Avalon revisited: Morgan le Fay's ultimate treason revealed: and 'The veils of wretched love': uncovering Sister Loepolda's hidded truths in Louise Erdrich's Love medicine and Tracks

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Avalon Revisited: Morgan le Fay's Ultimate Treason Revealed

and

'The Veils of Wretched Love': Uncovering Sister Leopolda's Hidden Truths in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine and Tracks

by

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"Yet in every winter's heart there is a quivering spring, and behind the veil of each night there is a smiling dawn. Now my despair has turned into hope."
(Kahlil Gibran)

Thanks Dad, Mom, Grandmom, Bert, Steen, Andrea, and Maurice for your loving support.

Without you my despair would not have turned into hope.
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Abstract: This paper addresses the seeming critical inconsistency regarding Morgan le Fay in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. After first delving briefly into Malory's background source material as exploration of how and explanation of why Malory purposefully shaped Morgan le Fay's sinister character, we can then list, with comment, Morgan le Fay's appearances in the *Morte Darthur*. By tracing Morgan le Fay's ultimate role in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, we can not only erase critical inconsistency regarding Morgan le Fay, but we can, moreover, finally grasp and understand her ultimate treachery in the final barge episode.
Morgan le Fay has perplexed many critics with her mysterious yet alluring characterization throughout Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Critical opinion concerning Morgan le Fay is uniform in the sense that literary commentators initially discern her as an evil being in the court of King Arthur; yet, critics later attempt to define her underlying reasoning and character motivation for transforming, essentially, from a treacherous foe of Arthur's kingdom into a loyal and loving sister figure for Arthur's voyage to Avalon at the conclusion of the *Morte Darthur*. Morgan le Fay's final appearance presents, indeed, a challenging task in light of discerning her true role and function within the realm of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. The purpose of this paper is to erase critical inconsistency by illuminating Morgan le Fay's very consistent pattern of treachery so that we may, finally, grasp and understand her ultimate treachery in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

The first step is to delve briefly into Malory's background source material as exploration of how and explanation of why Malory purposefully shaped Morgan le Fay's wonderfully sinister character. The second step is to list, with comment, Morgan le Fay's appearances in the *Morte Darthur*.

successfully and logically trace Morgan le Fay's ultimate role in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

The character Morgan le Fay first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (ca 1149), in which Morgan (or Morgen) and her eight sisters reign over the *Insula Pomorum*. When Sir Thelgesinus brings the mortally wounded Arthur to the island, Morgen

placed the king of a golden bed and with her own hand she uncovered his honorable wound and gazed at it for a long time. At length she said that health could be restored to him if he stayed with her for a long time and made use of her healing art.

(Parry p.85, ll. 934-38)

Geoffrey had earlier written the *Prophetiae Merlini* (ca 1136) followed by the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca 1136), which describes Arthur's voyage to the Isle of Avalon. Neither work, however, connects Morgan le Fay with this voyage.³

Geoffrey of Monmouth is generally accepted by critics as the source for Robert Wace's *Roman de Brut*. In Wace's text, Anna, not Morgan le Fay, is again Arthur's sister, and


³It is at this point where confusion arises regarding Arthur's sisters and their different names. In the *Historia Regum Britanniae* Arthur's sister Anna, according to John Rhys, "is probably to be identified with Arthur's sister called Morgan le Fay in the romances." (Studies in the Arthurian Legend. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1891, p.22) Rhys's opinion has generally been accepted by Arthurian critics since the names Anna and Morgan are etymologically similar.
there is no connection made between the king's sibling and his journey to the Isle of Avalon.

Most critics accept that Chrétien de Troyes was the next major author whose material included the character of Morgan le Fay.¹ In Erec et Enide (ca 1165-68) she is briefly and benevolently mentioned only twice: once as the friend of Guingamar, the "lord of the Isle of Avalon," (Chrétien, p.61, ll. 1982-84) and again as the indirect healer of Erec's wound:

The king sighed deeply, then had an ointment brought which his sister Morgan had made. The ointment that Morgan had given Arthur was so wonderfully effective that the wound to which it was applied, whether on nerve or joint, could not fail to be completely cured and healed within a week, provided it was treated with the ointment once a day.

(Chrétien, p.89, ll. 4248-53)

In Chrétien's Yvain (ca 1173) Morgan le Fay is alluded to as well. Yvain meets a damosel who recalls "an ointment given [her] by Morgan the Wise, she told [her] that it could drive from the head any madness, however great." (Chrétien, p.332, ll.2939-41) In Yvain she is also mentioned as the mistress of Guigomar, the lord of Avalon, and the sister of Arthur.⁵

During Chrétien's lifetime, the French monk Étienne de


⁵As Richard Wright comments, "Indeed, no evidence has been found that she was previously called Arthur's sister, and Chrétien's work remains important as the first to establish the relationship between Arthur and the lady of Avalon." (Wright, p.5)
Rouen wrote the *Draco Normannicus* (ca 1160). Most critics believe the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Vita Merlini* supplied the necessary source material for this Latin poem in which Arthur writes to the historical King Henry about seeking healing herbs from his sister Morganis in the *Insula Avallonis*. Thus, Etienne de Rouen, in addition to Chrétien, labels Geoffrey's lady of Avalon Arthur's sister.

Many critics consider Giraldus Cambrensis's *De Instructione Principum* as the next noteworthy source concerning the character of Morgan le Fay. According to Wright, Giraldus the Welshman speaks of the discovery of Arthur's grave at Glastonbury. Morgan, or Morganis as she is again called here, is once more held responsible for the healing of Arthur's wounds, this time at Glastonbury rather than Avalon. (Wright, p.6)

This particular Morgan differs from the others in the various source material. She is not the "*dea phantastica* of the 'fabulosi Britones'" (Wright, p.6) anymore; rather, she is "a noble matron who was ruler and patron of those parts and akin to King Arthur by blood." (Chambers, p.121) Loomis suggests that Giraldus the Welshman "derives his characterization of Morganis from her Welsh background."

(Wright, p.6)

Most scholars generally believe that Layamon's *Brut*, "the first English treatment of the Arthurian legend," (Wright, p.6) soon followed the *De Instructione Principum* of Giraldus Cambrensis. Layamon's source material draws from
Wace whose work, in turn, derives from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Layamon's Morgan figure, however, is Argante, the queen of the elves. Argante and her elves "bring Arthur gifts at his birth, support him throughout his life, and take him into their care at his passing." (Wright, p.7) Layamon's Morgan figure, Argante, is not mentioned as the sister of Arthur; rather, she is Arthur's healing figure:

... that he would fare into Avalon, into the island, to Argante the fair; for she would with balm heal his wounds; and when he were all whole, he would soon come to them. This believed the Britons, that he will thus come, and look ever when he shall come to his land, as he promised them, ere he hence went. 6

(Layamon, p.212)

Although Layamon's Argante does not bear the exact name Morgan, she does, nevertheless, resemble the Morgan figures of previous works.

In addition to his Morgan figure, Layamon's work also possesses the motif of a barge that holds women who will guide Arthur to the Isle of Avalon. Layamon's Arthur "will fare to Avalon, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound; make me all whole with healing draughts."

(Layamon, p.264) Yet,

Even with the words there approached from the sea that was a short boat, floating with the waves; and two women therein, wondrously formed; and they took Arthur anon, and bare him quickly, and laid him softly down, and forth they gan depart. (Layamon, p.264)

This very barge appears also in *La Mort Artu*, "the first major synthesis of Arthurian material before Malory."

(Wright, p.8)

Since Layamon cannot be considered as a source for the later development of Arthur's departure, however, the similar appearance of a barge in the *Mort Artu* (ca 1230-35) of the Vulgate Cycle, which appeared shortly after Layamon, strongly suggests that this motif must have been part of the tradition. Subsequently, the Morgan figure in Arthurian literature is usually affiliated with a barge scene.

Critics generally accept that Morgan le Fay is acknowledged in the Vulgate Cycle as Arthur's sister from Chrétien's source material. Morgan's character, however, differs from the previous source material as she begins to change in the Vulgate Cycle prose romances: "Physically she can be beautiful or ugly, but the romancers always stress her native cleverness, an important asset for a powerful sorceress." Morgan's character is not fully developed in the Vulgate Cycle, and, furthermore, motivation for her change in character is not clearly identified, either.

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1I have used Oskar Sommer's *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances* Vols.1-7 for my Vulgate Cycle references.

2Lucy Allen Paton is not troubled about the physical inconsistencies in the Vulgate Cycle regarding Morgan le Fay. She attributes the various physical portrayals of Morgan to the will of the romancers. See Paton's *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, p.63.
In the Merlin Morgan's arrival at court with her sister is described. Morgan is acknowledged as Arthur's sister and also as a clever student of Merlin's teaching. Moreover, in the Suite du Merlin or Huth Merlin, "a continuation of the prose redaction of the late twelfth-century poet Robert de Baron that is based in part upon the Vulgate Merlin, more confusion occurs regarding Morgen le Fay."

In the Suite du Merlin we again discover that Merlin is Morgan's teacher in crafts. Although Ny nyve, the Damsel of the Lake, is generally associated with learning these enchantments and disposing of her teacher, Merlin, it is in the Suite du Merlin where Merlin's traditional teaching occurs with Morgan instead of Ny nyve. This change in tradition further confuses readers about Morgan le Fay's actual role and identity.

Clues regarding her character motivation are found, however, in the Suite du Merlin:

Morgue... haoit le roi Artu[s] son frere [et] seur toushoumes, non mie pour chou qu'il li euust de riens mesfait, mais pour chou qu'il est us et coustume que les desloiaus gens et les mauvaises heent toutdis les preudomes et ont vers eus rancune qui tousjours dure.\(^9\)

\(^9\)Wright basically refers to the confusion between the names Morgue(s) and Morgain and how Morgan "becomes two people through the Middle French declension of her name." (Wright, p.8) Although there is confusion with Morgan's name, what is of primary importance here is that Arthur does indeed have a named sister.

\(^10\)Cited from Patricia Ann Land, p.67, who quotes from the Huth MS, II, pp. 188-89.
Morgan hated King Arthur her brother above all men, not because he had done anything bad to her, but because it is the custom for disloyal and evil people to hate all those who are worthy and to bear a grudge against them which continually lasts.--my translation

It is this deep hatred of her brother that repeatedly leads Morgan to attempt to kill Arthur.

Although the Suite du Merlin does provide motivation for Morgan's character, some confusion still remains for readers. Her character in the Prose Lancelot, furthermore, only supplements the confusion regarding her role and identity in the Suite du Merlin. In the Prose Lancelot Morgan reveals her evil nature as she thrice imprisons Lancelot, attempts to shake his allegiance to Guenevere, and seeks to disgrace Lancelot, Guenevere and Artus (Arthur) alike. Land suggests:

Apart from her ultimate role as the fay who comes to transport Arthur to Avalon, another branch of her story, replete with carefully interlocking themes, has been accumulated by the various romancers. In this outgrowth of her legend, her plots and intrigues are calculated to demonstrate Lancelot's fidelity to Guenevere. Her hatred for Guenevere, her affairs with knights, her bespelling of the Val Sanz Retor are all planned and elaborated upon to prove this one point.

(Morgan's evil nature leaves no question how we are to feel about her in the Prose Lancelot. Lancelot says to her, "sai iou bien que vous feres encore asses plus de mal que de bien" [I know well that you will ever do more ill than good] and adds, "Et si voir ment mait diex que chest moult grant dolour en terre quant gent vivent el siecle dont nus biens ne nus porfis ne vient fors tous iours nuisance & maus."
[some people are always bent on mischief--Sommer, Vol. V, p.167; Sommer's sidenote] Land continues:

In reading the romances of the Vulgate Cycle, one becomes accustomed to the role of Morgain la Féee, Arthur's sister, as a major villainess, usually plotting revenge against Lancelot and Guenevere. Therefore, this reversal of her role at the end of La Mort le Roi Artu, wherein she comes to take her wounded brother Arthur to Avalon, can seem out of keeping with the rest of her portrayal.  

(Land, p.iii)

Morgan's role reversal at the conclusion of the Mort Artu from a treacherous woman to a benign sister does, indeed, seem strangely inconsistent.

Having explored Malory's background source material, we discover that Morgan le Fay's final character has emerged from a gradually darkening pattern. Beginning with Monmouth's Vita Merliri and ending with the Mort Artu, the character of Morgan le Fay has gradually evolved from a kind and generous healing figure to a treacherous and hateful

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"See Land's The Representation of Morgain La Féee in the Vulgate Cycle Romances for a detailed account of the various folklorist, romantic, and traditional interpretations regarding Morgan le Fay's character transition. In brief summary Land states that the folklorists trace the roots of Morgain's personality back to the Celtic goddesses, especially to the Morrigan. The romantics believe her representation is due entirely to authors' imagination and that each romancer contributed with time perhaps one incident or episode that was enlarged upon by his successors, or even omitted, as they saw fit for their story. The traditionalists or moderates compromise the folklorists and the romancers by acknowledging that the frontiers of tradition and imagination are difficult, if not impossible, to delineate. Their theory is that the romancers probably used both tradition and imagination as they created and that the ratio occurring in any one romance is a matter of the individual author's taste."
woman. I believe that Malory deliberately shaped his particular Morgan figure to go even beyond what his sources dared. Malory purposefully shaped Morgan le Fay's sinister character to commit the ultimate treachery that he thought possible. In order to subscribe to this point of view, we must review Morgan le Fay's appearances in the Morte Darthur and, then, explore the final barge episode. I think that we have perhaps discredited Malory's Morgan le Fay by transforming her final role in the Morte Darthur, and, therefore, misread the final barge episode.

Malory introduces Morgan le Fay in the Morte Darthur as the youngest of Queen Ygrayne's three daughters by her first husband, Duke Gorlois of Tyntagil. Morgan le Fay was "put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye." (Morte Darthur (MDa), p.10, ll. 9-10) The dark art of necromancy is, indeed, a powerful yet potentially dangerous weapon. After her convent education she "was wedded to kynge Uryens of the lond of Gore that was syre Ewayns le Blaunche Maynys fader." (MDa, p.10, ll. 11-12) She is not only the wife of the mighty King Uryens; we also discover that Morgan is King Arthur's half-sister when Sir Ulphuns publicly denounces Queen Igrayne, both Morgan's and Arthur's mother, as "the falsyst lady of the wor[1]de, and the moste traytoures unto the kynges person." (MDa, p.45, ll. 10-11) Malory writes that Morgan is "a fayre lady as ony myght be," (MDa, p.45,
11. 6) yet there is a subtle family connection made between her and her beautiful mother's alleged treachery.

The next appearance of Morgan in the Morte Darthur occurs after Merlin sagaciously warns Arthur to "kepe well the scawberde of Excaleber, for ye shall lose no bloode whyle ye have the scabbard uppon you, though ye have as many woundis uppon you as ye may have." (MDa, p.78, ll. 24-27) Foolishly Arthur entrusts the scawberd to Morgan's keeping. Malory explicitly comments upon the loyalties of Morgan:

And she loved another knyght bettir than hir husbande, kynge Uriens, othir Arthure. And she wolde have had Arthure hir brother slayne, and therefore she lete make anothir scawberd for Excaliber [lyke it by enchauntement, and gaf the scawberd Excaliber to her lover]. And the knyghtes name was called Accolon, that aftir had nere slayne kynge Arthure.

(MDa, p.78-79, ll. 29-32, 1-3)

Arthur unwisely gives the magical scabbard to Morgan immediately after Merlin's warning. Without the magic scabbard, Arthur is defenseless and vulnerable to death just like other mortals. Moreover, Arthur is exposed and susceptible to the machinations of Morgan's faithlessness. Without a second thought she breaks the bonds of her marriage to King Uryens with her love interest in Sir Accolon--and she can just as easily sever sibling ties with King Arthur. Malory does not attempt to teach his readers a lesson in marital fidelity or feudal loyalty; rather, he shows that Morgan is faithful only to her own will and desire.
Morgan appears again in the Arthur and Accolon chapter of the Morte Darthur as she treacherously lures King Arthur, King Uryens, and Sir Accolon to an enchanted ship and then magically separates them from one another by stranding them in different places. Through her deliberate scheming, Arthur and Accolon gradually approach fatal combat with each other.

Morgan makes provisions for her lover, Accolon. Her dwarf messenger approaches him and tells him,

... she [Morgan] gretys yow well and byddyth you be of stronge herte, for ye shall fyght to-morne wyth a knyght at the houre of pryme. And therefore she hath sent the Excalebir, Arthurs swerde, and the scawberde, and she byddyth you as ye love her that ye do that batayle to the uttirmoste without ony mercy, lyke as ye promysed hir when ye spoke laste togedir in prevyte.

(MDa, p.84, ll. 19-24)

Morgan has been arduously thorough in her treacherous scheming. While Accolon prepares himself for battle, she also sends a damsel messenger to Arthur who

... brought unto sir Arthure a swerde lyke unto Excaliber and the scawberde, and seyde unto Arthurs, "She sendis here youre swerde for grete love." And he thanks hir and wente hit had bene so; but she was falce, for the swerde and the scawberde was counterfete and brutyll and false.

(MDa, p.85, ll. 23-28)

Morgan's treachery nearly costs Arthur his life. The Lady

12Terence McCarthy addresses the problematic qualification of whether Accolon of Gaul was Morgan le Fay's "love" or her "lover." For more detailed information on the possibility of scribal error in Vinaver's emendations of Caxton's text, see McCarthy's article, "Did Morgan le Fay Have a Lover?" Medium Ævum 60 (1991): 284-289.
of the Lake rescues Arthur because "she knew how Morgan le Fay had ordainèd for Arthur shold have bene slayne that day, and therefore she come to save his lyff." (MDa, p.142, ll. 22-24) Before expiring, Accolon reveals Morgan's hatred for Arthur:

"Now, sir," seyde Accolon, "I woll tell you: this swerde hath bene in my kepynge the moste party of this twelve-monthe, and Morgan le Fay, kyng Uryence wyff, sente hit me yestirday by a dwarfe to the entente to sle kynge Arthure, hir brothir; for ye shall undirstonde that kynge Arthur ys the man in the world that she hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and of prowesse of ony of hir bloode. Also she loveth me oute of mesure as paramour, and I hir agayne. And if she myght bryng hit aboute to sle Arthure by hir crauftis, she wolde sle hir husbonde kyngre Uryence lyghtly. And than had she devised to have kynge in this londe and so to reigne, and she to be my quene."

(MDa, p.145-46, ll. 29-37, 1-3)

Morgan's treason infuriates Arthur. He vows vengeance "that all Crystendom shall speke of hit. God knowyth I have honoured hir and worshipped hir more than all my kyn, and more have I trusted hir than my wyff and all my kyn aftir." (MDa, p.146, ll. 21-24) Malory's writing places all the blame solely upon Morgan since Arthur mercifully pardons Accolon for his conspiracy with her: "I wyte the the less for my sistir Morgan le Fay by hir false crauftis made the the agre to hir fals lustes." (MDa, p.146, ll. 19-20)

Meanwhile, Morgan does not realize that her perfidious scheming upon Arthur's life has failed and that Accolon is dead. She already plots to kill her husband and usurp his throne. Later, when stealing the magical scabbard away from Arthur yet again, she states: "Whatsoever com of me, my
brothir shall nat have this scawberde!" (MDa, p.151, ll. 14-15) She has exposed his mortality and, therefore, made him permanently vulnerable to death: "The good magic that can save Arthur is now lessened. The scabbard, one of the magic talismen, is gone; and from now on, Arthur, like all men, is subject to the loss of blood." (Reiss, p.69) At the very beginning of her role in the Morte Darthur Morgan shows her overmastering motivation--an evil and vicious intent to harm, even to kill, her brother, Arthur.

Morgan's treacherous plotting cannot be checked by Arthur or his knights of the Round Table. Morgan eludes capture through her power of shape-shifting since she turns herself and her forty knights into immovable marble stones. She also warns Arthur that she fears "hym nat whyle I can make me and myne in lyknesse of stonys, and lette hym wete I can do much more whan I se my tyme." (MDa, p.152, ll. 27-28) Morgan is not a woman to be taken lightly. She is serious in her threats, and, if Arthur is not constantly on his guard, Morgan's unsuccessful attempts will one day prove successful.

Seeking to destroy him yet again, Morgan entices and tempts Arthur with the gift of a magnificently rich yet deadly mantle. Her treacherous plot almost succeeds--until the Lady of the Lake once again intervenes and saves Arthur from certain destruction. Arthur tells Uryens: "My sistir, your wyff, is allway aboute to betray me." (MDa, p.158, ll.
5) Morgan's plans are once again foiled and Arthur becomes even angrier.

Morgan's hatred of Arthur is so obsessive that she seeks to do him harm through others as we see in the tale of Sir Lancelot. When Morgan dictates to the imprisoned Lancelot that he must choose one of the four queens for his paramour or else die within her castle walls, he replies: "I woll none of you, for ye be false enchaunters." (MDa, p.258, ll. 3) Lancelot's answer frustrates Morgan le Fay as she unsuccessfully tries to malign Arthur's greatest knight to denounce the chivalric code that cements Arthur's realm and, instead, serve her.

The episode of the enchanted horn similarly shows Morgan's strategy of harming Arthur through others. Her sending the horn is not only motivated by jealous spite but it also serves as a means of destroying Arthur. She viciously attacks those whom Arthur loves best. Consequently, by destroying Gwenyvere and Lancelot, she will devastate Arthur. Her treachery is foiled yet again when Sir Lameroke intercepts her messenger and sends the magical horn, instead, to King Mark's court:

Than the barownes gadred them togedrys and seyde playnly they wolde nat have tho ladyes brente for an horne made by sorserie that cam "frome the false sorseres and wycche moste that is now lyvying." (MDa, p.430, ll. 18-21)

But since Lameroke misdirects her treacherous scheme, her actions affect Mark's court. And, thus, she attempts to
strike at Arthur again via Lancelot by setting an ambush of thirty knights to slay him.

Malory leaves no question of how we are supposed to feel about Morgan as he carefully guides our opinion through the use of other characters, as with Sir Gawain's comment: "Fy for shame, . . . 'that evir such a false treson sholde be wrought or used in a quene and a kyngs systir, and a kynge and a quenys doughtir!" (MDa, p.511, ll. 12-14)

Furthermore, he confronts Morgan's evil plotting: "I know youre false treson, and all placis where that I ryde shall know of youre false treson." (MDa, p.511, ll. 29-30)

Morgan, however, proves to be a worthy opponent to Gawain since she publicly accuses him of cowardice: "A, sir Gawain, full well wotist thou what thou dost and seyst, for, parde, we know the passyng well. But all that thou spekyst and doyst, thou sayste hit uppon pryde of that good knyght [Tristram] that ys there with the" (MDa, p.511-12, lines 35-36, 1-2). Throughout his writing, Malory shows that Morgan also seeks to destroy Tristram as well as Lancelot. Just as she chips away at Gawaine's faults, she, similarly, chisels away at those knights whom Arthur loves best. If she destroys the representation of idealistic chivalry in Arthur's knights, then she will also shatter Arthur.

We see the same strategy in Morgan's using Tristram as a knightly pawn in yet another attempt to devastate Arthur.
She commands Tristram to take to Arthur a wonderful shield "with a kynge and a quene therin paynted, and a knyght stondynge aboven them with hys one foote standynge uppon the kynges hede and the othir uppon the quenys hede" (MDa, p.554, lines 23-26). Morgan treacherously arouses Arthur's suspicion and diabolically plants the future seeds for his downfall. Moreover, she savors her evil deeds and patiently waits as these wicked seeds take root and grow.

Morgan next appears in Malory's Morte Darthur with the fatally wounded Alexander the Orphan. She deliberately and voluntarily channels her energies to heal, not kill, Alexander. But we learn what her purpose is after she secures his promise to stay with her for twelve months and a day. One of Morgan's damsels tells Alexander "my lady, my cousyn, quene Morgan, kepyth you here for none othir entente but for to do hir plesure whan hit lykyth hir." (MDa, p.643, ll. 20-23) Morgan's attentions are not wanted by Alexander: "A, Jesu defende me, seyde sir Alysaundir, from such pleasure! For I had levir kut away my hangers than I wolde do her ony suche pleasure!" (MDa, p.643, ll. 23-25)

Although the episode with Alexander the Orphan does not initially seem to connect with the obsessive hatred that Morgan feels for Arthur, it does possess, however, the recurrent theme of treachery. With Alexander, Morgan disguises her intentions and attempts to lure him to do her will. It is my thesis that with Arthur at the final episode
of the *Morte Darthur*, Morgan, similarly, attempts to have him do her will and serve her.

After Alexander escapes, Morgan's attentions focus on destroying Arthur yet again as she sets a trap for his greatest knight, Lancelot: for five years Morgan and the Queen of North Galys torture the beautiful and naked Elaine of Corbyn. Elaine cannot be freed until "the beste knyght of the worlde had takyn her by the honde." (*MDa*, p. 792, ll. 19-20) Morgan seeks to again harm Arthur by destroying the knight whom he loves most. If Lancelot fails Morgan's test of fidelity and chivalric loyalty, then everything that Arthur represents is futile.

We learn that Morgan's treachery succeeds to a limited degree: Elaine is pregnant with Lancelot's child, Galahad. Lancelot's failure frustrates the chivalric code of honor and loyalty. Doubt and suspicion in Arthur's court, therefore, is growing unhealthily. Consequently, Arthur cannot defend himself or his subjects from certain destruction. One might go so far as to say that Morgan's treachery terminates the chivalric age of Arthur's Round Table, at least if one regards the Elaine episode as contributing to the disintegration that accompanies the impact of the Grail on the stability of Arthur's society and the later catastrophe resulting from the Lancelot-Guinevere story and its aftermath.

Morgan le Fay is consistently portrayed by Malory as
the enemy throughout the *Morte Darthur*. She is the evil
force who plots against her brother and those who represent
him and his ideals. When the final catastrophe occurs in
the concluding episode, and the barge approaches the dying
Arthur, however, Morgan seems to have suddenly transformed
and reverted to the sympathetic and compassionate healing
and loving sister figure from earlier source material.

It is here in the final episode of the *Morte Darthur*
that readers have a difficult time interpreting Malory's
artistry. There is, moreover, a problem of shattering
inconsistency for the reader of the *Morte Darthur*. How are
we, as readers, to explain this sudden transformation of the
previously consistent evil force of Morgan le Fay? Most
critics believe that Morgan le Fay does indeed transform
into the loving sister and healing figure for Arthur's
sojourn to Avalon. And there are others who simply do not
know what exactly we are to make of Morgan's appearance in
the final episode. Until the final barge scene, however,
what we can conclude regarding Malory's treatment of Morgan
is that, although Malory eliminates some of her appearances
in the French source episodes, he does not in any way give
any reason for us to feel that she differs from her
appearances in those sources. She is presented as
consistently hateful and malevolent. The target for her
evil nature is consistently either Arthur or a knight whose
downfall would reflect on Arthur. Malory does not modify
his sources to give Morgan any redeeming characteristics or to present us with insights into her character that would help us understand her hidden motivations and thus perhaps make us more sympathetic to her. To this we must add that in any case the commentary regarding Malory has increasingly realized that he was not a clumsy writer who carelessly stumbled through his sources merely transcribing what information they presented to him. Malory knew exactly what he was doing while creating the character of Morgan le Fay in his Morte Darthur. Therefore, we can assume then that he, above all, was aware of the seeming inconsistency of the Morgan figures in the sources. In order to erase this critical inconsistency regarding Morgan le Fay role and function throughout the Morte Darthur, I believe that we must review the concluding episode once again. Thus, I hope to show not only how Malory's audience has consistently misread the final episode of Malory's Morte Darthur, but to reveal Morgan le Fay's ultimate treachery.

Thus, would it not be possible, perhaps probable, that Morgan's final appearance in the barge scene can be viewed in the same way as all her other appearances? Need we feel that she has completely transformed simply out of deference to the sources? More importantly, she now has what she has labored for all these years before her, a defeated and broken Arthur, on the verge of death. Although forces in which she has had no role have brought Arthur to this pass,
she has consistently done her best to accomplish it and must be considered to have at least some part in it. With the others in the barge, she indeed "wepte and shryked," (MDa, p.1240, ll. 16) but finally she has triumphed. Although Malory does not specifically name whose "lappis kyng Arthure layde hys hede," (MDa, p.1240, ll. 21-22) it would seem sure that is Morgan's lap, not Nynyve's. It is entirely possible to assert that at least one of the ladies, no matter how much she weeps and shrieks, no matter how solicitous she seems, ("Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught overmuch coulde!" [MDa, p.1240, ll. 24-25]) may not be at all as unhappy as she appears to be. It is significant that Malory, contrary to his sources, targets Morgan for special attention in the scene. Perhaps Malory's intends to emphasize her presence and also her triumph. Arthur, now submissive to her, his head in her lap, goes toward his tomb, now lost forever to the world as the barge "rowed fromward the londe." (MDa, p.1240, ll. 26) The matter concerning Britain is finally brought to an end as the seeming critical inconsistency regarding Morgan le Fay's treachery is, finally, made consistent afterall.
Abstract: Before dismissing and condemning Sister Leopolda to the ranks of the criminally insane, we must first lift away her dark veil of self-righteousness in an attempt to understand the psychological motives behind her actions. Consequently, we will discover that Sister Leopolda tries not only to protect her daughter from the clutches of Satan, but also to teach her to recognize the evils of man that had surrounded Sister Leopolda when she was an adolescent. By pushing aside Sister Leopolda's dark veil we can identify her not as a psychotic and religious fanatic, but, rather, as a respectable although excessive character who earns our forgiveness.
In Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, Sister Leopolda seems initially to be a deranged religious fanatic who viciously preys upon and brutally tortures the poor, helpless would-be martyr, young Marie Lazarre. As James Ruppert suggests, Erdrich does indeed have "an uncommon ability to create memorable characters" (Ruppert 47). Before dismissing and condemning Sister Leopolda to the ranks of the criminally insane, however, we must first lift away her dark veil of self-righteousness in an attempt to understand the psychological motives behind her actions. If we do, we will discover that Sister Leopolda tries not only to protect her daughter Marie from the clutches of Satan, but also to teach her to recognize the evils of man that had surrounded Sister Leopolda when she was an adolescent. Readers sometimes underestimate Sister Leopolda's powerful obsession "for smelling out brimstone and evil thoughts" (*LM* 43) as she works to ensure that Marie's spiritual and physical well-being are not victimized as her own had been. My objective in this paper is to push aside Sister Leopolda's dark veil in order to identify her not as a psychotic and religious fanatic, but, rather, as a respectable although excessive character who earns our forgiveness. First, I will attempt to peer beneath Sister

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1 In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, I will use "Pauline" and the past tense to refer to the younger woman, and "Leopolda" and the present tense to refer to the nun.
Leopolda's veil in order to examine her adolescent years as presented in *Tracks*. Second, I will explore the meetings between Sister Leopolda and Maria Lazarre in *Love Medicine* to explain not only her underlying motivation, but also to show how she manifests her twisted and overzealous beliefs. Only by retracing Sister Leopolda's shadowy footsteps in *Tracks* and then sifting through Marie Lazarre's bizarre narrations concerning Sister Leopolda in *Love Medicine* can we fully understand how Sister Leopolda ultimately responded and reacted to the "veils of wretched love" (*LM* 42) that she saw in young Marie.

Sister Leopolda's given family name was Pauline Puyat; we are introduced to the adolescent Pauline in *Tracks*. She was the fifteen-year-old half-breed product of a mixed Canadian-Chippewa marriage. Traditionally, the Puyat family were the skinners of the Chippewa clan, but Pauline decided at an early age not to follow in the professional footsteps of her family. She rebelled against her family's skinning trade and, consequently, she was scorned when she refused to prick her fingers with quills. Pauline "hid rather than rub brains on the stiff skins of animals" (*T* 14). She believed that she "was made for better" (*T* 14), and she eventually managed to convince her father to send her "south, to the white town" to where she "decided to learn the lace-making trade from nuns" (*T* 14).
Instead of learning to make lace from the Catholic nuns, however, Pauline began working in her aunt's butcher shop in the small town of Argus. She swept floors, sprinkled fresh sawdust, and made deliveries. The very winter she began working in the butcher shop, many Chippewas died of a mysterious illness. She did not know whether her immediate family survived this fatal illness:

No one knew yet how many were lost, people kept no track. We heard that wood could not be sawed fast enough to build the houses for their graves, and there were so few people strong enough to work, anyway, that by the time they got around to it the brush had grown, obscuring the new-turned soil, the marks of burials. The priests tried to discourage the habit of burying the dead in trees, but the ones they dragged down had no names to them, just scraps of their belongings. Sometimes in my head I had a dream I could not shake. I saw my sisters and my mother swaying in the branches, buried too high to reach, wrapped in lace I never hooked. (T 15)

Separated from her immediate family at a crucial stage of her personal development, Pauline was forced to depend solely upon herself for her survival: "I tried to stop myself from remembering what it was like to have companions, to have my mother and sisters around me" (T 15). She was forced to forget the family from which she never heard again; instead, she had to concentrate on supporting and taking care of herself. Pauline was alone in the world.

Although the adolescent Pauline seemed to be the lone survivor of her family, she was, in a sense, physically dead to those around her because she was forever overlooked by others: "I was fifteen, alone, and so poor-looking I was
invisible to most customers and to the men in the shop. Until they needed me, I blended into the stained brown walls, a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes" (T 15-16). No one bothered to notice her. Instead, she was an invisible figure who was able to witness everything that happened around her, then run and hide in the protective shadows. She was tall, thin, and exceedingly plain-looking during her adolescent years: "God had overlooked me in the making, given no marks of His favors. I was angles and sharp edges, a girl of bent tin" (T 71).

Pauline did have advantages, however, with her practically invisible status. She witnessed many events and knew many secrets:

I took what advantage I could find. Because I could fade into a corner or squeeze beneath a shelf I knew everything: how much cash there was in the till, what the men joked about when no one was around, and what they did to Fleur. (T 16)

Pauline was jealous of Fleur Pillager, the repeated object of male attention. According to critic Daniel Cornell, "the men in the store erase Pauline's presence because she does not fit the representation of 'woman' that has been constituted by their male-gendered vision." Cornell continues:

In a system where woman is defined in terms of male desire Pauline is found lacking: what she has to offer men is outside their construction of woman and so she says they do not see her. In this she contrasts with Fleur, who is the ultimate representation of male desire, regardless of whether the men are Euroamerican or American Indian. (Cornell 54)
Fleur's visibility made Pauline more painfully invisible: "Fleur's sexual presence, as Pauline describes it, is all the more visible because it fulfills male expectations" (Cornell 54).

Pauline associated Fleur's visible womanhood with the water monster, Misshepeshu:

Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself. He's a devil, that one, love hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur. (T 11)

Pauline was engrossed in her association of Fleur and the water monster: "She is obsessed with the water monster, seeing him in Fleur, who both draws and repells her" (Van Dyke 21). She and other young girls, however, had been verbally warned about Misshepeshu through Chippewa oral tradition:

We'll think he's handsome, for he appears with green eyes, copper skin, a mouth tender as a child's. But if you fall into his arms, he sprouts horns, fangs, claws, fins. His feet are joined as one and his skin, brass scales, rings to the touch. You're fascinated, cannot move. He casts a shell necklace at your feet, weeps gleaming chips that harden into mica on your breasts. He holds you under. Then he takes the body of a lion, a fat brown worm, or a familiar man. He's made of gold. He's made of beach moss. He's a thing of dry foam, a thing of death by drowning, the death a Chippewa cannot survive. (T 11)

Pauline believed Misshepeshu to be "this monster of desire as beautiful and seductive but ultimately destructive" (Cornell 54). Consequently, "male desire is a monster in
her eyes, and its representation by the phallus is clear in
the linguistic equation of 'lion,' 'fat brown worm,' and
'familiar man'" (Cornell 55).

In addition to the Misshepeshu's seductive yet
destructive desire for young women like Fleur, Pauline
believed that the Argus butcher shop's hired male employees,
Dutch, Tor, and Lily, only saw Fleur "in the flesh" (T 18).
When Fleur initially began playing poker with these men
after a long day of work, she acknowledged Pauline's
physical presence simply by telling Pauline to stake her
with her meager eight-cent weekly wage:

She held out her long fingers. I put the coins on
her palm and then I melted back to nothing, part
of the walls and tables, twined close with
Russell. It wasn't long before I understood
something that I didn't know then. The men would
not have seen me no matter what I did, how I
moved. For my dress hung loose and my back was
already stooped, an old woman's. Work had
roughened me, reading made my eyes sore,
forgetting my family had hardened my face, and
scrubbing down bare boards had given me big,
reddened knuckles. (T 19-20)

Pauline was jealous of the male attention directed towards
Fleur. She watched Fleur's every move whether she was
slaughtering an animal behind the butcher shop or winning
exactly a dollar during the nightly poker games. As an
ignored and invisible observer, Pauline saw other things as
well.

Pauline saw the way the men eyed Fleur, and she also
noticed how frustrated and upset Dutch, Tor, and Lily were
becoming when Fleur beat them at poker. With her invisible
status, Pauline saw how the three men "drank, steeped in the whiskey's fire, and planned with their eyes things they couldn't say aloud" (T 24).

Both Pauline and her younger cousin Russell witnessed the brutal rape of Fleur Pillager. Though Russell threw his slim body against Dutch, Pauline did not move to help save Fleur. Instead of making her physical presence felt for the first time, Pauline was determined to distance herself from the vicious and violent rape:

I closed my eyes and put my hands on my ears, so there is nothing more to describe but what I couldn't block out: those yells from Russell, Fleur's hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language and our names repeated over and over among the words. (T 26)

The next morning Fleur was nowhere to be found and the rapists were "slack-faced, hungover" (T 26). Though Russell was on his knees rocking back and forth, Pauline felt the "dense" heat of mid-morning as she recalled the events of the previous evening: "But I was sick, I was smothered, I was sweating so hard that my hands slipped on the knives and I wiped my fingers clean of the greasy touch of the customer's coins" (T 26). Pauline went outside the shop to locate Russell and then realized that we were all balanced, ready to tip, to fly, to be crushed as soon as the weather broke. The sky was so low that I felt the weight of it like a door. Clouds hung down, witch teats, a tornado's green-brown cones, and as I watched, one flicked out and became a delicate probing thumb. (T 27)
According to Van Dyke, "one of Pauline's versions of the story is that to avenge the rape, Fleur calls down the tornado during which the men are killed under suspicious circumstances" (Van Dyke 20).

While the tornado ripped through the small town of Argus, Pauline and Russell struggled desperately to find shelter. Dutch, Tor, and Lily had disappeared and locked themselves in the Kozka meat locker for protection. After screaming for the men to let them inside the temporary shelter, Pauline and Russell faced the tornado alone as "everything in Argus fell apart and got turned upside down, smashed, and thoroughly wrecked" (T 28). Both Pauline and Russell survived the extraordinary storm, but the three male employees of Kozka's Meats were reported as missing. After a search party was organized and the meat locker was located, the townspeople of Argus concluded that the storage facility "was locked from the outside . . . wedged down, a tornado's freak whim" (T 30). Dutch, Tor, and Lily had thrown down their last hands and hunkered tight, clutching one another, knuckles raw from beating at the door they had also attacked with hooks. Frost stars gleamed off their eyelashes and the stubble of their beards. Their faces were set in concentration, mouths open as if to speak some careful thought, some agreement they'd come to in each other's arms. (T 30)

Perhaps their last thoughts were of Pauline securing the meat locker door. Her invisibility concealed her crime.

By Pauline's deliberate actions, she was "no longer the watcher on the dark sill, the skinny girl" (T 31). People
wondered what really happened to the men while the tornado whipped through Argus, but, as Pauline stated, "It comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't know anything" (T 31). According to Van Dyke, "because they are imprisoned in the meat locker and frozen during their last gambling game, the suggestion is that they have in fact been taken over by the windigo, the cannibalistic ice-monster" of Chippewa folklore (Van Dyke 20). Pauline later confessed to locking the men inside the meat locker:

I relived the whole thing over and over, that moment so clear before the storm. Every night when my arms lowered the beam, it was my will that bore the weight, let it drop into place--not Russell's and not Fleur's. For that reason, at the Judgment, it would be my soul sacrificed, my poor body turned on the devil's wheel. And yet, despite that future, I was condemned to suffer in this life also. Every night I was witness when the men slapped Fleur's mouth, beat her, entered and rode her. I felt all. My shrieks poured from her mouth and my blood from her wounds. (T 66)

After she leaves Argus, Pauline's dreams of locking Dutch, Tor, and Lily in the storage facility ceased.

Pauline then returned to the reservation and started working again, but this time she worked for Bernadette, the community's female undertaker. She told Bernadette many things about her wretched existence while working at the

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2 In another of Louise Erdrich's novels, The Beet Queen, the bizarre death of Dutch James in the Kozka meat locker is briefly mentioned only once. Sita Kozka, the daughter of the owners Pete and Fritzie Kozka, said, "He froze solid in our very meat locker. But that is an event no one in this house will discuss" (BQ 31).
butcher shop in Argus. She was a miserable victim of a loveless childhood:

I was beaten by Regina. Cursed by Dutch. Mocked by my small cousin Russell, whom I did not want to leave behind, but must. I told how I scrubbed the rough boards and clabbered mild, boiled salves and washed bandages, how homesick I had become. (T 64)

Bernadette offered Pauline a place to stay and a job, and assured Pauline that she would not beat her. Pauline said, "Bernadette had known my mother, and disapproved of the way I had been left behind. She offered pure charity, but I accepted" (T 64).

Bernadette taught Pauline how to prepare people for death. Pauline learned "the way to arrange the body, the washing and combing and stopping of its passages, the careful dressing, the final weave of a rosary around the knuckles" (T 69). Pauline's adolescent experiences were not "normal." She did not learn about love; rather, she learned about death. Consequently, Pauline began to develop her distorted religious beliefs regarding death:

I knew I was different. I had the merciful scavenger's heart. I became devious and holy, dangerously weak and mild. I wore the nun's castoffs, followed in Bernadette's tracks, entered each house where death was about to come, and then made death welcome . . . . I handled the dead until the cold feel of their skin was a comfort, until I no longer bothered to bathe once I left the cabin but touched others with the same hands, passed death on. (T 69)

This childhood association with death made her comfortable with the idea of human mortality. At an early age, then, Pauline's comfortable sense of death helped to build and
fortify her future stronghold of religious vigor. While living and working with Bernadette, she said:

We sent them praying into the ground if they were Christians, or if unconverted, along the death road of the Old Ones, with an extra pair of shoes. It was no matter to me what happened after life. I didn't care. I accompanied Bernadette, waited for the moment that brought me peace. (T 69)

In *Love Medicine*, Pauline, as Sister Leopolda, can make others capable of feeling as comfortable and at peace with death as she is—but only if they renounce Satan's sinful temptations and believe in the Catholic theme of life everlasting. According to Cornell,

> Conflating American Indian and Judeo-Christian religious traditions, Pauline sees herself as a visionary savior, the carrier of an understanding not available to those who have accepted the blindness and deafness of a literal experience cut off from the symbolic. In her mind, Misshepeshu, the Chippewa spirit of Lake Matchimanito, is identical to the Christian devil, who is to be chained and thrown into the lake of fire. (Cornell 50-51)

Similarly to Cornell, Van Dyke also suggested that Pauline equated Misshepeshu with the Christian idea of Satan. Pauline viewed the Chippewa as "doomed" and decided that "she can make her mark by leading her people to Christ" (Van Dyke 21):

> Instead of dismissing the idea of the power of the water spirit, she [Pauline] vows to fight him as Christ's representative, conflating Christ with a Chippewa bird or sky spirit which was believed to be in eternal conflict with the water spirits. By conflating the water spirit man with Satan, Pauline's beliefs contradict traditional Chippewa ideas about evil. As a Chippewa notes, 'In the old days evil spirits were spoken of as doing harm, but no one ever spoke of a leader among
them. The belief in the devil came with the Whites.\footnote{This Chippewa quote has been extracted from Van Dyke's article concerning the work of Sister M. Inez Hilager. For additional information, refer to Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 146. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1951.} (Van Dyke 21)

Pauline's religious views were strangely distorted. She associated Fleur Pillager with the water spirit Misshepeshu; moreover, she equated seductive yet destructive sexual desire with the Christian idea of Satan. As an adolescent, Pauline was never shown any love, tenderness, or desire by men. Since she was ignored by and invisible to men, she was not privy to this sexual desire for which she longed. Hence, Pauline viewed this sexual desire as evil and, later as Sister Leopolda, battled this physical desire. She waged war against the evils of Satan and men that she saw in the Chippewa community.

To compensate for remaining virtually invisible to men, however, the adolescent Pauline unsuccessfully organized elaborate schemes and concocted lies in order to gain the attention and love she never had. Van Dyke discussed the episode in Tracks where Pauline devised a terrible scheme with Sophie and Eli to obtain revenge for her sexual invisibility:

> She [Pauline] forces Fleur's husband Eli and young Sophie to have intercourse in the slough in broad daylight with "love medicine" which she procures from Fleur's cousin, Moses: "And then, I turned my thoughts on the girl and entered her and made her do what she could never have dreamed of
herself. I stood her in the broken straws and she stepped over Eli, one leg on either side of his chest. Standing there she slowly hiked her skirt" (T 83). (Van Dyke 31)

Pauline was jealous of Fleur and sought to obtain revenge for Fleur's visible sexuality. Sophie, however, "like Fleur, represents the sexual lack that fulfills male desire in exactly the ways unavailable to Pauline" (Cornell 56). When the episode concluded, Pauline possessed an empty victory. She only gratified "her sexual desires voyeuristically" (Cornell 56) and was still ignored by men.

Nanapush, a respected elder in the Chippewa community, believed Pauline Puyat was

the only trace of those who died and scattered. She was different from the Puyats I remembered, who were always an uncertain people, shy, never leaders in our dances and cures. She was, to my mind, an unknown mixture of ingredients, like pale bannock that sagged or hardened. We never knew what to call her, or where she fit or how to think when she was around. So we tried to ignore her . . . . Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. There was some question if she wasn't afflicted, touched in the mind. (T 39)

Pauline desperately sought sanctuary from ridicule and rejection as she painstakingly made her way in the world. By her absurd actions, she did not become visible or accepted by the Chippewa community; rather, she only immersed herself more deeply in her wretched existence.

While she lived in the Chippewa community, Pauline, clad in her dark clothes, acted as a midwife as well as an undertaker. She was "hailed down with both interest and
dread. I was their fate" (T 75). The people, according to Pauline, believed that their bodies would eventually come to her:

Somewhere now, in the back of their minds, they knew that these bodies they tended and preened, got drunk, pleasured and refused, fed as often as they could and relieved, these bodies to which they were devoted, all in good time came to me. (T 75)

Pauline "decides that she can make her mark by leading her people to Christ" (Van Dyke 21). Her presence would finally be acknowledged; yet Pauline felt "more invisible than ever in my black clothes, and now the picture of my life stared plain enough. Death would pass me over just as men did, and I would live a long, strict life" (T 75). She would still be ignored and rejected by men.

Knowing that men ignored her, Pauline desperately desired to understand "the way things happened with a man and woman" (T 75), but, "Pauline is at her worst when she is dealing with sexuality" (Van Dyke 21). Although Bernadette's older son, Napoleon, cast sideways looks in Pauline's direction, he nevertheless sexually rejected Pauline as "he looked at my hand with curiosity, no intent, and then, like a fish too small to keep, he threw it back" (T 77). Later in Tracks, Pauline managed to conceive an illegitimate child with Napoleon before retiring to the halls of religious life: "But by then I had gained too much understanding, plunged too many times, seen too far" (T 134). Pauline realized that she will even be more of an
outcast after giving birth to an illegitimate child: "If I
gave birth, I would be lonelier. I saw, and I saw too well.
I would be an outcast, a thing set aside for God's use, a
human who could be touched by no other human" (T 135). This
cruel and pathetic rejection made her turn to religion in an
attempt to find peace, love, and acceptance in God.

Pauline believed she had been chosen to serve as an
instrument of God. Her new identity was unveiled as she
"grew in knowledge. Skins were stripped from my eyes.
Every day I saw more clearly and I marveled at what He
showed me" (T 137). She now had an important purpose in her
life: she will be Christ's "champion, His savior" (T 195)
against the water monster. Though working as an
unexperienced novice at Sacred Heart, Pauline adamantly
believed that she communicated with God in the convent
kitchen. She said that "when He came off the stove, his
breath was warm against my cheeks. He pressed the tears
away and told me I was chosen to serve" (T 137). She
visualized God as having dark hair and eyes "blue as
bottleglass" (T 137). Here she romanticized God as being
the caring human lover she never had, and she finally
received the unconditional love she was denied for so long.

Since she now had a real purpose in life, she had to
erase all motherly thoughts from her mind: "I was forgiven
of my daughter. I should forget her. He [God] has an
important plan for me, for which I must prepare, that I
should find out the habits and hiding places of His enemy" (T 137) for "there was no room for Him to dwell in so much as a crevice of their [the people's] minds" (T 137).

Pauline denied and repressed her true maternal connection with Marie. Consequently, Bernadette adopted Pauline's infant girl, Marie, and Pauline journeyed to the Sacred Heart Convent to begin her new religious life and work: she was determined to seek out and prepare souls in order to make them worthy of attaining God's eternal salvation.

Pauline believed that Satan was running rampant in the land and that she "should not turn my back on Indians" (T 137). She understood her mission to be that of gathering souls to God's loving bosom by uncovering the evil hiding places where Satan lurked:

He gave me the mission to name and baptize, to gather souls. Only I must give myself away in return, I must dissolve. I did so eagerly. I had nothing to leave behind, and nothing to acquire, either, except what would come into His hands. I fit easily through the eye of a needle. (T 141)

In preparation for becoming "His champion, His savior too" (T 195), Pauline endured strict religious training from the nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent. She inflicted, however, terrible acts of punishment and penance upon herself to prove her worthiness to God:

My routine was both simple to follow and terribly hard, as I set new limits. At night, I did not allow myself to toss or turn for comfort, but only to sleep on my back, arms crossed on my breasts in the same position as the Virgin received the attentions of our Lord. When I woke I released myself, and then broke the ice on the buckets. I
used my hand and no spoon. I drank only hot
water, took the thinnest cut of bread unless
Superior forced hers on me . . . . I put burrs in
the armpits of my dress and screwgrass in my
stockings and nettles in my neckband. Superior
forced me to turn my shoes the right way around,
but I let my toenails grow until it ached to walk
again and each step reminded me of His tread on
the path to Calvary. (T 151-52)

Pauline's self-inflicted punishment and penance were
certainly more stringent than was necessary to prove her
"worthiness" to God. Indeed, her actions were excessive and
looked like she was "following a strange spirit guardian who
demands odd things from her like wearing her shoes on
opposite feet and relieving herself only at dawn and dusk"
(Van Dyke 22).

Pauline's excessiveness continued when she obtained her
religious title, Sister Leopolda. While stalking her
Chippewa victims, she portrays a lion with uncanny hunting
instincts:

I stayed in my own body and behind me in the
spring mud I left only the tracks of my misworn
shoes. Of course I prayed with every step of
discomfort, but I addressed God not as a penitent,
with humility, but rather as a dangerous lion that
had burst into a ring of pale and fainting
believers. (T 196)

While accepting her name, Pauline reacted in a rather
excessive manner, too:

I will pray as I put on the camphor-smelling
robes, and thereafter I'll answer to the name I
drew from Superior's hand.

I prayed before I spread the scrap of paper in
air. I asked for the grace to accept, to leave
Pauline behind, to remember that my name, any
name, was no more than a crumbling skin.

Leopolda. I tried out the unfamiliar syllables.
They fit. They cracked in my ears like a fist through ice. (T 205)

Ironically, "Leopolda's name recalls another name for the water spirit man: the Great Lion" (Van Dyke 23). She associates the seductive yet destructive desires of Misshepeshu with the sinfulness of Satan. While battling those evils, she murders Napoleon Morrissey, the father of her child. Furthermore, "assuring herself that she could not have known what shape the devil would take, she molds her interpretation of events to fit her high and holy purpose" (Clarke 39). In her mind, she does not murder a man; rather, she triumphs over Satan.

She stalks her prey with tearing claws, roaring faith, and an uncanny sense of smell. She smelled Satan on her daughter, Marie: "And she [Leopolda] sniffed. She had a big stark bony nose stuck to the front of her face for smelling out brimstone and evil thoughts. She had smelled him on me [Marie]" (LM 43).

Leopolda could not reveal her true maternal identity to Marie. Instead, she had to seek out and prepare souls in order to make them worthy of attaining God's eternal salvation. By doing so, she experienced tremendous difficulties with the reluctant followers of Christ who "spat on the crown of my veil, so that before I rose I had to admonish myself in Christ's instruction, turn my cheek to more blows. I put out my hands" (T 164).
Some readers believe that Sister Leopolda is an overzealous religious woman, a crazed fanatic or a "demented nun" (Jaskoski 55). We must look beyond this initial impression to uncover the hidden truth of her identity: the adolescent Pauline was a miserable victim of a loveless childhood. Her excessive traits stemmed from absolute neglect and a perverse upbringing as seen in Tracks; furthermore, in Love Medicine, Sister Leopolda acts in the only manner with which she is familiar. According to Schneider, "It is hard not to forgive someone once it becomes clear that they . . . are only repeating behavior that they have learned" (Schneider 5). Sister Leopolda does all that she can to ensure Marie's freedom from these very loveless bonds which had imprisoned her. Sister Leopolda is now determined to save and protect the souls of Satan's innocent prey before he devours them in sinful passion. She does not want the Lord's innocent lambs, especially her daughter, to experience the lack of love she knew in her own wretched childhood. She desires, instead, to gather these poor souls and save them from the deadly clutches of Satan:

I have vowed to use my influence to guide them, to purify their minds, to mold them in my own image. I will add their souls to those I have numbered. For Christ's purpose is not for us to fathom. His love is a hook sunk deep into our flesh, a questionmark that pulls with every breath. Some can dull themselves to the barb's presence. I cannot. I answer with the ring of fidelity, with the veil. (LM 205)

Her lonely childhood has developed her concept of love as an
strangely contorted and fiercely painful experience. This "wretched love"

springs from the act of staring down pain, holding one's ground in spite of pain, with the full and certain knowledge that suffering has an inevitable role in shaping the universe, but that is all. (Jahner 98)

Louise Erdrich's writing manifests this wretched love in both Sister Leopolda and Marie Lazarre. There is definitely a perverse mixture of love and pain within the relationship of Leopolda and Marie:

But despite the conflicts and personal tragedies, it is love medicine, a potion that works reconciliation in spite of its unconventional sources, that holds these characters together even as they antagonize and disappoint one another. Love is so powerful that it creates indissoluble ties that even outlast life, and ultimately it allows forgiveness. (Sands 21)

This warped, painful, and wretched concept of love becomes the only thing Leopolda can offer to her daughter Marie in Love Medicine.

Let us now exam the initial meeting between the adult Marie and Sister Leopolda as we uncover the hidden truths behind Sister Leopolda's murky veil. Through torturous lessons Leopolda seems to offer only physical pain to Marie. Yet, more importantly, she actually offers wretched love and knowledge. She tells Marie, "You have two choices. One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog. Or two, you can give yourself to God" (LM 45). Here Leopolda gives Marie the opportunity either to succumb to the evils of man or to follow in her own footsteps to
discover God's love.

Sister Leopolda lifts Marie to a higher level of understanding through her seemingly demonic teaching methods in an attempt to snatch her away from the evils of Satan and, instead, introduce her to the blissful rewards of heaven. She only wants to improve Marie's uncommitted "mail-order Catholic soul" (LM 41) because she loves her "dear one" (LM 50) whom she had abandoned in Tracks. She is now concerned about her daughter's heavenly welfare:

"... Sister Leopolda sees herself as fighting the devil for control of Marie's soul and insurance of her salvation" (Jaskoski 55). Marie even comments upon her ignorance at the young age of fourteen years: "The length of the sky is just about the size of my ignorance" (LM 40). Moreover, Marie has "confidence in Leopolda. She was different" (LM 42) from other nuns.

Sister Leopolda is indeed different from the other nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent. Her excessiveness in religion intimidates and terrorizes people as she works toward accomplishing her soul-saving mission in life. In one of Marie's escapades with Leopolda, she is thrown into a convent closet with a "dead black overboot" (LM 44) that, in Leopolda's mind, represents Satan: "He wants you . . . . That's the difference. I give you love" (LM 44). Leopolda has tried to hunt down and expel Satan from her daughter's soul. Her secret mission in life is succeeding according to
Marie's narration: "Love. The black hook. The spear singing through the mind. I saw that she had tracked the Dark One to my heart and flushed him out into the open. So now my heart was an empty nest where she could lurk" (LM 45).

Marie views Leopolda's excessive religious fervor as "a kind of perverse miracle" (LM 46). In a painful baptismal rite, Leopolda pours scalding water into Marie's ear "to boil" (LM 49) Satan from her mind and, later, savagely stabs Marie's hand before knocking her out with a hot iron poker. Leopolda firmly believes that she is doing the Lord's work as she battles Satan for Marie's soul. Moreover, she inflicts physical pain on Marie only out of love for her daughter. Leopolda, though, offers only a wretched and painful love. As Marie puts it, "But she had loved me, or offered me love. And she had tried to hunt the Dark One down" (LM 46). Leopolda responds in her overzealous way: "And when your flesh is hot, remember that the flames you feel are only one fraction of the heat you will feel in his hellish embrace . . . . You're like I was . . . . He wants you very much" (LM 48). Leopolda sees herself in Marie and she wants to protect Marie from that same pain and rejection to which she was subjected in her adolescent years.

Leopolda's tears "glittered in her eyes, deep down, like the sinking reflection in a well" (LM 49) as she struggles to maintain her guardianship over Marie's soul.
Battling Satan and the perpetual fires of hell is not an easy task. Such an effort requires tremendous strength, incredible perseverance, and unyielding faith. Yet, when two nuns inquire about Marie, Leopolda says, "She is mine . . . A good girl . . . She will shine . . . when we have burned off the dark corrosion" (LM 51). Leopolda is determined to save her daughter.

Before Leopolda's stringent and painful purification rituals are completed, however, Marie leaves the Sacred Heart Convent to return to the outside world. Marie reminisces about how "the pain had kept me strong, and as it left me I began to forget it; I couldn't hold on" (LM 52). Her mind begins "flapping in the breeze" (LM 52) without Leopolda's inspiring pain. As Marie walks down the hill towards the reservation, she pitifully looked back at Leopolda "with the desperate eyes drowning in the deep wells of her wrongness. There would be no one else after me. And I would leave. I saw Leopolda kneeling within the shambles of her love" (LM 56). As suggested by Le Guin, "the relations and relationships are different from what we're used to, differently felt, different in kind" (Le Guin 6).

As we push aside the "cutting edges" (LM 56) of Sister Leopolda's veil, we can see that she really does love Marie in her own religiously perverted way. She cares about the future condition of Marie's soul as she labors to protect Marie from following in her own wretched and loveless
footsteps of childhood. Readers should identify Leopolda's religious zeal as excessive yet respectable since Sister Leopolda truly cares enough about Marie to participate actively in what Leopolda believes to be her soul's redemption.

We do not meet Marie and Sister Leopolda again in Love Medicine until twenty years have passed. Marie, a mother herself now, brings her daughter Zelda with her to visit the dying nun at the Sacred Heart Convent. Marie envisions a pitiful Leopolda as she "saw her kneeling dead face, without love" (LM 111). Marie lifts away the concealing veil to reveal Leopolda's hidden identity: a victim of wretched love.

Marie is eager to bring Zelda along with her to the Sacred Heart Convent because, she thinks, Zelda shows how Marie had chosen to live her life:

I would let her [Leopolda] see I had not been living on wafers of God's flesh but the fruit of a man. Long ago she had tried for my devotion. Now I'd let her see where my devotion had gone and where it had got me. (LM 113)

But Leopolda, "unimpressed with this litany of accomplishments, cuts her [Marie] to the quick with a reminder of her heritage" (Schneider 7). Leopolda reminds her that she is a worthless Lazarre.

When Marie sees Leopolda propped up in bed and as "frail as a dead plant" (LM 116), however, she pities her. The emaciated and shriveled Leopolda is still attending to
God's work and gathering souls to His bosom. Marie grasps the old nun's hand and feels "the grim forbidding strength" (LM 117) rush back into her thoughts: "'Oh no, I never forgot you,' [Leopolda] said, and squeezed my hand tighter. 'I knew you would come back!'" (LM 117).

Marie wears a royal-plum wool dress that strongly resembles, according to Leopolda, a cut-up "old Easter shroud" (LM 117). Perhaps Leopolda's undying faith allows her to believe there is still hope for Marie's spiritual rebirth in Christ, as suggested in her surname.4 Nevertheless, Leopolda still persists in her religious excessiveness as she berates and belittles Marie's life thus far. Leopolda pushes her daughter toward Christ's eternal salvation because she has not "come up in the world" (LM 118); she needs to be ripped away from Satan's grasp or else, Leopolda believes, her soul will burn in the perpetual fires of hell.

In a last attempt to show how much she perversely loves her daughter, Leopolda gathers all her remaining strength to achieve the final victory over Satan. Marie struggles in the "deep square hole" (LM 122) of Sister Leopolda's gaze and screams in fright as "it seemed just as if I was falling

4The last name "Lazarre" resembles that of the biblical character Lazarus. According to the Christian version, Lazarus was a faithful believer in Jesus Christ who miraculously rose from the dead. Christ proclaimed the message that whoever believed in his teachings would never die, but, instead, live life everlasting.
fast into her eyes and would be covered up by flowers and clods of earth unless she [Leopolda] pulled me back (LM 122).

This essential pulling in and gathering of souls accomplishes Leopolda's mission in life. Leopolda has educated and resurrected Marie Lazarre to another level of consciousness. Marie can now, in turn, help others wage the battle against Satan: "So I did for Nector Kapshaw what I learned from the nun. I put my hand through what scared him. I held it out there for him. And when he took it with all the strength of his arms, I pulled him in" (LM 129).

She finally understands her lessons in love. Marie now realizes that "the nun was clever. She knew where my weakness had been" (LM 128). The "cutting edges" (T 53) of Sister Leopolda's veil have admirably accomplished what had previously seemed to be a religiously excessive and perverse mission of faith.

Sister Leopolda, then, is a bizarre and excessive but respectable character. She appears to be a religious fanatic obsessed with inflicting bodily torture on young Marie Lazarre to dispel The Dark One. Yet, if we peer closer at Sister Leopolda, we can discover and ultimately respect her underlying motivation: she wants only to protect and save her daughter from the clutches of Satan and the evils of man that she had experienced in childhood. Marie even says, "I wanted Sister Leopolda's heart. And
here was the thing: sometimes I wanted her heart in love and admiration. Sometimes. And sometimes I wanted her heart to roast on a black stick" (LM 45). Instead of seeing Sister Leopolda as a hateful and vengeful character in Louise Erdrich's Tracks and Love Medicine, perhaps we can respect the spiritual healing power of her wretched love and, ultimately, forgive her excessiveness.
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Biography

Ann Maureen Cavanaugh was born on March 24, 1967 in Dallas, Texas to Francis and Roberta, and she grew up with her two brothers, Sean and Neal, and one sister, Gayle, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She graduated with High Honors from Canevin Catholic High School and then continued her education at Lehigh University. There she was a member of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society and Gamma Phi Beta National Sorority. In addition to these societies, Ann student taught, reported for the Brown & White, and participated in varsity softball, volleyball, and cross-country sports teams. After graduating from Lehigh University with a B.A. degree and the 1989 Sorority Sportswoman Award, 1989 Mary O. Hurley Award, and 1989 Outstanding Young College Women of America Award, she left the United States for two years in order to teach conversational English in Japan. She was then awarded the Lucy G. Moses Graduate Scholar Award that enabled her to continue her higher education and receive her M.A. from Lehigh in October of 1993. During her graduate study she was a teaching apprentice for Peter Beidler's American Literature and Chaucer classes. Presently, Ann teaches Freshman Composition and Literature at not only Lehigh University, but also at Northampton Community College and Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales. Ann plans to teach medieval and multicultural studies at the secondary school level.
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