
“ . . . just crushing silence like the inside of a drum before the stick drops”: *Zwischenraum* as a Site for Productive Silences in Louise Erdrich’s *The Painted Drum*

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Literature, by its very nature, breaks silence and counters the blank page or the empty spaces. In a broader sense, fiction plays a crucial role for imagining the stories of the silent, the silenced, and their missing voices in the tomes of history; in the context of colonial and despotic narratives, silence is not a choice but imposed. Literature, however, can imagine agency where there was none, and it can offer insights into selective silence, or intervals of silence. While I do not dispute that literature “speaks” and books “talk”¹ to their audiences, I argue that inadequate attention has been given to the ruse and power of silences in contemporary literatures.

Literature spatializes silence and transitions to reveal selected moments for silence to speak. I contend that the importance of *Zwischenraum*, or in between spaces, in Erdrich’s novel, *The Painted Drum*, acts as a site for productive silences,² or intervals of transitions. Silence as an in between space enables a writer, like Erdrich’s character Faye Travers, to create new narrative skeins and fuse them with narratives of influence—that is to say, the continuum of all narratives, oral, written, and fusion of both. Furthermore, I propose that a closer reading of *Zwischenraum* as a metaphor for narrative creation offers insights into Faye’s social silence and her perceived withdrawal from the world; upon finding the eponymous drum, the one-quarter Ojibwe Faye Travers redefines *Zwischenraum* as she accepts her individual, familial, Anishinabe, and U.S. literary narratives to efface divisive lines of demarcation and redraw them as narrative threads linking people and their stories to each other.

Erdrich’s novel opens and closes with the point of view of Faye Travers, a fifty-something estate appraiser who resides in rural New Hampshire with Elsie, her mother and business partner. Living on the historic Revival Road with its connotations of spiritual rebirth, Faye ties herself to her mother with a profound sense of filial duty, companionship, and their shared sorrow for losing her young sister Netta. She also engages in a nocturnal relationship, which is not discussed or publicly declared, with the road’s resident sculptor Kurt Krahe, who has lost his wife and more recently his teen-aged daughter Kendra. While the lives of this road’s residents are entwined, Faye maintains an emotional distance from Kurt and her neighbors. The same car accident that kills Kendra claims the life of two

other Revival Road residents: Kendra's friend, the car's driver, Davan Eyke and the former Indian agent John Jewett Tatro. As a direct result of Tatro's death, the Travers women are called to manage the Tatro estate where Faye discovers a powerful Ojibwe painted drum. Faye's theft of the drum marks its eventual return to the Ojibwe people, specifically the novel's second narrator, Bernard Shawaano, who narrates the communal history of the drum. Present, but silent, Faye and her mother Elsie travel to meet their Ojibwe relatives. They listen to Bernard narrate the drum's origins and how it came to contain the bones of a little girl who was Bernard's aunt. Associated with noise and sound, the drum is silent about its origins, which marks an interval of silence, and its silence is broken by narrative. Viewed as a living being, the drum reunites the Ojibwe community and inspires its narratives, oral and written, to be shared again. *Zwischenraum* marks a unique conception of space where the drum's hushed influence joins Faye's soundless, written story to illuminate the universal power of narrative. In *Native American Fiction*, native novelist and critic David Treuer suggests that readers of *Love Medicine* "[look] at it as literary production in relation to other literary products," which can be carried over to Erdrich's novels and American Indian literature (68).

To foreground the power of silence, I find Cheryl Glenn's work on the rhetoric of silence invaluable. While the scope of Glenn's writings is informed by Western rhetorical tradition and draws from U.S. culture at large, Glenn argues in *Unspoken* that "silence is too often read as simple passivity in situations where it has actually taken on an expressive power: when it denotes alertness and sensitivity, when it signifies attentiveness or stoicism, and particularly when it allows new voices to be heard" (18). Inherited from the Athenian polis and the canonical writings of Aristotle, our Western value of eloquent speech, albeit sophistry, as Glenn reminds us, remains an instrument of power; those in power speak to seize the audience's attention and to silence these "nonprestigious people," which would have included women, "devalued the silent rhetorical display" (20). To complement her own understanding of chosen silence and its power as a feminist tool for resistance, Glenn acknowledges that "we inhabit silence constantly—as we think, in the spaces between our words, as we wait for others to finish their speaking, in our preoccupation" (13). Furthermore, as Cynthia Ryan reminds us in her response essay, "[s]ilence, as a rhetorical art, must be strategically timed and placed (that is, kairotic) to serve a productive rather than unproductive function" (669). In the dialogic, silence too "speaks"; like speech for the great rhetoricians, silence's meaning, as Glenn argues and appropriates, hinges upon or is determined by context, timing, and place, or *kairos* (263). In reading the rhetorical function of silences in literature, the written narrative reveals chosen silences, where writing

may purposefully replace speech because it requires a nonverbal space for reflection. The *kairos* of silence is linked to the potential of *Zwischenraum* for the character of Faye Travers in Louise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum*.³

To observe in silence allows a character to listen and quietly record, or narrate. Faye's presence in the world as a silent bystander enables her to document and cite her lover's ability to self-define through both his stone sculptures and his German peppered English. As the novel's bookend narrator, Faye cites her lover Kurt Krahe's claims that "he has fallen in to what he calls the *Zwischenraum*, the space between things," when his artistic production has been fruitless (6). Instead of describing a sculpture, Kurt describes his own existence in terms of his creations, or lack thereof. For a sculptor who has not completed a piece in many years, we infer that he finds himself in a creative rut, or he feels blocked. Art and creating art are equated with productivity and a positive space; the space between things, for the sculptor Kurt, is an uncreative space, or a metaphorical negative space. Furthermore, one of the definitions extended to negative space is the space between or around the main object. For the visual arts, positive space exists in relation to negative space; in-between-ness and the space between things is not nothingness but relational, which better explains Faye's initial adoption of the term.

In her written documentation, Faye silently co-opts Kurt's word and state of being when she adds, "*Zwischenraum* is real. It is the way I see the world sometimes" (6). Through the German word, Faye gives weight and presence to her distinctive perspective, which, she implies, is ineffable in the English language. She also understands the term to articulate both a world view and a site of transition and becoming, but not a space of emptiness. Instead of accepting language's inadequacy and marginalization of certain spaces, she adopts a foreign word to give "in-between-ness" a site; she conveys that the space between things, or the negative space, matters as much as the space those things occupy. In the case of human existence, our lives are bracketed by two markers: birth and death; whatever its duration, life is the space between. Ultimately, Faye understands she plays a minor role in a larger story and in nature; as a result, she accepts her place and "biodegradability" in the organic world (32). Although Kurt employs *Zwischenraum* for his "in-between-ness" and absent creativity, Faye moves towards abstraction to reveal what she perceives to be patterns in her emotional and physical landscapes. For Faye, we might understand *Zwischenraum* as the site for observation between the event and narration, and therefore as a site for productive silences; this site reconfigures "negative space" as a site for stored potential, whose key function in the larger narrative of the community and its artifacts where silent

observations evolve to become something else.

The novel's very structure not only questions the relationship between positive and negative spaces, it makes one wonder which of the narratives is the novel's focal point. Parts One and Four, narrated in the first person by the character of Faye Travers, encase what appears to be the central story of the drum in Part Two in Bernard's and Fleur's points of view. Linking the novel's four parts are the complex mother-daughter relationships and the roles of the sister in the characters' lives.⁴ Near the end of Part One, Faye finally discloses the circumstances around her sister's death and her fear, which she quells with silent reflections: "Thinking saved me" (94); thoughts may precede speech and written acts.⁵ Abruptly taking over the role of the first-person narrator for the novel and its long-gone characters in Part Two, Bernard allows the readers a glimpse of Faye and reminds the audience of Faye's role as a silent, but receptive listener in this section, which offers a playful inquiry into literature's use and manipulation of silences. Bernard begins in silence by listening to the gathered women, Chook, Geraldine, Faye and Elsie, and ponders that the latter two women do not know their family history and its link to the drum. "So I tell them," he ironically indicates quietly to himself (107). And through him, Fleur narrates.

Upon further reflection and narrative progression, the structural play between Bernard's orally simulated narrative (Part Two) and Faye's internal one (Parts One and Four) moves from a subtle to stark contrast in audience, voice, and conceptions of space and time. Like Nanapush in *Tracks*, Bernard informs readers that his audience of listeners is present.⁶ However, Bernard's narrative distinguishes itself from Faye's as communal because his voice contains another voice. His story also belongs to the collective where he underscores telling as a way of sharing the narrative and its telling space: now. In the vein of the storyteller and historian, he sustains his use of the first person to impart the legendary Fleur Pillager's point of view; Bernard transmits what Fleur has told him in the chapter entitled, "The Wolves": "From this old Pillager lady, I learned the next part of what I'm going to tell you" (122). The "I" that appears next is not Bernard's but Fleur Pillager's "I," breaking her narrative silence in the Erdrich's preceding novels to tell the story of her mother's love for a man and her half-sister's death.⁷ Bernard's voice becomes Fleur's, catching readers unawares as we must actively bridge the interstitial gaps in the plot and in the characters' point of view.⁸ Faye's, Bernard's, and now Fleur's respective narratives underscore the need to further examine the crucial roles of silence—or what Glenn calls the rhetorical art of silence—and *Zwischenraum* in the novel.

Surrounded by creations in the natural and human worlds, Faye informs the

reader that she observes, documents, or “at least record[s] connections” in her leather-bound journal (5). The subject of her records reiterates the importance Faye places on relationships. Faye’s profession and keen observation skills allow her to create order; a go-between, she is called on by the living to arrange the affairs of the dead. As if she were merely background, or somehow forgettable, Faye moves discreetly through the estates she manages and the landscape of her New Hampshire town. Often solitary and silent, but ever watchful and orderly, Faye confides, “My purpose in life is to pay attention and to remember” (79). Here, her self-description reveals her *raison d’être* to memorialize. She does both when she describes the synesthesia of the natural world around her, her intricate world views, people, and the memories within her. Her writings give her otherwise undeclared memories substance. Annually, Faye orders a red hardbound notebook. When she states matter-of-factly, “I am writing as usual in my daily journal,” she confirms her record of unspoken thoughts and silent observations (20). Moreover, she values the word whose power resonates in cross-cultural narratives, such as the Bible and oral texts. My reading of Faye’s character echoes Thoreau’s ideas on writing: “A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself” because the written word, unlike a tableau or sculpture, is “carved out of the breath of life itself” (67). Faye does not name her written words as “relics” or as “art,” but, through writing, she testifies to the everlasting power of words. By contrast, Kurt’s standstill in his sculptural production is impacted by his internalized sense of importance in the art world. Again, thirty-three books occupy Faye’s shelves; as memories of substance, the books and their inked relics occupy a definitive space and testify to her life. If not publically, but privately, Faye adopts the Euro-American legacy of the printed word. As she comes to learn more about the drum and her maternal family history, Faye writes and enacts what Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls “the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance” (109).

Moreover, as a writer, Faye’s character prefers written documentation, so we infer—and she confirms—she is not a loquacious character. Instead of retelling what she says, she narrates in ink what she observes, leaving the reader to wonder how much her silence in the presence of others yields to the lyrical observations she records internally and in the journals she keeps. Erdrich’s novel gives us several examples of Faye’s awareness of her silent presence and others’ response, or lack thereof, to her. In one scene, driving to town, she offers a ride to Kit Tatro, a sociable, soul-searching neighbor and relative of the deceased Tatro to whom she utters all of eight words (*Painted* 52-53). In another instance, she

observes her friend Kurt with the teenaged Davan, “Locked in their man-space, they do not acknowledge me” (18-19), and “I can see the black web between them” (19).⁹ When burdened with the pending news of Kurt’s daughter’s death, Faye brings him an abrupt, prefatory comment about the accident *before* falling silent; she omits the essential information of his daughter’s death. In her muteness, she employs both synesthesia and metonymy when she compares her heart to a hinged door, a connecting, well-used item, “[her] heart creaks shut” (25). In her psychoanalytic reading of the novel’s imagery, Jean Wyatt views Faye’s use of bodily imagery in Part One as a highly guarded inner sanctum whereby Faye can “keep her sister with her and avoid the finality of death” (16); such descriptions support Wyatt’s reading of the section’s imagery as “a melancholic encapsulation of the dead” (17). Furthermore, the metaphor of the hinge would be akin to what Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei expands on as a metaphorical space. Instead of symbolic readings of space in Rilke’s prose, Gosetti-Ferencei argues that there is “not only a “spatiality of consciousness, but the experience of real spaces that illuminate poetic consciousness” (304). If language is the means by which writers articulate how they renegotiate space and its boundaries, and how they translate their experiences, they need silence for reflection and creation. While one’s heart does occupy space in the chest cavity, Faye envisions the heart as an enclosed space to be opened and closed. Instead of the systolic pumping, she imagines her heart makes a different sound—a sound only she can hear—in place of the words she fails to utter. Suspended between utterance and silence, Faye discloses her observations to be of the sensory nature and of abstractions in the form of metaphors such as the aforementioned black web and a hinged, enclosed space.¹⁰

Having established her sense of self as invisible or unremarkable, Faye defines herself as inconspicuous and takes comfort in this self-perception. Her written language enables her to document what she sees, smells, and hears. Through the ritual purchase of the same notebook and the cataloguing required in her profession, Faye illustrates her place between things and between the living and the dead as she is called to document and appraise the contents, or cultural artifacts, of her neighbor’s house. The deceased John Jewett Tatro was a former Indian agent on the Ojibwe reservation, where Faye’s own grandmother, Niiibin’agee, was born and raised until she left for Carlisle. In addition to the drum, Tatro’s collection includes a cradleboard, birch bark baskets, and a variety of beaded attire, all of which are noticed by Niiibin’agee’s half-sister Fleur Pillager, according to the narrator Nanapush, in the novel *Four Souls* (190-1). Entering the Tatro attic, Faye discovers and corroborates that these items— a cradleboard, winnowing baskets, and bandolier bags (*Painted* 38)—once hung on the “loaded walls” of Tatro’s bar

(*Four* 191). These artifacts offer readers of Erdrich's novels a meta-literary skein that shows, through shifting lenses, how narratives are collaborative and ever-changing; Erdrich's novels imply a narrative continuum in their self-referentiality. Unlike Kurt's abstracted stone sculptures, hand-made objects such as these were crafted and created for daily use; a practical connection between the creator and his/her creation exists. In the instance of Kurt, he has fallen between the act of creating and its results; traded for drink and hoarded for its market value, the handmade items in Tatro's loot have fallen out of use as times changed and older technologies are abandoned for newer ones. As an appraiser who happens to be of Ojibwe heritage, Faye recognizes the artistic, cultural, and historical value of the objects in Tatro's possession, which mark the life of and the connections between their creators and the objects' former use. While the life of these things will be explained in Bernard's section, their disuse in Tatro's attic renders their lives or narratives silent until they are found again, or revived, by Faye who brings them out in to the open—that is to say, to life—again.¹¹

Her discovery is not limited to visual appraisals, but unveils the power of scent and links it to time's passing. Connecting her mind with her body's sensory experiences, Faye heeds her olfactory observations, "The rooms are filled with the odor I have grown used to in my work. It is a smell that alerts me, an indefinable scent, really, composed of mothballs and citrus oil, of long settled dust and cracked leather. The smell of old things is what it is" (*Painted* 28). Smell becomes a way of identifying death and marking the continued material survival of inanimate things; it is as if this obscure odor marks a transition between human life and the new life of its relics. But smell itself cannot be captured the way film and digital technologies capture sights (visual) and sounds (aural); they can only be documented with the aid of language. Nevertheless, scents and smells communicate their source and hint at time's presence in spatial terms; we can imagine the life of things through "an indefinable scent" that occupies neither space nor matter. Faye's synesthetic descriptions and her ordering of human artifacts reinforce her role as mediator, or go-between; this role distinguishes her from her neighbors, yet gives her a place in the world among, or in relation to, them.

Silence and sound also make their impact on Faye Travers. First, she perceives silence's disquieting effect on her road after the death of the two young people, Davan and Kendra: "A disturbed hush has fallen upon our road" (46). Through language's first person plural, she gives an implicit nod to her Ojibwe background while textually recognizing the road's role in connecting people. More importantly, Faye's self-anointed purpose is "to pay attention and to remember," in which she succeeds. While she might go unnoticed and keep silent, she does understand her

life as relational when she notes: “I am *part of* the chain of events that began when Davan gunned his engine on Revival Road. And the drum is *part of* it, too, and my taking of it” (emphasis mine, 65). She reminds us of her *Zwischenraum* worldview, by stressing the relational and the continuance of life thorough relationships even in silence.¹²

At times it is unclear whether Faye’s own solitary and silent persona allows her to perceive and hear what others do not. One of the most important moments in the novel is when she discovers the painted drum in the Tatro estate. “[W]hen I step near the drum, I swear it sounds. One deep, low resonant note. I stop dead still, staring at the drum. I hear it, I know I hear it, and yet Sarah Tatro [the deceased’s niece, handling the estate] does not” (39). A drum’s sound comes from contact with another object, such as a baton or a hand, that causes vibrations, yet this drum has not yet been touched by Faye or Sarah. Aware of how this observation might be interpreted, Faye adds, “I don’t just hear things and I’m not subject to imaginative fits” (39). Such observations also reveal Faye’s reflection on her place as intermediary between things, people, and events. Faye’s own silence, arguably, enables her to pay attention and hear what others do not. In a way, she seems to enact her world view as a go-between who mediates from the spaces between seen and unseen, audible and inaudible and finds a language in silence for telling.

It seems befitting then that Faye’s profession consists of managing the affairs of the dead, which she believes sets her and her mother apart from—but needed by—their neighbors. Aligning herself with her mother and (unconsciously) with her Ojibwe heritage, Faye employs the first person plural pronouns,¹³ “But our fascination for the stuff of life, or more precisely, the afterlife of stuff, has always set us apart” (28). Faye’s commentary engages the chiasmus, which plays with syntax and meaning through positioning. Without “things,” she posits that there is nothing for life and memories to wrap themselves around. Without “stuff” there is no demarcation of the positive space for the margins of life to demarcate. Things mark space, without them there is no “in between”—no center, no margins. In a profession that handles the sorrow and the fate of former possessions, Faye’s life and work ensure the continuance and interrelatedness of matter and memories as she fits in gaps between the living and dead, the dead and their things.

For a writer, observer, and survivor of trauma, Faye redefines *Zwischenraum* as a world view where the space between things is articulated as a process of continuance—of living, dying, and becoming—and therefore as a productive silence for creating narrative, which we witness in both Bernard’s and Faye’s narrative sections. Here, I want to focus on Faye’s views about her own life as a

kind of negative space, which highlights the positive space, or importance, of her memories and the objects belonging to the dead. Essentially, her life and how she lives it memorialize her sister's life and death. In Part One of the novel, narrated by Faye, we understand the idea of life, in Faye's perception, as a negative space, whereas memories and objects left behind by the dead act as positive space. The memories of her dead sister Netta outshine Faye's own life and all of its potential. Commenting on the impact of Netta's death, Faye tells her readers that "[o]ver the years I've warped my life around her memory..." (73). Marginalizing her own life as a misshapen perimeter for her sister's life and her memory of that short-lived life, Faye also sees her life as the space, or vessel, for enveloping the sorrow and guilt that breathe life into her sister's memory. We also come to learn that it is not so much the sister's short life around which Faye has bent her own life, but the circumstances of Netta's death.

Zwischenraum, or that space between things, might also be an apt extended metaphor for Faye's place in the world and her life as negative space. When one is in between beliefs and traditions, one has not claimed a place for belonging in those beliefs. One enacts a kind of silence that questions its positioning. However, for Faye, the German—and not an English—word allows for the illusion of another space as place and a site of belonging; appropriating a different language, Faye can name and give a place to her sorrow and guilt, her living and not-quite-living. Apart and yet connected to the untold stories and ideas she doesn't quite own, Faye documents the beliefs and customs of others, which she tailors to fit her life.

Part Ojibwe on her mother's side, Faye does not wholly claim views from that strain, yet she confesses their appeal and how she enacts her beliefs:

Were I a traditional Ojibwe, I would have a special place in the community because of my line of work. . . . Those persons who distribute the objects [of the dead] should not wear the color red—it is the one color the dead are thought to see clearly. It attracts them. They wander toward it. I avoid wearing red in my work, for somehow I find that idea compelling. (33)

In these lines, she silently enacts her belief that the color red attracts the dead; we learn later on from Bernard that Faye and Elsie wear "combinations of black and cream white" and appear "monklike" (103). While Jean Wyatt argues that Faye's transformation includes adopting Ojibwe world-view and beliefs, I would argue that Faye has already internalized them. Faye's observations about the synergistic relationship between life and death and what she calls human "biodegradability" (32) do not reveal Euro-American views of life and death but more interdependent

native views. However, it is not until she emerges from her perceptions of *Zwischenraum* as a dwelling space, or a negative space that is relational, to viewing it as a site for crossing and redrawing boundaries and developing her relationships that she exhibits confidence in, or accepts, her Ojibwe heritage.

Another point she quietly, yet profoundly, articulates in that quote is her use of the subjunctive: “Were I.” Here, the subjunctive expresses a wishful mood and draws attention to one’s existence as unfulfilled desire. Again, one must imagine that much of what Faye documents in her journals remains unvocalized, but they are words and wishes that hover on the tip of her tongue. They are between conception and utterance. But the mood extends to her existence and living, which she keeps on the cusp of becoming realized or articulated. The use of the subjunctive conveys the speaker’s trepidation to be or belong in the world without her sister. Her role as a co-narrator, keeper of records, and arbiter of the afterlife of things reinforces an armor of chosen silence and wishful thinking that extends to her relationship with the living. For example, the silence between Faye and her mother Elsie is a silence of potential: “...there are times I nearly spill over with my need and wish to confide my feelings” (15). Quiet is not nothingness but a space of restraint and a potential for self-articulation and desire. Faye’s silent use of the German portmanteau word and the subjunctive frames the importance of language and give her thoughts weight against the perceived negative space of her silence as empty space or nothingness.

Faye hints at a design to her life and how she has chosen to live it cautiously until she finds the drum. Her own existence is relational. “All I have are other people’s lives. What I do belongs to them and to my mother—her business, her legacy, her blood” (44). What or who would she be without other people’s lives? The power of the first statement suggests holding others’—her mother’s and Kurt’s—lives in her present care; she also defines herself in relation to her sister Netta’s death. In all their years together, Faye and Elsie do not speak of Netta’s tragic death in the apple orchard; this silence—what Cheryl Glenn might read as a tactical silence—binds them. And silence unites Faye and Kurt who delay declaring their sexual, nocturnal relationship to outline its shape. While the second sentence (“What I do...”) reinforces Faye’s ties to others, it marks a moment where Faye confesses a dependency, a chosen perspective that all she does belongs to her mother’s heritage and life; she self-defines through the actions related to her profession, not her being. Faye describes her chosen existence as a shadow to her mother’s form and Kurt’s artistic energy; her monkish life seems to be a tribute to her sister’s memory. “Other people’s lives” become the fixed polarities between which Faye maintains her parameters of intimacy in her chosen silence.

Faye's profession and the premature deaths of two girls in the novel factor in to the omnipresence of death and memories of the dead. A number of Faye's observations draw attention to her perceptions about the liminal space between life and death as a confluence or corporeal chiasmus. On two specific occasions, she describes her body as two-fold and halved: "I feel the breath of my own passage, as though my dead self and living self briefly met in that doorway to sleep" (45) and "my two selves stand apart and allow him [Kurt] to pass" (47). Both quotes show moments of joining with her dead and living selves, which are in flux as they "stand apart." Faye's sense of self is not a static space between things, but the crossing of those boundaries she perceives *between* the living and dead, *between* her self and her memories, *between* her and the people she loves, *between* her deconstruction of positive and negative spaces, and *between* event and narration.

These various sites of in-between-ness reinforce the tensions in the novel and underscore the shifting narrative voices. While Faye's narrative emphasizes the printed word and Bernard's and Fleur's the spoken word, all narrators require silence: for thought and of an audience. Oral narratives require the silent participation of their listeners, and their power, as Erdrich has observed, is universal: "Why is that, as humans, we have to have narrative? I don't know, but we do. I suppose it goes back to before the Bible; that storytelling cycle is in oral traditions of all cultures" (Chavkin 175). As a kind of oral historian, Bernard has not underestimated the silence of listeners. Integral to Krista Ratcliffe's definition of "rhetorical listening" is the openness and readiness of the audience, individually and collectively, to embrace a holistic understanding between self and others and "to proceed from within a *responsibility* logic, not from within a defensive guilt/blame one" (204). In Part Two's chapter four, Bernard attends to the stories of the older generation.¹⁴ Elders, like Fleur Pillager, entrust Bernard with their stories and the drum's secret origins. There are several examples where he introduces his narrative sources, his grandfather, Ira's father Albert Ruse (the man who talks to the wolves), and Erdrich's ubiquitous Fleur Pillager. However, instead of paraphrasing or using a third-person point of view, Fleur, through Bernard, speaks directly to his audience: Faye and Elsie Travers; Chook String and her son John; Judge and Geraldine Nanapush. In Erdrich's earlier novels—*Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, *The Bingo Palace*, and *Four Souls*—Fleur lacks agency as a narrator. When she speaks, it has been reported by Nanapush, Pauline, Father Damien, Lipsha, and Polly Gheen, the aforementioned novels' first person narrators. In the collection of novels noted, Fleur's role is never as narrator or oral historian, but as the topic of many conversations. Her beauty, perceived power, and own chosen narrative silence makes her ripe for gossip and ultimately legends;

she never confirms or denies the yarns about her. In fact, Nanapush compares her “awful,” “just crushing silence” to the inside of a drum (*Tracks* 212, 58). However, I contend that, in *The Painted Drum*, Fleur’s voice becomes the novel’s central voice; like the untouched drum that beckons Faye, Fleur’s voice is heard through Bernard who illuminates the power of narrative and of imagination.

Never before *The Painted Drum* has Fleur possessed narrative power as a first-person narrator; she is the central focus of both narrators’ focus in *Tracks* as many critics have noted, which furthers her purpose as a heroic and legendary character who strives, through several novels, to regain her land.¹⁵ While she does indeed symbolize, in DePriest’s words, “what is gone” (251), I propose that Fleur’s significance in the Erdrich oeuvre is synecdochal for history, albeit one unwritten, imagined, and enacted. Erdrich depicts her character of Fleur as a woman who chooses action and silence. Several generations—and novels—later Fleur speaks through Bernard to their audience. A witness, Fleur testifies to the little girl’s spirit who visits their mother, Anaquot, before the drum’s construction. According to Bernard’s recollection of Fleur’s tellings, the dead girl whispers warnings and advice to Anaquot, who has moved in with her lover’s family. Once again, as Amelia Katanski observes in earlier works from the Erdrich’s novels, “Fleur is thus at the center of Erdrich’s imaginative universe. She herself is the love medicine, the song, the scroll that holds that world together and helps Erdrich and her characters remember and create” (74).¹⁶ Often read as a trickster figure, Fleur’s character—in her narrative presences and her historical significance—is aligned with the discovered drum.¹⁷ Fleur’s narrative agency in *The Painted Drum* and her presence in Erdrich’s earlier novels remind us “that all stories exist in continuum” (*Painted* n.p.).¹⁸ Without the negative, or relational, space of *Zwischenraum*, there is no narrative continuum—that is to say, communal history.

Memory and its language play a significant role in the narrative continuum in *The Painted Drum*. Foregrounded by silence, the death of the three narrators’ family members, Faye’s sister’s death in the orchard and Bernard’s aunt’s—also the narrating Fleur’s half-sister’s—death by the wolves, emerge as personal, internally narrated memories and then as shared narrations. Through her diction, Faye painfully recalls her sister’s fall as a “[step] out of the tree,” (93) but her mother, once confronted about that fateful day, proposes that her sister “[j]umped” and not “stepped” (263).¹⁹ Choosing “stepped” over “jumped,” Faye hints at her sister’s move as a sacrifice, but her wording neither clarifies Netta’s action nor the circumstances of the day. Words shed light on our interpretations, but as words change so can the narrative and its retellings.

As Elsie’s language calls Faye’s memory—and Faye’s memory of a particularly,

emotionally charged experience—into question, Bernard uses language as a balm and thread to mend his father's loss and guilt. When Bernard's father, the surviving brother, holds on to his sister's shawl, a younger Bernard must convince him to burn it "[b]ecause we never keep the clothing of the dead" (116). Having grown up hearing the tale that blames the girl's mother, Anaquot, "when the wolves closed in, Anaquot *threw* her daughter to them" (my emphasis, 111), the maturing son asks his father, "don't you think she lifted her shawl and flew?" (117). The daughter's spirit whispers to Anaquot in Fleur's narration: "*There was one who gave her life for you*" (130). Fleur transmits her mother's memory of the girl's words as an offering and sacrifice. The words chosen for retelling a memory impact how the speaker (and listener) might relive, or experience, the power of that unspeakable memory, which is told and retold in unquiet minds. Memories' interpretations and retellings are mutable, depending on both the narrator's and listener's perceptions and diction. In my earlier articulation of *Zwischenraum* as the site for observation between the event and narration and as a site for productive silences marked by guilt and linguistic choices, we must recognize that the *Zwischenraum* in which we dwell can be understood as an organic and ever-shifting realm of memories. In between-ness requires that we be between two points that are defined. In fact, all of life requires juggling and renegotiating the "middle" space between what we designate as fixed polarities, or sites, and then we re-shift those polarities, or perceptions. *Zwischenraum* as a metaphorical site marks this evolving, organic, and liminal space makes the ineffable utterable.

Having heard Bernard Shawaano's and Fleur's embedded narratives, Faye experiences personal and interpersonal transformations, which, as Jean Wyatt observes, takes place outside of the narrative and narration. I contend that relationships between narrators, their narratives, and their shifting points of view take place *between* narrative and narration; the missing narrative of healing occurs importantly in a space between, another kind of *Zwischenraum*, where Faye decisively omits retelling what Bernard has relayed. Moreover, bringing the drum home elicits Fleur's voice, the novel's most central narrator, which, like the drum, acts as a site for fusing and oral and written narratives and reconnecting people. The drum's material existence as a living being and as a metaphor reinforces that idea of the organic nature of *Zwischenraum* and embodies the significance of the space between: the painted drum is constructed of space between two polarities, marked by hides and sapling trunks. To extend our understanding of Faye's restorative process, it takes place in both sound and silence, and between the events of sound and silences; her sections of the narrative are enacted through silence, but she needs the inaudible sounds of the drum and others' oral and written narratives to

complement the novel's narrative structure. In this space off-stage and in-between event and narration, or this *Zwischenraum*, Faye enacts her history in a space between whose boundaries must be redrawn and crossed. These boundaries serve as a real site for imagining the self-articulation that takes root in the fourth and final chapter of the novel.

Faye's writing, Bernard's communally gathered oral and written narratives, and the drum's power join their various audiences and redraw polarities. Having returned the drum and learning of its origins, Faye and Elsie return to Revival Road with a shift in earlier drawn boundaries. Not only have Faye and Elsie broken the silence over the day Netta died, they also forgo "safe behavior" for reconnecting with the world of the living (263). Having read Bernard's letter, where she and Elsie are reminded of their welcome in the presence of the drum, Faye confesses a collective healing release and her sense of belonging in her sustained use of the first person plural: "So who can say where *we'll* find *our* rescue?" (emphasis mine, 269). If Bernard's letter marks a newfound interpersonal connection and narrative evidence of its continuance, Faye's rhetorical question implies that her need for dwelling in between things and living is undesirable. Faye, for instance, has found her place among her extended family. The question also marks a redrawing of polarities; we often revise and reconfigure our questions and answers as we negotiate or re-evaluate our perceptions of ourselves in relation to our world. This reconfiguration and reevaluation may be a result of listening to old stories that influence contemporary ones; Faye comes to see her critical role in bringing the drum home to her Ojibwe relatives so that the instrument may once again foster communal healing. Reinforcing the restorative power of narrative and the drum, I am reminded of the communal tone in closing lines from *The Bingo Palace*: "Our lesser hearts beat to the sound of the spirit's drum, throughout those anxious hours when *we* call our lives to question" (emphasis mine, 275). Jean Rosier Smith reads Fleur's significance in the closing lines of *The Bingo Palace*, "Fleur becomes the ghost in the machine, the fluid spirit, chance, chaos in the margins of our ordered minds that flashes out . . . 'when we call our lives to question'" (109). Faye's question and rescue hint at Fleur's narrative's restorative power. Calling our lives to question and finding our rescue ask that, even if we are restless or fretful, we must give pause to reflect in that space between. The hush of the drum, Fleur's drum-like silences, and the reticence in Faye's narrative all mark potential; they embody the importance of negative space and the spaces between. *Zwischenraum* need not adhere to a fixed definition, but can serve as a reminder of shifting polarities where productive silences forge connections and enact potential. *Zwischenraum* is where the physics of space meet the philosophy of potential.

Notes

¹The narrator of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* comments upon his intrigue with books and learning to read; he tells his readers of his “great curiosity to talk to the books as [he] thought they did” and his concern when he found the book “remained silent” (64). When he was not yet able to read, Equiano perceived the books as silent; literacy makes the “silence” of books productive.

²An essay entitled, “What the River Knows: Productive Silences in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* and ‘1937’”, in the 2009 special issue of *Antipodas* XX, marks my inaugural use of “productive silences” and the examination of the ruse of silences in literature. I’ve since explored the significance of silence in another article, “‘Trawling in Silences’: Finding Humanity in the Páginas en Blanco of History in Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.” After having written these articles, I came across Cynthia Ryan’s “Unquiet Gestures: Thoughts on a Productive Rhetoric(s) of Silence,” where Ryan describes Glenn’s ideas about the rhetorical art of silence as “productive silences” (668).

³Because the character of Faye adopts Western materialist traditions, I find Glenn’s and Ryan’s rhetoric integral to understanding her character. However, the best or most appropriate critical lens for reading American Indian literatures is unresolved. Pdraig Kirwan observes the complex issues around reading American Indian literature to include the broadly defined tribal nationalist critics who have been labeled literary separatists and the more formalist literary modes of reading native literature as literature in his article, “‘All the Talk and All the Silence’: Literary Aesthetics and Cultural Boundaries in David Treuer’s *Little*.” For the purpose of his article, Kirwan observes how David Treuer’s *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual* has further complicated this debate; “Treuer’s dissatisfaction with the tendency of cultural questions to outweigh matters of style and artistry within the study of indigenous literature bears more than a passing resemblance to Gates’s earlier anxiety” about the lack of literary recognition of African American literature and reading it as a cultural artifact (447). I will not resolve the culture vs. aesthetics debate, but my paper does focus on Erdrich’s text’s literary qualities to include rhetoric and aesthetics.

⁴While Part Three underscores the role of the drum in Bernard’s community to include the mother Ira and her children, this section is told in the third person. *The Painted Drum* draws attention to the role of the sister in Bernard’s first-person narration wherein he retells his father’s loss of his sister who is also Fleur’s half-sister; Faye’s story unveils the death of her sister Netta. See Karah Stokes’s *MELUS* article for an interesting reading of the patterns of plot and relationship from Anishinabe perspectives in Erdrich’s earlier novels, specifically the two sister stories about Oshkikwe and Matchikewis (90). The mother-daughter dyads include Faye and her mother; Anaquot and the dead daughter’s ghost; and Ira and Shawnee of the novel’s third section. With Faye and her mother, Erdrich sustains a thread of forgiveness between mothers and daughters, which has been noted by Louis Owens in his chapter, “Erdrich and Dorris’s Mixedbloods and Multiple Narratives,” in *Other Destinies* (215).

⁵Faye underscores the value of thinking as she starts to learn her family history and her link to the drum she finds. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen explains that the Keres Thought Woman “is only the creator of thought, and thought precedes creation” (15). Lisa

Brooks reminds us of the importance of thought in her reading of Sky Woman's story in *The Common Pot*: "[T]he creation of the earth requires thought" (2). Thought belongs to the narrative continuum.

⁶ In *Tracks*, Nanapush narrates to Fleur's daughter, Lulu, whom he addresses as "Granddaughter" (1) and tells us he has named her (61). He participates in this narrative continuum and in mending Fleur and Lulu's relationship.

⁷ Fleur Pillager, like Nanapush, Leopolda, and Father Damien, makes appearances across Erdrich's novels. Her actions and speech remain reported. In *Four Souls* (2004), Nanapush tells his readers that Fleur and her son, in win back the Anishinabeg land in Tatro's bar where the drum and other handmade items have been traded for liquor. Lipsha Morrissey of *The Bingo Palace* seeks out his great grandmother Fleur whose speech he reports in dialogue, urging him to claim the family name, "If you're a Pillager then claim so. Don't say Morrissey" (133).

⁸ Catherine Rainwater's seminal article, "Reading between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich," illuminates how Erdrich's writing explores narrativity and problematizes interpretation, based on conflicting codes of beliefs and narrative techniques.

⁹ See Jean Wyatt's thought-provoking article, "Storytelling, Melancholia, and Narrative Structure in Louise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum*," for her reading of the "web" as a metaphor for the fragility of the "temporal cocoon of daily routine" created by Faye and her mother (Wyatt 17).

¹⁰ See David Treuer's controversial formalist reading of *Love Medicine*. In his close reading of the novel's prose, Treuer underscores his reading of Native American literature as literature not as cultural artifacts.

¹¹ In *The Common Pot*, Lisa Brooks examines early writings by native peoples in the northeast, which share the metaphor of the "common pot." Such a vessel represents the interdependent, collaborative view of native space in the northeastern region and how it changed when the Europeans entered the common pot, or shared space (Brooks 7). Brooks offers an explanation of the common pot as "the network of relations that must nourish and reproduce itself" (4). The container extends to include earth, dwellings, communal resources, common spaces, and, more importantly, a shared worldview. Such a metaphor creates an awareness and interdependence of a vessel's form, or boundaries, and its space as opening, not emptiness.

¹² Faye's attention to the ravens reveals her understanding of the continuance of life: "Say they have eaten and are made of the insects and creatures that have lived off the dead in the raven's graveyard—then aren't they the spirits of the people, the children, the girls who sacrificed themselves, buried here?" (276). Bernard's sister nourished the hunger of wolves and ravens; the "bitter" meat of the wolf nourishes the children (e.g., Fleur) of Simon Jack and his two wives, Anaquot and Ziigwan'aage (147). At the novel's end, Faye affirms symbiotic relationships between living beings in her narrative and between her narrative and Bernard's, which includes Fleur's.

¹³ In the Bill Moyers interview, "Searching for Native American Identity: Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris," Erdrich and Dorris discuss the absence of "I" and the emphasis on "we" in native languages. Faye's use of the first person plural pronouns surpasses professional life she shares with her mother Elsie. While Faye may not "throw [herself] into Native traditions," she has enacted beliefs in these traditions (269), which she melds with her white-Euro-American practices.

¹⁴ Oral traditions have been noted as ceremonial and central to healing, a central theme in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Roberta Rosenburg, in an article that predates Wyatt's and focuses on *Tales of Burning Love*, argues that "contemporary literature needs the kind of healing narrative found in oral traditions, but has lost the consciousness of that need" (Rosenburg 113). In writings about Erdrich's novels, the power of stories to heal those narrating and listening has also been acknowledged by David T. McNab in his short piece, "Of Bears and Birds: The Concept of History in Erdrich's Autobiographical Writers." (40).

¹⁵ Nancy Peterson, in her *PMLA* article "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," suggests Fleur may well be "the central character" of *Tracks* (987).

⁶ While I do not dismiss Wyatt's observation that, to show the importance of Ojibwe tradition, one ought to start with the story of the drum's origins as a kind of epicenter, I would clarify that Fleur's character—in her narrative presences and her historical significance—is needed to understand the drum's origins. See earlier citations from *Tracks* that compare Fleur's silence to the drum's interior.

¹⁷ For references to Fleur's shape-shifting, trickster role, see DePriest's article, "Once Upon a Time, Today: Hearing Fleur's Voice in *Tracks*," where she argues that "[a]nother aspect of Fleur that Nanapush conveys to Lulu [in *Tracks*] has to do with complex assumptions of the trickster narrative, in which Fleur is central, about the powers of storytelling to create native narrative presence" (259). Michelle R. Hessler's "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans: Pauline and Fleur in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" explores the two characters' shamanistic power. In *Tracks*, Nanapush is the first to describe a seventeen year old Fleur as "wild as a filthy wolf" (3). Pauline corroborates the lupine descriptions of Fleur who has a "wolf grin" when she beats the men at cards (19,23, 88), and looks "lean as a half-dead wolf" in another card game (162). See Susan Scarberry-García's essay, "Beneath Creaking Oaks: Spirits and Animals in *Tracks*" for additional support on Fleur's and Pauline's character traits and how they can be read through a cultural lens of aligning power with animals.

¹⁸ In her "Author's Note," Erdrich acknowledges both the personal and literary sources for the story of Bernard's aunt who feeds the wolves' hunger, specifically Cather's 1918 novel (*Painted* n.p.). In Cather's 1918 novel *My Antonia*, Antonia translates Pavel's dying confession of knocking a bride and groom of a sledge into the jaws of a wolf pack.

¹⁹ In this conversation with her mother Elsie, Faye repeats the past participle "stepped" four times, hinting at the diction of her inner narrative to which she has clung over the years (263).

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