

AN INSIGHT INTO THE INSCRUTABLE DESTINIES OF LOUISE ERDRICH'S CHARACTERS IN "THE ANTELOPE WIFE"

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Abstract: The present study aims at giving a full and clear view on destiny in Louise Erdrich's "The Antelope Wife". It shows how the destiny of each and every character influenced the way in which all the things happened and how these actions had various consequences on the personalities presented in the novel. Furthermore, it gives a perfect insight into the characters' features and emotional intelligence while it also concentrates on their positive or negative decisions. Moreover, it touches upon the aspects, which portray the experiences the characters had and the obstacles they had to face in order to achieve internal development and self-esteem. This paper also presents some specific perspectives upon symbols, which helped the improvement of each personality and are key tools in Erdrich's novel. Through its flawless way of describing each path of the characters, the paper also offers the possibility to better understand the Native American culture and to have some data about their life, beliefs, customs, tradition and history.

Keywords: destiny, identity, life path, death, culture, past, present, future.

1. INTRODUCTION

Louise Erdrich is a famous gifted American novelist known for admiring the Native Americans and their cultures using the Native American issue in most of her pieces of art. She idolizes the traditions and customs of the Native Americans being one of the most significant creators of the Native American Renaissance. According to Vine Deloria Jr. "In order to understand the spiritual/ intellectual journey of the Indian elders, we must start where they began their quest for understanding" (Deloria, 2006: XXIV).

The novel entitled *The Antelope Wife* is the outcome of her attitude towards the Native American people as she wanted to create something unforgettable conveying the message of destiny, ancestry, death and salvation. By writing this novel, she wanted to highlight the massive importance of Native Americans in the country, to make people remember the true ancestors describing them as a very valuable community with a rich culture, which must not be ignored or neglected. "Indigenes as otherness may well date from antiquity or cross every border. But few have attracted fantasy quite so insistent, or lavishly popular and beguiling, as that of the Indian" (Lee, 2003:91).

The book highlights the themes of love, revenge, family, destiny and identity offering a very interesting perspective from the view of a girl called Cally. She is the narrator of the novel explaining everything in minute details for us to better understand the situation the characters are put in throughout the story. "The technique of using multiple narrators in Native American works should be declared legitimate not because William Faulkner uses it, too, but because it incorporates the rich traditions of Native American storytelling" (Manley, 1994:128). This is "but one example of acknowledging that writings by Euro-Americans exist in tandem with Native American works" (Bona & Maini, 2006:79).

It is very interesting how the mixture of Native American culture and present personal issues slowly unfolds itself as the reader is digging himself deeper into the novel. All the lives and destinies of the characters are somehow interwoven because of the same ancestors they have and also due to the same culture they share. The bond between the characters can be felt through all the happenings and the reader might experience the close relationship these Native Americans held and took care of. Although there are several conflicts presented in the story, we can say that behind all these conflicts, there is always love and support for each other.

As Vine Deloria says “to be an Indian in modern society is in a very real sense to be unreal and ahistorical (Deloria, 1969:10).

Every destiny of each character presented in the novel is meaningful. The issue of destiny is a very complex one tackling multifarious aspects and perspectives. Every little detail and every trivial aspect might represent a key tool for the destiny of one of the characters in the novel.

Destiny itself is very faded and blurred in the first part of the novel as nobody could predict anything about the routes of the characters. However, as the story continues and slowly unfolds itself, the separate paths of the personalities start to reveal.

2. SCRANTON ROY'S DESTINY

At the beginning of the novel there is one significant quote being a general quote from the battle in which Scranton Roy unfortunately participated: “Scranton Roy was most disturbed not by the death yells of old men and the few warriors shocked naked from their robes, but by the feral quiet of the children” (Erdrich, 2002:4). This was the exact moment when the whole story started by the cruel battle they experienced. The unlucky destiny of Scranton Roy was the first move into the story, which meant a huge step towards his end, as he was questioned by the dead woman at the end of the novel.

To continue with Roy, he also kidnapped a girl, which meant the “newness” in his life, she was teaching him by her presence, he was developing and experiencing the state of being blessed. “So he was able at last to remove the child from its wrappings and bathe it, a girl, and to hold her. He'd never done such a thing before” (Erdrich, 2002:5); “It occurred to him one slow dusk as he looked down at her, upon his breast, that she was teaching him something” (Erdrich, 2002:7) and “She loves him like nothing else. He is her father, her human” (Erdrich, 2002:11). The relationship between the two shaped Roy's destiny as it was forged throughout the novel.

Another very important aspect and key-event in Scranton's life is the birth of his grandson, Augustus. It represented a life commitment because he was finally able to have a descendant. “There was no pulse in the birth cord but Scranton Roy thought to puff his own air into the baby's lungs. It answered with a startled bawl. Augustus. She had already named her baby. Known that it would be a boy” (Erdrich, 2002:17). The birth of a child is always a very important moment in anyone's life. It means that a new life overcomes the past, it means that the miracle of fertility is unbeatable and it is also

highlighted the beauty of becoming parents and this also happened in the case of the girl and Scranton Roy.

The last important thing about Scranton Roy refers to the actions which took place in the last pages of the novel. In the end of the novel, Roy's regret is portrayed, that of killing the woman in the beginning. After the ghost visited him a few time, he actually felt wrong and regretted his crime. "On the hundredth night that she visited him, exhausted and fearful, Scranton Roy made a promise to the now familiar old woman. He would find the village and the people he had wronged. He would bring along the son of the boy nursed on Father's milk. His grandson, Augustus" (Erdrich, 2002:238). Poor Augustus had to live the consequences of his grandfather's fault and he actually expresses his emotions by his gestures. "Now, his feet big, step gloomy, his forehead raw from the cold spring wind, he trudged east leading the horse toward a place he'd never been and a destiny set into motion by his grandfather's guilt and an old woman's ghost" (Erdrich, 2002:238-239). Augustus served as a tool for his grandfather to fulfill his true duty because of the crime he committed. It was a necessary action, though, because the death of the old woman must have been revenged or, at least done something about. It was sure for me that Roy would not have remained unpunished, and the regret he felt was the true final destiny for him.

3. ROZIN'S DESTINY

Rozin is the next character, which radiates complexity. Rozin was firstly presented beside Richard, her husband, who was not necessarily good for her mental health, they lived in a toxic relationship and no positivity was brought to Rozin's heart from this marriage. "She was never sure how she stood because his mood changed with no reference to anything she did. So when she lied she could at least control his anger by keeping him satisfied at the appearance of his world" (Erdrich, 2002:58).

Rozin was actually adapting to her destiny and was afraid to change or do something against it. Even though, I felt like she was afraid all the time, she finally made the decision to step forward and leave the marriage. This step had several further consequences, mostly Deanna's tragic death. "*We're moving*, when his job became dangerous and the reservation life too political. And now, directed to him, *I am leaving*" (Erdrich, 2002:63).

Another important thing, which must be mentioned about Rozin, is that her destiny was strictly sewed together with Frank's destiny. All through the novel, they were never apart, they always find their way back to each other and they never let go of the true connection they developed together. The only thing perhaps, which meant an obstacle for their relationship, was the grief experienced by Rozin because of her daughter, Deanna. "When his peremptory gestures occasionally irritated her, she told him. Their honesty with each other was a wonder to them both. The problem, on that day of days, was from the past. From history. Richard Whiteheart Beads. History is grief and no passion is complete without its jealous backdrop" (Erdrich, 2002:160).

The aspect of Richard being the infinite "revenant" was also a huge factor in Rozin's unhappy life and she was also depressed and anxious about the situation.

Although, her path was heavily influenced by the mistakes Richard made, she always felt the connection and closeness they had before and remained till Richard's death. She knew that her destiny was folded with Richard's destiny and she somehow got used to it, she accepted that she would always be connected to him, even in the afterlife. "Hatred for Richard. Longing. This tangle of blame and killing anger and wilted love" (Erdrich, 2002:189).

Rozin's destiny led her to remain with Frank, who supported her throughout her battles against mental illness and who actually never left her side even in the dark days. The two of them deserved the way they loved each other and knew that their destiny was written. "Death might work. Only she has this thought: He will be standing at the western gate. And when she gets there, having shot herself or swallowed sufficient pills, it will only be to land in Richard's arms. "I'm not leaving', says Frank" (Erdrich, 2002:192).

Rozin's mental health was never at the top of the pyramid, she always had difficulties with experiencing things and live life as it is. She processed things very hard and always felt uncomfortable in her life. As Cally described "You never know which it is with Mama anymore - love or the bottom line" (Erdrich, 2002:195-196). Her destiny was unsure, she never felt truly happy, but accepted her written destiny.

4. RICHARD'S DESTINY

Richard is the next character, whose destiny was not at all clear, he had several journeys in life and eventually ended up dead by the final moment of the story. At first, we might be sorry for him, being so violent and embarrassing towards Rozin, a little bit angry, too, because that is not what Rozin deserved. He was initially influenced by his negative behavior, which is the main cause why he felt guilt at some point. "Part of him is shot with pity, even a little guilt - those furtive, stolen moments, so shabby, so unsatisfactory - she really deserves better even from a rival, a lover, even from this man with the stupid name Shawano" (Erdrich, 2002:64).

Another important moment of Richard's life was when he actually became homeless and an alcoholic, he could not process the death of his daughter and the abandonment, which he had to face, so he ran towards alcohol to better the situation, but eventually as we know, it just got worse. "He slept off his whiskey head and went out to the garage the next morning (Erdrich, 2002: 84). And "Richard screwed the black cap carefully onto the empty bottle. He set the bottle on the margin of grass beside the museum steps" (Erdrich, 2002: 93).

He actually got to a point where he was somehow subordinated by regular people, he became inferior, insignificant and earned the saddest destiny imagined. "A museum guard in a dark uniform, a large woman bland and bored, walked down the steps and told them to leave" (Erdrich, 2002:95).

He was experiencing an illness, the kind of inner pain, which must not be experienced by any parent. Richard's destiny was probably one of the most tragic and dramatic of all. Despite the fact that we might be very disappointed by his decisions, yet we could feel some kind of connection with him, as if he wanted to do his best to become

what he wanted to, but the destiny of life could not approve and it had other plans for him. "Richard's hand in what happened to his little girl was that kind of untouchable sorrow where you can't even drink it off, no matter how long and hard you try" (Erdrich, 2002: 150).

Richard's final destiny had as a main source the deep sadness, depression and trauma he experienced most of his life. He felt that he could no longer live the life destiny offered him, so he somewhat knew what was going to happen. We might be very sorry for Richard, even though we know that he hurt a lot of people, including her daughter, Cally, and her wife, Rozin. "For although yanked against the rough stone and nearly over, the Reverend had not let go and still held Richard two-handed by the ankle, a deadweight, unconscious. And the wife of Klaus, whose eyes had never left Richard, was there suddenly too" (Erdrich, 2002:169).

Richard is the kind of character the readers feel sorry for. He is complicated, transmits the feeling of depression, anxiety and the readers feel unfortunate by his appearance. On the other hand, Richard also tries to make the readers feel hope, they hope for the character's well-being and hope for him to overcome his faults and get a better future. He represents the life struggles an ordinary person could have after the loss of his most valuable aspect in his whole existence. He was full of love and tried to unfold this, but had no idea how to actually do that. Rozin was the perfect woman and ideal partner for him, but he acknowledged that he messed things up and eventually lost her forever.

5. CALLY'S DESTINY

The most important and meaningful character and the most special personality in the novel is Cally. She was the one who suffered the most, firstly because of the death of her sister, secondly, because of the separation from her parents and finally because her identity never got to a point, where she could feel comfortable and sure about her life.

Cally is the key personality in the novel because she connects every other character to each other. First of all, her destiny was initially influenced by her origin of nationality. She was partly deer, so she had some specific qualities, which she was proud of. "One day Grandma Zosie told us it was no wonder we threw our clothes off and danced for each other, naked in the rainy yard. We were part deer and there was nothing to be done" (Erdrich, 2002:55).

She also had some kind of supporter or helper throughout her life, namely Almost Soup, who eventually saved her life and he was the one who made her feel well again after her severe disease. "It is then, in the hospital room, halfway asleep, that Rozin feels me put her daughter's life inside her again. Unknown to her, I have taken it with me to keep it safe" (Erdrich, 2002:90).

Cally feels very much miserable and lost and that is why she asked a lot of questions from her grandmothers. As she moved to Frank's house, she had even more questions connected to her past and family. She knew that something had to be done in order to have a clearer perspective upon her family and to eventually clear her mind. "All my life so far I've wondered about the meaning of my spirit name but nobody's told

it, seen it, got ahold of my history flying past" (Erdrich, 2002:102); "Pleased that my drama of identity is something we can talk about. All my reasons. I list them quickly, before she can change the subject away from me" (Erdrich, 2002:112) and "I was never in the city, since a little girl. Very sheltered. Not yet recovered from losing my sister. And my name. I think I want a new one, or at least I want to find my grandmas to ask them a few things about the one I've got" (Erdrich, 2002:112).

There are a few words which describe best how Cally was probably feeling all her desperate life. "I have so many things I want to say – What does my name mean? Where is my sister? What about my father? And Mama, will she ever stop avoiding Frank and make him her destiny?" (Erdrich, 2002:121). Her existence consisted in questioning herself, she did not know where she came from, what her true destiny is and what to do to actually find out some details about these issues. It is very sad to think about this girl being so out of hope because she deserved the best in the world. After Deanna's death, she was ignored and never given the affection and love she wanted and deserved.

Cally's destiny also heavily involved her grandmothers, whom she admired so much, but never received any important message throughout the novel, just bits of history, past and origin. They were a huge help in her life, for sure, they provided all the necessities she needed and tried to support her, even though they did not tell the entire story of their origin and nationality. "Yet, at my naming, both Grandma Zosie and Grandma Mary blessed me. They raised their female golden eagle fans and swept me with the smoke of sweet grass" (Erdrich, 2002:109). She was always desperately searching for their presence throughout the novel, because they meant the only certain point in her entire life. "While they chew, their eyes rolling, I usually come forward with my question. 'Do you know where Mrs. Zosie Roy or Mary Shawano are living these days?'" (Erdrich, 2002: 119).

6. KLAUS'S DESTINY

Another special character of Erdrich's novel is Klaus. He is also someone who suffered a lot throughout the novel, because of a woman, who is rather an animal, a deer, if we want to be more specific. Sweetheart Calico is the one, who actually broke Klaus's heart and made him feel nothing by the end of the novel. It was not her fault, though. She was trapped and compelled to live in her unnatural environment by Klaus. Calico was also in pain, even though everybody considered her a strange woman, who has nothing to do with normality. At some moment, we even thought about her being non-existent, just a ghost, who was hunting the entire group. But we might like how Calico's destiny shaped Klaus's and helped him realize that he has no right to make her stay and to "lock her up".

Klaus had a trauma connected to Calico, he never escaped the thought of her while he knew he was going to lose her at a certain moment. The kind of harsh dependency which characterized Klaus is not healthy or beneficial at all. "And I think of her. Now and again they'll ask me, the others, what was so fucking great about her? What did she do, in bed for instance, or what did she cook? Was it something she did

with her hands, her face, some way she had perhaps. A love way” (Erdrich, 2002:154-155).

The longing dependence is the best word to describe his feelings towards Calico, who wanted nothing just to go home and live her life as it is. Klaus had a long time to finally accept his destiny, as he let the deer go and eventually gave her the freedom she deserved. “If he looked at her he wouldn’t be able to do it. So he did not look at her face. Slowly, reluctantly, fighting his own need, dizzily, Klaus pulled at the loop of dirty gray sweetheart calico, undid the knot that bound her to him” (Erdrich, 2002:229). This was the biggest step Klaus ever had to take, so we must appreciate and encourage him to become a better version of himself. His destiny was to eventually defeat himself and to get rid of this addiction.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of “blueness” is a very interesting recurrent motif in the novel. The color blue is often mentioned and we might wonder why this color popped up in every chapter of the book as well as at the end of the novel: “I had a lot of time to think about this blueness. I could see it before me, how it appeared and disappeared, the blue at the base of a flame, the blue in a fading line when I shut my eyes, the blue in one moment at the edge of the sky at dusk. There. Gone. That blue of my beads, I understood, was the blueness of time” (Erdrich, 2002:215).

The blueness meant the time passing by, the years, which crossed the characters and actually the whole world and existence they lived in. The concept of blueness is something we do not hear about often in our regular lives. We must think about the metaphorical and subjective perspective of the world sometimes because we forget how time flies and how the “blueness” overtakes our life, too.

There is a wonderful quote in the novel: “Love pulls us, implacable, from under the skin, I see that” (Erdrich, 2002:212) and it summarizes how feelings affect our future and how sensitive we are, how deep we can feel and how the surrounding can affect us both positively and negatively. We cannot do anything about this, so we should accept that sometimes we are led by our emotions, and it is all right to feel lost and hopeless in life because our destiny is written and everything will turn out how it should.

According to Vine Deloria Jr. “the secularity of the society in which we live must share considerable blame in the erosion of spiritual powers of all traditions, since our society has become a parody of social interaction lacking even an aspect of civility [...] The change of living conditions experienced by Indian people in the last century also has a great deal to do with the erosion of our spiritual powers” (Deloria, 2006: XVIII).

To conclude, this novel should be perceived as a true experience, it should be read and especially felt. Louise Erdrich is a very gifted writer having one very special talent, possessing all the tools appropriate to convey a very interesting cultural message by means of her novel.

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