

Structures of Urban Poverty in Greg Sarris's *Grand Avenue*
Reginald Dyck

Literary critics have given considerably more attention to Native identity and culture than economics and social relations. Yet from its first sentence, Love Medicine is saturated with economic details that entail class conflicts. Also, with traditional work mostly destroyed, characters must participate in alienating forms of modern labor. This essay uses two reading strategies to analyze how economic structures, class hierarchies and work cultures shape characters' lives both on and off the reservation.

The first emphasizes the ways socioeconomic status impinges on characters' sense of identity. Here we see June Morrissey's struggle to maintain her dignity when facing the crushing economically inflected ethnic hierarchies in reservation border towns. We also see Marie's lifelong struggle to gain acceptance transform her lowest-class status as a "dirty Lazarre."

The second reading strategy uses class as an occupational position to consider Lipsha and Lyman in their work settings. No other contemporary Native novel has as much to say about work and work culture. Lipsha experiences the exploitative conditions of the industrial workforce when the tomahawk factory becomes the new community center, yet he also makes his living as a healer. He offers some hope that tribal traditions can survive, even under the conditions the novel depicts. Lyman as entrepreneur and bureaucrat extraordinaire is more thoroughly lost within the capitalist values of modern work culture. Love Medicine shows the oppressive quality of this work, yet in the end its critique is absorbed into personal solutions. Louise Erdrich imagines no structural remedy.

While these two approaches emphasize different aspects of class analysis, they both understand its hierarchies as forms of domination and exploitation. Erdrich sensitively represents her characters' painful struggles to find well being within systems of oppression.

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