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The Antelope Wife. By Louise Erdrich. New York: HarperCollins, 1998. 240 pages. \$24.00 cloth; \$13.00 paper.

For the benefit of admirers of Louise Erdrich's earlier five novels, let me state right from the start that her sixth novel is emphatically *not* what the dust-jacket blurb says it is: "*The Antelope Wife* extends the branches of the families who populate Louise Erdrich's earlier, award-winning novels." No, no. Beyond one vague and undeveloped reference to a very minor character who goes south where he "stops" with "a Pillager woman" and is "lost" (p. 35), there is no overlap between the characters in this novel and the characters in the earlier novels. This new novel is set in and around Minneapolis, not further west on the unnamed North Dakota reservation of *Love Medicine* (1984, 1993), *Tracks* (1988), and *The Bingo Palace* (1994), or the towns of Argus and Fargo, North Dakota, where many of the events of *The Beet Queen* (1986) and *Tales of Burning Love* (1996) take place.

Most readers will rightfully celebrate this new novel. They will take pleasure in its language and memorable scenes. They will enjoy the humor and the happy ending. They will immerse themselves in the family Christmas party, reminiscent of the Kashpaw family gathering in the first chapter of *Love Medicine*. They will be pleased to see Erdrich take advantage of her fame to try new things, like having a woman be part antelope and having a dog tell a dirty joke. They will appreciate her insistence on blurring the lines between the human and animal worlds and her exploration of the subtle geography of family relationships.

The Antelope Wife, however, is not an easy read. Some readers, having lost the narrative thread of this maddeningly complex novel, will not finish it, wondering where the plot got bogged down. Some who do finish it will wonder what is gained by giving us so many names and characters whose purpose or function are not clear until a second reading—if then. Some will both yearn for and resent the need for genealogical charts. Some will find confirmation in their suspicion that Erdrich is more comfortable writing short stories than novels, and that her efforts to combine stories into a novel leaves both too many plots and too many gaps. They will not quite see what is gained by coupling a story about a Cavalry officer who suckles a baby with a story about a trash collector who abducts a deer-woman, with a story about another trash collector who accidentally kills his daughter, with a story about a German prisoner of war who makes a delicious cake, with a story about a man who marries one twin and has an affair with the other, and so on.

Despite these kinds of criticisms, some of them valid enough, *The Antelope Wife* will enhance Erdrich's reputation as a writer who risks brilliant failure to achieve glowing success. Through Cally Roy, the dominant consciousness of much of the novel, we come to probe the relationships between the family and the individual, the past and the present, the dominant white culture and the marginalized Indian culture, men and women, parents and children. If the mix of stories and the sweep of generations are puzzling to first-time readers, these readers need to realize, as Cally comes to, that "family stories repeat themselves in patterns and waves generation to generation, across bloods and

time. Once the pattern is set we go on replicating it. . . . From way back our destinies form. I'm trying to see the old patterns in myself and the people I love" (p. 200). If Cally sees the patterns, perhaps she can break free of the most unpleasant or damaging ones. If we learn through her to find such patterns in our own lives, perhaps we too can break free from some of them.

The patterns in *The Antelope Wife* are indeed complicated. Erdrich gives us a whole new set of intertwined characters and their families. Three families dominate: the Roy family, starting in this novel with a Pennsylvania Quaker named Scranton Roy who joins the U.S. Cavalry and takes part in a bloody raid on an Ojibwa village, then deserts and suckles a baby girl that he follows west when the dog she is strapped to runs off; the Shawano family, including an early infusion of blood when an Ivory Coast slave pokes his head into the tent of an Ojibwa girl; and the Whiteheart Beads family, so named when the grandson of Scranton Roy trades some red whiteheart beads for one of two Shawano twins who become his wife. The beads wind up on an embroidered gift to a pregnant Ojibwa woman, whose son loves them so much that he takes them as his name.

Cally Roy is part of all three families: "I am a Roy, a Whiteheart Beads, a Shawano by way of the Roy and Shawano proximity—all in all we make a huge old family lumped together like a can of those mixed party nuts" (p. 110). Readers will find themselves both fascinated and frustrated by these nuts.

The events of *The Antelope Wife*, though they cover at least eight generations, focus primarily on the 1990s. The past events are important but serve mainly as prologue and pattern. As usual, Erdrich gives us a rich panoply of characters, the most interesting and successful of whom are women: Blue Prairie Woman, who sees her baby carried off by a dog chased by a murdering white soldier, and who six years later summons her daughter home at the cost of her own life; Sweetheart Calico, the title character, who is carried away from her three daughters by Klaus Shawano; Zosie Roy Shawano, who shares her husband with her twin sister Mary; Rozina, the granddaughter of Scranton Roy and the wife, successively, of Richard Whiteheart Beads and Frank Shawano; and Cally herself, Rozina's daughter, whose twin sister her father Richard Whiteheart Beads had accidentally asphyxiated in a yellow pickup truck.

Although the characters and setting of this novel are new, many of the techniques and themes are extensions of ones we have become familiar with in earlier novels. We have seen people-like animals in the previous novels; here we find people who are part deer. We have seen gender-crossing in the earlier novels; here we have a soldier who suckles at his own breast an Indian baby girl. We have seen confusing family relationships before; here we see four generations of twin girls, two sets with the same first names. We have seen conflicting love and grief before; here we see a wedding night interrupted by the suicide of a former spouse. We have seen Erdrich's extended metaphors before; here we follow from the first page to the last page the metaphor of DNA-like bead-stitching and the patterns the beads make and remake of people's lives.

The Antelope Wife reveals an acceptance of past pain and a genuine hope for growth and peace that mark this novel as somewhat different from

Erdrich's earlier fiction. It is very much about the need to give up what we love and move on. Blue Prairie Woman refuses to give up her daughter Matilda, and pays with her own life for temporary reunion with that daughter. Klaus refuses to let his antelope wife, Sweetheart Calico, return to the open spaces, and pays the price for his selfishness by becoming a miserable alcoholic; only when he lets her go does he become free himself. Richard refuses to let Rozin go, and pays the price for holding on with his daughter's life and, eventually, with his own. Frank Shawano, on the other hand, by letting Rozin come to him of her own free will and by not insisting too much on his own needs, is rewarded with a woman he can both love and respect. In *The Antelope Wife* Erdrich refers to a sense of humor as "an Indian's seventh sense" (p. 115). It is encouraging that Frank, whose loneliness had caused him to lose his ability to laugh, regains it on his first anniversary.

Perhaps what is most new—and most welcome—in *The Antelope Wife* is the philosophical bent to the novel. The metaphor of beadwork takes us to the enigmatic core of the meaning of life and death in the novel. As the beads appear, disappear, and reappear in varying designs, we struggle with Cally to make sense of a chaotic world. How can a novel that starts with the pointless killing of defenseless Indians in a miscalculated Cavalry raid on a sleeping Ojibwa village, that proceeds through misery and near starvation and disfiguring disease and death-in-childbirth and death-by-suicide, end in love and peace and laughter? At the end Cally asks, "Who is beading us? . . . Who are you and who am I, the beader or the bit of colored glass sewn onto the fabric of this earth? All these questions, they tug at the brain. We stand on tiptoe, trying to see over the edge, and only catch a glimpse of the next bead on the string, the woman's hand moving, one day, the next, and the needle flashing over the horizon" (p. 240).

In this new novel, as not before, we sense that Erdrich herself is seeking the larger pattern in the mixed-up beadwork of human existence. We can all be pleased that one of America's finest writers continues to grow, even out of personal tragedy, that she continues to write, and that she continues to keep the sharp silver of her own pen flashing over the horizon.

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Apocalypse of Chiokoyhikoy: Chief of the Iroquois. By Robert Griffin and Donald A. Grinde, Jr. Preface by Denis Vaugeois. Laval (Québec): Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997. 271 pages. \$27 cloth.

The *Apocalypse* reclaims a 1777 French text from near oblivion, reproducing the original pamphlet along with commentaries on its historical, cultural, and archivist significance by Grinde, Griffin, and Vaugeois, respectively. Masquerading as an Iroquoian vision, the apocalyptic prophecy was actually a foil for a satirical critique of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French colonial politics, ultimately advocating French support of the American Revolution.