

THE TORUS CHRONOTOPE: SPATIAL MOTIF AS ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN *THE NIGHT WATCHMAN*

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Here I am, where I ought to be.
A writer must have a place where he or she feels this, a place to love and be irritated with.
 – Louise Erdrich,
 “Where I Ought to Be: A Writer’s Sense of Place,” 1985

Introduction

Near the end of Louise Erdrich’s *The Night Watchman*, Patrice visits the eye doctor and receives glasses to help correct her nearsightedness. As she walks out of the clinic, she describes her new sense of vision in terms of distance:

Patrice walked down the hospital steps and it didn’t seem there was a big difference. Everything seemed absolutely normal. Except that when she looked at Wood Mountain waiting at the bottom of the steps, she could see every detail of his battle-marred face. She could see the expectant hope, the love she didn’t want him to utter again. As she walked down the steps toward him, she realized that she’d never been able to read people’s faces at a distance; she had never seen their expressions. She hadn’t even realized that, from a distance, he looked different now. (Erdrich, 2020, p. 375)

Questions of proximity—things looking different from a distance, the details that become clearer with closeness—are a key part of understanding this novel in which an ensemble cast move in and out of each other’s spatial worlds. Later still, when Patrice and other members of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa are attending the congress meeting to determine whether or not House Concurrent Resolution 108, the 1953 bill proposing termination of nation-to-nation treaties between the United States and American Indian Nations, would be passed, she describes feeling like “everything was suddenly overwhelmingly massive” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 396). Distance, scale, proximity, movement: there is a sense throughout the novel of the importance of space. Characters are either grounded or out of place, staying put or in constant transit. In fact, there is a repeated spatial motif in *The Night Watchman* that helps to illuminate Erdrich’s sense of spatiality: the torus.

The torus is “a doughnut-shaped surface generated by a circle rotated about an axis in its plane that does not intersect the circle” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the chapter titled “The Torus,” Erdrich describes the torus at length:

If you revolve a circle around a pole, the surface of the revolution would be a torus. An inner tube. You can have a hollow torus or a solid torus, which is the torus plus the volume inside the torus—a doughnut, a jewel bearing. A metal spindle turns in a jewel-lined pivot hole. The hole is shaped like a torus, and the mechanism makes possible the ideal of frictionless eternal motion.

You cannot feel time grind against you. Time is nothing but everything, not the seconds, minutes, hours, days, years. Yet this substanceless substance, this bending and shaping, this warping, this is the way we understand our world.

Zhaanat was lying on her daughter's bed, in a slat of cool fall sunshine, the exhausted baby in her arms. They were drifting in frictionless eternal motion when Patrice entered, slipped out of her shoes. She took her hat off, lay down beside them, and opened her blue coat like a wing. (Erdrich, 2020, p. 193)

I read the torus as a powerful explanatory spatial motif that justifies and strengthens the polyvocality of the novel. The chorus of characters that make up the many perspectives in this text exist in a torus, none of them able to see the entirety of space from their perspective (something is hidden on the other side of the internal pole) but ultimately making up a constitutive whole as a community. The torus presents a specific relationship between space and time, it is one of a plurality of spatial understandings of the world (one of many tori, perhaps), it presents patterning as a powerful ordering force, it complicates the urban/rural binary, it keeps hidden a tribal private core, and ultimately the torus presents a type of spatial resistance to the totalizing logic of settler colonialism. Torus spatiality offers a unique form of geographic resistance to the asymmetrical power dynamics of settler colonialism that remains sensitive to the infinite complexity of spatio-temporal relationships in fiction and in reality. In this essay I argue for the torus as a literary-artistic chronotope that disrupts the domination/resistance binary in which resistance must parallel that which it disrupts, denaturalizes space's subordination to time under capitalism, and enables the polyvocal ensemble cast of *The Night Watchman*.

Substanceless Substance: The Time–Space Continuum Is a Doughnut

The notion of the chronotope in literature comes from Russian literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Chronotope literally means “time-space” and refers to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. Bakhtin (1981) describes how, in literature, time thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes visible, while space becomes charged and responsive to time, plot, and history (p. 84). This kind of relationship is absolutely present in *The Night Watchman*; in the above quote about the torus, Erdrich describes time as a “substanceless substance” that bends and *shapes*, recognizing the spatial element of time. Likewise, Thomas's father, Biboon, describes his conception of time as he nears the end of his life: “For years now he'd understood that time was all at once, back and forth, upside down. As animals subject to the laws of earth, we think time is experience. But time is more substance, like air, only of course not air” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 267). Again, time is a substance, described spatially (back and forth, upside down). The motif of the torus can be understood as chronotropic, as it gives shape to Erdrich's treatment of time-space in the novel.

Erdrich's treatment of time-space is subversive, as it privileges space over time, a reversal of the way that critical theory typically subordinates space and geography to time and history (Halberstam, 2005, p. 27). This destabilizing of the space/time binary mirrors what Bakhtin (1981) has to say about their interaction: “The contingency that governs events is inseparably tied up with space, measured primarily by *distance* on the one hand and by *proximity* on the other (and varying degrees of both)” (p. 99, emphasis in original). So, events (or history, or plot) are determined by spatial closeness as much as they are by time itself. There is a substance to history that strictly temporal analysis misses. In the chapter titled “Skin Tent,” Patrice describes how time, or the keeping of time, does not exist in her family's house, and her alarm clock loses five minutes on

the hour. She describes feeling like a skin tent stretched across a frame, the only barrier between her family and disaster (Erdrich, 2020, p. 20). Here, too, space is prioritized: she herself is a space, with her family sheltered under her “wing” in which the regulatory power of school or work time is decentred.

The priority of space over time is particularly salient when coupled with Indigenous spatio-temporal theory. Settler colonialism is directly connected to space, as the primary motive of settler colonialism is access to territory (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). State-orchestrated enclosure and unconcealed violent dispossession play a persistent role in ongoing colonial and capitalist relations (Coulthard, 2014, p. 9). Dominant settler-colonial hegemonic discourse presents time as linear and unidirectional and space as unified and rigidly defined. In his exploration of alternative, plural notions of time *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, Mark Rifkin (2017) describes how

insistence that Native People(s) occupy a singular present with non-natives and that the notion of being-in-time or the potential for change remain contingent on belonging to that shared, unified “now” (which includes a shared “then” of the past) seems to eerily resemble the representation of Indigenous populations and territories as necessarily part of the United States. (p. 1)

What Rifkin is describing is a colonization of time itself, which edges out other potential understandings of temporality as backwards, nonexistent, or incompatible. Instead, he suggests the following:

Rather than approaching time as an abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, we can think of it as plural, less as a temporality than *temporalities*. From this perspective, there is no singular unfolding of time, but, instead, varied temporal formations that have their own rhythms—patterns of consistency and transformation that emerge immanently out of the multifaceted and shifting sets of relationships that constitute those formations and out of the interactions among those formations. (Rifkin, 2017, p. 2, emphasis in original)

For the purpose of this paper, I consider space in the same way that Rifkin considers time, as multiple spatialities that have patterns and interact through relationship, overlap, and time. Plural spatio-temporal orientation moves beyond the modern/traditional Native binary, troubles absolute distinctions between Indigenous/white orientations (discrepant temporalities affect each other inequivalently), and facilitates Indigenous expression and self-determination (Rifkin, 2017, pp. 3–4). Attending to the multiplicity of spatio-temporal frameworks also resists simplified typologies, such as linear vs. circular or space-based vs. time-based sensibility, that might freeze meaning and ultimately be limiting for Indigenous or critical use (Rifkin, 2017, p. 17). This attention to complexity is already a part of the “grounded normativity” of an Indigenous worldview: there are “modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman other over time” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). This kind of connection to the land and the past has been critically mistaken as the Indigenous “circular time” that Rifkin mentions in the above quote, but as Scott Richard Lyons (2010) points out, “shape is a characteristic of space, not time” (p. 9). Lyons (2010) describes how there have historically been a multiplicity of Indigenous organizing concepts of spatiality—camp-space, frontier-space, the checkerboard, subaltern Indigenous Nationalism, and the communal, circular space of the kitchen table (pp. 16–21). None of these spaces ever exerts total control, and each comes with its own affordances and constraints; even the kitchen table, which Lyons praises for its ability to keep power and decision-making in

the realm of the everyday, carries with it the problem of erasing class differences (pp. 20–21). This points to the way that the spatial is always also social—in any landscape there are multiple distinct forms of space including counter-hegemonic and decolonial spaces, and it is through attending this plural spatiality that re-visioning space takes place (Keith & Pile, 1993, p. 6).

Both the chronotope and the torus are terms that originate not in literature, but in science and mathematics. In fact, the time-space described by the chronotope derives from Einstein's Theory of Relativity (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). The scientific mapping of space is linked to colonialism as maps in the 1800s began to be understood as representing the “real” through grids and mathematics, naturalizing the destiny of the settler states that set the very rules of this representation of reality (Goeman, 2013, p. 18). Maps are a tool for naturalizing settler control over space: “The development of the ‘scientific’ modern map—one of geometric, abstract grids—is a development that coincides directly with Europe’s war on Indigenous people” (Goeman, 2013, p. 17). But science and mathematics fall short of total representational understanding of the world. When white math teacher Barnes tries to understand his place with the Chippewa people using mathematics, Jarvis finds “the straw-haired teacher staring into an invisible shifting plane of numbers that looked like space” and says, “This way lies madness” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 209). The reason the chronotope is not madness-inducing is that it is interdisciplinary; it uses concepts from both STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and artistic literary expression to understand the fullness of reality. Given that the torus is made of a geometric grid and the term comes from science, the torus is like the chronotope; it uses ideas from STEM, but put into practice in a social, artistic, literary way, it provides a subversive way to think about space that undermines totalizing mapping projects of colonialism. Imagine a colonizer’s map swollen all over with tori, and the terrain of the map looks very different, warped and shaped by the very people whom it means to erase.

To return more closely to the novel, the torus motif repeats throughout in rings, rounds, and circles. There is the boxing ring and the “rounds” of a boxing fight, Thomas’s rounds of the jewel bearing plant as night watchman and the jewel bearings themselves, Thomas’s circular driveway, the parade through town, and the little space that Patrice finds to sleep in next to the bear that cradles her like she is outside of normal space time in the hole of the torus. The repeating motif of the torus and the grid that makes up the torus itself each present the organizing power of a pattern. In response to some of the problems of “scientific” maps mentioned above, Massey (2005) suggests the need to question thinking about space as only surface (as cited in Goeman, 2013, p. 5). Extant patterns emerge in the substance of space that allow us to orient ourselves, to know where and at what pace we are going, and to “have a feeling of place and self in relation to other places and selves” (Rifkin, 2017, p. 2). Following such spatial patterns creates a regeneration of continuity that “is the substance, feel, and force of time unfolding” (Rifkin, 2017, p. 3). Fictional narrative allows for the creation of distributed patterns of attention that are “at odds with, or divergent from, the formed pattern of attention in the discourse” (Woloch, 2003, p. 41). Erdrich uses the torus to map patterns in the spatial world of the novel and orient her characters in relation to other places and selves. In *The Night Watchman*, “Erdrich’s Minneapolis gets revealed through circulations” (Furlan, 2017, p. 144). The grid and ring of the torus is throughout. When Patrice retrieves her money from her hiding place “buried underneath the eighth green square from the right in the linoleum’s design” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 64), she is interacting with a grid in order to move dramatically through space to Minneapolis. When Barnes is coaching boxing, he does so in “three and three” intervals to mirror the rounds the boxers would eventually fight in, orienting them temporally to influence how they will move in space (Erdrich, 2020, p. 29). Even Thomas’s Palmer

Method of penmanship is made of “hour after hour making perfect circles” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 16), and his writing is cyclical as he writes and then reads, forgets what he wrote and then forgets what he read, and then writes again (Erdrich, 2020, p. 15). These circles and grids point back to the motif of the torus and orient Erdrich’s characters spatially as they follow these circular and grid-laden patterns of attention that are an alternative to the flatness and distinct spatiality of dominant discourse.

Close to discourse about spatial orientation is discourse about the urban/rural binary, which is also disrupted via the torus motif. Jack Halberstam (2005) dubs the devalued nature of rural in the urban/rural binary of spatialization “metronormativity” (p. 67). The opposite valuation of terms occurs in normative Indigenous discourse, where the rural reservation is given favourable treatment over the city, obfuscating the fact that “all US [and Canadian] cities are Indigenous cities” (Furlan, 2017, p. 12). Erdrich deliberately blurs this binary, both in her fiction and in her non-fiction writing about place, in which she says, “We are all part of a societal ebb and flow, a people washing in and out of suburbs and cities. We move with unparalleled ease ... we are nomadic, both by choice relocating in surroundings that please us, and more often by necessity” (“Where I Ought to Be,” 1985, p. 1). Erdrich continues to disrupt spatial boundaries by portraying reservations as global places and Minneapolis as a site with a historically Indigenous understructure (Furlan, 2017, p. 34). Changing place-based associations can have major implications:

When we think about Native peoples as cosmopolitans, we pay attention to the existence of multiple homes and homelands. We challenge geographical fixity and boundaries of empire, rethink relationships to place and nation, and rework conceptions of homogenous Indigenous identities. (Furlan, 2017, p. 29)

Tori operate on a personal and geographical level. Tori overlap like tori Venn diagrams as the “societal ebb and flow” intersects, separates, and otherwise spatially organizes itself. This complexity of spatialities delimits the rural/urban binary and in fact makes any hierarchical valuation of space nonsensical. Thomas points to this nonsense when he wakes up in the hospital and asks the nurse, “Have you finished measuring the earth?” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 411). What Thomas knows is that any type of static measurement—be it maps, binaries, or equations such as Barnes’s—will always fall short of the cosmic complexity and ever-changing nature of place on earth.

The torus exists in multiplicity, overlaps with other spaces, and shifts with time. But how do characters move through the torus? The train in the novel is an exemplary case study of Erdrich’s characters’ movement through space. When Patrice is first riding the train to Minneapolis, “the swaying of the train was voluptuous, hypnotic, and she drifted to sleep on a sea of motion” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 75). Gerald Vizenor (1998) describes how, for Indigenous peoples, “transmotion” or “natural motion” is a form of survivance (p. 15). And, indeed, motion is the opposite of termination, and termination of all American Indian tribes is the goal of the bill the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa opposes in the novel. Trains are semantically rich: “The train represents time as movement through space” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 315), and shares similarities with the road motif in which “time fuses with space and flows in it” and the socio-historical heterogeneity of one’s own country is revealed (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 244–45). Erdrich’s focus on unboundedness, movement, and exchange contrasts ideas of Indigeneity as frozen in time/space and interrupts traditional narratives of Indigenous life that stress the retention of purity (Furlan, 2017, pp. 134-65). So the sea of motion that Patrice falls asleep on is a fusion of space and time,

revels in the continuance of cultural movement, and resists dominant termination narratives. Voluptuous, indeed.

The Ensemble Cast as Chorus or “Core-us” and Resistance

When Billy-Ray Belcourt is discussing the title of his novel *A Minor Chorus*, he mentions the polyvocality of his text and that a much less sexy way to describe his work could be “sociological fiction.” He says that

if he’s going to write a novel, it has to be about where he’s come from because he wants some light shed on who he might become. But also, and more importantly, because there’s a whole chorus of voices there that indicate something about the colonial condition. (Naimon, n.d.–present)

Similarly, when describing her own writing, Erdrich (1985) says, “In a tribal view of the world, where one place had been inhabited for generations, the landscape becomes enlivened by a sense of group and family history” (“Where I Ought to Be”, pg. 1). Both Indigenous authors justify their use of polyvocality as coming from a sense of space. This corresponds with definitions of space as a product of interrelations where space is made up of constant meetings between people, conceptions of land, and ways of being (Massey, 2005, as cited in Goeman, 2013, pp. 5–6). Nowhere is this spatialization of relation more apparent than in the novel, where actual page space is devoted along a distributional matrix and attention is given inequivalently to different characters who “jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe” (Woloch, 2003, p. 13). Alex Woloch’s (2003) terms for thinking about the ways that characters relate in the space of the novel are character-space and character-system. Character-space refers to particular encounters between an individual and a space or position in the novel, while character-system refers to the arrangement of character-spaces into a unified narrative structure (Woloch, 2003, p. 14). In a traditional (read: Greek) narrative structure, a literary hero is the referential core of the novel, while secondary characters represent delimited extremes, become allegorical, and remain peripheral to the core protagonist. These minor characters are given less space in the novel and are reduced to functional reference; they “produce ‘apparitions’ which shadowily reflect the fullness that has been excluded” (Woloch, 2003, pp. 18–24). Erdrich’s approach is much different, as she gives a large cast of characters space in the novel and uses free indirect discourse to provide a fuller picture of even characters as minor as the racehorse Teacher’s Pet, to whom Erdrich gives a chapter of her own. This is a novel chock-full of a multiplicity of character-spaces, creating a chorus of perspectives, and many of the character-spaces are given significant page space out of the whole. Patrice and Thomas have about equal character-space, while Barnes, Wood Mountain, the Missionaries, LaBatte, Vera, Millie, Teacher’s Pet, and even Roderick the ghost are all given slices of the torus in the character-system of the novel. In this way, Erdrich does justice to the chorus of voices that enliven the landscape.

The torus can make sense of what happens when a character-space is in fact a character absence, which is the case for Vera in the majority of *The Night Watchman*. Near the beginning, Patrice suggests that she may have to “follow Vera, who had maybe disappeared” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 13), but in a deliberate narrative act of resistance, Erdrich continually has her characters representing Vera’s absence, giving her space even without actual presence. Vizenor (1998) describes *survivance* as both “an active sense of presence” and a rejection of “dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (p. vii), and Erdrich’s narratological treatment of Vera is this notion of survivance in

praxis. Patrice, Zhaanat, Wood Mountain, and the other characters who look for Vera insist on Vera's aliveness, disallowing her to fully disappear, and holding on to her as unlost even while she is missing. Anne Carson (1999) describes being *unlost* spatially, as “between retrieval and obliteration” (as cited in Halberstam, 2005, p. 82), and emphasizes how “remembering draws attention to lostness and is made possible by emotions of space that open backward into a void” (as cited in Halberstam, 2005, p. 123). In the motif of the torus, that backward void of space is the other side of the torus that any given character cannot see. If the character-system of the novel is a torus, and that torus is divided into segments where each character has their own slice of the circular tube, then there would inevitably be an opposite side of the tube (across the hole) that remains obfuscated to that character's perspective (see Figure 1). When Patrice is looking for Vera, she never fully allows her to be lost. She insists that Vera is out there, on the other side of the torus, even saying that she has “maybe” disappeared, rather than finitely stating it. In traditional “hero” narrative structures, the hero would be at the centre and could see all the characters around them. In this case, when a minor character is absent from the story, “the strange significance of minor characters ... resides largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing” (Woloch, 2003, p. 38). But in the torus character-system, tension or relief comes from an always present obfuscated core. The narrative work done by minor characters is flipped as all characters are held in centrifugal force by a core that is opaque, and behind which other characters or perspectives lie, emphasizing the importance of continual frictionless movement around the core.

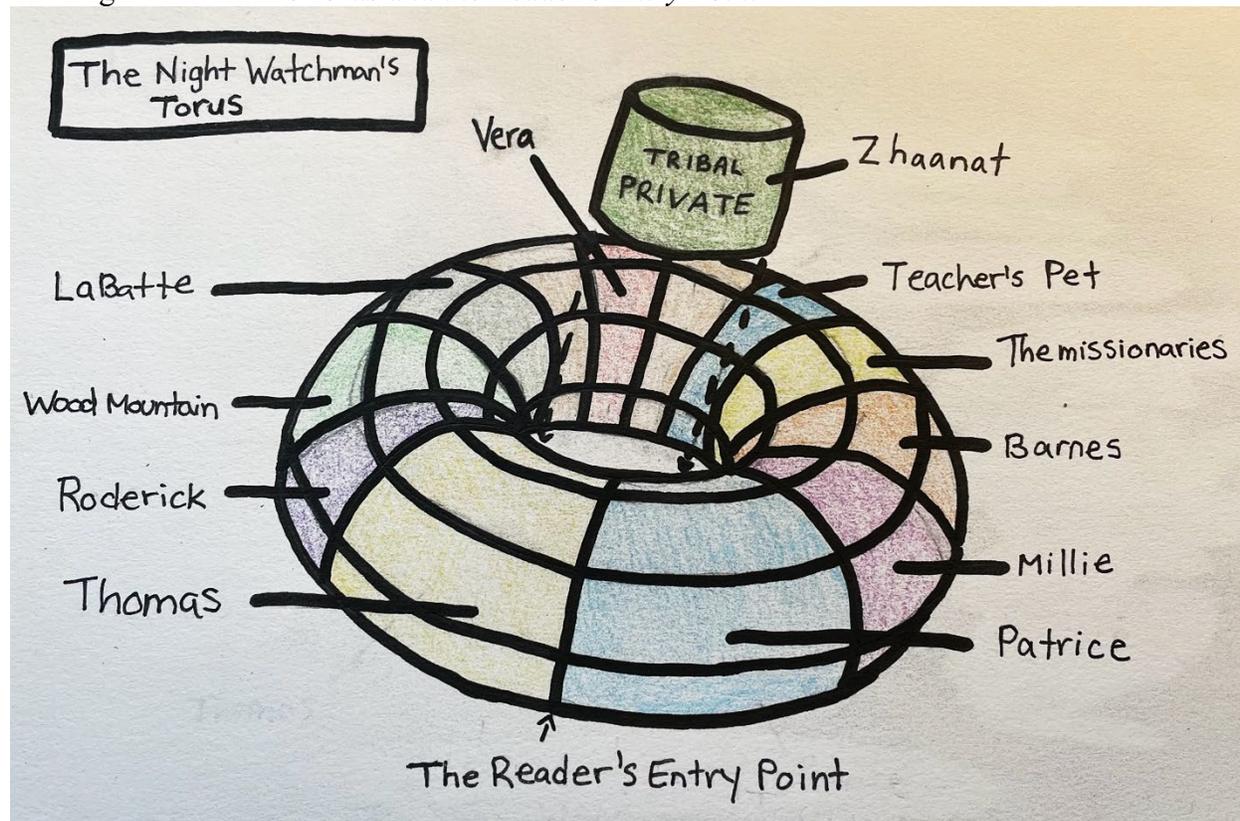
Finally, we come to the core or the pole that the torus tube is wrapped around. The core is not part of the space of the novel, and yet the space of the novel is organized around it. What does it mean to have a core which organizes space and time and yet is not defined or discussed? Erdrich (1985) describes the task of contemporary Native American writers as to “tell the stories of contemporary survivors while protecting and celebrating the *cores* of cultures left in the wake of the catastrophe [of settler colonialism]” (“Where I Ought to Be,” emphasis added, pg. 1). Likewise, in his discussion of Indigenous space, Lyons (2010) gives a name to such a cultural core: the tribal private. In his description,

the tribal private does not enter Indian space. It is hidden away where it can be defended by taboos, elders, and culture cops; and the reasons for it are purely protective. People who are invested in the survival of the tribal private are justifiably wary of discourse formations appropriating, mutilating, or in some other way destroying knowledge that has existed “since time immemorial.” (Lyons, 2010, pp. 25–6)

In *The Night Watchman*, Zhaanat's character-space represents the cultural core of the tribal private that must be hidden away and protected. When she was growing up, “Zhaanat's knowledge was considered so important that she had been fiercely hidden away, guarded from going to boarding school” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 21). Tellingly, though Zhaanat interacts with the character-space of many other characters, the reader is never given free indirect discourse or granted access to Zhaanat's close thoughts, knowledge, or emotions. She is the core that the chorus is formed around, and the choral characters protect her from the potentially friendly but still prying gaze of the reader. The reader, who is presumably on the periphery of the torus, is placed in closer proximity to the outer tube, perhaps located where Patrice's and Thomas's character-spaces touch on the torus, and the tribal private remains just that—private.

Figure 1

The Night Watchman's Torus and the Reader's Entry Point



Ultimately, the spatial motif of the torus is an act of resistance. Glen Coulthard (2014) describes how the current political strategy of nation-to-nation relationships between Canada and Indigenous nations is a politics of recognition, which reproduces configurations of power that Indigenous resistance seeks to transcend (p. 3). Settler colonialism sorts space via ideological premises of hierarchy and binaries, but Indigenous authors undertake “(re)mapping” as a way to generate new possibilities metaphorically and materially (Goeman, 2013, pp. 2–3). This is an example of what Coulthard (2014) calls “self-affirmative cultural practices,” which “transcend the fantasy that the settler–state apparatus—as a structure of domination *predicated* on our ongoing dispossession—is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects” (p. 23). (Re)mapping space and advancing alternative spatial orientations contribute to the spatial expression of contradictions that are ultimately capitalism’s (and colonialism’s) Achilles’ heel (Keith & Pile, 1993, p. 24). Resistance makes other spaces possible/impossible; as authority produces space through cutting it up, differentiating parcels, use/abuse of borders, and control of movement within and through boundaries; its project of total spatial control is always proved groundless by the existence of always already present alternative modes of spatial orientation/movement (like the torus, for example) (Pile, 1997, p. 3). These spaces or “geographies of resistance,” because they are outside of the frame of reference and fantasy of recognition from settler–state apparatus, “do not necessarily (or even ever) mirror geographies of domination” (Pile, 1997, p. 2). In a chapter from Thomas’s point of view, he wonders, “How could Indians hold themselves apart, when the vanquishers sometimes held their arms out, to crush them to their hearts, with something like

love?” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 98). Notably, the language of holding arms out and crushing to the heart makes use of the language of proximity. But of course, Indigenous characters and authors *do* hold themselves apart. Erdrich (1985) describes how the progressive movement (linearly through time) on which white American writers base their work means that as soon as they name or describe what they love, they lose it (“Where I Ought to Be”, pg. 1). Perhaps this is the “something like love” to which Thomas refers. But Indigenous writers such as Erdrich create space not to crush, but to expand characters: think, for example, of all the full characters Erdrich is able to fit into one novel, while traditional white narratives tend to only fit one and at the expense of a hoard of minor characters who tend to disappear. Pile (1997) describes how “tactics of resistance have at least two ‘surfaces’: one facing towards the map of power, the other facing in another direction, towards intangible, invisible, unconscious desires, pleasures, enjoyments, fears, angers, and hopes—the very stuff of politics” (p. 16). The torus does not mimic the spatial structure of domination. Though it uses a pattern from the realm of science and a grid stretched across a surface, it is ultimately an asymmetrical form of resistance that describes a place that the author loves without losing it, a space where the chorus of characters can be held in the inner tube without being crushed. It has at least two surfaces, the outside of the torus that faces the reader/outsider, and the inner surface in which the characters hide and protect what they need to survive and continue moving spatially through time (perhaps more than two surfaces, given the core would have an outward and inward facing surface, too). Some of these characters live in the city while others do not leave the reservation. Some move very quickly through space while others move slowly or not at all. Of course, the resistant space of *The Night Watchman* is specific and not universal; the torus need not be applied as an organizing motif for all resistant spaces, but it is the organizing motif for this one. Erdrich’s novel proves that resistance is always already present throughout the multiplicities of space and time of this world—indeed that to find some kind of vision of liberation, “we don’t have to go elsewhere,” as Billy Ray Belcourt says (Naimon, n.d.–present).

Conclusion

In Louise Erdrich’s *The Night Watchman*, the torus is a recurring spatial motif that represents a resistant, destabilizing chronotope in which the ensemble cast of the novel can be polyvocal while protecting the tribal private core. In *Geographies of Resistance*, Steve Pile describes how “the subjects of resistance [are] neither fixed nor fluid, but both and more. And this ‘more’ involves a sense that resistance is resistance to both fixity and to fluidity” (1997, p. 30). Erdrich’s characters embody this hybrid sense of resistance, while the torus motif is ambiguous, open to multiple interpretations, and fixed in its fluidity. Indigenous philosopher V. F. Cordova (2007) insists, “There can be no universals in the face of an infinity of complexity. There are no absolutes. The complexity is infinite because part of that complexity is change, motion. Whatever is, is in motion, and change is inevitable in the world” (p. 70). As Erdrich’s characters move through their torus world, enjoying or struggling against frictionless eternal motion, they encounter change, as Thomas and his father see the new-old ways that the American government tries to legislate them out of existence. Not only do they encounter change, but Erdrich’s characters themselves change, too, as Patrice transforms from Pixie the jewel-plant worker, to the waterjack performer who dazzles patrons with a circular series of moves through the watery substance of the tank, to Patrice the capable young woman with corrected vision, able to see great detail even at a distance, ready for still more change. We turn the page and leave our characters with one final round; the last sentence of the novel in free indirect discourse comes from Thomas: “He shook his

head, wiped his eyes, settled back into his task, underlining words in the birthday wishes and adding his own greetings, forming his letters with precision, until it was time again to punch his card and make the last *round* of the night” (Erdrich, 2020, p. 443, emphasis added). Curtains close on the torus and on the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, which was never terminated.

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