

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Four Souls. By Louise Erdrich.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/20q4r2wx>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 28(1)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

2004

**DOI**

10.17953

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**Four Souls.** By Louise Erdrich. New York, HarperCollins, 2004. 210 pages. \$23.95 cloth.

At the end of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988), Fleur Pillager sends her daughter Lulu off to boarding school and magically calls in a wind to drop trees on the loggers who have come to clear-cut the trees around her cabin on Matchimanito Lake. Then she heads off pulling a cart containing her few belongings to an unknown destination. Although in the intervening novels we have had several sightings of Fleur, Erdrich fans have had to wait sixteen years to read in *Four Souls* where Fleur went, why she went there, what she did there, why she comes back to the reservation, and whom she brings back with her.

When she leaves Matchimanito in 1919, the Fleur of *Four Souls* follows the tracks east (the train tracks, mostly) to Minneapolis, taking along with her the bones of her ancestors. In fact, she is following her beloved trees to where they have been hauled on the train. She finds them as lumber on a prominent riverside hill in Minneapolis, where the enemy she has never met, lumber baron John James Mauser, has used it to build a huge and opulent mansion. Her plan is to murder him and by doing so somehow take back her land. *Four Souls* does not mention it, but John James Mauser is the grandfather of Jack Mauser of *Tales of Burning Love* (1996). And Jack, we recall, is Andy of "The World's Greatest Fishermen" in *Love Medicine* (1984), the mud engineer who attempts to seduce June Kashpaw.

As part of her plan to take revenge against Mauser and get her land back, Fleur takes a job as a laundress in the Mauser mansion. Her main duty is to wash Mauser's clothing and bedding—a major task, since he is very sick and sweats voluminously. He is, indeed, so sick that Fleur, thinking that it will be no real satisfaction to kill a sick man, helps to nurse him back to health so that she can have the pleasure of killing a well one. Partly because of Fleur's beauty, partly because she has helped him recover, and partly because he does not want Fleur to slit his throat, Mauser sets aside his first wife and marries Fleur, promising to make her his heir. As his wife, Fleur gradually begins to feel some affection for her husband, particularly when she becomes pregnant with his child. Her affection begins to feel a bit like love, and in the end she cannot murder Mauser.

The narrative might have ended there as a simple and heartwarming story about the way in which a man's heartless greed and a woman's hateful vengeance gradually turn into a gentle love cemented by the birth of their son. Louise Erdrich's stories, however, are rarely either simple or heartwarming—which of course helps explain why none have been turned into Hollywood films. One of the complications of the plot of *Four Souls* is that Fleur has trouble keeping her baby full term and is ordered to stay in bed for the duration of her pregnancy. To help keep her calm, a woman named Polly Elizabeth Gheen, the unmarried sister of Mauser's first wife, helps take care of Fleur. Polly Elizabeth's main medicine for calming Fleur is whiskey, and it is no surprise that with repeated applications of such medicine, Fleur soon becomes an alcoholic.

She does not lose the baby, but when she finally does give birth to her son John James Mauser II, Fleur continues to self-prescribe whiskey both for herself and, indirectly, for her fussy baby. This child soon shows signs of abnormality: he is fat, indolent, spoiled, retarded, and unable to speak. Several of the characters in the story speculate on why the child is so distressingly unlike other children. We never do find out for sure, but it is easy enough to suppose that he probably suffers from what was later to be called fetal alcohol syndrome. We know that Erdrich, who wrote the introduction to Dorris's *The Broken Cord* (1989), is familiar with FAS, and it seems likely that this child, who appears as an adult named Awun or "Mist" in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), is an FAS child. In *Four Souls*, his mother is able to teach him only one important skill: how to play poker. That skill he learns very well indeed.

By the end of the novel Mauser, his financial affairs in disarray because of both his own mismanagement and the economic crash in the late 1920s and early 1930s, runs off, leaving his creditors and abandoning his family. Having come to Minneapolis pulling a cart, Fleur leaves driving a white Pierce-Arrow automobile, her son on the seat beside her. Although he is addicted to sweets, spoiled, and almost totally dysfunctional, the boy is a genius at poker. His skill with cards becomes important near the end of the novel when he stands in for his drunken mother and wins Fleur's ancestral lands back from the corrupt agent Jewett Parker Tatro. That incident had been referred to briefly in *The Beet Queen* (1986). This high-stakes card game brings to mind the poker game in *Tracks* that led Lily, Tor, and Dutch to rape Fleur, but this card game gets Fleur back to her own land where she can finally rebury the bones of her ancestors and undergo a purification ritual directed by Margaret Rushes Bear.

Readers who remember *Tracks* will see a number of connections between the two books. Not only is Fleur the central character in both, but the plot of this new novel is very much a continuation of the earlier work. At the end of *Tracks*, Fleur loses and leaves her land; at the end of *Four Souls*, she regains it and comes home. Fleur's body and land are both raped in *Tracks*; her body is in a sense raped by whiskey again in *Four Souls*, and the land she reclaims is still denuded of its once-magnificent forests. Nanapush is a key narrator in *Tracks*, as he tells Lulu about the history of her mother Fleur and why Fleur had sent her daughter to the government boarding school; Nanapush is again a key narrator in *Four Souls*, and some of his narrative effort is directed specifically at Lulu, who has still not forgiven her mother. *Tracks* is told in alternating chapters with two quite different narrators, one a genial old Ojibwe man, the other an unattractive young woman who never quite understands Fleur; Pauline Puyat plays no role in *Four Souls*, but most of the alternating chapters (with the exception of two told by Margaret Rushes Bear) are told by another unattractive young woman, the sister of Mauser's first wife. *Tracks* is explicit in its criticism of white men—their dishonest government agents, their exploitation of Ojibwe women, their colonization of the landscape, and their general insensitivity to the ways of the people they plunder; so is *Four Souls*.

Indeed, *Four Souls* is so deeply and widely connected to *Tracks* that we can understand why Erdrich's original intention had apparently been to combine

it with the earlier novel (as she did with the additional chapters she added to *Love Medicine* in 1993), and reissue it as a new and expanded version of *Tracks*. I have never been convinced that Erdrich improved *Love Medicine* by expanding it, and I am happy that she has kept *Four Souls* separate from its predecessor. *Tracks* has a tightness of structure and nicely balanced narrators in Nanapush and Pauline, and I am glad she left it unchanged. *Four Souls*, although it depends for much of its interest and power on the earlier novel, has its own attractive unity in its focus on the Minneapolis life of Fleur and her growth as a human being. Readers who pick up this new novel without having read *Tracks* will be puzzled by some of what they read, but that puzzlement is part of the fascination of reading Erdrich. We read one and then want to read and reread others so that we can trace her complex and often comic internarrative connections.

There is no question that *Four Souls* is very much Fleur's story. Always at home in the wild, Fleur becomes for a few years an urban Indian in a big house in a big city. She succeeds there but she does not flourish. "Four Souls," a name that her mother had used, is the name Fleur gives to her own spirit the night she arrives at Minneapolis. Its symbolism is too complex to explain in a brief review, but Nanapush tells us on the second page of the novel that "she would need the name where she was going," and he is right.

Where she is going is the big house on the hill. She emerges from that house more than a decade later in an alcoholic stupor with a grotesque son at her side, searching in a fancy white car for her lost land and her lost daughter Lulu. She ends the novel weaker and less sympathetic than she was at the start. Fleur Pillager has always been a captivating subject, in part because Erdrich never takes us directly into her mind or lets us see her point of view. Indeed, we rarely hear her speak, for she is a woman of few words. We see her only through the trickster eyes of Nanapush, who loves her and understands her pretty well, and alternatively through the duller and often jealous eyes of others. The other main narrator in *Four Souls*, the rough counterpart to Pauline in *Tracks*, is Polly Elizabeth Gheen, sister-in-law of Mauser. Polly Elizabeth hires Fleur to do Mauser's laundry and later, when her sister's marriage to Mauser is annulled, returns to the house on the hill and becomes in essence Fleur's personal servant, nurse, and babysitter. Why she does so is never all that clear, and she never quite understands Fleur. Despite her white-woman's ignorance, however, she shows us things about Fleur that are worth knowing.

Through the eyes of Nanapush, Polly Elizabeth, and Margaret, Fleur emerges as a deeply conflicted character. Fleur has been raped, yes, but in her drive for vengeance she fails to see the blessings she does have, such as her daughter Lulu, who might have come to Fleur as a result of Fleur's having been raped in Argus. (Incidentally, we never do find out who Lulu's biological father is.) Realistically full of contradictions, Fleur remains one of the most memorable of Erdrich's creations—lovely but finally unlovable, strong but finally weak in her self-pitying anger and addiction, victimized but ultimately the victim of her own inability to forgive.

Erdrich has always been an elegant narrative stylist, and she remains so in *Four Souls*. In the chapter entitled "Love Snare" (earlier published in slightly

different form in the *New Yorker* for October 27, 2003), she has Nanapush dream of sitting by the winter fire. He mentions the *aadizokaamag*, or sacred legends of the Ojibwe. These are “stories that branched off and looped back and continued in a narrative made to imitate the flowers on a vine” (114–15). In that language Erdrich is, of course, describing her own stories, her own approach to a fiction that branches off and loops back. At her best, Erdrich writes with a lyric force so powerful that we cannot help pausing to admire both the tangled vine of her larger narrative and the individual flowers, such as *Four Souls*, on that tangled vine.

At the heart of the Erdrich style in this novel is the narrator Nanapush. Although he was never in Minneapolis and does not know directly what Fleur did there, he learns from others some of what he narrates and surmises the rest. His genial philosophy is winningly phrased, as in this passage from chapter three, where Fleur stands outside Mauser’s door imagining the sweet revenge she will get when she goes in to murder him:

Time is the water in which we live, and we breathe it like fish. It’s hard to swim against the current. Onrushing, inevitable, carried like a leaf, Fleur fooled herself in thinking she could choose her direction. But time is an element no human has mastered, and Fleur was bound to go where she was sent. Maybe in those long nights as she watched the crack of light beneath the door, she had an inkling. She thought revenge was behind that door, and satisfaction. Maybe she began to realize that she was wrong. There was only time. For what is a man, what are we all, but bits of time caught for a moment in a tangle of blood, bones, skin, and brain? She was time. Mauser was time. I am a sorry bit of time myself. We are time’s containers. Time pours into us and then pours out again. In between the two pourings we live our destiny. (28)

*Four Souls* might seem to some readers an imperfect work. The narrators are brilliant in places, but in other places they seem to stumble. Late in the novel, for example, Nanapush tells a story of snaring his beloved Margaret, of competing in dark medicine with his old enemy Shesheeb, of getting drunk on the communion wine he steals from the convent, and then of wearing Margaret’s medicine dress to make an oration to his fellow Ojibwe about voting against a proposal to sell more of their land. It is a funny story, but it seems to have so little to do with the story of Fleur or with Nanapush’s desire to tell Lulu about her mother that it will come across to some readers as self-indulgent slapstick. Such readers will want to consider whether their expectations for unity in a novel are different from those of a writer whose Ojibwe heritage urges her to write to a different standard of narrative unity.

Some readers will be troubled by Polly Elizabeth Gheen. This narrator ought to be a minor character, but by being selected as the person who gives us a vantage point from which to see Fleur’s life in the big house, Polly Elizabeth takes on an importance that she does not deserve. At one point she holds a glass up to a wall so she can report to us a conversation on the other side. Her doing so signals the limitations of limiting the narrative point of

view, since it drives narrators to eavesdrop in unlikely ways on unlikely conversations. At other points, we are distracted from Fleur's story by the sketchy, aborted, and unconvincing stories of Polly Elizabeth's own love life. At the end, how many readers will really care that Polly Elizabeth finds happiness with a man whose tongue had been cut off by a sardine can?

Whatever its possible minor flaws, *Four Souls* is a welcome addition to the growing body of fiction from one of America's most gifted, original, and prolific writers. We are fortunate that Erdich has many more books in her. We can look forward to new surprises as she continues to follow the tracks set down in her earlier novels, and to blaze new trails.

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**In Bitterness and Tears: Andrew Jackson's Destruction of the Creeks and Seminoles.** By Sean Michael O'Brien. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003. 254 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

Andrew Jackson's wars against the Creeks in 1813–14 and the Seminoles in 1818 are hardly neglected subjects. Two Creek memoirists, George Stiggins and T. S. Woodward, have left firsthand accounts. Within the present generation, Frank L. Owsley has chronicled the military side of the Creek War, while John K. Mahon has dealt with both wars in several articles. More recently, David D. and Jeanne T. Heidler have focused on Jackson's conduct of both wars and their diplomatic and political contexts. Biographer Robert Remini fits the story into his analysis of Jackson and the quest for empire. Joel Martin expounds upon the cultural revitalization that provided a religious basis for the Creek civil war, which, with U.S. military intervention, became a phase of the international War of 1812. Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Claudio Saunt have examined the source of strife among the Creeks in the class and racial divisions incident upon "contact": trade, intermarriage, the U.S. "civilizing" program, and diplomatic bribery. Tribal histories by Angie Debo, Michael Green, and J. Leitch Wright have explored the cultural and military problems of the Muscogee in relation to Jackson's ambition to displace them and their sometime Spanish and British allies in the Southeast.

These are only a few of the sources on which a popularizer such as O'Brien might draw to construct an account of the wars and of Creek dispossession. His narrative neglects Debo's and Green's work, but otherwise draws on the best secondary accounts. He misses some of their nuances, and most of his citations, including those with quotes from original sources, are footnoted only to secondary works. In addition, O'Brien uses published memoirs and letters, with archival collections of eyewitness letters and journals to provide a sense of immediacy to his story.

To explain his contribution, one might compare his work to a recent version of the history of the conflict with the Creeks and Seminoles, the *Heidlers' Old Hickory's War: Andrew Jackson and the Quest for Empire* (1996). Because