

**Psychological Aspects in  
Contemporary Canadian Narratives of  
First Nation Writers**

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## **Abbreviations**

*Kiss*= *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

*MB*= *Monkey Beach*

“FWC”= “First Wives Club”

“GS”= “Goodbye Snauq”

*ONL*= *One Native Life*

# 1. Introduction

Aboriginal writing has been gaining widespread attention in Canada and at the international level in the past few decades and is described as an innovative and exciting new field by critics. Contemporary Indigenous literature reflects the many different realities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit today and recognizes the dualistic nature of their living conditions between the Euro-Canadian culture and their distinct traditional cultures. While political events initiated the upsurge of Native writing in the 1960s and the 1990s, Native-authored narratives can now no longer be reduced to protest writing alone, as writers from different cultural backgrounds are creating a new aesthetic by challenging Western standards and incorporating culture-specific imagery and values into their texts. While contemporary Aboriginal writing is highly diverse, many Native writers thematize the historical trauma that affected generations of Native people from different cultural backgrounds in Canada and the US and that is responsible for many challenging social, psychological and physical conditions today. One policy that caused long-lasting damage to the fabric of Native communities was the residential school system, which disrupted families and traumatized thousands of children who experienced physical, psychological and sexual abuse in those institutions.

When discussing psychological aspects in Native writing, it becomes immediately evident that approaching this issue as a cultural outsider poses many challenges. First of all, the issue of terminology and identity arises. In fact, all designations defining Aboriginal origin are colonial constructions. The term “Indian” is especially inappropriate for two reasons: Firstly, it is a result of Christopher Columbus's incorrect geography and secondly, it is closely linked to the imperial Indian Act (LaRocque 2009: 151). In this thesis I will use the term “Indian” if it is explicitly mentioned in the secondary literature dealing with Aboriginal peoples in the historical context. Otherwise, I will use First Nations, Métis or Inuit to refer to the Indigenous population of Canada and Native American for the Indigenous population of the US. This distinction is in fact also constructed, since the national border between the US and Canada does not reflect the localization of Native communities on the North American continent. Hence, the imposed distinction between American and Canadian identities is a political construct that does not correspond to lived realities.

Secondly, the question arises as to whether the term “Aboriginal literature” is appropriate, since this definition is based purely on race. Thomas King (1990) suggests that this term “assumes that the matter of race imparts to the Native writer a tribal understanding of the universe, access

to a distinct culture, and a literary perspective that is unattainable by non-Natives.” (x). Consequently, to suggest that this definition is equally applicable to all Aboriginal writers regardless of their living conditions, education and knowledge of traditional values and beliefs does not acknowledge the diversity of contemporary realities. The authors discussed in this thesis come from different cultural backgrounds and grew up in vastly different living conditions. Nonetheless, it should not be left out of sight that they all belong to an intellectual elite. Tomson Highway is a member of the Order of Canada and all of the other writers discussed in this thesis have received honorary degrees and awards from prestigious universities. It has to be recognized that the stories analyzed in this thesis represent a fraction of contemporary writing and that thousands of other stories remain unheard or untold.

Thirdly, addressing psychological aspects in Native writing is potentially problematic, as this issue echoes the historic depiction of Native people – first as savage because of their supposedly “primitive” belief systems, and later as sick due to the numerous problems the residential school system caused in Native communities (McKegney 2007: 147). Furthermore, Western psychologists and counselors are now aware of the importance of Native healing techniques, but Western theories still dominate and counseling programs lack Native psychologists. It is therefore highly important to include Native trauma theories and acknowledge the importance of Native approaches to healing.

This thesis discusses narratives which tackle different forms of trauma: They address collective and individual trauma, female trauma, intergenerational and acute trauma, demonstrating the complexity of psychological aspects in Native writing. Each chapter will look at the representation of traumatic experiences from a different perspective. Consequently, this thesis is not exhaustive as it focuses on specific aspects to provide a more profound analysis of a selected number of narratives. The first chapter will outline the history of Aboriginal writing and elaborate on the historic and current challenges concerning the publication, reception and categorization of Native writing. The second chapter will look at how individual trauma is represented in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* based on the assumption that this novel transcends the cathartic re-enactment of trauma. Addressing Native writing on the extratextual level of communication, the third chapter is devoted to the literary reception of trauma narratives and discusses the implications of embedding a Native novel like Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* in a Western literary context. The last chapter concludes with two narratives, Lee Maracle's feminist story collection *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* and Richard Wagamese's memoir *One Native Life*, which, despite their difference in genre, style and content,

center on traumatic experience and offer paradigms for healing. Hence, this thesis provides an in-depth analysis of literary strategies Native authors use to communicate, subvert and transform individual and collective trauma.

## 2. Towards a New and Vibrant Body of Aboriginal Literature

In 2002 E. F. Dyke suggested that “aboriginal literature is now established in Canada” (2002: 63). At the risk of overgeneralizing he maintains that what is now considered Aboriginal writing did not begin before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (64). Strictly speaking, however, Canadian literature started long before European missionaries introduced writing in Native communities. The rich oral culture of the Native communities of North America comprised (and still comprises) myths, legends, songs, poems and speeches handed down from one generation to the next (Lane 2011: 1). The highly successful Native author Thomas King (1990) criticizes that the oral tradition is often regarded as an art form of the past although it is still a flourishing tradition today and has also been exerting significant influence on Native writing (xii). To some extent what Métis writer and scholar Emma LaRocque (2010) calls the “civ/sav dichotomy” (civilization versus savagery) (39) is still very much relevant today when it is commonly assumed that literacy is a feature of a civilized nation and that oral cultures are always subordinate to literate cultures. Through the incorporation of characteristics of oral speech into written texts by writers such as Thomas King this is slowly changing but the misconceptions that Native communities were “civilized” by the introduction of a writing system and orature lost its importance still persist.

As Europeans conquered the continent and started to settle, they curiously studied the Native population and so early written texts included ethnographic reports and story collections gathered to preserve the culture of what was believed to be the “vanishing race” (Lane 2011: 1). The first Aboriginal-authored book in English was published in 1847 by Ojibway author George Copway, who wrote a memoir about his life as a missionary called *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-Bowh*. At the time independent Native publications were rare and hardly known. One exception was poet Pauline Johnson (1861-1913), daughter of a Mohawk father and an English mother, who still influences contemporary writers, such as Jeannette Armstrong (Armstrong 2001: xvi). Besides writing and performing poems and short stories she also collected Aboriginal stories and is often considered a mediator between Native and non-Native cultures.

A new wave of Aboriginal writing emerged in the 1960s and 70s as a consequence of the united political resistance within the Red Power movement. The 1960s saw the establishment of a number of Native papers and periodicals which published essays, poems and speeches, often referred to as “protest writing” for their harsh and bitter critics of Western culture. The “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policies”, commonly termed “White Paper”,



proposed in 1969 by the Trudeau government sparked a vivid discussion and a wave of Native writing as it suggested abolishing the special status for Natives for a supposedly more democratic country. Much of the non-fictional and fictional writing at the time was concerned with resistance to persisting power imbalances and political inequalities (Gruber 2008: 415). Biographies and autobiographies were a popular genre because of their political force and their mediation of Native identity (Murray 1991: 66). Well-known examples are Métis writer Maria Campbell's memoir *Halfbreed* (1973) and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975), which traces the author's childhood, adolescences and early adult years depicting the challenges she faces as a member of a minority and her development to a politically active woman. One challenge that many Native writers at the time faced was that many non-Native editors took advantage of the power imbalance and regarded Native writers as mere informants. *Bobbi Lee*, for instance, was published under the name of Don Barnett, Maracle's interviewer and editor (van Toorn 2004: 33).

In the 1970s many Native anthologies were published, such as *Many Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Indian Poetry* (1977) edited by David Day and Marilyn Bowering. While autobiographical writing and poetry were important genres in the 1970s, prose fiction, however, was rare (Gruber 2008: 417). This gradually started to change in the 1980s when the first Aboriginal-authored novel was published. *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) by Métis writer Beatrice Culleton relates the story of two sisters, April and Cheryl, who grow up in very different foster homes. Cheryl lives in a family that encourages her to be proud of her Native heritage but she loses hope later as a social worker, struggles with substance abuse and eventually commits suicide. Her sister April, who is told to be ashamed of her Native roots, faces constant racism and becomes the victim of a rape when she is mistaken for her sister. This traumatic experience and Cheryl's suicide induce her to claim her Native heritage. Other noteworthy novels published in the 1980s include Jeannette Armstrong's first novel *Slash* (1985), a fictitious account of a young Okanagan man who becomes an activist in the Red Power movement and Thomas King's debut novel *Medicine River* (1989). Native drama also gained prominence in the 1980s, attracting massive attention when Cree writer and playwright Tomson Highway's first play *The Rez Sisters* premiered in Toronto in 1986. The play was extremely successful and Highway has had a significant influence on Native Canadian drama ever since (Lane 2011: 163).

Despite the seemingly growing success of Aboriginal literature, the upsurge of Native writing initiated by the Red Power movement subsided in the following decades. In 1985 Margaret

Harry criticizes that for non-Native writers and readers “the native peoples of Canada are either invisible or appear only in the form of stereotype” and that “[m]ost Canadian publishers, especially the larger firms with facilities for extensive promotion and distribution, do not publish works of native writers” (Harry 1985, online).

One important event that again generated wide public awareness of Native issues and gave a boost to Native writing was the so-called Oka crisis in the summer of 1990. According to Armstrong (2001), this political event initiated an “era of literary proliferation reinforcing an appreciation of Native cultural diversity” (xx). The Oka crisis, a conflict between Mohawk protesters on one side and the police and army on the other side, was ignited by plans to extend a golf course on disputed land on which a Mohawk burial ground was located. The standoff ended when the protesters peacefully left the site and many of them were arrested. The protest was widely broadcast and brought Native rights and land claims to public attention like never before (van Toorn 2004: 39). Important writers that started or continued to write in the 1990s included among many others the influential German/Greek/Cherokee writer Thomas King, Ojibway writer Richard Wagamese, Okanagan writer and activist Jeannette Armstrong, Mohawk writer Beth Brant, Salish-Métis author and critic Lee Maracle, Métis writer Maria Campbell, Cree poet Louise Halfe, Métis playwright Ian Ross, Ojibway author Drew Hayden Taylor and Haisla writer Eden Robinson. During the 1990s and 2000s styles and themes in Native texts became more diverse and writers created a number of strategies to communicate historical trauma and express resistance without resorting to bitterness or hatred:

Less confrontational than Aboriginal writing of the 1970s, contemporary works by First Nations writers in Canada thus cannot ignore the impact of a traumatic history and the ongoing effect of colonization [...]. The approaches may have changed with irony and subversive humor frequently replacing angry denouncement [...] (Gruber 2008: 428).

Nowadays, Native literature can no longer be reduced to mere protest writing (Eigenbrod 2006, online) while at the same time the issues of persisting inequalities and the healing of historical trauma remain important topics. As will be shown in this thesis, contemporary writers use an array of strategies to communicate trauma forging a new and exciting Native aesthetic. If they write in English their Native roots strongly influence their writing and unsettle Western readers’ expectations concerning genre and style. Contemporary writers are “breaking the frames” (van Toorn 2004: 44) as some Native writers tackle themes of international concern and establish connections with people from all over the globe. A recent development also includes the growing number of renowned publishing houses interested in Native writers. Eva Gruber (2008) argues that gradually “Aboriginal writing has reached mainstream publishing (426). Hence, it is reasonable to argue that “aboriginal literature is now established in Canada” (Dyke 2002: 63).

Contemporary Aboriginal literature is described as new, vibrant and exciting by critics but writers still face a number of challenges. The legacies of colonialism are still tangible in many areas including publishing and funding and Aboriginal people are still a long way from being treated as equal members in the Canadian society.

## **Part 1: Issues in Contemporary Aboriginal Writing**

### **2.1 Aboriginal Writing in the Context of Postcolonialism**

Our words, our sense, and use of language are not judged by the standards set by the poetry and stories we create. They are judged by the standards set by others [...]. We are grandchildren of an abusive industrial British parent, and in fact are nowhere near a post-colonial literature (Maracle 1992: 205-206).

In academia, Canada is usually considered postcolonial despite the many questions this categorization raises (Gross and Zimmermann 2012: 1). In literary studies the term “postcolonial” started to be widely used in the 1980s when it began to replace the term “Commonwealth writing”. At the time it was mainly used to refer to English narratives by authors of former English colonies (Devereux 2003: 179). Arnold Krupart (2000) rejects the term “postcolonial” with regard to Native American literature as he regards it as a misnomer. While Native American literature “performs ideological work that parallels that of postcolonial fiction elsewhere” (74), this term suggests that colonial activities are located in the historical past and hence it is inadequate as long as Aboriginal peoples do not hold equal status. As Diana Brydon (2003) points out, Canada is still “a settler state that has not addressed the full implications of its invader status”. Even if the ongoing effects of colonialism are taken into consideration, postcolonial studies still rely on “larger disciplinary paradigms that have constructed norms of excellence and aesthetic value based on ethnocentric understandings of the universal, the true and the good” (62). That is to say that Native literature is not postcolonial since it is judged mainly “by the standards set by others” (Maracle 1992: 205). In academic settings postcolonial studies aim at “undertaking a work of decolonization” by critically interacting with texts and dismantling Eurocentric perspectives (Devereux 2003:197). According to Cecily Devereux (2003) this process can also be counter-productive. Postcolonialism like postmodernism signifies the closure of a time period and therefore the term “postcolonial” might shift the students' focus away from ongoing power imbalances as according to its meaning these inequalities should not exist anymore (180). When analyzing presumably postcolonial texts in classrooms, it is therefore essential to draw attention to the proximity of imperial practices (185).

The influential American-Canadian Native writer Thomas King (1990) opposes the term “postcolonial literature” for similar reasons. According to him, this term suggests a linear and progressive development from precolonial to postcolonial literature in which colonization per definition occupies a central position. It is highly imprecise as there is no correlation between precolonial and colonial literature. Furthermore, this term insinuates that “Native writing is largely a construct of oppression” (12), while in fact Native traditions have survived colonization and play an important role in so-called postcolonial narratives. It also suggests that literature has progressed and has become more sophisticated because of the arrival of European settlers. King argues that while Canadian literature could be termed “postcolonial”, using this term to describe Native literature is simply incorrect. He introduces new categories which are not exhaustive but could be applied to numerous texts written by Native writers: tribal, polemical, interfusional and associational (12). Tribal literature is literature written for and in the language of a community. It is therefore usually not accessible for outsiders of a specific cultural group. Polemical literature, on the other hand, is also written in other languages, mostly English and French and “concerns itself with the clash of Native and non-Native cultures or with the championing of Native values over non-Native values” (13). Interfusional literature incorporates the oral tradition into written narratives. It thus makes use of syntactical structures, themes and other characteristics of orature and “translates” those features into written discourse. The fourth category, associational literature, is primarily concerned with Native communities and the daily lives of their members. It is characterized by a “flat narrative line”(14) and an emphasis on community. Even though these categories cannot be applied to all Native texts they are certainly more accurate as this categorization rejects the assumption that postcolonial literature is a product of colonization and completely cut off from precolonial literature.

Arnold Krupart (2000) also offers an alternative to “postcolonial” by introducing the term “anti-imperial translation” (74). Similar to “postcolonialism”, which depends on “colonialism” to make sense, the term “anti-imperial translation” emphasizes the significance of imperial translations in the history of America. Krupart states that “people indigenous to the Americas entered the European consciousness only by means of a variety of complex acts of translation” (74). This began when Columbus started to name places and people that already had names. When Columbus conquered the New World different worldviews met and contact zones became places where “European assumptions, desires, projections and mismappings” (Siemerling 2005: 59) constructed Indianness. These “acts of translation” usually involved the process of translating from “primitive languages” to English, from spoken words to written texts, from the subjected to the dominant culture. Interpreters translated oral stories depending on their

affiliation to an academic field. While the social sciences favored texts in which the verbal expression was transmitted as authentically as possible to demonstrate the difference between the literate Western culture and the “primitive” Native culture, translations in the humanities produced texts that were supposed to be interesting by Western standards. This form of misrepresentation still occurs today. The successful Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong (2006, online), for instance, states that “mostly sanitized versions” of Aboriginal stories are published in English and that these stories would shock people if told accurately.

In contrast to imperial translations, the concept of the “anti-imperial translation” suggests that Native writers, even when they write in English and employ Western genres, incorporate features of their own culture into their texts and thereby resist colonial interests (Krupart 2000: 79). Consequently, an English text written by a Native author could be considered an act of translation of cultural concepts and ideas in a non-imperialistic way. In contrast to imperialistic translations the cultural influence goes both ways. On the one hand, an English text by a Native author is the result of the integration of Western norms and standards into Native cultures. On the other hand, by incorporating Native words, expressions, perspectives and oral narrative devices into written English texts, Western literary genres are being transformed. Anti-imperial translations destabilize dominant Eurocentric standards by creating a polyvocal narrative. The literary works of Thomas King, for instance, exemplify the successful incorporation of Native forms into Western literary genres. In some of the stories of the collection *One Good Story, That One* (1993) he textualizes oral narrative devices, such as the repetition of words and syntactical structures, colloquial expressions and digressions. In this way he demonstrates that features of orature can successfully be incorporated into English texts. Furthermore, he proves that “Native experience can be expressed by Native authors in Western literary structures and idioms and that standard written language, because of its plasticity, can be indigenized in the service of peripheralized cultures” (Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell 2006: 8). The literary devices that many contemporary authors use to communicate distinct Native identities and to subvert Western literary genres are innovative and creative. However, whether or not a book gets published or an author receives funding for a new project depends on much more than on a writer's creativity and talent.

## 2.2 Issues of Publishing, Authorship and Authenticity

While writing is an art form, publishing is a business. As such it is subject to the laws of the market and consequently tries to cater to the demands of readers. These, however, are not stable and therefore difficult to predict. While some writers claim that their writing solely reflects their interests, it is not surprising that many writers are influenced by “what funding agencies value, what agencies and publishers are willing to invest in, what award committees find worthy, and what retailers want” (Dobson 2013: 3). Even though this is slowly changing, Native writers today are still confronted with the pressure to conform to specific ideas of “Nativity” that readers are believed to be interested in. Consequently, some Native authors are successfully marketed while others remain unknown. E.F. Dyke (2002) criticizes that Native writers such as Thomas King are highly praised although he does not receive much recognition from some Native communities because he does not observe the rules determining under which circumstances trickster tales should be told (66). In this context he speaks of a new form of voice appropriation committed by Native writers (65). What is deemed a good book and is consequently accepted by publishing houses often depends on socio-political influences and is closely linked to the values of the dominant culture (Godard 1990: 186). Hence, successful books often cater to the needs and expectations of the most powerful group in a society. In other words, it is essential to keep in mind that the expectations of the Canadian readership exert a considerable influence on publishing houses and writers and therefore also determine what is written and published. Being part of the Canadian canon, therefore, should not necessarily be considered desirable, as Ashok Mathur (2007) points out. He finds it alarming that so many writers of marginalized groups wish to become part of the mainstream (141). While it is not negative to aim for a wider readership, the incorporation of mainstream ideals to meet the demands of readers is highly problematic (141). If “a 'good' book is an ideologically correct book” (Godard 1990: 187), the criteria that determine which narratives make their way into the Canadian canon are not based on quality but on the politics of representation. The dominant group who is in control of publishing houses, newspapers and electronic media has the power to subject the masses to their ideologies and make their truth appear normal and given.

In the nineties Native writers' main objective was to make their voices heard and to be included in the literary scene. Nowadays, the tricky question that many Native writers face is to which extent they do have to fulfill the demands of a white Canadian readership who desires to learn about otherness in a specific way, which often reinforces preconceived ideas about indigeneity. Native writing often elicits specific expectations depending on the author's heritage and culture,

which is not the case for white Canadian writers. Depending on their age, Native writers are expected to write about old myths and legends, colonialism and its consequences on Native communities or substance abuse, residential schools and foster homes (Hoy 2001: 6). These expectations influence writers, critics as well as publishers and control which narratives are published and how they are received and talked about.

Kit Dobson (2009) takes a more positive stance on this issue by arguing that “readers bear witness to a shifting politics in writing in Canada” (56). *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson, for instance, resists being classified as a Native book. In an interview with Dobson, Lee Maracle argues that she would not classify it as such because it reads like a mainstream novel (56). This is an interesting comment because it suggests that writers from a minority group have to deal with pressure and expectations both from the dominant culture and from other minority groups. But what constitutes a Native book, one may ask. Even if one is able to come up with a number of criteria that define what a Native book is supposed to be like, should not every Indigenous writer be free to write creative texts without being scolded for writing “too Native” or not Native enough? The Ojibway writer Richard Wagamese expresses his anger about being pigeonholed quite trenchantly by asserting, “I’m not a native writer [...] I’m a fucking writer” (Hanson 2014, online). Eden Robinson is the first female Haisla writer even though she also does not want to be seen as such since as a Haisla writer she would most likely be reduced to being a representative of her community. It is clear why she wants to resist that categorization:

The ghettoization of writers into essentialized ethno-cultural categories is of a piece with the history of the representation of Indigenous peoples as vanishing. It is also consistent with Canadian colonialism, in which Native writers are associated with a fixed point of origin— their indigeneity tied to taxidermic notions of tradition and history rather than to the present— a position that limits their participation in contemporary life and their ability to posit self-governance (Dobson 2009: 60).

Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* invites the reader into a world in which traditional recipes (informing the reader, for instance, about how to make oolichan grease) intermingle with a world in which Kraft food, Orea cookies, Kool Aid and Jell-O powder are consumed on a regular basis. A world in which old myths are important merges with a world which embraces American pop culture. Since the protagonist's knowledge of the Haisla culture is limited and the community is disrupted by traumatic experiences, the reader does not gain much insight into the Haisla culture (61). Eden Robinson cannot be regarded as an informant of the Haisla culture through her works but classifying her as a mainstream writer would also be problematic, as the chapter on *Monkey Beach* will illustrate in further detail. Hence, Eden Robinson challenges the expectations of her non-Native and Native readers. This shows that despite the unequal power relations in the Canadian society, contemporary Native writers can apply

strategies to contest incorrect representations: “Thus the 'real' is, as it were, an ongoing production, in constant process of transformation, and subject to struggle and contest through equally dynamic processes of signification” (Gledhill 1997: 348).

## 2.3 Writing in the “Enemy's Language”

As has been shown, when adhering to Western literary conventions, Native writers are either accused of lacking authenticity or they are praised for their ability to compete within the dominant discourse (Horne 1999: 2). The process of colonization often involves strategies aimed at imposing the dominant culture on the colonized peoples to assert its supremacy. The colonized are then encouraged to imitate cultural conventions and rules to accelerate their assimilation into the dominant culture. As used to be the case in residential schools, similarity to the dominant culture is encouraged but denied at the same time. The residential schools educated Native children according to Western standards and conventions but they were treated as inferior to white Canadians and were just taught a few practical abilities which allowed them to work in menial jobs. This is to say that similarity and difference to the dominant discourse is often constructed at the same time (5-6). Indigenous people can never become white since white Canadians claim superiority over them and have to maintain the unequal power relations. They can only imitate the white culture in order to participate in the dominant discourse. Imposing the dominant culture on the colonized communities, however, gives the colonized groups the power to influence and alter the colonial or postcolonial discourse. Writing in the “enemy's language” (Armstrong 1998: 175) can be problematic but it also allows authors to shape the dominant discourse. Literary mimicry, the act of imitating literary strategies, themes and conventions of the culture of the colonizers can take two different forms: Colonial mimicry adopts literary conventions of the dominant group in order to express consensus and affiliation with it, while subversive mimicry does the opposite. The power of subversive mimicry lies in the fact that an author's strategies are not immediately apparent:

Through subversive mimicry, American Indian writers can adopt the guise of affiliation (of appearing to write within the colonial discourse and colonizers' language) to unmask, to exterminate, the colonial pattern of filiation that the colonial relationship engenders. (Horne: 1999: 12-13).

Similar to anti-imperialistic translations subversive mimicry expresses criticism by holding up a mirror to the dominant group (14). It challenges existing power relations by presenting the dominant group as the Other (20) while asserting the colonized group's subject position (23). Furthermore, it recognizes that cultural differences exist and that these differences should be



articulated. In this way, it influences the reader and gives them “paradigms for decolonization” (24). One strategy to decolonize through writing is by writing interfusional texts. Jeannette Armstrong (2006, online) argues that Native writers create “a new aesthetic” by transforming features of oral speech into written texts. These interfusional texts are usually characterized by a certain degree of non-linearity due to digressions and the incorporation of different viewpoints. This creates a sense of community, of interaction with a group of people in real time. Despite the fact that a certain degree of linearity is a feature that publishers and readers often demand, many Aboriginal texts resist these expectations.

On balance then, even if Native writers write in English and use Western genres they can still express their Native identities in their writing and perform acts of decolonization. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, all writers discussed in this thesis use an array of strategies to subvert Western literary conventions and emphasize their cultural backgrounds. Tomson Highway, for instance, communicates trauma by developing a distinct Cree trauma theory, Richard Wagamese promotes pan-tribal healing techniques and Lee Maracle expresses Squamish counter-memories of historical events. Subversive mimicry is often not palpable and readers of texts using this strategy therefore often have to analyze it more closely in order to discern the underlying humor and irony. One important advantage of this strategy is that when the imagery in a text is made less tangible it is more difficult to be appropriated. I would argue that the trickster figure enjoys so much popularity among contemporary Aboriginal writers partly because it is such an elusive concept which Western critics struggle to pin down. While the issue of cultural appropriation is not as important today as it used to be a few decades ago, it is still a problem affecting Aboriginal artists today.

## 2.4 The Problem of Cultural Appropriation

Non-Native readers are often intrigued by the cultural differences represented in Aboriginal writing and feel entitled to gain insight into their cultures. The problem is not the curiosity to learn about another culture and the sharing of culture-specific knowledge but that due to unequal power relations the dominant group often feels entitled to study and evaluate marginalized groups (Hoy 2001: 5). Cultural appropriation takes this issue one step further as it goes beyond the mere study of a culture and implies the use of that knowledge for one's own purposes, financial or otherwise. A resolution by the Writers' Union issued in 1992 defines cultural appropriation as “the taking from a culture that is not one's own – of intellectual

property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Roo et al.1997: 1). As can be seen, this definition lacks clarity and raises numerous questions such as, what is specifically meant by “taking”. It also relies on a clear distinction between an ingroup and an outgroup and the assumption that everybody clearly is a member of either the one or the other category (3). As different cultures meet, cultural influence is unavoidable and goes in both directions. The decisive factor that determines if assimilation or cultural appropriation is at work is the presence of power relations (5). The subordinate group is often forced to appropriate cultural forms by the dominant group in order to facilitate assimilation into the dominant culture (7). For the dominant group knowledge of another culture means power over it because it is often entitled to represent cultural knowledge on their own terms: “Power, it seems, has to be understood [...], not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural and symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way [...].” (Hall 1997: 259). The power dynamics underlying cultural appropriation are the reason why discussions on cultural appropriation have always been highly political (8).

In Canada, the issue of cultural appropriation caught mainstream attention in the 1980s and early 90s. The appropriation of voice controversy sparked heated discussions in literary circles throughout the country concerning the appropriateness of using Native cultural forms in non-Native texts. The main two concerns were if non-Native writers should be allowed to take on a Native perspective and if they should be allowed to use traditional myths and legends in their writing. In contrast to the United States, in which the issue of cultural appropriation was raised mostly by male writers in the 1970s, the debate in Canada has mostly been dominated by Native women. Lee Maracle and Leonore Keeshig-Tobias became important voices in the literary appropriation controversy (Lutz 1996: 139-140). For the Native storyteller Keeshig-Tobias non-Native writers should steer clear of using Native stories and imagery or assuming Native standpoints. According to her, Native stories and poetry represent a form of empowerment:

As time went by I did come to a greater understanding and that understanding is that, well, these stories are not meant for everyone. They're for certain ears only – Native or non-Native. Not everyone is, I suppose, capable of understanding a story, and then there are people who will abuse those stories or abuse that information – just use it in the wrong way (Keeshig-Tobias 2005, online).

When asked about cultural appropriation in an interview with Jennifer Kelly (1994) Lee Maracle argues that,

there's a certain amount of institutional and personal arrogance in white folks who look at us and see us as simple [and say] we're 'very spiritual people'. [...] It's not that simple. We're complex people, just like any other human beings in the world, and people have to come to grips with us. Particularly when half of us don't want to talk to white people, and the other half likes to tell them stories that may or may not be true. [...] You can't re-present us, and you should stop doing it. It's just a question of honour. We present you much better than you present us (82-83).

In this quote, Lee Maracle addresses an important aspect in the cultural appropriation debate, namely that when cultural outsiders take on the voices of insiders they often do so without the required knowledge or expertise to relate a story accurately (Lutz 1996: 140). In this way authors of the dominant culture can easily disseminate stereotypical and oversimplified representations of First Nations, which shape people's thinking and behavior towards them (Fee 2010: 66). Another concern in this debate addresses the financial aspect of cultural appropriation. Many Indigenous writers argued that non-Native authors should steer clear of selling Native myths and stories and should not be allowed to cash money for “stealing” valuable cultural forms. Another common argument was that by adopting the voice of a member of a subordinate group it is insinuated that they are unable to speak for themselves.

All these concerns were met with the insistence on freedom of speech and artistic liberty and the rejection of censorship. While some writers and scholars were more radical in their views, most supporters simply suggested that Native cultural valuables should be treated with more respect. Nowadays, the cultural appropriation debate is not as lively any longer but cultural appropriation remains an important issue in the US and Canada. On a positive note, the literary appropriation controversy drew attention to Native peoples and their cultures across the country and allowed them to speak and teach about themselves (Fee 2010: 64-71). When the cultural voice debate was still vivid in Canada, for instance, Tomson Highway and some of his fellow writers founded the Committee to Re-establish the Trickster in 1989, which set out to reclaim and promote Native traditions. The trickster, who embodies transformation, became an important symbol in the movement. Re-establishing the trickster was on a par with fighting against cultural appropriation (Fee 2010: 61). This means that the trickster figure was constructed to serve the purpose of reclaiming the Native voice, which partly explains its popularity in contemporary Native writing.

## 2.5 The Trickster

Tomas Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* starts with a short comment on the significance of the trickster figure in Native writing. Highway argues that the trickster is a genderless and humorous teacher for human beings and “as pivotal and important a figure [...] as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology” (Highway: *Kiss of the Fur Queen*). Dee Horne (1999) suggests that the trickster is an empowering figure in Native literature as it offers “literary paradigms for decolonization” (127) by subverting dichotomies and endorsing cultural differences. The trickster figure certainly poses difficulties for critics as it represents a concept that is not easily categorized. The trickster is said to have existed before humans inhabited the planet and is able to change shape. In different tribes the trickster figure is known as Coyote, Raven, Weesageechak, Nanabush and many other names. While often carrying an animal name the trickster is not an animal but he/she is neither wholly human nor god, nor a godlike being either. Not limited by human boundaries, tricksters move through time and space. They challenge not only spatial and temporal limits but also cultural categories by identifying neither as female nor male (I will use male pronouns to refer to the trickster according to the cited texts) and by blurring other well-established dichotomies (127-129). They “embody contradictions and ambiguity” (Blaeser 1996: 139), as they are neither entirely good nor entirely bad, neither entirely wise nor entirely foolish and neither fully irresponsible nor responsible. By transgressing social boundaries and resisting classification the trickster fulfills an important function in Native narratives: Not fully understood by non-Native critics and therefore not deemed as dangerous, the trickster undermines the dominant discourse and deconstructs it (Horne 1999: 131). In English texts the trickster figure affirms differences and “subvert[s] colonial discourse from within” (131). He is liberating as he resists to be defined, crosses boundaries and blurs clear distinctions. His identity is so flexible that he cannot easily be subjected to stereotyping (133). He is the master of “subversive mimicry” (144) since he resists the force to assimilate into the dominant culture by imitating the dominant discourse in a humorous or ironic way without bowing to it.

The Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor (1989) argues that the trickster is a comic and communal sign, which challenges limited worldviews. It is a sign of freedom as it evokes identities that cannot be singularized. It opposes tragic hyperrealities in social sciences such as the image of Native Americans as a vanishing race:

The trickster is a communal sign in a comic narrative; the comic holotrope (the whole figuration) is a consonance in tribal discourse. Silence and separation, not monologues in social science methodologies, are the antitheses of trickster discourse. [...] (9). Freedom is a sign, and the trickster is chance and freedom in a comic sign (13).

According to Vizenor, the trickster is a chaotic postmodern sign that defies clear definition. He argues that the trickster figure is not stuck in the past but stresses its relevance in contemporary times. This is not unproblematic as it suggests that the trickster can easily fit into current Western literary concepts. Since the 1980s the trickster has often been regarded as a “stable sign of chaos, disorder, or resistance” and as a “metaphor of postmodernism” (Fagan 2010: 5). The problem is that if the trickster is represented as a fixed sign it is emptied of all its complexity.

Contemporary trickster studies foreground the constructedness of the pan-Indian trickster archetype. As Reder (2010) suggests, the word “trickster” was first used by the 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Daniel Garrison Brinton (vii). The concept of the trickster was (and often still is) based on the assumption that there is one identifiable figure occurring in Indigenous folklore around the globe that can be observed and studied (Basso 1987: 5). The trickster gained widespread attention in academia in the 1980s and 1990s when critics started to focus on the differences between non-Native and Native literature. He embodied cultural differences in a fixed sign, which allowed Western readers and critics to manage and control cultural otherness without requiring extensive knowledge and expertise (Fagan 2010: 5). Contemporary trickster studies recognize that trickster figures are embedded in a specific cultural context and cannot be understood as a purely cross-cultural phenomenon (8). Consequently, their depiction “depend[s] on the storyteller(s), the context(s), the time(s), and the who/what/where/when/why a story is being told, as well as both to and for” (Sinclair 2010: 25). The trickster has been idealized by Western critics because of the healing power of some trickster stories. However, as James Sinclair argues, “not all stories build positive relations – some can wear them down and destroy them – and require great courage, negotiation, and thought to understand” (23). Fagan (2010) points out that Native writers have strategically been using old traditions to serve specific purposes. The trickster gained considerable importance after the success of Highway's play *The Rez Sisters* in which the trickster figure Nanabush plays a central role. When Highway became a famous playwright, his decision to introduce the trickster as a central character had an effect on other writers who were now interested in this figure as well (Fagan 2010: 11-12). Together with Daniel David Moses and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias he taught workshops and eventually created the aforementioned Committee to Re-establish the Trickster, which should help re-appropriate the trickster as a cross-cultural and mainly urban archetype (Fee 2010: 62). In Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, for instance, one of the trickster's many incarnations is a

two-spirit person who symbolically baptizes Gabriel in a gay bar. The trickster in this scene serves the purpose of expressing criticism against heterosexual norms (13). Consequently, the trickster figure has arguably been re-appropriated by some Native writers to serve specific functions and needs. While the trickster is central in some Native narratives it should not be left out of sight that an idealized pan-tribal trickster figure might be a construction of white critics and Native writers, who for different reasons and different purposes, have emphasized its importance.

## Part 2: Psychological Aspects in Aboriginal Writing

### 2.6 The Healing Power of Storytelling

Native writers from different cultural backgrounds have commented on the healing power of storytelling. Many argue that it constitutes a useful strategy to cope with historical trauma. The Métis professor Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009), for instance, states that storytelling is a medicine that can cure the trauma of colonialism since it is an effective way to counter the master narrative (2). The master narrative is defined as the dominant discourse that shapes how people think and act. Storytelling influences the dominant discourse and has the power to reinvent the master narrative. The healing power of storytelling thus stems from the fact that Native writers generate discourse which constructs their own identities and puts them in a position that allows them to control how they are being represented. Jeannette Armstrong (2006) stresses the importance of refusing to accept the victimization of Native people and the urgency to redefine the strength and power of Aboriginal communities:

What stories remain is based on who tells the stories based on what their reasons are, and as such continuously mediates what survives. Situating the aesthetic of Aboriginal writers places focus in Aboriginal writers and their themes and more broadly in the construction of ourselves within the contemporary. The fact is that it is we who textualize our origins, it is we who textualize our histories, our lives, our dreams, our griefs, and we who move from the aesthetic of Aboriginal literature from the common text of the settler into a new place in our communities (Armstrong 2006, online).

According to Episkenew (2009), writing in English is empowering because it allows her to reach other Native people from different cultures and bring them closer together (12-13). Writing and reading Native literature can also have transforming power since it helps Native people understand how colonialism has influenced their communities, how they are still affected by it and that they are not alone in their struggles. Native literature dealing with historical trauma also gives people expressions and concepts to talk about traumatic experiences and allows them to discuss taboo subjects in a safe way (15-17). Yuen et al. (2013) also emphasize that imagination plays an important role when it comes to claiming agency and self-determination. The decolonization of the mind presupposes the ability to imagine a different world characterized by healthy and strong communities. Being able to envision such a world is the first step to creating it (271-272).

Jeannette Armstrong (1998) argues that Native languages are deeply connected with the land and that the land “speaks” to her (176). Furthermore, she stresses that stories have a very profound effect on the people who listen to them. She describes the power of words as follows:

“To speak is to create more than words, more than sounds retelling the world; it is to realize the potential for transformation of the world” (Armstrong 1998: 183). Unlike Episkenew, who argues that writing in English can be empowering, the Okanagan author, storyteller and activist emphasizes the urgency of revitalizing Aboriginal languages. Teaching and sharing knowledge and stories in a community's Native tongue is vital as English texts do not hold the same power. Moreover, English translations often lack subtle facets of the meaning of the original text, which means that something is lost which cannot be transmitted in the translated texts. Subtle humor, for instance, is one of the characteristics which often do not find their way into English translations. As mentioned before, traditional tales are also translated into English in a much less shocking way (Armstrong 2006, online). This illustrates that preserving Native cultures and traditions and promoting Native writing is one of the most important strategies to counteract historical trauma. All of the books discussed in this thesis address individual and collective trauma in some way or another. But what is collective trauma and how does it affect individuals as well as communities?

## 2.7 Manifestations of Historical Trauma

The social situation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada is still alarming in certain Native communities. A report by Statistics Canada issued in 2011 revealed that Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to become victims of violent crimes than non-Native women (Brennan 2011, online). Furthermore, the suicide rate among First Nations is twice as high compared to the general population. The youth suicide rate is particularly dramatic with figures five to seven times higher than those of the general population (Kielland and Simeone 2014, online). The Canada Center of Abuse states that alcohol and drug abuse is still the number one problem for many Native communities (“First Nations, Métis and Inuit” 2011, online). In an interview with Craig Lambert the American scholar Sousan Abadian (2008), an expert on collective trauma, argues that the social problems that Native people suffer from today are rooted in the historical trauma that Aboriginal peoples experienced:

The most extreme types of collective trauma are sociocultural: it's not just an aggregation of individual traumas, but disruption of the fundamental institutions of society, and of its 'immune system' that can restore people and repair a culture. It is like an epidemic hitting a society when its doctors and healers have been exterminated. No one escaped the ravage (Abadian 2008, online).

She argues that the current social challenges are “the symptoms of trauma” and that if just the symptoms but never the underlying causes are tackled other problems will surface. For that



reason, healing programs must address the collective trauma first and foremost (Abadian 2008, online). The narratives discussed in this thesis revolve around individual and collective trauma. To be able to provide an in-depth analysis an understanding of how trauma affects the psyche and how intergenerational trauma is created is required. Hence, I will provide a short insight into trauma studies and contemporary studies on collective trauma.

### 2.7.1 From Individual to Historical Trauma

Post-traumatic stress disorder results from an “overwhelming event or events” and manifests itself in “repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behavior stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience [...]” (Caruth 1995: 4). Memories of traumatic events are often not comprehended and uncontrollable despite their immediacy and accuracy in dreams and hallucinations, which often results in what Caruth calls a “crises of truth” (6). The memory of traumatic events cannot be conjured up willingly but surfaces without the control of the person suffering from PTSD. The strength and clarity of the traumatic event in hallucinations and dreams and the simultaneous impossibility of controlling those memories lead to high levels of insecurity. Another factor causing doubt and posing challenges to trauma research is that responses to traumatic experiences often occur a certain time after the event. The belatedness of psychological responses shows that the meaning of what happens in a traumatic event is often only understood in another place and time (8). Hence, surviving a trauma can be more traumatic than the experience itself. Traumatic events are usually highly unexpected and consequently it might be the case that not amnesia leads to the frequent mental inaccessibility of traumatic events but that the impossibility of the event causes it to be never fully integrated into the conscious mind.

Since traumatic events might not be fully understood when they occur and hence cannot be consciously remembered, verbalizing memory is a very challenging task. Traumatized people often feel that something gets lost when they try to relate their experiences (Caruth 1995: 153). One important reason for this is that trauma, when translated into speech, loses its sense of impossibility (154). While it is extremely difficult to communicate individual trauma, the act of creating a meaningful narrative becomes almost impossible with regard to traumatic experiences that are not experienced but transmitted from one generation to the next. Intergenerational or historical trauma “creates a dissociation between history and memory, with the result of the creation of a history without memory, purely subjective, mythical, and therefore

ineffective for the creation of meaningful narratives” (Connolly 2011: 612). The concept of intergenerational trauma suggests that descendants of traumatized people may suffer from manifestations of trauma responses even if they have never experienced a traumatic event in their whole lives. Curiously, even if they never face any challenging situation they are more likely to suffer from the same symptoms as their ancestors. The Native American scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2007), who is an expert in historical trauma, states that, “[s]urvivors and descendants of intergenerational massive group trauma carry internal representations of generational trauma, which frame their perceptions of the world and their interactions with others” (Brave Heart 2007: 182). The idea that post-traumatic stress symptoms in parents can be transmitted to their children and further generations was first investigated in Holocaust victims when it became apparent that descendants of Holocaust survivors showed a higher frequency of psychological problems than the general population (cf. Kestenberg 1982 paraphrased by Connolly 2011: 610). Recent research in historical and intergenerational trauma has also been investigating the effect of historical in Native communities. The Native population of Canada and the US is highly diverse and comprises people from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, with regard to historical trauma and the treatment of post traumatic symptoms, Native people face common challenges as a result of similar traumatic experiences. The collective trauma of Indigenous peoples caused by oppression, forceful assimilation, land removal and the ongoing inequalities and discrimination Native people encounter in their daily lives are common historical and contemporary realities that Native tribes in the US and Canada share. Historical trauma is a form of intergenerational trauma and can be defined as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Brave Heart 2003: 7). One important feature of historical trauma response is “historical unresolved grief” defined as the “profound unsettled bereavement resulting from cumulative devastating losses, compounded by the prohibition and interruption of Indigenous burial practices and ceremonies” (Brave Heart 2011: 283). The prohibition of traditional ceremonies falls under this category as well as the violation of burial grounds. The scholar Darlene Johnston (2009), for instance, relates how she fights for an ancestral burial ground that was sold to a brick company. This was particularly problematic as traditional Aboriginal burial practices did not require coffins and so the soil the brick company meant to use consisted of dead bodies. She finally wins the legal trial and emphasizes how frequently the violation of burial grounds occurs (ix). Brave Heart et al. (2011) also stress the importance of traditional (as well as modern strategies) to cope with the sense of loss after the death of a family member or a friend. Cutting one’s hair constitutes an important ritual in many tribes, which symbolises the importance of the deceased and the

fact that they were part of the bereaved person's life (284). The prohibition of traditional burial methods, the inhibition of mourning and grief and adequate strategies to deal with loss are significant factors that aggravate manifestations of trauma response.

In 2000 Brave Heart conducted a qualitative study into the well-being of functioning Lakota men and women and examined the intergenerational effect of collective trauma. The study revealed that members of the community suffered from increased levels of anger and aggression, impaired cross-generational relationships, transposition (“living one's life in the past and the present”, 257), identification with the dead, impaired personal development, survivor guilt, self-destructive behavior and increased levels of heart diseases and psychosomatic illnesses as a consequence of historical trauma (255-259). One of the most painful collective trauma in the history of Canada has been the residential school system which has been affecting Native communities for generations. It has had a long lasting impact not only on individuals but also on whole families and communities. The trauma many children experienced in such institutions destroyed ties between families and communities, thereby disrupting the transmission of cultural knowledge and intergenerational communication and fostering cultural alienation. It affected almost all members of Native communities and produced generations of parents unable to acquire supportive and responsible parenting skills (Brave Heart et al. 2011: 287).

## 2.8 The Residential School System

In June 2008 Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally apologized for the residential school system on behalf of the Canadian government. He stated that the Canadian society was now aware of the damage the boarding school system had inflicted and that it still affected Native communities today. In his statement of apology he identifies the underlying aims of residential schools as follows:

Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child” (Harper. “Statement of Apology”, online).

From the 1890s to the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approximately 150.000 Aboriginal children were removed from their home communities and sent to residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their mother tongues or engage in any traditional cultural practices.

The children were separated into boys and girls, dressed in school uniforms and educated to fit into a westernised society as cheap workforce. The education the children received was poor and provided them only with the skills to do menial labour. Girls were trained to do domestic work like cooking, sewing and cleaning and boys were trained in agricultural work, woodworking and tinsmithing. A significant part of the children's time was not dedicated to studying but to keeping the school up and running. Residential schools were usually government funded and run by churches. Funds were often not sufficient, which led to horrendous living conditions and inadequate nourishment and health care. As a result, many originally healthy children suffered from severe illnesses or even died. Much of what actually happened in these institutions was revealed by reports from survivors who consistently speak of widespread psychological, physical and sexual abuse. The infliction of traumatic experiences on a large proportion of Aboriginal children and the alienation and disruption from their families and cultural heritage has had long lasting consequences on Aboriginal communities (Hanson 2009, online).

Sarah de Leeuw's (2009) analysis of the discourse surrounding the residential school system illustrates how the Canadian government morally justified their conduct and provided the legal ground for the residential school system. Throughout the centuries the discourse on First Nations shifted and even contradicted itself to cater to the needs of non-Aboriginal Canadians. The logic of government reports and policies was often flawed and based on imagination but it nevertheless provided the moral justification of imperial activities and hence had a powerful and material effect on Aboriginal peoples. Throughout the history and for different purposes, Native Americans and First Nations were described as “noble, as savage, as salvageable, as beyond redemption, as vicious, as vanishing, and as an ever present force to be reckoned with, particularly in the realm of land acquisition and expansion” (Raibmon 2005 paraphrased by Leeuw 2009: 125). To secure power over land and Native people, politically influential institutions depicted them in a way that suited their objectives, anchored these prejudices in the Canadian imagination and provided the moral justification for land appropriation and other colonial activities. Even if those discourses were not consistent through time, they all shared the assumption that Aboriginal people were in some way deficient (Leeuw 2009: 126). The moral justification of the residential school system was fuelled by the perception of Indians as childlike beings who needed assistance. This perception was nurtured by various government reports, notably the *Bagot Commission Report* of 1845-1847 and the *Davin Report* of 1879. The Bagot Commission first suggested a separation of children from their homes to be able to influence them at a vulnerable age. The *Davin Report* was supposed to investigate industrial

schools in the US and their suitability for Canada. It stated that day schools were not successful in the US since “the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school” (Davin. “Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds: 1). The allegedly childlike and fickle qualities of Indians provided the moral justification for such statements. The Canadian government thus had “the duty of a parent to monitor a child's propensity to indulge in things not in his/her best interest” and to “manage Indian's access to what ailed them: wild or unmanaged land, territory, nature.” In this way “Indian assimilation, the childlike qualities of Indian subjects, colonial desire for land, and concerns about territorial expansion were all intertwined.” (Leeuw 2009: 127).

Land appropriation was therefore an important motive underlying government policies. Residential schools were surrounded by farmland and Aboriginal children were indoctrinated to lead a sedentary life corresponding to colonial notions of private property. In the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the regulations concerning school attendance became stricter and in 1920 the head of the Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, initiated an amendment to the Indian Act which stated that all children between the age of seven and fifteen had to attend a school (Edmond 2014, online). At that time it was legally possible to use Aboriginal land for the establishment of schools, which further highlights that the residential school system is connected to colonial desires of more territory and land (Leeuw 2009: 130). It is also evident that the weakening of community ties and the alienation from Native cultural practices served the same purpose.

### 3. Exorcising the Weetigo: Resistance to Traumatic Experiences and Oppression in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

“I didn’t have a choice. I had to write this book. It came screaming out because this story needed desperately to be told” (Highway 1998, online).

Tomson Highway’s debut novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* published in 1998 is a trauma narrative as much as it is a celebration of life and the victory over traumatic experiences. It embraces Western art forms while infusing them with Cree spirituality and humour. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* relates the story of two Cree brothers who are torn away from their family and their Native community Eemanipiteepitat in Manitoba to attend a Roman Catholic residential school. In this institution the brothers Champion and Ooneemeetoo Okimasis are renamed Jeremiah and Gabriel, forbidden to speak their mother tongue and raised in a strictly Catholic way. They are physically and sexually abused at the hands of the school's principal Father Lafleur. This traumatic experience haunts them throughout their early adult years characterized by a conflicting struggle to find and express their own distinct identities. Alienated from their own Native community but not successfully assimilated into Western culture, the brothers have to navigate between their Native roots and Western culture, which allows them to fulfill their potentials.

In many aspects *Kiss of the Fur Queen* mirrors Tomson Highway's own life story. The award winning Cree playwright, novelist and pianist was born in 1951 to a caribou hunting family who led a nomadic lifestyle in northwest Manitoba. Like Abraham Okimasis, Highway's father was a caribou hunter, fisherman and excellent dog sled racer. Tomson Highway was six years old when he was forced to abandon his family and sent to a Catholic residential school in The Pas. Like the Okimasis brothers he went to high school in Winnipeg. Afterwards he studied at the University of Manitoba and Western Ontario and for a period of a year in London and earned a Bachelor's degree in music and English. After graduating he worked as a social worker for seven years supporting numerous projects in both rural and urban Native communities mostly throughout Ontario. From 1986 to 1992 he held the position of Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, Canada’s oldest professional Native theater company. He achieved his breakthrough as a playwright with his sixth play *The Rez Sisters*, which won the Dora Mavor Moore Award and the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award. Its companion piece *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* premiered in 1989 and was equally successful. Apart from several

plays and one novel, Highway wrote *Comparing Mythologies* (2002), a critical essay analyzing Catholic and Aboriginal mythologies, several bilingual children books and his most recent work, the musical *The (Post) Mistress* published in 2013. His only novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is dedicated to his brother René who died of AIDS related causes in 1990. Like Gabriel in the novel, René worked as a ballet dancer and choreographer and lived with Tomson for several years (Belghiti 2009: 2-7).

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* Gabriel pursues a career as a dancer after graduating from high school, while Jeremiah aspires to become a concert pianist. By analogy with his father who wins the 1951 Millington Cup World Championship Dog Derby Jeremiah is the first Aboriginal pianist to win the Crookshank Memorial Trophy. But instead of acting on his success he faces a severe identity crisis, gives up playing the piano altogether and works as a social worker in the streets of Winnipeg for six years. After his father's death he experiences an even more severe emotional and spiritual crisis culminating in a near-death experience on Mistik Lake. While lying drunk with his face in the snow Jeremiah has a vision of the Fur Queen as Miss Maggie Sees, a sassy transgender ex-showgirl who tells Jeremiah to stop pitying himself and wasting his time. The mystical encounter with the trickster figure “marks the beginning of Jeremiah's psychological and spiritual healing” (Howells 2004: 90). Amanda Clear Sky, an Ojibwa girl Jeremiah met in high school, and her grandmother motivate him to take up playing the piano again and he starts to write for the theater. His play *Ulysses Thunderchild* only turns into a success when Jeremiah infuses it with Cree spirit. Playing the piano starts to make sense as soon as he is able to use the instrument as “a pow wow drum [...] of the twentieth century”, that is to say when he successfully connects contemporary Cree culture with his classical training. In Jeremiah's play Gabriel works as the choreographer and as one of the leading dancers, like René in *The Rez Sisters*. In the grand finale Jeremiah conducts a Native ceremony for his dying brother with the help of Amanda and her grandmother. The hospital personnel tries to disrupt the ritual because Amanda's grandmother set off the fire alarm by burning sweetgrass but Jeremiah prevents them from entering the room. In this way he demonstrates resistance to his Catholic upbringing. The Fur Queen, who accompanies the two brothers in different and sometimes disturbing disguises throughout their lives, arrives, kisses Gabriel and takes his spirit with her. This last scene can be considered an active act of liberation from the dominant culture.

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* relates traumatic experiences and the long lasting effects of trauma but it is also a powerful novel that illustrates that the expression of resistance to the dominant discourse is possible and a necessary element in the healing process. In this chapter I will

analyze how trauma is constructed and how traumatic experiences affect future life choices and relations. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the novel manifests resistance against the dominant discourse while at the same time refusing to reject it in its entirety. As will be illustrated, the articulation of resistance against the dominance of the Euro Canadian culture and the trauma inflicted by the Catholic residential schools is clearly tangible both on the level of the enounced as well as on the level of the enunciation. Firstly, I will look at how the residential schools became sites in which traumatic experience was produced and reproduced by the children who attended them. As I will show the Okimasis brothers re-enact their trauma throughout their early adult years, but through various acts of resistance they manage to break out of the cycle of abuse. Finally, I will look at resistance to trauma and the dominant discourse both on the extratextual as well as intratextual level.

### 3.1 The Infliction of Trauma in Residential Schools and its Consequences

The second chapter of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* sums up in less than fifty pages the physical, psychological and sexual abuse the two brothers experience at Birch Lake Indian Residential School. The chronic traumatic experience suffered throughout the years fundamentally shapes their future actions and relationships. I have mentioned earlier that a strong link exists between Aboriginal land claims and the colonial residential school system as it was established to alienate children from their home communities and break family ties in an attempt to “speed environmental exploitation, resource extraction, and non-Indigenous settlement” (McKegney 2013: 3). Sam McKegney (2013) elucidates the correlation between deterritorialization and residential schools by identifying three “amputations” which all serve the purpose of facilitating the marginalization of Indigenous peoples and undermining empathy in Native communities. These amputations encompass

firstly, the severing of mind and body (and the concomitant derogation of the body);  
secondly, the severing of male from female (and the concomitant derogation of the feminine);  
and thirdly, the severing of the individual from the communal and territorial roles and responsibilities (and the concomitant derogation of kinship and the land) (8).

In the Catholic boarding schools the body and all bodily functions were regarded as shameful and as a potential source of sinful behavior. Harsh punishments enforced the connection between body and shame. The shaming of bodily functions and desire is further complicated with regard to sexual abuse (10). Victims of abuse often report to have felt disconnected from



their bodies during or after a traumatic incident. Dissociative responses to traumatic events defends the powerless victim from the overwhelming effects of the assault. It also serves the purpose of regaining mental power in moments of physical powerlessness (Spiegel 1991: 261-262). The separation of body and mind due to the chronic abuse in residential schools is particularly devastating since Aboriginal people are often reduced to bodies with limited intellects. This dichotomy of the (imperfect) mind and the (sinful) body complicates meaningful interpersonal relationships essential to strong communities. It also potentially creates a space in which subjectivity is projected to an external entity and the disconnected body is free to commit violent deeds (McKegney 2013: 10). The disembodiment of young boys in residential school thus facilitated violence in Native communities and in particular violence against women, who boys were taught to perceive as inferior and shameful.

Residential schools separated boys from girls, brought them up in different rooms and taught them different abilities. The Western concept of gender differences was thus constructed and reproduced on a daily basis. Far more harmful than the indoctrination of Western patriarchy was the systematic degradation of women. Many Aboriginal boys were taught to abhor femaleness and associate it with guilt and shame. The aim of this was not only to “denigrate and torment Indigenous women but to manufacture hatred toward Indigenous women in shamed and disempowered men” (2). Thinking about girls and playing with girls was considered sinful and dirty and any interaction was discouraged or even physically punished, which resulted in even more intense hatred for women. Disempowered men were taught to disregard women and view them as inferior with the devastating effect that some vented their rage on women who held less power in a patriarchal society. It can be thus argued that residential schools manufactured gendered violence and hatred (7).

The weakening of family ties was further enacted by separating boys and girls and by discouraging same-sex relatives from interacting with each other. This led not only to feelings of pain and fear but also guilt resulting from the inability to protect one's sibling (5). The goal was to “alienate the individual as completely as possible from social and familial ties and recreate her or him as a discrete, autonomous (albeit racially inferior and under-educated) individual within the Canadian settler state” (5). Corporal punishment and public humiliation was widely employed by teachers not only as a means of disciplining the children and creating obedient and “(w)ell trained soldiers of the church” (Kiss: 81) but also to serve another more damaging purpose. The public display of violence traumatizes not only the child subjected to the punishment but also his or her fellow pupils. It desensitizes the witnesses of the abuse so

that they are able to bear the guilt and pain evoked by such an experience. Thus the physical abuse in residential schools disrupted ties between family members, friends and communities, shut off empathy and thereby discouraged young survivors of residential schools from associating themselves with their home communities and land.

### 3.2 The Residential School Experience and its Long-Lasting Effects in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

All of the three “amputations” described above (the separation of females from males, individuals from the community and the body from the mind) can also be observed in Highway's trauma narrative *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Firstly, the separation of family members and boys and girls is addressed on numerous occasions in the novel. Jeremiah is separated from his two sisters Josephine and Chugweesees who “march[...] away to their own world the minute they [get] off the plane” (*Kiss*: 64). Jeremiah promises to himself to find a way to visit them again but the reader never finds out if that actually happens as they almost completely disappear from the narrative. The relationship between the boys and girls at Birch Lake School is sexualized and therefore sinful. The assumption that boys and girls interact within non-sexual and amicable relationships is denied. Girls are therefore kept in different rooms “away from the view of lusty lads who might savor their company” (63). This illustrates that the female body is sexualized from childhood on and hence presents a potential danger for men who are severely punished for all “lusty” behavior. This statement furthermore underlines the reduction of Aboriginal men to their “lusty” bodies, which excludes all non-shameful interaction with the other sex. It is not surprising that this strategy alienates boys and girls and disrupts relationships between siblings, who in their home communities live and play together on a regular basis.

The separation from his sisters certainly affects Jeremiah but he is much more concerned about alienating himself from his brother. When he returns home after his first year at residential school he is afraid that he might not be able to communicate with Gabriel any longer as he does not speak English. He is, however, relieved to find out that he is still perfectly able to speak Cree and immediately teaches him a few English words. At the age of five Gabriel joins his brother at the boarding school and as he steps off the plane a nun touches his long hair, which frightens him immensely. Jeremiah explains to him in Cree that the woman is a nun and that he does not need to be afraid of her. They immediately get reprimanded for speaking their native

tongue. The two boys have no option but to walk up to their school in silence. The prohibition to speak their native tongues further separates the children and forces them to remain silent when their words would have expressed compassion, reassurance or resistance. Another strategy to sever bonds between the students at Birch Lake School mentioned in the book is a “game” in which the boys are allowed to take away objects from other boys whenever they overhear them speak their native tongues. The person who is most successful at this game at the end of month is awarded a prize (63). Sitting in the schoolyard in solitude Jeremiah refuses to play along. Hearing himself speak his mother tongue seems at the moment more important to him than toys.

One of the most traumatizing realizations for Jeremiah constitutes the fact that he is unable to protect his brother, which he still regrets as an adult (301). The fact that the two brothers are not allowed to sleep in beds next to each other shows that any kind of brotherly affection is not encouraged at Birch Lake Residential School. When one night a priest discovers that Jeremiah is sleeping next to his brother he almost violently shakes him out of his dreams and sends him to his bed seven beds away from that of his brother (73-74). In another night Jeremiah wakes up and has to witness how his younger brother is abused by Father Lafleur. I will analyze this scene in further detail later but for now it is important to point out that Jeremiah is so traumatized when he witnesses how his brother is raped by the principle that “some chamber deep inside his mind slam[s] permanently shut.” He refuses to integrate the abuse into his consciousness: “It had happened to nobody. He had not seen what he was seeing” (80). As mentioned earlier, the act of witnessing violence can traumatize a person to such a degree that they lose the ability to feel empathy for other people. This is exemplified in the brutal re-enactments of the Passion of the Christ. The playful re-enactments of trauma allow the children at Birch Lake School to process the traumatic experience inflicted on them and to exert power and control in abusive situations in which under normal circumstances they would be powerless. When the two brothers and fellow students re-enact the Passion of the Christ they do so in a disturbingly violent way. In this role play, which is “admired, even praised” (84) by the teachers, Gabriel plays Jesus and Jeremiah leads the cruel and revengeful crowd. When a brother announces lunch all the children including Jeremiah leave Gabriel almost naked attached to the cross. The close tie between the brothers is visibly weakened and Gabriel vows revenge.

A lack of empathy is also displayed with regard to women. Hatred for and violence against women pervade *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Gendered crimes become an actual reality for Gabriel and Jeremiah when they move to the city. On numerous occasions they witness the rape and

murder of women in the streets of Winnipeg. Jeremiah, for instance, reads about the violent murder of Evelyn Rose McCrae in the newspaper, a woman he believes to have seen step into a car of four drunken men one week earlier. He reports this incident to the police but they do not take a fifteen year old Indian boy seriously (107). Gabriel once witnesses a gang rape but he does not intervene or call the police. He just passes by as the Cree woman is being abused by a group of men. His behavior might have to do with the fact that he is about to break a moral taboo, namely to have sex with a young man in a dark passageway and therefore might not want to report the incident to the police. Still, he seems to be disturbingly uninterested and desensitized to the brutal crime. Other instances in which historical, fictional or actual violence against women is tolerated or even glorified are numerous. When Jeremiah learns about the burning of the witches and a new student, an Indian woman, enters the room he is suddenly enraged and writes into his book, “Nine million women roasted. Live. And they deserved it” (124). In another scene, Jeremiah and Amanda watch a series in which she plays a woman who is physically abused by her husband. Afterwards Amanda tries to have sex with him but he is unable to do so. Instead he asks Amanda to watch the violent scene again. “Somehow, misogynistic violence – watching it, thinking it – was relief” (260).

The residential school experience furthermore distances the two brothers from their Native community and causes them to experience a tormenting identity crisis. The impossibility of communicating with their parents on a deeper level shapes the brothers relationship with their home community. On numerous occasions, Gabriel and Jeremiah have to admit that their mother tongue cannot fully reflect their experiences. There is no word for “AIDS” (296) or “concert pianist” (189) in Cree and the brothers cannot communicate their fascination with classical music and dance to their parents. Most disturbingly, their parents are ignorant of the sexual abuse the boys endured in school and as fervent Christians encourage them to pray and attend church on a regular basis. Until a major spiritual crisis after his father dies, Jeremiah identifies with the oppressors and their culture and incorporates Western beliefs based on the assumption of the inferiority of the “conquered race” (174) and consequently tries hard to become a “transplanted European” (124).

The separation of body and mind often caused by traumatic experiences is represented in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* in the conflict between Jeremiah and Gabriel, who are associated more with the body and the mind respectively. Gabriel lives a promiscuous life as a dancer, while Jeremiah's life is characterized by asceticism and self-discipline. He is so shocked to witness his brother's affair with Gregory Newman that he distances himself from his body (and by

extension his brother) and becomes “intellect – pure, undiluted, precise” (205). Jeremiah's experience in Winnipeg mirrors the concept of hell and heaven he was taught in residential school, which is a sad reminder of the fact that residential schools, while isolating children from the outside world, reflected the discrimination against First Nations in the “real world”. In the lesson in which the children learn about the afterlife, the priests justify the suppression of Aboriginal peoples by reducing them to their bodily needs and desires. Hell is filled with dark-skinned people, who engage in lustful activities all day round (60-61). Jeremiah does not comprehend why hell is a punishment when people revel all day. For him the idea of heaven and hell is an absurd and empty construction that he at first is unable to truly comprehend. By commenting on the “more engaging” (60) atmosphere of hell, Jeremiah resists the priest's depiction of the body and bodily needs as evil and the reduction of “dark-skinned” people to sinful bodies. This episode, however, only illustrates the initial alienation to a way of thinking both brothers are unable to resist as they grow older. The picture the children are shown in class underlines the body-mind dichotomy and the concomitant subordination of the body. In Winnipeg the “Hell Hotel” and the area surrounding it is the site where Native people engage in forbidden pleasures and women are abused and killed, while the domain of high culture is reserved for non-Indigenous people. Considering this setting, it is not surprising that Jeremiah rejects his roots and aspires to become a classical pianist. His decision to devote all his time to classical music provides the most important remedy for his unbearable solitude. The effect of music, however, is ambivalent as it also emotionally connects him with his sexual and physical abuse (Krotz 2009). The ticks of the metronome, for instance, make him think of “the heartbeat of Christ, the grandfather clock in Father Bouchard's Eemanapiteepitat parlour” (*Kiss*: 128). Playing the piano fulfils him but before he learns to use the piano as a modern “pow wow drum” (267), it also increases his loneliness and suffering (Krotz 2009: 188-189). In his small basement room he plays the piano until his fingers start bleeding (107). His relationship to classical music reflects his identity crisis on a deeper level. Jeremiah's loneliness is sometimes even reinforced by practising this Western art form. Sentences like, “the rhyme of his native tongue came bleeding through the music” (*Kiss*: 101) clearly establish an ambivalent relationship to classical music. The reference to blood also alludes to his sexual and physical abuse and his subsequent obsession with masochistic fantasies (“Please, Father, please, make me bleed“, 287). This illustrates that Jeremiah, who represents the mind in the body-mind dichotomy, has a conflicted relationship to his body as pleasure and pain are often intertwined in his life. Gabriel, on the other hand, resists the doctrines of his strict Catholic education and freely pursues his passions. However, his promiscuity is highly troubling as his sexuality seems to be driven by a compulsive desire to re-enact his abuse. Similar to Jeremiah, he derives

pleasure from pain and engages in sadomasochistic relationships. The link between sexuality and identity will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

As has been illustrated, one of the most central themes in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and a much discussed topic in academic writing is the construction of identity after traumatic experiences. Ann Coral Howells (2004) defines *Kiss of the Fur Queen* as an account of “inevitably hybridized identities of contemporary First Nations peoples” (84). Like many other scholars (cf. for instance, Löschnigg 2007) she focuses her analysis on the hybrid identity of the main characters realized both on the level of the enounced as well as on the level of the enunciation. Jeremiah and Gabriel are geographically removed from their Native community, educated according to Western standards and mostly live in an urban environment but at the same time they are not successfully assimilated into Western culture and live at the margin of Western society. This raises questions of how an empowered identity can nevertheless be formed. One answer is certainly that it can be formed through the creative act of storytelling (McKegney 2009: 69). “Storytelling has always had a healing quality”, says Heather Hodgson (1999, online) in an interview with Highway. But where does this healing quality of storytelling come from and why is it so significant? Put briefly, storytelling provides a constructive way to re-enact traumatic experiences and thereby transform them.

### 3.3 Trauma Re-enactment

Trauma re-enactment is a common phenomenon widely discussed in psychology which describes the automatic repetition of traumatic experiences from the past. Sigmund Freud (1920) first discussed how survivors often “repeat the repressed material” (18) of traumatic events. He observes that trauma re-enactment is negatively correlated with a person's conscious memory of the event. Hence, he defines trauma re-enactment as the “compulsion to repeat [...] the unconscious repressed” (20). The repetition of trauma often allows the victim to re-enact a disturbing experience while assuming an active and more powerful role in it (17). During the repetition pain and pleasure are intrinsically interwoven. Traumatic repetition includes self-destructive behaviour (including risky behaviour like drug abuse or sexual promiscuity), the abuse of others and the revisiting of the abuse in dreams, flashbacks and visions (Miller 1994 paraphrased in Trippany 2006: 96). Van der Kolk (1989) argues that survivors of constant abuse tend to re-enact traumatic experiences because they get addicted to them. The constant exposure to high levels of stress affects the body's opioid systems and can make a person addicted to high

levels of neurological arousal (400). Victims of child abuse often feel attached to their oppressors and blame themselves for the abuse, which leads to self-harming behaviour (394). The re-enactment of trauma does not, however, have to be an actual repetition of the abuse but can also be symbolic. In this context I understand storytelling as a meaningful and constructive way of dealing with traumatic memory. It also constitutes a “self-aware form of repetition, allowing repeated and indirect revisiting of a trauma” (Fagan 2009: 209). This means that the re-enactment of trauma happens on a symbolic level and not in real life. The construction of trauma in stories and poetry allows the narrator/speaker to exert full control over his or her traumatic past and change, reorganize or shape the traumatic memory.

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* both Tomson Highway on the extra-textual level of communication and Jeremiah, the playwright, on the intratextual level of communication relate their traumatic experiences in an act of positive trauma re-enactment. Interestingly, Highway's account of traumatic memory is pervaded with Cree language, mythology and humour. The traumatic experience described in the novel is devastating and has a long-lasting effect on both brothers' lives. This does not, however, suggest that they remain victims of their traumatizing childhoods. In fact, resistance to the trauma inflicted on them in residential school is expressed in the novel in a myriad of ways. It exists both on the level of the enounced/the story level and the level of the enunciation/the discourse level and shapes the narrative in its entirety.

### 3.4 The Expression of Resistance in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

Since the arrival of European settlers the history of the Cree has been marked by cultural, psychological and physical oppression. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* Highway successfully manages to

infuse that history with the very Cree spiritual dimension that Residential Schools sought to extinguish. In this way he inverts the assimilation process, taking a non-Native reliance on notions of objective history and subjecting it to Cree mythology, arguing that the mythic and historical pasts are never entirely distinguishable, nor are they separable in any absolute way from the present or the future (McKegney 2009: 68).

Tomson Highway inscribes his resistance to the dominant discourse not only onto the story level by subjecting shared history to Cree spirituality but also onto the discourse level. The most apparent manifestation of resistance on the textual level is reflected in the fact that the novel is interspersed with Cree words and phrases. The Cree language comprises five main dialects of which Plains Cree or paskwâw Cree is the standard version. Highway linguistically places his

characters on the northern Manitoba Woods Cree territory (Van Essen: 2012: 105). He does not use the Standard Roman Orthography but writes the words how he hears them, which potentially makes them inaccessible even for speakers or learners of other Cree dialects. The Cree words are glossed in the back of the book but some place names and other proper nouns are left untranslated. This “troubles the sense of familiarity” and “creates a linguistic boundary between Cree people and the rest of the world” (106). Highway, for instances, uses the precolonial name for “The Pas” (“Oopaskooyak”), thereby “reversing colonial appropriation and possession and reasserting Cree cultural memory by recalling the names that have been erased by the colonizing language(s)” (106). Some of the proper names are also highly humorous but as they are not glossed non-Cree speakers or speakers of another dialect are excluded from the jokes. The “Wuchusk Oochisk River” (*Kiss*: 60), for instance, translates as “muskrat anus” (107) humorously evoking the story of the Weesageechak and the Weetigo (*Kiss*: 118). “Chuksees” (*Kiss*: 15), a name of a dog mentioned at the beginning of the novel, literally means “penis” (108). In this way Highway sometimes only speaks to a group of insiders who understand Woods Cree and puts everyone else in the position of an outsider. Even if most words are translated, the Cree words and expressions “disrupt the flow of reading” (108) and make non-Aboriginal readers aware of their limited knowledge of the Cree culture and language. Hence, Highway, despite writing mostly in English, inspires resistance to the dominant culture.

By writing a novel Highway appropriates an intrinsically Western genre. Instead of expressing the dominance of one culture over another, Highway uses this genre on his own terms and for his own purposes. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is divided into six parts each carrying the Italian name of a specific tempo. The last part, for instance, is called “presto con fuoco”, “faster with fire”, which perfectly describes the mood and atmosphere and speed of the tragicomic last scene in which Jeremiah, Amanda and her grandmother refuse to let a priest enter the hospital room in which a medicine woman is taking care of the dying Gabriel. Interestingly, despite the novel's mostly tragic content, many traumatic events are depicted through a humorous lens. The aforementioned episode in which the hospital personnel, Mariesis and some firefighters try to break into the room in which Gabriel is lying in order to prevent them from performing a Native ceremony is very humorous despite its tragic content. “The smoke shriek[s]” and firefighters try to evade the room where Gabriel is lying. Jeremiah hears the noise, jokingly asks if the army is invading the building and looks outside just to come “face to face with a towering blonde nurse” with a funny German accent. He also sees Mariesis “teetering around the corner with an ancient priest in tow” (*Kiss*: 304) who demands access to the room. Jeremiah counters that they have the right to conduct their own rituals and “shove[s] the midget priest away”. He “pull[s]



Mariesis inside” (305) and Ann-Adele Ghost rider, who throws Mariesis's rosary on a “Ken doll sporting cowboy hat” (303) humorously linking Catholicism with both consumerism and imperialism, continues the ceremony. The Fur Queen arrives, kisses Gabriel and takes him with her leaving his body behind. On the story as well as the discourse level this event, which switches between the tragic and the comic mode, offers resistance to the dominate discourse. This episode can be read as a metaphoric struggle between Catholicism and Native spirituality, in which Native beliefs win over the colonizer's religion (Howells 2004: 91). It symbolises the victory of Native belief systems over the dominant culture and illustrates the endurance of Native spirituality. Its tempo is quick, its tone humorous but nonetheless serious and infused with Cree spirituality. In the end it is the trickster who dominates the story echoing the first scene in which Gabriel's father wins the 1951 Millington Cup World Championship Dog Derby and the Fur Queen bestows a kiss on him. Despite the often horrific content, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is an intrinsically humorous text that does not shy away from employing humour and irony in the most serious and devastating moments.

It is therefore not surprising that Gabriel's sexual abuse at the hands of Father Lafleur, despite its tragic note, is ironically accompanied with the soft tones of the song “Love Me Tender” (78) coming from the room next door. Humour and irony are an essential part of the Cree culture because through the lens of humour difficult issues can be tackled in a culturally appropriate way. Humour also has the function to ease the pain and heal wounds (Hodgson 1999: 2). Fagan (2009) points out that humour and laughter provoking storytelling is essential to Cree communities as they tend to favour indirect and non-confrontational communication (4). Humour enables people to address difficult subjects without breaking taboos or confronting anyone directly because the line between what is meant and what is not meant by a humorous utterance is usually blurred. In this way humour is a powerful tool that permits people to talk about potential taboo subjects in a culturally accepted way (2).

Another interesting formal aspect reflecting Cree culture is the conception of time in the novel. Time is sometimes not depicted as linear but as circular. The narrative is at times interrupted by flashbacks in which the brothers look back at events which took place at Birch Lake Residential School. At the end of the novel, for instance, Jeremiah vividly remembers how Father Lafleur sexually abuses him (*Kiss*: 287), an event related to the reader for the first time at this point of the novel. Time also seems to repeat itself in a slightly different way. Jeremiah's experience in the piano competition in which he wins the Brookshank Memorial Trophy, for instance, parallels his father's experience in the dog sledding competition in the first chapter (213-214).

As Jeremiah metaphorically comes closer to the finishing line he has a vision of the Fur Queen surrounded by the northern lights and smiling at him. This clearly evokes his father's victory in the dog sledding competition in northern Manitoba and the subsequent kiss from the Fur Queen. The narrative starts with a kiss from the Fur Queen and ends with it. This illustrates not only the significance of the trickster figure in the novel but also the circularity of the narrative. The novel furthermore presents many storylines and a number of different focalizers. In the episode in which Gabriel is abused by Father Lafleur, for instance, the focalization suddenly shifts from Gabriel to Jeremiah, who interprets the abuse as an attack by one of the scariest figures in Cree spirituality, the Weetigo. Jeremiah sees the priest as a monster “feasting on human flesh. [...] No, Jeremiah wailed to himself, please. Not him again” (79). It is suggested that Father Lafleur has raped either of the brothers before but it is not entirely clear which one. This ambiguity illustrates the strong bond between the brothers which causes Jeremiah as a bystander to be as traumatized as Gabriel who experiences the abuse.

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* the Weetigo represents Catholicism and consumerism which both affect Native communities. The depiction of Catholicism as the “exotic Other” constitutes one of the most important attempts at attacking the dominance of Western culture over Indigenous belief systems on the story level. Catholicism is a central theme in the novel not only due to its significance in the education of the two boys but also as an indicator gauging the brothers’ assimilation efforts. It is therefore not surprising that they attain the “decolonization of their minds and bodies [...] through the exorcism and abjection of Roman Catholicism (Buzny 2011: 3). For Jeremiah and Gabriel the residential school constitutes “an absurd mix of Catholicism and sexuality, of caretaking and abuse, of celibacy and sado-masochism” (Fagan 2009: 216). The link between non-normative sexuality, violence, eroticism and Catholicism runs like a golden thread through the narrative. In a heated argument with his brother Gabriel defines the Catholic Church as a primitive and immoral institution while depicting Native religions as more refined and superior. His argument is that the most central ritual in Catholic liturgy involves the symbolic incorporation of the body and blood of Christ, which he interprets as a symbolic act of cannibalism. Hence, he establishes a link between the Holy Communion and the most fearful figure in Cree storytelling – the cannibalistic Weetigo (*Kiss*: 184). This link becomes more evident when Gabriel receives a host in church and he is described as “spewing blood, his bloated gut regurgitant, his esophagus engorged with entrails” (181). The Holy Communion itself is depicted as a highly erotic, sensual and almost violent ritual in which the crowd “screaming with hunger” (181) waits to receive a host and their “tongues dart[...] out as the priest, with a confidential murmur, place[s] a wafer on them” (180).

The Catholic Church is furthermore accused of misogyny and in particular violence against women. In a biology lesson at school Gabriel realizes that the “essence of maleness” (*Kiss*: 125), the body of Christ, is the most important symbol in Catholicism. Femaleness does not enjoy the same privilege, on the contrary, Catholicism supports the subjugation of women. Black-eyed Susan Magipom, Abraham's sister, for instance, is shamed for leaving her abusive husband. Likewise, Chachagathoo, “the last medicine woman” (247), described both by Mariesis and the omnipresent Father Bouchard as evil (90,197), is sent to prison for witchcraft. The death of this powerful woman marks the “penetration” of the colonizing religion and the subjugation of an “essentially female Cree spiritual worldview by an invading patriarchal Christianity” (McKegney 2013: 69).

In many instances the Catholic Church is derided as a primitive religion in a humorous way. Gabriel, for instance, ironically translates “university” as “Semen-airy” (*Kiss*: 191) in Cree and the trickster figure in the novel lampoons the Catholic god as a “grumpy, embittered, sexually frustrated old fart with a long white beard hiding like a gutless coward behind some puffed-up cloud” (234). Jennifer Henderson (2009) draws a connection between Highway's portrayal of Catholicism and the anti-Catholic Gothic novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At that time England's anti-Catholic sentiments supported the depiction of Protestantism as sophisticated and Catholicism as primitive. George Haggerty (2004-2005, online) suggests that an important trope of the Gothic fiction at the time was the exploration of non-normative sexuality in Catholic settings. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is certainly reminiscent of the anti-Catholic Protestantism that inspired the Gothic literature in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but Highway's novel makes use of this trope for a different purpose, namely to inspire resistance to the dominant Western culture by reversing the power relations. The depiction of Catholicism as the highly sexualized and exotic Other reverses the power dynamics. The novel places emphasis on the perspectives of the colonized group who is usually the object of such biased views. In *Kiss of the Fur Queen* it is not the Aboriginal culture that is depicted as primitive and underdeveloped but the Catholic religion with all its rituals. It is not the “wild savage” but the priests and the religious community that lust for male flesh (in the form of the host). It is not the Aboriginal people who are depicted as wild and violent but the lusty teachers at Birch Lake Residential Schools and other Catholic priests who are reduced to their bodies as they cannot control themselves at the sight of young children. Throughout much of the novel Jeremiah's internalization of Western ideals make him refer to his own culture as primitive and view Native rituals through the lens of Western stereotypes (*Kiss*: 171). Gabriel, on the other hand, distances himself from his Catholic education and encourages Jeremiah to embrace his Native roots. In a

disturbing but also humorous scene, Gabriel eyes up and down the priest who administers the Holy Communion and is pleased to see that he obviously elicits desire in the man. His outbreak of laughter “where his “Amen” should have been” (181) signals his resistance to a religion that is on numerous occasions compared to the most frightful creature in Cree and Ojibway legends. The object of desire is the priest, who is reduced to his body and is unable to control his sexual desires. This scene, like so many others in this novel, reverses the stereotypical representation of Aboriginal peoples as savage since it is the priest who is compared to the cannibalistic Weetigo as “a length of raw meat dangle[s] from his fingers.” (181).

Sam McKegney (2013) suggests that *Kiss of the Fur Queen* stages a “mythic battle between the Son of Ayash and the Weetigo” (73). The two brothers are consistently confronted with the decision to either identify with the Weetigo and continue to re-enact the abuse or with the Son of Ayash and break out of the cycle of abuse. “The Son of Ayash” is a Cree legend also known in Ojibway, Algonquin and Innu communities. Published versions of the tale vary but basically the story revolves around a young man who is abandoned on an island by his grandfather, father or stepfather. He has to endure much hardship and master difficult challenges on his journey. He is, however, supported by his grandmother, by an animal spirits or an old woman sent to him by his mother. In some stories he is accompanied by a wise fox woman. He also receives magical weapons that assist him on his journey. In the end the Son of Ayash manages to return home, saves his mother, punishes the male figure and burns the world to make it a new and better place (Brightman 1989: 94-95). In Highway’s novel the Son of Ayash is associated with stepping out of the cycle of abuse and creating a meaningful life by using one’s creativity in a constructive way. The tale of the Son of Ayash is recounted partly by the boys’ father on his death bed. “The world has become too evil. With these magic weapons, make a new world” (*Kiss*: 227), Abraham tells the boys but he dies with a host in his mouth before he can finish the story (227-228). Despite the fact that this story is only briefly mentioned in the text, it is significant for the novel as it could be considered a symbolic representation of Gabriel’s and Jeremiah’s struggle to create meaningful relationships and a fulfilled life in spite of the trauma they had to endure. Similar to the Son of Ayash they are removed from their home community and have to find a way back to their Native roots. The Son of Ayash stands for the transcendence of the evil and the proactive creation of a better reality, while the Weetigo represents the danger of repeating abusive or self-harming behaviour.

Another legend, the story of the Weetigo and the Weesageechak, is first recounted when Gabriel and Jeremiah go shopping at the Marco Polo Shopping Mall. The sensual and lewd tale relates

how a weasel defeats the Weetigo by entering it through its anus and eating it from the inside. The Weetigo associated with Father Lafleur and Catholicism by extension in the second part is linked to consumerism in this episode. As the two brothers walk “deep into the entrails of the beast” (*Kiss*: 116), they are unaware of their own predicament. In the food court, the “belly of the beast” (119) they gorge themselves until “their bellies come near to bursting” (120). Like the weasel they, however, cannot exorcize the Weetigo as they both “consume and are consumed by the Weetigo” (Buzny 2011:9). They enter the “cathedral of sorts for capitalism” (Smith 2009: 157) to assimilate into the Euro-Canadian culture and not to express their Native identity. Nevertheless, resistance is expressed by the “Indigenization” of a “colonized space” (Smith 2009: 157) as their identity struggle is metaphorically represented through a Cree tale. This episode foregrounds an Aboriginal myth related trauma theory that represents the brothers’ identity struggle on a symbolic level. At its centre is the Weetigo who is connected to “colonial violence” (Belghiti 2009: 7). The Weetigo is a cannibalistic creature in Cree and Ojibway (Wendigo) culture that may infect its victims with the same appetite for human flesh. The Weetigo is a very dreaded figure not primarily because it can kill people but because of its ability to transform a normal human being into a cannibal. The legend of the Weetigo raises questions about the responsibility of humans as someone who is infected by a Weetigo cannot control his or her desire for human flesh any longer (Atwood 1995: 67). The Weetigo embodies the fear and danger of destructive trauma re-enactment. As mentioned earlier, trauma re-enactment can also be constructive. Sometimes one must dive into the abuse again in order to heal (Henderson 2009: 191-192) in analogy with the trickster who enters the Weetigo and eats it from inside.

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* raises a tricky question, namely to which degree is identity connected to trauma or, to put it differently, does sexual abuse cause non-normative sexual behaviour? Highway clearly links Gabriel's sexuality with his abuse, thereby establishing a highly controversial link between sexuality and identity. Gabriel re-enacts his trauma by deliberately searching for priests as sexual partners (*Kiss*: 185). He also associates elements connected to his abuse, like a silver cross, with sexual pleasure. While participating in an orgy, for instance, he imagines the silver cross of Father Lafleur pressing on his lips and the taste of warm honey, which takes him back to the first time Father Lafleur abused him. In this scene he performs oral sex on another man and honey most likely signifies semen in this case. As many critics have observed, Gabriel's sexual and physical abuse evokes not only pain but also pleasure in him (for instance Buzny 2011:7). As Henderson (2009) points out his abuse is also an “initiation into a particular mise en scène of desire” (190). While many literary critics have found it confusing

that Gabriel experiences intense pleasure in this awful moment in which the priest rapes him, it is a much documented experience that many rape victims share. Especially young children but also adults are sometimes sexually aroused and can even reach a climax while being abused. However, this does under no circumstances justify an abuse or make it enjoyable. On the contrary, the feeling of sexual arousal during sexual abuse only enhances a victim's fear, shame and confusion (Durham 2003:144). It is obvious that Gabriel re-enacts his abuse as a young adult as he was “eaten” by a Weetigo as a child but he does so on his own terms. What Andrew Buzny (2011) calls “repetition with a difference” (14) is the re-enactment of trauma in which Gabriel has full awareness of and control over the situation. It is therefore a form of re-enactment which leads him inside the Weetigo. It could also be argued that as an adult Gabriel while consciously choosing his sexual partners is subconsciously driven to repeat his abuse. As controversial as this link between identity and non-normative sexuality is, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* repeatedly insinuates that Gabriel’s sexuality was shaped by his abusive past. As an adult Gabriel absolutely needs to destroy the Weetigo as it represents a constant danger for him to continue the cycle of abuse. In his ballet lesson, for instance, he observes that the other children hardly reach his navel, which makes him “look, and feel, like a Weetigo” (*Kiss*: 152).

Similarly, when Jeremiah is teaching in *The Muskoosis Club of Ontario* he notices the “fresh” smell of his pupils and that he could “swallow them” (271). He too has been touched by the Weetigo, and so he has been infected with the desire to eat fresh meat but he is able to control the Weetigo inside. When a child approaches him after class, sits on his lap and indirectly tells him that he has been abused he immediately becomes sexually aroused. However, the short fight against the Weetigo is quickly won and he reports the incident to the headmaster. The heroic battle between the Son of Ayash and the Weetigo in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* ends in the “exorcism of the Weetigo” (Buzny 2011: 15) as both Jeremiah and Gabriel acknowledge that the healing of their trauma requires the rejection of Catholicism and the acceptance of their Native roots. Right before his death Gabriel confronts the Weetigo and manages to drive him away:

The Weetigo came at Gabriel with its tongue lolling, its claws reaching for his groin. ‘Haven’t you feasted on enough human flesh while we sit here with nothing but our tongues to chew on?’ Hissed Gabriel. But the cannibal spirit now had the face of Father Roland Lafleur. Gabriel crept towards the holy man. ‘But I haven’t eaten meat in weeks, my dear Sagweesoo,’ Gabriel whined, and flicked his tongue at the old priest’s groin. ‘Don’t move away.’ The creature lunged at Gabriel, brandishing a crucifix. ‘Get away from me,’ Gabriel thrashed. ‘Get away, awus [go away]!’ (299-300).

His ambivalent relationship with his abusive past is again demonstrated in this example. Gabriel sees the Weetigo and wants to drive him away but when it turns into a priest he changes his behaviour drastically and begs him to stay. Gabriel has become so addicted to the chronic abuse he experienced in residential school that he is unable to control his desire to repeat it. He, however, realizes that the Weetigo is the priest and that his psychological issues are due to his abusive upbringing and therefore manages to drive the beast away. It is important that he does so in his mother tongue Cree, which he was strictly forbidden to speak in the presence of the priests. This underlines that Native culture cannot be suppressed no matter how great the effort. In one flashback the children at Birch Lake School re-enact the Last Supper and Jesus announces that they only receive a host if they speak English and “the table explode[s] with a flurry of Cree so profane and so prolonged [...] that the feast would have been sabotaged” if the boys were not interrupted by a priest (*Kiss*: 179). Likewise, Jeremiah and Gabriel cannot suppress their Cree roots as adults. In many ways the act of driving the Weetigo away signifies the ultimate resistance to the trauma Gabriel and Jeremiah had to endure. As the novel “depicts Father Lafleur's sexual abuse in terms of the Weetigo's violence that infects the body it devours and intensifies their desire for other bodies” (Belghiti 2009: 4), the “exorcism” of the beast is a highly empowering act that allows them to decolonize their body and soul. The fact that trauma and the healing from traumatic events is related in terms of a Cree legend further supports this point. In the end it becomes evident that the residential school experience, while shaping the two brothers significantly throughout their lives, could not prevent their Cree roots from growing and flourishing. Ultimately, the Cree spirit proves to be eternal as the Fur Queen accompanies Gabriel's soul out of his dead body and into the magical Cree dreamworld.

#### 4. The Representation of Traumatic Experiences in *Monkey Beach* and the Native Canadian Gothic

In *The Routledge Concise History of Canadian Literature*, Richard Lane (2011) discusses Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* as a *Bildungsroman* redefining the trope of the indomitable and fearsome wilderness in the Canadian Gothic (172). Wilderness in this subgenre is feared not only for the potentially life threatening Canadian climate and the wild animals that inhabit it, but also for the Native peoples who populate it. A new literary form, the Native Canadian Gothic, reverses this Gothic convention according to which Aboriginal peoples are depicted as a menace to European civilization, and focuses on the negative influence of colonization instead. The classification of *Monkey Beach* as a Native Canadian Gothic novel is indeed tempting considering the numerous Gothic elements in the novel, but it also presents some issues that render such a classification problematic and should therefore not be ignored. After a short introduction to the Gothic genre, I will investigate the relevance of the Gothic in an Aboriginal context and how the depiction of traumatic experiences invites such an interpretation. The representation of traumatic experience in connection with magical thinking will play a key role tackling the question of whether the ghosts haunting the protagonist in *Monkey Beach* represent the return of the repressed (Freud 1919: 155) or whether Freud's concept of the uncanny is insufficient and inadequate in a Native-authored novel. Before analysing how trauma affects the Haisla community, I will introduce Eden Robinson, outline the plot of the novel and comment on its narrative situation and structure.

Richard Lane (2011) states that in contrast to the Canadian Gothic, the Native Canadian Gothic

reverses this mode of Canadian writing, so that instead of nature, it is the colonial urban landscape that has become the site of danger, and instead of wild beasts and ghosts, predatory white teachers and priests in Aboriginal residential schools are a threat to emotional and sexual order (172).

In this way, Lane posits that the Native Canadian Gothic has the potential to rewrite deeply entrenched images in the Canadian imagination and permits cultural liberation by redefining the Eurocentric definition of the Gothic while at the same time making use of its energy and force.

Providing much of Lane's theoretical background for discussing *Monkey Beach* as a Gothic novel, Jennifer Andrews (2001) suggests that the novel draws upon many literary conventions of the Gothic, notably the depiction of a remote setting, a distressed and vexed protagonist, the



first person point of view and the depiction of sexuality as an act of dominance over someone else (6), but at the same time deviates from this genre significantly. Firstly, the Canadian wilderness is not depicted as primarily menacing nor is it defined by a “lack of ghosts” (Birney. “Can Lit”: 1.15) but instead is full of myths and legends and a potential source of spirituality. Evil, a common feature in Gothic texts, stems from the external world, from the urban space and from historical sites that inflict harmful traumatic experience on the Native psyche:

By positing evil on the margins of the novel and exploring the potential empowering aspects of the natural and supernatural worlds, Robinson seems to suggest that the Gothic may be a way of distancing what is uncomfortable for non-Native readers to confront: a historical legacy of monstrosities that continues to impact the Haisla tribe Robinson's text traces the return of the repressed in a distinctly Native context [...] (Andrews 2001: 21).

According to Andrews, the eerie effect of *Monkey Beach* is due to the evocation but not explicit mentioning of imperial practices aimed at weakening family ties and Native belief systems, and systematically robbing First Nations of their culture. These colonial practices are not openly discussed but merely implied in the text, which creates the uncanny effect that, while ubiquitous, the evil is not tangible and therefore cannot be resolved. The obvious silencing of traumatic experiences enhances this effect. The haunted wilderness constitutes not the projection field of European anxieties, but a space where vital cultural knowledge is manifested and is shared for cultural empowerment.

As has been illustrated, the classification of *Monkey Beach* as a Native Canadian Gothic Novel could be considered an empowering reversal of a literary genre which used to depict First Nations as fearsome and wild. Nevertheless, it is problematic. Firstly, the question arises whether the term “Gothic” should be employed for texts that do not correspond to the historical and cultural context in which the term was coined. Even though Gothic literature has evolved and has produced writing that deviates significantly from Gothic texts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, this classification still stipulates a Eurocentric perspective on Native writing. It suggests that literary terms rooted in the dominant culture can be used effectively to define another culture. Secondly, arguing that *Monkey Beach* “traces the return of the repressed in a distinctly Native context” (Andrews 2001: 21) reduces this novel to a narrative of colonialism. It is evident that the trauma depicted in the novel mostly stems from the consequences of colonial activities – notably the residential school system, but the novel cannot be analysed solely on the basis of the impact of colonialism on Native communities. Thirdly, the concept of the “return of the repressed” also insinuates that magical thinking can be reduced to the “projection of primitive man's emotional impulses” on the outside world (Freud 1918: para 41). This suggests the pathologization of spiritual and traditional beliefs and is therefore highly problematic. Before

going into further detail on the implications of the novel's classification, I will take closer look at the novel itself.

## 4.1 *Monkey Beach*

*Monkey Beach* was published in 2000 by Eden Robinson, one of the foremost First Nation female writers. She was born on the Haisla Nation Kitimaat Reserve on the coast of mainland British Columbia. After earning a Bachelor's degree from the University of Victoria, she went on to gain a Master's degree in creative writing from the University of British Columbia. Her first book *Traplines*, a collection of sinister short stories dwelling on the spiritual abyss of human beings, was awarded Britain's Winifred Holtby Prize in 1996. Her first novel *Monkey Beach*, which is an extended version of the short story "Queen of the North" from *Traplines*, was shortlisted for the 2000 Giller Prize and nominated for the 2000 Governor General Award. Her second novel *Blood Sports* published in 2006 is based on the short story "Blood Sports", which also appeared in *Traplines*. Currently, Eden Robinson is living in Kitimaat to be closer to her Haisla father and her Heiltsuk mother. Her greatest literary influences are Stephen King, whom she loved reading from an early age and Edgar Allan Poe, whom she was introduced to by one of her teachers in school. Eden Robinson's second publication *Monkey Beach* is set in Kitimaat on the northern coast of British Columbia. The story opens up with Lisamarie, the first person narrator, waking up from a dream in which she hears the voices of ravens telling her, "La'es- Go down to the bottom of the sea" (*MB*: 1). Lisa might actually not be waking up from a dream, but be having a vision – as she is "half awake" when she hears the ravens and this state of being between sleep and waking is, as the reader learns later, required if one wishes to contact the dead. The protagonist also states that the Haisla phrase "La'es" "means something else" (1) but it has slipped her mind. The gloomy atmosphere and uncertainty about how to decode the spiritual world depicted on the first page frame the whole narrative. Lisa's brother has gone missing while fishing on the *Queen of the North* with his girlfriend's father Josh. Both of them are believed to be dead. This shocking turn of events fuels Lisa's memory of other traumatising events in her childhood. Her childhood memories are woven into ominous accounts of how she is trying to find her brother. Another mysterious voice speaking directly to the reader and seemingly coming from someone older than Lisa occasionally interrupts the narrative and provides interesting information about the Haisla culture, but also about human

anatomy. This voice relates much knowledge that Lisa's grandmother Ma-ma-oo hands down to her. Throughout her childhood, Ma-ma-oo has a significant influence on her granddaughter – sharing with her traditional stories and myths, recipes and other cultural practices. Lisa gains much strength from this traditional knowledge but finds herself unable to master her own relationship with ghosts and other spiritual beings. She is guilt-ridden when her frequent visions of a red-haired man who always foretells negative events or even death cannot help her to rescue her family members from their horrifying fates. Another important family member is her uncle Mick, who used to be an activist in the American Indian Movement, calls her his “little warrior” (69) and encourages her to stand up against inequalities. When Mick dies while out fishing, Lisa is devastated. Before she can recover, her grandmother has a heart attack and later dies in a fire in her house. On top of that, Lisa is raped by one of her friends at a party shortly after having almost been attacked by a group of white men in the street. In her attempt to find her brother, Lisa contacts a spirit that demands to be fed by her blood. She has visions of her brother attacking Josh on *The Queen of the North* to punish him for the constant abuse and impregnation of his daughter Karaoke, who Jimmy is dating. Josh dies in the fight and the ship sinks. The narrative ends with Lisa observing the ghosts of Mick, Jimmy and Ma-ma-oo, who all give her directions on what she should do on her return home. If and how Lisa returns home, however, is not revealed on the final pages.

#### 4.1.1 Narrative Situation and Structure

The narrative situation and structure of *Monkey Beach* are important aspects as they give clues on how to interpret the novel. The protagonist of the novel Lisamarie is a first person narrator, or to use Genette's (1980) terminology, an autodiegetic narrator. Stanzel (1979), who introduced the model of the three typical narrative situations (the first person, the authorial and the figural narrative situation) distinguishes between the narrating I and the experiencing I (Nünning 2009: 111). These entities are “often separated by temporal, and sometimes also by moral, distance” (111). While some temporal distance exists between the experiencing I and the narrating I in *Monkey Beach*, this distance does not seem significant enough to provide the protagonist with the cognitive and emotional maturity to re-assess her actions and motives. The narrating I is Lisa at the age of 19, who remembers both beautiful and traumatic memories from her childhood and teenage years.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first and second chapter are of approximately the same length, but the third is much shorter and the last chapter only a few pages long. The brevity of the last chapter and the painfully open ending reinforce the sense that many things remain hidden and secret in the end. Lisa's account of how she and her parents react to her brother's disappearance is interrupted by the chronological narration of childhood memories. Short interludes in which the fictive reader is explicitly addressed are intertwined in the narrative as well. As mentioned before, this narrative voice gives the impression of coming from an older and wiser person than Lisa, but this impression cannot be verified. In these interludes an overt narrator explicitly addresses an overt narratee, thereby fulfilling diverse functions. These interludes provide detailed culture-specific knowledge by telling the reader how to find the remote village of Kitimaat on a map (4-5), by describing violent natural events like, for instance, how a sea otter devours an urchin (131), by teaching the reader how to contact the dead (139, 179-180, 212) and how to make oolichan grease (86), and by providing information on the history of the Haisla tribe (for instance 194). This voice also informs the reader about the anatomy of the heart (163-164, 191-192) and how a heart attack is caused and what its symptoms are (269, 275) and tells the narratee to pull their heart out of their body (191), carefully examine its anatomy and then put it back into the body again. *Monkey Beach* is hence marked not only by a complex structure and a non-linear plot, but also by a collage of different discourses. The frequent interludes are brief and mysterious and evoke curiosity to learn more about the Haisla. The ample use of directions serves the purpose of stressing the importance for the narratee to actively find out more about the Haisla culture. The first interlude tells the reader where Kitimaat is located: "Find a map of British Columbia. Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Island. Drag your finger across the map, across the Hecate Strait to the coast and you should be able to see a large coast hugging the island" (4). This description clearly requires the reader to look at a map to be able to follow the instructions. It does not directly lead to the town of Kitimaat but makes the reader explore all the surrounding areas as well. It is certainly easier to look for Kitimaat on the internet but these instructions, reminiscent of a treasure hunt, require more knowledge, curiosity and time than any other method using modern technology.

*Monkey Beach's* gloomy atmosphere is not only due to its horrifying plot, but also caused by the limitations inherent in the narrative situation. As a child, Lisa does not fully understand the adult world and she is constantly excluded from essential information. This lack of information paired with her subjective and naive worldview raise doubt about the reliability of the narrator. Her limited access to information becomes evident when her parents consciously exclude her

in moments in which important information is shared. When her uncle Mick unexpectedly returns to the reserve, Lisa is immediately sent to bed. She relates that in her room she can “hear the murmur of conversation but not the actual words” (26). Likewise, her curious questions are often left unanswered. Mick, for instance, deflects Lisa's question about whether he was married by asking if she wanted ice cream (73). In another scene Lisa observes her uncle while he is having a nightmare and calling out the name of his deceased wife. She asks her mother to explain his behaviour but she just rejects the question by stating, “This is grown-up stuff. Don't ask him anything tomorrow” (109). Her tender age in the flashbacks, her lack of information and her memory lapses are all indicators that she may not be a reliable narrator. Furthermore, Lisa explicitly refers to the sometimes difficult process of retrieving memories. When she is trying to find her brother on a speedboat she recollects how her grandmother told her stories about a shape-changing raven but she cannot recount them: “I try to remember a story she told me, but I am distracted” (154). Her statement draws attention to the process of narrating, the narrating self and by extension to the unreliability of the narration. Lisa also allows external factors to influence her memories when she states, “The weather is inspiring my gloomy turn of thoughts” (165). Hence, the narrative situation is characterised by an autodiegetic narrator whose reliability is in question. The limited point of view of the narrator only enhances the novel's uncanny atmosphere.

With regard to the time span, the novel covers Lisa's childhood from the age of about six years to the age of nineteen. The narrative tense is the present tense at the beginning and shifts to the past tense as soon as Lisa recounts her first childhood memory. When the Coast Guard calls Lisa and tells her that they are not able to find the *Queen of the North*, she is devastated. In a dream she sees Jimmy on Monkey Beach and so her first memory takes her back to a mythical being called B'gwus, which is said to haunt the mountains near Monkey Beach (7). The transition between present and past tense and between different locales is unstructured and fluid. Different temporal and spatial realities merge and intermingle constantly. It is last but not least this transcendence of space and time on the structural level mirroring a transcendence of material and immaterial realities on the level of the enounced that so pervasively suggests a Gothic interpretation of the text.

## 4.2 The Gothic Novel

The Gothic novel emerged in late 18<sup>th</sup>-century England and then spread throughout Europe and to the US. The word originally comes from an early Germanic tribe, the Goths and later acquired the meaning “germanic” and then “medieval” (Abrams and Harpham 2014: 152). As an architectural style, the Gothic was popular approximately between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe and was characterised by pointed arches, ribbed vaults and flying buttresses. In literature, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) is often considered the first Gothic Novel. The setting of the literary Gothic usually involves medieval castles and later, old houses in exotic or remote places, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic novels also explored the dark streets and hidden secrets of urban centres. A typical plotline centred on “the suffering imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain” while making “bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turn out to have natural explanations)” which aim at eliciting “chilling terror” (152) in the reader. Over time, this narrow definition of the Gothic widened and has come to describe a number of literary works deviating from it. It started to be used for novels characterized by a gloomy atmosphere, by uncanny events, the depiction of cruelty and violence and/or abnormal psychological states (153). Due to its excessive use of monsters, ghosts, villains and criminals situated in menacing places and the simultaneous focus on the punishment of committed digressions, the Gothic both challenges and reinforces enlightenment and humanist values:

Gothic condenses the many perceived threats to these values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative accesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgressions, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption (Botting 1996: 2).

The depiction of supernatural elements in the Gothic transgresses the limits of reason and sensibility and promotes an emotional reaction to it. Rather than having a didactical function, the Gothic satisfies the readers' thirst for abnormal, uncultured and horrifying events (Botting 1996: 4). At the same time, however, the Gothic also makes a harsh distinction between moral and immoral behaviour and between good and evil and warns the reader about what a digression of social and moral standards might entail (7). By depicting an unexplainable and hence uncontrollable power, the Gothic also cautions the reader against crossing the lines of propriety and reason. The observation that the Gothic both challenges and reinforces cultural values and norms establishes the Gothic as an inherently ambivalent genre (23).

In order to provide a theoretical background for the Gothic, psychoanalytical theories have always played an essential role. In fact, the Gothic was of considerable interest for early psychoanalysts since it investigated why and when reality and fantasy intermingle (Massé 2012: 308). In his essay “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” (On the Psychology of the Uncanny) published in 1906, Jentsch states that uncanny feelings (one potential manifestation of the Gothic) are primarily caused by a foreign and unfamiliar situation: “The human desire for the intellectual mastery of one's environment is a strong one. Intellectual certainty provides psychical shelter in the struggle for existence” (228). Jentsch argues that since for children many things are unfamiliar, they are prone to be more easily frightened than adults (219). One of the most powerful experiences for humans is the inability to decide whether an inanimate object is animate or vice versa (222). Doubt creates an uncanny feeling as humans have the need to be able to make sense of the world. Thirteen years after the publication of Jentsch's analysis of the uncanny, Sigmund Freud (1919) posits that his colleague's line of argumentation is incomplete by suggesting that “the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (76). It is not only intellectual uncertainty that make us afraid but the surfacing of something “that ought to have remained secret and hidden, and yet comes to light” (79).

### 4.3 The Canadian Gothic

The Canadian Gothic, which arguably started with the publication of John Richardson's *Wacousta* in 1832, is a recurring genre in Canadian fiction as colonization is intrinsically uncanny. Colonization is the process in which the “heimlich” (Freud: 1919: 76) (homely) is left for the “unheimlich” (unhomely). Likewise, decolonization challenges the familiar power structure. The “unsettled, the not-yet colonized, unsuccessfully colonized or decolonized” (Edwards 2005: xx) space is uncanny because it is characterised by a lack of control and intellectual uncertainty. Cynthia Sugars (2011) argues that the Gothic has a long tradition in Canadian writing as it served among others as a means of dealing with the new and frightening aspects of the Canadian wilderness. The early pioneer writers warned the European settlers of wild beasts and belligerent Indigenous peoples. The Gothic was a way of dealing with these new and challenging circumstances. The fear of the unknown external space later gave way to an internalized anxiety concerning Canada's identity (echoing Northrop Frye's famous statement that the question is not “How am I” but “Where is Here”, 1965: 826). The 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which saw the Gothic Revival in Europe, was a period in which Canadian

writers still had to establish a distinct Canadian identity. The “Gothic is invoked as a means of getting at anxieties about historicity (where one belongs within history) and historicization (how one writes one’s self into history)” (60). The presence of the Gothic, however, was never as predominant as the “Gothic absence” (63) in Canadian writing. As Sugars explains, the “Gothic rhetoric is being invoked for a much more self-conscious purpose: as a way of establishing claims to settlement and a distinctive cultural identity” (63). A lack of stories and traditions eventually means a lack of history and it is this lack which causes so much fear in the Canadian psyche. The wilderness obviously causes much more fear because of the settlers’ own superstition and not because of the presence of an uncanny spirit. The last two lines in Sir Earle Birney’s poem “Can Lit” (1966) also evoke the image of an untouched land that still needs to be defined by white settlers. The famous ending of the poem, “it is only by our lack of ghosts that we are haunted” (Birney. “Can Lit”: 1.15-16) echoes a long tradition in Canadian writing concerned with their “inability to ‘story’ the landscape in front of them.” (Sugars 2011: 66).

Postcolonial Canadian Gothic writing also focuses on an internalized conflict comprising of “fears of territorial illegitimacy, anxiety about forgotten or occluded histories, resentment towards flawed or complicit ancestors, assertions of Aboriginal priority, explorations of hybrid cultural forms, and interrogations of national belonging and citizenship (Sugars et al 2009: ix). The presence of postcolonial ghosts in Canadian fiction representing all those fears suggests that the “post” in postcolonial might not yet be correct. Colonization is a process that by silencing the voices of the colonized peoples turns them into ghosts which haunt the colonized space until they are heard. Postcolonial art thus often features “the return of the repressed” in the Freudian sense, which refers to the return of what must not be expressed throughout generations. Ghosts occur due to “the imperial dominance and territorial appropriation that has forced the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunted the colonizer across generations, time and space (Edwards 2005: xxix). In this context the haunting does not affect one single individual but is collective (xxx). The fact that hidden stories, truths or people appear as ghosts in the present hints at the lasting impossibility of solving the conflict between postcolonial cultures. As long as they can only surface as ghostly figures, they continue to haunt the postcolonial world. Postcolonial ghosts connect the past with the present as they conjure up past atrocities but also hint at the present consequences of colonization (Vilain and Misrahi-Barak 2009: 16). They are usually manifestations of two different conflicts in postcolonial settings. Ghosts can be the manifestations of the repressed victims of colonization. In this form the postcolonial ghosts seek revenge or want to draw attention to lost stories or truths. They can also originate from the collective guilt of the victimizers (17). “Historical Ghosts” (19), which



haunt the pages of postcolonial written discourse, do not cease to return for centuries as they still represent the hidden and repressed. Historical ghosts can also function as mediators between irreconcilable realities:

Ghosts are useful agents to undermine dichotomous thinking since they juxtapose seeming opposites. They blur any sharp distinctions between the living and the dead, between the past and the present, between the natural and supernatural [...], between the rationally knowable and the inscrutable or incomprehensible (Gibert 2009: 256).

In this sense, ghosts hold the useful power of transforming fixed ideas and of negotiating between opposites. The ghosts in *Monkey Beach*, however, are not postcolonial ghosts in this sense. They do not mediate between opposites, they do not provoke postcolonial guilt or avenge colonial deeds. They populate the protagonist's world and are part of her daily life. While Lisa finds herself unable to maintain a constructive relationship with the spiritual world, her ties to spirituality remain strong and essential to her psychological well-being. Ghosts in *Monkey Beach* do not fulfil the function of representing the trauma caused by colonization, nor do they conjure up the memories of priests or teachers in residential schools or repressed memories of land removal, racism, oppression and the cultural genocide Indigenous peoples had to endure. On the contrary, they instead represent a traditional belief system that Lisa tries to incorporate into her westernised life. It is not the ghosts that draw attention to "the repressed", but the ghostly presence of intergenerational trauma. It is not postcolonial ghosts which haunt *Monkey Beach* but *just* ghosts and other spiritual beings. The trauma that Lisa, her family and friends have to endure, however, is certainly (post)colonial. Traumatic memories and the intergenerational effect of traumatic experiences pervade the Haisla community in Kitimaat. In the following part I will analyse how traumatic experiences corrode relationships and cause new trauma in *Monkey Beach*.

#### 4.4 Traumatic Experiences in *Monkey Beach*

The protagonist's life is marked by numerous highly disturbing and life changing events such as the violent deaths of her grandmother and her uncle Mick. Ma-ma-mo's death in a fire has a particularly devastating effect on Lisa, as she fulfils the important role of a teacher of vital cultural knowledge and of an emotional guide. She learns everything she knows about the Haisla culture from her grandmother, since her parents choose to live according to Western standards. Another traumatic experience includes the realisation that, as a Haisla girl, she is different and therefore more vulnerable in the dominant culture. Lisa has to witness open racism and violence when a group of white men threaten to attack her. She is furthermore reprimanded

by her parents for her openly provocative manner towards her wannabe attackers after the incident. Her aunt Trudy tells her that if she was a white girl the other people in the street would have protected her but since people believe Indian women are “born sluts” she should not expect help from them (255). Early in her life Lisa has to come to terms with her otherness and the concomitant enhanced vulnerability. Her vulnerability is, however, not only caused by her otherness but also by the webs of violence and abuse that pervade the small village. Just shortly after the incident mentioned above, Lisa is raped by her friend Cheese at a party, which constitutes another highly traumatizing event. Lisa's account of this traumatic event is elliptical and despite its force and apparent immediacy characterised by emotional distance: “It has the feeling of a dream, as if it didn't happen to me.” (258) The recollection of the event is fragmented, imprecise and impersonal due to the drug Cheese spikes her drink with and the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event itself. Lisa by no means expects the rape to happen and even though she has had sex education in school, she cannot imagine even kissing a boy. The event cannot be integrated into her consciousness, not because of repression but because she lacks the concepts to talk about such an event. After this event Lisa starts to sleepwalk and is taken to hospital by her parents, who never learn about the incident.

An additional cause of frustration in Lisa's life are the environmental problems caused by the emergence of the growing industry in her home town: “The Kitimaat River used to be the best one, but it has been polluted by all the industry in town, so you'd have to be pretty dense or desperate to eat anything from that river” (92). In her dreams Lisa sees both the world as it is and a perfect version of it “with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes” (265) but an abundance of whales, birds and oolichans swimming in a clear ocean. She clearly refers to a precolonial time before industries were established in her hometown and its surroundings and the large scale pollution of the environment.

The environmental problems in her community affect Lisa but the trauma that lingers ominously over the whole community and whose ghostly presence is tangible from the first to the last chapter is the sexual, physical and emotional abuse some members of her community had to experience in residential school. It constitutes a collective trauma which has devastating effects on the whole community. Kai Erikson (1995) defines collective trauma as:

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the suddenness normally associated with “trauma”. But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that an important part of the self has disappeared (154).

Shelley Kulperger (2007) laments that cultural memory often eschews the devastating consequences of genocide in the daily lives of women. She stresses the importance of shedding light on the implications of state violence on a community and the female body in particular as patriarchal institutions shape the family. Domestic violence and the violence of the state are intrinsically interwoven and have made Indigenous women particularly vulnerable:

These fused layers and reverberations of discursive and material, state and domestic violence undermine First Nations motherhood [...]. It is impossible to entirely stand back and judge a tyrannical father figure: the tyranny of the paternalistic wreaks violence upon First Nations' spaces and bodies. The Port Alberni residential school 'fathers' are thus ghostly figures in the text, whose responsibility must also be accounted for and remembered (234-235).

This is to say that the long lasting effects of genocide often materialize insidiously in a community in the everyday lives of women and are often “normalized and unnoticed by the wider community” (225). In this way, cultural trauma becomes individual trauma exemplified in the novel by the residential school system which alienates mothers from their children, hinders transmission of cultural knowledge from mother to children and causes abuse to manifest itself in the community. State-enforced policies can thus have far-reaching destructive manifestations in the mundane lives of members of a traumatised community. Kulperger's feminist reading of *Monkey Beach* focuses on the implications of imperial policies on the First Nation mother which undermine her power and in further consequence “control and erase” her (232). By defining residential school teachers as “ghostly figures” (235) she too insinuates that the uncanny atmosphere in *Monkey Beach* stems from the consequences of the colonial activities such as the residential school system and the loss of cultural memory. The fabric of Lisa's immediate social network is damaged in manifold ways and with long-lasting effects on community life. It is apparent that most of the traumatic experiences inflicted on the small community are linked to colonization. Lisa's grandmother had to send two of her children, Lisa's aunt Trudy (Gertrude) and her uncle Mick (Michael) to a residential school because her husband was beating her (*MB*: 254). Ba-ba-oo was a WW II veteran who could not find a job after the war because he had lost his arm, and neither the Veteran Affairs nor the Indian Affairs were willing to support him financially. As a consequence, he started to feel “useless” (81) and was unable to support his family. Aunt Trudy, who still suffers from the abuse she experienced at school, is unwilling to talk to her mother since she neglected her as a child (58-59). She is a heavy drinker, has unstable relationships and neglects her daughter Tabitha (127-128). What makes her most angry is that the priests who abused the children in residential schools were never held responsible for their deeds. “There were tons of priests in the residential schools, tons of fucking matrons and helpers that 'helped' themselves to little kids just like you. You look at me and tell me how many got away scot-free” (255), Aunt Trudy tells Lisa to make her aware

of her increased vulnerability as a member of a minority. Mike, on the other hand, transforms his contempt into activism for the American Indian Movement. He nevertheless abandons his family and, after a long absence, returns out of the blue. He too used to be addicted to alcohol and is still haunted by nightmares about his wife who was burned to death in a racially charged crime. When Lisa witnesses these nightmarish events her parents instruct her to remain silent and ignore the incident (109). On the following day Lisa overhears an agitated conversation between her uncle Geordie, her aunt Edith and her mother in which Mick blames the priests at residential schools for only being interested in converting as many young Native children as possible. When Uncle Geordie calls him crazy he shouts, “Crazy? I'm crazy? You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can't tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn't. [...] You're buying into a religion that thought the best way to make us white was to fucking torture children” (109-110). The traumatic residential school experience creates an abyss between the sufferers and the community members who cannot relate to the traumatic experience. The unwillingness to talk about traumatic experiences only aggravates the situation. After Mick's emotional breakdown Lisa's mother only tells him to look for oolichans and let the matter rest (110).

The difficulty of communicating traumatic events is met with the inability to listen to these memories. In this way, the trauma created by the priests in residential schools and the lack of psychological support for affected communities breaks family bonds, replaces love and compassion with evasive behaviour, communication with silence and sympathetic support with the inability to contribute in a meaningful way to relationships. Despite his challenging past, Mick is able to maintain a healthy and supportive relationship with his niece, but the family ties are strongly weakened by his traumatic experience and the community's inability to address it. The more dangerous and harmful consequences of abuse are exemplified by Josh as he finds himself entrapped in an intergenerational cycle of abusive behaviour. Joshua was also sent to a residential school where he experienced sexual abuse. As an adult he sexually abuses Karaoke and impregnates her. The young woman understands that trauma can be transmitted from a traumatised person to another. She finds a picture of Joshua as a boy together with an abusive priest standing behind him. Karaoke puts a picture of her face over Josh's face and a picture of Josh on the priest's face (365). This act signals that she refuses to continue to participate in the cycle of abuse any longer. Abuse is based on power relations and in this case the cycle of abuse was initiated by the imbalance of power between the colonizing power and the colonized. The abuse of this power imbalance materialized afterwards in the colonized community in a new form of unequal power relations (male/female, adult/child). The fact that Ma-mo-oo warns

Gertrude about Josh and says that “Josh isn't right” (58) signals that she might have witnessed or heard about his abusive behaviour, but the bond between mother and daughter is broken and her remark is taken the wrong way. When communication is flawed and family ties are disrupted, abusive and violent behaviour can destroy a community insidiously and secretly.

Another case in which the transmission of intergenerational trauma affects the community is when Pooch shoots himself (311). We learn that Pooch's father has killed himself as well and that his mother is missing for unknown reasons (219). It is not clear why Cheese becomes a sexual perpetrator or why Pooch and his family have such tragic fates, but it cannot be denied that most of the abusive, violent or neglectful behavior in *Monkey Beach* is either directly or indirectly linked to colonization.

I stated earlier that it is important not to reduce narratives by First Nation writers to discourses of colonization and victimhood. While *Monkey Beach* suggests that much abnormal behaviour in the community stems from external factors, the novel by no means suggests that colonization is the only source of violence and trauma in the Haisla community. The novel also draws attention to the dualistic aspect of nature. Far from romanticizing it, Robinson depicts it as both life-giving and destructive. The sea, for example, nurtures the inhabitants of Kitimaat as fishery plays an important role in the community. The novel places much focus on how the oolichan, for instance, is caught and prepared. The Native community has handed down the knowledge of how to prepare this fish and produce oolichan grease from one generation to the next. However, the sea also bears fatal dangers. Its destructive power, which is epitomised by the deaths of Mike, Ma-ma-oo's sister, Josh and Jimmy, illustrates nature's ambivalent character in the novel. Ma-ma-oo's sister's death is very dramatic and cruel. Eunice dies in a storm on her way to see her boyfriend who lived in Bella Bella and whom she wanted to surprise on his birthday (*MB*: 162). Mick dies in a fishing accident under mysterious circumstances. He is found with his “right arm and part of his left leg [...] eaten off by seals and crabs” (148). The potential cruelty of nature is exemplified in Jimmy's and Lisa's reactions to Mick's corpse. Distorted as they find him, Mick is reduced to an “ugly fish” and a “bad catch” (148).

Ancient myths and stories do not always portray an idyllic precolonial life either. B'gwus, the wild man of the woods, for instance, is at the centre of many stories featuring varying levels of cruelty and violence. In one version, a beautiful woman tries to kill her husband because she wants to live with his brother whom she has fallen in love with. The man does not die but turns into a Sasquatch and kills his wife and brother in revenge (*MB*: 211). T'sonoqua is an ogress

who lures her victims by pretending to be an old woman in need of help. When they come closer to her she reveals her true identity and devours the flesh of her prey (337). These ancient myths and stories and the depiction of nature as a potentially cruel entity show that violence was not absent in pre-colonial times. It proves that the discourse of mastery, which stems from a history of racism, abuse and violence, did not start when Europeans conquered the land but that it is inherent in any society, Native or non-Native (Kramer-Hamstra 2009: 112). Hence, Native narratives should not be reduced to discourses of colonization. In *Monkey Beach*, the concept of the idyllic precolonial state is refuted as a stereotype (115). This is important as it suggests that since violence has always existed in the community people have developed strategies to deal with it successfully. The assumption of a “pre-contact idyllic past”, however, enforces “a sort of (neo-colonial) mastery that seeks to undermine the way cultures continue to unfold as traditions are reinterpreted in dialogue with the contemporary context” (112). *Monkey Beach* shows that violence exists in every community and that traumatic experiences do not automatically lead to violence. Through the character of Mick, for instance, the continuity of trauma is interrupted. Despite the fact that he was abused in a residential school, suffered the loss of his wife in a racially motivated crime and since then has been haunted by terrible nightmares, he manages to establish a constructive and supportive relationship with his niece. He does not continue the legacy of abuse and violence but instead, as a member of the American Indian Movement, fights for the rights of Indigenous people. Furthermore he manages to bestow positive characteristics upon the stereotype of the “savage Indian” as for him this image signifies strength and resistance for a good cause (116). This stresses the importance of highlighting the perseverance of Aboriginal peoples despite the intergenerational trauma and the representation of them as victims.

## 4.5 *Monkey Beach* – A Native Gothic Novel?

As mentioned earlier, the Native Gothic reverses the Canadian Gothic's depiction of nature and the Aboriginal peoples as potentially dangerous and therefore threatening to the civilized European settlers. In Native Canadian Gothic texts, the danger lurks outside the community in white urban centres and colonial institutions like the residential schools. It is thus a genre that centres on the negative effects of colonialism. As the analysis of trauma in the novel demonstrates, the negative consequences of the abuse and forced assimilation in residential schools have infected the community like a virus and destroyed individuals as well as relationships within the communities. The bad influence clearly comes from outside – from residential school teachers and from polluting industries – and it insidiously invades the community. The urban centre functions as a place where substance abuse and violence take place. Lisa, for instance, lives in Vancouver for one year where she leads a marginalized life in which wild parties, alcohol and drug abuse take centre stage (*MB*: 296). *Monkey Beach* cannot, however, be reduced to a narrative of colonialism. Evil exists independently of it and human beings have the power to make conscious choices in the novel. Karaoke, for instance, tries to disrupt the cycle of abuse when she shows Josh with her “present” for him that she understands how trauma is re-enacted. Jimmy, on the other hand, makes a conscious decision to counter violence with violence and pays for it with his own life. While it is still true that most of the evil in the novel has its origin in the white Canadian world, the uncanny atmosphere in the novel only marginally stems from nightmares about residential schools, racism, alcohol abuse or the threat of white urban centres. White teachers and priests do not appear as ghosts in the novel haunting the colonized community, nor do victims show up as ghosts who seek revenge. Lisa is not shocked by her aunt's alcoholism but she confronts her and holds her accountable for her behaviour (126). When her history teacher makes her read a text that says that Indians on the coast of British Columbia were cannibals, she refuses to do so and sings “Fuck the Oppressors” (69) instead. She is not intimidated by a group of white men who threaten to attack her in the street. Instead, the uncanny character of the novel mainly results from her “gift” to see ghosts, communicate with spirits and her ability to foresee the deaths of her nearest and dearest. It is a gift that she cannot control and which is therefore highly dangerous. As the ghost of her grandmother tells her, if Lisa does not learn “how to use it, it will kill [her]” (371). Lisa's contact with the spirit world has been described as empowering by some critics (cf. Andrews 2001), but some see it as potentially harmful and devastating. Lydia Roupakia (2012), for instance, does not believe that the protagonist returns self-assured and confident to her community as the heir of culture specific knowledge in the end:

*Monkey Beach* does not restore the power of the 'old stories' and the value of spiritual belief. Rather, the novel stands out for the pronounced ambiguity it creates as to what 'taking on the responsibility of an heir' may mean for a young Native woman like Lisa (28).

She rightly argues that the protagonist's knowledge of the spirit world is ambiguous and potentially dangerous. Lisa is in a constant struggle to decipher the codes of the spirit world and almost risks her life coping with it. It is mostly due to her limited knowledge of the Haisla culture that she finds herself unable to master her relationship with the spirit world (282). Interestingly, the author often positions Lisa as a cultural outsider who does not have full access to the culture of her own community (283). This aggravates the process of making sense of the different influences that shape her from childhood to her teenage years. Ma-ma-oo explains that "to really understand the old stories" her granddaughter "had to speak Haisla" (*MS*: 211). Lisa, however, realises that learning one Haisla word a day would mean she would only be able to speak it when she is very old. Far from giving Lisa strength and assurance, the closing pages feature the ghosts of Mike, Jimmy and Ma-ma-oo, who all give her ambiguous directions on what to do upon her return to her community. Ma-ma-oo tells her to have children, while Mick wants her to fight for the rights of Native Americans. Despite all of that, it should not be left out of sight that Lisa seems to survive only because she has a vision of the ghosts of her grandmother, Mick and Jimmy, who all urge her to survive and return to the community.

Another aspect that illustrates the dangers that seeing ghosts and her magical thinking in general represent is that Lisa finds herself torn between the wish to know how to communicate with the spiritual world and her desire to be normal. "Old ways don't matter much now. Just hold you back" (153), is what Ma-ma-oo tells her when she asks her about the red-haired man she sees whenever something terrible is about to happen. Her grandmother cannot really help her to better understand her visions and just tells her granddaughter that the spiritual guides are not "reliable" and that she should not "trust the spirit world too much" (153). Ma-ma-oo also recommends Lisa not to use her gift as she lacks knowledge of the spiritual world (154). Lisa's mother also "sees things" (154) but she does not seem to tell anyone about her spiritual gift. When Mick asks Lisa if she believes in ghosts, her mother reprimands him for bringing up the topic. She warns him that Lisa will suffer from "nightmares" (107). Ma-ma-oo, on the other hand, insists that ghosts are a part of people's lives and that one does not need to be scared of them. When camping with her grandmother, Lisa once hears footsteps outside her tent but when she looks outside she does not see anyone. Her grandmother consoles her by saying, "You don't have to be scared of things you don't understand. They are just ghosts" (265). Lisa clearly finds herself confronted with two diverse and irreconcilable worldviews and tries to navigate between



the different positions. When Lisa first believes to have seen a B'gwus she does not tell her family for fear of being laughed at. Instead she starts to doubt her senses and asks herself if she just imagined the Sasquatch (16-17). In the end when Lisa is lying on the beach and she hears a B'gwus howling (374), it seems that she believes in the existence of the mythical being after all. Lisa's conflicted relationship with the spirit world intensifies when Jimmy disappears. Even though she is aware that she cannot quite put her finger on the messages she receives from the dead (17), she follows their instructions and ends up on a fine line between life and death. The uncanny atmosphere of *Monkey Beach* results from Lisa's highly disconcerting relationship with a dangerous power that she can neither understand nor control. When the spirits order Lisa to bring them meat if she wants them to help her find her brother, she offers them her blood. But they want more and she refuses. She tries to get onto her boat, slips and almost drowns. Lisa might have visions and dreams of the spirit world simply because she is exhausted, lacks sleep and food, but if one assumes the spirit world to be real, Lisa almost dies because of her lack of knowledge of how to deal with spirits. After all, her great grandmother was a medicine woman who instilled fear in people because of her ability to speak with the dead (134).

As mentioned before, the ghosts in *Monkey Beach* are not postcolonial as they do not represent postcolonial fears or guilt. They inhabited the small Haisla community long before European settlers arrived and therefore have no association with colonialism. Jodey Castricano (2006: 802) argues that the European Gothic cannot adequately explain the Haisla culture. She notes that *Monkey Beach* “invites, resists, and exceeds a Western Gothic explanatory model” (806). The evil in *Monkey Beach* not only results from a history of state-enforced policies to erase the Native population, but also from “the discursive import of that history via a certain interpretive model that continues to do the insidious and coercive work of colonization by attempting to frame the novel [...] in terms of a European, psychoanalytically inflected Gothic.” (809) It is certainly curious that critics often draw upon psychoanalysis and in particular the Freudian concept of the “return of the repressed” when discussing the Gothic, as psychoanalysis has always pathologized magical thinking. In this sense the protagonist in *Monkey Beach*'s visions and premonitions can be easily explained by referring to the trauma she had experienced in her childhood and early teenage years (804). Contacting the dead and communication with the supernatural world has no place in Western traditions but is of significant importance in Lisa's world. For this reason, the Gothic is an insufficient concept to explain the novel's uncanny atmosphere, a process which might even be termed “psychological colonialism” (808) as the text is appropriated by the conventions of Western traditions when Western psychological concepts are used to define people in the colonized culture. This is illustrated in the scene in

which Lisa has to see a psychiatrist, who pathologizes her ability to see ghosts and is delighted when Lisa tells her she just believes in ghosts to get attention (273). While it is true that the novel makes use of Gothic conventions, “the ghosts have a matter-of-fact presence that does not unsettle the Native characters who interact with them (though they often disturb the White characters!)” (Sugars 2011: 72). Hence, neither the Canadian Gothic nor the Native Canadian Gothic, which reverses the Canadian Gothic and depicts external imperial influences as uncanny, accurately describe *Monkey Beach* as it cannot be reduced to a narrative of colonialism and the uncanny atmosphere does not stem or only partly stems from external factors such as residential schools, addictive substances, and environmental problems. While it is problematic to describe her novel in its entirety as a Gothic novel, it is nonetheless clear that Eden Robinson appropriates Gothic elements and uses their force and power to effectively depict traumatic experiences and the vicious cycle of intergenerational trauma. The representation of uncanny and often highly symbolic events, such as the killing of the chickens by haws (*MB*: 37), or when Lisa is mesmerized by the sea (356-366), the intermingling of colonial violence and violence that has always existed in the community and of colonial trauma and precolonial trauma and the depiction of spiritual beings as vicious and helpful at the same time, on the one hand, invite the classification of the novel as Gothic but, on the other hand, reject this model at the same time as the uncanny atmosphere can neither be fully explained by the presence of ghosts nor by the consequences of the return of repressed traumatic experiences.

## 5. Transforming Individual and Collective Trauma in Lee Maracle's *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* and Richard Wagamese's *One Native Life*

The collective trauma of the Aboriginal population of Canada affected the whole fabric of their communities and, along with persisting inequalities, accounts for many socio-economic and psychological problems *First Nations*, *Inuit* and *Métis* face today. As mentioned in the first chapter, the revitalization of Native beliefs and traditions has proven to be a powerful tool to counteract the consequences of collective trauma and interrupt the transmission of intergenerational trauma. In this respect, Native literature plays a vital role as it provides a space for writers to express Native values and traditions and use culture specific imagery to subvert Western literary conventions. In the following chapter I will examine different strategies Native authors employ in order to foreground their cultural backgrounds and to provide models for healing traumatic experiences. At first, I will look at how collective or individual trauma are expressed and communicated in a persuasive manner to the reader. Then I will investigate how the texts transform the negativity of trauma and offer paradigms for healing. The narratives I have chosen for this analysis are different with regard to genre and content, but they all revolve around the consequences of trauma and propose strategies for transforming trauma which are manifested on the extratextual and/or the intratextual level of communication. Lee Maracle's feminist short story collection *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* addresses the collective trauma of Indigenous women inflicted by the introduction of patriarchal values in Native communities. It also considers the historical trauma of land removal and the non-compliance of treaties. Richard Wagamese's memoir *One Native Life* focuses on individual trauma but also reveals the sociopolitical factors underlying his personal challenges. Before analyzing Wagamese's memoir, I will discuss Native feminism in further detail and illustrate how Native feminist theories are reflected in Lee Maracle's short stories.

## 5.1 Subverting Patriarchal Values in Lee Maracle's *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*

### 5.1.1 Introducing Lee Maracle

Lee Maracle is a celebrated and award-winning author, poet, scholar and storyteller, who constitutes an important Native voice in the academic and literary fields. She was one of the first Native Canadian writers to have their work published in the 1970s and still is an important figure in Native literature analyzing the situation of the Aboriginal population in the contemporary political context. The Stó:lō writer has taught at numerous acclaimed universities, such as the University of Waterloo and the University of Toronto, and has published seven works of fiction, three works of non-fiction and a number of essays and other academic as well as non-academic texts. In her texts she reinvents old myths and traditions making them relevant to the status quo. Her writing is both highly personal and political. While especially her early works could be characterized as polemic because of their harsh criticism of the Canadian society, her recent stories, published in 2010, “strike a more conciliatory note” (Löschnigg 2014: 192). Her first published book, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* (1975), is an autobiographical novel encompassing the author's childhood, adolescence and early adulthood and capturing the difficulties and challenges of growing up as a member of a minority in a racist environment. Lee Maracle was born in 1950 in North Vancouver as the daughter of a Métis mother and a Salish father. In eleventh grade she dropped out of school and worked in different jobs throughout the country. She was politically active in the Red Power movement for several years and eventually earned a degree from the Simon Fraser University (Wilson 2007: 220-223). In 1988 she published *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (revised in 1996), which analyzes the position of Native women in the contemporary society. In this self-published book she establishes herself as a Native feminist while distancing herself from “mainstream” feminism:

White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people. We are there to teach, to sensitize them or to serve them in some way. We are expected to retain our position well below them, as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of “their movement”– the women's movement (Maracle 1996: 18).

In an interview with Jennifer Kelly (1994), Lee Maracle admits that in the past she explicitly did not want white people to read her books but that she is no longer concerned about her growing popularity among non-Native readers. Nevertheless, she defines Native people as her target group and often does not bother to translate cultural codes so that cultural outsiders can

understand them (76). Similar to her attitude towards non-Native readers, her writing seems to have become more moderate compared to earlier works, such as *Ravensong* (1993), which harshly criticizes Western culture. By contrast, her 2010 short story collection holds up a mirror to the Canadian society and reveals its restrictive and sometimes hypocritical perspective on female sexuality without resorting to bitter resentment. *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* is a feminist book depicting independent and empowered women. While her stories reflect the universal struggle of women for equal rights and autonomy, Lee Maracle specifically refers to the struggle of Native women in a society still dominated by white men. Her short stories portray the First Nation woman as an indispensable and powerful member of the Canadian society. While mainstream feminism shares the same goals in this regard, Maracle specifically addresses Native women's issues and her stories draw on a distinct Native feminist theory.

### 5.1.2 Native Feminism

Many scholars and activists stress the importance of distinguishing between white Canadian and Native feminist theories. When talking about Native feminism it is important to highlight that this term is as much an over-generalization as the term "Native literature". Still, scholars widely use it to stress that Native women in North America share historic commonalities and therefore face similar challenges today. Prior to the arrival of Europeans on the North American continent, the status, role and authority of women vastly differed from one tribe to another. In some communities the status of women was higher than in others, but colonization affected women of all tribes in a negative way. In fact, the subjugation of women was part of the government's colonial plan to control and subjugate Native peoples:

For Indigenous women, colonization has involved their removal from positions of power, the replacement of traditional gender roles with Western patriarchal practices, the exertion of colonial control over Indigenous communities through the management of women's bodies, and sexual violence (Huhndorf and Suzack 2010: 1).

While gender relations in precolonial times were diverse, colonized communities were dominated by patriarchal values. In this way, colonization changed women's lives fundamentally regardless of their living conditions in precolonial communities. It should, however, not be left out of sight that contact with the European patriarchal system did not happen at the same time for all Native tribes. While Eastern Canada started to be colonized in the 1600s, British Columbia was not much affected until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson 2000: 56-58).

The Yaqui professor Rebecca Tsosie (2010) identifies three aspects which Native women from different tribes shared until European settlers imposed their value system on them. Firstly, despite the fact that work was gendered, men and women's tasks were considered “complimentary” and not “dichotomous” (32). The Western hierarchical value system that prioritizes work in the public sphere over work in the private sphere was only later imposed by colonial powers. Secondly, while work was gendered to different degrees, it was usually acceptable for men and women to perform tasks not corresponding to their gender roles (32). Men and women often had to acquire skills that transcended their traditional roles to guarantee the survival of their families and communities. This ensured that men and women respected each other more since they experienced that traditionally male and female responsibilities were equally important for the community (Anderson 2000: 59). The third commonality Native women in North America shared was that in contrast to the male-centered Judeo Christian tradition women in Native spiritual belief systems play a central role (Tsosie 2010: 32). The Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson argues that “[c]reation is understood to be within the realm of the female because of the profound understanding that women bring forth life” (2000: 72). Many creation stories therefore are female-centered and powerful female spiritual figures pervade Native myths and legends. While in the Judeo Christian tradition women are excluded from holding any spiritual role of significance, Native women can occupy powerful roles as medicine women or shamans (71).

Shari Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack (2010) state that nowadays the patriarchal value system is so deeply ingrained in many Native communities that it is often considered traditional (5). However, many scholars agree that the introduction of patriarchy into Native communities should be held accountable for the alarming state of many Native women in North America. Douglas Brownridge (2009) notes that while studies show that violence against women existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans, it has significantly increased in the past 150 years. He argues that the introduction of patriarchy completely changed the power dynamics between the sexes and that internalized oppression turned many men against Native women as men vented their anger and pain on Native women. Furthermore, the residential school system, affecting four generations, produced traumatized men and women with insufficient parenting skills, abusive behavior and unhealthy attitudes towards sexuality and the other sex (171-172). Since colonial policies have had such a negative impact on the relationship between men and women, Native feminists stress the importance of pre-conquest norms and values (Grey 2004: 10). While non-Native feminists aspire to change traditional values, Native women often emphasize the importance of restoring precolonial power structures which granted women high status and

autonomy. This partly explains why the historical relationship between Native and Western feminism has been so problematic. Due to the persisting inequalities and the many challenges Native people face today, Native feminists are sometimes frowned upon because their issues are not deemed as relevant or urgent as other problems (St. Denis 2013: 17) and because they are accused of dividing communities (Huhndorf and Suzack 2010: 2). This means that in contrast to mainstream feminism the importance of Native women's issues often depends on the urgency of other Aboriginal issues. As mentioned before, the most important difference between Native and non-Native feminism is that male dominance is not viewed as a historical constant but as imposed by the Western colonial powers. Native women's aim is not to reach equality with white men since Western norms and values and the right to behave like a man are in general not considered desirable goals (19) but to restore gender balance in Native communities. In addition, Native feminists stress the importance of including men in order to revive fair traditional values that equally respect women and men. They recognize that by losing status and independence Aboriginal men have suffered as much as women. Furthermore, Native women are reluctant to unite with white feminists as they do not enjoy the same rights and opportunities as them and are unwilling to exclude Aboriginal men and stand on opposite sides in the struggle for equality (Grey 2004: 13-14).

Another important reason why many Native women often do not see their needs and ideas reflected in mainstream feminism is their diverging perception of motherhood. Lisa Udel (2001) uses the term “motherwork”, coined by the feminist Patricia Hill Collins, to describe a valued concept of motherhood which gives women the power to exert control in their families and communities (43). Since the nineteenth century, mostly white feminists have demanded the right for “voluntary motherhood”, which ignited the birth control movement in America. In the 1970s this movement also started to focus on women's right to have access to abortion (Davis 2003: 353). Udel argues that Native women take a different stance on the issue of motherhood partly because they have been robbed of their right to bear and educate children by numerous colonial policies. The residential school system, for instance, removed thousands of children from their homes and denied their mothers the right to control the education of their children. Elevated infant mortality rates and forced eugenic sterilization also increased the importance of reproductive autonomy for Native women as it is often regarded as an important means to counteract oppression (44). Forced surgical sterilization was legalized under the Sexual Sterilization Act in Alberta and British Columbia in 1928 and 1933 respectively and was practiced in those two provinces until the 1970s. In 1937 Alberta amended its Sexual Sterilization Act to legalize sterilization without consent. Eugenic sterilization targeted women

and men with physical and mental disabilities and deficiencies but marginalized groups were also disproportionately represented. Between 1928 and 1972 approximately 3000 people were sterilized in Alberta, many without actually giving consent to the surgery (Wilson 2014, online).

It is due to the aforementioned reasons that Native women regard the ability to bear children and to positively influence their mental and emotional development as highly important. Reproductive freedom and the authority over a child's education are also viewed as powerful tools to counteract the genocide inflicted on the Indigenous population (47). Furthermore, Udel (2001) argues that while work in the domestic sphere is often limited to a family's household, the domestic responsibilities in Native families expand to the whole community and is associated with more power and status (50).

#### 5.1.3 Confronting Western Patriarchy: Native Feminist Perspectives in Lee Maracle's Short Stories

Lee Maracle's short stories "The Canoe" and "First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style" echo this positive perception of motherhood underlying many Native feminist works. "The Canoe" revolves around a young man whose life has become challenging since the death of his mother. The story is told from the perspective of the young man who struggles to express his grief and has difficulties to communicate with his father. The narrative situation is characterized by an overt autodiegetic narrator and predominately by internal focalization, which provokes a more intense emotional response in the reader. The story unfolds in the present tense, which gives the narrative a sense of immediacy, and occasionally switches to the past tense in retrospective moments.

The story opens up with the young man sitting in the swing his father made for his wife, "the love of his life" (Maracle. "The Canoe": 88), and contemplates his relationship with his father since the death of his mother. His precise auditory memories of his mother's presence in the house illustrate how drastically his life has changed after her death. His memory of "the soft wish wish of her skirt" (88) or "the quiet rattle coming from the kitchen as she cooks" (89) are contrasted with the harsh sounds he hears when his father is trying to repair his grandfather's canoe in the shed. The young man repeatedly hears a loud "thud followed by a curse" (89). Since his mother's death, he is unable to break the almost unbearable silence between them. In the past his "mother tried to bridge the distance between [them] to soften the space" (91) but



her sudden death has exasperated the situation. As he is swinging on the porch, he contemplates one challenging encounter with his father, which occurred one month before. He remembers how he got drunk with his cousin and his father furiously picked him up, violently dragged him into the house and made him throw up the whole night before he forced him to remove all the garbage from the place he got drunk at on the next day. His father's "furious", "merciless" and "cold" (92) reaction to his misbehavior are contrasted with the positive memories he holds of his mother as an understanding, "soft" and "reasonable" (92) woman. After the incident his father indirectly apologized to him by stating that he did not know how to be good father (93) but ever since this event the silence between father and son has become unbearable. When the widower rediscovers his grandfather's old canoe and wants to reuse it, his son joins him out of guilt. However, he lets the canoe fall and it breaks. This incident makes them express their unbearable grief over the loss of the woman in the household for the first time and they cry together for a while. In the end they decide to improve their relationship step by step and the protagonist is able to look more brightly into the future. His father, who is described as a "crusty man with a short fuse" (92) and as "sad and silent" (94) puts one hand on his son's shoulder and there is a "sweetness" (96) to his touch that has only been associated with his mother up to this point. The characteristics that the protagonist attributes to his mother comprise of "sweet" (94), "soft and reasonable" (92) and "deliberate and austere" whereas his father is more associated with unreasonable harshness and the inability to communicate effectively. In the end, however, he adopts some of the sweetness that he lacks to comfort his son.

The story's empowering message for women is best understood with reference to Udel's concept of motherwork. Native women often criticize that in Western society child-bearing and the upbringing of children has little value in comparison to working in the public sphere. "The Canoe" honors motherwork and stresses its importance for healthy relationships. The protagonist of the story laments that his mother's "absence is so huge" (89), a statement which resonates with the whole story. His mother provides emotional stability and facilitates the communication between him and his father and therefore her absence causes a long and unbearable silence between them. The story makes it obvious that women's wisdom, knowledge and soft skills are essential to the well-being of social systems. The "new sweetness" (96) that the father displaces in the story, which curiously ends with father and son cooking together in the kitchen, suggests that stereotypical female character traits are absolutely essential for fulfilling relationships but also with regard to healing. The reader learns that the canoe was built by the narrator's great grandfather. Due to the prohibition of many Native cultural practices under the Indian Act, it was constructed "with no paint and no Indian design" (90) on it. The

fact that the father lets the boat fall and it breaks signals a rapture caused by the death of his wife. It could also hint at the necessity to redefine old colonial perceptions of gender roles and the urgency to construct a new definition of masculinity inspired by traditional precolonial values but also by new concepts. Since the canoe does not have any Native symbols on it, it could be seen as embodying masculinity influenced by colonial policies and so the fact that the father decides to build a new canoe constitutes a potentially empowering act. In the end the protagonist observes a young swan, which struggles to fly for the first time, but manages to do so eventually. This scene gives him hope that he might as well be able to become an independent and strong man one day despite his difficult family situation. His positive outlook indicates that he may break out of his victim mentality and fly the nest independent of his challenging fate.

Another story that emphasizes the importance of motherwork is the title story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style”, which analyzes women's sexuality in Western and Native cultures. In this short story, Lee Maracle experiments with different genres, stunning the reader with seamless transitions between different text types. Rather than confusing the reader, this technique foregrounds her message and communicates it more effectively. The story opens up in the personal essay format humorously commenting on common perceptions of women's sexuality. Even though the author makes it clear that “Western society's values have always confused [her]” (“FWC”: 2), Lee Maracle is far less resentful of Western culture in this short story collection than in her previous works and uses humor and irony as a main strategy to draw the reader's attention to historical and ongoing gender imbalances. By arguing that “sexiness in young women is desired” while at the same time “women actually engaging in sex have been considered immoral for a long time” (2), she criticizes society's double standards when it comes to women's sexuality and that sexuality is predominately associated with youth. With the arrival of European settlers in Canada the Victorian definition of a virtuous woman was imposed on Native communities and robbed many women of sexual autonomy (Udel 2001: 46). The regulation of Indigenous people's sexuality was part of the colonial project to assimilate them into the Christian society. Everything that deviated from the Victorian standard was deemed primitive and regulated by colonial law. The Indian Act of 1867, for instance, denied women the right to own land or inherit their deceased partner's property. The act was amended in 1884 to only allow women whose behavior corresponded to the high morality standards of the settlers to inherit their husband's property (Hanson 2009, online). Monogamy in marriage was the only form of sexuality a woman could engage in and Indian Agents granted special rights to those who lived up to the strict moral standards and penalized those who did not. In fact, Native women's sexuality was of considerable interest to the colonizing powers:

The sexual regulation of Native and non-Native women alike was part of a broader project of nation-building: the creation of moral families based on Western (largely Anglo) middle-class notions of sexual purity, marital monogamy, and distinct gender roles of the female homemaker and male breadwinner was an important means of creating moral and responsible citizens [...] (Sangster 2001: 169).

While the legal regulation of Native women's sexuality became important in the early years of settlement, it cannot solely be located in the distant past as Joan Sangster (2001), who studies the regulation of women's sexuality in Ontario in the first half of the twentieth century, explains. She states that since the Indian Act of 1867, the Indian Agent played a central role in policing women's moral behavior. The fact that a whole category, termed "Immorality on the Reserve", and containing complaints about immoral sexual behavior, existed in the filing system of the Indian Affairs offices, illustrates the importance of controlling Native women's sexuality (181). The Indian Agent was able to take legal action against women who did not conform and sent them to correctional institutions (182). Not all Indian Agents were equally successful in exercising control in their assigned reservations and resistance was expressed by Native people in particular against the imposition of life-long marriages (181) but their impact on Native women was nevertheless substantial as the number of women sent to correctional institutions after World War II increased steadily (168). The regulation of women's sexuality is not solely a historical problem but is still visible in many areas today.

The short stories "First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style", "Erotica" and "The Café" all resist the persisting regulation of women's sexuality by beautifully depicting erotically charged encounters between a man and a woman, who are neither married nor in a committed relationship. In these three short stories Lee Maracle describes sexuality as a natural and powerful force inherent in women of all ages and she suggests that they should embrace their sexuality like the protagonists of her stories. In "Erotica" the liberation of erotic feelings is described via highly metaphoric language painting a vivid picture of sexual liberation:

A warm summer tide slides into the shore of my own watery beachhead. A wash of gentle wind rushes over me and the tidal wave of desire I had carefully kept in a thin glass bottle of hope shatters. Inside my belly it explodes. My womanhood, damned up for decades bursts. [...] The shame, the years of shame that kept my desire bottled up, dissipates, leaks out with the hot fluid messing my underwear (Maracle. "Erotica": 34).

The protagonist's resistance to her own sexuality subsides due to the power of her sexual arousal, metaphorically depicted as a tidal wave. By choosing elements of nature in the source domain, sexuality is constructed as a powerful and natural force part of human existence. In "First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style" Lee Maracle criticizes that "permission to engage in sex is still a male prerogative" ("FWC": 3). She again emphasizes that sexuality is natural for all human beings independent of their gender or age. Embedded in her feminist essay is a short first-person

narrative depicting a highly sexually charged encounter in a café. This scene seems to be linked to the short story “The Café”, which also poetically describes the sensation of sexual arousal between two people. The fact that the first-person narrator in “The Café” carries the same first name as the author could signal that it is an autobiographical narration, which provides a deeper understanding of the author's point of view. The short inclusion of a first-person narrative in the title story also affects the reader more on an emotional level than her essay and therefore it fits well into the story, even if the transition is somewhat abrupt. In general, the shifts in genre fulfill the purpose of illustrating her point of view more effectively and address the reader on different levels. At the end, the story shifts again to a different text type when Lee Maracle's version of a traditional Salish myth is related. The story should encourage Native women “to manipulate men to do the right thing by their families” (6) by using their sexuality. The story opens up with two women and a baby who manage to survive a big flood. After a while one of the women, however, dies and the other is left to her own resources. In spring the solitary woman sees a man in a canoe and attracts him by swinging her hips. Over the years he returns each summer, helps her with the hard work and leaves again in winter because he is annoyed by her children. Unaware of how children are conceived, though, he continues to have sex with her. The woman is joined by other female survivors and they do not mind sharing the man in bed. They ask him to do the hard work to make sure they survive the cold winters. Despite his insistence to know where all the babies come from, the women never reveal it and “[t]o this day, no Salish woman has ever broken the promise they had made to each other” (12).

The myth's empowering aspect can again be best understood with regard to the concept of motherwork and women's freedom to freely enjoy and use their sexuality. After the flood it is the women in the story who rebuild civilization. They are supported by a single man, who impregnates them and takes care of the hard work, but they are mainly responsible for the continued existence of their community. Due to their ability to bear children they are the “heroes” (6) in the story. As a female reader I was wondering why the women are not bothered that the burden of bearing and raising their children lies solely on their shoulders and that they have to exchange their bodies for company and physical labor. From this perspective the story indeed may seem quite disturbing but this reading is based on the assumption that raising children is a minor task and that women cannot enjoy their sexuality as freely as men do. In fact, upon seeing the man in the canoe the solitary woman makes the choice to sexually interact with him. On noticing that he is approaching her the woman “decide[s] that she would have him”. She also sexualizes him by commenting on his “yummy”, “pretty” and “perfect body” (7). When the other women arrive, they decide to share the man but as it is the last woman's turn he is

exhausted and so she shows him how to satisfy her in another way (12). The women need to get pregnant but also enjoy getting intimate with the man. They raise their children with pride and avoid telling the man how children are conceived, so that they can use their sexual attractiveness for the survival of the whole community.

In conclusion, in *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* Lee Maracle addresses historical trauma that has specifically affected Native women. Her strategies for communicating this trauma in a persuasive manner include humor, puns, highly metaphoric language and frequent shifts between different text types. The more erotic short stories in Maracle's short story collection challenge the ongoing regulation and condemnation of Native and non-Native women's sexuality and constructs women of all ages as naturally sensual and sexual beings. By explicitly depicting an elder woman's sexual attraction to a man other than her husband in "Erotica", Maracle furthermore attempts to free the depiction of middle-aged Native women's sexuality from taboo, while her beautifully metaphoric language emphasizes the power and beauty of sexual energy. The title story provides a distinct Native feminist perspective on the link between morality and sexuality in the contemporary Canadian society and stresses the significance of motherwork and sexual autonomy.

## 5.2 Transforming Intergenerational Trauma in “Goodbye Snauq”

The short story “Goodbye Snauq” in *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* revolves around a young woman trying to cope with historical trauma. It centers on the belated ramifications of traumatic experiences and the importance of finding adequate strategies to express pain and grief. A young teaching assistant of Squamish heritage receives a letter from the Squamish First Nation government and anticipating its negative content tries to drown her sorrows in drink. Contemplating the history of Snauq, presently called False Creek, she starts a fictitious conversation with the well-known Squamish chief Khahtsahlano, who lived in this area until the land was sold to the Canadian government. She laments the loss of the purity of nature and the cruelty of the dispossession. Looking at a picture of Khahtsahlano and his son, she imagines how he and his family witnessed the destruction of their house by European settlers and how they had to leave their village for good. During one of the lessons she teaches at university she ponders about the changes imposed on the Squamish people and questions her own ability to make an impact in a “Western institution” (“GS”: 22). Overwhelmed by her strong emotions, she suddenly faints in front of her students. Upon recovering consciousness she and her students decide to conduct an official ceremony to grieve the loss of Snauq. On Granville Island the teaching assistant observes a Chinese woman and smiles at her. She has to admit that the fact that a Chinese multi-billionaire owns the North Shore of False Creek gives her hope as she recollects the blatant discrimination against Asian immigrants in the recent past. In the end the young woman criticizes that First Nations are now still not being treated equally, but she realizes that there are ways to heal historical trauma and that their situation might improve in the future: “I am not through with Canada. I am not a partner in its construction, but neither am I its enemy. Canada has opened the door. [...] But we are a long way from being participants” (27).

### 5.2.1 Communicating Historical Trauma

Madelaine Hron (2010) asserts that while it is challenging to communicate traumatic experiences it is certainly not impossible. The communication of pain requires an act of translation, in which an often intense non-verbal sign is translated into a verbal sign. Similar to the translation of a word in the source language into a word in the target language, expressing pain and suffering in discourse is accompanied by a certain degree of loss. Not all aspects of non-verbal impulses can successfully be translated into a coherent narrative. If the author's cultural background does not correspond to the dominant culture of the country in which a text

is published, the process of translating comprises a cultural dimension as well, which can potentially give rise to misunderstandings (42). When analyzing Aboriginal writing, for instance, it is inevitable that cultural differences must be taken into account. Since Lee Maracle does not primarily write for non-Native readers, she often chooses to include cultural elements without modifying them first or finding an equivalent in the Canadian culture. In this way she highlights her Native background or emphasizes that Native readers are her main target group. Nonetheless, the depiction of pain in narratives has to be comprehensible for the reader as the effective communication of pain always requires an act of persuasion (48). Consequently, the author has to make wise use of strategies aimed at making the pain and suffering of the narrator believable and persuading the reader of its relevance and intensity. Strategies that communicate suffering in a persuasive way in literary texts encompass the use of hyperboles, “metaphors”, “allusions”, “humor”, “exclamations”, “rhetorical questions” or, if psychological issues should be conveyed, “repetition, fragmentation, or the use of ellipsis” (48). What are Lee Maracle's strategies to communicate the pain and suffering of the protagonist in “Goodbye Snauq” to a culturally diverse readership? How is the depth of the historical trauma that haunts the focalizer communicated to the reader and which strategies are proposed to transform her trauma?

In “Goodbye Snauq” Lee Maracle acknowledges the difficulty of communicating traumatic experiences. However, the difficulty does not, as Hron suggests, primarily stem from the translation of non-verbal signs into verbal signs after the event but, as Caruth (1995: 6) suggests, from the inability to truly comprehend the traumatic event in the first place. This means that the event itself is so overwhelming that it cannot be fully grasped when it occurs, which complicates remembrance. The young teaching assistant in “Goodbye Snauq” envisions how Khahtsahlano and his wife Swanamia experience the burning of their house and the following dispossession of their land and she emphasizes the incomprehensibility of the event: It is “incomprehensible”, “impossible” and there is “no way to understand” (“GS”: 17) it because they have “no reference post” (17) for the loss of a village. While the teaching assistant’s ancestors must have found it difficult to understand the traumatic experience when it occurred, the young woman’s pain over the loss of Snauq is even more difficult to understand as she did not experience the trauma herself but it was transmitted to her over generations. As mentioned earlier in the introductory part, intergenerational trauma often manifests itself in transposition, which occurs when “one lives simultaneously in the past and the present with the ancestral suffering as the main organizing principal in one's life” (Brave Heart 2000: 247). Another important response to historical trauma is the identification with the pain and suffering of ancestors (247). The protagonist in “Goodbye Snauq” clearly has to cope with historical trauma as she completely

identifies with the suffering of her ancestors. In fact, the reflector figure relates to her ancestors and their suffering to such a degree that she evokes memories of events that took place prior to her birth: She “remember[s]” (“GS”: 20) False Creek as an unpolluted place with “cams, sturgeon, oolichan, sockeye, and spring salmon [...]” (21), even though she never experienced the precolonial ecological abundance of Snauq. She also asks herself if she should “*remember* Snauq as a Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil Waututh supermarket” (25) and declares that her people “will *remember*” Snauq as it used to look like before the draining of False Creek (26) (*Italics mine*). By uttering these statements the young woman does not draw on her own memory but on collective memory. The Squamish Nation was affected by colonial policies which determined the fate of the whole group. The dispossession thus became part of the collective consciousness of the Squamish Nation and as collective trauma it touched the entire fabric of the nation. The evocation of collective memory serves the purpose of establishing and maintaining a distinct social identity (Volpato 2010: 5). Hence, it locates a person in a specific sociohistorical context and gives meaning to his or her social identity. Collective memories also lead to a sense of unity and the dissociation of out-groups and consequently serves the purpose of justifying social or political actions (6). The protagonist in “Goodbye Snauq” draws on memory which is not located in the realm of her own experience but evokes the historical pain and suffering of a whole group. She draws on collective memory as it helps her understand her pain and justifies her actions. The historical trauma affects her emotionally as well as physically. It has a strong impact on her self-perception and the perception of her environment. While ruminating on the loss of the Native village the protagonist's “office closes in on [her]. The walls crawl towards [her], slow and easy, crowd [her]” (“GS”: 19). “The white fluorescent bulbs” in her office make the room appear “eerie” (13) and “the dry perfect room temperature insults, and the very space mocks” (22). The anthropomorphization of her office points to the fact that institutionalized inequality is caused by the decision-making of individuals and affects individuals in their everyday lives. The projection of her anxiety onto the external world makes her pain seem urgent and relevant to the status quo. The urgency to resolve the conflict as well as the source of her frustration are clearly highlighted. The pain of the historical trauma of colonization is so intense that her whole body reacts to her mental stress. The fact that her “eyes bulge, [her] muscles pulse, [her] saliva trickles out the side of her mouth” (22) and that she eventually faints in front of her students, elucidate the lack of control she senses in face of the long term ramifications of colonial policies.

Indeed at the beginning of the story she completely lacks the ability to follow Khahtsahlano's advice to “find freedom in the context you inherit” (13). By communicating with the Squamish



chief she projects herself into an imagined past and mentally “re-experiences” the displacement of the Squamish Nation. One clever strategy Lee Maracle uses in the story to effectively communicate the pain of the protagonist is to conjure up something desirable while negating its existence. In fact, the short story centers on a place that does not exist anymore as it has changed so drastically over the years. The story's title “Goodbye Snauq” is interesting in this regard as it evokes a historical place which now carries another name, namely “False Creek”. In her analysis of the short story, Eva Daria-Beautell (2012) states that

Maracle's strategy of re-appropriation of the land paradoxically implies its very dispossession, since it performs its own non-existence, literalizing the symbolic function of language and turning place into non-place by *naming it*. What “Goodbye, Snauq” names, then, is the absence of place, both material (Snauq, the place, does no longer exist) and symbolic (the name, Snauq, is no longer) (147).

Curiously, it is this evocation of a “non-place” in the story which so persuasively communicates the pain and suffering of the protagonist to the reader. By conjuring up an idyllic place while at the same time negating its existence, the pain for the loss of it becomes almost tangible to the reader. The story also alludes to another concept deeply ingrained in the Western cultural memory. While it is true that Maracle does not regard white readers as her main target group she is certainly aware of her growing non-Native readership. Even if she did not intend to depict Snauq as a Garden of Eden, it is certainly curious that she repeatedly refers to an abundant garden, in which people possessed all they needed and lived peacefully and harmoniously with each other until they were expelled from it. Before the European settlers arrived and the industrialization of Snauq began, Snauq is described as

a common garden shared by all the friendly tribes in the area. The fish swam there, taking a breather from their ocean playgrounds, ducks gathered, women cultivated camas fields and berries abounded. On the sand bar, Musqueam, T'sleil Waututh and Squamish women till oyster and clam beds to encourage reproduction. Wild cabbage, mushrooms and other plants were tilled and hoed as well (Maracle. “Goodbye Snauq”: 16).

In this paragraph Lee Maracle achieves two aims. Firstly, she constructs False Creek as Aboriginal land and secondly, she conjures up an idyllic precolonial image of it. The title “Goodbye Snauq” illustrates the paradox inherent in the short story. Snauq does not exist any longer but nevertheless the whole story revolves around it. Apart from the idyllic description of pre-contact life shown above, Maracle frequently mentions plants and animals that no longer exist in Vancouver or not in the same abundance as before. She speaks of “the biggest trees in the world”, “clams, sturgeons, oolichan, sockeye, and spring salmon”, “ducks, geese, grouse, deer and elk” and the “beauty” of “elk meat” (21). She mentions beautiful jackets made from sheep's wool and dog's hair from a special breed now extinct (20) and “the stanchions of fir, spruce, cedar and the gardens of Snauq” (26). By naming all those elements associated with the precolonial Snauq, the short story itself functions as a ceremony that commemorates the loss of

the village. Hence, the attempt to say goodbye to the village is visible both on the intratextual as well as on the extratextual level of communication. Like a funeral ceremony, in which the relatives and friends remember the life of the deceased and name specific aspects of their biography, the young teaching assistant on the intratextual level and Lee Maracle on the extratextual level name the positive aspects of Snauq as the Salish people remember it. In doing so, she stresses the importance of creating a mnemonic tradition that anchors this place in the cultural memory.

Memory and in particular cultural memory is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon and hence its literal representation largely depends on social, cultural and political factors. This means that the representation of memory is not anchored in the past but is significantly shaped by current developments. Consequently, what is memorized and how it is memorized mirrors the present consciousness of a society. Memories of the past are retrospectively evaluated and manipulated to reflect “present interests, needs, and current levels of experience (Erll and Nünning 2006: 11-12). With regard to cultural memory not only the content of memories is socially constructed but ceremonies and traditions determine *when* members of a mnemonic community remember past events. In her introduction to a study on collective memory Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) argues that people are taught from early childhood on how to “remember in a socially appropriate manner”, which includes knowledge about what should be remembered and what should be forgotten (4-5). Power and cultural memory are closely connected and for that reason different memories exist in a society depending on factors such as national or regional origin or ethnicity (Erll and Nünning 2006: 12). Since gender influences the socialization of children, it can also shape what men or women remember and how they recount past memories (Callenholm 2006: 249). In this context literature plays a significant role as it influences cultural memory. Ansgar Nünning (2006) states that “[l]iterature participates in the process of shaping collective memories and of subversively undermining culturally dominant memories by establishing counter-memories, which seek to consider, for example, gender conscious or ethnic perspectives on past events” (3). In “Goodbye Snauq” Lee Maracle re-appropriates False Creek as Native land and gives an insight into how she and her community remember this place. She puts the former Native village into a sociohistorical context and asserts the importance of her memory of it to the Squamish community. Furthermore, her memory of the Native village challenges the dominant discourse concerning the history of Vancouver, which often does not acknowledge the importance of the Native village.

In conclusion, in “Goodbye Snauq” Lee Maracle achieves two important aims: Firstly, she conjures up a wonderful place by describing it in detail as if it existed while simultaneously

asserting its absence. The use of tenses when referring to Snauq also highlights this point. In one retrospective moment the young teaching assistant imagines what life in Snauq must have been like: “Men from Squamish, Musqueam, and T'sleil Waututh *join* the men at Snauq to hunt and trap ducks, geese, grouse, deer and elk” (italics mine). Due to the frequency of the present tense in descriptions of the former Native village the narrator “imagines” Snauq into being but by establishing its non-existence at the same time she communicates the pain and suffering over its loss in an even more powerful way. She also pervasively communicates the pain to the reader by employing a powerful symbol of Christianity. The text evokes the idea that Snauq used to be a Garden of Eden characteristic by abundance and harmony until European settlers expelled Native people from this paradisiacal place and established environmentally damaging industries there.

Secondly, in “Goodbye Snauq” Maracle creates cultural memory (which is essentially environmental memory) of a place which belongs to the forgotten history of Vancouver. As literature has the power to shape collective memory, this short story could be understood as an attempt at challenging the master narrative by exclusively presenting a Native perspective on a specific historical event. On the intradiegetic level the protagonist and her students do the same by performing a short ceremony for the loss of the Native village. It is questionable if the protagonist really accepts how it has changed but it is obvious that she is more hopeful in the end that the current situation of the Indigenous population of Canada will improve. She also finds a way to recover from her trauma and regains strength and autonomy. By performing a ceremony for the loss of the village she constructs Snauq as Native land and uses her power as a teaching assistant of a Western institution to remind her students, who are both Native and non-Native, of the significance of this place for the Squamish Nation. Even if the protagonist does not seem to be fully convinced that she can accept the transformation of this place, she finds out how to follow Khahtsahlano's advice to “[f]ind freedom in the context you inherit” (11). This freedom encompasses the power to influence how her students remember Snauq. On the extradiegetic level the text functions as a ceremony that tries to anchor a collective Native memory of Snauq in the Canadian consciousness.

### 5.3 Resilience in Wagamese's *One Native Life*

*One Native Life* is a memoir capturing moments in Richard Wagamese's life which gave him strength and inspiration. The Ojibway writer was born in Northwestern Ontario in 1955, where he lived with his extended family until the age of almost three. His family were residential school survivors and suffered from severe psychological issues. While under the influence of alcohol, his parents abandoned him and his siblings on a campsite in mid-winter in 1958 and he barely survived. As a consequence, the Canadian welfare authorities removed him from his family and sent him to live with foster parents. He stayed with two foster parents until the age of nine, when he was adopted by a family in southern Ontario. At the age of sixteen Wagamese left his abusive foster parents and lived for several years in the streets. During this difficult time he struggled with alcoholism and drug abuse. In his early twenties his brother George tracked him down and reintroduced him to his family and his cultural background. In 1979 he started writing for various Native newspapers before working as a radio and television broadcast and as a columnist for *Calgary Herald*. In 1990 he was awarded the National Newspaper Award for Column Writing as the first Native journalist to win this award. Wagamese then turned to fiction writing and was awarded the Writers' Guild of Alberta Award for his first novel *Keeper 'n Me*, which appeared in 1995. The self-educated writer and journalist has published six novels, five works of non-fiction and one poetry collection and has been awarded numerous prizes for his literary works. In his first memoir *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* (2002) he relates his journey from a traumatized child in foster care to a successful journalist. His life story is embedded in traditional myths and teachings, which he hopes will provide useful lessons for his alienated son (Hanson 2009, online).

Wagamese's second memoir *One Native Life*, published in 2008, is a collection of positive moments which gave the author strength and helped him endure his challenging life. The first positive memory he recounts is that of his Ukrainian foster dad, who was his hero at the age of six because he taught him how to fish and recognized the importance of spending time in nature for the young Ojibway boy (*ONL*: 9-12). Wagamese's stories center on people that inspired him and encouraged him to become a writer and journalist. One of his teachers, for instance, took the time to teach him how to write correctly after she found out that he had learned to write upside down and backward because his eye sight was poor and he therefore had always copied from another pupil behind him (30-33). Another person that inspired him to become a writer was his teacher Leo Rozema, who praised his poems and encouraged him to keep on writing (59). Years after running away from his adoptive parents, the boxer Muhammad Ali joined him

in a lunch counter and bought him a piece of lemon pie. His aura of strength made him “a fighter” and gave him the courage to carry on (76). During his toughest years, libraries also provided an important escape for him (91-93). Because of his passion to learn and read and his inexhaustible drive to tell stories he applied for a reporter job and was hired despite lying about his qualifications. Upon reconnecting with his family at the age of twenty three he was told by an elder that his task in life was to be “a teller of stories, a communicator, a keeper of the great oral traditions of [his] people” (123) and thanks to the positive moments in his life, which encouraged him not to give up, he managed to reconnect with his Ojibway roots and started a new life as an important storyteller.

### 5.3.1. Communicating Individual Trauma

Wagamese’s life story is filled with numerous challenges and obstacles that he has to overcome in order to lead a fulfilling life. The severe neglect, violence and racism he has to endure as a child and in his adolescence is dreadful and deeply affects him. Nevertheless, he is able to heal by reconnecting with his family and by re-appropriating traditional cultural practices.

The title “One Native Life” signals that the author's life story is unique while at the same time it suggests that Native people share common experiences. In this manner, it emphasizes that even if many Native people across the country with diverging cultural backgrounds face similar challenges and had to go through similar struggles as a consequence of colonization, their personal life stories are worth listening to. The depiction of pain and suffering in literature is often associated with specific genres which are deemed more suitable for the communication of hardship. Some genres as, for instance, immigrant literature *require* the protagonist to overcome pain and suffering. The depiction of hardship in texts belonging to this category is therefore often shrugged off as stereotypical and risks being trivialized and devalued (Hron 2010: 44). A memoir written by an Aboriginal author like *One Native Life* certainly elicits expectations of pain and suffering in the reader. However, by signaling in the title that his life albeit revolving around the collective trauma of Native people is unique and special, Wagamese asserts right from the beginning that his stories cannot easily be discounted as generic. As the author explains in the introduction, his project is to tell autobiographical stories that are “positive” and that “embrace healing” (*ONL*: 4). Hence, already in the introduction the author destabilizes the readers’ expectations evoked by this specific genre: “Stories are meant to heal. That's what my people say, and it's what I believe. Culling these stories has taken me a long

way down the healing path from the trauma I carried” (4). Contradictory to what many readers expect when reading a Native memoir, they are told that the stories center on positive aspects in the life of the author. At the same time the author highlights the fact that he has experienced trauma which has shaped his life significantly and which has taken him a long time to overcome. Framed in this manner, the author’s suffering and pain take on meaning and become worth listening to. In more than sixty personal stories, which focus on moments in the author’s life which gave him strength and endurance, Wagamese also reveals the traumatic experiences he endured as a child and adolescent. Curiously, Wagamese’s pain and suffering is extremely unsettling *because* it is embedded in such a positive context. Expecting to read mainly about joyful moments in his life, the reader is startled at the extent to which he was abused as a child, which is conveyed explicitly along with more uplifting stories. Furthermore, the positive events are, except for a few exceptions, anything but out of the ordinary. Going fishing, observing the starry sky and watching television with the family are common activities that under normal circumstances would not be cherished in the same way, which hints at the severity of the circumstances he lived in. In this way *One Native Life* effectively communicates pain and suffering and successfully persuades the readers of its intensity and relevance.

### 5.3.2. Resilience to Individual and Collective trauma

In the introduction to *One Native Life* Wagamese comments on his reasons for writing this memoir. Firstly, he suggests that it helped him confront his trauma, recognize the bright aspects in his life and ultimately heal (3). By writing this memoir, Wagamese also gives significance to his life and the trauma that haunted him for so many years. The considerable distance between the narrating I and the experiencing I allows the author to logically explain his emotions and actions, which used to confuse him when he was younger. By connecting the puzzle pieces of his life and explaining the motives behind his thoughts and behavior, he makes his journey through life appear meaningful and significant. Wagamese also mentions that he wrote this book because he aspired to raise awareness for the situation of Native people in Canada to foster understanding and promote peaceful coexistence (4). Consequently, Wagamese specifically addresses non-Native readers, who he wishes to convince of living in harmony with all human beings and nature.

By emphasizing the resilience of Native people Wagamese reverses a persisting stereotype in American pop culture which has presented the Native population of America as a vanishing

race. Wagamese's whole family attended a residential school but nevertheless traditional values and beliefs play a significant role in their lives. The family does not, as intended by the residential school system, completely assimilate into the white Canadian culture but maintains the traditional Ojibway lifestyle to some degree. Wagamese makes use of what William Bevis calls the "homing in" (Bevis 1987: 580) theme by depicting the return to his community and land as the crucial event which initiated his healing. Bevis (1987) argues that while the heroes in many English classics leave their homes and families, which often stand for old values and norms, Native protagonists usually return home at the end of a story to reconnect with their families (582). In Native texts, finding oneself is often not an individual process but is "transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from that transpersonal time and space is to lose identity" (585). The importance that Wagamese places on his Native community and the land of his people are clearly noticeable in the following extract:

When I rejoined my native family after twenty years, it was the land that framed our reconnection. [...]. It wasn't easy coming back. I had little of the Ojibway left on me and they had no experience with the urban world I knew. But all of us felt a kinship with the territory we called our home and it was there, among the muskeg, rock and spruce of the northern land, that my family found a way to scramble past our differences (*ONL*: 133-134).

When the estranged narrator returns to his home community it is the land, which has been inhabited by his ancestors for thousands of years, that helps him reconnect with his family. Furthermore, the Ojibway culture strongly resonates with him. When he pronounces his first Ojibway word he feels as if he has "truly spoken for the first time in [his] life" (*ONL*: 137). At pan-tribal events, organized specifically to revive Native traditions and lifestyles, he participates in a number of Native ceremonies, which heal his troubled psyche. By learning of the importance of nature and ceremonies for his people, he realizes why as a child, in contrast to other white children, he loved spending time in nature on his own and why rituals deeply grounded him even if they just involved watching TV with his foster family on a specific day (13). In this way the narrating I (the narrator at the age of 53) highly shapes the narrative by re-evaluating his life story through the lens of his recently adopted identity as a member of the Wabasseemoong First Nation:

I could feel at ease with nothing but the land. They could never do that.[...] No one was interested anyway, so they never knew how much I learned of life and nature and the universe on the riverbanks of my youth. More importantly, they never understood how the land, rivers in particular, fleshed out my insides, soothed me, comforted me. They would never know that I was born into the Sturgeon Clan, or that the teachings of that clan membership would define me and give me purpose (*ONL*: 45-46).

Wagamese's long solitary walks as a child are considered strange and abnormal by his foster parents but as he learns more about his heritage in his twenties, his profound relationship with nature starts to make sense to him. In this way, reconnecting with his Native roots helps him construct an empowered identity and explains his perceived otherness as a child. By asserting his Native heritage at the end of the novel in a short statement – “I am and will always be Ojibway” (257) – Wagamese underscores the importance and continuing vitality of Native culture despite the numerous colonial policies, like the residential school system, aimed at assimilating Native people into the dominant culture. Hence, in *One Native Life* the Ojibway author displays individual and collective resilience, which communicates a powerful statement about the healing of Native communities from historical trauma.

Resilience in developmental psychology is defined as the “ability to do well despite adversity” and involves a “dynamic process of adjustment, adaptation, and transformation in response to challenges and demands” (Kirmayer et al. 2011: 84-85). There is a tendency in psychology to view resilience as an individual phenomenon but resilience may also exist within groups and manifest itself in a network of healthy relationships among community members (85). With regard to the Native population of Canada resilience is based on the persistence of cultural practices and values despite the government’s numerous attempts to eliminate many Native cultural practices. Laurence Kirmayer et al. (2011) state that resilience is grounded in the “renewal of indigenous identities” (88). This renewal may stem from the embedding of one’s personhood within the land that was traditionally inhabited by the ancestors of a person (89). Wagamese feels deeply connected with the land he grew up in and it plays a vital role in his healing process. Moreover, it provides him with the opportunity to connect with his ancestors: “I could feel the presence of my people, the staunch heart of them beating here for millennia, and I felt joined to them” (*ONL*: 135). This statement communicates resilience on multiple levels. Firstly, the metaphor of the “staunch heart” signals persistence and liveliness and secondly, through the ability to reconnect with his ancestors on a metaphysical level in a historically shared space, he undermines the Canadian government’s attempts to disrupt families by asserting that re-connection is nevertheless possible. Even if physical connection is impossible, connection is achieved on a metaphysical level.

Another way to renew Aboriginal identities is to refuse to see Native people as hapless victims who were subjugated by civilized Western settlers (Kirmayer et al. 2011: 89). Wagamese partly manages to heal from his trauma by looking at his life in a way that values his resistance and persistence. On numerous occasions, he reverses the so-called “civ\sav dichotomy” (LaRocque



2010: 39), which stresses the moral and scientific superiority of the colonial powers, and in this way gives value to the lives of his ancestors. He challenges the supremacy of Western culture by redefining the categories that characterize an advanced nation:

There are those who will say that if the Ojibway had any sort of technological or innovative sense, we'd have been further along the developmental trail at the time of contact. These are the descendants of the people who turned to us for survival's sake when the North American winter descended. Science and innovation apparently have slippery definitions. But the science of the earth is a different creature from the science of numbers and theorems. It's a discipline of coexistence. It's the knowledge and acceptance of the mystery that surrounds us – and the awareness that allowing it to remain a mystery, celebrating it rather than trying to unravel it, engenders humility and a keen sense of the spiritual (125-126).

Apart from highlighting the importance of the Indigenous population for the survival of early settlers, Wagamese subverts the assumption that the progressiveness of a country is determined by its scientific development, as different laws apply in life than that of science. He instead stresses spirituality and a sense of connection with all human beings and nature as crucial aspects which define a person's wisdom and profundity. He thus devalues scientific advancement in favor of a more spiritual approach to the secrets of life. In this manner, he redefines the characteristics that determine how progressive a society is at a particular moment in history.

Another important factor that contributes significantly to resilience is the revitalization of Indigenous beliefs, values and cultural practices (Kirmayer et al. 2011: 89). As mentioned before, cultural revitalization is one of the most important strategies to promote healing in Native communities. Wagamese, who was raised by foster parents, returns to his community as a cultural outsider. His perception of the Ojibway lifestyle is stereotypical and he is anxious about Native ceremonies, which supposedly apply dark medicine (*ONL*: 145). Nevertheless, he is eager to learn about traditional beliefs and speaks to his grandfather through an interpreter (149). His grandfather is the last one in his family to live a genuine Ojibway lifestyle and does not know how to write or speak in English. Wagamese notes that his grandfather's life is utterly different from the life of an urban Native like him but he nevertheless tries to learn from him. To his dismay he realizes that the Ojibway lifestyle is not the same as it used to be in his grandfather's times. When going camping with his family he is shocked to see his family watch TV but he later understands that living conditions have changed over the years and that it is not necessary to live in a traditional way to claim a Native identity. Despite being a cultural outsider he actively tries to achieve cultural revitalization. He tries to learn the Ojibway language and attends events specifically organized for culturally dislocated Native Canadians to acquire knowledge about traditional ways of living. The short story "Two Skunks" emphasizes the

importance of Native healing ceremonies, such as the sweat lodge ceremony. By relating the story of a half-Cree man, who was sexually abused by his foster father and experiences healing at the Native retreat, he highlights the effectiveness of Native healing methods. The man who is named “Two Skunks” because of his low self-esteem caused by his severe childhood trauma, which is clearly visible in his posture and manner of speaking, becomes a traditional singer and dancer, marries and becomes a father after the retreat. This demonstrates the collective resilience of the Native population, who despite the adversity of colonialism, possesses the knowledge and techniques to heal themselves.

In conclusion, the personal resilience that Wagamese displays in his novel stems from his renewed identity as a member of the Wabasseemoong First Nation. By learning about the Ojibway language, culture, spirituality and ways of living he strengthens his sense of identity and manages to counteract the persisting effects of the systematic suppression of Native cultures. Despite his position as a cultural outsider, his re-connection is framed by the common history of his people and the shared land. Collective resilience is grounded in the community’s power to provide models for healing and uphold traditional cultural practices. On the extratextual level, the whole memoir can be understood as an act of resilience as despite the fact that the author grows up alienated from his culture, *One Native Life* is deeply influenced by Native stories and values. It embodies the perseverance of Native culture and thereby promotes the transformation of historical trauma.

## 6. Conclusion

What emerges from this analysis is that contemporary Native writers employ a plethora of literary strategies to effectively communicate traumatic experiences, stress the complexity of psychological aspects in Aboriginal writing and offer models for transforming individual and collective trauma. By subverting Western literary standards and infusing their narratives with Native spirituality, Aboriginal writers have been creating a new and exciting aesthetic. The aim of this thesis was to discuss different psychological aspects in selected Aboriginal-authored narratives. One important aspect that all discussed narratives thematize is the representation of different manifestations of trauma. As has been illustrated, effective strategies to communicate pain and suffering encompass the use of irony, humor, Gothic elements, highly metaphoric language, the incorporation of traditional myths and legends and the evocation of cultural memory. All the authors analyzed in this thesis appropriated Western styles and genres on their own terms and to serve their own specific purposes. Tomson Highway, for instance, includes numerous Cree words in his novels, which in some instances can only be understood by a very small cultural in-group. The incorporation of Native terms and phrases is a useful method to foreground an author's cultural roots and his or her unwillingness to submit to the “enemy's language” (Armstrong 1998: 175) and conventions. In *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* Lee Maracle frequently shifts between different genres to communicate her message in a more powerful way, while Eden Robinson appropriates Gothic elements to communicate trauma in a more persuasive manner. Simultaneously, Robinson unsettles the readers' expectations by intermingling uncanny elements with Native spirituality, rendering it difficult for a cultural outsider to decipher the different layers of meaning. When examining the selected narratives more closely, a number strategies aimed at challenging historic and ongoing inequalities can be discerned. Tomson Highway destabilizes the persistent assumption that Western psychology is superior to Native ways of understanding the human psyche by developing a distinct Native trauma theory based on traditional stories and myths. The phenomenon of trauma re-enactment and the cycle of abuse are symbolized in the story of the Weetigo and the Weesageechak, which also reveals methods to heal trauma. Through communicating individual trauma in a meaningful narrative, which constitutes a positive form of re-enactment, Jeremiah on the intratextual level and Highway on the extratextual level revisit their traumatic experiences, purge their emotional baggage, manage to confront the Weetigo and eventually exorcise it. The recounting of Cree myths and stories in a humorous way and the revitalisation of their Native tongue plays a vital role in their healing process. Lee Maracle also highlights cultural values and challenges Western patriarchy by grounding her stories in a distinct Native feminist theory.

By employing beautifully metaphoric language she vividly portrays Native women who try to free their sexuality from social constraints in a society still dominated by white men. She also provides a Squamish perspective on a specific historical event undermining the master narrative by forging a space for a lost Native village in the cultural memory. Richard Wagamese's memoir, which embodies Native resilience, subverts a historically common stereotype that depicts First Nations as a vanishing race by highlighting the persistence of Native communities and the effectiveness of Native healing methods. All the authors mentioned in this thesis reverse the "civ/sav dichotomy" (LaRocque 2010: 39) by depicting Western influences as primitive, destructive and/or limiting and stressing the importance of the revitalization of Native beliefs and values to alleviate pain and suffering. Eden Robinson's novel, which has been criticized for reading more like a mainstream novel, is deeply unsettling because it defies categorization and places its protagonists in the uncomfortable position of a cultural outsider desperately trying to make sense of the world. Similar to the other narratives, this novel stresses the importance of Native spirituality but is arguably more ambivalent about its impact on young culturally-alienated Native people. The shift of perspective in the third chapter discussing Eden Robinson's novel is so essential for this analysis because it unmask the expectations non-Native and Native readers still hold towards Native writing and the challenges that may arise when embedding a Native novel within a Western literary context. Furthermore, while the authors mentioned fulfill the readers' expectations to different degrees, *Monkey Beach* cannot be easily categorized and hence, challenges its classification as a Native Gothic novel and by extension, the race-based categorisation of Native writers into a distinct group.

In conclusion, contemporary Aboriginal writers make ample use of creative and innovative strategies to inscribe their cultural backgrounds on their narratives, demonstrate resistance to Western literary standards and belief systems and offer methods to transform and heal individual and collective trauma. While the texts discussed in this thesis are unique, they all stress the persisting vitality of Native cultures. In this way they embody the resilience of Native traditions and the failure of government policies, such as the residential school system, aimed at assimilating Native children into the mainstream Canadian culture. The narratives discussed in this thesis exemplify that while colonial projects have disrupted Native communities and inflicted trauma on whole communities, they have not succeeded in suppressing Native cultures. On the contrary, contemporary Native writers have invented numerous clever strategies that allow them to navigate between Western culture and their own cultural backgrounds and subvert the experienced trauma from within.

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