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Book Review: *The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People* By Connie A. Jacobs

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The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People. By Connie A. Jacobs. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001. Maps, notes, appendix, works cited, index. xix + 260 pp. \$29.95.

Jacobs offers readers abundant contextual information pertinent to a critical understanding of Erdrich's novels. Her purpose is similar

to Susan Scarberry-Garcia's in *Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn* (1990); both books are valuable reference tools for newcomers to their authors' works and to American Indian Literature in general. This volume will be of particular benefit to teachers of introductory courses in Native American literature covering Erdrich's fiction.

Jacobs begins with a review of the post-1960s phenomenon sometimes called the "Native American Literary Renaissance," discussing Erdrich's role in this movement. Jacobs also outlines key features of contemporary Indian literature together with some of the main trends in its critical discussion. Her second chapter elaborates on how recent studies of oral traditions shed fresh light on our comprehension of Erdrich's storytelling practices. Indeed, Jacobs argues that most of Erdrich's narrative strategies reveal their origins in oral tradition. Erdrich's use of tribally-specific material and her emphasis on Chippewa family and community networks are the subject of Jacobs's attention in her third and fourth chapters. Her fifth chapter concerns the mythic dimension of Erdrich's narratives, including the ways in which Fleur Pillager and her Bear power connect the various novels within one larger story. The final chapter deals with Erdrich's place in American literature in general. Jacobs ponders the advantages and disadvantages of labeling ethnic writers—Native American, African American, and so on—reminding us of how Erdrich's works also participate in Eurocentric traditions exemplified by Faulkner, Joyce, Anderson, Twain, Gilman, and Salinger. Consequently, Jacobs insists, we must always read Erdrich's works with a kind of double awareness of their place within the mainstream and their unique status as tribal stories "grounded in a native way of organizing and perceiving the world."

Readers seeking an entry point into the world of Erdrich's fiction might do well to start with Jacobs's study, in which they will find historical and cultural information essential to a suitable appreciation of Erdrich's art. They will also be introduced to some of the

foremost critical voices in Native American literary studies, whose presence might, in fact, weigh a bit too heavily for some readers. Unfortunately, these other voices frequently dominate Jacobs's discussion, and thus her original contribution to Erdrich studies seems less than a book-length study might warrant. Nonetheless, the volume serves a useful encyclopedic purpose, and anyone who consults it prior to reading Erdrich's works will be rewarded with a much richer experience of her often difficult texts.

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