

ENG 490: Louise Erdrich
Dr. Sheila Hassell Hughes
Fall 2007

class meetings: T-Th 12-1:15pm / HM 344
office hours: T-Th 10:30-11:30am in HM 279; W 10am-12noon in AL 208; and by appointment
phone/e-mail: 229-4285 (HM); 229-4290 (AL); sheila.hughes@notes.udayton.edu
quickplace: <http://quickplace.udayton.edu/QuickPlace/erdrich490/Main.nsf>

Description

Since her first book, *Love Medicine*, won the National Book Critic's Circle Award in 1984, Louise Erdrich has emerged as the most prolific and widely-read American Indian writer today. She is best known for the saga now known as the "Matchimanitou" or "Little No Horse" series of novels. In these, Erdrich crafts a fictional world overflowing with complex characters whose fates and families intertwine over the better part of a century in the imagined town of Argus, North Dakota and on the nearby Little No Horse Ojibwe reservation. Faulkneresque in many ways, these novels present an enticing if tangled web of connections. In this seminar, we will read a handful of novels from this series, brief selections from her poetry and memoirs, and a range of critical and theoretical sources from the fields of literary studies, Native American studies, religious studies, and women's studies. Issues of literary and cultural tradition, orality and textuality, spirituality and religion, ethnic identity and cultural survival, and gender and sexuality will be highlighted. The course draws from and builds upon various approaches with the aim of offering a "big picture" of Erdrich's work, clarifying how the different cultural traditions and themes at play in her work relate to the grandest questions of human meaning.

Students may earn credit toward the Women's and Gender Studies major or minor for this course. Consult the instructor for more information.

Texts

Louise Erdrich. *Love Medicine* (1984). Revised and Expanded Edition (1993).*

---. *Tracks* (1988)

---. *The Bingo Palace* (1994)

---. *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001)

---. *The Master Butcher's Singing Club* (2003)

---. *The Painted Drum* (2005)

Peter Beidler and Gay Barton. *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich*. Revised and Expanded Edition (2006).*

*Students MUST use the new editions of these texts.

NOTE: Each student will be required to read one additional book by Erdrich in addition to the course list. Options include the novels *The Beet Queen* (1986), *The Crown of Columbus* (with Michael Dorris, 1991), *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), *The Antelope Wife* (1998), and *Four Souls* (2004); the memoirs *The Blue Jays Dance: A Birth Year* (1995) and *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (2003); and the poetry collections *Jacklight* (1984), *Baptism of Desire* (1989), and *Original Fire: New and Selected Poems* (2004). Each student will make her or his selection mid-way through the term, in consultation with the instructor.

Requirements

The following requirements are tentative and open to negotiation:

- 20% **thorough preparation and active participation** in seminar discussion
- 20% **five informal query papers** of 2-3 pages each (1 on each novel, with one "pass" allowed). Because these short papers are meant to serve as preparation and prompts for discussion, they are due at the beginning of class on the date scheduled and will not be accepted late.
- 10% **a "close reading" paper**, of 4-5 pages, on a passage from one novel or one poem
- 5% **an original review**, of 2-4 pages, of an additional Erdrich book, selected in consultation with the instructor. The review should situate the book in relation to Erdrich's opus, identify and comment upon its particular points of strength or interest, and incorporate your own personal but informed response to the book. Reviews will be shared with the class and we will discuss the reviews and the chosen texts in class together.
- 15% **a formal presentation**, introducing the class to a contextual issue relevant to Erdrich's writing. Presentations should be at least 15 and no more than 30 minutes long. They should be based on research in disciplines outside of purely literary studies (e.g. history, sociology, health studies, or interdisciplinary American Indian studies) and should incorporate American Indian sources and perspectives. The presentation may be used as partial groundwork for the research paper, if relevant. Suggested topics/issues are identified in the syllabus schedule, but other topics/issues will be considered and, if approved, scheduled at appropriate points in the semester.
- 30% **a formal research paper**, presenting an original argument about some aspect of Erdrich's work. The paper may be primarily a researched literary analysis, presenting an interpretive argument about one or more of Erdrich's works, or it may be more interdisciplinary in approach. In any case, however, it should demonstrate sufficient understanding of the socio-historical issues that impinge upon the text and are most relevant to the writer's interpretation. Several preliminary deadlines are identified on the course schedule. These are requirements, not suggestions. Note that an **annotated list of works consulted** must accompany the paper.

Details for all assignments will be distributed in class or posted to QuickPlace well in advance.

I expect deadlines to be respected, and late papers will typically be penalized by 1/3 letter grade (+/-) per day. Extensions on some assignments MAY be granted under extenuating circumstances, but I make no promises on this. Students should consult with me in advance if they anticipate a problem meeting a particular deadline.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. At minimum, plagiarism will result in failure of the assignment in question. An egregious case of academic dishonesty (e.g. presenting a professional book review or other piece authored by another as one's own composition) will result in failure of the course.

The following reading schedule is meant as a guideline and is subject to revision throughout the semester. Additional short readings -- poems, interviews, critical articles, etc. -- will also be assigned throughout the semester to supplement the novels listed below.

| | Date | Assigned Readings / Topics | Assignments Due |
|----|-------------|---|--|
| T | Aug 21 | Introductions to each other, to the course, and to Erdrich as an American Indian and "mixed-blood" writer | |
| Th | Aug 23 | <i>Tracks</i> ch. 1-3 | |
| T | Aug 28 | <i>Tracks</i> ch. 4-6 | query paper #1 |
| Th | Aug 30 | <i>Tracks</i> ch. 7-9 | |
| T | Sep 4 | <i>Tracks</i> cont. Hughes, Sheila Hassell. " Tongue-Tied: Rhetoric and Relation in Louise Erdrich's <i>Tracks</i>. " <i>MELUS</i> 25.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2000): 87-116. (MLA on-line) Gross, Lawrence W. " The Trickster and World Maintenance: An Anishinaabe Reading of Louise Erdrich's <i>Tracks</i>. " <i>Studies in American Indian Literatures</i> 17.3 (2005): 48-66. (MLA on-line) | |
| Th | Sep 6 | <i>Love Medicine</i> (through "The Beads") | - |
| T | Sep 11 | <i>Love Medicine</i> (through "The Red Convertible") The Failing State of Native American Women's Health (QP) Childhood Abuse Linked to Alcoholism (QP) Chemistry and the Rez (QP) | query paper #2 |
| Th | Sep 13 | <i>Love Medicine</i> (through "Resurrection") | |
| T | Sep 18 | <i>Love Medicine</i> (to the end) | - |
| Th | Sep 20 | <i>Love Medicine</i> Circle of Stories (QP link) Ojibwe Oral Tradition @ Waasa Inaabidaa (QP) Wong, Hertha D. Sweet. "Louise Erdrich's <i>Love Medicine</i> : Narrative Communities and the Short Story Cycle" (QP) Treuer, David. "Smartberries" (excerpt from <i>Native American Fiction: A Users Guide</i>) (QP) | |
| T | Sep 25 | <i>The Bingo Palace</i> ch. 1-7 | |
| Th | Sep 27 | <i>The Bingo Palace</i> ch. 8-14 Pasquaretta, Paul. "Sacred Chance: Gambling and the Contemporary Native American Indian Novel." <i>MELUS</i> 21.2 (Summer 1996): 21-33. (MLA on-line) Casinos: Is Gaming the New Buffalo? (QP) Indian Gaming News (QP) | query paper #3 |
| T | Oct 2 | <i>The Bingo Palace</i> ch. 15-21 The Cultural Conservancy (QP) | - |
| Th | Oct 4 | <i>The Bingo Palace</i> ch. 22-27 | Close Reading Paper |
| T | Oct 9 | <i>Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse</i> Prologue & Part I Connie Jacobs, "A History of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians" (handout) | |
| Th | Oct 11 | Fall Break | |
| T | Oct 16 | <i>Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse</i> Part II Erdrich, "Christ's Twin" & "Fooling God" (poems / handout) | query paper #4 |
| Th | Oct 18 | <i>Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse</i> Part III Presentation: Indigenous Traditions of Gender and Sexual Diversity | Presentation : Shelley |
| T | Oct 23 | <i>Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse</i> Part IV, Epilogue & Endnotes. Erdrich, "The Seven Sleepers" (poem / handout) | |
| Th | Oct 25 | <i>Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse</i> Presentation: Missionization and Conversion of American Indians | Presentation: Kevin |
| T | Oct 30 | <i>The Master Butcher's Singing Club</i> ch. 1-4 | |

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| Th | Nov 1 | <i>The Master Butcher's Singing Club</i> ch. 5-8 | query paper #5 |
| T | Nov 6 | <i>The Master Butcher's Singing Club</i> ch. 9-12 | Research Paper (RP)Topic |
| W | Nov 7 | Marilou Awiakta – 7pm, Science Center Auditorium [other Native American Awareness Week events TBA as well] | |
| Th | Nov 8 | <i>The Master Butcher's Singing Club</i> ch. 13-16 Erdrich, "The Butcher's Wife" (poems / handout) | |
| T | Nov 13 | <i>The Painted Drum</i> Part I | query paper #6 |
| Th | Nov 15 | <i>The Painted Drum</i> Part II A Line in the Sand (QP) Who Owns Native Culture (QP) Indian Wannabes (Blue Corn Comics / QP) | Preliminary list of works to be consulted for RP |
| T | Nov 20 | & <i>The Painted Drum</i> Part III & IV Thanksgiving: A National Day of Mourning for Indians (QP) | |
| Th | Nov 22 | Thanksgiving Break | |
| T | Nov 27 | <i>The Painted Drum</i> | |
| Th | Nov 29 | Book review discussion. | Book reviews |
| T | Dec 4 | Wrap-up & course evaluations | draft of RP & annotated list of works consulted |
| Th | Dec 6 | Individual Conferences on Research Paper Draft | |
| T | Dec 11 | No final exam | Final Research Paper & annotated list of works consulted – due in my mailbox by 12 noon . |