

## **IMPACT OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ON CANADIAN ABORIGINALS DEPICTED IN THE WORKS OF LEE MARACLE**

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The Canadian Aboriginal residential school experience is reflected in Aboriginal fiction, and to large extent the writing of these stories has helped Aboriginal people to process the individual and collective trauma produced by this institution. By analyzing the legacy of the residential school system in Canada through the fiction produced by both survivors and later generations.

There is very important role of stories in Native cultures ranges from teaching to punishment, to healing and spiritual needs, to simply for pleasure or celebration. Stories have often been used to make sense of the nonsensical experiences of life, such as creation myths and explaining the concept of birth to children. In the modern context, survivors and their relatives are using stories to make sense of the devastating residential school experience, an institution that was both traumatic and illogical to its students and later generations. In fictional works of Lee Maracle, an Aboriginal writer, varying in subject matter, but the one common thread throughout the novels is the reference to residential schools.

Though residential schools are closed, but their memory and impact are not, nor will they soon be forgotten. In this paper, by analyzing Lee Maracle's, *Ravensong in particular, Daughters are forever, Sundogs, and I Am Women* with passing references, I have tried to access that, the residential school experience in differing formats and levels, I have tried to make conclusions, on the impacts of the schools on both direct survivors and later generations, and that the greater reason and purpose behind the creation of these stories can be found.

At least 100,000 Inuit, First Nations, and Métis children from their homes, and their subsequent placement into government-funded, Church-run boarding schools constitutes one of the darkest incidents in both Aboriginal and Canadian histories. In the mid-twentieth century, while the Canadian government pushed along plans to shut down all residential schools, the federal government via the Department of Indian Affairs continued to shroud the truth of the residential schools and their impact.

Within the last two decades, the tragic history of the residential schools has come to light. Though the system has had an immense impact on the Canadian Aboriginal community, it was not their first taste of oppression or assimilation, nor would it be the last. Paternalistic educational measures have been imposed on Aboriginals since the first Europeans arrived on the rocky shores of Turtle Island. A brief sketch of European and Aboriginal interaction in Canada from the time of contact will be useful to understand the origin and the Impact of Residential school.

According to Olive Dickason, at the time when the first Europeans stood on Canadian New Foundland around the year 1000, Indigenous population estimates are placed between 500,000 and two million, with a large percentage concentrated along the Northwest coast. In the seventeenth century some early European exploration missions kidnapped Native people, bringing them back to Europe as proof of reaching Canada and with the hopes that they could be educated to act as an interpreter. This practice was rarely successful, as most captives did not survive the trip, but it was an early indication of the uneven power relationship between the two groups. Diseases brought by European explorers and later settlers also had a devastating affect on the Aboriginal population. Europeans began settling on the island in the seventeenth century to fish for cod, the combination of resource competition, violent interactions, and most importantly the spread of tuberculosis, quickly wiped out the population, with the last member dying in 1829 (*Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 63).

Canada held abundant reserves of fish and fur, which Europeans viewed as valuable resources. As the fur trade expanded throughout the seventeenth century, there was increased trade between the Europeans, who wanted furs and other products, and the Natives, who wanted metals, guns, and other goods. Along with increased European involvement and settlement came missionaries, who viewed the large population of Aboriginal “heathens” as ripe for conversion.

At assimilation education was enacted in 1620 by the Recollects, a French, Roman Catholic missionary order. The program selected Native children, were sent to France for education and then returned to Canada. It was unsuccessful, program and was discontinued, but the concept of assimilation education via day schools and boarding schools was continued on a small scale in New France by Protestant, Jesuit, Catholic and Anglican orders over the next two hundred years. The schools faced strong resistance from the Aboriginal community, especially since the foreign French education and discipline system had negative results including poor health and death

The conflict broke out between Britain and France in the late seventeenth century, British and French missions became embroiled in the struggle for control of Canadian territory. Missionary groups were in fierce competition as evidenced by the ‘battle for souls’ by the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries In the eighteenth century the connection between the state and the churches further increased, as both counties relied on the missions for support during the Seven Years War. As French forces weakened, Roman Catholic missions were slowly destroyed including Beauseiour in 1755, Louisburg in 1758, Quebec in 1759, and Montreal in 1760. Though the French lost the war and the majority of their land in what would be Canada, their defeat did not mean the end of French missionaries in Canada.

In 1763, Britain put little emphasis on the assimilation of Aboriginals in their newly acquired territory. In the beginning in the 1800s, the British adopt the French practice of using missionaries as agents of the state, and some churches began to open up day schools at their facilities. The idea of a residential school system for was to remove them from their traditional lifestyle and place them in boarding schools. There they learned basic mathematics, reading, writing, and practical agricultural skills, and transforming them into future Canadian settlers.

The British colonial administration in the 1830s was divided over two streams of thought regarding Aboriginals: assimilation into British society or the removal of the Indigenous people away from the white community. The colonial government chose the former path and focused on the goal of “civilizing the savage.”

The history books taught in schools always told the student(both Indians and Whites)

that the ancestors of the natives were ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians’. This version of history glorified the whites as champions of progress, agents of civilization of the ‘barbarians’ responsible for reforming the world. White historians believed that imperialism changed barbarianism into civilization. Eurocentric history is a political interpretation of the world based on Christianity as the divine order for the betterment of the world and western Europe’s blind belief in its superiority. These historians claimed that Indians, Metis and Inuit have no history as almost nothing is written about them before the European conquest (Howard Adams)

The churches, meanwhile, including Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Church denominations, would provide teachers and control the operations of the schools. The school system that removed children from the home, and away from the influence of their family and community, as the quickest route for assimilation of Native populations. The Churches had the additional goal of instructing Aboriginal students in Christian morality. The Church stood behind the residential schools for the first half of the twentieth century, there were several calls for reforms during this period, though most were ignored. Doctors, school inspectors, and government officials cited overcrowding, poor building conditions, poor sanitation and ventilation, inadequate food, diseases, specifically tuberculosis, and inadequate health services as major factors behind the high numbers of deaths in the schools. The Church also maintained residential school attendance by increasingly using the schools as “social welfare institutions” that took in Aboriginal children from alcoholic, abusive, or neglected homes. The Church often staffed schools with individuals who lacked adequate experience or training, and teaching positions were hard to fill due to the low salaries.

There were three major factors that created the disastrous experience of the residential schools. The first was the unbridled power held by school officials and staff, which created an institution of total power. The second was the lack of oversight by the Canadian Government, and their failure to take necessary action against schools that did not meet standards. Third, and possibly most important, was the inherent racism that existed at this time towards the Native population of Canada. The majority of teachers, staff, government officials, and even Canadian citizens did not view Aboriginal people as equals. The belief that Native people should be given some type of paternalistic education for their own good, so that they could become ‘civilized’, violence was used in this process, as the aim behind the entire education system was to “kill the Indian in the child.” says Milloy, (*National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*, 43) These racist attitudes, combined with the lack of structure, created a hundred-year long experience for the Aboriginal Community, which can only be described as a tragic experience for aboriginal community.

The experience of each student who attended a residential school was unique. There are accounts of Aboriginal people who have said that their memories from the schools were generally positive. But in the 1980s, accounts of abuse and neglect began to emerge that portrayed negative picture of the schools, beyond the recognized health problems. It was not that all children suffered abuse, but students suffered from the emotional stress of being removed from their families, communities, and cultures. The children who were sent away from their homes upset the entire framework of traditional Aboriginal society, where the youth learned spiritual and practical knowledge from the oral and hands-on teaching of elders in the community.

This form of cultural dislocation would had long-lasting negative effects, including loss of language, culture, and familial bonds, for survivors of the residential schools these losses

were less invasive than the immediate personal loss experienced as a direct result of mental, physical, and sexual abuse. The intended goal of the schools was to be a ‘home-like’ environment, the concept behind the assimilation and civilization of the Aboriginal children was inherently violent. The use of corporal punishment only in extreme cases, the lack of supervision led to the rampant use of physical violence, verbal assault, racist insults, and humiliation. These forcible discipline tactics were viewed as necessary means to create a standard of control, and to remove the “savage” from the child, thus creating an obedient pupil.

Returning home, the abuse, oppression, and loss suffered led many school survivors to turn to alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism for both their detachment from their community, as well as their memories of abuse. Former students often of fiction has also played an important role in healing for members of the Aboriginal community. Additionally, current fiction dealing with residential schools tends to focus on the modern day, thereby refusing to place the experience solely in the past, and bringing the tragedy into a modern context with ongoing effects.

In *Ravensong* by Lee Maracle tells the story of seventeen-year-old Stacey, who is conflicted between the traditional ways of family and village, and the White society she encounters going to public school across the bridge. Stacey believes the solution is to go to university, so she can return and teach the village children. According to Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey set in the Pacific Northwest in the 1950s, the novel chronicles the history of the ‘flu’ epidemic and its effects on the village, while the mythological Raven character in the story warns Stacey that her people might be on the brink of disaster again exhibited one or more symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder including: depression, panic attacks, insomnia, uncontrollable anger, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual inadequacy or addiction, the inability to form intimate relationships, and eating disorders. (*Stolen From Our Embrace; The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of the Aboriginal Communities*, 63). Aboriginal communities life went on as former residential school students returned home and began to form their own families. The second generation would be liberated from the physical confinement of residential schools, they would not be free of its legacy.

Until the late 1980s, the majority of published information on residential schools came from non-Aboriginal sources, including historians, the media, and Canadian governmental records. At the end of the decade, Aboriginal residential schools survivors slowly began to tell their own stories, both about their experiences in the residential schools, and the subsequent effects on their families, their communities, and themselves. The following nine works represent the outpouring of Aboriginal fiction that emerged beginning in 1992, which describe the residential school experience and the collective trauma produced by the system.

In addition to fiction, the residential school experience has also been expressed through autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries written by former students. The focus in this paper is on fiction for several reasons. Fiction offers an alternative and valuable insight, and should be considered no less useless than non-fiction sources, as it can provide the emotional and personal side of a history.

The loss of name is also alluded to in two of the second generation accounts.

In *Ravensong*, Stacey realizes at the end of the story that she does not know her mother’s real name. Her mother explains, “‘Momma is my name .... It was the first word your Gramma learned. She thought it was a name. Imagine having Momma for a name.’ Both broke into hysterics. ‘If I’d stayed in school, the nuns would have changed it’” (195).

By re-naming the Aboriginal children, the residential schools were removing not only the

child's given name, but also their culture and power. The underlying racism and Christian superiority that motivated the process of renaming is also evident. For many, the change in name would be permanent; and a loss of one's identity as Native person would accompany the loss of one's name. The loss of one's name was a devastating personal experience, the loss of language that occurred in the residential schools would have long-term and multi-generational effects. Physical violence in residential schools played a large role in maintaining total control of the students. The process of assimilation and re-socialization is inherently violent, and the often-untrained teachers were instructed to use physical discipline to maintain obedience. Some administrators even argued that physical discipline was necessary in order to reverse the "permissive home-life" of Native families.

In the schools themselves, children were generally forbidden to speak their native language, and punishments were harsh for those who continued to speak in their Native tongue. The schools believed that prohibiting Aboriginal language would force the student to learn English more quickly. Yet the fear associated with language drove many children into silence. The initial loss of language, as well as its effects, is evidenced in the following example:

Colonialism, holding the native in chains and emptying all from and content from their conscious thinking. The colonizer even turns to the past of the oppressed people distorts and disfigures it. As a result, the native is presented with a past which is extremely undesirable and he therefore wants to disown it. The Metis author Howard Adams, in *A Tortured People: the politics of colonization* remembers what happened in the school. "I was taught that we were retarded. I believed that I was dumb, in comparison to white students; and that I was low class, crude and dirty.... Hostility and violence emerged with selfhatred" (97).

The school administration stopped students from speaking native languages, specifically during their free time. As native students begins to speak in Cree, they were stopped, from doing so, "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. Last month, the prize had been a Indian war bonnet", say, Jeremiah in Highway (63). The residential schools preyed on the children's innocence and created a contest that would slowly strip the children of their language. Additionally this tactic further complicated the social structure of the schools by pitting the students against each other.

The generational loss of Native language is clearly evidenced in *Sundogs*. LaRocque says, "Colonisation works itself out in unpredictable ways. The fact is that English is the new Native language, literally and politically. English is the common language of Aboriginal people. It is English that is serving to decolonize and to unite Aboriginal people's" ("Preface" or "Here Are Our Voices- Who Will Hear?" *Writing The Circle : Native Women of Western Canada*, xxvi).

She fathers states:-

This is 1990...I was forced to learn English. In due time, I have 'appropriated' this language without abandoning my Cree. I have sought to master this language so that it would no longer master me. Colonization works itself out in unpredictable ways. The fact is that English is the new Native language, literally and politically. English is the common language of Aboriginal peoples. It is English that is serving to raise the political consciousness in our community; it is English that is serving to decolonize and unite Aboriginal peoples. Personally I all much poetic justice in this process. (28)

Maracle was forced to join a convent with the whites. Her grandmother inspired her to learn the language of foreigners to combat them and not to loss her own heritage. Her

grandmother said:-

“You are fortunate. How else will we ever master the language and keep our ways unless we can learn among them and still live with our mothers and grandmothers? You are fortunate. How else will be learn to master their ways and still master the ancient art of motherhood unless we are schooled by them and our mothers too? Further, it is not our way to bring misery to others. Better to teach them to treat you as a human being ought to be treated than to come here making gifts of misery to an old woman who has done you no harm. (IAW, 66)

In *Sundogs*, Marianne was not part of generation subjected to residential school still need to perform her own multi-cultural decoding her simultaneous immersion in predominantly non-Native environments and isolation from communities like her sister Lacey’s — “a village in the middle of Vancouver ... full of Natives from all kinds of nations all sorts of occupations, ... but all of them bronze with corn husk and violins in their voices” (164).

The cycle of language loss often had an enormous impact on the community as a whole. In *Ravensong*, the villagers had experienced generations of children being taken away to residential school. This had almost entirely robbed the villagers of their Native fluency. Stacey finds that, “ the only elder still alive among them who had not been to residential school was Ella. The villagers who could wield the language in the fashion of Ella were few and far between” (140). The third generation, parents often did not even know their Native language anymore, and thus could not pass it on to their children. Therefore a direct line can be drawn from a residential school survivor’s long-term loss of Native language to modern Aboriginal children who do not know a word of their own language

The residential school’s attack on students’ Aboriginal ethnicity and culture often left survivors shameful of their Native heritage. By associating Aboriginal society with immorality and backwardness, the Church taught many of its students to be critical of Native culture, and sometimes reject their background entirely. This loss is described in both survivor stories and in second generation accounts.

In *Ravensong*, Stacey describes this loss of freedom in relation to white society. “Someone was always in charge in their world. There was someone constantly watching over your shoulder policing your every move. And while none of the main characters in *Ravensong* abuse substances, Stacey explained the connotation alcohol had in her Native village. “Her own family didn’t like wine. ‘Not our way,’ Dominic has said. The few who did make wine generally drank it until it was gone. Sometimes it made them act crazy but generally the village was dry most of the year (151).

The effect of residential school can be clearly seen in the novel, *Daughters Are Forever*, the residential school student, who possibly suffered abuse, she began to drink heavily as an adult. This factor, combined with her lack of appropriate parenting skills, similarly Marilyn in daughter forever goes into flash back of her own childhood and motherhood (46-50) draw parallels between Marilyn, her mother, and Elsie, all chronically tired Indigenous women unable to care for their children (47-50). Marilyn sees direct links between the abduction and ‘whitewashing’ of Aboriginal children in the residential schools and the apprehension of many of them by mainstream welfare services. Ultimately suicide, became a part of the Aboriginal community, often in conjunction with the depression, and alcohol and drug use, which were the product of residential school experiences. Though it had been almost unheard of before assimilation, the increased occurrence of suicide by Aboriginals, which today is three times higher than White Canadians, presents an argument for linking this action with residential

schools and their long-term effects.

An example of third generation suicide is addressed in *Ravensong*. When a White girl across the river commits suicide, both Stacey and the Native villagers are shocked, and wonder what could have been so bad. Yet in the epilogue of the novel, an adult Stacey explains that the entire story had been told in response to her son's question, "Why did little Jimmy shoot himself?" Her nephew had shot himself" (197). Tragedy had permeated the Native village. Thus, the residual effects of residential school continue and claim another life.

The sexualized childhoods of former students also left many adult survivors without a clear understanding of appropriate sexual behaviors and/or norms. Popular historian Suzanne Fournier explains that adults who suffered sexual abuse as children often come to view themselves merely as sexual beings, which is "a devastating blow to their self-esteem expressed later in their lives through compulsive sexual behavior, promiscuity, sex addiction, prostitution, and an inability to found relationships on love rather than lust." (*Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of the Aboriginal Communities*) The effects that sexual abuse had on survivors were unique to each gender and individual.

Sexual abuse overall had a thoroughly negative effect on all children who were violated. Children were exposed to sexuality, in a variety of forms, at an age that was completely inappropriate. Students were often frightened and could not conceptualize the abuse they were enduring. Sexual violation in turn completely destroyed the ability for children to develop healthy sexual norms as they got older. Additionally, being abused by people in power made children feel like sexual objects. The result of sexual abuse often led to survivors to either equate sexual behavior with sin and shame, leading them to reject their own sexuality, or it made them associate sex with power, thus leading them to be highly sexualized. And without anyone or any method to cope with their abuse, survivors often turned to unhealthy alternatives. These long-term effects will be explored later.

The three types of abuse stated above would have life-long repercussions on the students who attended Residential Schools. Verbal abuse and racism affected children's self-esteem and identity as a Native person. Physical discipline instilled the normalcy of violence and created angry individuals. Finally, many survivors tried to deal with the pain and shame associated with sexual abuse by turning to drugs, alcohol, or in extreme cases taking their own life. Yet, the negative influence of the residential schools did not end when students were finally sent home. Survivors returned to their communities where the losses and abuses that they had suffered were passed on to subsequent generations.

The survivors experienced after residential school were a direct result of the children being separated from their families and communities for up to ten years. The residential school's assimilation process, combined with this prolonged absence, led directly to the loss of Native culture for the Aboriginal students. This loss of culture had a tiered effect. When survivors returned home without traditional knowledge, they felt isolated from their families and communities. In instances where survivors did not relearn their Native language and/or heritage, their losses were then transferred onto their own children. And thus the legacy of the residential school continued.

When the students returned home, after being literally trapped in residential schools for up to a decade, they would be elated to see their family and eager to rejoin their community. Students, especially those who experienced abuse, often felt abandoned and let down by their families and community. With nowhere else to place the blame, survivors often placed fault on

their parents for allowing them to be taken to an environment where such injustices could occur. Tragically, in some cases the residential schools created an estrangement between families at home and the returning students, which could never be repaired.

While this ‘second generation’ would be liberated from the physical confinement of residential schools, they would not be free of its legacy.<sup>254</sup> Many residential school survivors lacked both the proper parenting and discipline skills necessary to raise children successfully. Yet life in Aboriginal communities went on as former residential school students began to form their own families. In some cases, the negative coping behaviors would be passed on from parent to child, thus perpetuating a cycle of anger, violence, and alcohol and drug abuse.

Many times violence was present in these broken homes. As previously mentioned, sometimes this abuse was between spouses and sometimes it was directed at the children. The power and impact of the poem’s words come from the child’s perspective on the adult violence between her parents. The theme of inherent violence in the homes of former residential school students, especially in connection with drinking, overlaps with the examples of domestic violence already cited. The final and most devastating consequence of the lack of parenting skills and sexual norms created by the schools was sexual abuse. Incest is first cited in *Ravensong*, in the case of the character Old Snake, an alcoholic and residential school survivor. His wife, Madeline, and their children, live with his physical abuse for many years without seeking help. Thus when his wife shoots the Snake one day, the village is shocked and alarmed. Soon, Stacey and others find out the truth: “The snake had violated his daughter, his own daughter. Everyone in the room was shocked and disgusted” (162).

Aboriginal people to deal with the experiences and effects of the schools, they must, like their elders, find a way to tell their story, and in doing so reclaim their past. An author’s personal healing experience is often reflected in the characters in the story, thus the books offer a message to the reader.

In *Ravensong* the literal and figurative means of healing the disease plaguing the village is through the sharing of knowledge. This message is representative of the author’s personal belief in the power of education. A member of the Stó:lo Nation, Lee Maracle is of Salish and Cree ancestry. Growing up poor in North Vancouver, she attended public school and was plagued with a feeling of disconnect from her Native heritage. She dropped out of school and worked for years, until political activism inspired her return to her Native culture, and academia. This journey is reflected in the novel. While the story advocates Native people “getting back to their roots,” it also provides a second and more controversial message: taking these Native beliefs and ideas and sharing them with White society.

This message comes through the mythological Raven character in the novel. “Raven could power up the image she needed to end the drought which seemed to plague the people. It was a drought of thought. They had not retreated for sometime to the place of sacred thought” (23). This passage, and the underlying meaning of the novel, represents Maracle’s view that the central project for Aboriginal people in the twenty-first century is “reclaiming ourselves.” She further explains, “I think we have to find a way to live as Aboriginal people and as Canadians, which means dealing with patriarchy and misogyny at the personal level” (Distinguished Visitor in Women’s Studies 2007 Lee Maracle.)

This point is representative of the theme of the novel, the struggle between traditional Native life and the modern White world. This identity crisis had been troubling for Stacey, but towards the end of the story she appears to have found a compromise. Stacey wishes to educate her own people, the youth of the village, in their own setting, thus ending the cycle of



child removal from the village. She explained, “Indian Affairs had a new policy—Indian Day Schools on reserve. She wanted to start her own school, right here in the village” (59) The other villagers were wholly supportive of this plan, and her mother believed it would “alter the course of their history forever.” (58) Still, Stacey would first have to leave her village to go out into White society and share her Aboriginal knowledge with the world. On the day she leaves the village, “Raven brought Gramma’s voice to Stacey’s ears: ‘We will never escape the sickness until we learn how it is we are to live with these people. We will always die until the mystery of their being is altered’” (52) Stacey agrees with these words and decides, “She would go forth, collect the magic words of white town and bring them home”.

The author does not conclude the book with such a fairy tale ending. In the prologue she writes that when Stacey returned to the village, the government wouldn’t allow her to build the school. Thus her dreams and the potential for healing the village are crushed. And so the continued loss of children and community continue in Stacey’s village. This leads up to the revelation that Stacey’s nephew committed suicide, which was the impetus for the story to be told. Stacey explained how her son’s naïve question unraveled the past. “In trying to answer the question with a story she felt the necessity to recapture the lost sense of community that lay wounded in the shape of Jimmy’s suicide. It took all winter for Celia, Stacey, Momma and Rena to recount that summer. Young Jacob sat in silence listening to the women”(197).

The child’s death translates into Maracle’s message of the importance of storytelling as a coping technique. In her own life, Maracle had a deep seeded love for stories. “Maracle wrote her first poem the day she learned to read and knew at the age of 10 that she wanted to recreate myths.”( Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies 2007 Lee Maracle). Throughout the novel, stories were viewed as a means to learn about other people. They also serve as a way for Stacey and her mother to open up to each other. Yet the divide is evident between Stacey’s mother, who is illiterate and uses oral storytelling, and Stacey, who adopts the modern medium of written word. In this example, Maracle respects the beauty of oral tradition but pushes for the education of Native people and the embracing of the modern medium. She explained that in her life, writing has allowed her to “create a new place of belonging by going back to aboriginal stories and re-creating them in a modern, personal context.”

The second valuable aspect of fiction is its teaching capabilities. The previous examples described how many Aboriginal authors advocate learning about one’s heritage as a vital part of the healing process. Fiction offers a medium through which this knowledge can be channeled, and then digested by readers. All of the authors addressed in this paper use fiction as a way to pass along mythology, culture, customs and/or language, respective to their Aboriginal heritage, in an attempt to inform and inspire readers.

In *Ravensong*, the mischievous Raven is a central, though looming character, who keeps a watchful eye over the village. In *Ravensong*, mythological stories are used by elders as teaching tools, such as when Ella tells Stacey the “Story of the Snot Woman” in order to teach the young girl to forgive her mother for lying to her (105). In the novel, mythology is also used explain the occurrence of rain at the time of Stacey’s departure, which ends the symbolic drought in the village. Maracle eloquently personifies the rain. “She came softly at first, a woman weeping, delighted at her ability to shed tears at last for her lost children. She wept steadily throughout the night, gathering strength. She wept long for the lost ones” (190) In the story Stacey also realizes the value of mythology, which she uses to explain the complexity of the written English language to her illiterate mother. “She concocted a story about a family named Alphabet, gave them names and work to do. She even threw in trickster behavior

forthose moments when none of the Alphabets would do the right work” (195). This example shows how mythology and storytelling are not a simply parts of Aboriginal history; they can be applied to a modern world.

## **Conclusion**

Aboriginal history in Canada has been marked by the legacy of the residential school system and its policies of institutionalized racism and attempted assimilation of Aboriginal culture.

In this paper I have tried to analyzes the authors’ creation of Aboriginal identities through the main characters in the novels and demonstrates the obstacles towards achieving healthy communities, individual and identities that stem from residential schooling and its invalidation of Native culture. In her representation of these character, the Lee demonstrate that through there are still steps to be taken towards complete cultural healing, Native cultures continue to thrive and adapt despite systematic attempts to eradicate them. Through her works author enters into a dialogue with other works that seek to redress the belief that Aboriginal culture has been irreversibly damaged by colonial contact and that demonstrate alternative ways of seeing and being in the world.

Through the process of enfolding Cree spiritual elements within their realistic narratives these authors create worlds in which the spiritual is every bit as real as the empirically verifiable facts of reality. These elements shape not only how the narrative worlds are constructed, but also how the character interpret those worlds based on their specific relationships to their Cree cultures. Thus certain aspects of Euro-Canadian culture, such as Catholicism, residential schools. Thought not all the characters survive their residential school, their deaths illustrate problems within their communities, such as a continued adherence to Western-imposed ideological systems like Catholicism, gender roles, or stereotypical construction of Aboriginal identity.

‘Healing’ has taken a variety of forms for survivors of the residential school system and its abuses. Some are ‘western,’ such as therapy and activism while others are ‘traditional’ such as sweat lodges, shamans, and spirituality. A more recent style of healing has taken the form of literature. Aboriginal adults have found empowerment in their newfound ability to let their voices be heard, and through this expression turn their tragedy into art. For authors of survivor stories, this often meant dealing with the losses and abuses one suffered in residential school. At the same time, fiction allowed a level of anonymity, as it readers would not definitively know that everything that happened in the story happened to the author. For authors of second generation accounts, fictional writing often served as a forum to address the current problems of the Aboriginal community, as well as a way to express the traumatic incidents of their own lives.

The emphasis on healing in the selected fiction reveals the common urge of the author to find a resolution for the horrors of the past and the current problems of the Aboriginal community.

These works of fiction aim to be part of this community healing process, by providing readers with an accessible and relatable format to absorb and process the many horrors of the residential schools, while simultaneously transferring Aboriginal knowledge.

Thus stories carry powerful historical truth. Lee Maracle has made significant contributions to history, as well as literature, by creating essential and heartbreaking depictions of the tragic legacy of residential schools. The sad multitude of residential school losses and abuses catalogued in this paper include the loss of home, loss of family, loss of language, loss of traditional spiritual values, loss of hair, loss of name, and the loss of innocence. Long-term losses

experienced by survivors include the loss of customs and native skills, loss of pride of one's heritage, loss of familial connection, loss of power, loss of self esteem, loss of behavioral and/or sexual norms, and the loss of communication and parenting skills. These losses were transferred to following generations, contributing to the current situation of the Aboriginal community in Canada, which is plagued with abnormally high rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, prostitution, domestic abuse, incest, and suicide. The works addressed in this paper provides powerful and emotional accounts that reflect these disheartening statistics of the Aboriginal population.

The horrendous legacy of the Canadian residential school experience as revealed in the selected works of Lee Maracle confirms the simple truth and hard fact of the horrific experience that was the residential school system, These works are essentially "primary sources": produced by her, As she experienced these events and yet found it more palatable to fictionalize the trauma of the schools than to personalize it in a more direct means of expression. Such "fictional" works are valid, and indeed, tremendously valuable historical sources to be used for the study of modern Canadian Aboriginal life.