
Love Medicine: All Mothers Are Working Moms

“Mother love shapes cultures and individuals” (Savage). Mothers, in any culture, play a key role in their child's life. Mothers are the ones to teach them the way of the world and raise them with love. Love Medicine, written by Louise Erdrich, is several short stories about a Chipewyan family, in North Dakota, who comes together for the death of June Morrissey. The audience is introduced to Lulu and Marie, two of the main characters who are mothers. These are strong, loving women who are wonderful mothers to their children. Throughout the novel, the audience sees how motherhood plays a key role in who Marie and Lulu are.

Lulu Nanapush is a strong, independent woman and a mother to eight children. Her children still love her being their mom even though they all have different fathers. She does not let anyone or anything get to her or her family. Although it does seem that Lulu was never close with her mother. “I never grew from the curve of my mother’s arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her. But she had tore herself away from the run of my life like a riverbank. She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill out alone” (Erdrich, 68). She is telling the audience about her mother who left her when she was young. Erdrich creates the image of a young Lulu wanting to hold onto her mother and never let go over her, but her mother leaving her all alone. The riverbank can be seen as a symbol of a mother’s loving and protecting arms no longer keeping her child safe, being washed away. In an article by Marina Kamenev, she says, 'The decision is often reflective of an extreme form of maternal instinct – an altruistic desire to ensure their children's best interests are considered first.' Lulu’s mother most likely left because she felt she was an unfit mother. She decided the best option she could choose was to leave her child because she couldn’t provide her with a good life. After seeing how her mother was, Lulu decided that she didn’t want to be that mother to her children. She is present in all the children’s lives.

Marie Kashpaw is a loving woman and mother to five children and mother substitute to others. She cares for all her children, Rushes Bear, who is her mother-in-law, and Nector, her husband. The audience don’t learn too much about her mother, but they learn she lived in a convent shortly. “I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me” (Erdrich, 43). Marie was overly interested in Catholicism when she was younger. She imagined herself as a saint that the sisters would kneel to. She mostly seemed interested in the convent because she wanted to be accepted and valued regardless of her Native roots. Later in life, she took in many kids that weren’t hers. She most likely had sympathy for them because when she was younger, she knew what it was like to want to be accepted somewhere. According to Hoffstetter, that is why people foster kids. “I care about children and want to help them. Children and youth in the foster care system have been abused, neglected, abandoned, and face tremendous obstacles. Foster parenting is a powerful way to lift up the heads of children and youth, and show them that there is hope for the future” (Hoffstetter)

Marie and Lulu are two women who stay true to themselves while being mothers. After seeing how their mothers treated them, they realized that was not how they wanted to raise their children. They wanted their children to be surrounded with love and care while living in a safe

environment. Lulu and Marie ensured to put their children before themselves. They knew that was the sacrifice they had to sign up for when they became mothers.

During all the chaos in the love triangle, Marie and Lulu ensured to remember their self worth. Marie does not lose hope when her husband leaves her for Lulu. "I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa Tribe. I'd still be Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! I'd shine when they stripped off the wax!" (Erdrich, 165). The passage makes it clear that Marie knows who she is and realizes she has to stick to her true roots. Lulu also shows that motherhood has not taken away her true self either. "No one ever understood my wild and secret ways. They used to say that Lulu Lamartine was like a cat, loving no one, only purring to get what she wanted. But that's not true. I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms"(Erdrich, 276). Even though the two characters were wonderful in motherhood, it is said, "In youth, Marie and Lulu were both terrors, cutting a wide unholy swath. In marriage they fiercely raised their children. It was in age that they came into their own" (Erdrich, 303). The passage supports motherhood being able to teach women the ways of adulthood. Being a mother makes someone grow into a mature person. Mothers every day make sacrifices and put their child first, so they can have a good life. Motherhood is not something that has lessened their own self, but it is part of who they are.

Through the novel, Erdrich is managing to show how important of a role mothers play. She achieves this by providing the audience with two extremely different characters, Marie and Lulu, who share one important trait: being lovable, fierce mothers. Even though mothers differ in their personality and mothering techniques, shows that any mother plays an important part in their child's life. Erdrich presents the mothers and gives them the role of the hero to all those around them. It shows that being a parent, either father or mother, takes a lot of work, but will pay off in the end.