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Important North American novels published since 1990, discussed in three parts, each containing three essays on a total of three key recent works: this is the formal straitjacket the publication format of the Continuum Studies in Contemporary North American Fiction imposes on its editors. Each of the nine contributors to this volume is committed to a particular theoretical approach, some so strongly that their essays momentarily turn into handbook articles on the theory in question before—almost as an afterthought—coming back to Louise Erdrich’s novels.

Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin lay out Murray Bowen’s Family Systems theory (which is not without its detractors) in considerable detail before applying some—but not all—of its aspects to the character of Tracks’s Pauline Puyat. Connie Jacobs offers a substantial historical introduction to trauma theory but, in applying it to Pauline, makes some arguable historical generalizations. David Stirrup and Mark Shackleton, in their respective chapters, make strong and persuasive arguments about legal discourse in Tracks and Critical Race Theory as applied to The Last Report. Jane Hafen subtly and competently limns the intercultural workings of Indigenous and Catholic ritual in The Last Report. Patrice Hollrah’s article on “Love and the Slippery Slope of Sexual Orientation” shows how “queer theory does not necessarily work as the most appropriate theoretical appropriation” because Native culture recognizes fluid sexual orientations. The text, however, does not truly deliver what it promises in the subtitle, namely a study of “L/G/B/T/Q etc. Sensibility” in the novel.

Of the three essays on The Plague of Doves, John Gamber’s contribution about humor and Catherine Rainwater’s ecocritical essay are commendable for keeping the focus on their text even while invoking a theory. Gina Valentino’s essay really is two distinct essays, each of them interesting. The first part is an extensive review of nationalism and gender within Native studies, including a sensible and detailed critical assessment of Weaver, Womack, and Warrior’s 2006 anthology, American Indian Literary Nationalism; the second part focuses on Erdrich’s feminist critique in Doves.

Volume editor Deborah Madsen does her best to establish cross-chapter connections artificially separated by the formal strictures of the series. Her introductory chapter and “further reading” sections are excellent, though several proofreaders must have overlooked one writer’s reference to the “transatlantic railroad” on page 39. The volume is poignant in its deliberate application of one academic theory to one text in each essay: connections that suggest the coherence of Erdrich’s thinking in her fictional universe can fall by the wayside as a result of this methodology. Graduate seminars will study this book for a good while; time will tell which theories can reveal authorial intentions and may enhance our reading pleasure.

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