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While Edward H. Spicer's classic *Cycles of Conquest* (1962) can still hold its own historically, the forty subsequent years since its publication must be covered, and most undergraduates find his level of detail overwhelming. Given the existing choices, if I were teaching a course on Native peoples of the Southwest, I probably would choose this text, particularly if I had access to a good collection of videos and slides to fill in the missing visual context. Students far removed from the southwestern landscape who have never seen a mesa or an arroyo, much less know the difference between a pot from Acoma and one from San Ildefonso, need those visuals, as well as good lecture notes.

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The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People. By Connie A. Jacobs. New York: Peter Lang, 2001. 260 pages. \$29.95 paper.

While the first book-length work on the novels of Louise Erdrich, one of the most popular—and most prolific—contemporary American Indian writers, did not appear in print until 1999, several book-length studies of her work have contributed to a boom in Erdrich scholarship in the past three years. Connie Jacobs enters into this critical discussion with *The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People*. Since Erdrich's novels are widely taught in high school and university courses in literature, American Indian studies, women's studies, and American studies, Jacobs's book is designed to work as a reference guide and resource for those who teach and study this significant author. Jacobs's study carves out its own critical space, attempting a comprehensive examination of six of Erdrich's novels. Her book differs from texts like Lorena L. Stookey's *Louise Erdrich: A Critical Companion* (1999), which methodically works through one novel at a time; and from *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* (1999), edited by Allan Chavkin, which as a collection of essays does not claim to be comprehensive, but provides instead a series of in-depth readings on thematic concerns. Instead, Jacobs combines both comprehensive and thematic approaches to examine Erdrich's role as what she terms a "contemporary traditional storyteller." Jacobs structures her study around several thematic foci that allow her to highlight the dialogism of Erdrich's novels, demonstrating their function as a story cycle in which "touchstone" narratives reappear and ground the complex interweaving of her fiction.

Jacobs's volume begins and ends by contextualizing Erdrich, first within the field of American Indian literature and last within the larger category of American literature. Jacobs carefully reviews definitions of American Indian literature in the first chapter, and details the rise of the Native American Renaissance of the 1960s, demonstrating the formal and thematic concerns Erdrich shares with her contemporaries. The final chapter discusses the issue of the American literary canon and the place of American Indian literature within it. This material would be most useful to one who is coming to

Erdrich's work without much prior knowledge of American Indian literature since scholars well-versed in the field would have encountered much of these discussions elsewhere. But those who are using Erdrich's novels in an American literature survey course, or other broadly conceived forum, will appreciate the grounding that these chapters provide. Bracketed by these situating discussions, the body of Jacobs's study examines Erdrich's work in relationship to orality theory (an offshoot of folklore studies), Turtle Mountain tribal history, and finally the "still efficacious mythic presence in Chippewa life" (p. xiv).

Searching for a theoretical and methodological framework that allows readers to understand Erdrich's role as a contemporary traditional storyteller, Jacobs adopts orality theory, a framework that allows for the examination of "residual orality" in written texts. As she explains, orality theory informs the study of American Indian literature "by broadening our very ways of thinking about a chirographic literature whose roots lie in an oral tradition and by validating written Indian fiction as a genre whose distinctive characteristics are driven by its oral-based history" (p. 36). Orality theory focuses on the centrality of the speaker and the context for storytelling and avoids strict genre classifications, and Jacobs uses this theory to examine the relationship of Erdrich's novels to the oral tradition. She determines that Erdrich's works, like those of her contemporary Leslie Marmon Silko, "actualize a transitional text from the oral to the written," continuing their tribal literary heritages in written, English-language texts (p. 41). As Jacobs explains, "The focus of these works is to tell the story of their peoples' lives directly, through the communal tribal voices" (p. 41). By defining Erdrich's novels as "storytelling sessions," Jacobs hopes to provide "a context for readers to be able to position Erdrich's work along the continuum of the Native American storytelling tradition" while appreciating the formal innovations that result in hybrid transitional texts that balance the oral and the written (p. 50).

Since Erdrich's literary production should be read as the work of a tribal storyteller, Jacobs maintains, it must be read within the cultural context and "ethnometaphysics" of Erdrich's Chippewa/Ojibwa heritage. The heart of Jacobs's study reads Erdrich's many novels in conversation with one another to show how "she inscribes a living history of her people to serve as a record of their lives in the twentieth century" (p. 53). To this end, Jacobs compiles detailed information about the history of Erdrich's Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribe and their relationships with other racial and ethnic groups on the Northern Plains—important and extremely useful material that Erdrich scholars will find invaluable. This historical and cultural grounding proves essential to understanding the complexity of identity constructions in Erdrich's work. Jacobs demonstrates that the interactions between Métis, Northern Ojibwe, Cree, and Chippewa groups who came together at Turtle Mountain produced a complex society with its own syncretic language and culture—a culture that defies the simplistic "traditional" versus "progressive" split too often used as shorthand to explain differing reservation ideologies. Jacobs uses this historical background to illuminate the relationships between conflicting factions in Erdrich's novels, providing a framework that helps

readers understand the differences between and relationships among the families who populate her fictional world—Morrisseys, Adares, Lazarres, Pillagers, Kashpaws, and Nanapushes—as well as to understand their struggle to survive a century in which tribal identities were complicated and often fractured by culturally harmful government policies and practices. Significantly, Jacobs's project provides a way to read *The Beet Queen*, *The Antelope Wife*, and *Tales of Burning Love* (which critics have often set apart from the others as Erdrich's "off-reservation novels") as part of the same living history of a place (the region surrounding Turtle Mountain) and a people (those Ojibwa who remain on and who have left the reservations). Rather than seeing *The Beet Queen*, in particular, as part of a separate tradition, Jacobs teases out the thematic and formal ties that bind this novel (frequently left out of studies of Erdrich) to her larger story cycle, pointing out its representation of the intertwined histories of the Turtle Mountain tribe and the German immigrants who settled in the nearby town of Argus. Jacobs's dialogic reading of Erdrich's story cycles culminates in a detailed analysis of the mythic resonances of Fleur Pillager, a character whose transformative powers best embody this complicated, intertwined history, "[binding] the community together as no other mortal character could possibly have done" and "sustain[ing] the people's spiritual health" (p. 168). This focus on Fleur grounds Jacobs's book, and it is the point at which the rich potential of her historiographic methodology is most fully realized. The success of this section suggests the need for further studies that examine the way that Erdrich's work engages in a conversation with Ojibwe culture and history.

One of the hazards of writing about what Jacobs has elsewhere called Erdrich's "developing fiction," is that any book attempting comprehensive coverage of her work becomes incomplete as soon as she publishes another novel. Jacobs's study was not able to include Erdrich's most recent novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, published in 2001. This latest text further unfolds the history and mythologies of the reservation that is the core of Erdrich's fictional world—a reservation clearly named, for the first time, as "Little No Horse," and thus given an identity distinct from Turtle Mountain. Unquestionably, a study of *Last Report* would have deepened Jacobs's analysis of Erdrich's creative rendering of her tribal heritage. Jacobs acknowledges that the "mythical homeland" setting for Erdrich's novels is "not a copy of her reservation homeland" (p. 82), but analysis of the depiction of Little No Horse will enrich our understanding of Erdrich's alchemy of history and myth even further. Jacobs's study thus provides a platform from which students and teachers of Erdrich's writing can build nuanced and detailed readings of her novels, which continue to captivate a wide audience through what Jacobs describes as a "mythic rendering of her Indian people [as] her literary tribute to their abiding endurance" (p. 190).

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