FINDING A RHYTHM: HOW TRIBALISM CREATES IDENTITY IN ERDRICH'S THE PAINTED DRUM

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Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of English

Department of English

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

2007

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the connection between "tribalism" and identity, and then analyzes the connection in Louise Erdrich's most recent work, The Painted Drum (2005). It examines Erdrich's four primary characters and elaborates on the influence tribalism has in each of their stories.

Erdrich's novel tells the story of a tribal drum and its return to the reservation. In the process, the drum brings together Erdrich's main characters. On the night of the drum's return, Erdrich's characters tell the story of the drum's creation. Their exposition brings the group closer together as a tribe and serves to modify their individual identities into communal and tribal identities.

It is my contention that Erdrich's novel emphasizes the importance on tribal identities within Native American communities. The goal of my thesis is to clarify the role tribalism plays in Native American identity, and to shed light not only on the role it plays in Erdrich's The Painted Drum, but the role of the drum within the novel and how it ties into the concept of tribalism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to my thesis committee for taking the time to guide me through this process. I especially want to thank Dr. Katherine Montwieler for her mentorship and assistance in writing this essay. Her endless ideas, revisions, and perspectives helped me endeavor to persevere in the completion of this essay.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lee Schweninger for his encouragement to write this thesis and for first introducing me to the works of Louise Erdrich.

I want to thank my family and friends for being patient enough to read my early drafts, and for their endless support.

Finally, I would like to thank the Department of English for providing me the opportunity to pursue my heart's desire and granting me the resources to become a stronger student.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my family and loved ones, specifically my mother and father who first put a book in my hands and have always stood behind me.

INTRODUCTION

Adding to her opus of poetic prose, Erdrich's most recent novel, The Painted Drum (2005), explores the creation of a tribal drum and its return to the Turtle Mountain reservation. The drum serves as a symbolic representation of her characters, and is personified throughout the novel. Thus, the drum becomes a character and active participant in the narrative. Erdrich's characters' histories unfold around the return of this sacred tribal symbol. In the following pages I explore the concept of tribalism, demonstrate how tribalism affects identity within Native American fiction, and explore its relation to Erdrich's novel, particularly its symbolic incarnation in the drum of the title.

The first section of my paper is devoted to defining and understanding the concept of tribalism and briefly discusses its importance as a theme in Native American literature, the second section discussing the history of tribalism and the effects of "detribalization" on Native American identity. A basic discussion on the history of detribalization of Native Americans by dominant white culture is critical to understanding the significance of maintaining a tribal identity. Repeated attempts at detribalization have emphasized for Native Americans the necessity of maintaining a distinctive tribal identity and culture.

After an explanation of these topics, I move on to my discussion of the novel. I then discuss the role of the drum within the novel, and analyze its metaphorical implications. Following a short overview of the novel, in four sections I analyze the novel's principle characters and the effects of tribalism on each one. I arrange these sections according to the characters' appearances in the novel, rather than adopting a strictly chronological approach to my analysis. All of Erdrich's characters individually

take authorship of the narrative; therefore, it makes more sense to focus on them one at a time, then attempting to discuss the novel chronologically. Each character tells or passes down their own story to later generations and the reader. Following this structure allows for a more succinct analysis of the characters, and it allows for a clearer picture of how they work within the novel as a whole. My analysis begins where Erdrich begins the novel, with a discussion of Faye Travers. I then move to discuss Bernard Shaawano, Old Shaawano, and lastly Anaquot. While Old Shaawano and Anaquot's stories are told simultaneously in the novel, I elected to divide their analysis into two sections hoping to provide more clarity for the reader.

My conclusion reiterates the importance of maintaining a tribal identity, and how Erdrich's novel follows a similar pattern to those found in the Native American literary tradition. Like many Native American authors before her, Erdrich's novel captures the importance of community and highlights the importance of maintaining a tribal identity. Her use of the drum in this work not only serves as a tribal symbol, but also allows characters that are removed from tribal existence to create tribal connections.

Tribalism

The year 1867 began, what Native American scholar Arrell Gibson calls, the "reservation era" in the United States (443). Native Americans from all over the states were forced to live on relatively small areas of land predetermined for them by the federal government. Many tribes were assigned to plots of land far from their traditional homes. As a result, life for many Native American tribes drastically changed. Nomadic tribes became sedentary and tribal customs were forcibly altered. Since then, the reservation has become a staple feature of the Native American text. The reservation is a key component of demonstrating the tribal nature of the Native American community. Within Native American fiction, most characters find their identity within the tribe on a reservation created by whites but populated by native people. Tribal identity thus grows out of an attachment to a particular people and one's geographical location.

In its most simple form, tribalism is a loyalty to a group or tribe. In "D'Arcy McNickle: The Indian War that Never Ends, or the Incredible Survival of Tribalism," essayist Franco Meli describes tribalism as "the multiplicity of distinctive traditional cultures, which gives the lie to all stereotypes and resists the forces of assimilation" (363). Tribalism is a concept that is marked by a strong tie to a specific cultural group that remains distinct from other cultural groups, including other tribes, as well as mainstream society. For hundreds of years, Native Americans have existed as numerous distinct cultures despite being grouped together under the broad label of "Indian." And it is because of the continued subsistence of Native American communities to dominant culture that an emphasis on traditions and communal identity has been created.

History of Tribalism

At this time, there are 561 federally recognized tribes in the United States and there are approximately 100 reservations scattered across the country, all but ten of which are west of the Mississippi River (Bureau of Indian Affairs). These reservations serve as a nucleus for Indian traditions and culture and include their own governments. By retaining some lands, American Indians have been able to maintain tribal identities and avoid complete assimilation into mainstream American culture. According to D'Arcy McNickle in Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals, unlike Europeans, who generally lost their personal and political heritage when they immigrated and assimilated into the melting pot of American society, "the Indian political voice as well as their creative expression reject the values of the dominant society and turn inward for individual and group support" (170).

The desire to maintain a tribal focus and the will to keep it alive is an oppositional reaction to the historical precedent of the removal and the extinguishing of Native American traditions. For hundreds of years, both the United States and Canadian governments have been attempting the removal or reeducation of Native Americans, with assimilation as the final goal.[1] In order to accomplish their goal, the government began a process that Arrell Gibson terms as "detribalization." The movement of detribalization grew out of the official recognition of the importance of unity in Native American life, and the need to eliminate it. It was an attempt on the part of the federal government to eliminate the communal spirit of Native Americans and to foster, instead, an "American"

[1] In his book, The American Indian, Arrell Gibson discusses how the reservations were never intended to be permanent, but were intended to serve as centers of "detribalization" and reformation dating all the back to 1867 (443). He states that Native Americans were under overt pressure to give up their "Indianness and become hybrid Americans" (444).

or individualized identity. During the last part of the nineteenth century, there was a strong movement to eradicate Native American traditions. Several social reform groups led this movement, and they were ironically called "Friends of the Indian" (Gibson 448). Hairstyles and clothes that were considered too Indian were suppressed, and tribes were encouraged to wear "citizen dress." Native American men were forced to cut their long hair or face confinement and hard labor (Gibson 449). The new mandatory dress code robbed Native Americans of tribal pride and began to disrupt tribal unity. It divided tribes into groups of conformist and non-conformist. For example, the Mecalero Apaches were among the last Native Americans to conform to the mandatory haircuts. In addition, federal courts ruled that tribes were only tenants on the reservation, and therefore had only limited rights concerning its uses. Native Americans had few incentives to improve land that was not legally theirs. Essentially, this meant that Native Americans were guests of the United States government while living on reservation soil, creating more disunity among tribal factions, and altering perspectives on tribal identity.

Perhaps the most important moment of governmental detribalization came with the passing of the Dawes Act in 1887.[2] This act set aside 160 acres for each Indian on the reservation, and opened the "leftovers" up for settlement. From the government's perspective, reservations were supposed to be controlled environments for detribalization and assimilation of the Native American population. However, in packing the tribal members so closely together, members who had formerly been scattered across the United States, the government actually strengthened and sustained many aspects of tribalism (Gibson 488). The government hoped that granting individual Native

[2] Erdrich's novels Tracks and Four Souls address the Dawes Act and the issue of allotment. These novels demonstrate how allotment was used to steal tribal lands.

Americans private land ownership would force them to acquire individualized and "American" identities. Many Native Americans responded by resisting and reaffirming their tribal unity and pride. Some Cherokees refused to accept allotments and lived in camps on school or church grounds (Gibson 505). These mostly unsuccessful attempts to detribalize Native Americans only prove that American Indian identity ties in directly with tribal loyalty. The objective of detribalization was to achieve memory loss in the Native American community, for in Paula Allen's words, "the root of oppression is loss of memory" (213). Furthermore, forgetting traditions and culture "is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of self" (Allen 210). If anything, detribalization only emphasizes how important maintaining traditional tribal customs are to maintaining a Native American identity.

The tribal identity described in Native American literature is markedly different from the individualism found in so many stories by Anglo-American writers. William Bevis points to the American Western as the pinnacle of American fiction that details the urge to move west, beyond society, and into the great unknown. He also cites Moby Dick (1851) and Huckleberry Finn (1884) as American "classics" depicting a story of leaving home to "find one's fate farther and farther away" (581). A great number of American "classic" novels focus on the importance of moving out and onward seeking new territories. These tales of outward expansion characterize "the basic premise of success in our mobile society" (Bevis 582). On the contrary, Native American stories describe a process of contracting, shrinking, and converging. Often, Native American protagonists are summoned home and pulled inward. Native American novels, thus, present a distinctly different pattern that focuses on the importance of community to

individuals. According to William Bevis, their aspirations of reintegration "constitute a profound and articulate continuing critique of modern European culture, combined with a persistent refusal to let go of tribal identity" (Bevis 593). For the protagonists of the books, acceptance and identity lies with the tribal group, giving the characters a communal outlook. Instead of seeing what is best for the self, Native American protagonists often gain a perspective that extends beyond the individual.

Native American authors such as Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Silko have all written novels that depict characters seeking a tribal identity. All three of these authors have written novels that depict a protagonist's return to the reservation, which then meets a tribal elder, and reforms a tribal identity. Their novels, like Erdrich's, illustrate the struggle for an authentic Native American identity. Their novels seek to find an identity based on the strong communal ties that have persevered through a history of oppression. And it is among these peers that Erdrich finds her place within the literary community and a literary tradition. She builds on previous works by addressing similar themes, but through her structure and style, Erdrich builds on the idea of tribal history and identity. Her novels do not follow the formulaic pattern of Momaday, Welch, and Silko; however, the novels still analyze some similar themes.

The Novel

The majority of Erdrich's critics have focused on her first four works: Love Medicine (1984), The Beet Queen (1986), Tracks (1988), and The Bingo Palace (1994). While critics have paid nearly all of Erdrich's work some attention, none have yet focused on her most recent novel The Painted Drum. The works of Louise Erdrich often

share common characters and common themes. Erdrich's first, and most well known novel, Love Medicine, sets the stage for all of her later works, which are set before or after Love Medicine. First, the novel creates the backdrop for the rest Erdrich's texts, and second, it establishes a cast of characters that will appear and influence the rest of Erdrich's works. The fact that Erdrich's characters appear in many of her novels causes the novels to share several common themes. Some critics have focused on the structure of Erdrich's novels. Suzanne Ferguson points out the short story style of Erdrich's chapters. Erdrich maintains this style through out all of her novels. Within her novels, each chapter can be read as a short story. By using different narrators, Erdrich's chapters can depict unique short stories that play into the greater story of the novel. The Painted Drum uses this same structural device in order to unfold its story.

Critic Dennis Walsh draws connections between Love Medicine and Tracks in and the novels treatment of Catholicism. Karia Sanders discusses a similar a theme in her essay "A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine," and Catherine Rainwater discusses the conflict created between Christianity and Shamanism in Erdrich's The Bingo Palace. However, The Painted Drum diverges from Erdrich's usual focus on the conflict between Christianity and Native American beliefs. As Rainwater points out, Erdrich's characters are often caught between their traditional beliefs, and the imposing force of Catholicism. But in her recent novel, the characters are more concerned with self discovery and reestablishing lost tribal connections.

Another common theme in Erdrich's work is generational relationships between mothers and daughters. These complicated relationships are the focus of Meidan Tanrisal

in her essay "Mother and Child Relationships in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." In her most recent work, Erdrich again addresses the theme of mother and child relationships; however, in The Painted Drum, she pays special attention to the relationships between fathers and sons as well.

The Painted Drum is set both before and after Erdrich's first novel Love Medicine. It tells the story of one of her main character's birth, Fleur, while introducing us to a new cast of characters as well. The novel avoids typical Erdrich themes of the modern struggling against the traditional, and Catholicism, but pays close attention to relationships between parents and children. Furthermore, The Painted Drum uses a device relatively new to Erdrich's works. The utilization of the drum as a vital aspect of and symbol within the story is also relatively new to the genre of Native American fiction. That is not to say that traditional objects have never been used in Native American fiction. In Erdrich's novel The Bingo Palace, she uses the gift of a pipe to represent Lipsha's tribal connection. However, in The Painted Drum Erdrich's symbol is more than just an object. It is personified, and becomes an active influence on the narrative throughout the novel. Erdrich's use of the drum as a primary symbol and catalyst for healing and reconstruction is a new and intriguing way of portraying meaning. The novel centers on the use of healing, physically healing the characters, healing traditions, and healing identities.

The Painted Drum is both like her previous novels in structure, and unlike her previous works in its use of the drum. In her preceding works, characters and families were often linked through tangled love affairs or obscure parentage. But Erdrich's latest novel ties families from across the country together through the specific, tangible object,

of the painted drum. Even as The Painted Drum recalls her earlier works in its narration, which shifts back and forth between Faye Travers and Bernard Shawano, the drum serves as a constant and ever-present symbol. While these characters are new to Erdrich's stories, their families play pivotal roles in Erdrich's other novels. The novel depicts the story of the drum in three sections characterizing the three parts of the drum's life. The first section of the novel illustrates the re-discovery of the drum, the second its creation, and the third its return to use. But more importantly the drum itself also serves as the catalyst for the relationships and evolutions of the characters within the novel.

Within Erdrich's novel, the drum serves as a force pulling different people to it. The drum is at the center of the Ojibwe tribe's rituals. It is used at ceremonies and for healing sick members of the tribe. Located in central North Dakota, the Ojibwe tribe treats the drum as a living thing, not as a simple musical instrument. Faye, Elsie, Bernard and their respective families are all Ojibwe. As Ojibwe, they recognize the drum's power and trust it as an object that heals both individuals and communities, particularly when they are in the presence of the instrument. In Ojibwe culture, drums are only constructed for very special reasons. In fact, Erdrich's treatment of the drum's construction and its sacredness are consistent with Ojibwe traditions. According to Thomas Vennum, once the materials are assembled, minor ceremonies are held over the production of the drum's most important parts (156). Furthermore, only specially chosen tribesmen are allowed to participate in the construction of the drum. Because of its ritualized construction, the painted drum is symbolic of the tribe and the community surrounding it, and the drum serves as a bridge between Faye and Bernard's families. Faye's great grandmother is Ziigwan'aage, the wife of Simon Jack, who gives birth to Niibin'aage. Faye's

grandmother, Niibin'aage, a victim of detribalization, is recruited to attend a Catholic school, and never returns to the reservation. She settles in New Hampshire, eventually giving birth to Elsie, who later becomes Faye's mother. It is Faye and her mother, who finally return to the reservation and begin the process of homecoming. Simon Jack, Faye's great grandfather has an affair with Bernard's grandmother, Anaquot, not telling her he has a wife and family. Shortly afterwards Anaquot is with child. Simon Jack's actions serve as catalyst for the events within the novel.[3] The novel then distinctly follows the pattern William Bevis outlines in his description of the Native American novel, in which Native American protagonists often attempt to reintegrate into their tribe. Erdrich's novel indeed emphasizes a persistent return to tribal identity, an identity embodied most significantly in the drum of its title.

The Drum

While the construction of the drum happens over several sections of the novel, essentially, it is made from tribal wood set aside for this purpose. Old Shaawano then has a vision of how the drum is to be decorated, "He saw pictures. There they were. Little girl. Hand. Wolf. The bowl of reflecting water cut in half by the yellow strip of light would be the design for the head of the drum" (Erdrich 176). While the symbolic representations of the wolf and little girl may seem obvious, because, wolves killed his daughter, there are several other connections throughout the novel. Toward the end of the novel, a woman named Ira must travel through a snowstorm in order to reach her children. She is given a ride by a man named, Ma'iingan izhinikaazo, who is named for

[3] While he is referred to as Simon Jack in this novel, in Erdrich's novel Tracks, Simon Jack is referred to as "Pillager." Hence, Faye and Elsie are Pillagers as Bernard later states.

the wolf. The two of them are riding to Ira's house, but her children are not there. The house caught fire, and the oldest, but still very young, sister leads her siblings through the woods and snow to a neighbor's house. Here is the symbol of the little girl again, and she breaks her neighbor's window with her "frozen fists;" therefore, three of the drum's symbols appear in the last section of the novel.

The final aspect of the drum's decoration is the yellow painted line across the middle of the drum. The line is inspired the image of sunlight, and divides the drumhead into two halves. This symbolizes the broken families within the novel. Faye's mother and father, Old Shawwano and his Anaquot, and Bernard and his wife are all examples of divided homes. Furthermore, the characters of the novel can be divided into one of two families. There is the Travers family, which is descended from Simon Jack, and the Shaawano family, which descended from Old Shaawano. The two families are divided but are united at the end of the novel through the return of the drum. The drum symbolizes the relationship. They are divided by the yellow line, but unified through the circular construction of the drum, just as they are brought together through Erdrich's circular story telling.

The drum maintains a status that is greater than a mere object throughout the novel. Chook describes how the drum must be treated with respect, "you got to keep them protected. If someone comes in where the drum is, uses bad language, you got to put them out" (Erdrich 106). Her statements indicate that the drum is an entity, and it will recognize disrespect, hence it must be protected from disrespect. Faye states that she is going to learn the songs that belong to the drum. Her statement further illustrates the drum's status, not as just an object, but as an entity, and ceremonial objects are extremely

important in Native American tradition. The objects are scared and represent culture and traditions. Collector Louise Shotridge describes the pain the Tlingit Indians experienced at the loss of a mask, "they could do nothing more than weep when the once highly esteemed object was being taken away to its last resting place" (Fowler 1). Joseph D. Horse Capture states, "the tools of our ancestors, the objects they created and used, are invaluable to the understanding of ourselves" (Ogden v). Hence objects, such as the drum, are important beyond being sentimental reminders of the past; instead, they allow for a better understanding of tribal identity.

Faye

Erdich's novel does not follow a linear chronology, but begins in the present moment with Faye Travers before retreating to the past and returning again to the present. By beginning with the later generations, the recounting of ancestral histories becomes a process of discovery for both the characters and the reader. Faye, like the reader, must unravel the history of the drum as the story progresses. Faye Travers is the first of several narrators. She is an appraiser of artifacts. Specifically, she appraises items of people who are recently deceased for their family members. She does not seem to have any personal knowledge of her heritage that does not come from books. She is involved in a relationship with Krahe, a sculptor who lives nearby. Krahe seems to need Faye more than she needs him, even stating that they should marry (47). As Krahe's intentions become more serious, Faye works diligently to push him away. A private person, she does not want to be open with him or anyone else. Her identity is very individualistic; Faye tends to see what is in her own best interest, and avoids situations that would cause

her to open up to others. At the same time that she cannot make herself vulnerable to Krahe, Faye is also disconnected from a tribal existence; but even so, she imagines what her life could be like if she were more closely tied to a traditional Ojibwe community:

> Were I traditional Ojibwe, I would have a special place in the community because of my line of work…the objects left behind by a dead person were [and are] regarded with fearful emotion. They were never kept by family, but immediately gathered up by a person whose job it was to parcel the belongings of the deceased out to others. (Erdrich 33)

Faye's early daydreaming foreshadows how she will discover the drum and secretly take it, so that she can return it to the reservation. The dream also demonstrates her seemingly paradoxical desire to be special, and to have a place where she can belong. Such wishes could be fulfilled after gaining a tribal community. Shortly after this musing, Faye discovers the drum while appraising the house of recently deceased John Jewett Tatro.[4] Faye describes taking the drum as a "gut instinct," that she is powerless to ignore (Erdrich 40). According to Faye, the drum is in the back of her car before she has a chance to think about what she has done.

After bringing the drum home, the object plagues Faye's consciousness. She tells herself that she will accept the guilt that comes with taking the drum, but she is not going to give the instrument back. Instead, she describes the drum to her mother, Elsie, not actually confessing to taking it, but casually asking her mother for an explanation of the drum's importance. Faye's inability to be open with her mother is another example of

[4] John Tatro inherited the drum from his grandfather Jewett Tatro, a reservation agent. The drum appears briefly in Erdrich's novel Four Souls.

her inability to confide in others. Elsie then explains the significance of the drum to Faye. She tells her that all the Ojibwe drums are connected, that they are alive, and should be treated with respect: "it's more alive than a set of human bones," a telling allusion we learn later to the bones of Shaawano's unnamed daughter residing within it (43). While Faye says that she does not believe her mother's statement about the power of the drum, once alone upstairs, she places the drum on a table rather than the floor heeding her mother's assertion, never to place drums on the ground. It appears despite her assertions to the contrary that Faye does not disbelieve everything about the drum and its power. After taking the drum, Faye imagines what it would be like to play the drum and what it would sound like when played with other drums. As she drifts to sleep, Faye describes her chest as it "fills [with] a resurrection" (45). This dream of her resurrection, allows Faye to begin anew. She can begin the process of healing and creating a new picture of herself. Her reaction to the drum's presence is evidence of her new and changing identity, the birth of a new self, and her coming to grips with a difficult past.

The drum's effect on Faye is immediate. After she has acquired the drum, Faye can begin telling her personal history to the reader, focusing particularly on her relationship with her sister and father. The narration divulges several secrets about Faye's family. Faye spends most of the narrative relaying the history of her father and his academic career. We learn he was an underpaid professor of philosophy who was always working on his book, and that his students loved him (Erdrich 81, 91). The shadow of his professional obligations obscures his family. Volatile arguments between her mother and father stand out in Faye's memory, and her father's verbal abuse challenges his public persona. Faye evidences their strained relationship further by

describing when she and her sister "spent an hour whispering, imagining that he was not our father" (Erdrich 89). Furthermore, Faye never gives us her father's name. Without a name, Mr. Travers becomes less real and more ephemeral. The pain he has inflicted on his family seems worse because Faye refuses to give her tormentor a name, and perhaps his namelessness indicates that Faye has attempted to forget or erase her father from memory, a classic response to trauma. Her disconnection with her father climaxes the day of her sister's death. Faye jumps out of a tree expecting her father to catch her; instead, he lets her fall to the ground. When her sister jumps, Mr. Travers attempts to catch her but trips over Faye as she lies on the ground. Her father blames Faye for Netta's death, and convinces her mother of the same thing. Faye becomes isolated saying, "I knew how my mother and father would regard me from then on. And how I would come to regard myself" (Erdrich 93).

Only after Faye has the drum in her room, can she talk about these memories with the reader. Her openness suggests a personal quality and a newfound ability to be intimate with the reader. The drum begins the healing process for Faye and draws Faye along with her mother back to the reservation. Their return to the reservation marks the first homecoming of the novel. According to Bevis, this return home "is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (582). Faye, Elsie, and the drum's return to the reservation pulls everyone around them closer together, giving them a shared history and a shared identity. Bevis states that novels of homecoming assert a trans-individual tribal identity. The critic would have us believe that tribalism is not as distant or archaic a concept as some would think. Instead, the stories written by Native American authors depict individuals, along with entire

communities, who feel the pull of tribal identity and tribal pride (Bevis 594).[5] In returning home, Faye will learn not only her personal history, but also gain a tribal identity. She will gain knowledge about herself that she could not have achieved without the help of her tribe.

Faye's story is continued in the next section of the book, though she is no longer the narrator. Bernard Shaawano, a distant relation unknown to Faye, takes over. The narrative shift is important because it shows that Faye's story is not entirely her own. Instead, she and her family are a part of a shared tribal history. After Faye and her mother have brought the drum back to the Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota, many members of the tribe turn out to see the return of the drum. When Bernard hears that the drum has been returned, he too feels compelled to go. In an experience similar to Faye's, he has no control of his actions. He joins the judge, who is the nephew of old Nanapush,[6] Chook, and their families to witness the drum's return. Once everyone is gathered, Chook, one of Bernard's neighbors, begins discussing the importance of the drum to the tribe. She explains that the drum is used as a healing implement, which allows those who hear it to release their sorrows. The drum, Chook relays, must be given freely; you cannot buy or steal the drum. Upon hearing this, Faye can no longer make eye contact with the rest of the room. Her shame is evidence to her changing identity. She has violated a tribal custom, and the pain she feels at her violation reveals a connection to that custom. Bernard has been quietly observing Faye and her mother. Even though he

[5] Bevis was specifically referring to novelists McNickle, Momaday, Silko and Welch, and different stories of homecoming related by each of these authors. While Bevis does not address Erdrich specifically, a similar connection can easily be drawn to several of Erdrich's works.

[6] The judge's relationship to Nanapush cannot be overlooked. Nanapush will later adopt Anaquot's baby in Erdrich's novel Tracks. Therefore, even old judge Nanapush is connected to the story of the drum demonstrating a tribal connectedness and a tribal experience.

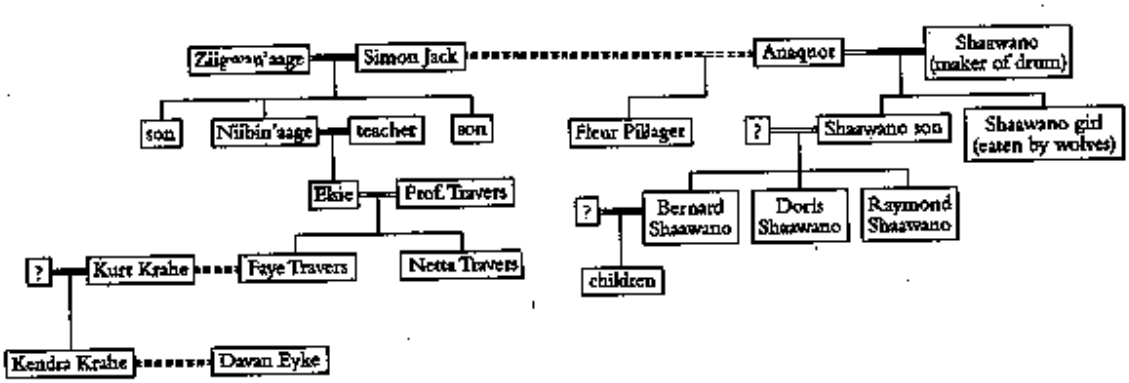
has been narrating the chapter, he has not said much to the other people in the room. At last, the room quiets down and everyone begins looking at Bernard expectantly. Bernard states that Faye and Elsie do not know who they are, or what it means to be from the Pillager clan.[7] They do not know their own history, "so I tell them" (107). Bernard has become a receptacle of tribal history. Everyone looks for him to recount the story of the drum's history, but the drum's story is not only Bernard's story. In fact, Bernard does not personally enter the narrative of the drum until the end of the tale. The complete story is a tribal story that involves several families. The story will give Faye and Elsie a new appreciation for their past and a new sense of who they are as individuals and as members of a family. At this point Bernard begins to tell the story of the drum's creation, recounting the events that transpired between his and Faye's grandparents.

Once Bernard begins recounting the drum's story, he acts out the most important aspect of Native American fiction, the continuation of oral tradition. According to Connie Jacobs, the oral tradition is "the foundational underpinning of contemporary Indian fiction" (Jacobs 12). In telling the drum's story to the room, Bernard is assuming a very important tribal role. Poet and author Leslie Silko writes that stories are "all we have to fight off illness and death" (Shaddock 106). The telling of stories is not just a way of passing down culture and tradition, but also an affirmation of survival and continued existence. Stories are not merely a means for interpreting reality, but a means of creating reality. Bernard's control of language is not just a retelling of an old story. The words are transformative, changing those around him as they listen. He is not just a storyteller, but he is also a historian extolling a tribal history, and therefore, a communal experience. The importance of this moment cannot be overemphasized. Once his

[7] As stated above, the Pillager clan is those who are descended from Simon Jack.

narrative is complete, everyone in the room will be changed. Faye and Elsie may return home, but they will not be the same people. They will have shared a tribal experience, and they will have new insight into their tribal identities, which they previously did not possess. As readers, we are privileged to sit in the room with the characters and share in the tribal event.

Bernard Shaawano's story illuminates the connection between the two families; he chronicles the life of both his family and Faye's great grandmother, Ziigwan'aage. His story sheds light on Faye's complicated family tree.



Bernard's accounts can be divided into two sections; the first describes the creation of the drum, and the second tells how Anaquot came to live with Ziigwan'aage. Faye and the reader discover how the two women came to live with one another, and how, though uneasy at first, the two established a strong bond, "Anaquot had left her family behind and was hungry for connection. And Ziigwan'aage, though surrounded by family, was set apart because of the nature of her fierce personality" (Erdrich 145). Though from different families, these women create a special friendship. Each one gains a place where she can belong and be a part of a community. Faye's understanding of her familial

history gives her the community and the sense of belonging that she wished for before she saw the drum.

When Faye returns as the narrator in the very last section of the novel, she has heard the complete history of her family. This last section of the novel is aptly titled "Revival Road." Faye, now more connected to her Ojibwe roots, states "We will travel back home to be part of what Bernard calls feasting the drum, and we also will learn the songs that belong to it… nothing is the same as it was before I reached out of untested rectitude and stole the drum" (269). There are two important aspects of her statement. First, Faye refers to traveling to the reservation as traveling home. Second, Faye's phrasing personifies the drum. Whereas before she returned the drum, it was just an object, now it is an entity, for which, she has gained a tribal respect. In returning to New England from the reservation, Faye is no longer as closed off; she needs others now. Her staying at Krahe's house for the first time evidences her new attitude. Faye is also ready to come to terms with her sister's death. She visits her sister's grave at the cemetery and rakes the leaves around the memorial stating, "I imagined that my sister and I would meet after death in the form of birds," and the closing lines of the novel describe Faye watching a raven soaring over the top of the trees (276). The raven is an Ojibwe totem, the powerful image signifies a change in consciousness, a self-awareness. Faye's past relationship with her sister and the blame Faye places upon herself seemed resolved. Furthermore, the new knowledge of herself has opened Faye up to the start of something new. She has a new relationship with Krahe and a stronger connection to her family. She has a tribe now, a place where she can belong. Now that she knows where she came from, Faye's present and future also becomes clearer.

Bernard

Unlike Faye who is removed from the reservation by distance, Bernard Shaawano seems removed from the tribe in spirit. Faye's narration focuses on her own private history, while Bernard's narration gives not only his own story, but a tribal history as well. For Bernard the drum's return catalyzes a recounting of a poignant past. As the grandson of the original creator of the drum, Bernard realizes its significance and is seen by others as the preserver of the drum's history. His tribe realizes that Bernard knows and will share the story of the drum with them. Just as the drum is built from a circular log, it has journeyed full circle back to the Ojibwe, back to the reservation, and back to Bernard. At the moment of the drum's return, Bernard is no longer closely tied with his tribe. His seems to resent being relied upon so heavily by his tribesmen, "I supposedly have so much extra time to kill, living alone as I do, that it is a favor to me to ask a favor of me" (Erdrich 97). Bernard's wife and children have moved to Fargo, North Dakota leaving him to his home on the reservation and his work in the hospital. Because he works in the hospital, many of his tribesmen assume some of the "medical profession has rubbed off on [him]" (Erdrich 97). This provides another reason for his neighbor to ask his assistance. After all, hospitals are in the business of helping people. Hence, Bernard must be more willing to help others.

But, like Faye, Bernard has been scarred by a difficult childhood that has left him isolated. His father, Shaawano,[8] beat Bernard and his brother and sister. Shaawano was distraught at losing his wife, and like his father before him, took it out on his children.

[8] For the purposes of this paper, I will distinguish between Bernard's grandfather and father by referring to his Grandfather as Old Shaawano and his father as Shaawano. This is the same manner Bernard uses within the novel.

Unlike his father, Shaawano's children were not rescued and carried off by the tribe. The community did not protect Bernard. Instead, when he turns thirteen, and "gets his growth," he stays and fights his father (Erdrich 113). While he is triumphant, the victory seems hollow, "There is a terrible thing about fighting your father, I never knew… a frightful kind of joy"(Erdrich 114). Once he has beaten his father, Bernard can't let Shaawano be his father again. He becomes a man without a father, and without his father, he no longer has a family. Like Faye, Bernard never calls his father by his first name. He always refers to him by his surname, Shaawano. His actions strongly suggest an impersonal relationship and a detachment. Given the disconnection between Bernard and his father, it is no great surprise that when Bernard does acquire a wife and family of his own, they leave him and move to Fargo. Without his tribal family, Bernard is missing his primary source of identity. Yet, before the narrative of Bernard's past concludes his father tells him the story of the drum. Thus, he is able to tell Faye and Elsie years later.

Shaawano tells his son of the drum's construction and the story of Old Shaawano and Anaquot's marriage. Unlike Shaawano, who receives the drum from his father, Bernard cannot be given the drum, though, because during one of his drinking binges, Shaawano sells the drum, which rightfully should be his son's. After all, Bernard's family is identified with the drum. His grandfather took it to ceremonies, and the drum became a recognizable part of the tribal community. Without the drum, Bernard is incomplete. Only after Faye returns it to the reservation can he begin to heal himself.

After the drum is returned, Bernard takes it back to his home. He awakes in the middle of the night to find three small children banging on his window. During the night, the children's home caught fire, and the three of them walked through the snowy woods,

following the sound of the drum. But, Bernard had not been playing the drum, "that drum is still covered up in the corner, where it always sits, I was asleep when they broke my window" (Erdrich 221).

The incident created by the beckoning drum causes Bernard to come out of his shell. He visits the children while they recover in the hospital, happy to be involved with them. Possessing the drum has changed his identity, pushing him closer to the tribal community. Bernard suggests that the children and their mother stay with him until they can get new housing. One of Ira's children, Apitchi, is very sick, having never recovered from the long walk through the snow. Bernard suggests using the drum to help him heal. Everyone has always assumed because Bernard works in the hospital, he has the healer's spirit. Now that the drum has been returned, he embraces this role. The drum is Bernard's inheritance, passed down from his grandfather. Having the drum gives him the missing bit of his heritage. Once the drum was returned, the reason was clear for him, "the reason he stayed had not come clear until it was piercingly apparent. He'd stayed for the drum" (Erdrich 250). The drum is symbolic of the Shaawano men as well. By regaining this lost symbol, Bernard is regaining a piece of his father and his tribal heritage.

The drum gives Bernard a reason and purpose for staying on the reservation. In contemporary Native American communities, tribal members with strong connections to traditional ways are deeply valued (Allen 210). Bernard's new connection makes him a valuable part of his tribal community. Similar to Faye, Bernard has a desire to be special; his newfound connection to the drum makes him an important fixture in the tribal community. After his wife and children left, the reason for Bernard's remaining on the

reservation was not clear. The drum does not just provide Bernard with comfort, it provides the entire tribe with comfort, "with the drum back, there is a good feeling here. People have come together around it" (Erdrich 269). Bernard's reclamation of the drum, and recitation of his history reintegrate him into the tribal community. His remembrance of tradition restores his identity as it does for his grandfather.

Old Shaawano

In conjunction with his personal history, Bernard recounts the story of Old Shaawano and Anaquot to Faye. Their struggles underscore the problems of their later generations. Old Shaawano and Anaquot are married with two children. After having an affair that leaves her pregnant, Anaquot leaves Old Shaawano taking her new child and her daughter with her. If the tribal family is the primary source of identity, then half of Old Shaawano's identity is riding away.

Once they have gone, Old Shaawano leaves his son and follows after them. He discovers his daughter's shawl, evidence of an attack by wolves and in a vision Old Shaawano learns she has been killed. The death of his daughter leaves him broken and incomplete, "During that time, a sick uneasiness of grief afflicted Old Shaawano and sent him wandering" (Erdrich 148). He wandered so long that when he returned home, his son was gone. Completely alone, Old Shaawano has no one to support or to care for him and he cannot understand his relation to himself or to others. Old Shaawano's pain stems from being incomplete. Without his wife and daughter, he no longer knows who he is, and he begins doing awful things that are out of character. While Erdrich's early descriptions depict Old Shaawano as an attentive husband and caring father, the

separation of his family devastates him. Each hate filled act such as the abuse that drives his son away, creates more self-hatred, which leads to more hate motivated acts. Old Shaawano is stuck in a painful cycle. In an attempt to escape blame, Old Shaawano accuses each part of himself for the loss of his family: his hands, his brain, and his heart; "he began to hate himself so much that the only relief he could obtain was to picture himself going back and savagely attacking the man he had been" (Erdrich 151). Consumed with drunkenness and rage, Old Shaawano is no longer a part of the tribal community, and the community cuts him off as well. They take his son and prevent Old Shaawano from visiting. Yet, although his actions at home cut him off from the tribe, what Old Shaawano needs is a stronger connection to family and the tribal community, a connection he finally makes through a vision of his dead daughter. The spirit of his daughter visits him while he is at his lowest point and orders him to begin constructing a drum. By constructing the drum, Old Shaawano is entering a new tribal role. The drum is a tribal symbol, created from wood that has been cut, soaked, and cured on a cliff for a hundred years (Erdrich 155). The drum he creates will not be his drum alone, but will belong to the tribe.

Even the wood is a part of the tribe. The trees are not just lumps of cedar, but are sacred and respected and, "from each generation certain men and women had been chosen to look after the wood, to visit and talk to it" (Erdrich 156). Therefore, the wood will serve as another link to bring Old Shaawano back into the tribal fold. Here is where Old Shaawano's identity begins to shift back to an identity constructed with a foundational tribal underpinning. Before he can begin constructing the drum, he must go and seek help from the rest of his tribe. Old Shaawano goes to visit Geeshik, a tribal

member who knows about the wood, to get instruction on how to build the drum and do it properly. Geeshik is the first person with which Old Shaawano has had contact in a long time; their meeting serves as a stepping-stone to begin reclaiming tribal identity. Geeshik provides him with encouragement as she tells Old Shaawano to "do everything [your daughter] tells you" (Erdrich 161).

After his talk with Geeshik, Old Shaawano resumes old traditions that he has long ignored. He begins placing an offering of tobacco on a tree stump everyday. He asks for help when he realizes that he will need a boat to reach the wood. While no one will trust him and loan him a working boat, Albert Ruse, a fisherman, gives Old Shaawano a broken down boat left in the woods behind his home. The broken birch bark canoe serves as a test for Old Shaawano, who must rebuild and patch the canoe before it will be of any use. Old Shaawano spends a week working on the canoe, and when Albert hears about his work, he is greatly impressed. The two men spend hours discussing the boat's reconstruction and restoration. Old Shaawano is finally back in the tribal fold as he and Albert sit and smoke a pipe, and Old Shaawano is "talking as he hadn't talked in a long time" (Erdrich 166). The two men discuss their visions and plan a trip to retrieve the wood. Old Shaawano learns that Albert's grandfather was one of the original keepers of the wood, and Albert's connection to the wood further pulls Old Shaawano towards a converging tribal experience. Together, along with Albert's son, the men make the journey to retrieve the wood for the drum. Old Shaawano's task is no longer a task for an individual; it becomes a tribal experience that he is sharing with Albert and Albert's son.

Old Shaawano receives more help during the construction of the drum from both the physical and spiritual worlds. His son returns to him and assists Old Shaawano in its

construction, attempting to be a son to his father. Supernatural visions, too, come to Old Shaawano explaining how the drum should be decorated. The son's reappearance and the visions of the drum's construction further emphasize reclamation of Native American identity. As a final act of closure and reclamation, Old Shaawano places the bones of his daughter inside the drum. With the drum's completion, Old Shaawano puts his daughter's soul to rest, and regains his familial and tribal place. The living and the dead meet in the construction and use of the drum. The pieces of his life put back together, Old Shaawano takes his place within the tribe as the keeper of the drum, and regains his tribal identity, despite no longer having a wife and children. Old Shaawano now has a tribal family to replace the one he lost with the absence of Anaquot.

Anaquot

When Anaquot leaves Old Shaawano for Simon Jack, she also leaves behind a part of herself. As Bernard recounts Anaquot's tale to Faye, Elsie, and the rest of the room on the night of the drum's return, he explains that he heard the story from Fleur, Anaquot and Simon Jack's illegitimate child. Erdrich adopts the voice of Fleur to tell the story of Anaquot and Simon Jack. Here is another shift in the narration. Fleur is a character that appears in all of Erdrich's Turtle Mountain tales. Her appearance and impact on the narrative ties The Painted Drum in strongly with Erdrich's other works. Anaquot's story is now a part of tribal history that transcends the individual novel. Her story has been handed down to Fleur, who gave it to Bernard, who is retelling it for Faye and Elsie, all retellings that emphasize oral tradition and tribal remembrance.

Anaquot, wife to Old Shaawano, travels to her lover Simon Jack's tribe to find out that, contrary to what he told her, he is married and has several children. Even so, Anaquot does not consider returning home. Instead, she only thinks about her lost daughter and how to establish herself within her new tribe. As she stays in Ziigwan'aage and Simon Jack's cabin, she is clearly an outsider. Ziiwan'aage hates Anaquot and, even Anaquot admits, rightfully so and attempts to poison Anaquot and her daughter.

Anaquot soon realizes that her safety and her only living child's safety hinge on establishing a tribal link with Ziiwan'aage. The "other woman" must become a part of her new tribal community or risk living as an outsider, and in fear. Forming a tribal identity is literally a matter of life and death. The two women sit down, and Anaquot tells Ziiwan'aage how Simon Jack told Anaquot he had once had a wife, but had thrown her away (Erdrich 134). The two women slowly begin forming a bond with one another and against Simon Jack. While neither of the women openly agrees to an arrangement, an understanding develops between them. They share all of the housework, and are completely open with one another. Ziiwan'aage decides that Anaquot would be "an invincible ally" as the two plan a punishment Simon Jack (Erdrich 137).

Anaquot is still an outsider until the rest of Ziiwan'aage's family comes to visit. While they are gathered, Ziiwan'aage lets them know Anaquot will be adopted into the tribe and "even though no word was addressed to her, Anaquot knew that she and her baby were now under the protection of these people" (Erdrich 138). Having established a connection with those around her, Anaquot is now a part of their tribe. Though her new family does not necessarily like her, she is allowed to remain in the cabin safely.

Anaquot's acceptance by the tribe hinges on Ziiwan'aage's continued trust of her. Anaquot has already trespassed against Ziiwan'aage, and Fleur is proof of her indiscretion. To maintain a tribal existence, Anaquot knows she must not allow Simon Jack into her heart again. When Simon Jack attempts to sneak into Anaquot's bed, she rejects him completely and loudly. Her actions place her securely in Ziiwan'aage's trust, and allow Anaquot a true feeling of security. Simon Jack can no longer return to his lover's or his wife's bed and sleeps "in the coldest corner of the cabin… alone" (Erdrich 143). As Anaquot becomes closer to Ziiwan'aage, Simon Jack replaces her as the outsider.

The two women become like sisters, always working and beading together. As Catherine Rainwater points out, "the Native American 'family' allows for various ties of kinship-- including spiritual kinship and clan membership- joining the individuals living together in one house" (418). Anaquot and Ziiwan'aage establish a spiritual kinship. Now that Anaquot is secure in her tribal identity, she and Ziiwan'aage turn their attention to punishing Simon Jack for toying with their hearts. The women begin beading a dance costume for Simon Jack. They work silently and in unison with one another stressing the strength of their relationship. When they finish, Simon Jack puts on the elaborately beaded costume only to realize he cannot take it off. His indiscretions have made him an outsider in his own home, and like Anaquot before him, he is not safe outside of the tribe. His clothes begin to reek with appalling smells. While Anaquot is safe under Ziiwan'aage's protection, Simon Jack becomes something to be pitied, "And to think, said the old men…He had all he could want. A wife, children, knowledge, and powerful songs. Now he has only the clothes he wears" (Erdrich 181).

Simon Jack no longer has a tribal identity. The story climaxes during a tribal dance. Coincidently, Old Shaawano attends the dance and brings the painted drum with him. When the songs start, Simon Jack begins to dance in his fancy beaded dance suit. As he dances around the drum, his suit will not let him stop, and Simon Jack dances his way into the spirit world. Simon Jack's dancing death is not a first in Native American fiction. The scene strongly echoes Susan Power's Grass Dancer (1994). Power's character Mercury Thunder seeks revenge by forcing her victim to dance into the spirit world. Simon Jack's death while circling the painted drum is another example of Erdrich's circular and converging story telling. Simon Jack dies in the presence of the man whose family he ruined. Simon Jack has fallen so low that even Old Shaawano looks on him with pity.

Without a tribal connection, Simon Jack dies shamed and alone. Despite being surrounded by others, Simon Jack has no family, no loved ones, and no one who does not pity him. He is alone within a crowd of people; meanwhile, Anaquot lives out her days with Ziiwan'aage and her new adopted family. She has gained a place among them, and when the tribe was struck with illness, she died along with them. Anaquot's experience parallels Old Shaawano's, Bernard's, and Faye's, each of whom must find and establish tribal connection in order to form stronger a identity.

Conclusion

The Painted Drum shows how tribalism influences the individual and communal identities of Erdrich's characters. Her symbolic use of the drum acts as a focal point for tribalism. Its symbolism and personification create an entity that pulls the characters

surrounding it closer together. It also serves as a representation of traditional Ojibwe culture and values. Through its construction and journey, the drum allows those come into contact with it to heal and reform their tribal identities. Along with the drum, Erdrich's shifting narrators help create an oral history that reinforces traditional values and remembrance of tribal history propels the next generation towards preservation and restoration. During their narratives, Erdrich's characters take control of language, and by doing so each gains authorship of tribal history. Their words demonstrate individual and connective growth through tribal unity. In addition, each of these characters is closely related with the others. Despite distance, time, and death each generation has a lasting impact on the others.

Faye, Simon Jack's great granddaughter, who originally depended on herself, learns to actively seek the companionship of others. Her connection to the tribe not only fosters relationships between herself and others, but also a desire to preserve those ties. She desires to be with Krahe and desires to return to the reservation again and learn her family's heritage and songs. She is no longer passive, but an active and seeking participant in her existence.

Anaquot, Simon Jack's lover and Bernard's grandmother, also knows the power of connecting with the tribe. Upon leaving her husband, she is isolated and alone. Her survival literally depends on forming a new tribal identity with Ziigwan'aage. The two women who are enemies become sisters as they weave Simon Jack's tragic fate.

Bernard, grandson to Old Shaawano, lived alone and resented his neighbors until the drum returns. With the return of the drum, he re-forges his relationships with the community. The wounds of his father's abuse heal, and consequently, he is able to use

the drum to healing of others. He assumes the mantle of the drum's keeper of his own volition. Similar to Faye, he transforms from a passive to an active tribal participant.

The departure of Old Shaawano's wife, Anaquot, consumed him and effectually isolated him from the tribal community. Nonetheless, after years of suffering, he begins constructing the healing painted drum. The drum not only heals others, but its construction heals Old Shaawano's soul and reunites him with the tribe. He becomes the keeper of the drum and a representative of traditional tribal customs and values. Old Shaawano continues the oral tradition, passing down the story of the drum to his son and eventually to Bernard.

All of these tales share a common thread of survival. They are not merely tales of personal survival but tales of a culture that endures. Erdrich's novel, and the stories of her characters, attest to the importance of tribalism through the oral tradition. Erdrich's characters enact oral tradition by sharing their stories with one another; they gain a better sense of their own identities. In her work, Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country, Erdrich states that to be Ojibwe is to be "raised on stories and to contain many books in mind" (Erdrich 140). The Painted Drum is an illustration of this belief. In order for her characters to gain an Ojibwe identity, they must be exposed to stories. They must draw together to generate a tribal experience, an experience the characters can share in common with one another and use as a starting point for a new identity. Using the oral tradition as a means of creating tribal experience allows previous generations to influence and help define later generations. Erdrich's work is an act of preservation and an assertion that Native American customs and beliefs will preserve and foster itself amid a new generation.

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