Approaches to Healing after a Trauma: Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

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Norwegian Abstract

I denne masteroppgaven analyserer jeg hvordan bøkene *Monkey Beach* av Eden Robinson og *Kiss of the Fur Queen* av Tomson Highway presenterer ulike tilnærmingsmåter for å bearbeide traumer, og da spesielt et transgenerasjonstraume. Både forfattere av bøkene samt tema er tilknyttet den kanadiske urbefolkningen, og denne oppgaven begynner med en belysning av et spesifikt traume som berører begge bøkene under diskusjon. Dette traumet er knyttet opp til en kanadisk assimileringspolitikk hvor barn som tilhørte urbefolkningen ble sendt til internatskoler i håp om å gjøre dem til "fullverdige" medlemmer av det kanadiske samfunnet. Denne politikken har i etterkant blitt kalt et kulturelt folkemord, der det første stadiet innebærer den traumatiske opplevelsen av å bli fjernet fra familie og lokalsamfunn samt nektet tilgang til eget språk og kultur. Dette har deretter påvirket etterfølgende generasjoner og ført til blant annet utrydningstruede språk, splittede familier og lokalsamfunn, og tap av kultur. I min analyse av bøkene tolker jeg de motsetningsfylte identitetene til hovedkarakterene i begge bøkene som et resultat av et individuelt traume samt et transgenerasjonstraume. Denne motsetningen kommer til uttrykk gjennom en urbefolkningskultur og -identitet på den ene siden, og en kanadisk kultur og identitet på den andre. Min tese går ut på at en tilnærming til å bearbeide traumet er avhengig av at hovedkarakterene oppnår en balanse mellom disse motsetningsfylte identitetene og kulturene. Dette vil innebære en anerkjennelse av den delen som er knyttet til urbefolkningen ettersom det er den som har blitt undertrykket. I de to første kapitlene nærmer jeg meg dette gjennom lesninger basert på Jodey Castricano's ide om å lære å snakke med gjenferd, både bokstavelig og billedlig, som et ledd i karakterenes anerkjennelse av en hybrid identitet. De to siste kapitlene viderefører diskusjonen om hybriditet, og sentrerer rundt Homi K. Bhabha teori om det han kaller 'third space'. I lys av denne teorien argumenterer jeg for at hovedkarakterene anerkjenner sine

hybride identiteter innenfor ulike former for liminale tilstander. Gjennom anerkjennelse av en undertrykket kultur anerkjennes også et kulturelt traume som har ligget tilsynelatende stille under overflaten. Tematikken i bøkene belyser viktigheten av å bryte stillheten rundt traumer ved å fortelle historier. Dette vil kunne resultere i en bearbeidelse av traumer som kan bidra til å stoppe videreføring av et transgenerasjonstraume.

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Introduction

> The impossibility of a comprehensible story, however, does not necessarily mean the denial of a transmissible truth. (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 154)

Canada has a long history of colonization, repression, and abuse of the indigenous population by white settlers, and consequently, a long history of cultural and individual trauma. For about a century and a half, the residential school system has been at the heart of the Canadian assimilation policy and the active repression of the indigenous community. This system can be traced back to 1867 when the Catholic Church ran a few boarding schools for indigenous children, but it quickly expanded to the point where residential schools were found all across the country. According to a report released by the Canadian government in 2015, 'the last federally supported residential schools remained in operation until the late 1990s' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 3). Moreover, the report cites an estimation by the federal government that 'at least 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students passed through the system' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 3). The report describes the intention and outcome of the residential schools as 'cultural genocide', which at its core means that 'families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 1). In practice, the schools created the foundation for an assimilation policy through the suppression and ban of languages, sub-standard education, forced manual labor, removal of homemade clothing and cultural objects, as well as physical, emotional and sexual abuse. These practices are described in the report as 'at best, institutionalized child neglect' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 43). The experience of the residential school system, in particular the removal of language, as well as punishments towards any child that dared speak it, resulted in

subsequent generations' decision 'not to teach their children an Aboriginal language' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 84). This decision has in turn 'contributed significantly to the fragile state of Aboriginal languages in Canada today' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 154). The schools were mainly run by different churches, with the Roman Catholic Church taking the lead, as they ran 'twice as many schools as did the Protestant denominations (*Truth and Reconciliation* 56). The reason why churches were given so much control over these schools by the government was partially explained as a benign attempt to offer indigenous communities with an alternative to the faith they were denied access to (*Truth and Reconciliation* 55-56). The churches were determined to instil the indigenous children with a '"good clean character"' and used the tools at their unsupervised disposal to '"counteract the evil tendencies of the Indian nature"' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 73). The stories about what actually occurred at these schools are just starting to emerge in Canadian society. Survivors and their families are beginning to open up about the trauma they have endured in an attempt to find justice and healing. The attempt at reconciling the past with life in the present is also reflected and explored in the literature that has been published in Canada in recent years.

The Indigenous Literary Canon

The reference book *History of Literature in Canada* consists of about 550 pages, and included in this book is a single subchapter dedicated to indigenous writing, taking up a total of 16 pages, entitled 'Literature of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis' and written by Eva Gruber. A book dedicated to literary writing that originates within the geographical boundaries that constitute Canada only entails 16 pages detailing indigenous writing. The reason for this was not the absence of stories or indigenous writers, but an exclusion of these from the 'Canadian publishing

industry and book market' (Gruber 413). This exclusion is a part of the larger systemic suppression of indigenous voices. Nevertheless, in the late 1960s the publication of indigenous writing began to develop due to political resistance against the silencing of indigenous voices (Gruber 413-414). There has been a development in both the scope and popularity of indigenous writing since the 1960s' politically motivated literature, which has resulted in a rich variety of texts and authors that are aiming to balance between becoming 'an integral part of Canadian literature' while simultaneously 'never giving up its idiosyncratic characteristics and traditional origins' (Gruber 427).

One of the most recognised voices in the developing indigenous literary canon in Canada is Thomas King (Gruber 419). Notable works by King include *Green Grass, Running Water*, which was published in 1989, and a collection of ten short stories from 1993 entitled *One Good Story, That One* (Busby). He made history in 2003, as the first indigenous writer to become a Massey lecturer (Gruber 419). In each lecture, King told different stories, and he ended all of them with the same subtle warning to the audience about the story they had been told:

> It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (King 29)

King's sentiment in this lecture echoes my motivation for writing a thesis about this topic. I was ignorant of Canada's history of forced assimilation in the form of residential schools, as well as unaware of any specific indigenous writing in the Canadian literary canon. All it took was one story, the story presented in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* to start a journey of exploration. The novel helped break a silence around a subject that I had previously been unaware of. It also

sparked a curiosity that made me seek out other indigenous voices and narratives that had historically been silenced. As a result, I have written a thesis that examines two novels written by First Nation authors, namely Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Both attempt to broach the underlying trauma of indigenous communities while navigating between the aspect of two seemingly opposing cultures and their impact on the experience of trauma. I will look at how the novels depict approaches to healing after a trauma, and to what extent this process of healing is contingent upon negotiating the perceptions of culture and identity.

Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

The first novel is Haisla author Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, which was first published in 2000. Robinson was born to a Heiltsuk mother and Haisla father and grew up near Kitaamat Village on Haisla land, which is also the same area that serves as a setting for *Monkey Beach* (Lewis). She is an internationally recognised writer who is concerned with portraying parts of Haisla culture in her writing. The novel *Monkey Beach* depicts LisaMarie Hill, a member of the Haisla community, and her search for her missing brother Jimmy. The narrative shifts continuously from the present to the past as LisaMarie explores her memories and the series of events that have led to the present moment in time. On the surface, LisaMarie is struggling to come to terms with her Haisla heritage while living in a community that is increasingly influenced by Western culture. However, the reader is slowly made aware of an established silence within the community that is a direct result of assimilation policies such as the residential school system. This silence only enables the denigration of Haisla culture further. As the

narrative unfolds, it also emerges that the trauma of the present, such as the loss of a brother, are deeply connected with the traumas of the past.

The second novel discussed in this thesis is *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and it was written by Cree writer Tomson Highway in 1998. This was Highway's first novel, as he is mostly known for writing plays such as *The Rez Sisters* from 1988 and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* from 1989 (Boyd). From the age of six, Highway was removed from his home and placed in a residential school. However, he claims that his experience was a positive one, and that it resulted in an education he would not have had access to if he had stayed with his parents (Ostroff). Despite his own personal and favourable take on the schools, he was inspired to write about the general indigenous experience of this system of assimilation after his brother, René, died of AIDS, which was supposedly linked to his troubling experience of residential school ("Tomson Highway"). The result is the novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, which portrays the life of two Cree brothers, Jeremiah and Gabriel Okimasis. Highway writes about their life from early childhood in the Eemanapiteepitat reserve, their stay at the Birch Lake Residential School, followed by their adult lives in different Canadian cities. The brothers' experience at the school results in a trauma that affects their entire lives and perception of themselves, particularly with regards to identity and sense of cultural belonging.

This thesis will be concerned with literary approaches to healing after trauma, and how and if, they come to fruition in the novels *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson and *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway. I interpret the conflicting identities of the main characters in both novels as a result of the trauma they have experienced individually, as well as through transgenerational trauma. The split in their identities is caused by an indigenous heritage and identity on the one hand and a Canadian identity on the other. In both novels, healing after a

trauma is contingent on achieving a co-existence between seemingly opposed identities and cultures. This duality manifests itself chiefly in a suppression of the indigenous identity and therefore requires the characters' acknowledgement of this suppressed part of themselves and their community in order to emerge as equal to the dominant Western cultural identity. The acceptance and inclusion of their indigenous identity is necessary for the main characters in both novels to begin a process of healing after trauma. Significantly, both Robinson and Highway draw on mythological figures of metamorphosis and hybridity in their depiction of this process, such as the shapeshifting Trickster in both novels and the B'gwus in *Monkey Beach*. Moreover, the mythical figures function as guides towards what I understand with Homi K. Bhabha as a 'third space' where the characters can acknowledge and accept their hybrid identities. Connected to this is the characters' ability to access threshold states, either through a connection to the spirit world or the creation of a creative space, as it is within such liminal spaces that a process of healing after trauma can begin.

Trauma Theory and Literary Studies

First of all, it is necessary to frame the concepts of trauma and healing before entering into a discussion about them in relation to these two novels. Although my focus is on approaches to healing *after* a trauma, this thesis requires a thorough examination and understanding of trauma in order to carve out those approaches. In her book, *Trauma Fiction,* Anne Whitehead offers an overview of different representations of trauma in literature and how it connects with trauma theory. According to Whitehead, studies of trauma can be traced back to the acknowledgement in 1980 of a condition referred to as 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)', which results in the emergence of trauma theory as a field in literary studies in the the early 1990s with trauma

theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Shosana Felman and Geoffery Hartman (4). Whitehead posits that literature and trauma theory are inherently linked and inform each other, as literature can be seen as 'an extension of the theory's own silences' (4). In this thesis, I make use of Whitehead's overview to tie the concept of trauma into the literary strategies employed by the authors. I also rely heavily on Cathy Caruth in my thesis, as she has been continuously referenced in my research as an established and respected scholar in the field of trauma studies. According to Cathy Caruth, 'trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (*Unclaimed Experience* 91). In this context, I understand the concept of healing to be a process of making oneself whole again, because trauma has resulted in a fragmentation of the self. This fragmentation is associated with trauma in general, as psychotherapist Alessandra Cavalli writes that those who experience trauma 'are left to pick up the pieces of a blown apart self and reassemble them together into something similar to a former self' (597). The way both novels are structured indicates a presence of this fragmentation. There is a switch from the present to past point of view continuously throughout the novels as well as a doubled narrative consciousness in *Monkey Beach* and two distinctive points of view in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. A 'dispersed or fragmented narrative voice' is consistent with features that are typically used in trauma fiction (Whitehead 84). This ties into the notion of opposing identities, where the indigenous identity has become inferior as a consequence of trauma, whereas the dominant Canadian identity is pushed to the forefront.

The understanding of cultural genocide as a result of the residential school system and the overall Canadian assimilation policies can be linked to the concept of transgenerational trauma. This term refers to trauma that is passed down through generations, where a succeeding

generation can experience the effects of a trauma that occurred before their time. In their book, *The Shell and the Kernel,* psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok posit that 'trauma can be silently transferred from one generation to the next when it is too shameful to be spoken about' (171). This concept is also referred to as a "haunting" because the trauma appears as a 'transgenerational phantom, a remnant of a past generation's secrets that haunts the succeeding generations (Abraham and Torok 165). This notion of transgenerational trauma is also alluded to by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in their report, as the 'impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the Survivors' partners, their children, their grandchildren, their extended families, and their communities' (*Truth and Reconciliation* 135-136). As a result, the terminology used in this thesis has real historical relevance in Canadian society.

In order to properly explain how a process of healing after a trauma can begin, it is important to frame these novels within the concept of transgenerational trauma. In *Monkey Beach*, the exposure to the residential schools is the trauma that is rarely talked about but nevertheless affects both the characters who experienced it and later generations, such as the protagonist LisaMarie Hill. The effects this trauma has on LisaMarie are not apparent at the beginning of the novel, but slowly emerge as she delves deeper into her memories. The notion of transgenerational trauma is presented differently in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* with regards to residential schools. The reason for this is that the main protagonists in this novel experience these schools first hand. However, the concept is still relevant because the narrative allows the reader to experience the process behind a burgeoning transference of trauma, which in turn can result in a development of transgenerational trauma. This process is rooted in the brothers' refusal to confront or even acknowledge their trauma because it is considered too shameful, and as such

allows for the passing of trauma onto the next generation (Abraham and Torok 171). By giving the reader direct access to the experience of residential schooling, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* fills a gap that is left unexplored in Robinson's novel. However, traces of transgenerational trauma is still present within the Okimasis family and the Cree village of Eemanapiteepitat with the forcible influence of Western culture and religion in their lives. For instance, the boys' parents are practising Catholics, and as such have been warned about certain aspects of their own culture. This includes Cree figures such as the Weetigo and the Weesageechak. The former is a cannibalistic figure within Cree mythology that once was a human but now preys on other humans, whereas the latter is known as the Cree trickster. These figures play an important role in the way trauma is figured in the novel, and are integral to arguments presented in Chapter Two and Three of this thesis with regards to the brothers reclaiming parts of their Cree identity and culture.

Overview of Existing Scholarly Research with Regards to the Novels

During my research, I came across only two articles that compared these two novels to each other, and only one of them is explicitly focused on the subject of trauma. The first article, 'Beyond the Contact Zone? Mapping Transcultural Spaces in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach'*, was written by Katja Sarkowsky and is a sub-chapter in the book *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Sarkowsky is concerned with the concept of 'mapping' as an approach to negotiating meaning between seemingly opposing cultures. Kristina Fagan's article 'Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and

Eden Robinson,' also involves a comparison between Highway and Robinson. Fagan's focus is on how indigenous writers use humor in response to trauma, and to what extent this literary strategy also highlights the presence of an indigenous literary theory concerning trauma. The use of this type of critical theory in analysing indigenous literature is commented on by Michéle Lacombe in her article, 'On Critical Frameworks for Analysing Indigenous Literature: The Case of *Monkey Beach'*. Lacombe criticises the predominant use of Western literary theory when discussing indigenous writing, as it limits the reading when indigenous perspectives are not considered in the analysis (253). Lydia Efthymia Roupakia is another scholar who recommends caution with regards to using only Western theoretical frameworks to discuss and analyse indigenous texts. In her article, "On Judging with Care and the Responsibility of an Heir: Reading Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*," Roupakia argues for a literary reading that is based upon attentiveness to a specific story, rather than uncritically applying 'consolidated theoretical discourses' to fit into a perception of how a narrative should function (294). As a result, Roupakia urges the reader to be aware of how 'the novel invites the reader to reflect on the complexities of 'judging with care'' (279). An example of a Western literary theory that is applied to indigenous writing can be found with Jodey Castriciano's article 'Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothics and Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*'. Castriciano ties the Gothic genre to indigenous trauma by referencing the established silence in the Haisla community depicted in Robinson's *Monkey Beach*: 'In the Gothic tradition, coming to terms with the unspeakable means, paradoxically, learning how to talk *with* ghosts, a task which not only takes the form of a legacy but also brings with it the responsibility of an heir' (802).

My thesis takes into consideration the limitations of only using literary frameworks derived from a Western perspective and attempts to include indigenous approaches to

understanding the novels under study. Although I use the framework introduced by Castriciano in the first two chapters of this thesis to present one of the approaches to healing, I focus on a specific part of her analysis, namely the process behind 'learning to talk with ghosts'. This focus allows me to open up for a reading of the novel that takes into account both Western literary theory and indigenous perspectives concerning approaches to healing after a trauma. The current existence of only two articles that involve direct comparisons between Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Robinson's *Monkey Beach,* leaves a space for my thesis to cover a specific area of research that is unexplored, and hopefully, contribute to the critical discussion on the topic. In this thesis, I present two approaches in the novels to healing after a trauma that are played out differently in each of the two novels. Moreover, my focus on the effects of a specific trauma, namely that of the residential schools, offers a rare opportunity to discuss the subject of indigenous transgenerational trauma in literature.

Hybridity and Postcolonial Theory

Both of the approaches I examine are tied to what I describe as 'hybridity', which is also a heavily debated term within postcolonial studies. The notion of hybridity is often used in postcolonial theory to explore individual, social and cultural implications of being posed 'between' cultures. In this thesis, a significant part of my discussion about how hybridity figures within the novels and as an approach to healing, will draw on the work of the Indian English scholar, Homi K. Bhabha. However, Bhabha's work is not without its critics. In her book, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique,* Benita Parry critiques Bhabha's lack of actual inclusion of 'material conditions, institutions and practices of colonialism and the neo-colonial'

in his writing (58). Although Bhabha acknowledges the presence of it, Parry argues that he neglects problematizing them further (58). As such, his use of the term hybridity is generalizing, and its application to actual situations and people offers a too simplistic explanation, as it is one that favors the 'privileged postcolonial' (Parry 71). Another critic of Bhabha's work is Arif Dirlik. In his article, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,' Dirlik criticises Bhabha's conception of hybridity, and argues that Bhabha confuses the topic with his mode of writing, as well as reducing 'social and political problems to psychological ones' (333 no. 6).

Despite the criticism regarding both the term hybridity as well as Bhabha's own critical theory, I believe some of his concepts, such as his theory of a 'third space' can be used to support my arguments in this thesis. I discuss hybridity with reference to two specific novels as well as an established historical trauma, and as such, do not enter into a discussion about hybridity on a generalizing level. My perspective on the term hybridity is that it is not a phenomenon exclusive to members of the indigenous community in Canada. This thesis works on the assumption that everyone has a hybrid identity, although most people are not necessarily aware of this. Even with an acknowledgement that people can have different identities and roles depending on context, it may safely be argued that the majority of the world's population will identify with a specific nationality or ethnicity. The problem with this form of identification is that it is nearly impossible to define a set of criteria for a specific ethnicity and nationality that would fit with everyone who would try to define themselves as such. It is very difficult to conceive of the idea of a specific culture that is without influence from other cultures. As a result, the notion of a hybrid identity and culture is left as the only real option. The reason why this is important in reference to these novels is that it is precisely the lack of understanding and acknowledgment about this "reality"

that is in some ways enabling trauma, and moreover, preventing a process of healing for the characters in both *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Monkey Beach*. The difference between a white Canadian and a First Nation Cree retaining a hybrid identity with influences from other cultures, lies in the nature of the confluence. It is easier to accept something that is neither painful nor a result of forced assimilation and colonization. By not accepting the notion of hybridity, the characters in the novels are not acknowledging the trauma that led to a hybrid identity in the first place.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter One, I discuss an approach to healing after a trauma in *Monkey Beach*, which will be based on Jodey Castricano's article "Learning to Talk with Ghosts' and centered around the concept derived from the title. I will argue that the novel shows how rediscovering and acknowledging parts of one's identity is integral to healing, and that one of the ways this can be achieved is through an examination of the past; a conversation with ghosts. This takes on a literal configuration in *Monkey Beach*, where LisaMarie must come to terms with her spiritual gift of communicating with the spirit world as well as her Haisla heritage.

In Chapter Two, I continue the discussion around the concept of 'learning to talk with ghosts' with reference to *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, where the concept arguably functions figuratively rather than literally in the process towards healing. The brothers confront the "ghosts" that reside in their past through a different mode, namely storytelling and performing, and as a result, begin to resolve the trauma they have suffered. It should be noted that this chapter is considerably longer than the others due to the fact that Highway's novel depicts in detail the

trauma that is left unrepresented in *Monkey Beach*, and as such, may be read as its companion narrative. Filling in the absence of the other novel, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* requires a focused reading to illuminate the trauma that is at the core of both texts.

In Chapter Three, I will explore how the main characters in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Gabriel and Jeremiah Okimasis, begin a process of healing after a trauma by employing the term hybridity as well as Homi K. Bhabha's 'third space'-theory. I build on the arguments from Chapter Two and argue that the plays the brothers create are a metaphorical conception of a 'third space' where they can express their stories and their hybrid identity, which enables a process of healing to begin.

In Chapter Four, I discuss how hybridity causes both conflict and a possibility to begin a process of healing after a trauma in the novel *Monkey Beach*. This discussion is centered on Robinson's use of mythical figures such as the B'gwus and Weegit the Raven, where the latter is considered to be the Haisla configuration of the Trickster figure. The figures represent the possibility of reframing Haisla culture from notions of past relevance to the modern world through storytelling. The result would mean reaching a place of acknowledgement for the hybrid identity that is present within the character of LisaMarie Hill, as well as the Haisla community.

Lastly, I would like to note that although the indigenous communities depicted in both novels are in fact classified as First Nation tribes, Cree and Haisla respectively, I have chosen to chiefly use the more general term 'indigenous' in this thesis. The reason for this is that the residential school system and the overall transgenerational trauma that is the subject matter of this thesis does not exclusively involve First Nation tribes, as it also plagues both Inuit and Métis communities. As such, I feel a more general term is needed as to not minimize or ignore the trauma of other indigenous communities in Canada.

Chapter One: Learning to Talk with Ghosts in Robinson's *Monkey Beach*

In this chapter, I will explore how conversations with ghosts figure as a form of healing after a trauma in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*. I will argue that the novel show how rediscovering and acknowledging parts of one's identity is integral to healing. One of the ways this can be achieved is through an examination of the past; a literal conversation with ghosts. My discussion will draw on Jodey Castriciano's article, "Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothics and Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*", where Castriciano uses the Gothic literary genre to analyze *Monkey Beach.* Castriciano's reading of the novel amounts to a 'call to responsibility' with regards to cultural inheritance for the protagonist LisaMarie Hill (14). Although I agree with Castriciano's conclusion, I want to shed light on the process rather than the end result. My focus will be on the verb 'learning' as well as the preposition 'with', seeing as I interpret these two words as the process towards the ability to talk with ghosts. This can lead to a confrontation with trauma and a reconnection with the fragments of a divided identity. I will argue that the novel shows that this process takes place through hypnagogia, which is the state between wakefulness and sleep. Although I am reluctant to use a term derived from Western psychology to describe a phenomenon of indigenous culture, I consider that the duality within the characters' identity invites a hybrid reading where terms from both cultures are used. Moreover, this type of reading connects to other approaches to healing after a trauma, which will be explored in the third and fourth chapter of this thesis.

Transgenerational trauma: Silence and suppression

Over the course of the novel, LisaMarie overhears and is told bits and pieces of her family and community's traumatic history, that she has to puzzle together in order to discover the scope of

that trauma. The very first mention of residential schools occurs when LisaMarie asks her cousin, Tab, why aunt Trudy does not talk to Ma-ma-oo:

> Tab sighed. “Don’t you pay attention?” “I pay attention,” I said, getting indignant. “No, you don’t. Ba-ba-oo was an asshole. He beat Gran. Instead of sending him away, she sent Mick and Mom to residential school.” “And?” “God, you can be so dense,” she said. (59)

This exchange fits in with the notion of transgenerational trauma because it is the children who first mention the residential school system and not the adults. In the absence of action from the adults in their family and community, the next generation is the one who must actively deal with the trauma that affected the preceding generation. Although it seems like LisaMarie has no associations to residential schools and is thus ignorant of the trauma it caused her family, this passage can also be read as an unwillingness to recognize something she may already be aware of, either consciously or subconsciously. The reasoning behind this argument, is that if Tab is really providing LisaMarie with new information, we would expect her to react more strongly than with a nonchalant ‘and?’. It is possible that her reluctance to engage in a conversation or react to what Tab is saying stems from a subconscious knowledge about the legacy of transgenerational trauma. She may know something is not quite right but is unwilling to recognize it because that would mean having to deal with the full scope of it. Moreover, her unwillingness to recognize the truth can be a result of the enforced silence that is inculcated within her family and community.

Her parents divulge very little of their own personal history and the history of the Haisla tribe, and the narrative suggests that this is an attempt to shield their daughter from the pain and

trauma that is embedded in that history. As a result, LisaMarie is at first unaware of the trauma that surrounds her family and community. Ironically, this silence facilitates the passing of the original trauma over to LisaMarie. This is most apparent with the loss of culture and language, which results in LisaMarie being unable to come to terms with her own spiritual gift and the traumatic events she is involved in throughout the novel. Although these events at first glance can appear as separate from the transgenerational trauma, there is an argument to be made that they are connected. The event that opens the novel and arguably triggers her narrative about her life up until that moment, is that of her brother, Jimmy, being lost at sea. Although this at first seems to be an accident, it turns out that Jimmy took a job on a fishing boat to kill the captain of the boat, Josh, because the latter had sexually abused Jimmy's girlfriend (who is also Josh's niece). This incident is connected to the transgenerational trauma because as a boy Josh went to a residential school, where it is heavily implied he was sexually abused by a priest. He went on to continue that cycle of abuse with his niece as well as with his nephew Pooch in adult life. Jimmy tries to resolve the sexual abuse that his girlfriend suffered by inflicting physical abuse towards her abuser, thereby repeating the cycle of violence within the next generation.

Another incident shows the potential of a traumatic event: this is when LisaMarie and her cousin Erica narrowly escape being sexually assaulted by a car full of white men. LisaMarie cannot understand why everyone is so upset at this because as she sees it the men would never have hurt her in 'broad daylight' and with 'tons of witnesses' (255). This argument is quickly opposed by aunt Trudy:

> "Honey," she said, "if you were some little white girl, that would be true. But you're a mouthy Indian, and everyone thinks we're born sluts. Those guys would have said you

> were asking for it and got off scot-free." "No, they wouldn't." "Facts of life, girly. 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 of them got away scot-free." (255)

Not only does Trudy break the silence that is seemingly enforced by the other adults in the novel, she also likens the situation LisaMarie was in to her own experience during her and her brother Mick's time at residential school. This passage highlights two important issues for survivors of the residential school system. First of all, it shows that Trudy is stuck within the confines of her traumatic past, and transferring it onto similar situations in the present. Moreover, the reactions LisaMarie receives from other members of her community indicate that this is not only a memory that triggers Trudy but is also a collective memory that blurs the lines between past and present. Secondly, it highlights the divide between us and them, the oppressed and the oppressor. By likening the two situations, Trudy is upholding the roles and lines created by the original trauma. The abuse she has suffered makes her expect abuse in certain situations from certain people, regardless of it being reasonable or not. However, it should be noted that according to a report from the Department of Justice, which reviewed criminal victimization of indigenous people in Canada, sexual assault occurs in a disproportional number for indigenous women (Scrim). Therefore, this can be considered a justifiable assumption by Trudy. Despite being told these things by Trudy, LisaMarie still displays a lack of understanding of why Trudy is distraught, and why she herself 'was the one getting blamed for some assholes acting like assholes' (255). She does not see the divide in the same way as Trudy does because in her mind it is not because they are white or belong to a different group within society; they were just behaving like assholes. At

this point in the narrative, LisaMarie does not share Trudy's personal experience. She is able to see glimpses of a collective memory that contains the transgenerational trauma, but because she did not personally take part in it, she is stuck between her own experience and the collective experiences of her family and her community. By not teaching her about her cultural heritage or even the reason for the diminished extent of it, her family is unknowingly transferring the phantoms of their past. This is not to say that upholding the divide is beneficial for healing, but it is necessary to understand the root of a problem before attempting to solve it.

The novel is written mostly in a first-person narrative, which gives the reader insight into LisaMarie's thoughts and observations. However, it should be noted that LisaMarie shows a lack of reflection upon the different revelations in the novel. An example of this is the conversation between Karaoke, Frank, and LisaMarie after Pooch's funeral, where Karaoke hints at the reason for Pooch's suicide:

> "Did he say anything to you guys?" Frank said. I shook my head. "Not to me. But we didn't talk much." "We all know why he did it," Karaoke said. "Shut up," Frank said. "Just shut up." "Yes, let's not talk about it. Josh didn't—" "Shut. Up." They were both quiet. Frank started telling me about his new satellite dish. (319)

There is an interesting contradiction in this conversation, in that Frank asks if Pooch told either Karaoke or LisaMarie anything before he killed himself, but when given a reason by Karaoke, he refuses to hear it. The notion of ambiguity comes into play as it is not clear whether Karaoke is inferring that Pooch's suicide was a result of abuse by comparing their silence to Josh's refusal to

talk about his abuse, or that their refusal to talk about it will be as damaging to them as Josh's refusal was to him. Either way, the exchange shows a transference from the older generation to the younger of silence around shameful and traumatic events. When Karaoke dares to break that silence, she is quickly rebuffed, by her own generation nonetheless. As a narrator, LisaMarie leaves it to the reader to interpret and reflect upon these revelations and connect the dots. The reader, like LisaMarie, does not have full knowledge of the underlying trauma. As the trauma cannot be resolved as long as the extent of it is unknown, the novel suggests that healing will only be complete or possible, when LisaMarie (and the reader) uncover the entirety of the trauma that the novel is concerned with and acknowledge this out loud. The novel alludes that the reason for Pooch's suicide is related to his uncle, Josh, sexually abusing him. Again, the concept of transgenerational trauma and cycles of abuse and silence is displayed in the novel through different narrative techniques. There is especially one scene that alludes to this possibility, where Frank tries to tell LisaMarie about the reason why Pooch killed himself, only to be silenced by LisaMarie (313). This scene will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, but it shows LisaMarie's struggle between asking questions and breaking the silence around trauma and becoming an active part of the that established silence. It should be noted that the reason why she is not reflecting upon some of these revelations can be a result of trauma. According to Caruth's definition, trauma is not fully grasped when it occurs. The reader is presented with her memories as flashbacks, and as such, there will be no reflections present because they did not occur at the time of the event. The particular trauma in question here is the suicide of her good friend Pooch. She is not able to reflect upon the situation she is in, because she cannot fully comprehend his death.

Narrative Consciousness: Breaking the Silence

The novel is structured in such a way that the reader witnesses the life of LisaMarie, as recounted by her, while she is on her way to search for her missing brother. However, only a short time passes in "real-time", whereas most of the narrative takes place in the past. The disruption in time, shifting from the present to the past, fits within the genre of trauma fiction as presented by Anne Whitehead. She draws upon trauma theories by both Freud and Caruth, which correlate with regards to a 'non-linear temporal relation to the past' (Whitehead 6). This stylistic observation can be seen in connection with a theory posited by Pierre Janet, who

> contends that the traumatic cure comprises a transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory, so that the event is integrated into a chronology of the past and into the individual's life history. Where traumatic memory repeats the past without consciousness, narrative memory recognises the past as past. (Whitehead 140)

The recollection of LisaMarie's past that provides most of the plot for the novel seems to belong to the category of narrative memory, yet, there is a specific trauma that seems to adhere to the category of traumatic memory, and that is the heartbreak LisaMarie suffers after the loss of her grandmother and uncle. There are passages scattered throughout the novel that entail detailed descriptions of human anatomy, more specifically depictions of the heart. In these passages, there is a shift from first-person narrative to second person narrative, which in turn makes them appear as instructions not only to the reader but to LisaMarie herself; one part of her is speaking to another. There appear to be two narrative consciousnesses in the novel. One of them is naïve and

asks questions rather than attempting to answer them. The other is reflexive and insightful as evidenced by the moments in the novel where LisaMarie occupies a role as a teacher of and guide to the Haisla culture. American scholar Michelle Balev, writes in her book *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, that the presence of a double narrative consciousness is an established part of a literary strategy of 'narrative dissociation', which attempts to capture 'responses to trauma' in fiction (xvi). An instance of the second narrative consciousness is found in this passage:

> Make your heart into a fist. This is roughly the size of your heart. If you could open your own chest… Reach into your chest cavity and pull your lungs away from your heart to fully appreciate the complexity of this organ… Peel away this sac. Inside is a watery lubricant that minimizes friction when your heart beats…Behold your heart. Touch it… (163-164)

In a literal sense these passages that are detailing the anatomy of a heart foreshadow Ma-ma-oo's heart attack later on in the novel, as seen with '[i]f the plaque breaks off and blocks the arteries that send blood to your heart muscle, your heart will starve. This is a heart attack', and 'death often follows within the next few hours' (269, 275). However, they also function as a figurative description of the overwhelming heartbreak LisaMarie suffers as a result of loss throughout her life. The senseless examination of the anatomy of a heart shows an inability to confront the actual heartbreak, which is emotional rather than physical. In his work, Pierre Janet indicates an ambivalence with regards to what would ultimately lead to catharsis after a trauma. According to Ruth Leys who wrote an article reviewing Janet's work, Janet posited (through his

account of the treatment of a young woman and her trauma) that a patient 'was cured not by the recovery of memory but by *the excision of her imputed or reconstructed trauma*' (649). However, Janet later stated that the therapeutic value lay in 'the capacity to distance oneself from oneself by representing one's experience to oneself and others in the form of a narrated history' (Leys 654). This latter approach seems more reasonable and is supported by psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman, who states that the 'goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism' (181). Thus, by naming the trauma that has affected her family, by narrating the events of her life, LisaMarie is slowly but surely healing herself from the loss she and her community have suffered. LisaMarie is telling this story as much to herself as to others, and because of that, she is acknowledging her own story. She is examining the events in her and her family's past that led to the present moment in the novel and learning from those experiences. From that place of newly found knowledge, she is also re-channelling that knowledge into a narrative for a wider audience and readership.

By revisiting Caruth's definition of trauma, it is possible to state that the fragments of the self that LisaMarie is searching for, are not within reach of the conscious mind. Therefore, LisaMarie must find a way to rediscover these parts of herself. As previously mentioned, there is an established silence that exists within her community and her own family. Another instance of this occurs on the trip LisaMarie takes with some her relatives to Kemano:

> "Is there a village here?" Mom shook her head. "Used to be." "What happened?" She looked down at me. "Most of the people died." "How?" "They just died," she said, her lips thinning. Which meant that she wanted me to stop asking what she called my nosy questions. (100)

This passage shows the non-verbal understanding that is communicated from the simple act of LisaMarie's mother thinning her lips; LisaMarie stops inquiring into what happened to the village that used to be in Kemano. This type of body language is usually connected to anger or sadness. Moreover, the act of pressing the lips together can symbolize repression, almost as if she is about to burst, but is forcing herself to hold it in. By thinning her lips, LisaMarie's mother is silently communicating that LisaMarie should 'stop asking what she called my nosy questions'. This indicates that LisaMarie's curiosity is a recurring occurrence that often challenges the established silence within her family. Moreover, her acceptance at being shut down emphasizes my earlier point about LisaMarie being aware of the presence of trauma at some level, but that she is reluctant to explore the full scope of the underlying trauma. Her curiosity continues to emerge as questions throughout the novel, but the continued silence makes it a journey she must make alone.

An Approach to Healing: "Learning to Talk with Ghosts"

Paradoxically then, one way to achieve this rediscovery is to learn how to talk with ghosts. LisaMarie's path towards healing is twofold and interconnected. First, she must learn how to speak with the phantoms, namely her ancestors who reside in the established spirit world within Haisla culture. If she is able to do this, she will regain insight into the transgenerational trauma that haunts her family and her community. LisaMarie can also connect this to her own personal struggles with trauma. Secondly, in order for LisaMarie to learn to speak with the spirit world, she has to acknowledge and accept her gift and ability to do so. In her article, Jodey Castriciano

argues that the act of learning to talk with ghosts is aligned with learning to live (801). Moreover, she alludes to the possibility of LisaMarie's healing as a consequence of learning to talk with ghosts, seeing as 'it involves the recollection as well as the reintegration of a spiritual dimension of Haisla culture in spite of its negation in the wake of European contact' (802). In other words, by learning to communicate with the spirit world, LisaMarie can reconnect with her Haisla identity despite the dominance of Canadian culture.

The process of learning to live is closely aligned to the issue of trauma, as Caruth writes: 'Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories, I would suggest, it thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*; between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival' (*Unclaimed Experience* 7). There is a balance between recognizing the event and learning to live with it; however, Caruth presents both conditions as unbearable and equally traumatizing. To heal from this compulsion to repeat, the trauma needs to be acknowledged. One approach is to learn to speak with ghosts in order to try and resolve the trauma. This double telling is present in *Monkey Beach* as well, with LisaMarie commenting that '[w]hen I dreamed, I could see things in double exposure –the real world, and beyond it, the same world, but whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes. Whales rolled in and out of the water, and not just orcas either…' (265). LisaMarie needs to reconcile the world as it used to be with the world that she lives in now, and figure out how 'the real world' came to be. In order to accomplish this, she needs to examine the past by learning to speak with ghosts.

The question then becomes, how can LisaMarie learn to speak with ghosts? This question is problematized by the lack of a proper guide to help LisaMarie navigate her gift in relation to

the spirit world. Her grandmother at times serves as a guide, for instance when she tells LisaMarie that 'to really understand the old stories … you had to speak Haisla' (211). However, she too shows limitations in her knowledge: '"All the people knew the old ways are gone. Anyone else is doing it in secret these days. But there's good medicine and bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don't know what you're doing. It's like oxasuli. Tricky stuff"' (154). The lack of a guide demonstrates a paradox, seeing as LisaMarie has a responsibility to learn, but has no one to teach her. This in turn emphasizes the immense scope of trauma the Haisla community has suffered; not only has the population been greatly diminished but so has the knowledge and traditions, and with that quite possibly a chance at healing.

In my reading, the answer to the question comes in the form of three very interesting passages found at different places in the novel. They all begin with the phrase 'contacting the dead' and as mentioned previously, they are presented as lessons to both the reader and to LisaMarie herself (139, 179, 212). This can be seen with a shift in point of view, from a first-person narrative to the unusual second-person narrative, which results in a direct engagement with the reader, while also enabling LisaMarie to create a dialogue between her dual narrative consciousness.

> Contacting the dead, lesson one. Sleep is an altered state of consciousness. To fall asleep is to fall into a deep, healing trance. In the spectrum of realities, being awake is on one side and being asleep is way, way on the other. To be absorbed in a movie, a game or work is to enter a light trance. Daydreams, prayers or obsessing are heavier trances. Most people enter trances reflexively. To contact the spirit world, you must control the way you enter this state of being that is somewhere between waking and sleeping. (139)

The first lesson indicates the space where LisaMarie can learn to talk with ghosts, namely a state between wakefulness and sleep. In his book, *At the Borders of Sleep: On Liminal Literature*, Peter Schwenger writes about the different **'**liminal states between waking and sleep' (xiii), and one of these is hypnagogia. He describes this state as an 'observation … from a distance: the images appear as if projected upon a screen, and one is oddly detached, observing the phenomenon with interest and curiosity' (5). Moreover, Schwenger stresses the fact that people in this state are conscious and able to convey what they are seeing, which in turn distinguishes this state from dreaming (5-6). By including terminology that is already established within Western psychology, I hope to validate the presence of this state in the novel; this elusive threshold of consciousness that LisaMarie is given directions to. As I mentioned in the introduction, literary critics should be careful when using Western terminology to describe an indigenous phenomenon. However, in this instance, it is not done in an attempt to undermine or reinterpret a phenomenon, but rather to offer support for a phenomenon that is already established as a part of a cultural reality within the Haisla community.

The first lesson can be read as the starting point of a map telling the reader how to reach the spirit world. It is important to note that control and consciousness are preconditions. Moreover, the spectrum that illustrates the divide between sleeping and being awake can function as a metaphor for the splitting of worldviews and identities in the novel. On the one hand, there is the Native identity and Haisla culture, while on the other hand, there is the Canadian identity and Western worldview. These two points are presented as dichotomies in much the same way as sleep and wakefulness are perceived to be. However, the narrator also points out that there is a whole world inside the spectrum and that the ideal is found somewhere in the middle. Therefore,

the state of hypnagogia mirrors this thesis' argument that healing will occur at the convergence of LisaMarie's conflicting identities, namely the acknowledgement of a hybrid identity space.

> Contacting the dead, lesson two. You are in a large mall near closing time. It's Christmas Eve. You turn away for just a moment, look back and your toddler is gone. Even through the noise, even through the confusion of bodies bumping and swearing as you push through the crowd, even as you yell your child's name, you are listening for that one voice to call for you. Names have power. This is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere. Call out the name of a supernatural being, and you will have its instant and undivided attention in the same way that your lost toddler will have yours the second it calls your name. (179-180)

In the second lesson, the power of names is highlighted. If converted into a verb, the act of naming can be juxtaposed to the established silence in the novel. In order to learn to talk with ghosts, a person needs to break the cycle of silence, and hopefully, the end result will bring about an end to the transgenerational cycle of trauma. This argument is made more forceful by interpreting the word 'supernatural' through the definition from the Oxford English Dictionary, where it is construed as '[b]elonging to a realm or system that transcends nature, as that of divine, magical, or ghostly beings' and can be 'attributed to or thought to reveal some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature' ("supernatural"). As mentioned previously, transgenerational trauma is often referred to as a haunting because it is silently transferred from one generation to the next. The supernatural being referred to in the passage can function as a metaphor for the trauma that haunts the Haisla community, and more specifically LisaMarie.

According to Judith Lewis Herman, '[r]emembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims' (1). By naming what has so far been silent, LisaMarie is confronting the ghosts of both her past and the Haisla community.

Furthermore, the narrator points out the significance and power behind familiar bonds, particularly the bond between parents and their children. By likening the supernatural to a 'lost toddler' in the parable, there is an argument to be made that the child represents the younger generation in the novel that is charged, through no fault of their own, to call upon their parents, the preceding generation, and the trauma that connects them. Within the parable, it is the possibility of getting separated from your parents at a mall that is the traumatic incident that binds the family together, whereas in the actual novel it is a transgenerational trauma that connects them all. However, it should be noted that although trauma connects LisaMarie's family, it is also what separates them. The silence surrounding the trauma is what creates distance between the different family members, and it also highlights the distance between where the Haisla community is now compared to their origins. LisaMarie needs to acknowledge the existence of these ghosts if she wants to learn how to talk with them.

Moreover, this lesson, comparable to the first, contains imagery that illustrates an ambiguous duality. By interlacing parts of the instruction on how to talk with ghosts with traditional non-indigenous images of a mall and Christmas, the narrator is demonstrating the relevance of magic even in modern commercialized times. Additionally, the duality illustrates the distractions that face anyone attempting to undertake these lessons, and more importantly, the reason why the lessons are needed in the first place; the dominant culture of white settlers wiping out indigenous traditions and culture. By placing the lessons in a modern Western setting, the

'real' world is connected to the spirit world. In other words, the aforementioned dichotomies of Western and Haisla culture that are placed on different parts of a spectrum are tied together. The duality can also be a way to include a larger readership with regards to a concept that without the parable would seem far-fetched. By evoking relatable imagery, it seems more plausible and as a result, there is a greater understanding of the underlying message.

The first half of the third lesson also entails the notion of duality:

> Contacting the dead, lesson three. Seeing ghosts is a trick of concentration. You must be able to concentrate on nothing and everything at the same time. You must be both asleep and awake. It should be the only thing on your mind, but you can't want it or expect it to happen. It's very Zen. (212)

The narrator's instructions present two clear oxymora, 'nothing' and 'everything', as well as 'asleep' and 'awake'. Although these dichotomies indicate a state of mind that seems impossible to achieve, it can symbolize the duality in LisaMarie's identity, and call for her embracing the different fragments of her identity. However, in order to do this, she must be 'very Zen', which can translate into being at peace. Interestingly, the use of the Buddhist term 'Zen' can serve both as an approachable explanation, but also a criticism of how different indigenous practices and beliefs are often muddled together by the Western population. The latter point is emphasized further when it is put into context with the wider readership that was established earlier. Therefore, it serves as yet another subtle critique of the dominant culture of white settlers.

The second half of the lesson contains specific instructions on how to enter this state of consciousness:

> Lie down. Wear loose clothing. Don't play any music. Especially don't play any of that New Age, sounds-of-the-humpback-whale music. Be still. Close your eyes. Keep your arms flat by your side, your legs uncrossed and relaxed. Begin by becoming aware of your breathing. Then your heartbeat. Then the blood moving through your body. Expand. Hear the traffic outside, or the wind in the trees, or your neighbour taking a shower. Then concentrate on both your body and the outside world. If you have not contacted the dead after several tries, examine your willingness to speak with them. Any fear, doubt or disbelief will hinder your efforts. (212)

The use of the term 'New Age' further underlines the previous point about a Western perspective on alternative approaches to reality. It ridicules the idea that any input from this perspective is necessary to reach the state between sleep and wakefulness. Additionally, the aforementioned use of a second-person narrative further underlines the possibility of LisaMarie somehow functioning as her own guide in this narrative, through one of the narrative consciousnesses. This argument is strengthened by the placement of the passages throughout the novel, thus giving LisaMarie the tools to finally learn how to speak with ghosts. Moreover, it gives the reader an opportunity to interpret the ending of the novel in a new light, as well as establish connections between different parts of the novel. The first lesson is placed in between two passages set in the present tense, in which LisaMarie is trying to search for her missing brother. It appears without any warning, much like the visions LisaMarie has throughout the novel. This indicates that the narrator is

trying to convey a message to the reader, much in the same way that the leprechaun tries to warn LisaMarie about upcoming tragedies. However, the placement of this lesson in the present tense implies that LisaMarie has yet to connect her past to the present, thereby making it difficult for her to reach this state. The last two lessons, on the other hand, appear in between jumps in time, from the past to the present. This opens up the argument that LisaMarie is learning from her explorations of the past and bringing them into the present. A result of this is making her ready to enter into the threshold state of consciousness towards the end of the novel, and hopefully, she can begin a process of healing where she can learn to live with a newfound knowledge of her own and the Haisla community's past.

Entering the Spirit World: the Acknowledgement of Trauma

The novel begins with six crows speaking to LisaMarie in Haisla. '*La'es*, they say, *La'es*, *la'es*' (1). LisaMarie provides the reader with an incomplete translation, '*La'es* – Go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, but I can't remember what' (1). Even though the translation does not cover the full meaning of the word, it is still possible to argue that the novel is providing the reader and LisaMarie with the key to unravelling her own personal trauma as well as the transgenerational trauma that is plaguing her community. In order to try to resolve the trauma that entrenches the entire novel, LisaMarie accompanied by the reader, must get to the bottom of it all; we must go where no one has gone before. The message can also serve as a clue to Jimmy's whereabouts, as it is very likely that he drowned when the boat he was on sank. In that case, LisaMarie has subconsciously been aware of Jimmy's fate all along, but it is

not until she has examined her past and the trauma that resides there, that she can come to terms with this new loss.

The last paragraph of the novel is highly ambiguous and is open to interpretation as to whether LisaMarie survives drowning or in fact drowns herself. In my reading of the ending, she survives and has come out on the other side (the "real" world). One reason for this interpretation is that there are several descriptions that ground LisaMarie in the physical world. These include evocations of several senses, such as sight through the observation of a raven 'above my head', and touch with the 'clamshells are hard against my back' (374). Moreover, at one point she has both literally and figuratively delved into the ocean to uncover the trauma of loss she has experienced throughout the novel. While she is on the other side, she meets with Ma-ma-oo: '"When it's time to go, you go," she says. "Nothing you can do or say will change it. We're where we belong, and you have to go back. Do you hear me?"' (371-372). This arguably functions as a resolution for LisaMarie, seeing as she has felt guilty for not using her gift (that often warns her when people are about to die) to help her loved ones. It could be Ma-ma-oo's way of telling LisaMarie that some things cannot be changed, and begin to facilitate her healing and coping with the loss of her dead relatives and friends. Her experience on the other side also shows her rediscovering her Haisla heritage and identity: 'For a moment, the singing becomes clear. I can understand the words even though they are in Haisla and it's a farewell song, they are singing about leaving and meeting again, and they turn and lift their hands' (373-374). This line stands in juxtaposition to the beginning of the novel where LisaMarie grapples with the Haisla language. Moreover, it can be seen in relation to Ma-ma-oo's statement about the connection between old Haisla stories and the Haisla language. LisaMarie has found a way to understand the old ways even though she has not been introduced to them the traditional way. Although the

beginning and the end of the novel are both set in the present, LisaMarie has been on a journey through her memories; taking her from the present to the past and back to the present again. She has arguably resurfaced with a newfound knowledge about her Haisla heritage and identity.

One of the last lines in the novel, 'Close, very close, a b'gwus howls—not quite human, not quite wolf, but something in between' (374), can be interpreted as a metaphor for LisaMarie and her conflicting sense of identity. The B'gwus is a notable figure within Haisla culture that has the ability of shapeshifting. His presence in the novel will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four of this thesis. Nevertheless, the B'gwus's ambiguous nature mirrors that of LisaMarie's identity. She is not entirely Haisla and not quite Canadian, but rather something in between. Moreover, there seems to be not only an acknowledgement of this but also an acceptance. This in turn makes it possible to argue that she is working towards healing from her traumatic past, and the transgenerational trauma that haunts her family. Additionally, this state of being in between mirrors the aforementioned state of hypnagogia, which is the threshold space in which a person can learn to talk with ghosts. Furthermore, the words 'in between' used in connection with the mythical and indigenous figure of the B'gwus alludes to an acknowledgement of the existence of magic, and thereby also LisaMarie's gift. In one way, the ending can be seen as LisaMarie embracing her Haisla heritage and gift after struggling throughout the novel to do so. The definition of transgenerational trauma posits that trauma is passed from one generation to the next when it is too shameful to be mentioned. By rediscovering her indigenous identity, and thereby acknowledging the hybridity that exists within her own identity, LisaMarie has reached a state where she can receive knowledge from the spirit world. Previously, Ma-ma-oo warned LisaMarie that her gift was tricky because if she did not know how to use it, it could be dangerous. If we assume that the Haisla language is key to healing, by

understanding it, LisaMarie has reopened communications and understanding between the past and the present. By being able to understand the old stories she has opened a connection between the Haisla spirit world and the world of the living. The importance of language also ties into the power of naming. Recalling the second lesson, it is pointed out that ‘Names have power. That is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere’ (180). By acknowledging the trauma that haunts her family, she is in fact naming that trauma and thereby counteracting the established silence. As a result, LisaMarie opposes the passing of the transgenerational trauma onto the generations that come after her.

Chapter Two: Learning to Talk with Ghosts in Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

In this chapter, I examine how Castriciano's concept of 'Learning to talk with ghosts' functions in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. In contrast to *Monkey Beach*, the focus is on a figurative conception of this approach with regards to healing. In other words, how the Okimasis brothers reconnect with their cultural heritage through a creative outlet, rather than a literal communication with ghosts, as seen with LisaMarie Hill in *Monkey Beach*. Although it is a different perspective, the concept of 'talking with ghosts' is still applicable to this novel, because the brothers have created a dialogue where their memories and experiences are communicated to the audience through a play. They are reclaiming their identity by presenting certain aspects of their cultural heritage in a new light, away from the distrustful confines and restrictions of the Catholic Church and Western culture. An example of this is the story of Chachagathoo, branded as a witch by the Church, but in truth the last shaman of her kind. The creative outlets that are used in this novel, are first and foremost dancing and the playing of a musical instrument, specifically the piano. Throughout the novel, these talents develop and result in the ability to compose music and write plays, as well as choreographing and directing said plays. This chapter begins with a discussion on how the notion of transgenerational trauma is present in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. I then proceed to discuss trauma in relation to the novel, with a specific focus on residential school, and how that trauma is suppressed and silenced. That discussion enables me to use Castriciano's article, particularly with regards to what triggers the brothers' trauma and how creative outlets can forge a path towards healing.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, although transgenerational trauma is figured differently in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* as opposed to *Monkey Beach*, it is still present in the

influence of Western culture within the Okimasis family and the Eemanapiteepitat reserve. Even before the Okimasis brothers are sent to residential schools, the role the schools had in creating cycles of transgenerational trauma is shown through the previous generations refusal to acknowledge openly and share with their community the experiences they had at these schools, which enabled more "unknowing" parents to send their children to these schools. This possibility presents itself when Mariesis asks her husband whether they have to send Champion to a residential school, to which he replies '"What Father Bouchard wants, I guess," he finally admitted, wishing dearly that he had some say in the matter. "But couldn't he wait two years? Until Gabriel can go with him? That school is so far away." "*Sooni-eye-gimow's* orders, Father Bouchard says. It is the law"' (40). First of all, this displays the faith the community placed in the word of the local priest. Secondly, it is important to note that the only words explicitly spoken in Cree are in relation to the Indian Affairs Agent. The function of this stylistic device is to illustrate the omnipresence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the novels and historically. By explicitly saying it in Cree, it shows how the word has the power to end an argument, which in turn demonstrates the power of the bureau in charge of overseeing indigenous communities. Despite his faith in the priest's words and his obedience to the law, 'Abraham wondered out loud, to other long-faced parents on the priest's old dock, what on earth their son was going to get "down there."' (47) Although this shows the reluctance and hesitance in Abraham's mind, it also points to a suppressed resistance seeing as his doubt is only uttered within his own communal circle.

Moreover, the suppression of this transgenerational trauma can have made it possible for them to accept the status quo. In other words, this was simply what was done to Cree children. This is especially true for those communities and families, such as the Okimasis family, who are devout Catholics and as such never question orders from their local priest, not to mention the

Catholic Church as an institution. This is evidenced when Abraham, the patriarch of the Okimasis family, shunned his own sister under orders from the priest because she had left her abusive husband, and any association with her would give 'approval to her sin until she had returned to her rightful husband' (129). This points to a presence of a larger transgenerational trauma that surpasses the Canadian residential school system and encompasses the overall colonization, discrimination and forcible conversion of the indigenous population in Canada. This is the result of a culmination of seemingly minor deprivations, such as the ban against dancing, because '[n]o good Catholic danced on Sundays' (17). For each new generation, parts of their culture are diminished as their stories, language and names are slowly but surely replaced by Western narratives, languages and Christian names. This argument is apparent with the brothers' observation and description of an airplane, as '[t]hey had never been on an airplane. They had seen them, drifting in the wind like dragonflies. They had seen them berth at Father Bouchard's old dock, swallowing – or, better, spewing out – Josephine, Chugweesees, Chuchilia, and other Eemanapiteepitat children.' (47) In other words, the children are first swallowed whole when the plane arrives to bring them to the schools. However, when they return they are ejected as vomit, seeing as the definition of 'spewing' is 'to vomit' ("spew"). A figurative interpretation sees the children as not being worthy of the vessel that consumed them in the first place, and as such, they are discharged rather contemptuously. Moreover, this allegory implies that for each time the children are consumed and spewed out, they will diminish bit by bit.

The Residential School System: "Kill the Indian; Save the Child"

The sexual abuse that the Okimasis brothers suffered at the hands of the principal of the residential school, Father Lafleur, is at the core of the trauma they experienced while at school.

However, it is important to establish the other instances of abuse and discrimination that the novel presents, because they not only enable but also deepen the traumatic experience of sexual abuse. Champion Okimasis is seven years old when he is sent to the fictional Birch Lake Residential School. His first encounter proves to be very traumatic as all the newly arrived children are forced to have their hair cut off. Champion observes one of the priests cutting one boy's hair before saying '"Next" in a tone as business-like as if he were counting money' (51). This observation should be considered in context with the purpose behind these schools, which was the assimilation of indigenous children into Canadian society. As a result, the children were treated as investments – their value considered to be non-existent when they first arrived at the schools. However, the goal was that upon their release from the schools, they would be high-functioning and contributing members of Western society. Within this goal lies a perspective that equates the children to objects, rather than equal human beings, which is reflected in the metaphor of the priest seemingly counting money as he cuts the children's hair off. The underlying assessment of children's value seems to be picked up in Champion's descriptions of his own hair being cut, as he saw himself being '[p]oised for slaughter' (52). His description seems to suggest that Champion compares himself to nothing more than an animal, at least in the eyes of the priest who is cutting his hair. Moreover, 'Champion could feel his hair falling, like snowflakes, but flakes of human skin. He was being skinned alive, in public; the centre of his nakedness shrivelled to the size and texture of a raisin, the whole world staring, pointing, laughing' (53). This additional description raises the possibility that he believes that by cutting his hair the priest is removing an essential part of what makes Champion who he is, seeing as many indigenous tribes believe that their hair is a source of power and strength. The metaphor of being 'skinned alive' also emphasis this interpretation, considering that skin is the organ that

protects the rest of the body from harm. By removing this layer of protection, Champion finds himself in a very vulnerable position.

This incident is quickly followed by a question of what his name is, and after some confusion, he clearly states his name. However, his first name is ignored by the priests, who by his surname identifies him as Jeremiah Okimasis from Father Bouchard's baptismal registry. Champion tries to counter this, as '[h]e summoned forth the only English word he knew and, with it, shielded his name. "No. Champion. Champion Okimasis"' (54). His simple protest is only met with a chortle from the priests who reiterate his name to be Jeremiah, whereupon Champion reacts: 'His hair now gone completely, Champion had no strength left; he began to bawl' (54). This underlines the assumption of his hair being a source of power for him, and when it is removed, his will to fight back diminishes. Champion is stripped of fundamental pieces of his identity, namely his hair and his name. The process of alienation from all he knows is furthered by the suppression and official ban of his native language. This is evidenced by a scene in the schoolyard: '"The winds of late October…," said Champion-Jeremiah to himself, then stopped. His Cree must not be heard or he would fail to win the prize: the boy who acquired the greatest number of tokens from other boys by catching them speaking Cree was awarded a toy at month's end' (63). The priests have created what at first glance seems to be a game with a prize to be won, however, the reality is that it turns the children against each other and undercuts the severity and discriminatory nature of their actual agenda, which is assimilation. Moreover, the revelation that the previous month's prize 'had been an Indian war bonnet; this month it was to be a pair of cowboy guns' (63), further undermines indigenous culture and tradition. By making the war bonnet a prize to be won, the true significance and importance of such an attire are subverted, namely honour and combat skills ("War Bonnet, Blood Tribe"). This subversion is further

strengthened by this month's prize, namely cowboy guns. By equalling these two objects, cowboy guns and a war bonnet, and labelling them as prizes and toys, the priests are trivializing the violence and colonization that followed this historical feud. This in turn further undermines indigenous culture and tradition, and functions as a tool towards the goal of assimilation.

Champion exhibits some resistance to the ban against his language when he speaks Cree to himself while playing because 'Champion-Jeremiah suddenly didn't care whether he lost or won the guns' (63). Despite this small sign of resistance, Champion is shown to have made a temporary compromise with regards to his name, as he refers to himself as 'Champion-Jeremiah – he was willing to concede that much of a name change, for now…' (58). He entered the school identifying himself as Champion, but after a while, he responds to a hybrid name. This speaks to a unique quality amongst children to adapt to situations in a way that would be harder for adults who are usually more set in their ways. However, upon his return to the school after a short break at home, Champion is just referred to as Jeremiah in the narrative. This is an important change that is not addressed at all, but rather included as if his name has no significance. In other words, his Cree name is erased without even acknowledging the erasure, which can be regarded as an accurate description and subsequent critique of the assimilation process forced upon these children.

His "new" Catholic name should be examined more closely because it relates to a specific prophet in the Old Testament, namely Jeremiah the Weeping Prophet. The name inspired the noun 'jeremiad', which is defined as '[a] lamentation; a writing or speech in a strain of grief or distress' ("jeremiad"). Therefore, his Catholic name can ironically be viewed as the only evidence of grief for the loss of his Cree name. The name also highlights the divide in his identity, as the connotations of a champion do not involve someone in grief. A champion is

usually labelled as such because he has achieved something, rather than lost it. However, the connection to the actual prophet is interesting. According to *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Jeremiah the Prophet was plagued with an inner conflict, namely 'a determination to abandon his calling defeated by an inability to evade it' (745). This description fits with the fictional character of Jeremiah, seeing as Jeremiah abandons playing the piano for almost a decade before realizing that music was not the problem, but rather his motivation for playing it had become twisted. Music is a part of who he is, and is his way of expressing himself. Therefore, the name presents itself as an oxymoron. On the surface, it seems to allude to a divide, however, as evidenced by the arguments above, it actually points to a direct alignment with his fate. The name foreshadows his difficulties, but also his perseverance through them.

In his return to school after the summer, Jeremiah is accompanied by his brother to the residential school, something Father Lafleur comments on. 'We didn't have much choice, [Jeremiah] would have added, if the language had been his' (70). Jeremiah's thoughts can be regarded as a silent act of defiance, because Gabriel's enrolment, or even his own, is not a result of free will but of keeping in line with the status quo. Moreover, the line 'if the language had been his', not only alludes to the fact that he is not fluent in English, but it also points to his ability to even state his thoughts and have it mean something. If he could resist, he would have, but he recognised it to be a lost battle. The English language functions as an indicator of power positions, and without proper access to it, his voice is inconsequential. After comforting a scared Gabriel by speaking the Cree language, he is approached by Father Lafleur, who 'with a gentle touch to Jeremiah's left shoulder, purred: "Now, Jeremiah. You know you're not to speak Cree once you're off the plane." Jeremiah felt a choke breaking against his throat' (70). Despite the game discussed earlier, this is the first and clearest indication that the children were not allowed

to speak their native language. Additionally, it shows the contradictory demeanour of the Church, represented here by the priest. He is seemingly gentle in his approach, yet the message he delivers is detrimental to the boys' Cree identity, and the Cree society as a whole.

The previously mentioned instances of trauma are highly relevant for the following paragraph detailing the sexual abuse the brothers suffered because it shows the vulnerability of the children and the systematic abuse enforced by the schools, which enabled the sexual abuse to prevail. By banning the use of the Cree language, the Church is removing their ability to speak their mother tongue, and as result, a wall is created between the children and their parents. This wall prevents the children from speaking out about the abuse. By cutting off hair, the Church is removing a source of power and identity. This in turn prevents the children from fighting back. By discarding and reframing cultural symbols, the Church is removing parts of the Cree cultural heritage. The significance of these symbols becomes lost to the children, while the symbols are made available for cultural appropriation by a Western society.

The first depiction of actual sexual abuse is narrated from the perspective of both brothers. It begins from the point of view of Gabriel, who is the one being molested by Father Lafleur, and then from Jeremiah's perspective who wakes up and goes to check on his brother. Gabriel is at first asleep when the molestation begins, but when he wakes '[h]e didn't dare open his eyes fully for fear the priest would get angry; he simply assumed, after a few seconds of confusion, that this was what happened at schools, merely another reason why he had been brought here, that this was the right of holy men' (78). At his young age, Gabriel is not able to process the severity of the abuse he is suffering, and his response demonstrates this. The passage also highlights the role of priests, who were essentially custodians of the Catholic Church, and the unquestionable and seemingly immense power they had in those positions. This incident

transpires merely days after Father Lafleur discovered Jeremiah sleeping in his brother's bed, and upon that discovery forced Jeremiah to return to his own bed. Jeremiah's reaction is very interesting because it emphasises that with '[h]is hair … gone; he had no power. Childish sleepiness masking his defeat, he shuffled down the aisle of slumbering bodies, back to his own bed' (74). This second reference to his power being gone with the removal of his hair must be seen in context with what has been previously discussed, in addition to a seemingly random line in between the descriptions of the molestation of Gabriel, which reads 'Gabriel had no strength left' (78). Not only does this show a similar regard for the power of hair from both brothers, but it also illustrates how Gabriel's ability to fight back or protest is cancelled out by previous actions of assimilation.

This particular incident of sexual abuse is interrupted by Jeremiah, who is checking up on his brother during the night: 'But Gabriel was not alone. A dark, hulking figure hovered over him, like a crow. Visible only in silhouette, for all Jeremiah knew it might have been a bear devouring a honeycomb, or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh' (79). Jeremiah does not identify the perpetrator as Father Lafleur, but rather perceives it to be a Weetigo feasting on his brother. The figure of the Weetigo plays an important part in Cree mythology and storytelling. According to Kristina Fagan, a Weetigo is a 'cannibalistic creature'. They 'are once-human creatures who, after being "infected" with a Weetigo spirit, have an insatiable hunger and an ability to turn other humans into Weetigos' (217). The importance of inserting an image of a Weetigo in the novel is that it functions as one side of a metaphorical representation of the divide in the brothers' identity. The Weetigo embodies Western assimilation through the representation of the Catholic Church. This is evidenced by the similarity between a Weetigo devouring human beings and priests sexually abusing young children. In addition, there is the even larger context

of Western colonization which entails devouring indigenous land and traditions in hope of spewing out a landscape which mirrors Western values and ideals. The other side of the brothers' identities is seen through the Weesageechak, also known as the Cree trickster, who represents their Cree cultural heritage and is also present in the novel as a guide towards the brothers' destinies. The role of the Weesageechak will be discussed more thoroughly later on in the chapter.

Jeremiah description of the sexual abuse also shows his inability to process the reality of what he is witnessing. He is replacing the reality of the situation with allegorical figures. This inability is made clearer with the next passage:

> No, Jeremiah wailed to himself, *please*. Not him again. He took two soundless steps forward, craned his neck. When the beast reared its head, it came face to face, not four feet away, with that of Jeremiah Okimasis. The whites of the beast's eyes grew large, blinked once. Jeremiah stared. It *was* him. Again. (79)

This passage alludes strongly to Jeremiah's own traumatic experience of being sexually abused. In relation to trauma, Anne Whitehead writes, 'The traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time that it occurs and only becomes an *event* at some later point of intense emotional crisis' (5). In this instance, the crisis is witnessing his own brother being molested. Jeremiah also continues to reference the perpetrator as a beast rather than identifying him as Father Lafleur. By describing him with animalistic features as well as including the allusions brought on by the figure of the Weetigo, the novel is criticizing the predatory nature of the Church. Not only

through the widespread and acknowledged sexual abuse that was rampant in these schools, but in their mission to track down indigenous children to convert and assimilate them at an early age, where they would be more susceptible to the abusive process. Although there is an allusion to Jeremiah's own traumatic experience, the chapter ends with a suppression of that trauma:

> Jeremiah opened his mouth and moved his tongue, but his throat went dry. No sound came except a ringing in his ears. Had this really happened before? Or had it not? But some chamber deep inside his mind slammed permanently shut. It had happened to nobody. He had not seen what he was seeing. (80)

By witnessing his brother being molested, Jeremiah is reliving his own trauma. However, his mind is not able to interpret it as such, making him question whether this had happened before or not. According to Cathy Caruth, 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on' (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). This in turn relates back to the discussion in the previous chapter about 'the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*' (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 7). Jeremiah is trying to shield himself from his experiences by suppressing it and by extension his brother's trauma. However, he is in fact only prolonging the trauma, because 'the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way' (*Unclaimed Experience* 59). In other words, Jeremiah is doomed to repeat his traumatic experience regardless

of his determination and inability to face the full extent of it. As a result, life after the traumatic incident becomes part of the trauma as he tries to find a way to get through the '*crisis of life*'. By locking away his own traumatic experience alongside that of his brother, Jeremiah is in a sense also locking away a part of himself. He is inadvertently expanding the trauma by sharpening the divide in his identity because the part he locks away is the Cree child. This is evident from the fact that his ethnicity is what put him in this position of abuse. However, the metaphor of a 'chamber' within Jeremiah's mind leaves open the possibility for healing this divide and the trauma alongside it, as a door that is shut can technically be opened at a later point.

The Suppression and Silencing of Trauma

There is a specific scene in the novel where one of the brothers try to tell their mother what really happened to them at the residential school. However, Gabriel is hindered by the presence of the Catholic Church, an institution that can be regarded as the perpetrator to their traumatic experiences. The instance occurs when the boys return home from residential school during the summer, and Gabriel asks his mother a seemingly innocent question: '"Do '*machipoowamoowin*' mean what Father Lafleur do to the boys at school?"' (91). In the narrative, the meaning of this Cree term is perceived by the brothers to mean '"bad blood" or "bad dream power"' (91). When they asked their uncle, Kookoos, for a better explanation of the term, he replies that '"It means that when you dream you dream about things that go *chikaboom chikaboom* in the darkest corner of your mind, and that generally happens when you don't have no money to make the good homebrew"' (91). If this is the perception Gabriel has of the term, it is safe to assume that he regards the abuse he has been exposed to with unease because he categorises it as "bad dream

power". This categorisation takes place even though he has justified the abuse in his own mind as a priest's divine right and the natural order of things at school. Additionally, Kookoos' reference to alcohol and its ability to result in numbness for whoever consumes it, points to a larger societal issue where the Cree community are in need of detaching themselves from reality.

Gabriel's question is followed by an illuminating line because although his intention was 'to tickle his brother with this light-hearted joke, Gabriel's question ended with an eerie, spectral chuckle that could have popped out of a bubble in his blood' (91). This description illustrates the friction between Gabriel's childish innocence with an inside joke about life at the residential school and the knowledge of a serious underlying trauma. Although a 'light-hearted joke' seems to be met with an appropriate 'eerie, spectral chuckle', there is nevertheless a juxtaposition between these two because of the conflict within the latter composition as a result of the addition of the two adjectives. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'eerie' as synonymous with 'fearful, timid' and 'spectral' as 'having the character of a spectre or phantom; ghostly, unsubstantial, unreal' ("eerie"). A 'chuckle' on the other hand, is usually associated with an exultation of glee. The use of the adjective 'spectral' points to a trauma that has yet to be acknowledged, as Gabriel's laughter at his own joke is affected by the omnipresence of trauma. Moreover, the inclusion of 'eerie' indicates an already established agreement of silence about what really happens at the school, and with his joke, Gabriel is gently testing the parameters of that agreement. Jeremiah's response to his brother's "joke" clearly reinforces that agreement, as 'Jeremiah's words in English, were as cold as drops from a melting block of ice. "Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur"' (92). It is important to note that the novel spells out that Jeremiah specifically uses English in his reply. He is using the language that separated him and his brother from their mother tongue and family to put an even greater distance between them

and their parents. In addition, this is the first time in the novel that Jeremiah acknowledges out loud that something untoward happened at the school. The response also shows the first lapse in Jeremiah's determination to suppress the trauma. This is especially apparent through the use of the plural pronoun 'we' rather than just referencing Gabriel and his trauma with a singular pronoun 'you'. Jeremiah's reply also illustrates his knowledge of the power of the Catholic Church even with regards to their own parents believing them. Whether the Church actually had this power over these communities is irrelevant, because the assumed belief is strong enough to guide the actions of the main protagonists.

Their mother's response shows that her inability to help them is made possible by the very thing they need help with in the first place, namely the consequences of Western assimilation, which in this case is alienation through language barriers: 'Selecting one of the three Native languages that she knew – English would remain, for life, beyond her reach, and that of her husband's – Mariesis turned to Jeremiah. "What are you saying my sons?"' (92). The reply to their mother comes from Jeremiah: 'If moments can be counted as minutes can, or hours or days or years, one thousand of them trickled by before Jeremiah was absolutely sure Gabriel's silence would remain until the day they died. And then he said, his voice flat, "*Maw kegway*." Nothing' (92). His response is naturally in Cree, but the fact that it is stated first in Cree only to be repeated in English by the narrative voice reinforces the suppression of trauma. By repeating the word 'nothing' the novel is addressing not only a hybridity in readership but also to the hybridity present within the brothers' identities. In this passage, Jeremiah functions as an obstacle, in much the same way as the Church. It is possible to read this as an unwillingness to open the doors to his own suppressed trauma, which would trigger a break from his established sense of reality. As such, it reads as a repetition of his earlier denial of witnessing his brother being molested.

An Approach to Healing: 'Learning to Talk with Ghosts'

Now that the novel's depiction and subsequent repression of trauma have been established, I will explain how Castriciano's notion of 'Learning to Talk with Ghosts' serves to illuminate the novel's approach to healing the trauma experienced by the characters. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I interpret this notion figuratively in relation to *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, meaning that I view the plays they produce as a way to communicate with their past and confront their trauma. A result of that confrontation is a reaffirmation of their indigenous identity, which can help bridge the divide in the brothers' identities. This creative outlet is a result of their respective gifts, which have been a part of them since before birth. In that way, it is possible to draw a parallel to LisaMarie Hill's gift in *Monkey Beach*. Ojibway lawyer, Valerie Waboose, reveals in a book review that it is common in indigenous cultures to believe that all 'children are born into this world with a special gift and a purpose in life' (410). This is evidenced by Champion, who 'had his little accordion strapped to his chest, as if he had emerged from his mother's womb with the instrument attached' (41). The passage also helps to establish these gifts as something that is inherently linked to their identity since birth, and that their gift is a part of their path towards a purpose in life. Additionally, it points to a passing of a cultural and familial heritage, as seen with Champion:

> …Abraham knew that his son was singing for him. For wasn't it his greatest pride to have finally sired a child with a gift for the making of music, one to whom he could pass on his father's, his grandfather's, and his great-grandfather's legacy? The assurance that this

> ancient treasure of the Okimasis clan could rest intact for at least another generation inspired him to glide across the ice with even greater skill, greater precision, greater speed. (27)

The reference to Champion's gift as an 'ancient treasure' coupled with the line 'for at least another generation' also indicates a knowledge about how the cultural heritage of the Cree tribe is diminishing for each new generation. However, with this acknowledgment of a secured legacy for at least another generation, Abraham continues working with an invigorated sense of spirit.

At the beginning of the novel, Champion is playing his first original composition at three years old, and 'he squinted and banged his accordion with even greater vigour, the song kicking into a tempo he would later come to know as allegro con brio' (25). In this passage, Champion's composition is played in part in a tempo he has produced from instinct. It is only later that he learns that this tempo has a Western label, allegro con brio, which intriguingly means to play with vigorous spirit. This definition is derived from allegro meaning musical 'piece played at a quick tempo' and brio which is described as 'vivacity' ("allegro", "brio"). The term in itself is superfluous because the actual music is accessible to all and seemingly exists without the knowledge of the "correct" label. This point is crucial because it speaks to the divide between identities of the main protagonists, especially Jeremiah. Music is first and foremost a way to express oneself, as seen with Jeremiah when he was younger. After his stay at the residential school, he tries to force his talent into a traditional Western mould, because he believes that is what is expected of him. Moreover, a part of him believes that if he is successful in this, he will finally become a real Westerner, and in turn, worthy of something more. In context with previous arguments, it is possible that Jeremiah believes that if he is able to actually transition into a

"white Westerner", he will be able to separate himself completely from the Cree child who was abused. Although this is not a realistic possibility, he might subconsciously believe that he will never have to experience or re-experience the trauma if he can remove himself from what placed him in the traumatic situation in the first place, namely his ethnicity.

In much the same way as Champion was gifted with musical abilities at an early age, his brother is prophesied as a dancer by his father while in his mother's womb, and again at birth, as '[t]he midwife's voice intoned: "*Ooneemeetoo*. *Kiweethiwin*. *Ooneemeetoo*." And so the child was named: Dancer' (30, 35). The literal translation of this passage from Cree to English means 'Dancer. Your name. Dancer' (308-309). Gabriel's Cree birth name is Oneemeetoo, however, since his Catholic baptism this name is never mentioned in the novel again, and he is consequently referred to by his Catholic name, Gabriel. The latter name has obvious religious connotations, but a simple definition is that he is regarded as '[a]n archangel, used by God to deliver revelations to people on earth' (Delahunty and Dignen). There are two instances in the novel where Gabriel is described as an angel. The purpose of including these instances is to link descriptions of Gabriel to the first part of the definition mentioned earlier, namely being similar in appearance to an angel. This opens up the possibility that the rest of the name's definition can be applied to the character in the novel, namely the ability and divine purpose of delivering messages. The first instance occurs during communion at the residential school when Father Lafleur's

> gaze locked with that of his organist, Jeremiah Okimasis. The little angel, Gabriel, holding the golden paten to catch fragments of Christ's body from under communicants' chins, caught this telling exchange between his brother and the priest. He felt something

> heavy, cold and wet, at the base of his spine, a sensation vaguely like a bog-like squelch. (82)

This passage follows the night when Jeremiah witnessed Father Lafleur sexually abusing Gabriel, and as such, it can be regarded as a revelation because it enables Gabriel to make a connection between the abuse and his brother's knowledge of it. From that connection, he is able to discern that what happened to him was not acceptable, and not simply the right of the priest, as he had assumed during the abuse. This argument is extracted from the sensation he gets at the revelation, as it negates his naïve assumption of the priest's rights and motives and his own feeling of sexual pleasure during the abuse. The second instance takes place when Gabriel goes to a downtown establishment called the Rose, and he is instantly the focus of everyone's attention because of his beauty. He is describes as a 'bronze Cree angel' (166). This particular part of the novel shows Gabriel's revelation of his own power of attraction, which alludes to the possibility of a willing audience if he were to share his story. Although Gabriel differs from his brother with regards to his birth name not being referenced again in the novel, they are similar in the way their Catholic names allude to them both being messengers of some kind, either as a prophet or an angel. This in turn points to a predetermined destiny, which is as mentioned previously, in line with indigenous beliefs. Although these revelations are observed throughout the novel, they are not expressed before the end, and then not through traditional communication, but through storytelling, music, and dancing.

Triggered Trauma: Creative Outlets as a Path Towards Healing

Although these gifts manifested themselves before the brothers arrived at the residential school, they are not diminished by the school but remain intact throughout the narrative. However, there is a distinctive development towards a Western moulding of these gifts after their stay at the residential school when they venture into life in the city of Winnipeg. Jeremiah channels his musical talents towards the piano, rather than the accordion. This change can be seen in relation to a discovery he made in class during his stay at the residential school, when they were examining illustrations of heaven and hell, as 'Champion-Jeremiah was hoping to find an accordion player in at least one cave but, to his great disappointment, there was no place for musicians of his ilk in hell or heaven' (61). Despite the departure from the accordion to the piano, he experiences a pull towards his upbringing while playing, as seen with the following passage when he imagines his family and home while playing the piano, '"Come home, Jeremiah, come home; you don't belong there, you don't belong there" – the rhythm of his native tongue came bleeding through the music' (101). However, when he visits the reserve, he is hindered from expressing himself and his desire, because '[h]ow, for God's sake, did one say "concert pianist" in Cree? (189) The language barrier functions as a representation of the divide in identity and culture. This is also true for Gabriel's artistic ambitions, as seen with the line: 'For how else, in this language of reindeer moss and fireweed and humour so blasphemous it terrified white people, could one express a concept as nebulous as "ballet slipper"?' (194). Describing the ballet slippers as vague is another way of designating its use as confined to the world outside of Cree traditions and life. However, the same pull depicted earlier with Jeremiah can be found with Gabriel's initial discovery of ballet dancing as a teenager, a performance which transports him to his childhood:

> The arms were a sea of moving antlers. And Gabriel Okimasis, three years old, was perched on a moss-covered rock, the warm breath of a thousand beasts rushing, pummelling, the zigzagging of their horns a cloud of spirit matter, nudging him, licking him as with a lover's tongue. And whispering: "Come with us, Gabriel Okimasis, come with us…"' (145)

This revelation points towards a possibility to merge a creative outlet with a past memory, and even further with the acknowledgement of trauma and possibility of healing from it. However, the beginning of Gabriel's dancing career seems contradictory because he is described as '[s]till caged in Studio B of the School of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, he was free of gravity, trying out this newfound language that spoke to him in a way nothing else had ever done' (153). Ballet dancing is described as an oxymoron, as he is both caged and free. I interpret this to mean that although he is finally free to express himself through a creative outlet, it is still within the confines of a specific Western style. However, by likening dancing to language, he is opening up the possibility of a new arena to express himself. Moreover, he might be able to use dancing as a way to communicate the trauma he has been unable to name through a conventional form of language.

Gabriel is not there to witness Jeremiah performing at the concert the latter has practised for most of his adolescent life, due to a falling out about the former's homosexuality. During the concert, Jeremiah is playing his brother leaving, displaying his ability to channel experience into music:

> Jeremiah played a northern Manitoba shorn of its Gabriel Okimasis, he played the loon cry, the wolves at nightfall, the aurora borealis in Mistik Lake; he played the wind through the pines, the purple of sunsets, the zigzag flight of a thousand white arctic terns, the fields of mauve-hued fireweed rising and falling like an exposed heart. (213)

This ability is important because it establishes Jeremiah's creative outlet as a reliable source of information for the reader. The novel has made sure the reader is aware that Gabriel has left Winnipeg and is travelling, and as such, there is no need to question Jeremiah's musical depiction of that departure. This is a meaningful part of the narrative as it builds a foundation of credence for other creative depictions that occur later on in the novel. Moreover, his musical depiction is plagued by grief as evidenced by the first line 'played a Northern Manitoba shorn of its Gabriel Okimasis', which translates into depicting the world and reality he lives in deprived of the presence of his brother. This line also plays upon the notion of his Catholic name, Jeremiah, and how he is a messenger of lamentations. Towards the end of the concert he plays Gabriel's dancing career, but with a disturbing inclusion: 'The cities of the world twinkled at his feet – Toronto, New York, London, Paris: the maw of the Weetigo, Jeremiah dreamt, insatiable man-eater, flesh-devourer, following his brother in his dance' (214). The reappearance of the Weetigo can be seen both in relation to the revelation that his brother is homosexual, but also as an example of how music triggers the memory of underlying trauma. The reasoning for the first point is that Jeremiah equates Gabriel's homosexual behaviour to the sexual abuse that occurred at the school. This is evident by the fight that resulted in Gabriel not attending the concert, where Jeremiah asks Gabriel: '"How can you let someone do what that disgusting old priest did to you?

How can you seek out…people like that?"' (207). In his mind, Jeremiah is still influenced by the narrative he created when he witnessed the abuse of his brother, namely a Weetigo consuming his brother. As mentioned previously, the Weetigo has the power to turn other people into similar beings. Therefore, since Gabriel is displaying a sexual behaviour that on the surface appears to Jeremiah as similar to the abuse Gabriel (and in fact he) suffered, he is using the imagery of the Weetigo to make a connection between Gabriel's sexual orientation and the abuse. The figure of the Weesageechak, also known as the Trickster, also comes into play in this argument, because she/he[1] stands as a representation of their cultural heritage and the creative outlets they have been gifted with. Jeremiah's musical depiction then features both the Weetigo and the Weesageechak, which highlights the balance and constant presence of both their Cree identity and their Canadian identity; their trauma and their possibility for healing.

The inclusion of the Weesageechak in this interpretation is confirmed by the following passage as it entails the appearance of the Fur Queen, who appears while Jeremiah is finishing playing and receiving the coveted trophy. 'Then Jeremiah saw it, or thought he could: the Fur Queen's cape – the northern lights – the finish line was near! And there she was, the Fur Queen herself, smiling from the great dome of space, holding out the legendary silver chalice' (214). The Fur Queen can be interpreted as the figure of the trickster, who is simply appearing in a different form, which is in line with Cree mythology where the trickster is a polymorphic being (Highway vii). It should not be regarded as a coincidence that she appears at such an important moment for Jeremiah. Not only is it during an artistic display, which technically steers toward his destiny to become a great artist, but it also highlighted several revelations, which leads to a

[1] In the epigraph to the novel entitled 'Notes on the Trickster', Highway writes that there 'is no gender' in the North American Indian language. As such, the figure of the Trickster 'is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously.'

sobering realization for Jeremiah. Although Jeremiah's all-consuming goal has been to win this completion, he is shown to be miserable when he finally does win: 'He had tried. Tried to change the meaning of his past, the roots of his hair, the colour of his skin, but he was one of them' (215). His goal has turned out not to be the solution to all his problems, and he seems to be experiencing a devastating realization of his own ethnicity. Even though he has never explicitly stated his desire to move beyond the confines of his ethnicity, his actions alluded to that aspiration, and as such fuelled Gabriel's accusation during their fight, where he asked: '"…That's what you want, isn't it? To become a whiteman"' (207). Jeremiah's only response was to hit Gabriel, which can be interpreted as a shameful reaction to the truth within that accusation. The fight also included another accusation by Gabriel, where he is continuously hitting his brother while saying '"And you," between pummels, he spat, "how can you still listen to their sick propaganda? After what they did to us?"' (208). This exchange shows a fundamental difference in the brother's perception of the abuse they suffered because Gabriel includes the plural pronoun 'us' whereas Jeremiah's allegation towards Gabriel and his homosexuality being connected to sexual abuse only entailed the singular pronoun 'you'. This shows Jeremiah's continued inability to face his own traumatic past. However, the last line depicting this fight is '[a]top the Yamaha upright, the Fur Queen smile' (208). Despite Jeremiah's refusal to connect himself to the abuse, the Fur Queen is still smiling, and this is likely due to the fact that the brothers are finally speaking parts of their truth to each other, or even out loud for that matter. The description of the Fur Queen atop a piano further emphasises her role as a guide towards reconciliation and the destiny that exists in the future achievement of the brothers' artistic potential.

The trickster's role comes further in to play when Jeremiah attempts to ruin his hands so he can no longer play the piano. He wants to do it by cutting them with shards from a beer bottle,

as '[w]hat more appropriate tool with which to bid the noble instrument farewell' (215). However, before he can do it, he experiences what appears to be hallucinations of three indigenous women mentioned previously in the narrative. All of these women were murdered and victims of sexualised violence by white perpetrators. I interpret these women to be manifestations of the trickster trying to dissuade and distract Jeremiah, because without his hands he will not be able to fulfil his destiny. This interpretation is partially based on two of the women wearing similar clothing to the Fur Queen, as one wears a 'white fur cape', while another has a 'tiara' (215). It also plays upon the notion that the trickster appears in many different guises. The last woman, however, tells Jeremiah: '"You make me so proud to be a fuckin' Indian, you know that?"' (216). The trickster's familiar sense of humour comes through in this line (Highway vii), as it is obviously an ironic jab at Jeremiah who has tried to rid himself of the label as 'Indian' by assimilating to Western society. However, the line can also be interpreted to be a very real possibility for Jeremiah, if only he channels his creative abilities onto a platform that celebrates indigenous culture and proudly highlights Cree voices.

After their father's death, the brothers reconcile and they create a play together called '"Ulysses Thunderchild"' (277). During rehearsals for the play, one of the actresses, Amanda Clear Sky, interrupts and this exchange between her and Jeremiah follows: '"Jeremiah, you're trying to write a realistic play from a story that's just not realistic." "And what, pray tell, is this story all about?" "Magic." Magic? What did she want, a bunny pulled from a hat, a woman, sawed in half, water turned into wine?' (279). Jeremiah limits himself in his perspective on the concept of magic, namely seeing it from a Western perspective. This is not constructive to the narrative they are trying to depict on stage, which is chiefly meant to be dealing with indigenous motifs and stories. Gabriel intervenes and tries to show Jeremiah what is missing through dancing

because so far '"It's all head, Jeremiah, all head and no gut. Watch."' (280) He starts improvising a dance routine with the different actors in order to inject emotions and a sense of reality into the play, instead of a construed notion of it. This interjection also shows Gabriel's move away from a Western standard of dancing, namely ballet dancing, towards a dance that resembles the Pow Wow the brothers witnessed earlier in the novel: 'Shooting to the ceiling, the wail dove, resurfacing as samba-metered hisses. And one by one, the company fell in with the chant, a dance, a Cree rite of sacrifice, swirling like blood around the altar and bouncing off the bass of the piano like, yes, magic' (280). Even though Jeremiah created a new tale meant to showcase indigenous stories, he was still trying to write something in a Western mould through the association to Ulysses, instead of creating something from the mould of himself and his Cree upbringing. By incorporating improvisation, the play aligns itself closer to an indigenous way of telling stories.

The first reviews of their play are positive except for one comment: '…the cannibal spirit shedding his costume at death, revealing a priest's cassock, confuses the viewer. The image comes from nowhere. And goes nowhere.' (285). Jeremiah does not understand this comment, to which Gabriel replies: '"You didn't say it loud enough, Jeremiah," said Gabriel. "Didn't say what loud enough?" Jeremiah tried to ask again. But, finally, his memory opened the padlocked doors' (285). First of all, it is important to look at the review in itself. The reader has not been privy to the plot of the play, but the inclusion of this scene alludes to the abuse the boys suffered at the school. However, the audience and the reviewer are not aware of the backstory in the same way that the reader is, and is therefore understandably confused. This can be seen in relation to Gabriel's reply, which can either be interpreted to mean that Jeremiah did not say his line loudly enough, or that the message was not conveyed well enough in the play itself.

Secondly, it should be noted that it is the Weetigo that sheds a costume to reveal its true identity as a priest, and not the other way around. The novel is alluding to the possibility that the priests were not infected by a cannibalistic spirit, but that they and their predatory behaviour were the very cause of its existence in the first place. The last two lines of the review can be regarded as an accurate description of the Western suppression of the realities of the residential schools. When a society is unaware that there is a gap in the stories that are out there, it is hard to be aware of an attempt to fill that gap with new stories. At this point in the novel, it is the early 1980s, and most Canadians are not aware of the systematic abuse that is rampant within the residential school system. Therefore, many of them are unable to understand the references to it.

Lastly, the play inadvertently triggers a memory for Jeremiah, enabling him to acknowledge his own traumatic experience of sexual abuse. The recurring metaphor of 'padlocked doors' is interesting because it shows that the subconscious mind can be opened with the right "key". The realization of his own trauma opens up the question of whether he initially believed himself to be telling the stories of others, like his brother, only to realize that he subconsciously used the play to communicate his own experiences. The flashback that is triggered, entails several memories sewn together in a dreamlike fashion, but it begins with Jeremiah standing on the dogsled with his father, mother, and Gabriel, who is nursed by his mother. Then a face appears suddenly in the forest, whereupon 'Champion closed his eyes, hoping it would go away. But when he opened them again, the old man was still glaring. At him. Why did he look so angry, so embittered, so dreadfully unhappy?' (286). This face turns out to be Father Lafleur's, and as discussed previously, he is often depicted as a Weetigo. This is important because the next line in the novel features the Weesageechak: 'Gradually, against the old man's mouth, an arctic fox appeared' (286). This emphasises, yet again, the antithesis between the

Weetigo and the Weesagechak, which is particularly prevalent at important moments in the brothers' lives. The culmination of the flashback entails Jeremiah finally acknowledging his own abuse as '[n]ow he remembers the holy man inside him, the lining of his rectum being torn, the pumping and pumping and pumping, cigar breath billowing somewhere above his cold shaved head' (287). There are two details that should be highlighted in this particular passage, and the first one is the description of the priest as a 'holy man'. The definition of a person who is holy is that he is a 'sinless' and 'sanctified' man ("holy"). The first adjective points to the novel's use of irony in the description of the priest, because his actions circumscribe the very essence of sin. Whereas the second adjective emphasis the power the priests had over the children, and how religion functioned as justification and redemption for the abuse they put these children through. The second detail is the mention of Jeremiah's hair being shaven off, which results in, as mentioned previously in this chapter, a perceived inability to fight back.

The flashback ends with Jeremiah questioning himself: 'What had he done? Whatever it was, he promised that, from now on, he would say the prayer in English only: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. And make me bleed. Please, Father, please, make me bleed."' (287) This passage links the line that triggered the flashback, namely 'you didn't say it loud enough' to the original memory because it connected Jeremiah to a feeling of doing something wrong and subsequently being punished for it. In this instance, it was the belief that he was being molested because he did not say a prayer in English. This illustrates the power of language, and how it functions allegorically as Jeremiah rejecting his Cree identity in favour of a Canadian counterpart. It is important to point out that Jeremiah refers to himself as simply 'Champion Okimasis' in the flashback (285). A reason for this could be that he is encountering a part of himself that is tied to his childhood, and to the most vulnerable time of his life, both of

which are aspects that are connected to his Cree identity. This serves as an explanation to himself as to why he has repressed specific parts of his identity, namely those that are tied to his ethnicity. By using the earlier mention of the Weesagechak in the flashback, this argument can be developed further. The trickster is depicted as not interceding in the narrative but only persevering through its presence. Although that might seem at first glance to indicate that the Weetigo is defeating the Weesagechak, the novel's epigraph offers another interpretation: 'Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever' (vii). Therefore, the mere existence of the trickster in the narrative seems to suggest that there is still hope for Jeremiah's Cree identity, and moreover, the survival of the Cree tribe's culture and traditions.

Kiss of the Fur Queen ends with the production of a new play called 'Chachagathoo, the Shaman' (302). The significance of this figure and the plays will be discussed further in the next chapter. In this new play, the brothers are moving beyond their personal trauma to retell aspects of Cree mythology and history that include instances of a collective trauma. The latter is chiefly exemplified with a story about the indigenous tribes' devastating encounter with white settlers. Intertwined with the narrative from the play are scenes from the hospital where Gabriel is dying of AIDS. This interchangeable narrative enables the play to come "alive" within the novel as it is brought into the present. The novel differentiates between the sequences from the play and the events unfolding in the hospital room by writing the former in italics:

> *And as he moved ever closer, Gabriel Okimasis could decipher the word and the numerals printed across her sash, syllable by syllable, letter by letter: "The Fur Queen, 1987".* (306)

> Through the smoke and candle light, the Fur Queen swept into the room. Covering the bed with her cape, she leaned to Gabriel's cheek. (306)
>
> *…He was the champion of the world. And then the Queen's lips descended. Down they came, fluttering, like a leaf from an autumn tree, until they came to rest if only for a moment, though he wanted it to last a thousand years, on Gabriel Okimasis's left cheek. There. She kissed him. And took him by the hand.* (306)
>
> Rising from his body, Gabriel Okimasis and the Fur Queen floated off into the swirling mist, as the little white fox on the collar of the cape turned to Jeremiah. And winked. (306)

The presence of the Fur Queen in both narratives points to the culmination of Gabriel's artistic potential, which means he has fulfilled his destiny as an artist. This is not only interpreted through her presence but in her active engagement in both narratives. As a result, she enables Gabriel to cross over from this world to the ancestral spirit world where he will be at peace. By intertwining the present and the past, whereupon the latter is envisioned through the play, a possibility of healing presents itself in terms of reconciling the brothers' divided identities. This is evidenced further by the fact that the only words written in italics in the novel up until this point were in Cree. A result of this stylistic device is that there is an aesthetic connection between the present display of their creative outlet and their Cree identity. Moreover, all of these passages

are repetitions of their father's encounter with the Fur Queen: the first occurring when he won the World Championship Dog Derby, and the second when he passed away. As a result, the narrative ties Gabriel's death to both a familiar and cultural cycle of life, which further underlines the parts of his identity that are connected to Cree culture.

The ending sees Jeremiah, for the first time since they were children, stand up for his brother by confronting, not only authority figures at the hospital but also a physical representation of the Catholic Church. The latter is evidenced by Jeremiah refusing a Catholic priest entry to the hospital room to give Holy Communion one last time to his brother, and by inviting Ann-Adele Ghostrider and letting her perform an indigenous ritual. Jeremiah is honouring his brother's wishes: '"When I die, I want Mom to be allowed her Catholic mumbo-jumbo. But I do not want priests anywhere near my bed. Do you hear me?"' (299). He is making up for a guilt that has consumed him since they were children, namely an inability to protect his brother from sexual abuse. When Gabriel dies, and is escorted away by the Fur Queen, the last line of the novel sees Jeremiah being awarded a wink from the Trickster (306). This can be interpreted as an indication to Jeremiah that his story is not over yet, and his ability to tell stories has yet to reach its potential. The presence of the trickster at the end of the novel suggests that there is hope for the survival of indigenous culture. Moreover, that survival is contingent upon further storytelling from artists and members of the indigenous community, such as Jeremiah.

The Okimasis brothers recapture parts of their Native identity by using their creative gifts in a play about Native myths, which includes a creative expression of their own memories and lives. They leave behind the Western schooling they both received in relation to their gifts, and as a result, break free from the Western mould. Moreover, they uphold a balance within their plays between a modern setting and traditional Cree storytelling. One of the reasons for this is

explained by Jeremiah: '"Because I want my *Muskoosisuk* to get it. Could we relate to Dick and Jane and that damned dog Spot when we were kids? No. Ever wonder why the school dropout for Native people – ?"' (278). Although he only explicitly seems to want to create a story that indigenous children can relate to, his ambition extends to an overall empowerment of indigenous children. This can in turn result in indigenous children becoming more secure with regards to their ethnicity. The brothers learn to talk with ghosts by accepting the full scope and potential of their gifts, and the events that have led them up to this point in their lives. One of these events seems fitting in this argument, namely Jeremiah and Gabriel playacting a sermon in the woods with their dog in the audience. The dog begins chasing a teasing squirrel, to which the novel offers up the line: 'Wars start when two parties haven't taken the time to learn each other's tongues' (95). Although this is a remark made in passing, it can be used to interpret the warring duality within the brothers' identities. It is not until the end of the novel, that they have been able to mediate between these seemingly opposing identities. This has resulted in an expression of self, which is represented by the different plays. By telling their stories, they are reaching towards a place of healing, where they can accept who they are in relation to who they were before trauma occurred.

Chapter Three: Hybridity in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

In this chapter, I will explore the notion of hybridity and the role it plays in the novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, with a particular focus on the Okimasis brothers' identities. According to Ian Buchanan, the term hybridity is 'used in contemporary Postcolonial Studies to theorize and to a certain degree celebrate a global state of mixedness – a mixedness of cultures, races, ethnicities, nations, and so on' ("hybridity"). The term has historically had negative implications, especially towards children born as a result of miscegenation (Buchanan). However, in recent years it has undergone a positive redevelopment where the focus has shifted to the interdependency between colonizer and colonized rather than seeing this relationship in somewhat simplistic binary terms (Buchanan). This shift in focus stems in large part from Indian English scholar Homi K. Bhabha, and it is the foundation on which I build my arguments in this chapter. I will discuss how the experience of hybridity causes both conflict and the possibility of healing in the novel. The latter point will be centred around the term 'third space', which originates from Bhabha. I will apply this term to the novel, and discuss how it opens up a possibility of healing after a trauma. First, I will show how the novel rejects the nostalgic notion of a "pure indigenous space" within the Eemanapiteepitat Indian Reserve, depicting a community that is already a part of a hybrid space, where an indigenous way of life is intermixed with Canadian values and a Catholic religion. This results in a space for identity construction that is marked by seemingly conflicting identities, which is intensified during the brothers' time at the residential school and in particular by the trauma they experienced there.

The condition of hybridity is present throughout the novel, causing inner turmoil and confusion for the brothers only because of their inability to accept that their identities are of

hybrid nature. In her article, 'Identity/Alterity,' Monika Fludernik writes about the intricacy of identity as it should be 'used in the plural – identities – to acknowledge the multiplicity of roles and their contextual relevance' (261). Fludernik rejects the notion of 'a real self, a definite reality' and instead defines identity as 'an accumulation of performative stances and memories of past experiences which creates a continuity of self-understanding between roles and between contexts' (261). This continuity is severed in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by the trauma the brothers' experience, which results in an increasingly conflicted perception of identity. The disconnection of identity is, for instance, evident in the denial of the Cree language, as the brothers are unable to partake in their past roles and use their past experiences to inform their current roles and experiences. The notion of identity is further problematized through their failure to belong either to the Cree community or the city life in Canadian society. It is not until the end of the novel that they seemingly accept the hybrid state of their identities, and it appears through a metaphorical conception of a third space. This conception is presented by the different plays the brothers create together, which in turn function as an approach to healing after a trauma. The structure of this chapter is loosely based upon Highway's division of his novel into six parts because it is important to demonstrate how the notion of hybridity develops throughout the novel.

The Reserve: A Place of Cultural Expression or Containment?

The first part of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is set in the surrounding areas of the fictional Eemanapiteepitat Indian Reserve, which is located in the province of Manitoba, Canada. With the exception of the opening chapter, where Abraham participates in a dogsledding competition, this is the only part to be set entirely in the Northern parts of Manitoba, specifically within a Cree

Indian Reserve. The significance of this setting is that it establishes the backdrop for the Okimasis brothers' early childhood and the construction of a 'self' within a seemingly secluded First Nations Cree community. It is in this setting that both brothers receive their Cree birth names, Champion and Ooneemeetoo. They reside in a 'pine-log cabin' (15), but live a primarily nomadic lifestyle during the first part of the novel due to Abraham's occupation as a caribou hunter. Their life is depicted as simple, but happy, as the 'afternoon sun, amiable enough for early January, wasn't making much headway on the top layer of snow, but its golden light made Champion Okimasis and his family feel warm and at ease with life' (24). Moreover, the secluded nature of their life is mentioned by Jeremiah when he proudly wants his music 'to be appreciated, not just by his father and the caribou, not just by the two other hunting families on the other side of the island, but by the world' (24). The function of a remote setting is that it suggests a space that is free from external influence, however, Champion does display a knowledge of an outside world that he wants recognition from. The beginning of the novel paints a picture of a happy childhood where the family knew 'that Abraham was expressing his joy by yodelling the only word in his yodelling repertoire, the word Champion loved with all his heart' (25). Abraham does this while hunting the caribou, and the Cree word he is yodelling is '"*Weeks'chiloowew*!"' (25), which means '"the wind's a-changing!" with childish pronunciation (a cry of joy, of boundless elation, as nonsensical yet as expressive of a point as "heavens to Betsy!")' (310). This word is important because it exemplifies how a Cree word might seem nonsensical when translated, but when used amongst those who know it, the word holds great meaning. In this novel, the word ties together the significance of the Cree language with everyday work and expression of self, in addition to Champion's warm feelings towards it. In other words, it highlights the value of the Cree language for individuals, but also in social interactions. On the other hand, this word appears to be 'the only word in his yodelling repertoire', which is an important detail, because it

implies a cultural loss of language. This revelation points towards the notion of assimilation through Canadian influence on a Cree community.

The depiction of the Eemanapiteepitat Indian Reserve as a place designated for their community, where they are ostensibly free to express their Cree identity, is first and foremost challenged by the understanding of a Reserve as a place of containment. According to Bhabha, cultural differences often result in strategies of neutralization where the dominant culture attempts to offset the juxtaposition between cultures through a practice of containment ("Third Space" 208). This practice is based upon the idea that 'a transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture which says that these cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them in our own grid' ("Third Space" 208). By placing indigenous groups in specified geographical locations, Canadian society is able to keep an eye on 'the Other', which in turn stems from the radical ambivalence white settlers have towards natives, namely 'narcissism and paranoia' (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 131). In other words, this is an institutionalized practice of containment that often ends up reinforcing the divide between cultures instead of creating a sense of co-existence or acceptance of hybridity. In the novel, the Cree community is assigned a specific place, the fictional Eemanapiteepitat Indian Reserve, which frames the community within a larger Canadian society. This framing results in an unequally balanced divide between cultures, while also contributing to the influence and reinforcement of the idea of a dominant Canadian culture that encroaches on the seemingly free space of identity construction for the Cree community.

The idea of containment of a specific culture is transferred when the brothers are moved by plane to another place, namely the Birch Lake Residential School, where they are not allowed to speak their native language nor use their birth names. However, the notion that the Reserve is

exempt from such infringement upon the brothers' identities is challenged by Gabriel's baptism, which occurs on Reserve land. During his baptism, Father Bouchard's 'tongue formed the words, "*Abrenuntias satane?"* The words meaningless to Cree ears, pierced the infant's fragile bones and stayed there' (37). The Latin expression can be translated as 'Do you renounce Satan?'. This point is important because the novel presents hell as associated with indigenous ethnicity, whereas heaven is represented by the presence of white Westerners. The divide between heaven and hell and the corresponding white Westerners and indigenous people is shown in a lesson led by Father Lafleur later in the novel, in which he presents the Cree children with a picture of heaven and hell. While studying the picture of heaven, 'Champion-Jeremiah tried to spot one Indian person but could not' (59). However, when he looks at the illustration of hell he discovers that '[t]his is where the Indians are, thought Champion-Jeremiah, relieved that they were accounted for in this great chart' (60). This passage also demonstrates how unfamiliar concepts of heaven and hell are to him and indigenous communities. The fact that Champion-Jeremiah is relieved that indigenous people are accounted for without understanding the significance of their placement in hell, can be seen as the novel subtly critiquing not only Christian origin stories but the prejudicial placement of indigenous people in hell. As such, the context shows that the words that pierce Gabriel's soul are in fact a question about whether he renounces a part of himself. The reasoning behind this argument is that if the priest and by extension the Catholic Church are of the belief that indigenous people belong in hell purely based on their ethnicity, and Satan is synonymous with that place, then by asking him if he renounces Satan, he is in fact asked to renounce his ethnicity. The ironic fallacy is not lost on the novel, as it will be impossible for him to actually renounce his ethnicity, and as such he is doomed to fail in the eyes of the Church and Western society.

The priest's Latin utterance is misinterpreted by his godmother, Annie Moostoos, who protests because she believes that the priest is giving Gabriel a new name. Father Bouchard ignores her to which she responds: '"His name," she states, "is Ooneemeetoo. Ooneemeetoo Okimasis. Not Satanae Okimasis"' (37). Her misinterpretation would not have happened if the Cree people were familiar with concepts such as heaven and hell and illustrates an aspect in the divide in understanding between these two cultures. Nevertheless, her protest is ignored and from this point on in the novel, Gabriel is never referred to as Ooneemeetoo again. The novel does not comment on it further, it simply becomes a part of the status quo, which is similar to the previous chapter's discussion on Champion's name. Even though she mistook his first utterance, she perceived the motive behind the baptism, which was an assimilation to Western culture by changing his name. The priest's dismissal of her protest and the indigenous congregation's compliance of this points to yet another part of the established acceptance and silence concerning the diminishing Cree culture. Moreover, it exemplifies the hybrid space for identity construction that is present from the very beginning of the Okimasis brothers' lives.

It should be noted that the semblance of an uninterrupted identity space within the Reserve still allowed for a specific expression of their Cree heritage. An example of this is the inference that the family is not only able to, but exclusively expresses themselves through the Cree language. This is illustrated through Jeremiah's return from residential school during the summer, where 'Gabriel found himself faced with a dilemma: if he could speak no English and his older brother no Cree, how were they to play together?' (67). Language is a key factor with regards to social interaction and is an important part of retaining a cultural heritage. Gabriel's dilemma, though presented from a child's perspective, demonstrates the potential for future alienation from an indigenous community if the Cree language is slowly diminished through their

stay at the schools. However, Jeremiah regains his language when he trips over the family dog, which causes him to curse in Cree. This is described as an 'epiphany' (67), a word that can be defined as a 'manifestation or appearance of some divine or superhuman being' ("epiphany"). The definition opens the argument that Weesageechak, also known as the Trickster, is marking his/her presence in the narrative. The use of the word 'divine' evokes connotations to religion, but instead of assuming a Catholic or even Christian association, it is possible to point to the indigenous belief system and the figure of the Trickster. It is in fact Highway who likens the Trickster's importance within North American Indian mythology to that of 'Christ in the realm of Christian mythology' in the epigraph to the novel (vii). Moreover, his presence is likely because the Trickster is infamous for playing tricks on people, reminiscent of practical jokes. Highway refers to him as '[e]ssentially a comic, clownish sort of character' (vii), and triggering Jeremiah's knowledge of the Cree language by making him trip over a dog, would qualify as a practical joke. The novel uses the trickster to humorously critique Jeremiah's inability to access the Cree language. Not only does this connect the figure of the Trickster closely to the expression of the brothers' Cree identity, it also shows a humorous spin on a serious matter. The fact that the novel shows Jeremiah regaining his Cree language, also demonstrates the possibility for a co-existence of both languages and cultures, as Jeremiah has no problems partaking in social interactions with his brother once he regains access to his mother tongue.

There is also a direct reference to the figure of the Trickster earlier on in the novel, when the Okimasis family stops for a break 'on a largish island in the middle of the lake that, some say, had once been fished by someone named Weesageechak' (39). On the one hand, this reference points back to my argument in the previous chapter, about the presence of Weesageechak functioning as a representation of Cree culture. However, it should be noted that the use of the

verb ‘fish’ in the past tense indicates that the trickster’s presence is also a thing of the past. The reference has a seemingly offhand tone, especially to readers who are unaware of Cree mythology, and points to the notion that if the stories are not told and the traditions and culture not upheld, it will all slowly diminish to stories in the past tense.

The figure of the Weetigo is also mentioned at the beginning of the novel when Abraham returns from the dogsledding competition and he describes his journey through the village as he ‘was racing past … the house of the widow Jackfish Head Lady, who once had a near-death encounter with the cannibal spirit Weetigo just off Tugigoom Island’ (15). As discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of these figures in the novel can be interpreted as representations of Cree culture through the Weesageechak and the Catholic Church through the figure of the Weetigo. By placing both figures within the Reserve, the novel attempts to highlight the hybridity that is already present within the community.

Suppression of Hybridity

The second part of the novel is entitled *Andante Cantabile* and depicts the Okimasis brothers’ life at the residential school. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the brothers are explicitly banned from identifying with and expressing their cultural heritage. They are in effect banned from accessing their Cree identity. This ban is enforced from the moment they step off the plane that carries them from the reserve to the school, as seen with Father Lafleur’s reminder to Jeremiah ‘“Now, Jeremiah. You know you’re not to speak Cree once you’re off the plane.”’ (70) This invisible line that separates acceptance and suppression of their Cree identity is directly tied to a specific place. Therefore, it functions as a place of containment and testifies to an evident

strategy of neutralization that is put in place by the dominant society to counteract the notion of hybridity. In an attempt to neutralize the effects of cultural heterogeneity, the children were removed and subsequently placed into residential school in order to be assimilated into Canadian society. The ban against the Cree language is ridiculed by Gabriel later in the novel when he is reunited with Jeremiah in Winnipeg and speaks to him in Cree:

> "*Tansi*." Jeremiah stopped breathing. In the two years he had spent in this city so lonely that he regularly considered swallowing his current landlady's entire stock of angina pills, he had given up his native tongue to the roar of traffic. "Say that again?" "*Tansi*," repeated Gabriel. "Means hi, or how you doing? Take your pick." He was smiling so hard that his face looked like it might burst. "Why? Cree a crime here, too?". (113)

By including the last line, the novel is commenting on the notion of containment and how setting constitutes what is allowed and not allowed when it comes to expressing oneself in a specific language. It also relates back to the residential school where anything connected to the Cree culture was viewed as wrong and would be punished by the staff. Additionally, the passage shows Jeremiah's longing for family and his Cree heritage, as he had let go of the Cree language because it was not applicable to interactions in the city. According to Fludernik, 'Identity cannot be upheld without the co-operation of others. The continuity between present and past self that subjectively exists for individuals relies to a significant extent on the support that identity construction receives from the other' (261). When the brothers' past selves are rejected and not acknowledged by the priests and nuns at the residential school, their access to that part of

themselves diminishes slowly by each rejection. This process of self-denial persists for Jeremiah when he arrives in Winnipeg because there is no one he can interact with in Cree. Moreover, he is also unable to interact with other non-indigenous members of Canadian society, simply because he is Cree. His ethnicity places him in a situation where he is cut off from Western society, however, it is his unacknowledged hybrid identity that alienates him from living his life fully. He is trying to fit in within the accepted frames of Western society, but his ethnicity gets in the way. On the other hand, returning to the reserve is not a viable option due to Western influence on his ambitions for his musical abilities. Jeremiah is trying to fit into conceptions of binary societies that are not compatible with his hybrid identity.

Sexuality and Shame

The sexual abuse the brothers are exposed to while at residential school is also tied to the notion of hybridity because it has an adverse effect on the brothers' perception of sexuality. They are unable to dissociate the trauma they experienced from their sexuality and expression of that sexuality post residential school. This can be connected to what Cathy Caruth writes about the 'double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*' (7). The trauma they experienced is what Caruth categorizes as the '*crisis of death*', an event that the victim is unable to process at the time it occurs. However, life afterwards is described as the '*crisis of life*', because it entails the victim trying to carry on with life but with the constant repetition of an event that has yet to be processed. Therefore, the latter is an equally traumatizing experience of learning to survive. On the one hand, there is the recognition of themselves as victims of sexual abuse as evidenced by their fight, although this is a fact that Jeremiah has yet to

consciously acknowledge, and then there is the desire to explore their sexuality. They are unable to do the latter without constantly being reminded, both consciously and subconsciously of the abuse they suffered. Both Gabriel and Jeremiah struggle with strong feelings of shame with regards to their sexuality. However, their subsequent solutions to that struggle are juxtaposed, as Jeremiah becomes sexually impotent and Gabriel exhibits overtly promiscuous sexual behaviour. This opposition is also present in their argument halfway through the novel, when Jeremiah discovers Gabriel's sexual orientation and asks: '"How can you let someone do what that disgusting old priest did to you? How can you seek out…people like that?"' (207). To which Gabriel responds: '"You'd rather diddle with a piano than diddle with yourself. You're dead, Jeremiah. At least my body is still alive"' (207). Both brothers see the other's behaviour as wrong; where Jeremiah views Gabriel's homosexual explorations as a continuation of Father Lafleur's molestation, Gabriel seemingly sees an act of resistance. Gabriel, on the other hand, perceives Jeremiah's repression of his sexuality as an attempt to assimilate completely to the dogmas enforced by the priests at the residential school. One of these dogmas are exemplified in the novel with the separation of boys and girls: 'Girls had their own yard on the other side of the giant building, out of sight, away from the view of lusty lads who might savour their company, so Champion-Jeremiah was to learn in the nine years he would spend here' (63). This example can serve as an explanation of why Gabriel believes Jeremiah is not pursuing a sexual relationship with anyone, however, Jeremiah's inability to exhibit any sexual behaviour is most likely tied to the sexual trauma he suffered.

The notion of shame is a recurring theme throughout the novel, and an example of this is Gabriel fantasising about his male biology teacher while attending high school in Winnipeg, only to be reminded of a sermon held by Father Bouchard about 'the union of man and woman' (125).

The flashback to this sermon spurs this reaction from Gabriel: 'Like a jackbooted foot kicking at a padlocked door, a terrible guilt pummelled his heart. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. Suddenly, a terrible need came over him, to run into his mother's arms and hide, crawl back into her womb and start over' (126). This passage shows an equation in Gabriel's mind between sexuality and shame, specifically homosexuality, because it is while he fantasizes about his male teacher, that he experiences feelings of shame. The mention of a 'padlocked door' functions as a metaphor for the suppression of his homosexual desires. His expressed need to return to his mother's womb speaks to a longing for a childlike innocence and life before the sexual abuse started. The inclusion of the need to 'start over' can mean that he connects his homosexual desires and the subsequent shame to the abuse he suffered. Without the latter, he would be free to seek pleasure without shame. However, it is not just the abuse that has created this connection, but also the lessons, dogmas, and culture that has been enforced in the attempted assimilation of indigenous children such as himself. Additionally, the inclusion of the Latin phrase further links his sexuality to the sexual abuse he suffered, because the phrase was used by Father Lafleur during church service right after an incident of sexual abuse took place in the novel. It is during this service that the Okimasis brothers ponder upon the phrase, as it is used by priests to ask for forgiveness for sins committed by themselves and their congregation:

> The Okimasis brothers had never discussed this phrase but both had concluded that they were being asked to apologize for something beyond their control. Under these circumstances, however – yards enclosed by steel fences, sleeping quarters patrolled nightly by priests and brothers – they had also independently concluded that it was best to accept the blame; it *was* their most grievous fault. (81)

The brothers are in effect taking the full blame for the incident, and with that blame experiencing a real sense of shame. As a result, Gabriel is later in life constantly forced to experience a feeling of shame whenever he engages in homosexual activity. Moreover, shame appears to be an expected aspect of his sexual explorations. In the novel, Gabriel overhears the students at his high school in Winnipeg, including Jeremiah, say '"Wanna blow job? Go check out them faggots at the Rose." Such yearning as had simmered just beneath the convulsive, near-hysteric hatred had only fuelled Gabriel's hunger.' (166) The last line can either be interpreted to mean that the other boys are teetering between fascination and disgust or that Gabriel is the one who is conflating desire with self-hatred. Either way, he is aware of this connection and it only fuels his desire to engage in this type of sexual behaviour.

The connection between sexual desire and self-hatred is also an important facet of Jeremiah's sexuality. This is exemplified by a dream he has about one of the missing First Nation women and her unborn child, which quickly turns into a nightmare: 'Disengaging from the womb, the child tumbled seemingly forever, to a bed of broken beer bottles and screwdrivers filed sharp as nails. The shards loomed closer. And closer. And it was Jeremiah's own groin that suddenly rammed into them, again and again' (144). In the dream, the tumbling is reminiscent of the brothers' descent from heaven before their births[2], whereas the mention of 'broken beer bottles and screwdrivers' is directly related to the rapes and subsequent murders of indigenous women. Lastly, the descriptions of self-mutilation can be linked to a punishment of a looming

[2] The novel depicts the birth of the boys as a journey that begins on a spiritual realm and continues with their descent towards earth, whereas the final destination is the actual physical birth from their mother's womb.

sexuality. Anything that is deemed sexual is immediately associated with shame. This is in line with his coping mechanism, considering that Jeremiah suppresses any memory or association to the sexual abuse he suffered. According to Cathy Caruth, the nature of trauma is that of an event that is not perceived in all its clarity by the victim, but instead 'return[s] later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (*Unclaimed Experience* 91). Moreover, Caruth writes that the 'return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome that it was *not* direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place' (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). Therefore, the dream can be interpreted as Jeremiah trying to come to grips with the trauma he experienced. The realization that it is suddenly his own groin that is rammed into the shards, links the dream to the abuse he suffered. One of the reasons for this is the use of the verb 'rammed' and the repetitive nature of this action against the shards from 'broken beer bottles and screwdrivers', which links it to a violent and traumatic sexual activity. He is unable to dissociate normal sexual behaviour from self-mutilation, pain, and trauma.

The notion of sexuality must also be seen in the context of transgenerational trauma and the cycles of abuse, especially with regards to Jeremiah. Towards the end of the novel, he exhibits the first mention of any type of sexual desire, and it is towards a young boy. The incident takes place at Jeremiah's new job where he is 'providing urban Indian children, most from broken homes, with REC: recreation, education, culture' (269). One of the children, Willie Joe Kayash, who reminds Jeremiah of Gabriel as a child, asks what a Weetigo is, to which Jeremiah replies that it is a 'monster who eats little boys' like him (271). This exchange is followed by:

> When the room was empty, Willie Joe skipped back in and jumped on Jeremiah, the rope-like arms wrapped around his waist, the hot face buried in his groin. "A Weetigo ate me," the child mumbled into the faded blue denim. And then bit. Up Jeremiah's spine shot a needle longer than an arm. In a panic, he disengaged himself and squatted, his eyes inched from the six-year-old's. He had a raging hard-on. "What do you mean, Willie Joe?". (271)

The novel seems to insinuate that Jeremiah's sexual preference leans towards children because he suffered sexual abuse as a child. On the other hand, he shows the instinct to help and to end the cycle of abuse: He disengages himself from the situation and asks Willie Joe to explain. Moreover, after class, he goes straight to the director's office, where he is told that the perpetrators will be charged and jailed, however, '[f]or Jeremiah, jail was nowhere near enough' (272). Although Jeremiah's response to the punishment can be seen in relation to his personal experience of trauma, the novel is most likely trying to show that abuse amongst the indigenous population is not just an issue of a single perpetrator but a collective trauma that has resulted in cycles of abuse. Despite the tragic revelation that sexual abuse has influenced Jeremiah's own sexual preference, the novel presents another more positive outcome with this scene. By providing the children with stories of mythical figures, such as the Weetigo, Jeremiah is essentially giving indigenous children a tool to come forward about the trauma they might be plagued with. This incident takes place right after his own acknowledgement of the abuse he suffered, which was triggered by a re-enactment of the brothers' life. Jeremiah is creating a space where trauma can be acknowledged through using creative stories, and thus, breaking the silence around trauma. Therefore, the revelation in the novel figures as both an acknowledgement of the presence of transgenerational trauma and cycles of abuse, as well as an act of resistance against

it.

The Presence of Hybridity

As pointed out previously in this chapter, the novel does not depict the Eemanapiteepitat's Cree community as impervious to Western influence. Their Cree heritage, and as such, parts of their identity, have unconsciously been diluted as a result of discrimination and encroachment that stems from a Canadian assimilation policy. This point shows how it is impossible for the brothers to restore a complete Cree identity because it was affected by centuries of loss. Healing is not contingent upon reclaiming a complete Cree identity because it was never really present for the brothers due to transgenerational trauma. Even so, the notion of hybrid identities and cultures is not acknowledged by the brothers, as evidenced in a conversation between Jeremiah and Gabriel. They are discussing the Reserve and an annual tradition where the inhabitants mark the new year by shooting guns into the air. Jeremiah makes a comment to Gabriel about his expectation that the inhabitants are readying themselves for this year's celebrations, to which Gabriel responds:

> "Father Bouchard put a stop to such savage behaviour last year, I'm sorry to inform you," said Gabriel, in a hollow-voiced effort to lift their spirits. "How would you know?" "Dad told me. Ever since they opened up that little airport, ever since –" "Civilization?" [Jeremiah counters] "has come within one daily flight of Eemanapiteepitat, the booze has been flowing in like blood from slaughtered caribou, as Dad puts it. So now, he says, they don't shoot guns into the air to mark the new year, they shoot each other". (137)

It is the local priest, Father Bouchard, who puts a stop to the tradition because he considers it to be the mark of 'savage behaviour'. If it was in reference to the act of shooting each other, it would be a more understandable reference, but Gabriel has yet to inform Jeremiah of this development. Therefore, it can be assumed that the original tradition was viewed as savage by the priest. This view is ironically juxtaposed in the passage to Jeremiah's likening of the introduction of the new airport to civilization entering Eemanapiteepitat. The passage also shows the irony of the perceived superiority of Western society in relation to the primitive ways of indigenous people, as it is the unrestricted access afforded by the new airport that enables a greater influx of alcohol, which in turn leads to increased violence. A tradition that was previously a celebration to mark the new year, has turned into a bloodbath labelled as civilization. In connection to hybridity, the comment shows that the brothers perceived their community to be isolated until the opening of the new airport, and as such helps to understand their unwillingness to embrace the cultural hybridity present within their identities. However, this perception of containment is challenged in the novel by Gabriel's realization that there is no place for him at the reserve because of the Catholic Church's influence. This discovery occurs when Gabriel returns from residential school and his father tells him:

> "The Catholic church saved our people! Without it, we wouldn't be here today. It is the one true way to talk to God, to thank him. You follow any other religion and you go straight to hell, that's for goddamn sure." It was at that moment that Gabriel Okimasis understood that there was no place for him in Eemanapiteepitat or the north. Suddenly, he would join Jeremiah in the south. He could not wait! (109)

In speaking with his father, Gabriel discovers the degree to which his childhood home has been enshrined within a religious Western space. He no longer feels a sense of belonging knowing what he knows about the Church and being aware of his own sexual orientation and the Church's stance on that. He is not a part of the white Canadian society, but he does not feel he belongs to the Eemanapitepat Indian Reserve either. A place he remembers as a refuge has now been "swallowed" within the confines of a space that is eerily similar to the one he just escaped from at the residential school. This realization echoes Jeremiah's feelings of alienation from both Western society in Winnipeg and the Cree reserve. The presence of the Church is not an actual issue for the brothers until they experience trauma on an individual level at the hands of the Church, or at least a representative of it, and then its omnipresence becomes painfully obvious. In Gabriel's mind, there is no room for anything in-between, and he is not open to the possibility of a negotiated identity.

The Notion of Hybridity as an Approach to Healing

So far in this chapter, I have shown how hybridity is present in the novel and how it causes conflict for the main characters. However, it is also possible to view hybridity as an approach to healing in the novel by employing Bhabha's term 'third space'. The idea behind a third space is that it produces all kinds of identity, and it is placed between 'the subject and their idealized other' (Buchanan). This is true for both the Cree culture and the Canadian culture that affect the brothers' identities. In other words, the brothers as subjects are placed as separate from the idealized notion of being Cree, as well as the idealized notion of a Canadian identity. The acceptance that their identities are neither one nor the other will make room for the notion of

hybridity and can help begin a process of healing. The novel presents a form of acceptance of this through the plays the brothers create together. According to Bhabha, third space is not representable in itself (*Location of Culture* 55). However, I argue that the fact that the plays are stage productions mean that they are not depictions of reality, but rather creative and imaginary conceptions of reality. They conflate time and space, and in other words, create a metaphorical conception of a third space. An acceptance of this space would mean that there is no longer a longing for identities that are binary and able to be confined to a specific place or culture. This would negate the hegemonic structure of Canadian society by which the Reserve is placed as 'the other', and instead, the brothers create room for hybrid identities, such as their own, in the city. The fact that it is also placed in the heart of Canadian society defies the idea of containment.

The first stage production the brothers create is a showpiece where Gabriel is dancing alongside several professional dancers while Jeremiah accompanies him on piano. It is the result of an impromptu session between the brothers ten months prior, where Gabriel instructed Jeremiah to play the piano as a way to apologize to the former. Jeremiah had abandoned his brother during a Pow Wow they attended earlier in the novel, where other indigenous people had confronted Gabriel about his sexuality: 'For how else would he face the truth: that he was embarrassed to be caught in cahoots with a pervert, a man who fucked other men? On an Indian reserve, a Catholic reserve?' (250). At first glance, the issue merely seems to be that Gabriel's homosexuality goes against the Catholic religion which is pervasive within many Indian reserves as the foundation for established acceptable behaviour, and as such is perceived as the truth for Jeremiah as well. However, upon a closer examination of the passage, the repetition in the last line is reminiscent of a mirroring effect, where the Indian reserve only appears as a façade for what in reality is a Catholic reserve. This revelation underlines the previously established attempt

to neutralize the gap between cultures, and how it in effect creates a platform for the dominant culture to enforce assimilation and results in even greater differences between those who comply and those who do not.

To make up for deserting his brother, Jeremiah participates in the production of the showpiece because he knew 'that he had to play or his relationship with Gabriel was history, and he'd be back in the alleyways of Winnipeg' (267). Both the relationship between the brothers and Jeremiah's purpose in life are contingent upon the showpiece. The latter was discussed in the previous chapter and entails him using his creative abilities to convey stories about indigenous culture and life. This impromptu showpiece was inspired by a specific dance at the Pow Wow, where 'Gabriel saw a people talking to the sky, the sky replying. And he knew he had to learn this dance. Someday soon, he may need it' (244-245). This is a ritual that is replicated by Gabriel and seemingly with success:

> Gabriel knew that his magic had worked, for the audience was speaking to some space inside themselves, some void that needed filling, some depthless sky; and this sky was responding. Through the brothers, as one, and through a chamber as vast as the north, an old man's voice passed. "My son," it sighed, "with these magic weapons, make a new world . . .". (267)

The display of creativity speaks to a yearning to belong somewhere, and when that place is not found in the real world or at least the present one, the brothers create an imaginary space for belonging on stage. Moreover, this passage functions as an example of the metaphorical

conception of a third space, because it entails a subject that is instigating an internal dialogue within a void. Although a definition of a void would make the idea of a dialogue impossible, it does imply that there is a beginning and an end to the void. In much the same way, a third space is positioned between a subject on the one side and an idealised notion on other. Therefore, the void represents the third space.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the last play the brothers create before Gabriel dies is about Chachagathoo. She was the last of the Cree shamans and as such, a strong figure for the Cree community. However, over time and due to a strong influence from the Church, she had become associated with something shameful and evil: 'Like all children of Eemanapiteepitat, they had been told since early childhood that they were never to mention the name of Chachagathoo inside the house. And they didn't. All that they had heard of Chachagathoo was whispers that trickled through the village, from time to time, like some unpleasant, unwanted news' (90-91). According to their mother, Chachagathoo had '*machipoowamoowi'* (90), which means bad dream power. This perception is challenged by Ann-Adele Ghostrider who tells the brothers the real story of Chachagathoo, who '"was the last medicine woman in that part of the world, the last medicine woman, the last woman priest!"' (247). However, the emergence of Christianity led to her demise, and since then the Church has continually spread lies about her. Within Ann-Adele's story, there is the inclusion of a man that 'became possessed by Weetigo, the spirit who feasts on human flesh' (246). His story is subsequently followed by the seemingly innocent revelation that 'the first priest arrived on Mistik Lake' (246). Yet again, the novel supplies the reader with a link between the Church and the cannibalistic Cree figure. This link is important to keep in mind because Gabriel has an epiphany at the end of Ann-Adele's story: 'if *machipoowamoowin*, bad dream power, was obviously powerful enough to snuff out a human

life, then would not *michoopoowamoowin*, good dream power, be as strong?' (247). In the previous chapter of this thesis, I compared the sexual abuse the boys suffered to the notion of bad dream power. In this context, the good dream power can be used to resolve and hopefully balance out the trauma the brothers experienced. By creating a play about Chachagathoo, the brothers are taking back their stories and thus reclaiming their heritage. As mentioned previously, they are not able to return to a place before Western influence, but they can reframe their stories with an acceptance of a hybrid presence. This hybridity is also present in the last passages of the novel where Gabriel dies, as his death converges with scenes from the play.

In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned how some critics argue that Bhabha's work on hybridity, including the 'third space'-theory, can be perceived as an idealised notion that easily explains away any complicated disparities. Although the criticism is based on valid points, this chapter has shown that Highway's novel does not display hybridity as an easy explanation or solution to help the brothers heal from the trauma they have experienced. It entails accepting a cultural loss and the interdependency between seemingly opposing cultures and images of identity. Moreover, the possibility of healing within this narrative can be tied to the concept of transgenerational trauma, because by changing the course of the abusive cycle they find themselves in, but by no means eliminating it, the brothers are able to find a constructive outlet. In other words, they have found a way to break the silence and attempt to remove the shameful stigma around the trauma they and the indigenous communities in Canada have endured.

Chapter Four: Hybridity in *Monkey Beach*

In this chapter, I examine Eden Robinson's *Monkey* Beach and continue exploring how the experience of cultural hybridity presents itself within an indigenous community, both in terms of causing conflict and as an approach to healing of trauma. Robinson's novel is similar to Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* with regards to referencing mythical creatures rooted in indigenous storytelling and mythology, such as Weegit the Raven and the B'gwus. I will use these figures and others to show how the cultural and psychological experience of hybridity is part of the trauma that underpins the entire novel, as well as providing an approach to healing. I will begin the chapter by explaining how hybridity is present in the Haisla community that is depicted in Robinson's novel, and how it is connected to transgenerational trauma. I will also give particular attention to the scene that depicts LisaMarie's appointment with a psychologist, because this incident explores the oppressive and painful aspect of a hybrid condition, in which one culture presents itself as superior in comparison with another, and as a result excludes the latter. In this instance, it is the use of Western psychology to describe a First Nation/Haisla phenomenon and trauma, and how that ends up erasing and discrediting the latter based on the assumption of superiority of Western culture. The inclusion of critique does not take away from the possibility of healing but rather highlights one of the core issues of the novel, namely how to balance a life and identity that is placed between what appears to be binary oppositions. Lastly, I will discuss a mythical figure called the B'gwus and how its presence in the novel illustrates the shift in LisaMarie's acceptance of her gifts and of the hybrid state of her identity and community. Within that discussion, I will also include the Trickster figure in Haisla mythology, Weegit the Raven, and how his presence can open up the possibility of access to stories and subsequent storytelling to new generations.

Hybridity and the Haisla Community

The notion of hybridity can be understood as a combination of different cultures and identities, and in this novel, it manifests itself through the co-existence of Haisla culture and Canadian culture, as well as the identities and roles that emerge from these cultures. From the very beginning of Robinson's novel, this hybridity is present, as seen with LisaMarie checking the time on the clock on her nightstand: 'The Elvis clock says the time is seven-thirty, but it's always either an hour ahead or an hour behind. We always joke that it's on Indian time' (2). On the one hand, the 'clock-face has a badly painted Elvis caught in mid-gyrate' (2), and as such it represents a well-known figure from Western culture. However, the inside joke of the clock being on 'Indian time' intimates that the clock's function of telling time does not mirror the expectations put forth by the imagery. The joke infers that indigenous communities have a different perception of time and by extension a different way of life. Moreover, the fact that it is either 'an hour ahead or an hour behind' can be interpreted to represent the clash between cultures on a larger scale. From a Western perspective, indigenous communities can be perceived as inferior in their beliefs and way of life. In other words, that they are behind the times and the developments in Canadian society. On the other hand, there is the point of view of indigenous communities, such as the Haisla community, where they are in possession of knowledge that is incomprehensible to most Canadians. Despite this juxtaposition, the notion of hybridity stays intact because the opposing cultures are centred on a specific object that has a function as long as you are able to interpret it.

Within this cultural mix, there is still a relation of power. The novel presents the Canadian culture as the dominant one, whereas the Haisla culture is depicted as diminishing, as evidenced from the very name of the village they live in, which 'has been called Kitamaat ever since [a misunderstanding by white settlers], even though it really should be called Haisla' (5). The notion that the place name is due to a misunderstanding and not an intentional abuse of power points to the power of a dominant culture's perception. Moreover, the gap in perception is also exemplified by the Haisla language, as 'Haisla has many sounds that don't exist in English' (193), which speaks to the difficulties in understanding each other as they operate with separate frameworks of communication. The novel reveals that the difference in language comes from the simple fact that 'most English sounds are formed using the front of the mouth, while Haisla uses mainly the back' (193). Native speakers of each language are fundamentally different in the way they produce sound, and to establish a common ground between them is not a simple matter. LisaMarie tries to bridge this gap by "mapping" the Haisla language and teach the reader how to say 'Haisla/Xa'isla' (193):

> To say Xa'isla, touch your throat. Say the German "ach" or Scottish "loch." When you say the first part, the "Xa," say it from the far back in your throat. The apostrophe between the syllables signals both an emphasis and a pause. Say "uh-uh," the way you'd say it if you were telling a child not to touch a stove. Put that same pause between the first and last syllables of Xa'isla. (193)

In this passage, LisaMarie is educating herself as much as she is teaching the reader. This particular passage is set in the present, and as such, shows how LisaMarie is taking upon herself the role of a guide to the readers in a very similar way to what her grandmother did with her. She is invoking Western sounds and language to create a foundation of understanding for Haisla. In other words, she is creating a hybrid space of intercultural translation, communication and learning for her community, but also for non-indigenous people.

Divided Identities within the Hill Family

The novel's portrayal of LisaMarie's family highlights the difficulty of living with a hybrid sense of identity. Most of the members of her family have consciously or subconsciously decided to conform to and identify with either Haisla or Canadian culture. LisaMarie's mother embodies Western stereotypes of beauty with her 'perfectly manicured fingernails with their stylish red nail polish' (34). In this sense, she has conformed to an outward appearance that is similar to Western culture, but the novel reveals that she has buried a part of herself that resembles LisaMarie with regards to their ancestral spiritual gift (154). She is taking an active part in distancing herself from her Haisla heritage by constantly silencing LisaMarie and her questions because there was nothing to silence she would simply not react to it or have any problem explaining a past that is simply in the past.

For most of the novel, Jimmy, LisaMarie's brother, strives to succeed within Western society. His goal is to be a part of Canada's national swimming team and compete in the Olympics. This rather ambitious goal can be seen in relation to his childlike attempt at fame and fortune, when he tries to take a photograph of a sasquatch so that his parents will have money to

‘go to Disneyland’ and to ‘buy a ‘new house’ (10). He is using a Haisla story about the B’gwus and seeing the monetary “benefit” from a Western point of view. As a result, he is not understanding the story for what it truly represents, but rather seeing how he can “exploit” the story. This in turn speaks to a frame of mind that is distanced from the values and the true meaning of Haisla stories. The B’gwus is a creature closely connected to Haisla culture, and the conception of the sasquatch should be considered a Western adaptation more than being synonymous. The fact that LisaMarie and parts of her family refer to it as a sasquatch can be seen in relation to the influence of Western culture and the appropriation of stories. The gap between the B’gwus and the sasquatch is evidenced by LisaMarie’s father telling a story about this creature and Ma-ma-oo’s reaction to it: ‘Every time Dad launched into his version, she punctuated his gory descriptions with, “That’s not how it happened.” “Oh, Mother,” he’d protested finally. “It’s just a story.” Her lips had pressed together until they were bloodless. She’d left a few minutes later. Mom kissed Dad’s nose and said family was family’ (8). This passage effectively illustrates the divide within the family; where some reject the old stories as simply stories that are open to interpretation and exaggeration, while others regard them as important facets of Haisla culture.

One of them is Ma-ma-oo, LisaMarie’s grandmother, who in the passage above shows a silent defiance towards the dismissal of Haisla stories as figments of imagination that can easily be reinterpreted. Her response indicates that she is not correcting a misinterpretation of a narrative, but rather a misrepresentation of history. Unlike most members of LisaMarie’s family, she still practices old Haisla rituals and is a fluent speaker of the language. Although she clings to what she refers to as the ‘old ways’ (153), she does so with a sense of nostalgia and loss as seen when she talks about LisaMarie’s great-grandmother on her mother’s side: ‘“She could really

dance, and she made beautiful songs – that no one sings any more. And I was too young back then to put them in here." She tapped her temple' (154). Ma-ma-oo is referencing the oral tradition of retaining cultures, such as stories, songs, and dances. However, with intrusions from a Western society that brought about Christianisation and residential schools, the ability to communicate and transmit culture across generations diminished alongside the actual size of the tribe. This explains why Ma-ma-oo tells LisaMarie that '[o]ld ways don't matter much now. Just hold you back' (153). The notion of being held back can refer to the increasing need to adapt to the Western culture in order to succeed in society, as well as connecting Haisla culture with the past.

LisaMarie's uncle, Mick, also proudly displays his ethnicity and Haisla heritage. This can be interpreted from his outward appearance of wearing a 'Levi jacket with Trail of Broken Treaties embroidered in bright red thread on the back' or a 'claw that dangled from his bone choker. He wore it all the time, along with an earring of a silver feather' (56). However, the novel also reveals that his commitment reached further than just appearances, as he has spent time with AIM, the American Indian Movement, and that he married an indigenous woman in what is referred to as '"…an Indian marriage…Medicine man and everything"' (72). He refers to LisaMarie as his 'little warrior' (69) and tries to teach her about the injustice and discrimination that indigenous people have faced. Nevertheless, he is portrayed as wounded from his experiences at residential school and his attempts at fighting for indigenous rights, as well as the loss of his "wife" Cookie. Ma-ma-oo and Mick, the two biggest influences on LisaMarie's connection to her Haisla heritage die in the novel. As a result, LisaMarie loses the potential of guides that could help her navigate her gift and attempts at reclaiming her Hasila heritage. However, even before they died, both of them showed a defeatist attitude towards the prospect of

maintaining an indigenous identity and culture. As mentioned in the paragraph above, Ma-ma-oo claimed that the old ways only held a person back, whereas Mick showed subtle hints at his own cultural loss. When he and LisaMarie try to trap crabs, they accidentally catch a halibut to which Mick exclaims: '"Don't touch it. It means either really good luck or really bad luck, I think. We'll have to ask someone"' (98). Mick shows an awareness of knowledge, but also reveals an ambivalence that renders that knowledge meaningless unless one can find that 'someone' who can confirm the correct answer. Moreover, the presence of knowledge but also of cultural loss is illustrated when Mick explains that the halibut is '"a magical thing…You aren't supposed to touch them if you don't know how to handle them"' (99). This foreshadows Ma-ma-oo's warning to LisaMarie that her spiritual abilities are dangerous if she does not learn how to use them correctly.

Regardless, the influence of both Ma-ma-oo and Mick becomes clear when LisaMarie starts singing a song Mick taught her called 'Fuck the Oppressors', after she is forced to read a book in class 'that said that the Indians on the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices' (69). She tries telling her teacher that Ma-ma-oo told her '"…it was just pretend, the eating people, like drinking Christ's blood at Communion"' (69). Although LisaMarie attempts to compare indigenous rituals to Christian rituals in order to bridge a gap in the misrepresentation of indigenous culture, she is promptly ignored by her teacher and punished. This instance partly explains LisaMarie's negative perception of school and what she learns there later on in the novel: 'Nothing they taught me meant anything. None of the stories I read in English had anything to do with my life' (165). The direct misrepresentation of history and lack of inclusion of Haisla narratives and perspectives results in LisaMarie's alienation from what she learns at school. It also shows how Western influence on indigenous communities not

only came in the form of intrusive policies such as the residential school system but also subtly through the curriculum and education indigenous pupils received.

The assimilation (forcibly or voluntarily) to Canadian culture is put into context in the novel when a white family drives a car past LisaMarie and Pooch. The car slows down and according to LisaMarie's narration, the children 'stared at us as if we were dangerous animals in a zoo' while the 'adults excitedly pointed at us' (218). Pooch reacts by showing them the finger while the woman in the car takes pictures of them. LisaMarie then proceeds to tell Pooch that the picture of him will be made into a postcard that '"will read, 'Indian boy gives ancient Haisla greeting.'"' (219). The novel employs humour to show how anything a member of an indigenous tribe does can be interpreted by a white Canadian as something that is inherently indigenous, and by extension exotic and worth commemorating by taking a picture, although in this case wrongly so. Moreover, this particular example shows how the Haisla community and their residents are treated as a tourist attraction. The novel is creating an imagery of a zoo by placing the white family in a car that is driving by slowly, while the occupants stare, point and take pictures of the "attraction". This imagery functions as an indication of a systemic issue with regards to many Canadians' perception of indigenous people, which is based upon a confident belief in their own superiority in terms of culture. It also displays what Monika Fludernik describes as a 'latent orientalism' where the native is viewed as something exotic (267). For many indigenous people, the solution to break free from this perception is to adopt a Canadian way of life. Homi K. Bhabha referred to such strategies as acts of 'mimicry' (*Location of Culture* 122) but explains the futility behind the attempt as the result will be that of '*almost the same but not quite*' (*Location of Culture* 127). According to Bhabha, the reason for this is due to mimicry being an 'interdictory desire' (*Location of Culture* 128). In other words, a desire that is prohibited, because of the

ambivalence showed amongst colonizers towards the native, namely the 'twin figures of narcissism and paranoia', which translate into the firm belief of a superior culture while simultaneously exhibiting fear of the unknown culture (*Location of Culture* 131). Therefore, although the attempt at dismissing their Haisla heritage in favour of Western culture is understandable, it is ultimately futile. It further shows how attempts at achieving a complete identity and culture is not a possibility, and that the actual solution is to acknowledge the presence of hybridity.

Hybridity and Pain

The novel also explores the painful and destructive aspects of a hybrid condition. The clearest example comes in the form of LisaMarie's appointment with a female psychologist, which was set up by her parents after she began sleepwalking. Her parents are worried it is a result of believing in ghosts, but unbeknownst to them and to the psychologist, it is due to recently having been drugged and raped by one of her friends at a party. From the very beginning of the meeting, LisaMarie becomes aware of a creature beside the shrink, which has 'no flesh, just tight, thin skin over bones' and has 'its fingers sank into her arms, its legs wrapped around her waist as it clung to her like a baby' (272-273). LisaMarie can hear the creature whispering to the psychologist: '"…screws her? Do you think he thinks of you? When he puts his hand on your thigh, does he imagine hers? Is he—"' (273). She is trying to block out the whispering, however, the creature suddenly turns its attention towards her when she admits to the psychologist that she believes ghosts exists. The creature 'unwrapped its arms from Ms. Jenkins and drifted across the room, hovering over me. It hummed like a high-tension wire' (273). After the creature begins whispering to LisaMarie, her 'mouth [begins] moving by itself' and she "admits" that her visions

are an attempt at getting attention (274). LisaMarie then goes on to describe how the creature 'was feeding' on her, while '[w]ords came out of [her] mouth, ones the thing knew Ms. Jenkins wanted to hear, but [she] was drowning' (274). LisaMarie's ability to perceive liminal states such as the spirit world seems to manifest itself in this situation. Although her ability is a part of her indigenous cultural legacy, it has somehow been appropriated and rechannelled into an instrument of the dominant culture. She is seemingly possessed by a destructive being that speaks through her by feeding on her.

Firstly, the creature can be interpreted as a manifestation of the psychologist's deep-seated insecurities, whereby the whisperings that LisaMarie overhears are the sustenance that gives the creature life. It is not interested in LisaMarie until she utters something that collides fundamentally with the psychologist's worldview. This change in focus is consistent with the interpretation of the creature as a manifestation of insecurities because if LisaMarie's statement about believing in the existence of ghosts turns out to be true it would shatter the psychologist's perception of the world, and in turn also Western beliefs. Moreover, when those insecurities are satisfied at the end of the appointment, the creature 'fled back to Ms. Jenkins' (274). This in turn strengthens the initial argument of the creature materializing from her insecurities.

Secondly, this is an example of how the novel is sceptical towards the use of Western psychology to describe a hybrid condition because Western science and discourse is shown to be irrelevant and unable to address psychological experiences that are culturally conditioned. In other words, the novel illustrates the use of Western psychology to describe a Haisla phenomenon, and how that application ends up erasing and discrediting the latter on the belief of the superiority of the former. Although the intention is to help, the truth of the situation is that the treatment is condescending towards LisaMarie's perception of the world, and moreover, the real

perception amongst many indigenous people. This speaks against the notion that the acceptance of hybridity can heal a transgenerational trauma caused by cultural genocide because one culture is historically placing itself in a superior position which undermines the very idea of hybridity as a third space. An important aspect of LisaMarie's trauma is her inability to reconcile her spiritual legacy with the hybrid society she lives in. Therefore, the dismissal of her ability only results in further alienation from the acknowledgement of a hybrid identity and culture, seeing as it is the Western part of her identity that is emphasised and given value.

LisaMarie's feeling of drowning is an important aspect of her experience because it foreshadows the ambiguous ending of the novel. In a similar way to how she lets the creature feed on her now, she lets the spirits on Monkey Beach "feed" on her in search for answers about Jimmy's whereabouts. Although the latter entails a blood sacrifice, she is also sacrificing a part of herself here, only in this instance, it is her integrity and by extension, her identity when she erases her own genuine responses for the answers expected by Western society. Moreover, while giving the psychologist the answers she wants, LisaMarie begins replaying the memory of Mick's death. A reason for this could be a subconscious feeling of betrayal, as she is letting a Western perspective and cultural tool (in this case, psychoanalysis) take over and redirect her experience of trauma and life.

When she returns from her appointment, LisaMarie comes to a realization: 'I knew it was wrong to want the thing to feed on me again. I knew it was bad. But without it, the night was long and empty and endless' (275). The denial that the psychologist afforded through the creature is too tempting for LisaMarie to turn away from. With the death of her uncle, one of the two people who functioned as anchors to her Haisla heritage are gone, and in addition to the newly experienced trauma of being raped, LisaMarie is sent over the edge in terms of being able to deal

with her spiritual gift. Therefore, her experience with the psychologist can be tied to the notion of transgenerational trauma because the "cure" provided by Western psychology in effect results in a mode of silencing. The descriptions of LisaMarie's mouth moving on its own accord or words coming out of her mouth instead of being produced voluntarily speaks to the removal of autonomy in the face of perceived authority, which is a signifier for the overall treatment of indigenous people in Canada. LisaMarie has been reduced to a mouthpiece in her own narrative.

Presence of Mythical Figures: Path towards Healing

Even though the novel does display a critical remark towards the possibility of a hybrid identity functioning as an approach to healing, it also provides a platform for that possibility to develop through the mythical figure of the B'gwus. LisaMarie's first encounter with the B'gwus happens when she is around nine years old and she is with her family on a trip to Monkey Beach because her brother wants to take a picture of the elusive sasquatches: 'I turned back and saw him. Just for a moment, just a glimpse of a tall man, covered in brown fur. He gave me a wide, friendly smile, but he had too many teeth and they were all pointed. He backed into the shadows, then stepped behind a cedar tree and vanished' (16). Jimmy appears right after this sighting, however, for LisaMarie '[d]oubt began to set in: it had happened so fast and had been so brief, I wondered if I'd just imagined the whole thing' (16). This is the first example of what becomes a pattern for LisaMarie, namely that her experience appears unreal in one world, the Western world, and as such is dismissed. If the relationship between a Western point of view and a Haisla perspective was more balanced, she might not be so quick to assume that her observation was just a figment of her imagination. Even though the world would still be the same, an acceptance of a hybrid

perception of reality would mean that it would be easier for LisaMarie to explain a phenomenon or creature that as of now is mystified and sensationalized. However, her reaction upon contemplation is: 'I cringed when I imagined myself telling people I'd seen a b'gwus. They'd snicker about it the way they did when Ma-ma-oo insisted they were real. But if the *Globe* did pay a lot of money for a picture, I'd probably given up a chance to make us rich' (17). This glimpse of the past is immediately followed by a passage in the present: 'I sigh. Maybe dreaming about Jimmy standing on Monkey Beach is simply regret at missed opportunities. Maybe it means I'm feeling guilty about withholding secrets. It could be a death sending, but those usually happen when you are awake' (17). In her first encounter with the B'gwus, LisaMarie disbelieves what she sees in fear of ridicule, and therefore points her brother to go in a different direction than the creature. The mention of missed opportunities can be seen in relation to a regret about not being forthcoming about what she saw and by extension the presence of a diminishing culture and her gift in general. Moreover, there is a sense of guilt about whether the present state of her family would be different if she had been honest about these things.

When telling LisaMarie a story about the B'gwus, Ma-ma-oo's insists that in order 'to really understand the old stories … you had to speak Haisla', however, that is not possible for most of the characters in the novel or the majority of the readers (211). The solution comes in the form of the 'shape-changing raven named Weegit' (154). He is often referred to as the Trickster figure in Haisla mythology, and as a polymorphic being, he shares many characteristics with the trickster figure in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. The first mention of him reveals very little as LisaMarie tries to remember a story about him that Ma-ma-oo told her, but finds herself 'distracted' (154). However, towards the end of the novel LisaMarie imagines a story about Weegit in the modern world:

> Weegit the raven has mellowed in his old age. He's still a confirmed bachelor, but he's not the womanizer he once was. Playing the stock market – instead of spending his time being a trickster – has paid off and he has a comfortable condo downtown. He plays up the angle about creating the world and humans, conveniently forgetting that he did it out of boredom. Yes, he admits, he did steal the sun and the moon, but he insists he did it to bring light to humankind even though he did it so it would be easier for him to find food. After doing some spin control on the crazy pranks of his youth, he's become respectable. As he sips his low-fat mocha and reads yet another sanitized version of his earlier exploits, only his small, sly smile reveals how much he enjoys pulling the wool over everyone else's eyes. (295-296)

First of all, this story shows that LisaMarie's knowledge of stories and her subsequent retelling of them to the readers develops throughout the novel, and as such she is subtly reclaiming parts of the Haisla culture. By placing Weegit in the modern world, she is making him and the message his story provides relevant for her community. The story cleverly ridicules Western markings of success, like '[p]laying the stock market' and having a 'condo', while simultaneously downplaying his original purpose and the role he played in indigenous creation stories. By describing what he reads as a 'sanitized version', the story subtly critiques the notion that indigenous people were seen as unclean and savage compared to the white settlers, which in turn inspired policies such as the residential school system. However, the ending of the story shows how Weegit is very aware of what he is doing, and that he is simply playing yet another deceitful 'role', which is in line with traditional stories about the trickster.

The importance of this story is that it shows how that although the novel implies that the Haisla culture is diminishing, this might not be the case. There is still a presence of figures, gifts, and places that carry meaning, such as Monkey Beach, the B'gwus and Weegit. The story is humorous while simultaneously displaying serious undertones in an effort to ridicule and critique the notion of Western superiority. Lastly, his ability to morph into new shapes and cultural contexts functions as a metaphor for the productive part of a hybrid culture and identity, namely how the acknowledgement of that hybridity opens up possibilities for new stories to emerge.

The apprehension towards Haisla culture that LisaMarie displayed after her first encounter with the B'gwus, sees a turning point in the novel with her second encounter with the creature, which happens while she is driving with Frank: 'The memory of him is imprinted on my brain—the dark brown fur on his back, the lighter fur on his chest, the long hairy arms, the sharply tilted forehead and the row of pointed teeth he flashed at me when he snarled' (315). Although she tells Frank she saw a moose because she doesn't want to 'sound cracked' (315), there is a clear juxtaposition in her response to the sighting: 'As I drove away, I felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world' (315-316). LisaMarie seems to be re-establishing her belief in spirits and Haisla stories, such as the presence of the B'gwus. However, this cultural inheritance that LisaMarie is slowly reclaiming is not coded unambiguously as 'good' or as something that will heal her. The novel has already revealed that it is an inheritance that has threatening aspects to it, especially when a person is unaware of the context or is lacking a proper guide. As mentioned previously, Ma-ma-oo stated that knowledge of the Haisla language was a prerequisite for understanding the old stories. Moreover, she warned LisaMarie that her gift was 'like oxasuli. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you' (317). It

is not the sighting in itself that is comforting, but the knowledge that she still has access to that part of her cultural heritage; that it was 'still living in this world.'

With regards to LisaMarie's different reaction to this sighting compared to the first encounter, there is also a notable difference in the way the B'gwus is acting in this encounter. The B'gwus has gone from displaying a friendly smile to snarling and flashing his teeth. This provides a juxtaposition in her response and in his demeanour that is flipped from the first encounter and is an example of the complexities of her cultural inheritance and her subsequent ambivalence towards it. Although the B'gwus functions as an access point to her cultural heritage, he also serves as a reminder that LisaMarie is a part of and at times enabling the established silence that facilitates the passing of transgenerational trauma. When he first appeared to her she was inquisitive and asked questions to everyone about everything, although she received very little in the way of answers. However, right before the second encounter with the B'gwus, LisaMarie shuts down Frank's attempt to talk about the reason why Pooch committed suicide, which the novel alludes to be a result of sexual abuse by Josh.

The B'gwus can be regarded as one of the spirits of Haisla culture, and his presence in the narrative is coded neither as unambiguously 'good' or 'bad', but rather show how LisaMarie's ability to learn how to integrate her knowledge of his presence into her 'modern' life can function as an approach to healing. Therefore, his change in demeanour can be seen as a reaction to LisaMarie's suppression of Frank's testimony. Her dismissal of the reason why Pooch committed suicide is part of a larger problem of dismissing indigenous struggles. Moreover, many of these struggles are a direct result of the suppression of indigenous culture, including the dismissal of spiritual beings such as the B'gwus.

The novel also draws a distinction between the B'gwus and what is referred to as a sasquatch. The creature that LisaMarie observes is a B'gwus, whereas Western society has created a myth around a creature they refer to as a sasquatch. Although both the B'gwus and the sasquatch are mythical beings, the sasquatch has a seemingly constant form, whereas the B'gwus is referred to as a 'shapeshifter' (210). While the B'gwus represents a genuine aspect of Haisla culture, the sasquatch can be seen as a metaphor for the Western appropriation of indigenous culture. Without the complexities of shapeshifting and rich backstories, the sasquatch appears to be a "sanitized" Western version of the B'gwus. Despite the fact that the B'gwus makes an appearance in the novel, whereas the sasquatch is nowhere to be found, it is the sasquatch that people are looking for. He is the creature that is kept alive by the flow of stories and interest about and around him, while knowledge and stories about the B'gwus dwindle with each generation. The third chapter of the novel is titled 'In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch', and takes place after Ma-ma-oo dies and up until LisaMarie enters the spirit world. It is therefore devoted to the part of LisaMarie's life when she is without guidance. The use of the words 'Elusive Sasquatch' points towards LisaMarie's belief at that point the novel, namely that she accepts the dominant culture's understanding of the creature, which is naturally easier when she is left without a guide to understanding the Haisla stories.

Acknowledging Hybridity

The notion of only embracing the dominant culture is not a realistic prospect if the goal is to begin a process of healing, which is confirmed when she enters the spirit world and all her deceased family members point her in different directions. Ma-ma-oo tells her to '"…Go home

and make me some grandkids"', whereas Mick tells her that she should '"…go out there and give 'em hell. Red Power!"' (373). Last of all is Jimmy, who gives LisaMarie the message: '"Tell her"' (374). These conflicting messages echo the previous divide within the family, but Jimmy is most likely referring to Karaoke in his message to LisaMarie. He is giving her the responsibility of telling his story, but without indicating what story that is. Is it a story of a young man who was overcome with anger and took revenge, or is it about a man who tried to right a wrong out of love for a young woman? Robinson has included an epigraph to the novel, which is a Haisla proverb: 'It is possible to retaliate against an enemy. But impossible to retaliate against storms.' A storm is a force of nature, and as such you cannot retaliate against it, instead you must ride it out. Jimmy might have taken revenge on behalf of Karaoke, however, the real "enemy" and source of all the pain and trauma that encompasses the Haisla community as well as the overall indigenous population in Canada, is the repercussions of the colonisation that began after the first white settlement. In this novel, the focus is on the damages that the residential school system caused. Moreover, what would the implications of taking on the responsibility of communicating Jimmy's message be? Firstly, it would entail LisaMarie breaking the silence about the specific trauma that spurred Jimmy's revenge, which in turn could result in a recognition of the transgenerational trauma that encompasses the Haisla community. Secondly, by communicating this message, LisaMarie would be acknowledging her spiritual gift out loud and in public.

At the end of the novel, LisaMarie seems to have reached an understanding that she needs to be her own guide, which requires her to trust her own voice and instincts seeing as there are no guides for her in her own community at this point. The ambiguous ending of the novel means that the reader is not given a narrative that is neatly wrapped up. Instead, it offers multiple interpretations and gives the reader the opportunity to envisage LisaMarie's future. My

interpretation of the novel's ending is not a convenient way of drawing a line in the sand with regards to the trauma that still plagues indigenous families and communities, like the Haisla, to this very day. However, I am indicating ways in which the novel addresses an approach to healing, and interpreting the ambiguous ending to mean that a process of healing is within reach if people are open to accepting it.

The acceptance of a hybrid state of identity would help break the silence because it would entail acknowledging the trauma that led to the hybridity. The state in itself is not a defeat as it recognizes the pain that unfolded to result in this state of affairs, but it also opens up the possibility of moving forward (not "on" or away). Criticism on the term hybridity often boils down to the belief that it is a term used to easily explain away or make things right. Although the argument can be valid, I disagree with the premise that it is an easy conclusion to make because it requires understanding how things came to be this way. Only with a thorough understanding of the process can the foundation for healing take place. Acknowledging hybridity entails considering more than one culture and identity, which means that the perceived dominant culture, in this case Western culture, cannot be left unopposed. In the same way that Western culture informs indigenous culture, the other way around should also be true, but that will only happen if silence is broken. Although this leaves an arguably unjustifiable responsibility upon those who have been wronged in the first place, stories must be told for understanding to go both ways. One way to solve this is to tell stories such as the one *Monkey Beach* offers up. It is a narrative that invites a large readership, while also including references that only indigenous people are able to pick up on.

Conclusion

> Without truth, justice, and healing, there can be no genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about "closing a sad chapter of Canada's past," but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice. We are mindful that knowing the truth about what happened in residential schools in and of itself does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. Yet, the importance of truth telling in its own right should not be underestimated; it restores the human dignity of victims of violence and calls governments and citizens to account. Without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. (*Truth and Reconciliation* 12)

The intention of this thesis was to discuss how the two novels under study presented different approaches to healing after a trauma that is deeply connected to the Canadian residential school system. The discussion has been focused on two interlinked questions. The first is a question about the nature of approaches to healing in these novels. The second question is whether the approaches discussed are catalysts to a process of healing in the two novels. In order for that healing process to begin, I posited that the characters in the novels needed to acknowledge the divide in their cultural identity, which entailed embracing a hybrid identity.

The first two chapters discussed how the characters' journeys in both of the novels can be interpreted as a process of 'learning to talk with ghosts'. Each of the three main characters, LisaMarie, Jeremiah, and Gabriel, have specific gifts that they have had since birth. These gifts have strong ties to their indigenous cultural heritage, and as such, play an important role in the characters attempts to reclaim a part of their culture and identity that has been lost due to trauma.

In *Monkey Beach*, LisaMarie tries to come to terms with the spiritual and cultural legacy behind her ability to communicate with the spirit world, and it is that exploration that enables the literal configuration of 'learning to talk with ghosts' to be used on the novel. The ending of the novel can be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that LisaMarie has finally begun to learn how to talk with her ancestral spirits. That beginning also signals the start of a process of healing. LisaMarie has established a link to the Haisla culture, which helps break the silence enforced by the dominant Canadian society and strengthens the part of her identity that is connected to her Haisla heritage.

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the concept of 'learning to talk with ghosts' is applied in a figurative manner, whereby the brothers, Jeremiah and Gabriel, use their musical gifts to acknowledge the trauma they suffered at the residential schools through the production of several plays. They can express themselves in a way that does not require conventional modes of communication, circumventing the imagined impossibility of retelling their experiences at the residential school. Moreover, the brothers use their creative abilities to negotiate and navigate between the conflicting cultures and identities that have caused so much pain, and by the end of the novel seem to reach a place of healing. One of the ways in which the novel does this is through the use of mythical figures to stand as representations of the opposing cultures and identities.

Chapter Three and Four discuss in greater detail the presence of hybrid identities in the novels and how such hybridity could function as an approach to healing, specifically through the perspective of Bhabha's 'third space'-theory. The third chapter focuses on *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and build on the arguments presented in Chapter Two. In their creation of the plays, the brothers constructed a space of acknowledgement and acceptance of their hybrid identity and the history

behind it. The plays result in a metaphorical 'third space' where they can express themselves and by extension the trauma that has influenced their perceptions of life. By reframing indigenous stories, the brothers are reclaiming their heritage and bringing Cree culture into the modern world. This in turn helps to begin a process of healing from the pain of not being able to access and express their Cree identity and culture, which is true not only for the brothers but for the general indigenous community in Canada. One story is not applicable for all, but it creates room for others to break their silences. The brothers take on roles as storytellers within their communities, which results in empowerment of the next generation.

In the fourth chapter, I return to a discussion of *Monkey Beach* and how accepting a hybrid identity entails acknowledging the trauma that led to that specific state of hybridity. Although it involves pain and a seemingly unfair responsibility placed upon those who have already suffered, the telling of stories is necessary to break the silence around trauma. Only then can the processes behind transgenerational trauma change direction and become a force working towards reclaiming indigenous heritage rather than cause the piecemeal dissolution of indigenous culture. In a similar way to the narrative in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, *Monkey Beach* makes use of mythical figures in storytelling. Not only does their presence in the narrative signify a natural part of the indigenous culture but the reframing of the stories makes them applicable to a modern society informed by cultural hybridity. By embracing her Haisla heritage, LisaMarie is also accepting her legacy and role as a guide for her community. In a similar way to the Okimasis brothers, she is growing into a role of someone who can positively influence her community and their cultural awareness.

The role of stories and storytelling has a double and intertwined effect in these novels. The first layer of this effect involves how LisaMarie and the Okimasis brothers tell their own

personal stories while also rewriting indigenous stories about mythical and historical figures. The second layer is the novels themselves and how the story they tell can be regarded as representations of their authors' voices. As a result, the reader is provided with a story within a story, where both stories inform and enrich each other. The characters in each of the novels try to reclaim their heritage and use this newfound knowledge to enrich other members of their community as well as society at large. In the same vein, the authors contribute to enhancing awareness of Cree and Haisla culture as well as participating in a growing indigenous literary canon. Through their writing, both Highway and Robinson are enlightening readers in Canada and internationally to the transgenerational trauma that still plagues indigenous communities. This is one side of the balancing act that indigenous writers in Canada have to take into account, namely the inclusion of their writing in the national literary canon. The other side is concerned with retaining an indigenous voice and relaying that voice in a traditional mode, and that objective is present within both novels. Both novels challenge the readers' perception of what constitutes a traditional narrative because they do not have neatly packaged endings, but rather ambiguous ones. This is a literary strategy employed by the novels to make the readers question the narrative they have been presented with, and hopefully, seek out more answers to those questions that are left unclear.

Highway and Robinson's contribution to the Canadian literary canon ties in well with King's final words in his Massey Lectures, which were presented in the introduction to this thesis:

> It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (29)

By telling these stories, Highway and Robinson, are sharing the responsibility that their characters have had to endure with the audience at large. Even though these stories are works of fiction, they are also literary depictions of a real phenomenon that is still causing pain to this very day. In my opinion, Robinson's and Highway's stories echo King's sentiment and provide a challenge to readers: Ignorance is not a defence even if the work is fictional, because at times the only way to relay a trauma is through a creative outlet. It does not lessen the truth that inspired these stories. The fictional account of a general truth may even be presented and relayed to the readers in a way that is more approachable and less intimidating for them to witness. It is only then that readers can consider the story they have witnessed, and decide for themselves whether they will bear the responsibility of acknowledging the truth behind these stories. Acknowledging the presence of a trauma creates a space for new stories to emerge and the possibility of an even higher level of awareness amongst readers. In my reading of the novels, I suggest that healing from trauma is contingent on the indigenous community and their ability to break the silence surrounding trauma by telling stories. However, this should also result in a sense of responsibility in bearing witness to those narratives as a reader. I am in no way suggesting that readers should internalize trauma, but as King suggests in his lecture, they can no longer claim ignorance as an excuse.

The gap in *Monkey Beach* with regards to depictions of the trauma experienced at residential schools is filled by the narrative in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. I have used this to explore two different perspectives on a trauma that can be traced back to the same institutionalised abuse. The perspective in *Monkey Beach* entailed someone who had not been directly affected by the residential schools but still experienced the effects of the cultural genocide it caused. In contrast, the narrative in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* depicts life at the residential schools for two main

characters and thereby addresses the trauma directly. I selected two approaches to healing after a trauma that were presented differently for each novel. This still leaves room for other approaches to be explored in relation to these two novels. Furthermore, a future focus might involve an analysis of how these novels might inform each other and engage in a closer comparison of how trauma is figured differently in the two novels.

In the epigraph to this thesis, I included a quote from Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*: 'The impossibility of a comprehensible story, however, does not necessarily mean the denial of a transmissible truth' (154). It captures the difficulty in recreating the actions of a traumatic past into a story that will be understood, while simultaneously encouraging the possibility of communicating a truth. The Canadian history of colonization alongside continuous suppression and discrimination of indigenous communities at the hands of the dominant Western society is still an issue that affects the indigenous way of life to this very day. The systematic cultural genocide that took place in Canada through the residential school system is still in the process of being acknowledged and reconciled as a part of Canadian history. For many, it involves disclosing parts of a traumatic past that have been silenced for so long that the truth they are trying to bring to the surface almost seems unbelievable for those who have either not been privy to its existence or closed their eyes to it. In this confusing and often hurtful space, the importance of storytelling comes into play. Novels, such as *Monkey Beach* and *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, can help open communications around a painful truth that seems impossible to come to terms with through conventional modes of communication. The novels that I have discussed in this thesis do not only present approaches to healing for the characters in the narrative, they contribute to sharing a truth that can help begin a process of healing for indigenous communities in Canada, as well as the Canadian society as a whole.

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