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Dimensions of Homing and Displacement in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

JILL JEPSON

INTRODUCTION

William Bevis has argued that, whereas the classic American novel tells a story of "leaving," in which characters find growth and fulfillment away from the homes they grew up in, the typical Native American novel is based around "homing." In homing stories, the characters do not "find themselves" through independence but rather discover value and meaning by returning to their homes, pasts, and people.[1] Although Bevis's notion provides insight into many Native American works, one novel calling for a somewhat different approach is Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*. Although notions of "leaving" and "homing" are central to *Tracks*, they operate in ways far more complex than Bevis's view suggests.

Since the novel's 1988 publication, scholars have probed its depictions of characters losing, reclaiming, searching for, and finding home. Most have focused on the displacement and marginality the characters experience. *Tracks* has been described as "a novel entirely haunted by historical dispossession"[2] in which the characters experience "dislocation from their heritage, their environment, and themselves."[3] A number of scholars have argued that displacement is manifested in the novel thematically and in the disparate voices and multiple perspectives it employs as narrative strategies.[4]

This concern with displacement obscures the fact that the novel is about losing home and about finding it. As Tom Berninghausen has pointed out, Erdrich's characters are working toward "coming home in a social sense, being at home in the tribe's history, and returning to the particular landscape that is home."[5] Lydia A. Schultz and E. Shelley Reid have disputed the suggestion that the novel's narrative discontinuities reflect chaos and dispossession in the lives of the Anishinaabe, arguing instead that they represent the multivocalic strategies of traditional Anishinaabe storytelling—that is, they reflect continuity

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rather than disruption of Anishinaabe culture.[6] Gloria Bird has pointed out that, although many of Erdrich's characters live on the margins of society, they are people for whom those margins *are* home.[7] Similarly, Pauline Woodward writes that Erdrich "offers a new rendering of community" concentrating on the endurance of the Anishinaabe even through the discontinuity they experience.[8] Forces for and movements toward homing are intricately interwoven with energies and actions toward displacement throughout *Tracks*.

HOME, HOMING, AND DISPLACEMENT

The notion of home is as complex as it is fundamental. Culture-specific notions of what comprises home on a material level, of what home signifies, and of what behaviors should and do take place there underlie human life. The notion of home informs the structures of our landscapes, patterns of consumption, life-span distinctions (that is, between childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age), and gender divisions. In recent decades, home as an object of study has been viewed from many standpoints, including the symbolic meaning of dwelling design,[9] gendered views and use of space,[10] and the effects of social and technological change on notions of residence.[11] For some philosophers, being human *means* having a home, a dwelling, a space of one's own.[12] Recent writers have considered the inviolability of home, of its protection from physical or emotional intrusion.[13] Others have explored the importance of relationships, emphasizing that being with loved ones is one way of "being at home."[14]

For Bevis and others, the Native American notion of home is tied into a transpersonal self that includes a network of relationships to a culture, history, and place. According to Tom Berninghausen, this model of homing clearly applies to the displacement Erdrich's characters experience. The deracination and loss of identity that is evident in many of her characters involves several forms of dispossession—loss of social context, disconnection from the past, and displacement from the land.[15] Similarly, Wong argues that the Native American sense of being at home engages the individual's association with a network involving family relations, larger communities, geographic space, and "cosmic networks."[16] Home refers both to a physical place and a network of belonging and history.

In this article, I will explore the complex interactions between homing and displacement in *Tracks*, focusing on the tensions that arise between those opposing forces as the characters navigate tricky routes toward and away from homes. I will argue that the tension between home and homing, on the one hand, and marginality and displacement, on the other hand, is revealed along three dimensions:

1. *Community*. A place becomes a home only through the presence of people. In *Tracks*, characters' ties to others play fundamental roles in the determination of what is and is not home for them. Throughout the novel, homing is reflected in bonds of affection and mutual support and in community cooperation and harmony. Displacement is made manifest through betrayal, discord, and destruction of community bonds.

2. *Landscape*. The topographical nature of the land and characters' relations to it play essential roles in *Tracks*. In particular, homing energies emerge in natural landscapes and in characters' intimacy with the land, while displacement is reflected in indifference toward and destruction of the land.

3. *The body*. At its most basic, home is defined in terms of corporeal factors: it is the place (at least ideally) of bodily safety and shelter, nourishment and leisure, privacy and rest. The degree to which a place fulfills these needs is essential to its designation as home. In *Tracks*, home is closely tied to the corporeal existence of the characters: Homing is associated with bodily health, sexual energy, physical strength, and vigor, while displacement is manifested through physical weakness, pain, and suffering.

These dimensions of homing and displacement emerge in the overarching story of the Anishinaabe told in *Tracks*, as well as the depictions of the three main characters. Those characters—Nanapush, Pauline Puyat, and Fleur Pillager—differ in the ways they define home, the strategies they use for keeping and creating home, and the ways homing and displacement forces play out in their lives.

HOMING AND COMMUNITY IN *TRACKS*

The loss of community solidarity lies at that heart of *Tracks*. Although the threatened loss of land to white lumber interests appears to be the tribe's primary challenge, the disintegration of community underlies that loss and ultimately defeats the Anishinaabe.

From the beginning of the novel, the Anishinaabe are a fragmented people. Disease and relocation have taken the lives of such a large number that many survivors no longer have the most basic elements of Anishinaabe community structure: they have lost their immediate families and their clans. As the novel opens, Nanapush, Fleur, and Pauline have all lost their families. Nanapush has lost three wives and has no children to continue his lineage; Pauline is an orphan from a mixed-blood family whose clan name has been lost; and Fleur's entire family has just died in an epidemic of tuberculosis. Community cooperation—once a cornerstone of Anishinaabe life—has disintegrated. Fueled by hunger and despair, quarrels break out on the reservation, and, as white financial interests encroach upon their land, the Anishinaabe families fight about whether the land should be sold or kept. A sometimes violent feud erupts. Displacement is intricately connected to weakened community ties: The loss of home through relocation and destruction of Anishinaabe territory has shaken the community to its roots; conversely, weakened community cohesion contributes to further loss of Anishinaabe land.

The dissolution of community is undercut to some extent by opposing forces that work toward keeping the community together. Currents of mutual support and solidarity counteract the fragmentation and discord among the Anishinaabe. As the novel progresses, Fleur and Nanapush begin to build new communities for themselves. Fleur takes a lover (Eli) who moves in with her, and his mother and brother (Margaret and Nector) later join them. Nanapush, who has become Margaret's lover, also moves into the burgeoning household.

When Fleur gives birth to a daughter, Lulu, a new generation begins. Although it is unclear who the child's father is—whether it is Eli, one of three white men who raped Fleur in Argus, or, according to some community members, a water monster that inhabits the lake upon which Fleur's land sits—she is treated as completely Anishinaabe. Together, these six people form "a kind of clan, the new made up of bits of the old."[17] For a time, this improvised community lives in harmony and relative comfort. When Fleur is threatened with losing her land if she does not pay a fee on it, they work together to save the property, and the money is raised through their combined efforts. Thus, community building counteracts the forces acting to pull the tribe apart.

Unfortunately, this solidarity is short lived. When Nector is sent to pay the fee, he betrays the trust of his makeshift family and puts the money toward another allotment. This betrayal dissolves the mutual cooperation and solidarity of the improvised "clan" and leads to the loss of Fleur's home, thus effectively annihilating the homing forces in the novel. Significantly, it is not the inability to pay that defeats Fleur but the betrayal of a member of her "family." Community solidarity serves as a homing force—as long as the new family works together, the land is safe—while community fragmentation and discord lie at the root of displacement.

This opposition between community solidarity and fragmentation are made manifest in the lives of the three main characters as well. Nanapush—an old man and one of the novel's two narrators—is an unflagging proponent of community. Old enough to remember when the Anishinaabe were a strong people, Nanapush "embodies the whole of tribal history and tradition."[18] He grieves the loss of Anishinaabe unity, which he compares to the unraveling of a coarse rope, and throughout the novel he works in various ways for tribal cohesion.

Nanapush's community building can be seen in his attempts to create a family for himself. Early in the novel, he claims Fleur as his "daughter" and begs her to stay with him. Later, he calls Eli his "son" and "relative."[19] After Lulu is born, he registers her last name as Nanapush, thus assuring that his lineage will not die with him.

The most notable way Nanapush acts as a force for community is in his attempts to bring people together. Throughout the novel, Nanapush promotes connections between tribal members and aids them when they are trying to forge bonds. His very account of Fleur's life is a "narrative of connection": He is telling the story to Fleur's now-grown daughter Lulu, in an attempt to get her to reconcile with her mother.[20] Although he initially attempts to persuade a youthful Eli not to pursue Fleur, he ultimately helps him win her heart, and, later, tells Eli how to save his floundering relationship with her. In the end, when the new makeshift clan has disintegrated, Nanapush, speaking to Lulu, laments, "I have seen each one of you since then, in your separate lives, never together, never the way it should be." If he could, he tells Lulu, he would "bring old times back, force [Fleur and Eli] to reckon, make them look into one another's eyes again."[21]

It is important to note that, despite the energy Nanapush puts into uniting people, he is seldom successful. He does not hold together the new family he

creates; he brings Eli and Fleur together only for a time; and he does not succeed in preventing the sale of Anishinaabe land. His primary effort in *Tracks*—to unite Lulu and Fleur—remains unresolved at the end of the novel: we only learn that he has succeeded by reading other volumes of Erdrich's work.

Although Nanapush does become involved in the divisive feud among tribal families, he takes action only after Margaret is attacked and humiliated. Even then, Nanapush foregoes killing Margaret's attackers, and he eventually forgives them, going so far as to forge an association with their families. "We must live close together, as one people, share what we have in common," he tells Lulu (180). Even at the end of the novel, when the forces of displacement seem to have won out, Nanapush continues to strive for community. He isn't surrendering when he finally adopts the bureaucratic identity he had previously shunned but searching for a way to get Lulu back from the government school to which she has been sent. This acceptance, as Sloboda points out, is a means of ensuring the survival of the tribe.[22]

In contrast to Nanapush, the second narrator, Pauline Puyat, is most clearly characterized by an intractable lack—and rejection—of community. Pauline is a woman of mixed blood and broken lineage. The Puyats are an "uncertain people" whose clan name has been lost. Pauline is "an unknown mixture of ingredients," Nanapush tells us. The other tribal members "never knew what to call her, or where she fit or how to think when she was around."[23] Even her narrative reveals her isolation: unlike Nanapush's, it is directed at no one.[24]

Throughout *Tracks*, Pauline hovers on the outside of communities, her participation in them always tenuous, muddled, and flawed. She has no friends, and her only sexual affair is unpleasant and humiliating. She does not belong to a family: although her father is mentioned early in the novel, he disappears almost immediately—apparently having died in the tuberculosis epidemic—and, though she bears a daughter, she refuses to have anything to do with her.

Pauline has no desire to be part of the Anishinaabe community. Despite having grown up on the reservation, she makes no bones about which side of the ethnic divide she wants to belong to. She refuses to speak Chippewa, and once begged her parents to build an outhouse. "Even as a child," she says, "I saw that to hang back [to Anishinaabe ways] was to perish." As a girl, Pauline will not learn to bead—Anishinaabe women's work—but she asks her father to allow her to go to Argus to learn lace making—white women's work—from the nuns of the local convent. He consents, despite his feeling that she will "fade out" there and become completely white.[25] Later, Pauline declares herself to be white: she is allowed to enter the local convent only because she claims to have no Indian blood.

Pauline is even less at home among whites than she is living with the Anishinaabe. Although she moves to Argus hoping to find a place for herself, she is no more a part of the community there than she was on the reservation. She ends up not learning lace making after all but rather finds work cleaning a butcher shop. She is lonely and longs to return to the reservation. She feels like the outsider that she is.

When Pauline does go back to the reservation, it is to live with a family, the Morrisseys, who are powerful agents against the solidarity of the reservation community. Like Pauline, Bernadette Morrissey is of mixed blood and has no loyalty to the Anishinaabe. She makes money by trading on and off the reservation and by buying up land other tribal members cannot manage or afford to keep. She is so unconcerned with the future of the tribe that she eventually takes a job serving notice to Anishinaabe who are about to lose their land.

Pauline does not find a family in the Morrisseys or a community on the reservation. She is as lonely and friendless there as she was in Argus. She begins to sense that no one wants her around. She has gone from living as an outsider among whites to living as an outsider among the Anishinaabe.

Later, Pauline once again leaves the reservation. This time, she goes to the local convent—itself a marginal place, lying outside the mainstream of white society. Pauline speaks of the convent less as a refuge than a place of exile. "I have no family," she explains to Fleur and Nanapush. "I am alone and have no land. Where else would I go but to the nuns?" (142). At the convent, Pauline once again finds herself an outsider, at least until the very end of the novel. She practices extreme austerities that even the sisters believe are too severe. Her behavior disturbs the nuns. Again and again, they are called on to take care of Pauline because she has injured her hands or feet in acts of mortification. Furthermore, Pauline is often belligerent toward them, rewarding even their attempts to take care of her with hostility.

Although Pauline seems at times to be searching for a community—she admits that she is lonely, longs for a lover, and even attempts to convince herself that she is related to the Morrisseys on the gossamer evidence that she and Bernadette look somewhat alike—her lack of belonging is largely her own doing. She is either unwilling or unable to act appropriately. She blames her exclusion from reservation life on her homeliness and her status as a single woman, but it is more her improper behavior and unpleasant attitude that alienate people.

Pauline's actions are almost always misguided and ineffective—and they are sometimes ruinous. On more than one occasion, she simply fails to act when she is needed. She watches as Fleur is raped by three white men in Argus but does nothing to help. Later, she flounders helplessly when Fleur goes into premature labor, and she is blamed for the child's death. In other cases, Pauline deliberately acts inappropriately. On the reservation, she serves as one who prepares the dead for burial, but she doesn't clean herself afterward, thereby "passing death along" (69). In one pivotal scene, Pauline purposely interrupts a healing ritual being performed for Fleur. In addition, she refuses to bathe or change her clothes—part of her elaborate and idiosyncratic system of austerities—and her odor becomes unbearable until Fleur finally forces her to wash. These disruptive acts pale in comparison with the most extreme examples of Pauline's antisocial behavior: She commits three murders. Early in the novel, Pauline locks Fleur's rapists in a meat-storage locker, in which all but one of them die. Later, she kills her former lover, Napoleon Morrissey.

In short, Pauline is not merely a woman who has difficulty forging normal relationships but a force operating against community. Despite her ostensible

attempts to belong, she acts almost entirely in opposition to harmony and solidarity among people. She refuses to get along with others, relishes her distinctiveness, and behaves in ways clearly intended to push people away. She rejects her Native community, but she also acts antagonistically toward the nuns. Finally, this denial of community reaches a culmination at the end of the novel, when we find Pauline rejoicing at the disintegration of the Anishinaabe and the dismal future she predicts for them.

If Nanapush acts in support of community solidarity, and Pauline works against it, Fleur Pillager plays a more ambiguous role. In the beginning of the novel, Fleur spurns her community. In a culture based on interdependence, she insists on acting independently. She neither relies on the community nor obeys its mores. Her very identity—young, unmarried, and without a family—makes her an aberration. She flouts tradition by insisting on living by herself—unheard of for a young woman—and scandalizes the tribe with her unconventional behavior. She even abandons her home and community for a time to take a job in the nearby white town of Argus.

Fleur's eccentricity alienates her from the reservation. Gossip runs throughout the tribe of her strangeness, unnatural independence, and rumored use of magic. Stories go around about how she "messes with evil," that she "laid the heart of an owl on her tongue" to enable her to see at night, and that she hunts in the form of a bear (12). When a tornado destroys Argus the day after Fleur is raped there, Nanapush and Pauline believe it was her doing. When Eli falls in love with Fleur, his mother is certain she practiced magic on him. Fleur is perceived by many on the reservation as dangerous, untrustworthy, and—most significantly—as someone who doesn't fully belong.

As the novel progresses, Fleur's interactions with the community shift. With the growth of her large, multigenerational family, of which she is clearly the center, Fleur becomes a force for community cohesion. She provides not only for her daughter but also for the other members of her new clan. She works hard to preserve the strength of the reservation by trying to save her own land from the lumber companies. She serves as the "funnel" of Anishinaabe history: the only one who can save the Pillager clan from extinction (178). From the independent girl who eschewed reservation mores, she has been transformed into a woman who contributes all of her resources to community cohesion.

Unfortunately, all of this changes once Fleur discovers she will lose her land. After she learns that she has been betrayed and that the land will be sold, she ends her relationship with Eli, turning down Margaret's invitation for her to live with them. Rumors about her surface again. She is blamed for Napoleon's murder: it is said that she carries the dead man's tongue with her and that "it enabled her to walk without leaving tracks" (215). Most significantly, she sends the daughter she loves and once doted on to a government boarding school and, at the end of the novel, leaves the reservation. The loss of community—Nector's betrayal, the end of Fleur's relationship with Eli, the breaking apart of the cobbled-together "clan," the negative perceptions of Fleur by other tribal members, and the severing of Fleur's ties with her daughter—is closely intertwined with the loss of her home.

HOME AS LANDSCAPE

Wendy Faris has pointed out that "love and nature are allied" in Louise Erdrich's fiction: that human love relationships are "tied to the experience of harmony with the natural landscape."[26] In *Tracks*, home and nature are similarly linked. Homing is represented through the nature of landscapes and characters' harmonious interactions with them, whereas destruction of and disregard for the land act as manifestations of displacement.

The control of land lies at the crux of *Tracks*. The essential tension of the novel is not merely between the interests of white corporate entities and those of the Anishinaabe but between two visions of how land should be used. The Anishinaabe live off the provender of the land: it is in their interests to keep the land healthy. The white corporations wish to fell the trees for lumber, reaping a single crop and leaving the landscape decimated. These disparate visions of land are closely tied to issues of homing and dispossession: protection of the land is essential if the Anishinaabe are to maintain their home; destruction of the land is a route to inevitable displacement.

Images of homing and displacement are mirrored in the differences between the landscape of the reservation and that of the white town of Argus. On the reservation, the natural landscape is maintained: the land is wild and covered with forests that still harbor populations—albeit shrinking ones—of beaver, deer, and bear. It is a place primarily of footpaths rather than roads, and most of its buildings are small homes built of logs. Argus is a "grid of streets" on either side of a railroad depot.[27] Its landscape consists of grain elevators, stores, and churches. Significantly, the entire town is built around a railroad, the very technology that is facilitating the encroachment of white interests and contributing to the displacement of the Anishinaabe.

Each of *Tracks*'s three major characters has a distinctive attitude about the land. Nanapush's connection with home is in large part a connection with the land. He frames his life in terms of the natural landscape: He was the one who led the last buffalo hunt and saw the last bear shot. "I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth," he informs the reader. "I axed the last birch that was older than I" (2). He describes in vivid detail his horror at the felling of trees on the reservation: "I heard the groan and crack, felt the ground tremble as each tree slammed earth . . . as a gap formed here, a clearing there" (9). For him, loss of home is manifested in the partitioning and destruction of "the land we would never walk or hunt, from which our children would be barred" (174). It is to those who "draw lines across the land with their strings and yellow flags" that he directs his anger (9). "Land," he tells Lulu, "is the only thing that lasts life to life" (33).

In contrast, Pauline Puyat exhibits little regard for the land. What is most interesting about Pauline's narrative is how little attention she gives the natural landscape. Very few references to the land or descriptions of landscapes occur in Pauline's narrative—a striking contrast to Nanapush's. Moreover, the two vivid landscape descriptions Pauline does offer are telling. The first is not of a natural landscape but of the white town of Argus (12–13). The second takes place when Pauline follows Fleur to the land of the dead,

in which Fleur gambles for the lives of her children. Here, in one of the most detailed depictions of landscape in the novel, Pauline describes the crust of the snow, the evergreen needles shaking in the wind, the "wide and furiously trodden" path, the "dark and vast seas of moving buffalo," and the tall grasses: "No fences, no poles, no lines, no tracks" (159). However, this is not the landscape of the reservation but of a place that only exists either in Pauline's mind or in some sort of mythic reality. Of Pauline's two landscape descriptions, one is of a landscape built by whites, the other of a supernatural realm. At no time does she describe in any detail the natural landscape of the reservation.

At the end of the novel, Pauline's lack of regard for the place she grew up is made most explicit. Pauline savors the loss of Anishinaabe land with the same relish that she has for the breakdown of the tribal community. The dividing and selling of the land, she says, is Christ's work: she feels no sorrow for its loss (204).

Fleur's interactions with landscape also parallel her affiliation with home. That Fleur is deeply connected to the land is indisputable. She knows the woods and lake intimately, hunts and fishes with skill, and may even have control over natural forces—such as the tornado that destroys Argus. In some ways, she seems almost to merge with the land: she wears only a threadbare dress even in severe weather, and she makes love—and conceives—out of doors.

One of the most interesting aspects of Fleur's ties to the land is the way the landscape appears to reflect qualities of Fleur. For one thing, the Pillager property reflects her mysterious, somewhat eerie nature. Like Fleur, who is believed to be in control of magic powers, the Pillager land is viewed as a place of strange occurrences and supernatural forces. "Those trees are too big, thick and twisted at the top like bent arms," Nanapush tells Eli. "In the wind their limbs cast, creak against each other, snap. The leaves speak a cold language that overfills your brain" (42). The lake near Fleur's house is perilous, the land is haunted, and the woods are inhabited by the ghosts of dead Pillagers, "moving lights and lamps of people," who refuse to speak to the living and laugh among themselves (9).

Just as Fleur's shifting position in her community reflects the tension between homing and displacement, so does the ambiguous nature of the land she lives on. Like Fleur, the Pillager land is both part of the reservation and independent of it. Located within the reservation's boundaries, it is nonetheless remote and difficult to reach. It lies far into a dense forest and can be reached only by two arduous and perilous routes: one through the woods and the other across the lake. Several characters, including Nanapush, Margaret, and Pauline, nearly drown trying to reach Fleur's home, while those who try to get there by land often find themselves lost in the woods—and, in some cases, are never seen again.

The remoteness of Fleur's land parallels her personal independence: Although they are both to some extent liabilities, they are also assets. Independence from the community contributes to Fleur's strength and resilience; isolation does the same for her land. Although the location of the Pillager land segregates it from the reservation's community life, it also offers

it some temporary protection from the encroachment of white society and capitalist devastation. Like Fleur, the Pillager land can stand up to insult and intrusion, at least for a time.

HOME AND THE BODY

If community and landscape make up the foci of *Tracks*, the human body is the backdrop upon which homing and displacement forces play out. Physical hardship, comfort, pleasure, and pain, and the experiences of health, illness, sex, birth, and death are all interwoven with the finding, losing, and reclaiming of home. Homing is mirrored in physical strength, health, and vitality; and forces for displacement are reflected in disease and infirmity.

The displacement the Anishinaabe have suffered is mirrored at the beginning of the novel by the epidemic of tuberculosis that is spreading through the tribe and, later, by the starvation and alcoholism that afflicts them. In several places in the novel, loss of land is directly attributed to physical hardship. Nanapush tells of two ways Anishinaabe homes are lost—one is through sales to the lumber company, but the other is through death (172). In one scene, Fleur's starving household watches as the local priest shows them a map displaying the lands the Anishinaabe had lost (173). "Starvation makes fools of anyone," Nanapush tells Lulu. "In the past, some had sold their allotment land for one hundred poundweight of flour" (8).

Nanapush—the man who tries in vain to unite people, whose roots lie firmly in land that he is losing—is also losing the physical vitality and sexual prowess of his youth. "Although I had lived no more than fifty winters, I was considered an old man," he tells us. "I'd seen enough to be one" (2). He is toothless and no longer strong enough to ward off the attack on Margaret. He complains of a pain in his hip that prevents him from hunting. Nanapush's aging is explicitly linked to the loss of Anishinaabe land: He became old, he explains, "as one oak went down, another and another was lost" (9).

The correlation between homing and the body becomes clearest in another aspect of Nanapush's life. He works to unite people and protect the land; he is also a healer. It is Nanapush who finds the gravely ill Fleur among the corpses of her family, brings her to his home, and nurses her back to health. Later, he heals Fleur again when she is wasting away from fear of losing her land. Fleur's cousin, Moses, also owes his life to Nanapush: years earlier, the old man "spoke a cure for him, gave him a new name to fool death" (35). Similarly, when Eli, barely able to stand from starvation, goes out to hunt, it is Nanapush's magic that gives him strength, helps him survive, and enables him to find food. Nanapush has healed himself as well. "During the year of sickness, when I was the last one left," he tells us, "I saved myself by starting a story . . . I got well by talking" (46).

This association of home with wholeness and displacement with infirmity rises to the fore in a clash between Nanapush and a white doctor over how to treat Lulu's frostbitten feet. The physician, who has been brought in by the well-meaning local priest, insists that the child be taken off the reservation to have her feet amputated before they become gangrenous, but Nanapush

refuses. He knows that the inability to run would be devastating to Lulu—and he knows how to heal Lulu's feet. Ignoring the fierce insistence of the doctor, he keeps Lulu on the reservation and uses ancient methods to cure her. Here, home—the reservation—and the healing of the body are clearly linked in contrast to displacement and bodily mutilation.

If homing is mirrored in Nanapush's skill at healing, displacement is reflected in Pauline Puyat's hatred of her body. Some of the most memorable scenes from *Tracks* are the ones that reveal that hatred: The same woman who shows disdain for communities and rejoices at the loss of Anishinaabe land, deliberately denies her own physicality and torments her corporeal self.

Pauline is acutely aware of her physical unattractiveness and sees it as the source of her unhappiness. "I got my growth too fast," she says, "stretched long as a hayrake and acquired no softening grace in my features . . . God had overlooked me in the making, given no marks of His favors" (71). Other characters confirm Pauline's appraisal of her looks: Nanapush describes her as "unnoticeable, homely," (39) and her only lover, Napoleon, tells her she is "thin as a crane" (73). Pauline is ashamed of her physical appearance: during sexual intercourse, she closes her eyes so she will not have to look at her body. She also sees the appearance of her body as the source of her alienation. Blind to the effects of her own behavior, Pauline attributes her rejection by both the whites of Argus and the Anishinaabe to her physical unattractiveness. Pauline's body serves as a driving force in her sense of displacement.

Not only is Pauline's body unattractive but also her physical life is stunted and disordered. Normal corporeal experiences such as sexuality and childbirth are distasteful and alien to her. Nanapush aptly describes her as "afraid of life" (57). Her only lover is a man who cares nothing for her, and when she becomes pregnant by him she tries to abort the fetus by throwing herself against an axe handle—a particularly striking act in the light of her Roman Catholic faith.[28] When her attempts at abortion fail, she tries to kill herself and the child by clenching her legs together while she is in labor. The child is born anyway, but Pauline sees her daughter as "soiled, formed by me, bearing every defilement I had known" and refuses to have anything to do with her.[29]

If sexuality and childbirth are repugnant to Pauline, death—another natural bodily experience—proves elusive. Despite her work with the dying, her willingness to spread contagion to others, and her own desire to die, the experience of physical death escapes her. One of her great epiphanies early in the novel is that "death would pass me over just as men did, and I would live a long, strict life" (75).

Pauline is so alienated from her own body that, instead of direct physical experience, she comes to know many normal bodily sensations and physical relationships through a kind of extrasensory connection with other people. She experiences sexuality, motherhood, violence, and even death vicariously. She witnesses Fleur's rape by the white men in Argus and lives through the attack as if it were being committed against her: "I felt all," she tells us. "My shrieks poured from [Fleur's] mouth and my blood from her wounds" (66). Although dying eludes Pauline, she experiences the deaths of the people she tends to. She describes a feeling of lightness that comes over her, a sense of

having been cut free. "A cool blackness lifted me," she says of her first experience of death, "twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below" (68). Pauline also experiences sexual intercourse through other people. After magically inducing Eli to make love to Sophie Morrissey, Pauline feels everything that Sophie is experiencing during lovemaking—and she feels every stroke of the beating Sophie receives afterward from her mother.

Pauline's alienation from her body is most evident in the physical self-abasement she undertakes as part of her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Once she moves into the convent, Pauline sets on a course of austerities that not only surpass what her order expects of her but also that it actually condemns as too severe. "Suffering is a gift to God," she declares. "All I have left is my body's comfort and pleasure, and I give that last pearl to Him now" (144).

There can be no question about the sincerity of Pauline's efforts to suffer. She wears her shoes on opposite feet, a practice that is not merely painful but physically damaging; she makes underwear from potato sacks so that she will be reminded of Christ's suffering from the chafing; and she chips ice with her hands so long and hard that they bleed. She also refuses to bathe—something she declares vain—or to touch her body even to scratch, and she allows herself to urinate and defecate only twice a day. Her efforts at bodily mortification culminate when she interrupts a healing ritual being held for Fleur. The ritual requires Nanapush to plunge his hands into boiling water—after he has protected them with a traditional herbal treatment. Determined to show that Christ is as powerful as the old ways, Pauline thrusts her hands into the water as well—and is severely burned.

Pauline's hatred of her body is closely tied to issues of homing and displacement. As Susan Friedman points out, Pauline's physical self-abuse reveals a racialized and gendered self-hatred.[30] Pauline detests being a woman and being Anishinaabe, and her disordered treatment of her body is a way of denying them both. Moreover, Pauline's denial of her body is what leads to her acceptance into the convent and, thereby, to her final and complete estrangement from the Anishinaabe. Denial of sexuality is, of course, a requirement for a Catholic nun. For Pauline, however, acceptance into the convent requires that she deny her very race as well. No Anishinaabe woman can enter the order, and Pauline must convince the sisters that she has no Indian blood before she is allowed to take her vows. Furthermore, although the sisters are shocked at Pauline's austerities, her willingness to engage in them is ultimately what convinces them of the sincerity of her conversion. Pauline's alienation from home derives in part from her attitude toward her physical self: displacement and bodily self-abasement are intimately related.

Fleur Pillager's corporeal experience is also tied to homing and displacement forces. Her ambiguous and shifting relationships to home are mirrored in physical ambiguities and fluctuations. Fleur's body is ambiguous in several ways. First, though unmistakably female, she has a number of male characteristics. She is described as being as tall as a man, and the fact that she has a man's physical strength is reiterated several times throughout the novel. Eli describes Fleur as having "no curve to her." Furthermore, she sometimes

accentuates her masculine qualities by wearing men's clothing.[31] These masculine characteristics contrast with her physical beauty and sexual attractiveness and with the energy and skill she puts into the quintessential female role: giving birth and acting as a nurturing and protective mother.

Fleur's corporeal existence is ambiguous in an even more fundamental way: she is alive and yet can cross over into death. Three times, she is found apparently drowned in Lake Matchimanito; each time, she appears to be dead but is revived. After she gives birth to Lulu, she is so still and pale that her family thinks she has died. It is only when the baby cries that Fleur opens her eyes. If Pauline's narrative is to be believed, Fleur even travels into the realm of the dead, in which she wins back Lulu by beating the spirits in a card game.

Fleur's body oscillates between health and illness as her association with home changes. During times in which displacement is the stronger of the forces, Fleur experiences ill health, injury, and bodily violation. When homing forces rule, she is healthy and strong. When we first meet Fleur, she is delirious with fever and near death—but Nanapush describes her even then as "a big, bony girl" whose "sudden bursts of strength" terrified him (3). Once she heals, she becomes a healthy, sexually attractive woman with a quality of animal vitality. "Fleur's shoulders were broad and curved as a yoke," Pauline tells us. "Her glossy braids were like the tails of animals, and swung against her when she moved" (18). Pauline and Nanapush comment on Fleur's sexual attractiveness. She is beautiful, Nanapush says, even after she shaves her head to show support for the humiliated Margaret (117). Fleur is also tall, strong, and vigorous: "she could lift a haunch or carry a pole of sausages without stumbling," Pauline informs us (16).

Fleur's familiarity with death, sex, and childbirth—the core experiences of the human body—all reveal her vitality and the intensity with which she experiences her physical life. As people die all around her, Fleur wards off death again and again. She survives three near-drownings and the tuberculosis epidemic that kills her entire family, lives through two childbirths, including one that takes the life of her child, and survives a winter of starvation. Her sex life is active to the point of scandalizing the tribe—and Eli's mother. Even when the rest of the tribe is suffering through the hunger of winter, the sounds of sexual enjoyment are heard from Fleur and Eli's dwelling, "full of pleasure, strange and wonderful to hear" (130).

In much the same way that a weakened community and landscape devastation are tied to displacement in the novel, Fleur's physical vitality flags when her home is threatened. As the foreclosure draws near, Fleur's appearance changes. Pauline describes her face as "starved lean," and Nanapush tells of being "shocked" when he sees her: "She was wasted, her bones sharp and raw. [She was] smudged in the face with dirt and ragged in her hair and clothes" (170). Most significantly, Fleur's second child dies during delivery in an earlier scene very different from the one in which Fleur delivered healthy, active Lulu. As Michelle Hessler points out, "Fleur's miscarriage coincides with the steady advance of white civilization."[32] It is concomitant with the displacement of the Anishinaabe.

The most dramatic way displacement plays out in the depiction of Fleur's body takes place in Argus. The white town is clearly an alien environment for Fleur. It is the only time she leaves the reservation until the very end of the novel when she has lost her land, and it culminates in a beating and rape by a group of white men. Fleur's intentional departure from home results in the severest form of bodily violation and degradation and that, in turn, sends her back to the Pillager land.

CONCLUSION

William Bevis's notion of Native American homing involves the finding of a sense not of separateness and individualization but of relationship: to others, to the land, and to one's self.[33] In *Tracks*, this notion of transpersonal identity is translated into networks of disconnection and reconnection with community, landscapes, and the corporeal body. Through depictions of community solidarity and disintegration, connectedness with and destruction of landscapes, physical health and strength, illness and infirmity, Erdrich portrays the intricate, interwoven forces that operate for and against Anishinaabe homing.

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NOTES

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