

Unveiling Realities: Indigenous Writers' Exploration through the Realism in Louise Erdrich's Select Novels

P. Divya¹, Dr. M. Sangeetha²

Submitted: 16-Aug-2024 Revised: 30-Aug-2024 Accepted: 15-Sept-2024 Published: 31-Oct-2024



OPEN ACCESS



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

Manuscript ID:
IJEWLPSIR-2024-010104

Volume: 1

Issue: 1

Month: October 2024

E-ISSN:3065-7873

*1*Research Scholar (Ft),
Department Of English,
Nallamuthu Gounder
Mahalingam College, Pollachi
*2*Assistant Professor,
Department Of English,
Nallamuthu Gounder
Mahalingam College, Pollachi
Email:
perumaldivya93@gmail.com

How to cite this article:
Divya, P., & Sangeetha, M.
(2024). Unveiling Realities:
Indigenous Writers'
Exploration through the
Realism in Louise Erdrich's
Select Novels. *International
Journal of English and World
Languages & Literature
Paradigm Shift in International
Research*, 1(1), 12–16.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14542640>

Address for correspondence:
Dr. M. Sangeetha, Assistant
Professor, Department Of
English, Nallamuthu Gounder
Mahalingam College, Pollachi
Email:
perumaldivya93@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper examine into the significant contributions of indigenous literature, centering on Louise Erdrich's novels, particularly *The Round House* and *The Night Watchman*. Indigenous writers often incorporate everyday realism to authentically represent the complexities of Native American life, addressing themes of identity, belonging, survival, and resilience. Through Erdrich's nuanced portrayal of cultural identity, social justice issues, and family dynamics, her works reveal the layered realities of modern Native existence and confront deeply rooted injustices impacting indigenous communities. Drawing on traditional storytelling techniques, Erdrich infuses her narratives with the customs, languages, and histories of her Ojibwe heritage, capturing both the beauty and struggles within indigenous culture. This analysis explores how Erdrich's novels address critical issues like racial discrimination, systemic marginalization, and the loss of tribal sovereignty, illustrating the effects of colonialism and social inequities on indigenous people. Through her storytelling, Erdrich challenges stereotypes, celebrates cultural resilience, and fosters a deeper understanding of indigenous communities' experiences. By examining Erdrich's vivid depictions of everyday realism, the paper underscores the role of indigenous literature in inspiring empathy, promoting cultural preservation, and advocating for social justice. As readers engage with Erdrich's work, they are invited to recognize the resilience of indigenous communities and to strive for a more inclusive world that respects and honors the voices of indigenous people.

Keywords: Indigenous literature, Everyday realism, Cultural identity, Social justice, Ojibwe heritage, Social inequities

Introduction:

Indigenous writers, frequently draw on their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, offering a unique perspective to writing. Several indigenous writers successfully use the techniques of everyday realism in their writing, making stories that have depth and real impact. The article examines how native writers successfully negotiate the realm of everyday realism while including realistic portrayals of identity, culture, and existence in their writing. Indigenous writing is unique because of its commitment to cultural realism. Indigenous writers bring a feeling of realism that is deeply rooted in their cultural background into their writings by adopting their customs, languages, and histories. These writers develop novels that capture the complexity and depth of indigenous cultures by associating elements like oral histories, traditional storytelling techniques, and indigenous languages. The way that indigenous literature challenges beliefs and preconceptions about indigenous peoples is an additional significant manner in which it engages with day-to-day life.

These writers write fascinating and deeply moving stories by embracing cultural reliability, recording real-life experiences, exposing myths, and elevating the voices of indigenous people. It is essential to acknowledge and honor the contributions made by indigenous writers to the development of our global perspective as we continue to engage with indigenous literature.

Native American writers effectively convey the theme of identity, belonging, and survival through stories that mirror the reality of modern native existence. These authors provide realism and nuance to their works, whether they illustrate the difficulties of living on reservations, the tenacity of urban indigenous communities, or the legacy of colonialism throughout generations. Native American literature clarifies myths and stereotypes while providing readers with a more complex understanding of indigenous cultures and experiences Native American writers contribute to the literary world and give

voice to indigenous voices by effectively addressing the challenges of contemporary indigenous existence through their stories. They do this by being sensitive, perceptive, and committed to cultural truth.

The concept of everyday realism is exhibited in Native American literature by depicting the ordinary and significant facets of indigenous society. For instance, in Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House*, the everyday struggles and triumphs of the characters on the Ojibwe reservation are depicted with vivid detail, highlighting the complexities of family dynamics, cultural traditions, and legal injustices. Similarly, in Sherman Alexie's short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the characters navigate the challenges of poverty, addiction, and identity in the contemporary Native American experience. These works exemplify how Native American writers apply everyday realism to their literary creations, grounding their narratives in the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples while offering readers a glimpse into the resilience, humor, and humanity that define Indigenous communities. Let's explore Louise Erdrich's novels as an example of discussing everyday realism.

Louise Erdrich, the celebrated author of numerous novels and short stories, possesses a unique ability to capture the essence of everyday life through her rich narratives and vivid characterizations. Her works explore the complexity of human relationships, cultural identity, and the complexities of existence, all while grounding her stories in the ordinary experiences of her characters. Through her adept use of language and keen observation of the human condition, Erdrich presents a nuanced portrayal of everyday realism that resonates deeply with her readers. The power of Erdrich's writing to provide everyday happenings with deep significance is one of its distinguishing qualities. Erdrich writes with an honesty and immediateness that comes through in her descriptions of the little victories and tragedies of daily living as well as the quiet routines of family life on a Native American reservation. Every reader may relate to her characters' obstacles because they face universal issues like love, loss, and identity.

In her novels like *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich creates a vivid portrait of life in rural North Dakota, capturing the rhythms of small-town existence with remarkable precision. Through her finely drawn characters and powerful descriptions, she brings to life the sights, sounds, and smells of the places she knows intimately, inviting readers into a world that feels both familiar and extraordinary. The relationship between culture and identity is another theme in Erdrich's works, especially as it relates to Native Americans. She presents detailed depictions of Native American life, exposing myths and highlighting the perseverance of indigenous people by depending on her own Ojibwe ancestry. Erdrich offers an in-depth analysis of what it means to be Native American in modern America through her novels, examining everything from the challenges of young people trapped between tradition and modernity to the enduring bonds of family and community.

Erdrich's writings have a sense of emotional depth and realism because of her attention to detail and her ability to convey the subtleties of human interactions. Readers can identify with Erdrich's characters because she writes with sympathy and comprehension, whether she's conveying the intimate moments between a mother and child or the complex dynamics of a family with problems. Her works stand as a testament to the power of everyday realism in literature. Through her expert storytelling and keen observation of the human condition, she brings to life the ordinary moments that define our lives, illuminating the beauty and complexity of the world around us. In doing so, she invites readers to look anew at the everyday experiences that shape our existence and to find meaning in the seemingly mundane aspects of life.

The Round House serves as a powerful indictment of the social injustices that plague Native American communities. Through the lens of a gripping mystery surrounding a violent crime committed against Joe's mother, Erdrich exposes the systemic failures of the legal system and the enduring legacy of colonialism on indigenous lands. Her characters in this wide sociopolitical framework, Erdrich exposes topics like the collapse of tribal sovereignty, sexual abuse against indigenous women, and regional issues. Erdrich challenges readers to face hard realities about the continuous problems that Native American communities in the modern United States endure through her consistent portrayal of these injustices. Erdrich invites readers to empathize with her characters' experiences while also challenging them to confront the broader issues facing indigenous communities today.

The novel *The Round House* effectively conveys Geraldine's experience of racial discrimination. In this scenario, white people are viewed as belonging to a higher caste or class than American Indians. This gives the impression that members of the white group are in power or that they have influence over non-white individuals. The general and significant inequity that certain groups experience as a result of rooted beliefs, customs, social and cultural prejudices, capitalism, and advertising is known as structural oppression and argued variously, it is evident in many aspects of everyday life (Young, 2004). This paper examines that not only did Geraldine, the protagonist of the novel, but also people who were close to her, including her family and friends, suffer different kinds of racial

persecution. Geraldine has been inspired by these kinds of incidents of racial discrimination to fight for the rights that the white people have taken away from her without justice.

The problem with most Indian rape cases was that even after there was an indictment the U.S. attorney often declined to take the case to trial for one reason or another. Usually a raft of bigger cases. My father wanted to make sure that didn't happen. (p.91)

Additionally, it shows racial discrimination in the form of marginalization in the legal system. As he works in the area of law, Geraldine's husband or Joe's father, who has greater experience, is the source of the evidence. In this explanation why the family decided not to proceed with taking this issue to court. Bazil is also thinking about other possibilities in which Geraldine's justice can be fulfilled. But reflecting on his understanding of several Indian rape cases that have been turned down for mysterious reasons. This shouldn't have occurred because everyone should be treated equally under the law, independently of their cultural background or origin. This has a significant connection to the issue of marginalized people's difficulties finding equal and good professions. These include elderly and young individuals who are becoming more difficult to hire, especially Black or Latino people; they also include a large number of single moms and their kids, as well as those with physical and mental disabilities.

This is unacceptable for any reason at all, as people should support rather than oppose social equality and individual rights in society. Geraldine was a victim of helplessness as well as racial injustice. In most of the data that will be discussed in this sub-chapter, Geraldine and Mayla are the most prominent figures who experience racial oppression in the form of powerlessness. Linden Lark is the group that carried out this racial subjugation. The Round House illustrates how helplessness results from the direct oppression of people. Women are the attacked group, and men with different racial backgrounds are the aggressors.

I need that file, she said. My life depends on that file, she said. She was thrown to the ground. Her hands were taped up behind her. The baby crawled over the dirt floor. She was wearing a ruffled yellow dress and her eyes, were so tender. Like Mayla's eyes. Big, brown eyes. Wide-open. She saw everything and she was confused but she wasn't crying because her mother was right there so she thought things were all right. (p.330)

Mayla and Geraldine were not able to fight back. Geraldine's tendency to simply reveal what is going on makes this evident. It is said that Mayla is helpless and has her hands restricted. Geraldine's condition is classified as helplessness because she is truly helpless. Besides an inclination towards helplessness, Geraldine could risk her own life in the first scenario if she tries to rebel and fight Linden Lark. The criminal Linden Lark is also extremely emotional to the point that he loses control over his emotions due to sensations of dread, anger, grief, worry, and other emotions that merge into one.

There is 'a culture of silence' in powerlessness itself, where people literally cannot use their voices to express their obstruction. This happens because the belief held by these individuals or groups that fighting by at least voicing their opposition is something that does not have a significant impact or influence. Similarly, in the second scenario, if Geraldine at least tries to scream and ask people nearby for help, the criminal would carry out his action.

In the present scenario, the scene is described as being in *The Round House* or another location used by American Indians. In addition, the location's proximity to the shore is mentioned in the previous section. Also, neither daylight nor a crowded time of day is present in the scene. It is hard for Linden, the criminal, to just remain silent when the victim weeps, so Geraldine is risking her life if she attempts her pitiful luck to shout and beg for help from people surrounding her.

But he had Mayla tied up, taped up. Mayla and I looked at each other. She didn't blink just kept moving her eyes to the baby, then me, back to the baby. I knew she was saying to me I should take care of her baby. I nodded to her. (p.330)

The novel that follows describes Geraldine's friend Mayla, who is just as defenseless as Geraldine and who is in a similar situation where their lives are in danger. At the time of the incident, despite their best efforts to assist, there was a baby. While there is a strong chance that everyone will survive the event, Linden, who is the most powerful individual, will ultimately decide. The two mentioned examples illustrate the state of helplessness, which occurs when everything goes wrong. It is evident from Geraldine and Mayla's statements that they feel helpless when the person torturing them actively oppresses or violates them. Geraldine felt helpless because she felt that her life was in threat. The main reason for Geraldine's struggles, according to the study's analysis of the information from *The Round House*, is the violence that results from racial injustice.

The Night Watchman is a compelling example of her adept portrayal of everyday realism, capturing the intricacies of human life amidst the backdrop of historical and cultural upheaval. The story centers on the lives of characters facing poverty, injustice, and the struggle for tribal sovereignty in the 1950s on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. Amid challenges, *The Night Watchman* delivers a complex examination of love, resiliency, and the pursuit of justice through Erdrich's excellent writing and expressive characterizations.

The historical background of the work is that a bill designed to terminate agreements between the US government and Native American tribes was proposed by the US Congress on August 1, 1953. In addition, the statement said that if the bill was passed, five Native tribes would be abolished right away, and subsequently, all Native tribes would be removed. Similarly, Thomas Wazhashk in the novel, Erdrich's grandfather Patrick Gourneau avoided losing his job from his position as night watchman and tribal chairman. The bill's original introducer, Senator Arthur V. Watkins, is a fictional character in the novel.

The Night Watchman's protagonists consistently respond to challenges by banding together to find solutions. The story seems to imply that collective action is the most effective way for those in power to fight back against attempts by others to impose their will on them. In this attempt, the group of people Patrice works with comes in to provide food when she forgets to cook her bread and has nothing to eat for lunch. She is so shaken by her father's alcoholic outburst—an act of power, which involves the use of physical force and the fear of violence—that she forgets to cook her bread in the first place. The jewel-bearing plant serves as a backdrop for another example.

The women come together to file a petition to have Mr. Vold restore their coffee breaks when he takes them away. The real-life women who worked at the plant, whose tale the book is partially based on, also tried to unionize, as readers can discover from a message found at the end of the novel. Even though that campaign was a failure, the pay was increased, the cafeteria was completed, and coffee breaks were brought back as a result of their efforts.

A comparable dynamic can be seen in the novel's fundamental conflict. Senator Arthur Watkins is a powerful supporter who works to have Native American tribes no longer recognized by the federal government. The effects of his proposed bill on Native Americans would be catastrophic if it were to pass. Thomas helps gather his neighborhood to oppose this display of power, and the community comes together to fight. They begin by starting a petition, which Louise describes as "a garden" in an attempt to obtain signatures from every member of the tribe. At the community-sponsored boxing match fundraiser, which helps support a group's trip from the Turtle Mountain Reservation to Washington, D.C. to testify against the bill, the community brings together again. That being said, this solidarity is not portrayed. The majority of individuals don't want to travel to Washington when Thomas calls a committee meeting to choose who will go, despite their awareness of its significance. Action based on popular unity might be challenging to do, especially because success isn't assured. But in the end, Thomas can organize a group, and with their combined efforts, the measure is opposed. Therefore, the novel implies that community action, despite its challenges, can successfully oppose unjust demonstrations of power, regardless of whether they originate from an exploitative employer or an agent of one of the most influential organizations in the world.

A major part of the violence witnessed in *The Night Watchman* is committed by individuals who assert—and some may even think—that they are working in the best interests of the people they hurt. A man nearly kidnaps Patrice when she flies to Minneapolis; Jack Malloy then intervenes to "help." In an attempt to locate her missing sister, Vera, Jack agrees to help her in any way she pleases and drives her to the addresses she has noted. Of course, his scheme is incredibly deceptive; he employs Patrice to perform as a "water jack," which is dancing in a water tank while dressed like Paul Bunyan's sidekick, Babe the Blue Ox, all in an attempt to profit from her without thinking about the consequences for her safety. then Patrice leaves the scene as soon as she finds out that the first two water jacks who played at Jack's club "didn't last long".

Arthur V. Watkins, in a comparable manner, hides his racism and his plan of murdering Native American nations behind the salvific language of religion or the neutral language of government. His use of lofty terms to "disguise the truth: termination" includes "emancipation, freedom, equality, and success." The basis of this desire for termination is white supremacist and racist ideologies. Tribal Chairman Martin Cross writes to Thomas expressing his belief that the Mormon objective of converting Native Americans seeks to "turn Indians into Whites" and that "they think if you follow their ways your skin will bleach out." Arthur Watkins makes his case during the proceedings by using racialized concepts and terminology. In the present scenario, the U.S. government's consistent goal to erase Native American history, culture, and people is demonstrated, and Arthur Watkins contributes to this history while maintaining his strong sense of morality.

Arthur Watkins appears to have goals that are comparable to those of Jack and Vera's exploiters. "I suspect as always they simply want our land," Millie adds, reflecting on an inaccurate census years ago that gave the residents of the Turtle Mountain Reservation a prosperous appearance. Part of the intent of the Termination Bill appears to be the same: taking Native American land and using it for the benefit of the powerful. Watkins proposes a measure to accomplish that goal, which, if approved, would virtually eliminate the Native Americans' agency on that territory; they would be "relocated" without having a voice in the situation. In light of this, the novel emphasizes how those in positions of power usually attempt to subjugate the agency of others in lower positions to take advantage of their bodies or their property.

Conclusion

The exploration of everyday realism in indigenous literature, particularly through the lens of Louise Erdrich's novels, underscores the profound impact of storytelling in portraying the richness, complexity, and resilience of indigenous cultures and experiences. Focusing on indigenous voices and perspectives, Erdrich challenges stereotypes, confronts social injustices, and celebrates the enduring strength of indigenous communities. As we continue to engage with indigenous literature, it is imperative to recognize and honor the contributions of indigenous writers like Louise Erdrich, whose works not only enrich the literary landscape but also foster empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the diverse tapestry of human experience. Through their storytelling, indigenous writers illuminate the universal truths that bind us all and inspire us to strive for a more just and inclusive world.

Works Cited

1. Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House*. United States: HarperCollins, 2012 print.
2. Erdrich, Louise. *The Night Watchman*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2020 print.
3. Heldke, L. & O'Connor, P. (2004). *Oppression, Privilege, & Resistance Theoretical Perspectives on Racism, Sexism, and Heterosexism*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
4. Sultan Mas Pramudya. (2021). In Geraldine's Struggle Against Racial Oppression In Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*.
5. Young, I. M. (2004). *Five Faces of Oppression*. In L. Held P. O'Connor (Eds.). *Oppression, Privilege, and Resistance*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
6. Young, I. M. (2011). *Justice and Politics Differences*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.