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Winter 2001

**Review of *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* By Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton & *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* Edited by Allan Chavkin**

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Hafen, P. Jane, "Review of *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* By Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton & *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* Edited by Allan Chavkin" (2001). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2271.

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*A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich.* By Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999. Bibliography, index + 265 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

*The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich.* Edited by Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999. Selected bibliography, contributors, index, viii + 213 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Both of these recent publications support Professor A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's observation that Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) is the author most studied in recent

literary criticism of American Indian literatures (Chavkin 182). While Erdrich may be the object of much study and discussion, the accuracy and usefulness vary widely.

The stronger of the two books, Peter Beidler and Gay Barton's *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich*, carefully presents time lines, genealogies, geographic identifications, and character definitions. As a study guide, the approach thoroughly clarifies, delineates, and cross-references the complicated relationships among Erdrich's characters, places, and times. This meticulousness, however, is also the book's weakness; the authors have imposed a linear and categorical template on Erdrich's nonlinear tales and tribal and communal relationships. By fixing interpretations, kinships, and places, this encyclopedic critical approach loses the essence of Erdrich's narrative enchantments and suggestive ambiguities.

The collection of essays, *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*, edited by Allan Chavkin, is disappointing. Although published in 1999, the essayists seem caught off guard by the 1996 publication of Erdrich's novel, *Tales of Burning Love*. Several of the essays erroneously refer to *The Bingo Palace* (1994) as her most recent novel and then tack on undeveloped references to *Tales of Burning Love*. Most glaringly, Catherine Rainwater's essay on ethnic semiotics wrongly concludes Lipsha freezes to death in the end of *The Bingo Palace* when *Tales of Burning Love* affirms his survival.

Other essays have inexplicable omissions: William J. Scheick's analysis of "A Wedge of Shade" does not consider how Erdrich reworks the short story for a chapter bearing the same title in *Tales of Burning Love*. Robert F. Gish similarly fails to regard Erdrich's poem "Jacklight" in his discussion of hunting as metaphor in *Love Medicine*, even though Annette Van Dyke explains the Jacklight/hunting sexual metaphor in her essay on "Female Power in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." Van Dyke suggestively refers to a Chippewa feminine vision quest, but does not support

the idea or consider earlier studies by Patricia Albers and Bea Medicine on female power in gender complementary relationships. Likewise, Nancy J. Peterson's essay on "Indi'n Humor and Trickster Justice in *The Bingo Palace*" provides an inadequate cultural context for the Chippewa trickster or trickster in general, although the discussion does offer details of American Indian gaming legal decisions. And while Chavkin evaluates the political implications of the revised and expanded text of *Love Medicine*, he does not place the modifications within the tribal context of oral tradition of telling and retelling narratives.

The strongest essays in the collection are John Purdy's discussion of gambling and chance and Robert A. Morace's Bakhtinian reading of the carnivalesque in Erdrich's works. Brown Ruoff's afterword offers personal insight into the development of Erdrich's literary career. Along with Nancy Feyl Chavkin, the editor has compiled a selected bibliography of primary and secondary sources. As a whole, however, the collection falls short of providing the Chippewa context for Erdrich's writings that its title provocatively suggests.

Both *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* and *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* subordinate Erdrich's writings to their respective critical approaches. While each may be somewhat useful, clearly a Chippewa tribal and culturally based criticism of Erdrich's works is still needed. In the meantime, Erdrich's own work eludes and transcends most critics who attempt to apprehend her.

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