
Puzzle Pieces and Parts Becoming Whole: Toward a Tribalography of Erdrich

Shirley Samuels*¹

¹Cornell University – United States

Abstract

From my experience on the panel on Howe and her idea of tribalography at the first "First Nations" MLA in Vancouver, I have been rethinking my work in progress on Erdrich, as she continues to create and experiment with story and point of view in her work. One of the primary experimenters with juxtaposition of story in cycles that have, as Faulkner did, necessitated genealogies, Erdrich's narratives emerge in patterned connections to make wheeling constellations. This presentation, drawing on more than one novel, begins with *Love Medicine*, which itself began as a series of stories that through Erdrich's later novels has been transformed to become more and more constructed. Erdrich's long, and long unpublished *Tracks*, has been likened by the author to a car on concrete blocks, an abandoned vehicle, whose parts she cannibalized as she wrote other fictions. *Tracks*, with its two alternating narrators, one with a reader defending the absent mother and the other abandoned and motherless, articulates an order that articulates the spaces in between, using a sharp counter-punctual binary to plait and plead for wholeness. My contribution to this discussion comes from imagining what Erdrich's most divergent narrative experiments in stories becoming novels accomplish with each accreting season, supporting Howe's thesis on tribalography as a form that reverses cultural genocide. This reading of Erdrich and the complex interconnectedness of subjectivities in her oeuvre also, by definition, critiques the fiction cum novel of the singular self constituted through the privileged and individualist plot of the Bildungsroman.

*Speaker