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people from a range of tribal backgrounds whose lives in the twentieth century have been marked by frequent migration. McPherson recognizes this and makes good use of newspapers and other local sources from southeastern Utah in the last section. The death of his source in 1988, however, made it impossible for McPherson to fill some of the gaps in the original oral account. Many readers will finish the book all the more convinced that more American Indian oral history projects must be conducted soon.

Those with interests in Navajo culture or Utah frontier history will be particularly drawn to Oshley's autobiography. Most teachers of American Indian history courses, however, will likely find autobiographies by Charles Eastman, Agnes Yellowtail Deernose, Mourning Dove, Mark Monroe, or Mary Crow Dog more suitable for classroom use. Oshley's account remains largely local in focus and does not touch on some of the main themes of twentieth-century American Indian history such as Indian tribal and pantribal identity, tribal political and economic activity, water and mineral rights, the experience of World War II, and political activism.

None of these problems concerning the production and transmission of life histories or the relationship between autobiography and broad historical themes should in any way detract from Navajo Oshley himself, however. His autobiography and life history present to readers the picture of an honorable man cherished and respected by all who knew him. Those who meet him in this book will join the ranks of his admirers.

*James B. LaGrand*  
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**The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse.** By Louise Erdrich. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. 361 pages \$26.00 cloth.

*[Editor's Note: There are varying spellings of the term Ojibwa. The review author uses Ojibwe in accordance with Erdrich's usage in this particular novel.]*

*The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* takes us back, after Louise Erdrich's temporary detour into Minnesota in *The Antelope Wife* (1998), into the North Dakota world of her earlier novels. We find again familiar characters like Sister Leopolda, Lulu, Nector, and Marie from *Love Medicine* (1984, 1993); Jude Miller from *The Beet Queen* (1986); Nanapush, Margaret, Fleur, Damien, Pauline, Lulu, Napoleon, Sophie, Bernadette, and Nector from *Tracks* (1988); Lulu and Marie from *The Bingo Palace* (1994); and Leopolda, Fleur, and Father Jude from *Tales of Burning Love* (1996). The "present" time of the novel is 1996, not long after the events that end *Tales of Burning Love*, though there are references to many earlier events dating back to 1910, before the events narrated in *Tracks*. This new novel answers some of the questions raised or left unanswered in the earlier novels: who Pauline's parents were; how Nanapush "acquired" his wife Margaret; where Fleur went when she walked away from the reservation at the end of *Tracks*; and the identity of the little white boy who

comes back in the fancy car with her in *The Bingo Palace*. It leaves some mysteries still unanswered, such as the identity of Lulu's father.

The big mystery that this new novel solves is uncovered in the first dozen pages of the novel—the true identity of its central character, Father Damien Modeste, the priest who comes to the Ojibwe reservation in 1912 and spends the next eighty-odd years there living a near-saintly life ministering to the spiritual and earthly needs of his flock. The end of the novel has two central foci. The first is Father Damien's desire, at the close of a long life, to confess by letter, directly to the pope, the huge lie he has lived since 1912. The second is Father Jude Miller's arrival at the reservation to investigate the life of Sister Leopolda and to report to his superiors about whether this remarkable nun should be declared blessed or made a saint. Jude's investigations take him, of course, to Father Damien, who knows that Pauline, who had abandoned her daughter Marie and murdered Napoleon Morrissey, does not deserve beatification. The novel ends with Damien's death and with his loving servant Mary Kashpaw sending his body to the bottom of the deepest part of Matchimanito Lake. His secret goes to the bottom of the lake with him. Nanapush knew the secret, but he is dead by now. Leopolda had suspected it, but she is dead by now. Only Mary Kashpaw knows for sure, and she will never tell. We, Erdrich's readers, of course, know it as well, and we will enjoy talking about it to whoever wants to listen down through the years.

Father Damien's secret, which we learn at the end of the prologue to the novel, is that he is a woman. The central interest in the first part of the novel is the series of astonishing events that cause a nun named Sister Cecilia to leave the convent and become the common-law wife of a farmer named Berndt Vogel, then the shooting victim of a bank robber known as "The Actor," then the self-appointed replacement for the first Father Damien Modeste, who has drowned in a flood on the way to take up his duties at the Ojibwe reservation called Little No Horse. Yes, that is one more mystery that Erdrich solves in this novel, the name of the reservation that she has carefully kept secret in previous novels. She is still indefinite as to its precise location, somewhere vaguely "up north" of Fargo, North Dakota. It is the same reservation we have visited before, however, with the same Matchimanito Lake at its center. Now we know what to call it.

We do not, of course, always know what to call Agnes DeWitt/Sister Cecilia/Mrs. Berndt Vogel/Father Damien Modeste, or even what pronouns to apply to him or her. How to refer to our protagonist is a delightful and tricksterish problem for Erdrich as well. She solves it, as students and scholars no doubt will, with some contradiction and confusion: "Father Damien didn't want to pray. Nevertheless, Agnes went down on her knees and spoke earnestly aloud" (p. 66); "Father Damien, now fearing they might burn down his church in their frenzy, patrolled inside nervously, then outside. What else could he do? This was a test. Agnes stopped, put her hands on her hips, rallied her wits and her strength. Was her priest to be driven from his own church?" (p. 169). We at first may find such passages disconcerting, but we quickly get used to the idea that Father Damien and Agnes are the same person or, more precisely, two persons in one.

Like Erdrich's other novels, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* challenges our credibility. Can we really believe that this pianist/woman/nun/wife/paramour/priest could do all that she is said to do? Is it really likely that a hostage, bleeding from a gunshot wound to the hip and worried about whether the Actor will murder her and her husband, would have the presence of mind to rob him of his money? The story suggests no other reason than that she possesses "a busy intelligence" (p. 29). Is it likely that a grieving widow swept into a raging flood would, after later coming upon the corpse of a priest dangling from a tree, steal his clothes, bury his body, and fulfill his mission on a reservation neither has ever visited? The story is vague about why she would do so. Is it curiosity? Is it a desire to escape a life that no longer interests her? Is it a desire to help those who help themselves? Is it a desire to save souls that, unlike her own, may wind up in heaven rather than hell? (Damien is convinced that her sins will keep her from the Christian's heaven.) The narrative offers some answers to these questions, but perhaps we are better off not asking too many questions and simply enjoying being carried off imaginatively by the flood of Erdrich's miraculous words.

Although we grow to respect, like, and even love Father Damien, Erdrich carefully plants a number of questions in our minds. Why, for example, does Agnes not wonder more than she does at the hypocrisy of her life, and whether, in falsely offering God's forgiveness to Ojibwe sinners, she is condemning them to a hell they do not deserve? Why does she not wonder more than she does whether a false priest can truly serve the spiritual needs of a heathen people? Why does she not wonder more than she does whether it is right to spend stolen money on a new Steinway for herself when her Ojibwe friends have so many pressing needs that go unsatisfied? Why does she not wonder more than she does whether a woman who pretends to be a man of God, then has a torrid sexual affair with another man of God, and continues to play the part of a priest, has any right to write letters to the pope? That she does not wonder more about these things, of course, makes Father Damien a delightfully human character and helps to make it seem likely that she would find in the Ojibwe religion something far more friendly than the Catholicism she offers in its place. It is something of a cliché in fiction that the converters will become the converted, and in this case the conversion of a priest into a pagan, who then remains a good priest, is just as reasonable as the conversion of a woman to a man, who then remains a woman. These conversions pave the way for us to believe that an aging Father Jude Miller can fall in love with Lulu, now in her early eighties, and that he can convincingly divert his attentions away from seeking the beatification of Leopolda and toward seeking the beatification of Father Damien.

These are serious questions in a serious novel, but *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is finally a comic novel. In comedy we do not expect to take everything literally. The chapter called "Le Mooz" appears late but sets the tone for much of the novel. In it Nanapush, with three fishhooks in his butt, is for a day or two pulled by a moose through the lake and dragged overland in his boat. At the end of that chapter Nanapush is killed by Margaret's undercooked beans but comes back from the dead, rampant, to

give her one last night of sexual pleasure. In a chapter entitled "Nector," some Ojibwe boys go for a joy ride in a stolen car and then, with Nanapush's help, get themselves out of the predicament they find themselves in. These chapters are tonal anomalies that break the seriousness of the novel, but little in this novel does not share in the trickster qualities of those episodes. Louise Erdrich is finally a storyteller, not a historical novelist, and we have come not to expect strict realism from her fiction. Indeed, she is recreating contemporary fiction by breaking all the rules of realism. Just as no one told Agnes that she could not rewrite the rules of the priesthood and forgive virtually all sinners virtually all sins, so no one told Erdrich that she could not rewrite the rules of modern fiction and tell stories that keep breaking out of their own molds. We all know that dogs don't talk, but Erdrich has us believing—well, almost—that a black dog steps in Father Damien's soup and speaks diabolically to her, and that Damien much later gets her revenge by squeezing the dog's testicles between her knees.

*The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* is brilliant. It is perhaps less brilliant in itself than in the maze of connections it makes to her previous fiction. This new novel can be read in isolation, of course. Those for whom it is the introduction to Erdrich's fictional world will surely want to pick up some of her previous fiction to find out more about these characters. But this new venture into Little-No-Horse country will give special pleasure to readers who have already read Erdrich's previous novels. These readers will be pleasurablely stunned to see characters they thought they knew pretty well grow in bold new directions. They will want to reread the earlier novels to see if they can determine, for example, whether Father Damien was a woman all along rather than a man, or whether this female priest represents a fictional sex-change for a character who was previously really a man (see *Tracks*, p. 174, where he has a "sparse" beard). Taken together, these novels give us an amazing fictional glimpse into a century of Ojibwe-white relations, a century of trickster humor, a century of love and growth, a century of forgiveness for all sorts of sins.

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**Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852–1949.** By Amanda J. Cobb. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. 162 pages. \$27.50 cloth.

Amanda J. Cobb's *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories* is an important contribution to the fields of Native American studies and education. Winner of the North American Indian Prose Award in 1998, Cobb examines the role that Bloomfield Academy (renamed Carter Seminary in 1932) played in the Chickasaw's cultural preservation. The author more than fulfills her modest goal of "adding a thread to the history of women's literacy education, to the type of literacy instruction American Indians received, and to the special