write entirely within Ojibwe, while also showing her limitations in not being able to do so. However, just because she may never write a full novel in Ojibwe, does not mean that she cannot include the language within her works as she gradually becomes more knowledgeable about the language. She notes that the words and their position within her texts are carrying more and more weight as time goes by, showing how her control over the language directly relates to their increased depictions within her novels. For example, the word "booshoo," or rather "boozhoo" as Erdrich later uses it in her novels, is a traditional Ojibwe greeting, meaning something along the lines of "hello." Erdrich's first use of the word is found in her first edition of *Love Medicine*, in which the character of Lipsha Morrissey uses the word to greet Father Damien right before he makes a request for the priest to bless two turkey hearts for him. Erdrich writes, "'Booshoo, Father ... I got a slight request to make of you this afternoon'" (*Love Medicine* 242). In the novel, the use of the word serves mainly to represent a common greeting in the Ojibwe language, giving a certain authenticity to the interaction between Father Damien and Lipsha Morrissey. This is especially noticeable, given that it appears in what is an essentially dialogue heavy scene with not much rumination or exposition of what else is occurring internally for the characters. However, in one of her subsequent works, that being *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Erdrich places more weight behind the greeting, showing readers how much she has grown in her understanding and ability to employ such code-switching. In a scene depicting Father Damien, or rather Agnes, setting off to find and meet one of the elders of the community, Nanapush, for the first time, Erdrich writes, "'Boozhoo! Aaniin!' Agnes called out the various greetings she'd learned from Kashpaw" (*Last Report* 79). Here she consciously flips the roles seen in *Love Medicine*, having Father Damien instead speak the

Ojibwe greeting, rather than be greeted in Ojibwe by a member of the community, while also making it apparent that Father Damien took the time to learn the greetings from another indigenous elder of the community in order to greet other members of the community on their terms rather than his. This shows a conscious decision of using the Ojibwe greeting not only as a means for authenticity but also as a means for cultural respect necessary for dialogue. It's important to also note that Erdrich chooses to use the more standard spelling of "boozhoo" rather than her previous spelling of "booshoo" showing that she has consciously decided on which spelling she preferred to use to carry the weight of her meanings. Countless examples like these ones can be found throughout her works, depicting a growing awareness of how she uses the Ojibwe words amidst the English language.

Even though Erdrich does desire to write and speak entirely in her Ojibwe language, it does not mean that she wishes to forego the use of the English language. She specifically writes, "English is an all-devouring language that has moved across North America like the fabulous plagues of locusts that darkened the sky and devoured even the handles of rakes and hoes. Yet the omnivorous nature of a colonial language is a writer's gift. Raised in the English language, I partake of a mongrel feast" ("Two Languages"). For Erdrich, it is unavoidable mentioning the harm that colonizers have done to indigenous languages, specifically through their violent enforcement of their languages like English upon indigenous people. For example, multiple times throughout *Books and Islands* Erdrich notes the physical abuse that was inflicted upon indigenous children in residential boarding schools, or simply within the Catholic Church, who attempted to speak their own language. When referring to her partner's experience being taken away to residential school she writes, "He remembers singing his father's song to comfort himself as he was driven to a residential school at age eleven. The priest who was driving

stopped the car, made him get out, and savagely beat him. Tobasonakwut spoke no English when he first went to school and although he now speaks like an Ivy League professor if he wants to, he stubbornly kept his Ojibwemowin” (70). Like “plagues of locusts” this systemic and violent abuse took the Ojibwe language away from many indigenous children and people, while also entirely eradicating and crippling other indigenous languages across the Americas. Erdrich finds it necessary to denounce this evil found in the colonizer's language, while also noting that this predatory behavior placed English in such a position that it ended up consuming and absorbing the languages of cultures on almost every continent of this world, spanning Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This helped expand the lexical repository of the English language, allowing it to express a multitude of concepts that it previously was not able to do simply on its own in its original cultural context. Erdrich notes that this has a utility in supplying her with a wide variety of linguistic tools which she wishes to continue using to her benefit as an indigenous writer. Thus, she uses the English language, while also mixing in her growing knowledge of the Ojibwe language, which in turn helps explain why her writing as a whole pushes for the code-switching we see in her works instead of relying entirely upon one language or the other.

Now, keeping in mind that Louise Erdrich’s development in the Ojibwe language has been a gradual and cumulative process, it’s necessary to see her use of it within her works as a gradual and cumulative process as well, building off of each novel and period in her life to create subsequent works that display a greater control of the Ojibwe language. This may perhaps suggest that her very first novel, *Love Medicine*, may be her at her earliest point in merging her literary career with her own knowledge of the Ojibwe language, yet it does not mean that her use of the language is necessarily rudimentary or unimportant in its placement within the novel. This should be especially noted for *Love Medicine* in particular because of the three major editions

published, each with a multitude of changes made to fix continuity errors, and to enhance the reading experience overall. Although the first edition of *Love Medicine*, published in 1984, included some Ojibwe words, the novel was mostly absent of the Ojibwe words seen in it now. The second edition, which was published in 1993, is largely responsible for adding in all the Ojibwe words that are in subsequent copies of the novel, with the added chapter called “The Island” hosting a majority of the newly added Ojibwe words seen in the novel. In and of itself, this process of revision within the code-switching of the novel shows a deliberate and controlled intent in her writing.

In order to see and understand linguistic intent in its fullest sense within *Love Medicine*, one must understand language’s ability to exist as signage. This concept is shown no better than in Anton Treuer’s memoir, *The Language Warrior’s Manifesto: How to Keep Our Languages Alive No Matter the Odds*, in which he details the many different ways in which indigenous people and communities have fought, within the process of language revitalization, to ensure the preservation and developing health of their languages. Specifically, within Anton Treuer’s own language, the Ojibwe language, Anton Treuer points to cornerstones of language revitalization like pre-school programs where Ojibwe is the target language for communication, while also highlighting the emergence of Ojibwe words within non-native and English-dominated spaces in different parts of Bemidji, Minnesota. Treuer specifically points to the fact that within Bemidji most public and charter schools, businesses, regional events, and even the Bemidji Police Department display bilingual signage in both English and Ojibwe in public spaces to help advocate for the use of the Ojibwe language in the city. Within this example, Treuer explains the importance of having Ojibwe words within non-native spaces by writing, “The signage doesn’t produce speakers, but it acculturates everyone to seeing the target language in public spaces.

That means the language isn't used just for ceremonies. It sparks curiosity. For us, it says that you're in Ojibwe country now" (Treuer 161). He emphasizes the importance of having an indigenous presence within English-dominated spaces. Having indigenous languages produced as signage within these places may not actually teach the language to those who do not already have some grounding in the language; however, it does help create an awareness that indigenous people still exist in these spaces and that these lands are still theirs. It helps to remind everyone in these spaces that language exists in both a symbolic and practical sense of reclamation. In a sense this language as signage exists as a tool for acculturation. Treuer specifically writes, "These expansions of our language into shared space help normalize our language. Some people didn't even realize we had a living language. But in Bemidji, everyone knows we do" (161). Here, the dominant culture, existing within white-centered spaces, are acculturated to the Ojibwe language. They must adjust to understanding, and even just seeing, the existence of the Ojibwe language in spaces where Ojibwe people exist as well. As Treuer points out, when you produce this signage and everyone becomes acculturated to the existence of the Ojibwe language, there is no denying its existence nor its importance within America. Viewing language as signage and as a means for acculturation becomes an important perceptual tool for appreciating the beginning of Louise Erdrich's use of the Ojibwe language within her *Love Medicine* series.

Throughout much of Erdrich's first published novel, *Love Medicine*, she employs code-switching as a means to produce signage in her process of acculturating non-Ojibwe speakers/people to her and her characters' environments by relying heavily on two points of interest: the first being the heavy use of introductory Ojibwe words within her text and the second being the symbolic use of the Ojibwe language in the context of a history of violent suppression and assimilation. Together, this highlights Erdrich's intent that readers understand

that Ojibwe people still exist and thrive throughout North America and within her novel, despite outsiders' attempts to erase their language, culture, and lives entirely from the land.

To begin with, it is easiest to see Erdrich producing linguistic signage with the intent to acculturate readers to the language, and thus the people, by looking at the Ojibwe words chosen throughout the novel. Many of the words are terms that are necessary introductions to the language and to the culture that newcomers to both must know before interacting with the people, and even the novel, in good faith. Terms like *booshoo* (hello/greetings) and *miigwech* (thank you) exist within the novel as practical means for communicating in everyday conversations (Beidler 60-67). Knowing how to greet others and how to communicate thanks is an important custom no matter what; however, specifically within Ojibwe customs, hospitality and respect are fundamental cultural touchstones. As Treuer notes, "In Ojibwe, our word for truth is *debwe* – literally meaning 'to speak from the heart' or 'heart sound.' If someone says they will take care of someone else, that's a promise for life and across generations" (21). This respect and hospitality is conveniently cultivated by first learning simple greetings that portray goodwill like "miigwech" and "booshoo."

Other terms, terms like *wiindigo* (winter cannibal beast), *manidoog* (spirits), *jiibay* (ghost/spirit), and *jiisakiiwinini* (medicine man, tent-shaker) are all important terms for understanding fundamental beings/ideas within the spiritual practices of the Ojibwe people (Beidler 60-67). Understanding what these terms mean helps foster better respect for the cultural practices of the Ojibwe culture, while also allowing non-acquainted readers to see a living and thriving language and culture in action. For example, when describing Moses Pillager during Lulu's first meeting with him, Erdrich writes, "He was surprising, so beautiful to look at that I couldn't tell his age. His heavy hair coursed all the way down his back, looped around his belt.

His face was closely fit, the angles measured and almost too perfect. My mother's face was like that – too handsome to be real, constructed by the *manidoog*" (*Love Medicine* 77). The use of the term "manidoog" presents the idea that the being that created Moses and Lulu's mother was a powerful being rooted in Ojibwe spirituality. By saying "manidoog" instead of "spirits," this spirituality is made completely visible, especially in the sense that it presents the characters using the word and being described in relation to the word as being current practitioners of this form of spirituality. Meanwhile, subsequent terms like *n'dawnis* (my daughter), *akiwenzii* (old man), and *nimama* (my mother) are incredibly important tools for understanding basic relationships that exist between people (Beidler 60-67). These allow readers to examine their familial ties, while also allowing them to understand the respect held for elders within the Ojibwe community. As Anton Treuer notes, "The goal, as expressed in Ojibwe ceremonies, is to see all stages – to live a long life, to be so old that you can't even crush a raspberry between your gums anymore. Elders are highly venerated. They eat before anyone else. Respect for elders just doesn't come across the same way in the English-speaking world" (19). This perception brings a new meaning to the word "akiwenzii" seeing as how old age is a highly venerated characteristic to be sought after in every person's life. When Erdrich has Eli Kashpaw say, "Damn right. I'm an old man ... *Akiwenzii*," she is showing readers an admission of pride (*Love Medicine* 34). If "akiwenzii" had been removed from the text, Eli's description of himself as an "old man" might have been taken simply as an admission of dejection, or rather the pride of his age might not have been as clearly rooted in his cultural perspective. All of these words that have been listed are ones that are often and primarily used to code-switch within the novel, pointing back to the idea that in a way, Erdrich is showing readers the basics of the culture. They might not always get a direct translation, and they will not learn enough words to become full-fledged speakers, but they will

know enough to be aware of some of the principles that make up the culture and language at work within the lives of these characters.

It is important to not underestimate here the need to be aware of the presence of indigenous culture and language within colonized lands; however, Louise Erdrich takes it a step further, and makes people understand the gravity and nature behind such a presence. Her code-switching and use of these Ojibwe words within the text are not produced purely to educate readers on the language and culture of the Ojibwe people as an informative piece of acculturation, but rather it is also meant to stand as very realistic symbol of the endurance of the language and its people amidst the context of colonial and assimilationist policies. Using the Ojibwe language in companionship with the English language becomes quite a powerful statement of a growing vitality despite overall suppression. Erdrich notes this throughout her book during many of her accounts of the linguistic, spiritual, and physical realities experienced by the Ojibwe characters of her novel. She details violent and systemic issues that have plagued the Ojibwe community, such as the traumas of mass incarceration, alcoholism, war-induced PTSD, Catholicism, residential boarding schools, and the policies of allotment and termination. For example, when Albertine Johnson is driving to her family's home, she explicitly says, "The policy of allotment was a joke. As I was driving toward the land, looking around, I saw as usual how much of the reservation was sold to whites and lost forever" (*Love Medicine* 12). Here Albertine points out how past abuses, like the policy of allotment, which indirectly gave the federal government even more power over indigenous lands, can be seen within the current landscape of indigenous reservations. So much of the reservation's land was "legally" seized by or sold to the government, shrinking it down to an even smaller size than before. These are just a few of the main topics that find their way into the history of the characters within the novel.

They are deeply impactful traumas felt to this day, and in many cases, are still being inflicted upon many indigenous peoples.

In many of the mentions of these historical abuses, Erdrich helps explain the devastating effects that such violence has upon a people, specifically in terms of their spiritual, cultural, and linguistic health. She makes direct statements about what the landscape of the Ojibwe language looks like throughout the entire novel, offering up a context to her very use of the language. For example, Margaret Kashpaw and her two sons, Eli and Nector Kashpaw, help reflect the living reality of assimilation and the loss of culture. She shows how Western society pushes for indigenous groups like the Ojibwe people to give up vital aspects of their cultural and ethnic identities, such as language and tradition. Erdrich writes, “She had let the government put Nector in school but hidden the one she couldn’t part with, in the root cellar dug beneath her floor. In that way she gained a son on either side of the line. Nector came home from boarding school knowing white reading and writing, while Eli knew the woods” (*Love Medicine*, 19). Nector is one of many characters within the novel, as well as one of many indigenous children in real life, who were taken to residential boarding schools, and forced to abandon their language and culture in order to better assimilate to an English-dominated and Euro-centric society. Although in many cases, children were taken against their parent’s will, or were given up without full informed consent, Margaret allows Nector to go to this boarding school in order to have a child who can successfully navigate this Euro-centric and English-dominated society. Erdrich points out that this reasoning of Margaret’s is not entirely irrational because she writes, “He’d been an astute political dealer, people said, horse-trading with the government for bits and shreds. Somehow he’d gotten a school built, a factory too, and he’d kept the land from losing its special Indian status under that policy called termination” (*Love Medicine*, 19). By having her son go to a

residential boarding school, Margaret helped achieve a form of political and financial credibility for her community. Her son, Nector, having been educated in the English language, and in the politics of white American society, was successfully able to navigate said society and secure many benefits for his community, with one of the most important being saving his community from the policy of termination in the 1950s². Although there is utility in this, it comes at a great cost, which is the loss of culture and language for younger generations like Nector's. If all Ojibwe children had been sent to residential boarding schools, then it would be quite possible that the language and culture would have been greatly damaged to an irreparable point of eradication. However, Margaret saves her other son, Eli, from this fate, thus securing the possibility of a continued intergenerational transmission of the Ojibwe culture and language.

Another example that exists within the novel of a historical abuse that was afflicted upon indigenous peoples was the missionary practices of the Catholic Church. In the novel, Erdrich helps lay out the fact that the Catholic Church was directly instrumental in demonizing all aspects of Ojibwe culture, including traditional spiritual practices, racial/ethnic identity, and even the Ojibwe language itself. At every turn, the Catholic religion is tied deeply to any shame that many characters feel about their culture. This is best seen in Marie Kashpaw, who at a young age attempts to enter the Sacred Heart Convent in order to become a nun, but who is later tormented by the likes of Sister Leopolda. In Marie Kashpaw's sections of the novel, she is repeatedly humiliated, beaten, and chastised by Sister Leopolda for no real apparent reason. In Erdrich's later works, specifically *Tracks* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, it is revealed that part of this abuse Sister Leopolda inflicts upon Marie Kashpaw is because Marie is

² Erdrich's own grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, was the tribal chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and helped save his community from the policy of termination. Nector Kashpaw in the *Love Medicine* series and later Thomas Wazhhashk in *The Night Watchman* serve as literary parallels to Gourneau's own story.

Sister Leopolda's illegitimate daughter, and Sister Leopolda herself is an Ojibwe woman named Pauline who long since abandoned all traditional Ojibwe ways in favor for the power associated with the Church and the non-native world. This tormenting becomes heavily fixated on Marie's indigenous identity and often attacks her sense of worth in her cultural identity. For example, Erdrich writes, "She always said the Dark One wanted me most of all, and I believed this. I stood out. Evil was a common thing I trusted. Before sleep sometimes he came and whispered conversation in the old language of the bush. I listened. He told me things he never told anyone but Indians" (*Love Medicine* 46). Here, the Ojibwe language itself is associated with the language of the devil, demonizing any use of the language. Marie herself is primed by Sister Leopolda to believe that the devil only speaks to other indigenous people like herself, making indigenous communities "vulnerable" to his commands. This creates an imperative to cease all use of the language and for one like Marie to distance herself from her own community. This demonization and distancing become even more evident when Sister Leopolda tells Marie, "You have two choices. One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog. Or two, you can give yourself to God" (*Love Medicine* 48). She instills a racial dichotomy backed by her Catholicism that essentially tells Marie that she must choose between her Church or her people. If Marie chooses her people, and marries an Ojibwe man, she will live a "Godless" life; however, if she denies that she can become a "good" Catholic. This demonization of the indigenous languages and of ethnic identities is not extended to other ethnic identities within the novel and within the convent. Specifically, there exists two French nuns who almost exclusively speak in French and suffer no consequences or derision from Sister Leopolda or the Church. The very structure of the novel supports this by showing that much of their dialogue is presented in French. The nuns say things like "*Elle est docile*" and "*Je ne peux pas voir*" and are left to speak

French without any real commentary being added (*Love Medicine* 55-58). This demonization of the Ojibwe identity, and of the Ojibwe language, helps prevent the learning of and the intercultural dissemination of the language, supporting a perverse religious system that disproportionately affects the wellbeing of indigenous cultures and identities, while supporting other white and Euro-centric languages, cultures, and identities in its stead.

Examples like the one of the residential boarding schools and the Catholic Church are important within the narrative, especially when compounded with the use of the actual Ojibwe language because they present a society in which despite attempts to eradicate the language, the language still exists, and in many cases within our modern world, the language is flourishing amidst the revitalization efforts of language warriors³. Code-switching then, within *Love Medicine*, serves to be signage that points to the fact that readers are in fact, as Anton Treuer would put it, in “Ojibwe country.” It offers up introductory means to become better acculturated to the Ojibwe language, culture, and way of life; however, it also serves as a resounding declaration of cultural resiliency. The Ojibwe language, amidst a sea of English-dominated spaces, still lives. It is growing and will continue to grow, and despite the traumas inflicted upon its people to eradicate its use, Ojibwe has found a way to still occupy space in these lands. Its use within the novel may not produce speakers, and it may not convert many to the Ojibwe way of life, but it does spark a curiosity and begins the groundwork for creating a working relationship between the readers and the language, that Erdrich can, and will, use to build to higher things.

³ Treuer lists Erdrich’s daughter, Persia, as being one of the language warriors influential within the current revitalization process of the Ojibwe language (108).

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse: Code-Switching as an Alternative to
Binaries

Erdrich's earlier works, like *Love Medicine*, use code-switching as a way to introduce readers to the Ojibwe language and culture and to better acclimate readers to the existence and resiliency of the language itself. Using this as a starting point, in her later works, Erdrich creates a natural expansion upon this territory, moving beyond cultural acclimation and into the territory of education and conceptual transformation. Essentially, this means that her later works are focused more on the intent to not just display the existence of the Ojibwe language but to more pointedly place the language in conversation with the English language in order to call into question Western conceptions of identity, while also better establishing Ojibwe philosophy in the lives of American readers. No better is this development seen than in Erdrich's novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, in which her intent becomes focused on using code-switching to deconstruct the nature of forced binaries so that readers can follow a sort of conversion to the Ojibwe way of thought. In many ways, the language itself follows the same direction as the narrative conversion of Father Damien and helps readers learn about and adopt Ojibwe philosophy.

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse follows the epistolary revelations of a close to hundred-year-old priest, named Father Damien, as he is interviewed about the Church's intended canonization of Pauline Puyat, or Sister Leopolda, a well revered but also murderous and malicious nun within the Little No Horse reservation of the Ojibwe people. The novel is

centered around the revelation that Father Damien is in fact Agnes Dewitt, a German American woman, who left the convent for a life of playing Chopin and cohabitating with a farmer, but who after suffering a deep tragedy and a head injury, adorns priestly robes and heads out to be the parish father of Little No Horse. Throughout her role as Father Damien, and throughout her growing connections with the families of the Ojibwe community she enters, Agnes Dewitt begins to follow a process of conversion through which she becomes a member of the Ojibwe community and learns to understand her complicated role in helping to support and protect her community from the Catholic Church and colonization, while also playing a direct role in the propagation of these problematic powers in her community. Agnes Dewitt transforms into a person who blurs the lines of gender, culture, religion, and language

To begin with, the intent of code-switching in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is displayed in the very appearance of how the Ojibwe language is employed within the narrative. In much of *Love Medicine* there exists an inconsistency with how Ojibwe words appear. Some are shown in a standard roman style font, while many of the words are displayed in italics instead. The difference between the two presents a difference in how the words, and thus the language itself, are perceived within the novels. In general, placing non-English words in italics isolates the words from the rest of the English-dominated text, suggesting that these words are foreign to the text itself. In part, since many of the Ojibwe words within *Love Medicine* were added through the process of revision in Erdrich's second edition of the novel, italicizing the words works to show that they are new additions to the work, and thus, in many respects, they are foreign to the original text. However, it is important to note that even non-Ojibwe words that are foreign to English are also placed in italics, like the example of the previously discussed French words spoken by the nuns in the convent. This helps emphasize that in general all non-

English words are foreign to the text and that Ojibwe itself might not be solely the target of such aesthetic isolation.

Italicizing Ojibwe words within the narrative helps to isolate the language from the English words within the text, placing a spotlight on the appearance of the Ojibwe words. For *Love Medicine*, this functions well within the narrative, seeing as in the story the language itself is being suppressed through the various aforementioned historical abuses. Italicizing the Ojibwe words highlights the relative scarcity of the words from the text, essentially pointing to the survival of the words in a sea of English. The form of the language matches the context in which the Ojibwe language exists within the novel, yet this creates a predicament. It essentially places English and Ojibwe on unequal playing fields, suggesting to readers that the Ojibwe language does not entirely belong within this text. As mentioned earlier, the italics show that it is still foreign to Erdrich's own work. Erdrich's later works, specifically the *Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, responds to this idea and solidifies a new aesthetic direction by making sure that all Ojibwe words are in a standard roman style font. For the most part, the Ojibwe words exist within the text in the same appearance as the English words without any italics. This is quite important on a personal level because it suggests that Ojibwe is no longer a foreign language to Erdrich herself. Its placement in her novel is a lot more at home than it previously was, and it exists in equal companionship with her English words, showing that the weight they carry is the same. This is also important as a tradition within Ojibwe culture and art because it shows that the Ojibwe language is not foreign to written texts. Erdrich notes this idea multiple times throughout *Books and Islands*, pointing out the fact that the Ojibwe have had what she considers books for centuries. She writes,

The Ojibwe had been using the word *mazinibaganjigan* for years to describe dental pictographs made on birchbark, perhaps the first books made in North America. Yes, I figure books have been written around here ever since someone had the idea of biting or even writing on birchbark with a sharpened stick. Books are nothing all that new. People have probably been writing books in North America since at least 2000 BC. Or painting islands. You could think of the lakes as libraries... And in truth, since the writing or drawings that those ancient people left still makes sense to people living in Lake of the Woods today, one must conclude that they weren't the ancestors of the modern Ojibwe. They were and are the modern Ojibwe. (3)

As Erdrich suggests, written language is not a foreign concept to the Ojibwe people. Using the Ojibwe language within a written format is actually a lot more compatible with Ojibwe traditions and culture than many would think. This implies that the Ojibwe language and the English language are not incompatible and should not be seen as entirely foreign when placed next to one another; this further supports Erdrich's lack of italics for the Ojibwe words in her text. Erdrich reinforces this idea when she makes the claim that the Ojibwe people got their name from their ability to write. She writes, "The meaning that I like best of course is Ojibwe from the verb *Ozhibii'ige*, which is 'to write.' Ojibwe people were great writers from way back and synthesized the oral and written tradition by keeping mnemonic scrolls of inscribed birchbark. The first paper, the first books" (8). In this definition, Ojibwe people have had a sort of written language for centuries and such writing helped form the bedrock of their identity. What this emphasizes is that books may be as indigenous of a storytelling method as perhaps oral traditions are, although they might have existed in different formats that the Western world might not have recognized as a standard form of writing.

By placing Ojibwe words in the same roman style as her English words, Erdrich sets a visual precedent for her readers. No longer does she give readers the same visual cues, such as italics, to emphasize that the Ojibwe words are foreign to the narrative, but rather she leaves her Ojibwe unmarked. This is in part because for Erdrich, they are not foreign words to the narrative, but rather, they are foreign words to the reader. This becomes especially emphasized when one takes a look at the appearance of other foreign languages within the text. Throughout the text, languages such as French, Latin, German, and even other indigenous languages, such as certain Lakota dialects are used. The one difference between their appearance and the Ojibwe and English words used in the text are that they still appear in italics. This further suggests that the Ojibwe words used are natural to the narrative and that other words, mostly from European languages, are foreign. It also helps to reemphasize the distinction between different indigenous groups in the narrative and throughout the Americas. Indigenous peoples are not a monolith, and although the Ojibwe people may share some cultural similarities to other indigenous groups, they have languages, customs, traditions, and histories that are entirely distinct from one another. Narratively, and historically, this is important for Erdrich to note because of the tensions that existed between the Ojibwe and the Sioux as a whole during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Erdrich describes the Bwaanag, which is the Ojibwe word for the Sioux, as “a source of mortal hatred” for the Ojibwe (*Last Report* 150). She then goes on to describe an armed incident between the two, and writes, “The Bwaanug did the same and for hours, without a shot being fired, the two enemy camps exchanged volleys of shouted insults increasing in amazed fury and filth, which of course neither side could understand as they had no language in common, but which did vastly increase the knowledge of the children and their accompanying priest” (*Last Report* 150). This situation highlights how the Lakota language is an entirely different language

from the Ojibwe language, and thus the Lakota language is a foreign language to Erdrich and to the text itself. That's why she effectively code-switches and uses the term "Bwaanag" describing the Sioux not in terms of their language but in terms of the Ojibwe language. English and Ojibwe are the target languages at home in the text and within the philosophical makeup of the book.

The distinction about whether or not these words are italicized is an important one to make because it works to serve as a fundamental textual basis for Erdrich's unraveling of Western and European binary systems. Within the very aesthetic appearance of Ojibwe words within the text, there exists an immediate unraveling of the inherent binary of opposition between English and Ojibwe within her novel. These languages are not presented as either/or but rather they are presented as in conjunction with or in dialogue with each other. This helps represent the core ideas behind code-switching as a mode of dialogical and cultural representation for those that exist between two cultures. As pointed out in *Love Medicine*, a large goal for Erdrich is to help acculturate non-Ojibwe readers to better learn and understand Ojibwe language and culture. Code-switching in general is a great tool because it requires the reader to meet the writer halfway and to actually invest time and energy into researching what the words mean. By taking away visual cues like italics, this places even more emphasis on the naturalness of the words in the text, and places further responsibility on the readers to find and translate the Ojibwe words without the author's explicit guidance. As Dr. Peter Beidler points out, "Erdrich might not want non-Ojibwe speakers to understand the meaning of some of these sentences, or at least might not care if they do not understand them precisely. She might want to keep some phrases as private messages for those few readers, most of them Ojibwe, who can understand the old language. Or she might want to encourage her readers to struggle to learn at least the rudiments of the language, and so help to keep it alive" (56). When she code-switches in this

text, the lack of italics emphasizes that the code-switching is reserved for the understanding and appreciation of the ingroup. It is meant for the Ojibwe people and for those who understand the language, and if one wants to be in on the jokes and all the second meanings of words, one must put in the effort to learn. In a way, Erdrich is really taking the training wheels off of the bike in her readers' linguistic journey through the Ojibwe language.

The aesthetic presentation of the Ojibwe words, and its reliance on having readers meet Erdrich on her own linguistic grounds, in many ways mimics the journey of the main character, Agnes DeWitt, aka Father Damien, showcasing her shift away from a Western/colonial perspective and into an Ojibwe worldview as she interacts with the Ojibwe people, language, and culture. As Dr. Linda Krumholz points out, "Ojibwemowin plays a central role in Agnes's conversion; her major spiritual and cultural transformations grow out of her comprehension of the Ojibwe language" (188). In many respects, Agnes is a guiding character for readers. Her role as Father Damien exists as an almost parallel journey that readers themselves will follow if they attempt to learn about the language and culture in a genuine way. Using the Ojibwe language fundamentally changes Agnes, while also, hopefully, fundamentally changing readers. What is so interesting about this is that from a sociolinguistic perspective, Agnes' journey and use of the Ojibwe language could in many respects be considered a form of "language crossing." Language crossing, as defined by Ben Rampton and Mesthrie et al., is "the adoption of a language variety that isn't generally thought to 'belong' to the speaker" (173). It exists as a type of code-switching in which a person begins to absorb the language and language customs of another group, usually through the process of cultural interaction. As Mesthrie et al. points out, "In a later formulation [Rampton] refers also to 'styling the other': 'ways in which people use language and dialect in discursive practices to appropriate, explore, reproduce or challenge influential images and

stereotypes of groups that they don't themselves (straightforwardly) belong to' (Mesthrie et al., 173). Language crossing is produced through a genuine dialogue between cultures, in which a person's worldview is shaped by another culture that they themselves do not "straightforwardly" identify with. Its use is rather ambiguous in nature, suggesting that people may adopt and absorb other cultures' languages in a form of exploitative appropriation or as a way to challenge and reflect upon different worldviews and the problems that come with them. It is worth noting that Rampton's exploration of "language crossing" does not suggest that the speakers wish to take on the identity of the culture they are interacting with. As Mesthrie et al. writes, "In using these varieties, speakers were not actually claiming membership of particular ethnic groups ... and nor were speakers actively deconstructing ethnic boundaries. However Rampton argues that, in foregrounding inherited ethnicity, crossing at least partly destabilized this" (173-174). Language crossing acts as a way to examine cultural and ethnic identity, while also taking into account the fact that people may more easily pass on language to one another but may not as easily pass on the culture attached to that language. This allows for a great amount of ambiguity with what one does with that language and why one absorbs pieces of another group's language.

Much of the code-switching surrounding Father Damien's/Agnes' journey in learning the Ojibwe language follows this idea of language crossing; however, Erdrich more clearly delineates the intent of code-switching for Father Damien, and subsequently for the book itself, while also expanding upon how one views the process of conversion. Father Damien/Agnes exists in an almost similar linguistic space as do most non-Ojibwe readers of the book. Much of the structure of the book is set up so that readers follow a similar process of linguistic conversion as does Agnes. As Agnes learns more about the Ojibwe language and culture, readers begin to learn more as well. For example, the first fifty pages of the novel exist with almost no

appearance or mention of the Ojibwe language. The only languages outside of English that appear are a select few phrases of German, French, and Italian, all of which are notably italicized, again insinuating that they do not exist at home within the narrative. The Ojibwe language does not appear in these parts because Agnes herself, being of German descent, and having no relationship to the Ojibwe people before her journey to the Little No Horse reservation, does not know any of the language or culture. Most non-Ojibwe readers exist within the same space, only having at most the possible cultural exposure from Erdrich's own previous works.

The Ojibwe language and many mentions of it are left absent until she meets the Ojibwe people of Little No Horse and begins a form of language crossing. However, it is important to note that there do exist two explicit mentions of the language in these pages, one of which is from the original Father Damien, when Agnes first meets him before taking on his identity, and the other of which is from Agnes herself in her old age after taking on Father Damien's identity and role. Both of these mentions help Erdrich make the intent of the characters' language crossing clear. The first, from the original Father Damien Modeste, embodies the colonizing intentions behind the original Father Damien's journey into the Little No Horse reservation. Father Damien says, "Miss DeWitt, it is said that God often enters the dark mind of the savage via musical pathways. For that reason, I've studied translations of the hymns laid down in Ojibwe by our studious Father Hugo" (*Last Report* 36). This helps show the mindset of those who learn the language and the culture, not with the intentions to accept any of it or understand it through the two-way street of cultural interaction, but rather, with the colonizing perspective to use a people's culture and language against them to help convert the masses. This intent is purely to exploit an indigenous culture, and any language acquisition cannot be seen in good faith. The

original Father Damien does not have any respect for the Ojibwe people and cannot even properly address the Ojibwe and their culture as being equal to him and his own faith.

This mindset of the original Father Damien is important because the other mention of the Ojibwe language within the first fifty pages acts as a counterweight to such malicious intent. Taking place nearly a century after Father Damien's colonizing words, Agnes writes in a letter to the Vatican, "Although my mind is a tissue of holes, I have learned something of the formidable language of my people, and translated catechism as well as specific teachings. I have also rendered in English certain points of their own philosophy that illuminate the precious being of the Holy Ghost" (*Last Report* 49). Agnes, unlike the original Father Damien, shows an intent that imbues a certain amount of respect in her understanding of the language. Her intentions do not exist to primarily use the Ojibwe language to convert the Ojibwe people to Catholicism, but rather it exists to also convert the Catholic Church to a more Ojibwe way of life. She exists as a two-way street found in cultural interaction. Erdrich uses Agnes' intent to create a complication of both religious and gender identity. In turn, Erdrich uses the Ojibwe language and its code-switching with English to deconstruct the strict binaries of Western thought so that the Ojibwe language and its philosophy can unravel such oppressive systems.

To begin with, the first uses and mentions of the Ojibwe language do not consistently appear until Agnes, embodying the role of Father Damien, meets Kashpaw for the first time. It is no coincidence that this first meeting, and the mention of the language interaction that happens with it, is where Agnes' conceptions of gender begin to become closely examined. Erdrich writes, "He spoke, of course, no German, only some English, and his French was of vintage extremely valuable were it only wine. In addition, that eighteenth-century trapper's French was knocked aside or disarranged by words only to be guessed at – probably the language spoken by

Ojibwe. And yet in spite of their language problems, Agnes couldn't help questioning Kashpaw eagerly" (*Last Report* 62). This language barrier showcases the makeup of the text that exists after Agnes makes it onto the reservation. English, Ojibwe, and Michif, a French-Ojibwe dialect of the Métis people, are the only languages at home in the text, and thus will be the basis of code-switching until the end of the novel. Agnes takes this barrier in her stride and begins to communicate with Kashpaw in whatever way she can, so as to better learn about the language and the people. Erdrich later writes, "On the long drive north, she learned all of the polite Ojibwe she could cram into her brain – how to ask after children and spouses, how to comment on the weather, how to accept and appreciate food" (*Last Report* 62). She of course learns the very fundamentals, some of which mimic the fundamentals found in *Love Medicine*, as a sign of good faith in her willingness to meet the people on their own terms. Nonetheless, as she is communicating to Kashpaw, Erdrich writes, "Something new was at work, she could feel it, an ease with her own mind she'd never felt before, a pleasure in her own wit she'd half hidden or demurred. As Agnes, she'd always felt too inhibited to closely question men. Questions from women to men always raised questions of a different nature. As a man, she found that Father Damien was free to pursue all questions with frankness and ease" (*Last Report* 62). As Agnes is being separated from her linguistic groundings, that being her use of Western European languages like German and English, she is also experiencing a separation from her gender identity and expression. These European languages, most of which are, unlike the Ojibwe language, gendered languages, are deeply tied to a Western binary on things like gender roles and identity. By being released from the language, while simultaneously being released from her own appearance as a woman, Agnes in her role as Father Damien experiences a freedom from the oppressive views placed on women. She can now freely talk in a way that was not allowed

for her before as a woman. Ojibwe here acts as a release, allowing her to see how much of her life she has not been free to live.

Now, it is important to note, that the learning of the Ojibwe language and the use of code-switching within the novel does not exist solely for the benefit of Agnes, or white people in general. Its use is most important in conveying the naturalness with which gender and sexual fluidity are found within the very foundations of the Ojibwe culture, showing readers why a Western worldview does not work in assessing Ojibwe identities. Throughout the book there are many mentions of gender identities within the Ojibwe culture and other indigenous cultures that break from Western gender and sexual norms. They follow a more traditional Ojibwe understanding of gender and sexuality and help show that these concepts are deeply tied to one's culture. For example, during a recounting of the "History of the Puyats" by Father Damien, Agnes describes a race between Pauline's father, a Frenchman, and a two-spirit Bwaanag character referred to as a *winkte*. Erdrich writes, "the other was an ikwe-inini, a woman-man called a *winkte* by the Bwaanag, a graceful sly boy who sighed, poised with grave nuance, combed his hair, and peered into the tortoiseshell hand mirror that hung around his neck by a rawhide thong ... the others were lost in a debate. Was the *winkte* a man or a woman for the purposes of this race?" (*Last Report* 153). This depiction is so interesting because it poses three different cultural understandings of the two-spirit Bwaanag character. There exists the Ojibwe understanding of the character as an ikwe-inini, the English understanding of the woman-man, and the Bwaanag or Lakota understanding of the *winkte*. Instead of fully code-switching, Erdrich translates them by loosely associating the words together. She suggests that there are approximate similarities between the three; however, she ends up settling on just *winkte* and code-switches using this term every time after she refers to the two-spirit character. The reason

for this is that *ikwe-inini* is culturally specific to the Ojibwe just as *winkte* is culturally specific to the Lakota. The English language and ideology of the time did not have a specific designation for someone who was between gender identities because many gender-nonconforming individuals did not have a set place to exist within European societies. As Deirdre Keenan writes, “The sad thing about this refusal to recognize the constructed nature of the Western sex-gender dichotomy is that it suppressed older traditions among many Native American, First Nation, and indigenous cultures that recognized, accepted, and even honored multiple gender identities” (3). Gender existed in a strict binary, and in many respects still does in Western nations, almost always excluding those identities that do not conform to either side of the pole, while also forcing other cultures to accept said binaries. This is why the term “woman-man” is created as an equivalent to the Ojibwe and Lakota gender identities; however, in all realities, these gender identities are specific to tribes and are not interchangeable, just as the Ojibwe culture is not interchangeable for Lakota culture, nor are indigenous cultures as a whole interchangeable for European cultures. This is further reinforced by the idea that none of the characters in the novel can agree on whether or not the *winkte* character will race as a man or a woman. Erdrich writes, “Some of the Ojibwe, who judged his catlike stance too threatening, rejected him as a male runner on account of his female spirit. Others were wary of the scowling hunter and argued that as the *winkte* would run with legs that grew down along either side of a penis as unmistakable as his opponent’s, he was enough of a male to suit the terms” (*Last Report* 154). As noted earlier, there is no common agreement between the members of either group on whether or not their conceptions of these gender identities are the same. There exist cultural differences, but as mentioned earlier, with the Sioux and the Ojibwe being enemies at the time, there is political motivation underlying gender. Nonetheless, what this example shows is that the Ojibwe and the

Lakota, within their languages and cultures, have a more fluid idea of gender and sexuality, allowing for a safe space for people who defy Western norms, especially those of that time, to exist without persecution within their own culture.

This idea of gender being more fluid in the Ojibwe culture becomes quite an important plot point as it is later revealed that many of the Ojibwe characters on the Little No Horse reservation already knew that Agnes, in her role as Father Damien, was not a cisgender man. In one scene, while playing chess with Agnes, Nanapush, one of the elders of the community, and a good friend of Agnes', reveals that he knows that she is not a cisgender man. Nanapush says, "Nobody else ever said anything. But still, it is a question maybe just in my mind why you would do this, hide yourself in a man's clothes. Are you a female Wishkob? My old friend [Kashpaw] thought so at first, assumed you went and became a four-legged to please another man, but that's not true. Inside that robe, you are definitely a woman" (*Last Report* 231). From the moment that Nanapush first met Agnes, he wondered why she was dressed as a man, while hiding any mention of this fact. What would be an unreconcilable act at the time from a Western point of view, especially for the Catholic Church, is simply a normal thing for the Ojibwe people. There is nothing unusual about someone like Agnes presenting herself as a man; however, there is something unusual about Agnes hiding that fact. Erdrich reinforces this idea by writing, "Something struck Agnes, then, and she realized that this moment, so shattering to her, wasn't of like importance to Nanapush. In fact, she began to suspect, as she surveyed the chessboard between them and saw the balance tipped suddenly in her opponent's favor, that Nanapush had brought it up on purpose to unnerve and distract her" (*Last Report* 232). It is revealed that Nanapush does not actually even care about mentioning to Agnes that he knows she is a woman. He only did so to win at the game of chess that the two were playing because he knew it would

distract her. He knew that it would bother her and the Western binary perspective of gender that she felt constricted to. To him, it was not even really worth mentioning until he needed a distraction to win a simple chess match that he was losing. This part of the revelation is followed by a moment of code-switching in which Nanapush says “Ginitum” which roughly translates to “Your turn” (Beidler 62). Using Ojibwe in this place further cements Nanapush’s view on Agnes’ gender identity and expression as being tied to the Ojibwe language and worldview. It also serves as a way to invite Agnes to respond back in a similar perspective. That’s why when Nanapush describes Agnes as being in accordance with her “spirits” and that her “spirits must be powerful to require such a sacrifice” Agnes responds back saying, “Yes ... my spirits are very strong, very demanding, very annoying” (*Last Report* 232). She takes on a more traditional Ojibwe perspective, accepting the strength in her gender identity and expression, while also having the awareness that because of Western conceptions of gender, her “spirits” put her in a very difficult position.

The use of the Ojibwe language to help dismantle Western conceptions of identity and to help offer up an alternative view does not just stop at things like gender and sexuality, but is used for many more things, with religion and spirituality being at the forefront of the novel. For example, as Agnes interacts with the Ojibwe people, her notions of what is right and wrong in terms of religion begin to get challenged. Ojibwe spirituality offers up an alternative to the sort of Christianity seen in the novel, not necessarily as something to be practiced instead by non-Ojibwe people, but something that does not need to be erased or left to the wayside so that the masses can be proselytized in the Christian missionary sense. The Ojibwe language helps convey this idea in many of the moments in which the absolutist nature of the Church is challenged. This is especially well noted in the first instance that Ojibwe spirituality and practices are brought up

to Agnes by Kashpaw. Kashpaw says, “Here’s what I say ... Leave us full-bloods alone, let us be with our Nanabozho, our sweats and shake tents, our grand medicines and bundles. We don’t hurt nobody. Your wiisaakodewiniwag, half-burnt wood, they can use your God as backup to these things. Our world is already whipped apart by the white man. Why do you black gowns care if we pray to your God?” (*Last Report* 63). In this scene, Kashpaw offers up friction against Father Damien’s inquiry on what should be done to help the Ojibwe people. Kashpaw gives a genuine answer, in which he points out that “God” is not the answer to helping the Ojibwe people. Instead, what Kashpaw sees as being the answer is the need for the Ojibwe people to keep their culture. White people have already taken much of the material realities away from the Ojibwe people and left them in the poverty that Angles witnesses when entering the reservation. There is no need for them to as well take away their religious and cultural identity by taking away things like medicine bundles and shaking tents. It will not help fix the reality they now live in. Kashpaw even uses the Ojibwe language to note that the Métis people, or the wiisaakodewiniwag, whose identity is already mixed between Catholicism and traditional Ojibwe spirituality can keep their Catholicism since it is part of their identity. He uses the word, wiisaakodewiniwag, while translating it to show this mixed identity, and to show that a mixture of religion and religious practices is not a problem to the Ojibwe people. Their culture allows for this sharing of space; however, the Western conception of religion, especially in the Catholic tradition, does not condone the mixing of religious and spiritual practices into the Catholic faith. Catholicism demands that people either choose God or not. It does not often believe, as the Ojibwe do, that using God in a mixture of Ojibwe spiritual beliefs as “back up to these things” is a valid method of spiritual practice. This is often viewed as heresy within the Church, further stigmatizing and suppressing cultural practices and fluidity.

What further supports the dismantling of the European understanding of religion, especially in its either/or ideology of membership, is that other characters than just Kashpaw reflect upon how strange this ideology is in relation to the Ojibwe understanding of religion. For example, in an interaction between Agnes and Fleur Pillager, Fleur reflects upon how eager priests are to convert indigenous people. Erdrich writes, “What was it that made the black robes desperate to gather up the spirits of the Anishinaabeg for their god? Fleur decided that the chimookoman god was greedy, which made sense as all the people she had seen of their kind certainly were, grabbing up Anishinaabeg land, hunting down every last animal and wasting half the meat, swiping all they could” (*Last Report* 81). In this reflection, Fleur uses the Ojibwe word “chimookoman,” meaning “big knife,” for white people and their “God.” It’s a way of connecting white people’s spirituality and religion to the way that white people interact with the indigenous world. Just like a “big knife,” white people cut up and take Anishinaabeg land, hunt and slaughter every animal that is there, while also “swiping” down indigenous people in their path. Instead of just saying “white people,” code-switching using the Ojibwe word helps convey that this mentality of greed is found in both the religion and the actions of colonizers. The Ojibwe language, culture, religion, and people cannot simply exist because the colonial perspective of white people pushes for them to collect everything in their paths from things as abstract as souls to things as material as land.

The friction that the Ojibwe language and way of life offers up against European conceptions of religion and identity creates a reassessment of the dominant methods of thought within the Western world. Specifically, as Linda Krumholz notes, “Through Father Damien Erdrich creates an alternative concept of conversion. Instead of depicting conversion as a transformation from one belief to another, Erdrich constructs an idea of conversion as a potential

to see beyond the singularity of any one belief, as a potential for multiplicity, ‘a mixture of faiths’” (176). Agnes, through her interaction with the Ojibwe people, begins to reassess her perception of her faith through an Ojibwe lens. As noted before, this means that multiple religious and spiritual practices can coexist in one person’s idea of faith without being a fallacy. This allows for everyone, not just Ojibwe or European people, to be okay with the inconsistencies between religions because in many situations, such inconsistencies can help deepen faith. Erdrich shows this idea in how Agnes’ own faith becomes mixed through the Ojibwe language, and the culture attached to it. Erdrich writes, “Agnes’s struggle with the Ojibwe language, the influence of it, had an effect on her prayers. For she preferred the Ojibwe word for praying, *anama’ay*, with its sense of a great motion upward. She began to address the trinity as four and to include the spirit of each direction—those who sat at the four corners of the earth. Wherever she prayed, she made of herself a temporary center of those directions” (*Last Report* 182). The Ojibwe language begins to shape Agnes’ Catholicism. She begins to use Ojibwe words to pray, while also using the Ojibwe’s reverence for the number “four” as a grounding point in her prayers. By adding in these more traditional elements of Ojibwe faith to her own Catholicism, Agnes is better able to ground herself, even if it seems inconsistent to view the trinity as four. This causes a perceptual change that makes it hypocritical for Agnes to justify taking away Ojibwe culture from others in her role as a priest. This creates tension, as Erdrich writes, “He prayed that the seething factions merge and dissolve their hatred. He prayed, uneasily, for the conversion of Nanapush, then prayed for his own enlightenment in case converting Nanapush was a mistake” (*Last Report* 182). Because of Agnes’ new perception of her faith, she finds it hard to justify converting Ojibwe people that keep to traditional Ojibwe spirituality. She sees it as more destructive than helpful. This helps her move away from the

European/Western conception of religion that harms indigenous communities, while allowing the language to help deepen her own sense of faith.

Discussions, like the ones above, on how the Ojibwe language can reshape things like gender perception and spiritual identity, highlight the importance of indigenous languages, like Ojibwe, becoming more normalized and supported in its use, both by the Ojibwe people themselves and by non-Ojibwe people in general. Its inherent structure, and the philosophy found in it, deconstructs and dismantles deeply oppressive systems and ways of thought throughout the world. As Anton Treuer points out in the *Language Warrior's Manifesto*, "Indigenous language is vitally important for Indigenous people; that should be motivation enough for us as well as the rest of the world to actively support it. But there's more at stake than what's happening in Native communities and our capacity to be good, healthy neighbors and productive citizens. The rest of the world needs our ideas. Everyone needs to heal and interrupt the colonial process, which dehumanizes us all" (Treuer 26). Treuer shows us that the essential truth of the matter is that indigenous languages are worthy of support by everyone because they are important for indigenous communities. There should not be a need to motivate non-Ojibwe people to support the intergenerational dissemination of the language because the language's importance within the community is enough of a reason. However, Treuer points out that if a reason was needed for people to support the learning and use of the language, its roots would be found in the fact that learning the language helps break down the colonial systems that oppress everyone worldwide. As Treuer later notes, "White folks need healing. They are the primary beneficiaries of the systems of oppression operating in the world today. It hurts more to be a victim of oppression than a beneficiary, but oppression dehumanizes everyone" (Treuer 27). He highlights the fact that the colonial systems of oppression that white people helped create do not

just harm indigenous communities and people of color, but rather it also oppresses white people themselves. It is important to note that the harm it causes to white people in no way supersedes or equals the harm that it causes to non-white communities, but nonetheless the harmful effect is still there for everyone.

In its fundamental essence, oppressive ways of thought, specifically found in things like colonial violence, dehumanize everyone who is forced to work within these systems. They target everyone, although unequally, and create harmful cycles for people that showcase a need for large-scale change. As Treuer writes, “Native Americans have endured five hundred years of [colonial] violence; white folks have endured thousands of years of it. It is no surprise to me that people in communities of color dominate the crimes of desperation and poverty ... because this oppression has made them disproportionately poor. But white men dominate the ranks of school shooters and serial killers because the use of violence to cope with and solve problems is woven into the cultural fabric of white societies” (Treuer 27). Treuer notes that white people have for centuries upon centuries enacted colonial violence upon themselves before they inflicted it upon indigenous communities worldwide. They helped create a cultural trend of violence, that robs non-white communities of resources and stability, while enforcing the necessity for everyone, even themselves, to use violence as a coping mechanism. This in turn helped create deeply problematic and hierarchical systems that leave everyone, especially non-white people, in a vulnerable position. Yet Treuer concludes that, “White people need healing too. Their earth-based, indigenous connections have been so thoroughly eroded and colonized that they do not have sufficient cultural resources to lead themselves or anyone else to peace. Indigenous people can help pollinate the world’s garden and lead in this direction because we have more than a vestigial remnant of a different way of thinking and doing things. Our tools for doing so are often

embedded in our languages” (Treuer 27). Treuer echoes exactly what Erdrich practices in her novel. He shows that through the Ojibwe language, and through other indigenous languages, a new worldview can be reached. One that does not rely on the old systems of violence already set in place for millenniums. It’s one that can help everyone, both Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe, to reach a new goal of deconstructing and freeing ourselves from systems of oppression, not just for white people’s own sake, but for the world’s sake. This is exactly why the Ojibwe language in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* moves beyond just acculturating readers to the existence of the language, and instead deepens the importance of people learning how the language carries cultural knowledge that can dismantle harmful worldviews.

The Plague of Doves: What's in a Name?

It would be easy to mistake *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* as the natural conclusion to Erdrich's evolution in the use and design of her code-switching. In many respects, the jump in development between *Love Medicine* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is the most expansive in her use of the Ojibwe language, seeing as there are nearly seven full length novels in between the two works and almost seventeen years of separation between them as well. Given the time and the linguistic growth Erdrich had between the two works, it is no surprise that her code-switching becomes more pointed in its use and more consistent in its presentation and complexity. Although these developments do serve as the foundational basis for many of her subsequent works, even going into her most recent publications, they by no means signal the end of her continued development in the use of code-switching. Arguably, each novel after *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* that extensively uses the Ojibwe language offers up new intentions that complicate her working model for code-switching. No better is this point shown than in Erdrich's 2008 novel *The Plague of Doves*, in which Erdrich builds on the previous intentions of her code-switching, using the Ojibwe language to reconstruct the symbolic nature of names rather than just the ideological concepts they represent.

The Plague of Doves in many ways is a novel focused on names. That is to say the novel heavily focuses on the complicated histories and genealogies of the interconnected families that make up the communities at the center of the novel. Much of the tension of the novel exists in

how these histories are found in the realities of the present. The four main characters/narrators, Evelina Harp, Judge Antone Bazil Coutts, Marn Wolde, and Doctor Cordelia Lochren, find themselves tied together, not just through familial bonds, but through the longstanding ramifications of the brutal murder of a white farming family and the racially motivated lynching of four innocent Ojibwe people. Each character in the novel works to contend with the history that they have inherited, with many of them being direct descendants of those involved in the lynching. The novel is the first of three in Erdrich's Justice Trilogy and covers a wide range of thematic elements, naturally including themes surrounding justice, religion, sexuality, and history. Throughout the entire novel, one of the thematic elements that becomes more and more explicit is the importance of symbolic meaning, specifically through the process of naming. To explore this idea within the novel, Erdrich uses the Ojibwe language, and some of the previously established methods of code-switching in her earlier works, while expanding upon how they work in conversation with symbolic meaning.

To begin with, Erdrich for the most part sticks with the aesthetic direction she solidified within *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. The Ojibwe language continues to appear within the standard roman style font in which the English language of the novel appears. As before, this helps signify that the Ojibwe language is at home within the text and within Erdrich's own lexical repository. Erdrich also continues to keep other languages within the text italicized in the few instances that European languages such as Latin are used, helping to show which languages are foreign to the body of the text. Where Erdrich deviates a bit from her previous works, and what makes *The Plague of Doves* so interesting, is that instead of just generally using the Ojibwe language in all its varying dialects, she focuses in on just one dialect of the Ojibwe language, with that being Michif. For longstanding readers, who already had

experience being acculturated to the existence of this dialect in *Love Medicine*, specifically through the mention of jokes like the *ciga swa* joke (32), and further educated on its use by the Métis people within conversations found in *The Last Report*, its appearance is a welcome addition to the novel, although one that is not entirely new or surprising to them. For those readers who are unfamiliar with Erdrich's previous works, the appearance of the language itself within the novel may be a new discovery, although one that is explained well within the context of the novel, but one that might not be as easily understood just by its aesthetic appearance.

To the untrained eye, especially to those readers who do not know French or the Ojibwe language, Michif, a French-Ojibwe dialect, is often hard to distinguish between French by itself and Ojibwe by itself. One of the easiest ways to do so is to simply look at which words are italicized, and which ones are within roman style font, with Michif being in the standard roman style font and French being italicized. However, if one has not been accustomed to this aesthetic style from Erdrich's previous works, the presentation of the words might appear to be arbitrary to a certain degree. For example, whenever Henri Peace or Lafayette Peace speak Michif, their native language, the language always appears in standard roman style font, even when there are not any Ojibwe words in the mix. In one instance Henri says, "Oui, frère Joseph, weep now while you have the strength ..." (*Plague of Doves* 101). "Oui, frère ..." meaning "Yes, brother ..." does not technically have any Ojibwe words within the mix, yet its presentation is shown within the context of it being spoken as part of the Michif language. To those readers who have been accustomed to the appearance of this language within Erdrich's previous works, their previous experience provides them with a shortcut that more easily allows them to understand that when French is spoken by the Métis people they transform the foreign language of the

colonizer into the Michif language that is at home for them. The aesthetic presentation of the language signals this to long term readers without having to make explicit note of it.

For the new readers, and for the unaccustomed readers, Erdrich helps build in a teaching tool to catch them up to date on how the Michif language is presented. This is seen through the many instances in which Evelina Harp, being of mixed Ojibwe, Métis, and German heritage, attempts to learn the French language. As Evelina learns the language, she speaks to her grandfather Mooshum, who himself is Métis, in French. Evelina says, “La nord, le sud, l’ouest, et l’est sont les quatre points cardinaux!” (*Plague of Doves* 191). In its translation, that being “North, South, West, and East are the four cardinal points!” this instance of code-switching seems to be a throwaway line; however, when the aesthetic appearance is taken into account, it becomes obvious that when colonized people, such as the Ojibwe, speak the colonizer’s language, French, they transform it to be at home for themselves. This is essentially the creation of the Michif language, a language representing the blending of cultures and peoples. Mooshum even jokingly notes this when he responds, “That’s not how it goes! She tries to speak Michif and she sound like a damn chimookamaan” (*Plague of Doves* 191). Mooshum sees her use of the French language as being Evelina’s attempt to speak Michif, although he believes her delivery to be whitewashed, seeing as he refers to her pronunciation as “chimookamaan” or “big knife,” meaning a white person. Mooshum in this instance reinforces the idea that there is a symbolic importance in labeling Evelina’s attempt at French as being an attempt at Michif instead of French. It represents the context in which she, as an Ojibwe person, speaks the colonizers language.

The importance of naming things is echoed throughout the entirety of the book, not just through the importance of the language of the Métis people being called Michif instead of

French, but even in the names that each character holds. Names in the novel carry a symbolic significance in that they represent the weight of history being carried into modernity. For example, when Evelina reveals that her teacher, Sister Mary Anita, carries the last name “Buckendorf” her family reacts in a disgusted manner, with Mooshum taking particular offense to the word. For Mooshum’s response, Erdrich writes, “‘Oh yai! The Buckendorfs!’ His mouth twisted as he said it” (*Plague of Doves* 55). Mooshum, being the sole survivor of the original lynching that the white townspeople of Pluto carried out on four innocent Ojibwe people, recognizes “Buckendorf” as being the name of one of the men responsible for the lynching. He recognizes where Sister Mary Anita’s family comes from and remembers what they did to him and his family. Mooshum himself says, “You know why she’s a nun, after all, my girl ... Not too many people have the privilege of seeing right before their eyes there is no justice here on eart” (*Plague of Doves* 55). He suggests that Sister Mary Anita recognizes the horrific nature of her family’s history and that in many ways her calling as a nun is an attempt to make up for the sins of those with her last name. Later within the novel, Evelina asks this question directly to Sister Mary Anita, attempting to see if Mooshum was right in his judgement. Sister Mary Anita responds, saying, “To live my life atoning for another person's sin? ... I wouldn’t have had the strength. But then again, the hanging undoubtedly had something to do with my decision, growing up and finding out. Knowing one could be capable” (*Plague of Doves* 250). In a way, Sister Mary Anita is irrevocably affected by her last name. Although she may not be attempting to make up for the sins of her grandfather, the Buckendorf that tried to hang Mooshum, she does undoubtedly end up in the convent because of the knowledge that her family was capable of such evil, implicating herself in being capable of such evil as well. Here, the weight of her last name

carries a significance recognizable not only to the descendants of the victims of the lynching but also to the perpetrators of the lynching.

To tie this importance of naming into the very structure of the novel, and the structure of her linguistic choices, Erdrich uses code-switching to make it abundantly clear why the way names are used has an effect on the people they represent. This is best seen in the focal point of the novel, with that being the actual lynching that takes place. In this part of the novel, a young 13-year-old Ojibwe boy, named Holy Track, his uncle, Asiginak, and their acquaintances, Cuthbert and Mooshum, are hunted down by the angry white farmers from the neighboring town Pluto and are bound and placed on a wagon together in preparation for their deaths. These three Ojibwe men, and Holy Track, who is just a young boy, are accused of murdering the family of a neighboring white farmer, even though much of the evidence and circumstance surrounding the murder suggests that they were not at all involved in the murder, other than being the first people to stumble across the grisly scene. As they are driven on the road to their death, the older Ojibwe men in the group try to comfort Holy Track, who is described as being “sick and wild” because of the horrendous fate that is about to befall him. In attempting to comfort Holy Track, Cuthbert says, “We will see them soon ... All our relatives ... Aniin ezhinikaazoyan?” (*Plague of Doves* 77-78). Cuthbert tries to give Holy Track some sort of consolation that even though they may die now, they will go on to see all their family members and ancestors in the afterlife. He then asks in Ojibwe, “Aniin ezhinikaazoyan,” meaning “What is your name?”, to which Holy Track responds, “Charles” (*Plague of Doves* 78). Cuthbert responds back, “Not the priest’s name. Not even our nickname for you, Holy Track. How do the spirits know you?” (*Plague of Doves* 78). In this sequence of dialogue, Erdrich has Cuthbert code-switch, using the Ojibwe phrasing of “Aniin ezhinikaazoyan” to imply that Cuthbert is asking for Holy Track’s name in

Ojibwe because he wants Holy Track to answer back with his Ojibwe name. Holy Track does not understand this and gives Cuthbert his Christian name, but Cuthbert rejects Track's Christian name and his nickname, Holy Track, asking explicitly for his Ojibwe name. This is in part because as Cuthbert puts it, this is how the "spirits" know Holy Track. Using the Ojibwe language in asking Holy Track for his name is a signifier that Holy Track will not be dying as a Christian but as an Ojibwe, in part because his murder is motivated by his indigenous and racial identity.

Christianity will not and cannot save Holy Track from his ultimate fate, nor will it be of much use to Holy Track in the Ojibwe afterlife. Erdrich reinforces this idea when Cuthbert says, in response to Holy Track giving him his Ojibwe name, "Everlasting Sky. Good, you were named well. Give that name to the Person who will be waiting for you on the other side. Then you will go to the Anishinaabeg spirit world. Your mama and deydey will be waiting for you there, my boy. Don't be afraid" (*Plague of Doves* 78). This reinforces the idea that Holy Track is going to the Anishinaabeg spirit world instead of the Christian heaven. The importance of an Ojibwe name in this context suggests that this will be how Holy Track can make it to the spirit world and find his mother and his father. His Ojibwe name has a spiritual importance that connects him to the family members that have already passed on. It's a comforting sentiment to Holy Track, one that Erdrich takes care in emphasizing that its power comes from the language itself. She writes, "The other men standing next to the horses started as Asiginak and Cuthbert suddenly burst out singing. They began high – Cuthbert's voice a wild falsetto that cut the air. Asiginak joined him and Holy Track felt almost good, hearing the strength and power of their voices. And the words in the old language" (*Plague of Doves* 78). Asiginak and Cuthbert begin to sing their "death song" preparing themselves for the journey they are about to take in the

Anishinaabeg spirit world. Holy Track hears this, and the power of their voices and of the language itself lends him comfort. The Ojibwe language, and thus an Ojibwe name, acts as an important connection to Holy Track's ancestors and to the afterlife in which he will meet his ancestors.

The use of the Ojibwe language during Holy Track's death to emphasize the importance of having an Ojibwe name is an incredibly powerful statement, but it is not the only one that Erdrich ends up making. Erdrich shows a humorous side to how things are named as well, tying the Ojibwe language to the appearances of this humor. In many ways, Erdrich, and other Ojibwe writers, have made note of the fact that things sound funnier in the Ojibwe language. As previously mentioned, one of the primary reasons why Erdrich began to learn the Ojibwe language was because of her desire to understand the jokes in the Ojibwe language. There is often a recognition from multilingual people that jokes within their native languages are funnier because of the language itself and because of the inability for the joke to be properly translated. While this is very much the case for Erdrich and other Ojibwe writers there also exists a deeper cultural root to the humor that exists within the language. Erdrich writes, "The great teacher of the Anishinaabeg, whose intellectual prints are also on this rock, was a being called Nanabozho, or Winabojjo. He was wise, he was clever, he was a sexual idiot, a glutton, full of miscalculations and bravado. He gave medicines to the Ojibwe, one of the primary being laughter" (*Books and Islands* 43). Humor is an integral part of the Ojibwe culture and can often be viewed as a healing tool. This of course expresses itself through the language.

In *The Plague of Doves*, Erdrich shows this linguistic expression of humor during a scene in which a group of surveyors, including Lafayette Peace, Henri Peace, Emil Buckendorf, Joseph Coutts, and other members of their party experience an influx of indigestion as they huddle for

warmth in the freezing temperatures of the Western frontier. Erdrich writes, “He had never been an overly fastidious person, but the food that English Bill prepared sat heavy on the gut and one night the men grew so flatulent they almost blew the quilt off. Halfway through the concert, Henri Peace began to laugh and cried out in the dark, praising the men for playing so loudly on their own French fiddles. Joseph started laughing too, but Emil Buckendorf took offense” (*Plague of Doves* 100-101). Here, Erdrich creates a farcical scene in which the members of the surveying party, who have experienced extreme dietary restrictions and harsh weather, have a moment to laugh. Henri Peace in jest decides to equate their flatulence to playing the “French fiddle” in order to relieve tension, but some like Emil Buckendorf become offended by such crude humor. In response to this, Erdrich writes, “‘Gawiin ojidaa, ma frère,’ said Henri, who spoke the French-Chippewa patois as well as either English or pure Chippewa, or Cree, ‘I am sorry to have insulted you. For you were playing the German bugle, were you not?’” (*Plague of Doves* 101). Henri signals a change in names by code-switching in Michif. He says, “Gawiin ojidaa, ma frère,” almost as an invocation of brotherhood, and then proceeds to change the name of Emil Buckendorf’s flatulence from the playing of the “French fiddle” to the “German bugle.” The joke, being a pun on Buckendorf’s German heritage, does not go over well and creates tension between the two. Buckendorf takes the change in names as being a personal slight against him. This joke, in the traditional Ojibwe sense, is supposed to relieve tension and discomfort for the surveying party, but instead, because of miscommunications, it worsens things for certain members of the party. It is important to note that Emil Buckendorf, after this expedition with the Peace brothers, ends up being a part of the murderous party that kills the Peace brother’s cousin, Cuthbert Peace. Language, as a signifier of change in naming, helps further tie these parties together into a complex web of legacy.

The reason Erdrich uses the Ojibwe language to emphasize the importance of names, and how they can change the relationship between people, is because lineage becomes an important way of discovering how injustice carries itself into the modern world. As Evelina writes, “I think of how history works itself out in the living. The Buckendorfs, the other Wildstrands, the Peace family, all of these people whose backgrounds tangled in the hanging” (*Plague of Doves* 243). She describes history as not some abstract concept left in the past, but something that actively works itself out in the present. These family names become powerful indicators for seeing how that history ended up working itself out into the lives of those now living. She emphasizes this by writing,

I became obsessed with lineage. As I came to the end of my small leopard-print diary ... I wrote down as much of Mooshum’s story as I could remember, and then the relatives of everyone I knew – parents, grandparents, way on back in time. I traced the blood history of the murders through my classmates and friends until I could draw out elaborate spider webs of lines and intersecting circles. I drew in pencil. There were a few people, one of them being Corwin Peace, whose chart was so complicated that I erased parts of it until I wore right through the paper. (*Plague of Doves* 86)

She notes how these names become increasingly complicated. They show the people who carry the weight of the murders into the present, while also showing how each and every one of them are connected together. In a way, they are inseparable from each other because of their names. Evelina further emphasizes this when she writes, “I think of all the men who hanged Corwin’s great-uncle Cuthbert, Asiginak, and Holy Track. I see Wildstrand’s strained whipsaw body, and Gostlin walk off slapping his hat on his thigh. Now that some of us have mixed in the spring of our existence both guilt and victim, there is no unraveling the rope” (*Plague of Doves* 243).

Through these complicated lineages, Evelina can see the perpetrators and victims of the lynching in the faces and actions of their descendants in the present. It helps emphasize the lasting effects of historical violence, making it impossible for people to see history as a distant and isolated thing; however, it makes the responsibilities of those in the present more complicated. Because so many of these characters have ancestors who were both victim and perpetrator, the responsibility to change the course of history is placed upon everyone. No one can be left guiltless or victimless in their heritage.

Code-switching, throughout *The Plague of Doves*, becomes a way to reconstruct names to have more pointed meanings. It becomes a way of representing heritage through names and the active process of naming. Emphasizing the idea that the French spoken by Ojibwe people becomes the Michif language helps show the history of indigenous peoples using the colonizer's language in such a way that gives agency back to the colonized and creates a new language in the process. The same can also be said for examining the importance of indigenous names in creating a link to family members and ancestors, while deepening spiritual practices in the process. It inherently becomes a way for people to recognize how intimately connected we all are through history, imbuing history with a living and breathing body that is the present. While in many respects, Erdrich's code-switching continues to use techniques and concepts established in her earlier works, like the aesthetic appearance of the language and the tendency to challenge Euro-Christian beliefs, she creates an emphasis on heritage that was not there before. Through the Ojibwe language, she finds a way to dig out the life and meaning behind how things are named.

Conclusion: Intent Through Literary Understanding

Little scholarly attention has been given to code-switching within native and indigenous communities throughout the world, let alone to code-switching within just one indigenous language, author, or tradition. Part of this lies simply in the fact that indigenous languages, such as Ojibwe, are not commonly known by many monolingual English readers/speakers, and as a result, indigenous words are either translated to English, initially left out of works, or entirely edited out for “wider” demographics. As Holly Martin reveals,

Authors who are bilingual in English and another language other than Spanish, such as Chinese or a Native American language, have a more difficult task if they wish to code-switch. They cannot rely on their US readers to know even basic, simple vocabulary. As soon as an author inserts a word of Chinese without an explanation, for example, that portion of the work containing the Chinese expression becomes significantly marked and inaccessible for most US readers. Therefore, writers who wish to include their non-English language in their writing, yet still reach a monolingual, English-speaking audience, mostly code-switch on a limited basis. (410)

This makes it harder for indigenous authors, wishing to write in English and to code-switch using their indigenous languages, to actually include an untranslated version of their indigenous languages. However indigenous writers, as seen in the works of Louise Erdrich herself - or even within the works of other writers like N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Natalie Diaz, and Susan Power - do use code-switching in one form or another and are still able to create a

robust catalogue of works featuring their indigenous languages. This points to the fact that although there may be less of an abundance of works featuring code-switching of indigenous languages, in comparison to languages like Spanish or French, there is still an underrepresentation of indigenous code-switching within literary studies.

In many respects, since code-switching in indigenous languages is often harder to employ within works marketed to a monolingual audience, it is quite important to study and support the use of said languages in order to assure that these languages will flourish. For languages like Ojibwe, and other indigenous languages in general, a scarcity of native speakers or even second-language speakers greatly endangers their survival. As Anton Treuer writes,

Only one hundred languages in the world are actively and widely taught at colleges and universities. There are still around 6,700 languages spoken worldwide, but 2,500 are endangered. In the United States and Canada, the number of our languages has fallen from 500 precontact to 150 or so today. Of those, only twenty are spoken by children and only four have such a large and vibrant base of speakers that they will definitely be here one hundred years from now. For many who still have native languages to think about revitalizing, future vitality may be possible, but it is not certain. All depends on the depth and breadth of our interventions *today* to save them. (31)

This places an importance in studying and funding said study of indigenous languages in all its forms, whether through code-switching in literary works or through learning programs directed at young children to become native speakers. For example, a language like the Ojibwe language only has about forty thousand people, out of the two hundred fifty thousand Ojibwe people that live between Canada and the United States, that can speak the language (Treuer 77). This shows that about eighty-four percent of Ojibwe people do not have access to their native language.

Although the brunt of the work to remedy this fact is being done by language warriors and revitalization programs/movements, all of whom are ensuring the preservation and flourishing of their native languages, other areas of support are necessary, like the use and study of code-switching within indigenous communities. By studying code-switching within works by indigenous writers, like Louise Erdrich, one is better able to highlight the importance of language warriors and native or second-language speakers. It shows how the use of the language in an English dominated world is integral to the cultural, physical, and mental health of indigenous communities. Language choices are not trivial, and every time an author or speaker chooses to code-switch using an indigenous language, there is meaning behind it. This is why the use of a literary understanding of code-switching is not just beneficial, but entirely necessary to revealing said meaning.

The use of a literary understanding of code-switching by no means invalidates the use of sociolinguistics to study and define code-switching. Each field has its own place within the study of code-switching, and in many respects, ignoring one or the other leaves an incomplete examination of such linguistic skills. Sociolinguistics centers the scientific method of observation within its studies of linguistic behaviors, creating a field meant to be more objective and more focused on how language choices can affect conversations, and the relationships within said conversations. This trend towards observing behavior in more objective ways leaves out an integral aspect to code-switching, which is a speaker's intent. Literary understandings of code-switching inherently account for this discrepancy and recenters the conversation on the author's intent when code-switching. Part of this lies in the fact that linguistic identity, as Anzaldúa notes, is one and the same with ethnic and cultural identity. Language choices are deeply tied to one's cultural identity, and when one chooses to code-switch or not, there is an important meaning

behind that intent. This meaning, without the literary understanding of code-switching, would be lost to readers.

Choosing to use the literary understanding of code-switching, as one that focuses on intent rather than just behavior, becomes an incredibly powerful tool for many multilingual and multicultural writers choosing to portray the realities behind their identities. It becomes a way for agency in language to be placed back into the speaker's hands and out of the researcher's. For a writer like Louise Erdrich, this becomes integral as one maps out the development of her writing and her inclusion of Ojibwe words. By placing her novels in tandem with her own personal journey of learning the language, the context behind why she chooses to code-switch becomes centered within the conversation. Although it is important to responsibly interpret and contextualize Erdrich's use of the Ojibwe language within her code-switching, the importance is not so much placed on whether or not one interpretation is more accurate or not than another, but rather the importance is in the fact that one is even discussing what Erdrich's intent was at all. By having this conversation, one begins to center the speaker as being just as important if not more than the observer, making it integral to try to understand how they enacted agency for themselves by code-switching.

In giving Erdrich the last word, I would be remiss to not share a very important passage from *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*. On speaking of the importance of the Ojibwe language in shaping her understanding of "goodbyes," Erdrich writes,

Ojibwe people don't say good-bye, that's too final. 'I'll see you' is as close to good-bye as the language goes for a common pairing ... others jokingly say, *weweni babamanadis*, which translates roughly as an admonition to be careful as you go around being ugly in

your ugly life. Or *gego anooj igo ezhichigeken*. Don't do any of the weird things that I would. *Gigaa-waabamin* means 'I'll see you again.' (74-75)

To all readers, weweni babamanadis, *gego anooj igo ezhichigeken*, and most importantly, *gigaa-waabamin*

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