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# Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, and *Tracks*: An Annotated Survey of Criticism through 1994

DEBRA A. BURDICK

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## Guide to Abbreviations

- LM     *Love Medicine*  
BQ     *The Beet Queen*  
T       *Tracks*  
SAIL   *Journal of the Association for the Study of American Indian  
         Literatures*  
NDQ   *North Dakota Quarterly*  
{ }     Indicates a numbered item on the bibliography  
( )     Indicates a page number in a work

Louise Erdrich's novels *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, and *Tracks* form the first three installments of a loosely defined tetralogy,<sup>1</sup> in that some characters appear in two or more of the novels, and many of them are either biological or "soul" relations. Elaine Jahner's {81} prophetic remark described *Love Medicine* as "complex enough to affect consciousness . . . compelling enough to attract wide readership." This seems to have been true of *The Beet*

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*Queen and Tracks* as well, and the novels have achieved a combination of popular success and critical attention.

At least some of that attention arises from the sociological implications of the novels, which revolve around the mixed cultural origins that form the backdrop of Erdrich's life. Louise Erdrich was born in Minnesota in 1954 but was raised in Wahpeton, North Dakota, where her German-born father and Chippewa mother worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. While attending Dartmouth College, she met her future husband and editor/collaborator Michael Dorris. After graduating from Dartmouth in 1976, Erdrich conducted poetry workshops throughout North Dakota, then attended Johns Hopkins University, where she earned a master's degree in writing. She worked for a time as an editor for an Indian newspaper in Boston and then decided to devote her time to writing. She and Dorris have five children (from Wong {76}).

When *Love Medicine* hit the bestseller list, Erdrich was only thirty years old. Although she had been writing since childhood—encouraged by her father, who “paid” young Louise for her stories—her collection of previously published works was fairly modest, consisting mostly of short stories and poetry in magazines and anthologies and one collection of poems, *Jacklight* {104}. So Erdrich appeared to be an overnight success. *Love Medicine*, composed of fourteen thematically connected and interconnected stories narrated by several of its Native American and mixed-blood characters, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for 1985, the *Los Angeles Times* Award for best novel that year, and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters prize (from Owens {100}). The popular media response is reflected in the review and interview sections below {70–100}.<sup>2</sup>

Most reviews of *Love Medicine* focus on Erdrich's narrative style, which interweaves sometimes contradictory multiple speakers. Reviewers notice the cyclical portrayal of time (the narratives in *Love Medicine* start in the 1980s, go back in time to the 1930s, then return to a year after their starting point), the lyrical quality of Erdrich's prose, the tragicomic appeal of her characters, and the cultural significance of her work. The review by Marco Portales {85} is a representative sample. Interestingly, Erdrich's occasional detractors, notably Gene Lyons, identify these same qualities; Lyons thinks *Love Medicine* is easier to admire than to read {84}. Two other contradictory points of view are illustrated by Harriet Gilbert {79}, who sees “a tragedy made ingestible by humor,”

while Valentine Cunningham {78} focuses on the victimization and the violence.

Erdrich employs the same technique of multiple narratives in her second novel *The Beet Queen* as she does in *Love Medicine*, but the time element is more sequential, most of the characters are Euro-American, and the plot is less scattered. As Josh Rubins {92} notes, the work bears some resemblance to the genre of "foundling" narratives, in that it follows the lives of a separated family, although it dashes the usual expectations of joyful reunion. Probably because of the success of *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen* has frequently been judged by comparison. Some reviews, like Dorothy Wickenden's {95}, note that the tragicomic aspects of *Love Medicine* are still apparent in *The Beet Queen* but that the atmosphere of the Midwest ("the demon of flatness," as poet Robert Bly {89} terms it) seems grimmer. Rubins {92} finds that the story has more epic coherence than *Love Medicine*, but Wickenden {95} and Michiko Kakutani {90}, in what seems to be an opposite reaction to the same phenomenon, remark that the plot, particularly the ending, is somewhat contrived. One of Erdrich's peers, well-known Native American writer Leslie Silko {93}, gives a scathing review of *The Beet Queen* as a postmodernist cop-out of sorts, complaining that it asserts the power of words at the expense of their relationship to reality.

Erdrich returned to a closer observation of the Native American experience in *Tracks*, a "prequel" to *Love Medicine* that covers the time period between 1912 and 1924. Through the two alternating and sometimes contradictory narratives of characters Nanapush and Pauline, the novel describes the effects of land loss on Native American people and sketches the origins of some of *Love Medicine's* characters in the process. Critical response to *Tracks* was also generally enthusiastic, with Thomas Disch {96} proclaiming that Erdrich overshadows the efforts of her contemporaries. But if Silko's review shows disappointment in *The Beet Queen's* tenuous connection to reality, Jan Strouse {97} finds *Tracks* disappointing in that it is rather too didactic in its portrayal of good and evil.

Scholarly analysis of the three novels has taken its cue from reviewers' observations, and Erdrich's narrative technique has continued to be of interest. Catherine Rainwater's essay "Reading between Worlds" {56}, a much-admired piece of criticism, judging by the frequency with which it is quoted by other critics, proposes that Erdrich's use of multiple narratives defies the reader's attempt to synthesize the work into a coherent whole, thus compel-

ling the reader to accept differing points of view. Although many have referred to Rainwater in discussing Erdrich's multiple narratives, not all agree with Rainwater's vaguely pessimistic conclusion that these narratives force upon the reader the alienation felt by the characters. Marjorie Towery {59} suggests that they make the reader assume a more active role in solving the conflicts, but that they are solvable.

Erdrich's circular narrative style, as compared to the more tightly organized style of canonical Euro-American work, has led to speculation about the relationship between that style and the culture it portrays. Debra Holt {21} and Rainwater {56} typify those who connect it to Native American ritual time, as opposed to European linear time; the cyclical nature of *Love Medicine*, in particular, has been considered representative of a culture that emphasizes oneness and interrelationships as opposed to hierarchy.

In her review of *Love Medicine*, Elaine Jahner {81} correctly predicts that "scholars will find traces of tribal ritual in style and plot, proving the continuity of mythic tradition." Research on the origins of Erdrich's work has focused primarily on its relationship to Native American mythology and has yielded a great many comparisons. In an interview with Kay Bonetti {70}, Erdrich comments that some of these connections were unintended on her part, even though they seem quite valid. Discussion of these mythological origins generally includes the variety of names that refer to the Native American group to which Erdrich belongs. Brief mention of them here may prevent confusion: *Chippewa* is the anglicized name for the Ojibwa tribe, and *Anishinaabe* (and its variations in spelling) is the tribe's own term referring to either the people or their language.

The Trickster character is by far the most frequently discussed mythological aspect of all three novels. Alan Velie {16} offers a general discussion of the Trickster, who is variously described as a joker and a healer, one who has the ability to change shape and to come back to life after death. He has a large appetite for both sex and food. While he is not seen as a pillar of society, he is considered a champion of the people and, in some mythology, is responsible for having brought fire to man. He challenges the gods. Catherine Catt {52}, Jennifer Sergi {50}, Margie Towery {59}, Louis Owens {13}, and William Gleason {33} all refer to the Trickster character, but they are by no means the only ones who do.<sup>3</sup> Trickster's many and varied characteristics may offer some explanation for his frequent appearance in these essays; indeed it seems

that few of the characters in these novels have escaped being compared to him. While in many cases the comparison is illuminating, as when it is used in relation to Gerry of *Love Medicine* or Nanapush of *Tracks*, sometimes, as in Owens {13}, it seems a bit overdone.

Comparisons to other mythological figures have been made as well, though much more sparingly. Joni Adamson Clarke {45} makes a good case for *Tracks*' Fleur as the powerful bear and wolf figure, and Gleason's {33} essay on humor identifies in *Love Medicine*'s Lipsha some characteristics of a comic mythological figure called a *heyoka*.

Christian beliefs figure in the novels as well; several essays, including Rainwater's {56} and James Ruppert's {37}, discuss the tension between Ojibwa and Christian mythology. In discussing Erdrich's portrayal of the tormented and tormenting Pauline/Sister Leopolda (a minor character in *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, and one of the narrators in *Tracks*), Jennifer Sergi's essay {50} exemplifies the popular position that Pauline's psychological imbalance is related to her confusion of these two sets of beliefs. Pauline, according to Victoria Walker {51}, imagines herself a Christian saint but commits heinous crimes. She believes in both Satan and the Ojibwa lake monster Misshepesshu.

Erdrich's emphasis on oral tradition is another common topic that relates her novels to Native American tradition. As discussed by Debra Holt {21} and Clarke {45}, among others, it has yielded some perceptive responses.<sup>4</sup> In his essay on *Tracks*, James Flavin {47} recognizes the tension between Erdrich's own written genre and the oral one she champions, noting that she maneuvered through the contradiction by creating *Tracks* in the form of a performance by Nanapush for his granddaughter. Flavin sees this same tension reflected in the personality of old Nanapush himself who, in spite of his literacy, feels great distrust for the written word. James Stripes {58} observes that when the Office of Indian Affairs was transferred from the federal government's Department of War to the Department of the Interior, "the status of the Indians went from that of enemies to that of trees" (31). In *Tracks*, Nanapush observes that the trees were then pressed into paper and filed in drawers, a marvelous metaphoric explanation for his distrust.

The importance of oral culture relates thematically to Erdrich's individual characters as well. Several essays, including Holt's {21} and David Mitchell's "Bridge to the Past" {12}, observe that the

novels' "successful" characters (relatively speaking) are those who are able to make their peace with the past and transform tradition into a usable form. Oral tradition is seen as an elemental method of achieving this.

Also discussed in relation to *Love Medicine*, in particular, is the homing issue, described by Louise Flavin {32} as a common theme in Native American literature wherein characters achieve a renewed sense of self by returning to their roots. Although Jeanne Smith {39} suggests that *Love Medicine* uses the homing theme, Flavin {32} and Robert Silberman {15} see Erdrich as transforming the theme in recognition of characters' ambivalence toward their roots and their difficulties in achieving a true homecoming. The relationship between *Love Medicine* and the homing novel is complex and invites further analysis.

In linking Erdrich's work to contemporary Native American concerns, other Native Americans have occasionally joined Silko {93} in accusing Erdrich of glossing the harsh political realities of contemporary Native American life. By bringing up some issues themselves, Gloria Bird {44} and Sidner Larson {48} indirectly express the opinion that Erdrich's work could be more issue-oriented. Bird also accuses Erdrich of promoting Native American stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> Erdrich herself, while recognizing that her role as a Native American author is, to a degree, inherently political, says that she is not using her work to make any distinct political claims (from Schumacher {75}).<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, postmodernists have found Erdrich's work of interest, since differing points of view, an uncertain reality, and an emphasis on the power of language to create those realities are everywhere evident in the three novels. Susan Perez-Castillo {42} answers Silko in defense of both the Native American and the postmodern Erdrich, focusing on Erdrich's qualifications for inclusion in the larger canon and asserting that the subtlety and nuance of her characterizations may not lend themselves to politics. By contrast, Marianne Barnett {29}, in the process of waxing ecstatic over the experience of reading *Love Medicine*, inadvertently illustrates her own postmodern excesses.

Feminist critics have also attended to these novels. Of course, categories tend to overlap, resulting in postmodern feminist essays such as Schweninger's {20}, as well as various other combinations. Several essays, including Hans Bak's {17} and Nora Barry's and Mary Prescott's {30}, have convincingly proposed that one of the judgment criteria for Erdrich's more successful

characters is how well they assimilate traditional attributes of both genders into their personalities. But occasionally the androgynous qualities of Erdrich's characters result in some puzzling analytical gender switching: Schweninger {20} asserts that Nanapush embodies the positive elements of ecofeminism in that he is protective of all life, and compares him to Pauline, whom he describes as having internalized all the unfortunate characteristics of patriarchal oppression. The same phenomenon occurs in Hertha Wong's "Adoptive Mothers and Thrown-Away Children" {28}, wherein some of the "moms" discussed are men.

Also in a feminist vein, Wendy Kolmar {19} proposes that *Tracks* juxtaposes the supernatural and the ordinary to suggest a feminine "inclusive" worldview that connects the past to the present. On a more pessimistic note, Daniel Cornell's {46} apology for Pauline blames her insanity at least in part on her inability to fit into prescribed gender roles.

Since characterization is so rich in these works, many good introductory criticisms like Hans Bak's {17}, Marvin Magalaner's {10}, and Louise Flavin's {32} focus on multicharacter analysis. In spite of higher aspirations, some analyses, because of the novels' numerous characters and the convoluted nature of their relationships, begin to resemble the synopsis of a soap opera. Notably, Margie Towery {59}, in an otherwise exceptional essay, seems given to idle speculation about what Erdrich's characters are going to do next.<sup>7</sup> Towery {59}, Peter Beidler {31}, and Wong {28} have all made differing but helpful attempts at untangling the varied relationships among characters in the three novels through chronologies and genealogy charts.

Although criticism on these three novels is lively and varied, much remains to be said about them. Much of this criticism has been published in journals or books on contemporary Native American literature or, occasionally, in books with a feminist point of view. I have discovered no books devoted entirely to Erdrich's work. A book with an inclusive, unifying perspective on her work would be of interest, as would an anthology of divergent essays. Erdrich's vivid characterizations would also lend themselves to psychological interpretation, which has been done only to a limited extent in conjunction with discussions of Native American mythology. James Ruppert's {37} proposal that *Love Medicine* can be understood equally well in the context of both modern-day psychology and Native American mythology is a theory that deserves further exploration.

While there is room for more analysis of *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, and *Tracks*, the field for analysis of Erdrich's other work is even more open. The last novel in the tetralogy, *Bingo Palace* {102}, published in 1994, and another novel, *The Crown of Columbus* {106}, coauthored by Erdrich and Michael Dorris, have not received much critical attention. Erdrich's most recently published works are a book of essays on childbearing, *Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* {103}, and a novel, *Tales of Burning Love* {105}. It remains to be seen whether scholars will attend to these more recent works. Inexplicably, *Jacklight* {104}, the poetry collection that was Erdrich's first major publication, and rich from an analytical viewpoint, has received little critical attention; the same is true of her later poetry collection, *Baptism of Desire* {101}. The body of criticism that does exist on Erdrich's work, however, eventually brings to mind Oscar Wilde's retort that "life imitates art." As multiple points of view emerge, diverging and overlapping, adoring and irreverent, perceptive and gossipy, the critics themselves become real-life evidence of the validity of Erdrich's narrative technique of contrasting points of view.

### THE THREE NOVELS<sup>8</sup>

1. *Love Medicine*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984. Paperback edition, New York: Bantam, 1987, 1989; New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
2. *Love Medicine: New and Expanded Version*. New York: Henry Holt, 1993. (Unless otherwise indicated, critical work refers to the original version.)
3. *The Beet Queen*. New York: Henry Holt, 1986. Paperback edition, New York: Bantam, 1989.
4. *Tracks*. New York: Henry Holt, 1988. Paperback edition, New York: HarperCollins, 1989.

### SECONDARY WORKS

#### From Books

#### *Love Medicine*

5. Crabtree, Claire. "Salvific Oneness and the Fragmented Self in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." In *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues: Proceedings from the Native American Studies Conference at Lake Superior University, October 16-17, 1987*, ed.

Thomas E. Schirer. Sault Ste. Marie, ON: Lake Superior University Press, 1991.

Describes characters' interrelationships. Maintains the importance of lineage in the novel in the struggle for personal identity and a link with the past. Describes the men in *LM* as wounded by "patriarchal institutions" (55), yet healed through love. Describes the women as healers. Posits that death is portrayed as transcendence. Focuses primarily on Lipsha, Albertine, Henry, June, and Nector.

6. Hall, Sharon K., ed. "Louise Erdrich." In *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook, 1985*. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 39. Detroit: Gale, 1985.

Describes Erdrich's career up to and including *LM*. Excerpts reviews of *LM*.

7. Hanson, Elizabeth I. "Louise Erdrich: Making the World Anew." In *Forever There: Race and Gender in Contemporary Native American Fiction*. New York: Lang, 1989.

Congratulates Erdrich for producing "something more than a protest novel." Gives positive portrayals of Nector, Albertine, and Lipsha, delineating their different purposes in the novel: Nector as survivor, Albertine as searcher, and Lipsha as the embodiment of intuitive understanding. Maintains that *LM* reveals a Native American consciousness to the white reader, stressing the importance of human affection in the struggle for survival.

8. Jaskoski, Helen. "From the Time Immemorial: Native American Traditions in Contemporary Short Fiction." In *Since Flannery O'Connor: Essays on the Contemporary American Short Story*. Ed. Loren Logsdon and Charles W. Mayer. Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1987.

Analyzes the "Saint Marie" story of *LM*, claiming that the conflict between Marie and Sister Leopolda reveals the essentially punishing nature of the early Christianity imposed on Native Americans. Delineates the story's rich mythological roots, relating it not only to a perversion of Christian images of salvation, but to Native American Windigo and Trickster mythology and even "Hansel and Gretel." Also looks at Silko's *Storyteller* and Vizenor's *Wordarrows*, relating the works through their integration of short stories into a coherent whole.

9. Kroeber, Karl, et al. "Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." In *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*. Ed. Richard F. Fleck. Washington, DC: Three Continents, 1993.

Brings together introductory short pieces emphasizing narrative technique. Kroeber admires multiple narratives; discusses

ethnicity as a distinctly American phenomenon. Dee Brown praises "depict[ion of] the modern American Indian from the inside out" (264–65). Ursula K. LeGuin says *LM* invites the envy of other writers (265). Scott R. Sanders notes affection and care in character development and quotes generously from *LM* (265–68). Kathleen M. Sands christens multiple narrative a "gossip" technique that challenges the reader to bridge the gaps, and compares it to the more ritualistic style of Momaday, Silko, and Welch (268–73). Kroeber concludes by making a structural comparison to Faulkner and noting resilience of characters functioning in an unstable social milieu.

10. Magalaner, Marvin. "Of Cars, Time, and the River." In *American Women Writing Fiction: Memory, Identity, Family, Space*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989.

Introductory criticism delineates some of Erdrich's transmutations of Native American tradition into contemporary culture for use as a symbolic framework. Discusses symbolic use of water (as the river of life) and cars (as sensual and anthropomorphic havens). Compares bizarre characterizations to the overall "cathartic" effect of the novel. Admires the use of multiple narrators.

11. Medeiros, Paulo. "Cannibalism and Starvation: The Parameters of Eating Disorders in Literature." In *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*. Ed. Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.

Places *LM* in a discussion that includes Tantalus, Achilles, and Penthesilea, and Kafka's "Hunger Artist." Analyzes Marie's and Sister Leopolda's food and cooking-laden confrontations as contrasting representations of eating disorders—hunger versus religiously oriented anorexia.

12. Mitchell, David. "A Bridge to the Past: Cultural Hegemony and the Native American Past in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." In *Entering the 90's: The North American Experience: Proceedings from the Native American Studies Conference at Lake Superior University, October 27–28, 1989*. Ed. Thomas E. Schirer. Sault Ste. Marie, ON: Lake Superior University Press, 1991.

Presents June as the unifying force. Uses a scene between Henry and Albertine to illustrate shaky interpersonal relationships. Notes this is reflected in characters' tenuous grips on their own identities and understanding of the past. Concludes that an understanding memory of the past gives the more successful characters (Lulu, Marie, Lipsha, and Gerry) a "bridge" to selfhood.

13. Owens, Louis. "Erdrich and Dorris's Mixedbloods and Multiple Narratives." In *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Duncan, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

Step-by-step account delineates theme of search for identity. Notes the Native American history of *Tracks* and lack of it in *BQ*. Relies more heavily than usual on the Trickster in describing characters, including *LM*'s June, *BQ*'s Karl, and *T*'s Fleur in that category. Briefly but eloquently answers Silko's {93} attack on *BQ*, saying Silko seems to demand a rhetorical posture from Erdrich that she does not assume herself.

14. Sarris, Greg. "Reading Louise Erdrich: *Love Medicine* as Home Medicine." In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Includes much autobiography and related material. Compares *LM* to his own background as a mixed-blood seeking his heritage as a Kashaya Miwok. Notes family bickering in *LM*, and discusses it in terms of internalized oppression (racial self-hatred). Describes the interpretive strategies of critics Lester A. Standiford, Paula Gunn Allen, and William Gleason, noting that all interpretations show the reader's bias. Examines his own bias in his inability to identify with Erdrich's triumphant ending. Suggests *LM* glosses colonial oppression.

15. Silberman, Robert. "Opening the Text: *Love Medicine* and the Return of the Native American Woman." In *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*. Ed. Gerald Vizenor. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989.

Far-reaching general analysis. Compares June's failed homecoming to the novels of Silko, Momaday, Welch, and McNickle, saying it "signals a recasting of the tradition" (103) that recognizes the "dilemma of the individual—home as freedom versus home as trap" (108). Finds multiple narrations revolve around characters' needs to resolve the issue of June's death as it relates to homecoming and identity. Compares Erdrich to Garcia-Marquez and Faulkner: "a modernist sense of relativism and discontinuity as well as a good deal of ironic humor" (106). Explores the concepts of family, oral versus written tradition, and history.

16. Velie, Alan. "The Trickster Novel." In *Narrative Chance*.

Brief reference to Gerry Nanapush in this discussion of the trickster in Native American folklore (122–23).

### *The Beet Queen*

17. Bak, Hans. "Toward a Native American 'Realism': The Amphibious Fiction of Louise Erdrich." In *Neo-Realism in Contemporary American Fiction*. Ed. Kristiaan Versluys. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992.

Focuses primarily on *BQ*; mentions *LM* and *Tracks*. Defines *BQ* as most realistic and sensitive of the three, whose characters live unexamined lives contrasted with moments of inspiration. Admires tragicomic quality. Points out that *BQ* elucidates cultural victimization of Euro-Americans as well as Native Americans. Notes that character relationships emphasize spiritual bonding over biological connections. Asserts relative success of characters displaying traits traditionally associated with both genders. Perceptively analyzes each main character.

18. Bataille, Gretchen. "Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*: Images of the Grotesque on the Northern Plains." In *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*. Ed. Richard F. Fleck. Washington, DC: Three Continents, 1993.

Defines "grotesque" fiction: "characters who are alienated from themselves and from each other" (278)—a landscape that reflects that alienation—a blurred distinction between comedy and tragedy. Categorizes *BQ* as grotesque by emphasizing themes of separation and loss as well as characters' physical and emotional grotesqueness. Analyzes each main character.

### *Tracks*

19. Kolmar, Wendy K. "Dialectics of Connectedness: Supernatural Elements in Novels by Bambara, Cisneros, Grahn, and Erdrich." In *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*. Ed. Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Includes *Tracks* in a comparison of the traditional either-or dichotomy in approaches to the supernatural to the both/and vision of these women authors. Asserts that portraying the supernatural as a part of everyday life is a way of connecting the past to the present.

20. Schweninger, Lee. "A Skin of Lakeweed: An Ecofeminist Approach to Erdrich and Silko." In *Multicultural Literatures through Feminist/Poststructuralist Lenses*. Ed. Barbara Frey Waxman. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993.

Applies the theory that patriarchal oppression of women is linked to the exploitation of nonhuman life forms. Links Fleur to

the power of nature and discusses man's compulsion to dominate both through a force that becomes self-destructive. Uses a female character to discuss oppression, linking Pauline's sado-masochistic powers to her internalization of the patriarchy. Describes a male character (Nanapush) as embodying positive ecofeminist traits.

### *Love Medicine, The Beet Queen, and Tracks*

21. Holt, Debra C. "Transformation and Continuance: Native American Tradition in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." In *Entering the 90's: The North American Experience*.

Remarks on the importance of language, storytelling, and naming. Declares that *T*'s nonhierarchical gender roles reflect Native American tribal culture. Compares Erdrich's circular narratives to linear narrative of Western tradition. Multicharacter analysis. Posits that successful characters show the ability to adapt tradition to present circumstances.

22. Lee, Robert A. "Ethnic Renaissance: Rudolfo Anaya, Louise Erdrich, and Maxine Hong Kingston." In *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature Since 1970*. Ed. Graham Clarke. New York: St. Martin's, 1990.

Like Kroeber (9), defines the ethnic novel as distinctly American. Discusses the emergence of ethnicity in the 1960s. Presents an admiring, review-style discussion of *LM*'s multiple narratives, and *T*'s sense of history. Proposes that *BQ* is more subtly Native American, as opposed to not Native American.

23. Lincoln, Kenneth. "'Bring Her Home': Louise Erdrich." In *Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

Relates Erdrich's works to Northrup Frye's conception of literary modes. Concentrates on *LM* and the homing theme. Asserts the lack of specifically ethnographic material in novels that nevertheless deal with the problems of cultural identity. Notes survival aspects of humor. Includes a family tree for *LM* in a multicharacter analysis that focuses primarily on Lipsha. Includes charts for themes and characters.

24. Marowski, Daniel G. and Roger Matuz, ed. "Louise Erdrich." In *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook, 1988*. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 54. Detroit: Gale, 1989.

Describes career from *LM* to *T*. Includes a selection of reviews on *BQ*, *T*, and *Jacklight*.

25. McCay, Mary A. "Cooper's Indians, Erdrich's Native Americans." In *Global Perspectives on Teaching Literature: Shared Visions and Distinctive Visions*. Ed. Sandra Ward Lott, Maureen S.G. Hawkins, and Norman McMillan. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993.

Compares three of James Fenimore Cooper's novels to *LM*, *T*, and *The Crown of Columbus*. Describes Cooper's vision as a single destiny for America based on an assumption of the decline of Native American culture. Describes Erdrich's multiple narratives as culturally inclusive. Examines relationships between Nector and Eli, Dot and Albertine, and Pauline and Fleur in a cultural context. Likens Pauline's exclusionary viewpoint to Cooper's.

26. Shaddock, Jennifer. "Mixed Blood Women: The Dynamic of Women's Relations in the Novels of Louise Erdrich and Leslie Silko." In *Feminist Nightmares, Women at Odds: Feminism and the Problem of Sisterhood*. Ed. Susan Ostrov Weisser and Jennifer Fleishner. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Discusses the internalization of/resistance to cultural oppression in *T* and Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*. Uses *T*'s Fleur and *Ceremony*'s Tayo as models of resistance. Further suggests that these and similar models are more beneficial to feminism than models of victimization that may serve to reinforce a stereotype of the powerlessness of women.

27. Tharp, Julie. "Women's Community and Survival in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." In *Communication and Women's Friendships*. Ed. Janet Doubler Ward and JoAnna Stephens Mink. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993.

Notes general absence of strong women's friendships in the novels. Names Mary and Celestine's bond in *BQ* as an exception related to their rejection of traditional gender roles. Uses Paula Gunn Allen's concept of Native American culture as non-hierarchical and woman-centered to portray Erdrich's characters as anglicized. Describes Lulu's and Marie's late-life alliance as a reunion with their tribal past.

28. Wong, Hertha. "Adoptive Mothers and Thrown-Away Children in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." In *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Ed. Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Deals with Euro-American gender-role assumptions about nurture and mother-daughter relationships, comparing them to Native American traditions. Proposes that the abandoned children in all three novels reflect cultural alienation, while resulting

informal adoptions reflect a Native American tradition wherein mothering is a shared responsibility. Includes men in discussion of adoptive mothers, acknowledging a difference in perceived gender roles. Attempts a biological and adoptive genealogy of characters. Evenhandedly concludes that "Erdrich's novels, then, transcend easy categories of gender and ethnicity, reflect both Native American and Euroamerican influences, and extend Western notions of mothering" (191).

## From Journals

### *Love Medicine*

29. Barnett, Marianne. "Dreamstuff: Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *North Dakota Quarterly* 56:1 (1988): 82–93.

Recounts the plot and metaphors of *LM* in a dreamy, rhapsodic style. Postmodern, feminist reader response emphasizes the power of words over the imagination and throws in a commentary on her ex-husband for good measure.

30. Barry, Nora and Mary Prescott. "'The Triumph of the Brave': *Love Medicine's* Holistic Vision." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 30 (1989): 123–38.

Perceptively describes characters' relative success in terms of their ability to unite masculine and feminine traits and reconcile the past with the present. Emphasizes American Indian folkloric interpretations of Nector, Marie, Lulu, June, Gerry, and Lipsha.

31. Beidler, Peter G. "Three Student Guides to Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16:4 (1992): 167–73.

Offers questions for discussion, a basic family tree, and a chronological guide to events to facilitate teaching *LM*. Proposes that these guides can make a "first reading of a novel something like a second reading" (168).

32. Flavin, Louise. "Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*: Loving over Time and Distance." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 31 (1989): 55–64.

Perceptive and straightforward introductory character analyses. Hints provocatively that *LM* contrasts with the "homing" themes of other contemporary Native American authors.

33. Gleason, William. "'Her Laugh an Ace': The Function of Humor in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 11:3 (1987): 51–73.

Reminds readers of the affectionate wordplay, slapstick, and sarcasm in *LM*, proposing it is frequently ignored or misunderstood. Asserts humor is a valuable survival technique for *LM*'s characters. In addition to describing the Trickster character of Gerry Nanapush, identifies Lipsha and King, Jr. as *heyoka* (contrarywise man) characters from Native American lore. Notes circular narrative.

34. Lansky, Ellen. "Spirits and Salvation in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *Dionysos: The Literature and Addiction Tri-Quarterly* 5:3 (1994): 39–44.

Describes Gordie in the "Crown of Thorns" chapter as the classic alcoholic. Like Ruppert (32), notes the possibility for a dual interpretation of the apparition of June according to cultural context. Interprets June as a failed Christ figure, her resurrection disallowed because she is female.

35. Matchie, Thomas. "*Love Medicine: A Female Moby Dick*." *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought* 30 (1989): 478–91.

Leaves the reader pondering whether Matchie has read either of these novels. Details the adventures of the "Kashpahs" (sic), comparing Nector to Ahab and June to the white whale.

36. McKenzie, James. "Lipsha's Good Road Home: The Revival of Chippewa Culture in *Love Medicine*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10:3 (1986): 58.

Discusses Native American concerns that the novel promotes ethnic stereotypes. Allows that the work has sometimes been misconstrued in terms of race, referring to Portales (85) and Towers's (87) reviews as examples. Goes on to discredit their observations and give a careful examination of several of *LM*'s characters, concluding that for "the reader willing to do the work, the novel itself is a kind of love medicine, an antidote to the twin poisons of racial bigotry and a sugary romanticism about Native Americans, which have their common ground in stereotype" (62).

37. Ruppert, James. "Mediation and Multiple Narrative in *Love Medicine*." *North Dakota Quarterly* 59 (1991): 229–41.

Convincingly proposes that *LM* mediates traditional Native American and contemporary Euro-American beliefs in a manner acceptable to both. Uses the exploits of Henry, Lipsha, Nector, Marie, and Lulu to support his contention, stating that, in most cases, narratives proceed in such a way that they can be interpreted through either psychology or mythology, (e.g., when June's ghost appears to a drunken Gordie, the reader can attribute it to either manifestation or hallucination).

38. Schneider, Lissa. "Love Medicine: A Metaphor for Forgiveness." *SAIL* 4:1 (1992): 1–13.

Takes a therapist's view of *LM*, focusing on the alcoholism and/or recovery of June, Albertine, Gordie, Henry, and Lipsha. Notes Erdrich's own self-disclosed experiences with heavy drinking. Also posits that *LM* is a coherent whole that focuses on forgiveness through storytelling and understanding.

39. Smith, Jeanne. "Transpersonal Selfhood: The Boundaries of Identity in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *SAIL* 3:4 (1991): 13–26.

Maintains that Erdrich uses a "homing" plot that connects characters to the past and to place. Describes Erdrich's characters as "Whitmanesque" in that they absorb and are absorbed by the world.

40. Velie. "American Indian Literature in the Nineties: the Emergence of the Middle-Class Protagonist." *World Literature Today* 66 (1992): 264–68.

Includes Lipsha in a comparison of lost and indigent protagonists of earlier works of contemporary Native American authors to protagonists of their later work (Vivian Twostar of Erdrich's and Dorris's *The Crown of Columbus*). Characterizes earlier protagonists as generally downtrodden but occasionally hopeful, later ones as uneasy with their success and less connected to their roots.

### *The Beet Queen*

41. Meisenhelder, Susan. "Race and Gender in Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*." *ARIEL* 25 (1995): 45–57.

Argues against Silko's {93} complaint that *BQ* ignores issues of race. Claims that the characters of Russell and Sita describe the untenable position of white females and Native American males who try to embrace traditional role models, noting the similarities in their deathlike lives in spite of their misplaced enmity for each other. Offers Mary, Celestine, and Dot as hopeful counterpoints who defy stereotypical gender roles.

42. Perez-Castillo, Susan. "Postmodernism, Native American Literature and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy." *Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs* 32 (1991): 285–94.

Defends *BQ* from Silko's {93} scathing critique through witty discussion of poststructuralism and its limitations: "Even the most sincere deconstructionist, if she trips over a stool on her way to the word processor, will suffer the extratextual consequences of

her action, and probably react in irate verbal terms" (291). Objects to defining a subtle literary talent in strictly ethnic terms. Defends Erdrich's (multi)ethnicity in terms of her literary ability to compete with the mainstream canon. Compares Erdrich's multiple narratives to Silko's own portrayal of diverging realities.

43. Walsh, Dennis M. and Ann Braley. "The Indianness of Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*: Latency as Presence." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18:3 (1994): 1-17.

Maintains that *BQ* is as much a Native American novel as *LM* or *T* in that it exposes the emptiness of its Euro-American characters and portrays its Native American characters as possessing positive alternatives. Discusses the general lack of spirituality, meaningful tradition, respect for the land, and familial bonding in Wallace, Adelaide, Sita and Carl, contrasting their viewpoints with those of more positive Native American characters. Concludes that Dot finally chooses the more coherent Native American values in her decision to return home, an image reflected in *LM* when she marries Native American outlaw-hero Gerry Nanapush.

### *Tracks*

44. Bird, Gloria. "Searching for Evidence of Colonialism at Work: A Reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *Wicazo SA Review: A Journal of Indian Studies* 8:2 (1992): 40-47.

Native American writer argues that Erdrich's characters reflect colonial stereotypes of Native Americans: "The Vanishing Red Man," a noble, or ignoble savage unable to change and therefore doomed to extinction. Attempts to expose Erdrich's narrative style and depiction of family as a foil for a work whose resolutions reinforce hopelessness. Claims *T* ignores outside social forces. Uses *T* as a forum for protesting storage of nuclear waste on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington State, where she is from. Like Larson {48}, examines Pauline's double marginality.

45. Clarke, Joni Adamson. "Why Bears Are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to Be Murder: Transformation and Oral Tradition in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *SAIL* 4:1 (1992): 28-48.

Proposes that *T* is an implicit piece of theory that comments on oral and literary traditions and the power of language in a way that embraces ambiguity. Compares this to contemporary literary theory, noting that theory itself can be imaginative or prescriptive. Interesting analysis of Fleur as a powerful bear and wolf character from Chippewa mythology.

46. Cornell, Daniel. "Woman Looking: Revis(ion)ing Pauline's Subject Position in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *SAIL* 4:1 (1992): 49–64.

Postmodern feminist character analysis examines Pauline's voyeurism and possible insanity in relation to her role as an undesirable woman challenging the traditional female role of sexual object. Details her unsuccessful power struggle to become sexual subject. Reads Nanapush as sexist and impotent.

47. Flavin, James. "The Novel as Performance: Communication in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *SAIL* 3:4 (1991): 1–12.

Examines the tension between Erdrich's genre of written fiction and her celebration of the oral tradition, suggesting that she resolves it by the "performance" of Nanapush's story to Lulu. Describes Nanapush as a promoter of the spoken word, which functions as a survival tool and a link between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Equates Nanapush's fear of the written word (although he is literate) to its potential for loss of tribal power.

48. Larson, Sidner. "The Fragmentation of a Tribal People in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 17:2 (1993): 1–13.

Historical context. This member of the Gros Ventre tribe and cousin of James Welch gets off *T* a little in an eagerness to clarify some issues of government land allotment and the treatment of mixed-blood peoples by both Euro-Americans and Native Americans, but the background information is interesting in its own right. Returns to *T* for character analyses, including an unusually sympathetic one of Pauline as a mixed-blood character in an already marginalized society, expanding on a concept from Rainwater {56}.

49. Peterson, Nancy J. "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *PMLA* 109 (1994): 982–94.

Illuminates the connection between *T* and Native American history. Carefully examines the relationship between the theme of land loss in *T* and "documented" history, noting that Erdrich's work parallels historical events without making official reference to them. Commends Erdrich for successfully navigating the quandary of depicting Native American counterhistory in the midst of postmodern subversion of the concept of objective history. Notes that Erdrich reinforces the notion of a subjective history through the conflicting narratives of Nanapush and Pauline.

50. Sergi, Jennifer. "Storytelling: Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *World Literature Today* 66 (1992): 279–82.

Maintains that *T* captures the oral and mythic tradition in print by using the form and purpose of traditional storytelling, incorporating Chippewa myth, and using a voice that "harks back to the old as it creates anew" (279). Analyzes Nanapush's connection to Trickster. Details Pauline's psychological imbalance in relation to her confusion of Christian and Chippewa mythology (Satan and Misshepesshu).

51. Walker, Victoria. "A Note on Perspective in Tracks." *SAIL* 3:4 (1991): 37–40.

Discusses the contrasting narratives of Nanapush and Pauline, suggesting that while they give the reader a choice of perspective, the contrasts in their personalities encourage the reader to adopt Nanapush's perspective.

#### *Love Medicine, The Beet Queen, and Tracks*

52. Catt, Catherine M. "Ancient Myth in Modern America: The Trickster in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *Platte Valley Review* 19 (1991): 71–81.

Documents sources for the Trickster character in *T* and *LM* that describe him/her as a sexual adventurer who was conceived through a natural resource, has the ability to change and, most importantly, to defy death. Moderates antisocial characteristics by linking them to an ability to challenge the gods for the benefit of humans. Links some or all of these traits to Nanapush, Lulu, Gerry, and Lipsha.

53. Grodal, Hanne Tang. "Words, Words, Words." *Dolphin: Publications of the English Dept., U. of Aarhus* 18 (1990): 21–26.

Recounts the author's experience translating Erdrich and Marge Piercy's work into Danish. Says, "With Erdrich I stay very close to the text. . . . [O]ne gets the impression that every single word has been chosen with care" (24). Notes that translating is intense work. Asserts the necessity of preserving "foreignness" of foreign work.

54. Manley, Kathleen E.B. "Decreasing the Distance: Contemporary Native American Texts, Hypertext, and the Concept of Audience." *Southern Folklore* 51:2 (1994): 121–35.

Includes *LM* and *T* in an examination of the similarities of oral narratives, hypertext, and Native American fiction. Notes that the latter two have a dialogic quality that reduces the distance between writer and reader, bringing them closer to the performance model of oral tradition. Uses expanded version of *LM* as an example of how the Native American writer acknowledges the changeability of narrative.

55. Maristuen-Rodakowski, Julie. "The Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota: Its History as Depicted in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12:3 (1988): 33–48.

Provides documented historical background for *LM* and *BQ*, arguing that these novels are "based solidly on the facts of that area of North Dakota and its Native American history" (40). Includes a genealogy chart with characters of both novels. Describes the French influence on the area, including intermarriage, tracing the lineage of French-named characters, Fleur, Celestine, and Regina. Explains the Michif language as a combination of French and Cree, noting that succeeding generations in Erdrich's fiction speak Cree, French or Michif, then English. Concludes that Native Americans are being redefined in each succeeding generation, using Albertine's panic in *LM* as an example of the resulting personal confusion.

56. Rainwater, Catherine. "Reading between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *American Literature* 62 (1990): 405–22.

Posits that ambiguity and mixed references defy synthesis, thereby creating an "experience of marginality" (406) in the reader that mimics the "liminal status" of Erdrich's characters (405). Analyzes the mixed references to Native American and Christian religions, contradictory references to "mechanical and ceremonial time" (414), conflict "between nuclear family and tribal kinship codes" (420), and between psychological and Native American concepts of individual development (421). Maintains that Erdrich's work provides for no synthesis of these conflicts, leading the reader instead to an alienation, then finally an acceptance, of differing ways of structuring the world through stories.

57. Rayson, Ann. "Shifting Identity in the Works of Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris." *SAIL* 3:4 (1991): 27–36.

Includes *LM* and *T* in a discussion that maintains that Erdrich's and Dorris's work portrays numerous identities. Proposes that their collaboration precludes the portrayal of a strictly male or female identity.

58. Stripes, James D. "The Problem(s) of (Anishinaabe) History in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich: Voices and Contexts." *Wicazo SA Review: A Journal of Indian Studies* 91:2 (1991): 26–33.

Uses a multiplicity of sources and a singular lack of continuity in examining the novels in the light of revisionist history. Contains moments of genius: "In 1849 when the Office of Indian

Affairs was transferred from the Department of War to the newly created Department of the Interior . . . the status of Indians went from that of enemies to that of trees" (31).

59. Towery, Margie. "Continuity and Connection: Characters in Louise Erdrich's Fiction." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16:4 (1992): 99–122.

Maintains that Erdrich "connects destruction, survival, and continuity" (99) in both a linear and a circular manner that celebrates the survivor. Carefully sorts the interrelated genealogy and sequence of events through both charts and discussion. Extends discussion of Trickster qualities to include Euro-American characters. Convincingly compares Mary to Fleur. Sees overlapping characters creating more reader involvement. Describes interesting minor symbolism of dandelions and tattoos.

60. Van Dyke, Annette. "Questions of the Spirit: Bloodlines in Louise Erdrich's Chippewa Landscape." *SAIL* 4:1 (1992): 15–27.

Discusses the roles of Pauline and Fleur in *T*, proposing that they are shaman-like women, whose power is passed to their daughters Marie and Lulu in *LM* through bloodlines. Examines the mythology of lake monster Misshepesshu as the source of the first two women's power, noting the potential for both good and evil in that power. Concludes that Marie's and Lulu's reconciliation at the end of *LM* signifies unification for a common good among the Chippewa.

#### **Dissertations using *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, and/or *Tracks***

61. DePriest, Maria. "Necessary Fictions: The Re-Visioned Subjects of Louise Erdrich and Alice Walker." DAI 52: 1327A. University of Oregon, 1991.

Postmodern feminist viewpoint posits that both writers use "unorthodox" narrative to describe the experience of Third World women, whose environments inspire both creativity and resistance.

62. Galant, Alison Dara. "'The Story Comes up Different Every Time': Louise Erdrich and the Emerging Aesthetic of the Minority Woman Writer." DAI 54: 1803A. Ohio State University, 1993.

Places Erdrich in the new tradition of Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Silko, and Toni Morrison. Proposes that she subverts the romantic plot, deconstructs notions of gender, and delineates problems of identity and meaning for marginalized people. Examines Erdrich's double marginalization of race and gender.

63. Hafen, P. Jane. "The Complicated Web: Mediating Cultures in the Work of Louise Erdrich." DAI 55: 566A. University of Nevada, 1993.

Includes several other of Erdrich's works in an examination of the mixing of narrative voices, cultures, and genres.

64. Larson. "Issues of Identity in the Writing of N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Silko and Louise Erdrich." DAI 55: 964A. University of Arizona, 1994.

Compares his own experiences to these writers' portrayals of the Native American search for cultural identity.

65. Mitchell, David Thomas. "Conjured Communities: The Multiperspectival Novels of Amy Tan, Toni Morrison, Julia Alvarez, Louise Erdrich, and Cristina Garcia." DAI 54: 4094A. University of Michigan, 1994.

Proposes that these novels by minority women offer a feminist postcolonial viewpoint through the use of the novelistic device of "high modernism."

66. Schultz, Lydia Agnes. "Perceptions from the Periphery: Fictional Form and Twentieth-Century American Women Novelists." DAI 51: 3747A. University of Minnesota, 1991.

Contends that three novelists subvert canonically acceptable fictional forms to recreate their experience of marginality: Edith Wharton—realism—women; Tillie Olsen—stream of consciousness—marriage; and Erdrich—multiple narratives—Native American perspective of circularity.

67. Sergi. "Narrativity and Representation in Louise Erdrich's Fiction." DAI 54: 2582A. University of Rhode Island, 1994.

Notes the circularity of time and the incidental but related nature of events in the three novels. Asserts that this engages readers in the act of storytelling and underscores the impossibility of one truth.

68. Whitson, Kathy J. "Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*: A Culturalist Approach." DAI 54: 3441A. University of Missouri, 1994.

Explores the novels through Ojibwa tradition and mythology. Links Gerry and Nanapush to the Trickster character and Gerry and Pauline to historical figures Leonard Peltier and Kateri Tekakawitha, respectively. Proposes that the Christian devil displaces the lake spirit Misshepesshu in *T*.

69. Woodward, Pauline Groetz. "New Tribal Forms: Community in Louise Erdrich's Fiction." DAI 52: 1334 A. Tufts University, 1991.

Asserts that multiple narratives exemplify postmodern text, wherein no one consciousness asserts authority over another, so the reader must choose a point of view. Describes novels as testimony to cultural and familial survival in the face of loss.

### **Selected Interviews with Louise Erdrich**

70. *Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris Interview with Kay Bonetti*. Columbia, MO: American Audio Prose Library, 1986.

Discusses their close authorial "collaboration," although at the time none of their work was officially published as coauthored. Includes some biography. Explains how they develop characters through discussions that even include what the characters would order from a dinner menu. Details how some characters develop in ways that surprise Erdrich herself, as when Wallacette in *BQ* turns out to be Dot of *LM*.

71. Bruchac, Joseph. "Whatever Is Really Yours: An Interview with Louise Erdrich." In *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*. Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Series 15. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987.

Presents a nonstereotypical view of American Indian writers, including their interest in cultural, personal, and creative survival. Erdrich speaks plainly and simply about her writing, noting the surprising power of her Chippewa ancestry although she is also French and German, recounting her determination to become a writer and how her family encouraged her, yet maintaining that her stories are written more through her than by her. Some of her observations seem to contrast with her work.

72. Chavkin, Allen and Nancy Feyl Chavkin. *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994.

Collection of twenty-three interviews out of 145 that Erdrich and Dorris gave between 1985 and 1994, including two by the Chavkins. Concentrates on successful collaboration methods and their opinions on Native American issues. (From Hill, Lola L. "Reviews." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18 (1994): 280-85).

73. Coltelli, Laura. "Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris." In *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Brief biographies followed by a discussion of collaborative technique. Erdrich objects to classifying Native American litera-

ture as apart. Both discuss fetal alcohol syndrome and Dorris's *The Broken Cord*.

74. "The National Soul: Myth Morality and Ethics in the American Consciousness." In *Bill Moyers World of Ideas Anthology*. Videotape. Montauk, NY: Mystic Fire Video, 1989.

In a television anthology that includes interviews with historian Barbara Tuchman and author E.L. Doctorow, a quiet and slow-speaking Erdrich reveals a political agenda that includes returning certain lands to Native Americans by honoring past treaties. Remarks on the positive aspects of reservation life: "Reservations are homelands, places where the culture is strongest . . . where the language is spoken. . . . It's where the people understand you." Discusses the plurality and ecological wisdom that surviving Native American culture has to offer European-based culture.

75. Schumacher, George. "A Marriage of Minds." *Writer's Digest* (June 1991): 28–59.

Reflects on close collaborative editing between Erdrich and Dorris. Discusses the writing process, observing that Erdrich's stories never start at the beginning. Says her work is inherently political but not polemical.

76. Wong. "An Interview with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris." *North Dakota Quarterly* 55 (1987): 196–218.

Includes some biography, along with reflections on "labeling" Native American writers and possible reasons for the surge of Native American literary creativity. Discusses family life, success, and collaboration with Dorris. Comparable to Bonetti {70}.

## Selected Reviews

### *Love Medicine*

77. Bruckner, D.J.R. *New York Times Book Review*, 20 Dec. 1984: C21.

Describes setting as "junk made beautiful." Admires "distinct voices" and lyric quality of her writing. Limns plot, noting that seemingly bizarre characters are involved in familiar quests. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

78. Cunningham, Valentine. "A Right Old Battle-Axe." *Observer*. 24 Feb. 1985: 27.

Focuses on the violence as a response to victimization. Admires characters' resilience. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

79. Gilbert, Harriet. "Mixed Feelings: *Love Medicine*." *New Statesman* 109 (1985): 31.

Calls *LM* "a tragedy made ingestible by humor, tenderness, perceptiveness, and restraint." Admires its complexity and Erdrich's ability to immerse the reader in "the viewpoint of the reservation." From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

80. Hunter, Carol. *World Literature Today* 59 (1985): 474.

Admires tragicomic multiple narratives. Compares *LM* to Faulkner and to Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

81. Jahner, Elaine. "Love Medicine." *Parabola* 10 (1985): 96+.

Defines *LM* as "complex enough to affect consciousness... compelling enough to attract a wide readership." Predicts that "scholars will find traces of tribal ritual in style and plot, proving the continuity of mythic tradition." Hopes this valuable scholarship will not overshadow *LM*'s universality. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

82. Kessler, Jascha. "Louise Erdrich: *Love Medicine*." KUSC-FM, Los Angeles. Jan. 1985.

Celebrates a portrayal true to both cultural history and art. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

83. Kinney, Jeanne. *Best Sellers* 44 (1984): 324-25.

Sees *LM* as both explicating a "foreign" culture and affirming that the problems of its characters are much the same as anyone's. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

84. Lyons, Gene. "In Indian Territory: *Love Medicine*." *Newsweek*, 11 Feb. 1985.

Insists that *LM* is a group of short stories, not a novel. Admires Erdrich's poetic gift, but laments that she is "so self-consciously literary that they (the stories) are a whole lot easier to admire than to read." Contends that the various narrators sound alike. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

85. Portales, Marco. "People with Holes in Their Lives." *New York Times Book Review*, 23 Dec. 1984: 6.

Notes multiple narratives, humor, and poetic style. Places June as the central thematic figure. Rates "The Beads" as the best chapter and "Wild Geese" a contrasting second. Mildly criticizes lack of depth in portrayal of younger characters. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

86. *Kirkus Reviews* 52 (1984): 765-66.

Notes difficulty of following narrative. Admires portrayal of a culture socially in ruins, rich in spirituality. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

87. Towers, Robert. "Uprooted: *Love Medicine*." *New York Review of Books* 32 (1985): 36–37.

Admires poetic qualities. Contrasts "rhapsodic" language with the grim facts of the plot. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {6}.

88. Love, Barbara. Review of *LM*, revised edition. *Library Journal*. 15 Oct. 1993: 87.

Lauds how the five new sections complement the original novel. Says Erdrich places readers "right inside the heads of her remarkable characters."

### *The Beet Queen*

89. Bly, Robert. "Another World Breaks Through." *New York Times Book Review*, 31 Aug. 1986: 2.

"Erdrich plays well with the demon of flatness (of the prairie Midwest) and often wins." Compares the strength of female characters to the lack of it in males. Notes the power of her imagery. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

90. Kakutani, Michiko. *New York Times*, 20 Aug. 1986: C21.

Admires multiple narratives and interwoven characterization. Limns plot. Describes as "beautiful but unsentimental." Mildly criticizes "contrived" ending. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

91. *The New Yorker*, 12 Jan. 1987: 102.

Derides *BQ*'s narrative and characterization, saying its parts do not add up to a whole novel and its characters spend their time "lighting, smoking, and putting out . . . cigarettes."

92. Rubins, Josh. "Foundling Fiction." *The New York Review of Books* 33 (1987): 14–15.

Complements Erdrich's command of large-scale storytelling as compared to fragmentation of *LM*. Posits that lyrical imagery is not as distracting as it sometimes is in *LM*. Admires tragicomic avoidance of sentimentality. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

93. Silko, Leslie. "Here's an Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf." *Impact/Albuquerque Journal*, 8 Oct. 1986: 10–11. Reprinted in *Studies in American Indian Literature* 10 (1986): 177–84.

Admires prose style, but derides "academic, postmodern, so-called experimental influences" (178–79) that emphasize the power of words at the cost of their referential quality. Suggests that Erdrich is ambivalent about her Native American heritage. From Perez-Castillo {42}.

94. Simon, Linda. "Small Gestures, Large Patterns." *Commonweal*, 24 Oct. 1986: 565-67.

Proposes that life happens to *BQ*'s characters, they do not choose it. Contrasts bizarre events to prosaic characters. Says intense vignettes make it a poet's novel. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

95. Wickenden, Dorothy. "Off the Reservation." *The New Republic*, 6 Oct. 1986: 46-48.

Observes that characters' unhappiness is comically portrayed. Laments minor imperfection of a contrived ending. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

### Tracks

96. Disch, Thomas M. "Enthralling Tale: Louise Erdrich's World of Love and Survival." *Chicago Tribune—Books*, 4 Sept. 1988: 1+.

Delights in the skilled plot, portrayal of sexuality and celebration of the survivor. Says she eclipses the efforts of others of her generation. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

97. Strouse, Jan. "In the Heart of the Heartland." *New York Times Book Review* 2 Oct. 1988: 41-42.

Summarizes plot. Notes emphasis on the power of storytelling. Finds *T* more didactic than *BQ* or *LM* in its portrayal of good and evil. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

98. Towers. "Roughing It." *New York Review of Books*, 19 Nov. 1988: 40-41.

Complains that the "Native American Gothic" emphasis on vengeance and violence is exploitive and overwhelming. Says it does not live up to potential. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

99. Vigderman, Patricia. *Boston Review*, 3 Oct. 1988: 22-23.

Refers to *T*'s connection between human and nonhuman nature, noting Fleur's alliance with nature and Pauline's obstruction of it. Laments that the narrative of an insane Pauline detracts from the novel's sense of humanity. From *Contemporary Literary Criticism* {24}.

### General Reviews

100. Owens. "Acts of Recovery: The American Indian Novel in the '80's." *Western American Literature* 22:1 (1987): 53-57.

Praises accomplishments of Native American writers in the 1980s, including Erdrich, Welch, and Dorris. Claims Erdrich's light touch does not make the reader feel guilty. Proposes that *BQ* is more tightly written than *LM*.

## Other Works Cited

### By Erdrich

101. *Baptism of Desire: Poems*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.
102. *The Bingo Palace*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
103. *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
104. *Jacklight: Poems*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984.
105. *Tales of Burning Love: A Novel*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

### With Michael Dorris

106. *The Crown of Columbus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991. With Michael Dorris.

## Other Secondary Works Cited

107. Pearlman, Mickey. "A Bibliography of Writings about Louise Erdrich." In *American Women Writing Fiction: Memory, Identity, Family, Space*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989.
108. ———. "A Bibliography of Writings by Louise Erdrich." In *American Women Writing Fiction: Memory, Identity, Family, Space*.

## NOTES

1. The last novel, *The Bingo Palace* (102), was published too recently to have received much scholarly analysis; therefore it has not been included in this survey.

2. Mickey Pearlman (107 and 108) has done exhaustive bibliographies of early works by and about Louise Erdrich. The first includes separately published works, many of which were later incorporated into her novels, and the second includes short articles published in the popular media.

3. Indeed these references are so ubiquitous that after a point they became invisible, so that not every mention of them is described in the annotations.

4. Please note that, in this instance as well, no attempt was made to note each occurrence of a very pervasive observation.

5. It is interesting that no one mentions stereotyping in discussions of the Trickster character.

6. Since Erdrich's own commentary on her work is germane to these issues, interviews that fit into the context of discussion of the three novels have been included in the bibliography.

7. This observation probably applies to my own annotations as well, since the simplest way to give a point a reference seems to be to name characters.

8. Rather than categorize this material in a way that could prove more misleading than helpful, the organizational method here has been kept very simple. Attempting to list these works in terms of theme would have resulted in a number of interesting categories of only one entry, like Paulo Medeiros's (11) discussion of eating disorders in *LM*, Hanne Tang Grodal's (53) comments on translating Erdrich's work, and Gretchen Bataille's (18) definition of *BQ* as a "grotesque" novel.