



# Trauma and Memory in Magical Realism: Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* as Trauma Narrative

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## Abstract

The fundamental characteristic of magical realism is its duality, which enables alternative representations of society and history. Its specific narrative devices make magical realism a viable form for rendering traumatic experience and memories. *Monkey Beach* (2000) by Eden Robinson, a member of the Haisla and Heiltsuk First Nations in Canada, is a repository of memories, triggered and fuelled by trauma. Fragmented temporality, mixing of discourses, shifts in focalization, wordplays, repetition, and the magical are some of the devices the novel uses to address the complex landscape of trauma and memory. By unveiling personal memories, *Monkey Beach* gives way to the unconscious to enter the narrative structure, gradually revealing a much larger issue of the mistreatment of the Haisla people in Canada—and the resulting collective trauma. As trauma cannot be integrated into the narrative, it can only be uncovered indirectly and through a double distancing: firstly through the techniques of magical realism, and secondly, through the seemingly detached point of view of the narrator, who ultimately realises that her life is also encumbered with the dark stain of colonialism.

**Keywords:** Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*, magical realism, trauma narrative, Haisla people in Canada, residential school system

The (im)possibility of rendering trauma and traumatic memory into a unified narrative has long been contested. How to express with words that which cannot be said? This problematic of representation is likely what prompted Jean-Francois Lyotard to write that the conventional



narrative organization altogether precludes the integration of trauma (16–17). And yet we speak of trauma narratives, that is, texts that articulate traumatic experience by virtue of distinctive literary techniques. Magical realism—a literary mode characterised by an inherent duality, fragmented temporality, and wordplays—might be viewed as a valid tool for conveying trauma, for, as Maggie Ann Bowers observes, the literary devices pertaining to magical realism create a site “where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (77).

*Monkey Beach* (2000) is a novel written by Eden Robinson, a member of the Haisla and Heiltsuk First Nations in Canada. Among other topics, the text addresses the traumatic result of years of abuse and mistreatment of the Haisla people. In my reading of the novel, I want to focus on magical realism’s ability to recall and reformulate traumatic experience into trauma narrative.<sup>[1]</sup> (It merits mention, however, that the complexities of the novel’s intricate structure and thematic tapestry permit a variety of valid inferences and interpretations.<sup>[2]</sup>) In reading an Aboriginal literary text through the lens of the Western literary tradition, one invariably runs the risk of appropriating it to the laws and conventions that constrict Western literature. Yet magical realism re-evaluates hegemonic discourse in order to accommodate alternative/marginalised/ex-centric perspectives, which renders it a powerful tool of postcolonial interrogation. The mode’s essential trait of inextricably intertwining the magical/supernatural and the realistic/rational—what Durix defines as the coexistence of two mutually exclusive ontological codes within a single fictional environment (188)—can lead to reductionist essentialism if this duality is broken down into the rational and supernatural elements, where the former signifies the Western point of view and the latter the indigenous/aboriginal/ethnic perspective, or, as Jenni Adams puts it: “reading [...] magic realism as ‘ex-centric’, in its potential alignment of ‘magic’ with indigenous culture, may be considered problematic in its positioning of the Other as marvellous and exotic” (13–14; see also Aldea 15; Faris, “The Question” 105; Warnes 9; Adams 13–14). Eva Aldea stresses that it is immaterial whether the author, reader, or fictional characters (but not the narrator or focaliser) accept the magical as true or real, it is necessarily “divergent from the world-view, or system, established on the realist level of the text” (34). My conception of the magical/supernatural in the novel closely follows Brenda Cooper’s, who defines it as “the fictional device of the supernatural, taken any source that the writer chooses, sycretized [sic] with a developed realistic, historical perspective” (16). By the



same token, Wendy B. Faris sees the “irreducible element” as constituting the essence of magical realism; this element is “unexplainable according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated by modern, post-enlightenment empiricism, with its heavy reliance on sensory data, together with a preponderance of realist event, character, and description that conform to the conventions of literary realism” (“The Question” 102).

The crux of the historical background in the novel is the issue of the residential school system, an instrument of colonisation and assimilation of Aboriginal children, whose lingering consequences remain tangible in the contemporary reality of the text. To enunciate the traumatic experience of the Haisla community, the author employs magical realist devices: the “irreducible element”, shifts between first- and second-person narrator, a non-linear plot structure, and mixing of discourses. “*Monkey Beach* is only one of a large number of novels that place First Nations voices front and centre, challenging prevailing images of invisible, marginalized and victimized Indigenous subjects without for all that denying the serious effects of the legacy of colonialism” (Lacombe 257). The novel also addresses the dynamics of “post-memory” as it is reflected in the shared memories that are assimilated intergenerationally in the community. The traumatic subject matter is accessed in an effort to recast the lens through which Aboriginal history and identity is viewed, thus challenging hegemonic discourses on not just the Haisla people, but the First Nations in Canada at large.

In her 1985 *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, Beatrice Amaryll Chanady establishes the formal criteria of magical realism, namely, the amalgamation of realist and supernatural/magical elements, where both perspectives are equally autonomous and coherent, and the unproblematic acceptance thereof (18–23). In a similar vein, Wendy B. Faris observes five primary characteristics of magical realism: in addition to the “irreducible element of magic” already explicated above, the text features a “strong presence of the phenomenal world”; “the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events”; “the narrative merges different realms”; and “magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity” (*Ordinary Enchantments* 7). Tomo Virk further supplements these characteristics—according to which works by such authors as Kafka, Grass, and Nabokov could also be read as magical realist—with ones pertaining to subject matter, which entails the critique of Eurocentric discourse,



the incorporation of mythology, diverse timelines, and alternative perspectives on history (134–135).

Whereas these descriptive criteria prove useful in classifying works as magical realist, it is the subversive potential inherent in this mode that is of paramount significance. Magical realist texts have the capacity to address the issues of marginalisation and exclusion of the “other” from discourse and power relations, and are thus notable for “their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness [that] encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures” (Zamora and Faris 6). Magical realism is an effective tool for postcolonial and/or Aboriginal authors to present their singular perspective on politics, culture, and history, “a mode suited to exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic” (5).

Canadian magical realism shares with other postcolonial nations the capacity to rethink the dominant Western narratives that define and legitimate history and identity (Hegerfeld 3). According to Rzepa, contemporary Canadian magical realist fiction “springs from a troubled (post)colonial context of a former settler colony, and is often written by white writers holding a dominant social position as well as by First Nations writers, who are still in many ways in the position of colonial dependence” (21). It is in literature that Aboriginal peoples in Canada, largely marginalised and positioned as the silenced “other” in the prevailing white society, find the means to reclaim and retell their own histories, identities, and traditions. And it is through literature that their voices emerge and strengthen the (still) on-going processes of decolonisation. Magical realist texts written by Aboriginal authors are characterised by a “reliance on orality, focus on community and its relation to the land and the surrounding world in general; focus on questions of memory; and the presentation of the coalescence or interaction of antithetical worlds” (60). They are often bound up with traditional practices of the community, though they also invariably reflect on the character of their contemporary historical moment. “The hybrid experience of most post-colonial writers does not place them in a no man’s land between two cultures”, Durix writes and continues that it “forms the basis of their questioning of the fixed terms that such a polarity implies” (189). Their “in-betweenness” offers a unique position from which to query and destabilise the dominant power structures and present their perspective.



Magical realism is often linked to trauma narratives on the singular premise that the former “carries the potential to respond sensitively yet productively to the issue of traumatic experience, enabling such experience to take its place within representation” (Adams 174). Literary works labelled trauma narratives came under close scrutiny after the official recognition of the condition known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and sociology in the 1980s. It is now held that PTSD may result from both human and natural catastrophes including war, genocide, natural disasters, rape, and child abuse (Caruth, “Trauma and Experience” 3).

Yet, some of the most influential cultural theories define trauma in opposition to narrative (Luckhurst 80). “The term ‘trauma fiction’ represents a paradox or contradiction”, Whitehead points out, “if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction” (*Trauma Fiction* 3). Jean-François Lyotard also argues that conventional narrative organization precludes the representation of trauma, as it cannot be integrated into diachronic time (16–17). Caruth explicates this representational impasse as follows: “trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness of horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge [...] and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time. Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become [...] a ‘narrative memory’” (Caruth, “Recapturing the Past” 153). This problematic has triggered research into a special trauma aesthetic based on prototypical texts, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*, and D. M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel*. These texts have engendered the idea that “trauma can only be conveyed by the catastrophic rupture of narrative possibility” (Luckhurst 81).

It follows then that if suppressed trauma cannot be assimilated into a narrative, it has to be addressed indirectly. This is primarily achieved through temporal disruption, though other literary devices, such as the mixing of discourses, shifts in focalisation, word plays, repetition, and the incorporation of the supernatural, may also be used to the same effect (88). These characteristics of trauma narratives coincide with the devices magical realism uses to “express the real that is beyond language”, “to disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality and history”, and to “create a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (Bowers 77). Notably, the principal commonality between the two literary modes is the concept of “third time” as coined and



defined by Brenda Cooper. By “third time” we mean neither linear historical time nor circular mythical time, but a blend of different temporal forms (33). There are strong parallels between this conception and the non-sequentiality of trauma narrative/memory, which is “not subject to the usual narrative or verbal mechanisms of recall but is instead organised as bodily sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (Whitehead, *Memory* 115).

That memory is bound to both trauma narratives and magical realism hardly bears mention. Thus, for example, Rzepa argues that magical realism thematises “memory-related concerns, exploring in particular the suppressed or erased aspects of memory” (22). Memory in general and traumatic memory in particular are often engaged in an attempt to reclaim pre-colonial history and to critically investigate the validity of dominant assumptions about gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. “It is also often posed as a tool allowing for the reestablishment of severed community links, a renewal of community, giving a possibility of both retribution and reconciliation; as well as for examining the formation and deployment of the narrative of the nation and revising it” (23). Postcolonial memory can be framed as collective or cultural memory, by which I mean “memory that is concerned not with individual experience, but with practices of remembrance that are defined and shaped by the surrounding culture” (Whitehead, *Memory* 124). Collective memories are shared renderings of the past held in the memory of a community that bind it together and whereby the burdens of the shared past are transmitted. In this way individuals in a community or group inherit the collective memories of their parents and grandparents—a notion that Mariane Hirsch describes as “postmemory” in the context of the Holocaust and which defines the second generation’s experience of the traumatic events of their parents’ past (Adams 50), but which can also be extended to the postcolonial/Aboriginal situations.

*Monkey Beach* is an account of the impact of colonisation on the Haisla people in Canada and of the traumatic history which continues to haunt this Aboriginal community. Generically, the novel is a hybrid between a bildungsroman and a mystery novel. The reader bears witness to the coming-of-age experiences of Lisa and the physical and spiritual journey on which she embarks whilst searching for her brother, who is lost at sea. The novel spans only a few days, from Lisa receiving the news about her brother’s accident at sea to her visiting the site of the accident where she is to meet with her parents. However, in a series of flashbacks all of Lisa’s past is uncovered before the



reader. The narrative thus primarily takes shape from the memories of the protagonist, triggered by personal trauma. Lisa tells her story—and consequently the story of the Haisla community—in the first person. The reader is therefore privy only to the perspective of the narrator. Over the course of the novel, however, the reader is also invited to engage in the narrative process more actively when a shift from the first-person to the second-person account occurs, and the reader is directly addressed. This narrative device appeals to the reader to pay closer attention to the traumatic colonial experience of the Haisla people (and Aboriginal peoples in general), which is too often suppressed or “forgotten” in the official historical records.

The personal trauma of the protagonist reveals a much larger issue—the legacy of the residential school system<sup>[3]</sup> and how it continues to affect the Haisla community. Jodey Castricano notes that

*For the Haisla, the ‘unspeakable’ consists of the real and material effects of the forced relocation of Aboriginal people by the government of Canada pursuant to the Indian Act; the loss of traditional land and water rights; the pollution of the environment [...], and, perhaps even more insidiously, the psychological and emotional damage to Aboriginal children in residential schools where the suppression of language and culture and the outlawing of First Nations spiritual practices all manifest in emotional and spiritual trauma [...]. (802)*

Every time something tragic is about to transpire, Lisa is visited by the “little man”,<sup>[4]</sup> an apparition which acts as a harbinger of death and constitutes the quintessential “irreducible element” in the novel: “Now that I think back, the pattern of the little man’s visits seems unwelcomely obvious, but at the time, his arrivals and departures had no meaning. As I grew older, he became a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that faded in the morning” (27). While her mother perceives Lisa’s premonitions as a sign that she “need[s] Prozac” (3), her grandmother knows them for what they truly are—an ability transmitted down the female line in her family. (Ma-ma-oo mentions that Lisa’s mother too once possessed this ability, though she has seemingly ignored or suppressed it.)

But since “[a]ll the people knew the old ways are gone” (154), Lisa cannot fully understand her “gift” of foresight and is often frustrated with the visitations she receives. With great power comes great



responsibility, thus Lisa feels that she is partially to blame for the deaths of her loved ones for not having acted on her encounters with the tree spirit: "I have these dreams. This man comes. He's a little man. Bad things happen. After he comes. I saw him. Before Uncle Mick died. He came to me. I didn't listen. I should have gone. To check the net. I should have been there. I could have stopped. It. I. Wasn't. There" (225). Let us consider this passage in the context of traumatic memory: not only can the personal trauma be perceived on the semantic level, it is manifest in the fragmentation of the syntactical units, which indicates the disruption of the narrative sequence.

After she is raped at a party, she hears voices that promise revenge and beckon her to "[b]ring us meat [...] And we'll hurt him" (262). She decides to ignore them and attributes the voices to her overactive imagination. The trauma of rape and the tragic death of Ma-ma-oo, her last truly native guide, prompt Lisa to sever all ties with her family and community. She detests her gift, or curse rather, and feels extreme guilt for not succeeding in saving her grandmother: "I remembered that I could have saved her. If I had listened to my gift instead of ignoring it, I could have saved her" (294). She leaves for Vancouver where she becomes ensnared in a vicious circle of alcohol, drugs, and the false feeling of belonging with people who are only interested in her money and the drinks it can buy: "For the first time in my life, I felt like I was cool, if only because I bought the booze" (296). It is the visit of her cousin Tab's ghost that finally makes Lisa overcome her despair and denial; Lisa resolves to heed the spirits' guidance and to return home. That is why, upon hearing the news of her brother's accident, she takes action and goes to Monkey Beach in search of answers: "On the night Jimmy disappeared, I dreamed he was at Monkey Beach" (137).

Lisa's quest for answers about her brother Jimmy is in turn the first time she actively embraces the spiritual world and her Haisla heritage. At Monkey Beach, she offers the ghosts her blood in return for the truth about Jimmy. No longer a passive conduit for the spirits, Lisa confronts them and demands that she be given the answers she so desperately seeks. A vision reveals that Jimmy sank the ship and killed his boss Josh. Returning to her boat, she is accidentally knocked down and pushed underwater. For a period of time she enters the land of the dead, where she is reunited with Ma-ma-oo, Mick, and Jimmy. Despite wishing to remain with the ghosts of her family, Ma-ma-oo convinces her that it is not her time yet and that she must return. She also offers advice: "You have a dangerous gift [...] Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you" (371). This is where Lisa



accepts her Haisla heritage, which can be seen in her innately understanding the Haisla language: “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” (374)—something she is unable to do at the outset of the novel. Jennifer Andrews maintains that “Lisamarie finds peace with both past and present, recognising the need for her continued survival despite her desire to join the ghosts of family members. She also acknowledges her own powers to hear and see what is beyond the scope of most people” (20). Meeting her beloved family members, Lisa confronts her traumatic memories, finds consolation, and forgives herself. As Rzepa observes, Eden Robinson:

*[...] focuses on the process of incomplete re-membering of cultural traces of lost Native histories and mythologies buried in the ancestral landscape [...]. They are no longer ‘transparent’ in the sense of being comfortable ‘home’ immediately accessible through a coherent cultural and belief system. Rather, they have to be re-membered and re-experienced, and combine the mysterious and often terrifying unfamiliar with a vague and haunting sense of familiarity. (91)*

As the above occurrences suggest, the novel explores trauma through the lens of magical realism, whereby the “irreducible element”, here bound up with the traditional practices of the Haisla people, is used to say that which would otherwise be unsayable. The mysterious and the mystical offer, in Kramer-Hamstra’s words, a “counternarrative” to colonialism and to the violence it wreaked (111). Adams reiterates the idea that magical realism facilitates the rendering of traumatic events while “simultaneously signifying their lack of assimilability to realist narrative” (174). The “irreducible element” in the novel does not originate in the residential school trauma, but is rather based in the Haisla culture and heritage, and can as such be read as a benevolent and guiding force.

Lisa ultimately discovers the reason for Jimmy killing Josh. When Jimmy departs to work on a ship with Josh, Lisa wishes to comfort Jimmy’s girlfriend Karaoke by showing her the engagement ring her brother bought. In his room she makes a haunting discovery:

*In the pocket of Jimmy’s brown leather jacket, I found an old photograph and a folded-up card. The picture was black-and-white. Josh’s head was pasted over a priest’s head and Karaoke’s was pasted*



*over a little boy's. I turned it over: Dear Joshua, it read. I remember every day we spent together. How are you? I miss you terribly. Please write. Your friend in Christ, Archibald. [...] The folded-up note card was a birth announcement. On the front, a stork carried a baby across a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. It's a boy! was on the bottom of the card. Inside, in neat, careful handwriting it said, 'Dear, dear Joshua. It was yours so I killed it.' (Robinson 365)*

The events that set in motion the rest of the narrative are thus revealed: residential school abuse begot yet more abuse. Even prior to this discovery, the traumatic past of the residential school experience enters the narrative, for example, when Mick loses his nerves as Aunt Edith says grace: "Crazy? I'm crazy? You look at your precious church. You look at what they did. You never went to residential school. You can't tell me what I fucking went through and what I didn't" (109). Such episodes, however, are largely ignored by Lisa's family. Trauma returns to haunt the community, triggering a cycle of violence and causing the severing of family and community ties, as well as the inability of former students to function in a normal domestic setting.

The novel engages the legacy of residential schools through three characters. Josh, as seen in the above passage, perpetuates the sexual violence to which he was subjected by a priest at school; Lisa's aunt Trudy succumbs to alcoholism; and uncle Mick abandons his family to become an activist (though he seemingly overcomes his trauma and returns to his family). An examination of the role of Canada's residential school system established that the "Indian Residential School System set in motion a cycle of trauma, with some survivors reporting subsequent abuse, suicide, and other related behaviours" (Elias et al. 1560). The effects of trauma are passed intergenerationally, as Kramer-Hamstra notes: "Returning home, Josh brought back his abuse to the individuals of the young generation in the Haisla community, repeating what had been done to him" (114). This ultimately leads Jimmy to murder Josh, after which he himself drowns.

Though trauma cannot easily be expressed or symbolised, it penetrates the narrative flow by way of minute clues, for instance, when Lisa and her friends are contacting the dead with the Ouija board<sup>[5]</sup> and the pointer spells "J-o-s-h [and then] B-e-d" (Robinson 231) or after her friend Pooch's suicide, "'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.'" (319). Moreover, Adelaine Jones or Karaoke as she is called



displays violent behaviour on several occasions, which may have resulted from abuse: "Pooch, who was her cousin, told me she'd got the nickname Karaoke last year after she hijacked the machine at the bar and his older brother had to stop her from killing the bouncer who tried to throw her out" (280).

As was already mentioned, the harmful legacy of colonialism and the residential school also manifested in the disruption of family relations, in particular "the severing of the mother-child dyad [perceived as] a form of state violence that has wide-ranging repercussions requiring collective memorialisation" (Kulperger 225). This can be seen in the relationship between Ma-ma-oo and her daughter Trudy (Tab's mother), though the rest of the family turn a blind eye to it: "It occurred to me then that if Dad didn't talk much to Ma-ma-oo, Aunt Trudy didn't talk to her at all. I wondered if it was for the same reason" (Robinson 59). Lisa learns why this is so from her cousin Tab: "Ba-ba-oo was an asshole. He beat Gran. Instead of sending him away, she sent Mick and Mom [Trudy] to residential school" (59). When she confronts Ma-ma-oo about why Trudy is mad at her, Ma-ma-oo replies: "Old-people things. You'll learn about them, but not now" (196). Thus Shelley Kulperger writes about the novel's consideration of "lost or alienated motherhood" (233), which results from domestic and state violence, or rather intertwinement of the two, as domestic violence is "bound up in the exercise of power, and normalised through histories of domination and supported by an entire structure and system" (235). The text suggests that Ma-ma-oo is trying to make up for the lost motherhood by transmitting to her granddaughter traditional Haisla knowledge—"language, recipes, customs, understanding of coastal ecology, and forgotten figures and mythologies" (236).

A similar breakdown in parenting can be observed in the relationship between Trudy and her daughter Tab. In the grip of alcohol, Trudy often maltreats Tab, leaving her to her own devices. Removed from a family environment and placed in a state and Church administered institution, individuals came out not only emotionally and psychologically scathed, but also unable to reintegrate into a "normal" family environment. Tab confesses to Lisa that she wishes she had a mother like hers and says: "You're lucky. You're really lucky that your dad was too young to go to rez school. [...] Just Mick and my mum went and it fucked them up" (Robinson 254). Trudy's sister Kate similarly notes that Trudy "thinks Mother's dirt, while she goes out and parties and treats Tab worse than what she blames Mother for" (285).



The temporal structure of *Monkey Beach* greatly contributes to a notion of entrapment in time as a result of the unresolved traumatic past that pervades the Haisla community. Neither linear nor circular, the time dimension as it manifests in the novel is best described by Brenda Cooper's conception of "third time" (33). Adams adds that "the nonsequentiality of traumatic time is thus allied to challenge against linear historicity and the continuity and comparability of events this perspective entails" (133). The narrative deploys subtle hints in the form of symbols, such as crows or seals, which foreshadow future tragedy. Thus, intimations of forthcoming misfortune are afforded the reader in much the same way Lisa is visited by the little man. Short meditative descriptions with images of drowning and death also work towards foreboding death: "The urchin's shell parachutes to the ocean bottom, landing in the dark, drifting hair of a corpse" (Robinson 131). Repetitions contribute to the fragmentation of linear time and the notion of the interconnectedness of the events, and give way to the idea of history repeating itself, of violence perpetuating itself. The phrase "In the distance, I hear the sound of a speedboat", for instance, occurs three times in the novel: at the beginning when Lisa receives news about Jimmy's accident (2); at the discovery of Mick's corpse (135); and at the end, when Lisa is waiting on the beach (374). As this phrase always signals a turning point, it strikes the reader all the more profoundly when it is partially transformed to "In the distance, the sound of a seiner" (336), effectively foreshadowing pivotal events which take place aboard the seiner on which Jimmy works.

Jimmy's death is only the latest in the string of misery and misfortune that the Haisla people suffer. The novel also seems to suggest, however, that though Lisa learns the harrowing past of her people, her maturation ultimately signals a return of the Haisla heritage and traditional ways. Acknowledging that there exist elements that defy rationalisation, she notes: "I felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (315–316).

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<sup>[1]</sup> I am by no means the first to have read *Monkey Beach* as an example of magical realism. As Michele Lacombe notes: "Robinson's novel, thickly populated as it is with stories of warriors, activists, shamans, spirit beings, monsters, animals, plant beings, artifacts, landscapes, languages, rocks, rivers, architecture, streets, recipes, secrets, and 'ordinary' folk, while not as explicit as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), lends itself to a magic realist reading" (268).

<sup>[2]</sup> Michele Lacombe also observes that *Monkey Beach* embraces different and disparate approaches: ones derived from the Western literary theory, namely, ethnographic, magical realist, or gothic readings; and ones focussed on "Nation-specific uses of creation stories on cultural revitalization, and on urban 'post-indian' perspectives" (253).

<sup>[3]</sup> Historical context: From the end of the 1800s to the 1980s, the Canadian government ran a network of residential schools for Aboriginal children, which were administered by various church organisations (Llewellyn 255). In addition to physical, sexual and emotional abuse, unhealthy living conditions, and malnutrition, which resulted in a high mortality rate, the destructive effect sprung from separating children from their parents, causing a loss of culture, spirituality, identity, and language (258).

<sup>[4]</sup> The little man is a tree spirit that is connected with the cedar tree.

<sup>[5]</sup> A board printed with letters of alphabet, used to contact the dead and spiritual forces.