

Book Reviews

Four Souls. Louise Erdrich. New York: HarperCollins, 2004; ISBN: 0-06-620975-7; 210 pges, \$23.95 US.

Four Souls is the latest of Erdrich's novels which continues the lives of both reservation and non-reservation Anishnaabe peoples whose stories began in *Tracks*. These hearty people have survived boarding schools, smallpox and other epidemics, the theft of their land, and enforced Christianity. Both light and dark humor carry the story along. In *Four Souls* Erdrich once again employs the system of chapters being told by alternating narrators. Like the tracks of Fleur's pushcart, these concomitant stories, Fleur's life in Minneapolis and Nanapush's life back on the reservation, drive the novel forward and back, revealing more than just their own histories. While trickster/storyteller Nanapush weaves his own tales, Fleur still does not reveal her own story. Instead, her story is revealed through the eyes of John James Mauser's ex-sister-in-law, Polly Elizabeth.

Originally, Fleur goes to the city to find the scoundrel who stole her land and the land of many other Anishnaabe people back on her reservation. She finds the dying Mauser, whom she helps to nurse back to life, so that she can make him pay for what he has done to her people. Using all of her charms, she makes him her husband with the intent to kill him so that she would inherit his (her) land.

Meanwhile, on the reservation, Nanapush is having a few domestic difficulties of his own with Margaret. These two characters provide most of the humor throughout the novel, as a trickster is supposed to do. His insane jealousies about Margaret and Shesheeb, Nanapush's brother-in-law, drive most of his actions concerning the years Fleur is away from the reservation. Convinced that Shesheeb has gone Windigo, Nanapush watches him. Margaret, with insecurities and jealousies of her own, flirts with Nanapush just enough to keep him guessing about what is really happening.

Eventually Fleur and Nanapush's paths converge as Fleur returns with her nameless son. She has a white son and drives a big white car, which she gambles away to secure even more of her land. In these chapters narrated by Margaret, Fleur connects with her ancestors, *Four Souls* and the others who have made her so strong. Once again united with water, Fleur reemerges as the Anishnaabekwe she is supposed to be.

In the novel, Erdrich uses more Anishnaabe language, but it can generally be understood based on context. This use is not enough to chase away a non-speaker. In *Four Souls* the reader learns more about Fleur during her time in the city and how her son was born.

With each successive novel, Erdrich reveals more about the characters who inhabit her world, delving deeper into different characters in each book. Men and women who have read Erdrich's entire collection will recall connecting events from other books, but new readers will not be lost; instead, they will want to read the other episodes, too. In the end Fleur emerges victorious, but not without the aid of her family, past and present.

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Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat. Paula Gunn Allen. New York: HarperCollins, 2003; ISBN: 0-06-053687-X; 350 pges; \$41.95US.

What if Pocahontas was really a top secret spy chosen by her people to infiltrate the English forts and courts? And what if this spy was also a powerful medicine woman with her sights set on learning all she could about Christianity, British society, and as a result, influencing the course of history?

This is the premise of renowned Laguna pueblo/Metis author Paula Gunn Allen in her groundbreaking new biography *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*. This is a refreshing view of history and of a woman about whom we have been fed a steady Disney diet of true love, romance, and talking cartoon animals.

This Pocahontas, one very different from the romantic British/American version of her as a comely Indian maiden who was willing to throw it all away for love, is seen and interpreted by Allen through a very indigenized lens. As a result we see how her status among her people, her relations with the British and the successful partnership with her husband John Rolfe may have helped to shape the history of trade and diplomatic relations between England and what is now known as the United States of America.

Through Allen's writing, we come to see Pocahontas as a strong, powerful historical figure who played an important part in her nations' spiritual practice; a chosen one perhaps, whose gifts made it possible for her to be the perfect go between as relations shifted and changed between the Powhatans and the British. Calling Pocahontas a pathfinder, Allen believes we do a great injustice to her and others like her "by discounting their massive contributions to the modern world and instead