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**The Effect of Postcolonial Trauma on
Familial Relationships in
Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*
BA thesis**

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the development of intergenerational and intragenerational relationships in Tomson Highway's novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a semi-autobiographical work which follows two Cree brothers, Champion and Ooneemeetoo Okimasis living in Canada, is greatly disrupted by the acculturation and christianization of the indigenous peoples. Previous research on the novel has focused on the brothers' trauma recovery and reconnection to their Cree heritage. Through analyzing the key moments in the novel by using close reading, modern trauma theory and postcolonial trauma theory, this thesis argues that the intergenerational and intragenerational relationships in the novel are greatly affected by the acculturation and christianization experienced by both the brothers and their parents, as the physical and cultural separation of children from their family and community causes long-lasting damage to the emotional and mental connection between generations. The brothers, while close in their childhood, drift apart from one another during their adolescence and adulthood as they interpret and understand the traumatic experiences of their childhood differently, which causes conflict between them. Meanwhile the brothers' relationship with their parents is conflicted due to the physical separation between the family when the brothers attended residential school and which causes Champion and Ooneemeetoo to feel disconnected from their family and Cree community.

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Introduction

Discussions regarding Indigenous History, residential school and surrounding the history of Indigenous peoples has been active in many different circles, particularly following the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, who brought attention to unresolved issues. The report presented the history of Aboriginal peoples and their contact with Western cultures, pointing out the far-reaching negative consequences of contact between the groups and legislation (1996: 104-105, 267, 388, 400). Indigenous authors have an important role to play in unveiling these consequences on a more personal level and one author who has shared much of their personal memories and childhood experiences is Cree playwright, novelist and songwriter/singer Tomson Highway, whose bibliography includes *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a semi-autobiographical novel (McKegney 2012: 22) based on his and his brother's life. The novel centres around the lives of two Cree brothers: Champion and Ooneemeetoo Okimasis from their childhood to adulthood. The novel has been widely studied, with special focus on the depiction of individual trauma and trauma recovery, which is why I will be analyzing the effect of postcolonial trauma on the brothers' relationships with each other as well as their parents.

Colonialism has a long history in Canada - Christopher Columbus sailed to North America in 1492, operating under the Doctrine of Discovery, which stated that Christian rulers have the right and obligation to expand Christendom and granted anyone who discovered new land, that was not under the rule of Christians, the right to claim said land and the people inhabiting it (Johansen and Pritzker 2008: Sandy Grande – 208-209). While the land was being occupied, various religious orders established missions and attempted to convert the indigenous population to Christianity. According to Jean-François Lozier (Johansen and Pritzker 2008: 211), establishing Jesuit ideals among Indigenous Americans

involved “imposing monogamy, restraining independence (imposing French sovereignty), and suppressing a range of traditional practices as superstition”. The Jesuits used methods that had proven effective in other parts of the world, namely cultural integration, to teach the indigenous population Christian ideals and to bypass their animosity and apprehension. The work of Jesuit missions was made more difficult however, by the havoc and death caused by disease among the indigenous population, which caused the death of up to 90% of the indigenous population of the time.

The attempted integration continued and led to the establishment of *The Indian Act* of 1876, intended to integrate all previous policies regarding assimilation, and part of which established an “enfranchisement process”, which allowed individuals to obtain full citizenship and rights at the cost of terminating their Indian status, provided they meet the requirements set out in the *Gradual Civilization Act*. The requirements included the ability to speak, read and write in either English or French and a sufficient education, which would be assessed by commissioners, among whom there would be a missionary (Canada, 1857: 1-2). Especially in the 19th century, there were many amendments made to the act, outlawing various practices, such as the sale of agricultural produce and furs, and various cultural ceremonies, such as the West Coast potlatch and the Sun Dance as well as making residential school attendance mandatory (Johansen and Barry 2008: 538).

According to a report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the residential schools were established because it was thought that children were capable of developing “from the natural condition to that of civilization”, while their parents were thought to be unable to go through such a change (1996: 313). Due to that logic, it was deemed essential to separate the children from their “deleterious home influences” so that they could be re-socialized in the schools and eventually integrated into the non-Aboriginal world (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996: 313). Residential schools in

Canada were most often run by churches in cooperation with the government and as such, according to the report “selfless Christian duty and self-interested statecraft were the foundations of the residential school system” and by teaching the children according to European values and beliefs, “A wedge had to be driven not only physically between parent and child but also culturally and spiritually”. This wedge was created by forbidding the use of any language other than English or French in the schools, celebrating only the festivals of church and state and establishing European values and ideals as the only ones to have meaning (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996: 316). A big opponent to the eventual closing of residential schools was the Catholic church, who argued that separated residential school education had a better rate of acculturation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996: 324).

In Tomson Highway’s novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (henceforth KFQ), the narrative is centred around two indigenous brothers, Champion and Ooneemeetoo (Catholic given names Jeremiah and Gabriel respectively) who grow up in northern Manitoba in Canada with their family and surrounded by an indigenous community until they begin attending a Catholic residential school. The semi-autobiographical novel follows the brothers as they suffer abuse in the residential school at the hands of the priests and as they begin to feel separated from their culture, community and family through various methods of acculturation. As the brothers grow older, they move to Winnipeg, attempting to accept and integrate into the dominant Canadian culture, rejecting their own heritage. The relationships between the brothers as well as between the brothers and their family are eroded deeply by their experiences in the residential school, in the large metropolis of Winnipeg as well as by the various events that take place in their home of Eemanipiteepitat, Manitoba, underlying which is Christianisation and assimilation efforts. These traumatic events and situations can be seen as by-products of the colonial history of

Canada, and much of the progression of their lives can be viewed through the lens of postcolonial trauma.

Previous analyses of KFQ have handled the themes of cultural reconnection (Braith 2022: 104, McCall: 78, Krotz 2009: 183), the role of language, cultural heritage and community in the decolonization efforts (Essen 2012: 111, Scudeler 2016: 108, Belghiti 2009: 3, Krotz 2009: 183, Cunha 2009: 94), the issues that arise due to conflicts between settler and indigenous culture and ideology (Kang 2017: 201, McCall: 65, Krotz 2009: 183, Sarkowsky 2008: 337) and trauma recovery (Buzny 2011: 1, Fagan 2009: 204, Bowers 2017: 50-51), not focusing on how the postcolonial trauma suffered by the brothers affects their interpersonal relationships. The aim of this thesis will be to analyze how the postcolonial trauma caused by acculturation and christianisation that Champion and Ooneemeetoo have suffered, has affected their familial relationships. In order to achieve this goal I will discuss the history of trauma theory, modern understandings of postcolonial narratives, the colonial history of Canada as well as previous research on Tomson Highway's KFQ in the literature review. In the empirical part I will analyze the novel using the theories and methods covered in the literature review chapter, using the close reading of excerpts from the novel concerning the acculturation and christianisation and their aftermath. The main emphasis of this thesis will be on the relationship between the brothers and the relationship between the brothers and their parents.

The Treatment of Trauma in Literature and in the Reception of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

Theories of Trauma

While psychological trauma and trauma responses have been noted and described by physicians since around 1900, the phenomenon began to be more precisely studied during the late 19th and early 20th century (Gold, Figley, Ellis 2017: 1-2). Despite the studies being relatively new in the field of psychology, there are many theories regarding the nature of psychological trauma, what constitutes trauma, what causes trauma as well as what the precise effects of trauma are. Initially defined and researched using the concept of shell shock in World War I and “survivor syndrome” in the Holocaust, wherein the affected persons had been in direct contact with death.

The 5th edition of the “Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders” (2013: 271) by the American Psychiatry Association, states that one of the necessary criteria of a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is “Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence”. This definition is challenged by Ibrahim Aref Kira, who argues that “This limits the events that can cause PTSD to mostly survival traumas”, whilst individuals can experience a broad range of traumatic events beyond survival traumas and for which trauma responses can be equally diverse, being affected by how vulnerable a person is to traumatic experiences as well as environmental and genetic factors. One of the pioneers of trauma theory, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an ongoing phenomenon, defined not only by the overwhelming experience itself but also its often-belated effects. “Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction,” says Caruth, “but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (1996: 58).

The primary definitions of trauma are focused on the effects on the person, as opposed to the severity or specifics of the traumatic event. Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle explains that an excitation is traumatic when it is “powerful enough to break through the protective shield” of the psyche (1990: 23). Ronald Granofsky in his work *The Trauma Novel* states that “the experience of trauma [is] one which defies reason and a sense of order, cripples our ability to maintain a stable sense of reality, challenges our categories of understanding and consequently the model of the world by which we unconsciously operate” (1995: 8), which aligns with the definition provided by Freud in that at the core of trauma is its effect on human behavior and the human psyche, as opposed to the severity of the excitation. Granofsky also reflects on the perspective of Freud by stating that “as a defense, the individual's perception of the world will include a symbolic conception of trauma” and expands on it by stating that “[...]which in turn is projected back onto the world” (1995: 17).

Postcolonial Studies and Postcolonial Trauma

Originally used by historians to describe a “post-independence period” of a state, the term post-colonialism or postcolonialism has since the 1970’s been used to discuss the variety of effects that colonization may have on cultures and societies (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 168). Although many aspects and limits of the term are widely debated, one aspect that is fundamental to the term is grounded in “European colonialist histories and institutional practices, and the responses (resistant or otherwise) to these practices on the part of all colonized peoples” (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 171). According to Craps and Buelens, the classical trauma theory put forward by Caruth is limited in scope, excluding or marginalizing “non-Western traumatic events and histories and [...] theoretical work” which may “assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views” (Craps and Buelens 2008: 2). They also argue that understanding and acknowledging non-Western perspectives, traumatic events and cultural differences is essential in order to fully understand the scope and effect of trauma in different societal contexts (Craps and Buelens 2008: 3).

Psychotherapist Laura S. Brown has emphasised how for certain marginalized groups, trauma can be “a continuing background noise rather than an unusual event” due to “the constant presence and threat of trauma” (Brown 1995: 102-103).

An aspect of colonialism is the acculturation and attempted assimilation of the local populace. The terms acculturation and assimilation however are often used both synonymously and as subsets of the other. Sam and Berry (2006: 27) have argued that acculturation is “a process of cultural and psychological change that results from the continuing contact between people of different cultural backgrounds”. They also explain that current research has been regarding “culturally plural societies”, which are affected by the two contrasting models, the idea of a *melting pot* and the idea of cultural pluralism. According to the melting pot model, various minority groups ought to be “absorbed into the mainstream [society] in such a way that they essentially disappear” (2006: 27-28), which was the perspective taken by the Canadian government and Canadian missionaries during the 20th century. The definition established by Sam and Berry does not state that acculturation must have a negative or stressful effect on any of the peoples involved, however they also establish that the experience is much likelier to be stressful “the greater the cultural differences between the groups of the people” (Sam and Berry 2006: 31). Sam and Berry further argue that stress from acculturation can cause depression due to the “experience of cultural loss” and anxiety due to “uncertainty about how one should live in the new society” (2006: 43), which according to Berry’s research has been the case with Canadian Aboriginal peoples as they have experienced a loss of identity and confusion regarding their “cultural identity” (2006: 284).

Another by-product of colonialism is frequently the establishment and work of missions and missionaries, who were often essential in the spread of the colonial empire (Ashcroft et al 128). Religious beliefs of aboriginal peoples were considered and taught as

“mere superstition” and not acknowledged as legitimate (Ashcroft et al: 188). A person’s religion is an essential part of their personal as well as social identity (Ashcroft et al 2007: 189) and christianization was further established through education from a young age, as re-education was considered an essential aspect of Canadian aboriginal assimilation and the education involved not only the re-education of the children, but also the “eradication of the indigenous spiritual sphere and its replacement by the Christian faith” (Gmerek: 176). The residential schools were tasked with a “civilizing mission”, which meant meticulously managing every aspect of the children’s lives in an attempt to transform the aboriginal child into the modern assimilated Canadian (Gmerek 2023: 174-175, 181), in which religion would play an essential role as one way in which the aboriginal culture could be “overwritten and ignored” (Ashcroft et al 2007: 188).

Trauma in Literature

Caruth (1995: 5) writes that in order to analyze traumatic experiences, which according to Freud cannot be completely assimilated into one’s memories, ought also be described and depicted using the kind of literary language which “defies, even as it claims, our understanding”. Granofsky (1995: 21) develops the idea further, arguing that the “fictional depiction” of experiences that cannot be assimilated should “take the form of a challenge to the categories of understanding which we use to assimilate new experiences”. Granofsky argues that literature is by its nature a good medium to break down the preconceived and established categories which determine a person’s understanding of events (1995: 21-22). When discussing the origins of literary trauma studies, Barnaby analyzes the perspective of writer Katherine Anne Porter, who has explained that from her perspective, artists worked backwards, beginning in the end and ending in the beginning. She thought that an artist needed to understand the “consequences of acts” before writing about the acts themselves (2018: 33). Such retrospective analysis of traumatic events in

particular can be a challenge for an author who must first understand not only the objective details of a situation, but also the subject's subjective experiences and the consequences of their trauma, which may not be clear initially (Barnaby 2018: 32-33). Barnaby summarizes the later work of Freud and states that “a patient could move past neurotic repetition by means of the restoration of memory, a proper mental ordering of the past in temporal relation to the present”, which implies that literature could also fulfill that role for an artist, as in order to create a story, they need to retrospectively analyze their experiences and reactions, which would result in “proper mental ordering of the past”, which Freud conceptualized (Barnaby 2018: 33-34). Visser argues that storytelling itself is often used as a method of integration and connectivity after trauma in indigenous populations, as it “reduces fragmentation, disassociation and other trauma symptoms” (Visser 2018: 128).

Pederson argues that literature is particularly well suited to capturing trauma as an art form which can imagine and therefore envision traumas that individuals or history may not be able to (Pederson 2018: 99). For Pederson, trauma shapes narratives in three main ways: “absence, indirection and repetition”. Absence manifesting as memories that are often interrupted, incomplete or contain gaps (Pederson 2018: 100-101), indirection manifesting as a clear link between the text and the trauma, yet no direct discussion of the traumatic themes implied (Pederson 2018: 103) and repetition manifesting as reliving and retelling traumas, returning to their previous experiences.

Granofsky writes that in regard to literature, one of the more important aspects that drives the plot of a trauma novel forward is the character’s “search for an integrated, stable identity in the modernist sense”. Granofsky defines trauma as “a painful experience which defies assimilation” and therefore one of the main challenges in trauma literature is the character’s attempt at arriving at a stable state of being.

To sum up, trauma has been extensively handled in literature and as an art form it is well suited to depicting the subjective experience. While trauma in literature often describes the characters overcoming the symptoms, the literature can in and of itself be a tool for recovery, as it allows the artist to restore their memory and experiences and deal with the symptoms of their trauma. Trauma shapes narratives in characters in three main ways: the absence of memories, the indirection of the trauma and the repetition of the trauma. The characters in trauma literature are often driven by a desire to find an “integrated and stable identity”.

Elements of Postcolonial Trauma in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

The depiction of trauma in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (KFQ) has been widely analyzed. Olaveson (2017: 66) and Bak (2009: 5) discuss the ways in which the indigenous identity of the characters is undermined throughout the novel and their strategies for coping and recovering. Olaveson (2017: 67) briefly covers the importance of familial relationships in maintaining a sense of identity and developing a healthy personality and the role of music in connecting the narrator of the novel to their childhood home and family. Bak (2009: 7) focuses on modern developments and the role of the urban environment in separating the narrator and his brother from their Cree identity while also mentioning the emotional divide that is created between the brothers and their parents due to the traumatic events they experienced. Essen (2012: 112-113, 115) meanwhile has analyzed how language is used to “suppress and dominate the Cree community” and how Highway “uses language to explore the divide between characters” as the brother’s development in English comes at the cost of their knowledge in Cree, furthering the degree of separation between the brothers and their culture and their community.

Braith and Scudeler agree that the “breakdown of kinship ties” due to traumatic experiences can be seen for both brothers, though not focussing on how the “breakdown”

affected the relationship between the brothers themselves (2022: 14, 2016: 111). Braith, Belghiti, Krotz and Cunha have analyzed the role of storytelling as a way to restore relationships and as a way to recover from past trauma. Braith points out how stories have a dual purpose in Highway's novel, both depicting and reinforcing relationships as the brothers' relationship to their environment is depicted in their pre-birth stories, the brothers' relationship to their father is reinforced as their father relates to his sons through storytelling (2022: 13-14), while Belghiti, Krotz and Cunha discuss how the brothers find inspiration in Cree stories, integrating them into their art, which is beneficial for them working through their trauma, postcolonial and otherwise (2009: 6, 183, 94). Barith (2022: 14) explains that their experiences in the residential school affect the relationships between the brothers themselves as well as the relationship between them and their parents and the relationship between them and their cultural heritage, which further affects their ability to forge new connections.

Trauma recovery has been analyzed multiple times in regard to KFQ. Buzny looks at how Gabriel overcomes his traumatic experiences by embracing his Cree Two-Spirit identity and heritage (2011: 14), decolonizing his experiences through resistance. Fagan (2009: 215-216) argues that trauma recovery looks different in the indigenous cultural space, where direct accusations and statements are frowned upon. She writes that the brothers "struggle [...] with their inability to speak of their abuse" (2009: 216) and process and overcome their trauma through telling tales which help them understand their own lives and experiences, especially with the use of humor (2009: 218). According to Fagan (2019: 209), the ethical principles of Aboriginal people originate from a time of small and close-knit family units and encourage "personal submission to the community's need for harmony", and Fagan states that in the cultural context, silence may be the automatic response when faced with uncomfortable situations.

Special focus has been put on trauma recovery through various means, and particularly using art. Braith argues that telling his life story is a way for Jeremiah to restore relationships, as through blending his own life story with a traditional Cree story, he is able to “make meaning of his own experience while reclaiming a store from a tradition that the residential school tried to suppress.” (2022: 15-16). Belghati analyzes how their father’s storytelling affects Gabriel’s dancing, which Gabriel manages to integrate and adapt a memory into his choreography (2009: 6). While Braith discusses how Jeremiah used theatre in order to connect to his Cree heritage, Scudeler argues that Gabriel uses dance in a similar way, as a “tool of decolonization” (2016: 113). Each of the authors explains how Highway used either writing, dancing or music in order to restore the brothers’ relationships to their culture and community on a grand scale.

To summarize, postcolonial trauma in KFQ has been analyzed extensively, yet there has not been an in-depth analysis of how the postcolonial trauma experienced by the narrator and his brother affected the relationships between themselves as well as between them and their parents. While different papers have written about how the postcolonial trauma caused the narrator to feel disconnected from their Cree identity, there is a gap in the research where familial relationships are concerned, as most of the research thus far has been focused on the loss of identity, how various traumatic events lead to it, and how the brothers recover from their trauma. Understanding how familial relationships are affected by postcolonial trauma is essential because it increases our understanding of the consequences of postcolonial trauma and furthermore, important to the process of overcoming the trauma. Familial relationships in particular are valuable as assimilation and acculturation efforts can often greatly damage relationships with one’s community and culture and close relationships can be difficult to find and maintain. I argue that the effect of postcolonial trauma on familial relationships in KFQ outlasts the brothers’ experiences

in any one location and that by creating a divide between siblings and children and parents, the trauma recovery journey of Ooneemeto and Champion Okimasis is greatly complicated and lengthened.

The Impact of Acculturation and Christianization on Intergenerational and Intragenerational Relationships in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

As previously established, the Okimasis brothers in Highway's novel KFQ are greatly affected by the acculturation and christianization efforts taken by the Christian missionaries and the Canadian government and society. The postcolonial trauma caused by the events and situations in the process of their acculturation and Christianisation further influences their relationship with their parents as well as amongst themselves. I argue that in the case of both kinds of relationships - intergenerational and intragenerational alike, the connection between the characters deteriorates, and that they move apart from one another emotionally, physically, linguistically and culturally. The following analysis focuses on the relationships between the characters as they evolve through time, and it is structured according to the three periods marked by the most radical changes in their lives: the brothers' time in Eemanipiteepitat before the residential school, during the stay at the Birch Lake residential school, and after the residential school, when Ooneemeto and Champion live in Winnipeg and Toronto. I assert that the brothers' relationship following acculturation and christianization is strained because they drift apart emotionally due to their differing responses to their traumatic experiences which is exacerbated by their physical distance from one another and both brothers' feelings of cultural disconnection. In contrast, I assert that the relationship between the brothers and their parents is characterised by an expanding emotional distance between the parents and the brothers, caused by an increasing physical, cultural and linguistic separation, as the brothers unwittingly isolate themselves from their parents due to feelings of cultural and emotional disconnection.

Intergenerational Relationships

Before Residential School

As the missionaries were well established in Eemanipiteepitat before the beginning of the events in the novel, Champion's and Ooneemeetoo's parents, Abraham and Mariesis Okimasis, have experienced the acculturation and christianization efforts of Canada and the local Catholic mission. As argued by Ashcroft et al (2007: 188), Christianity had an essential role to play in the civilising mission, which was used as a tool to "overwrit[e] and ignore" the indigenous culture of the local populace. This is demonstrated by the fact that parents' relationship to Champion and Ooneemeetoo is from their birth defined by the local priests, as both brothers are renamed to Jeremiah and Gabriel respectively during their baptizing (Highway 2005: ch. 5, para. 11; ch. 3, para. 66-67). The renaming created a large cultural divide between the generations, as the names Champion and Ooneemeetoo were given with consideration to their birth stories (Highway 2005: ch.3, para 35, ch. 2 para. 34) and by their parents, while their parents held no influence over their children's baptismal names. By renaming the children, the parents were separated from their children culturally and mentally, as their naming traditions are overshadowed by the dominant Christian culture. This trend of parents' wishes and culture being ignored exhibits the goal of the christianization and acculturation processes, which was to "absorb [...] [minority groups] into the mainstream [society] in such a way that they essentially disappear" as described by Sam and Berry (2006: 27-28).

During Residential School

After only one year away, Champion's parents are concerned about his knowledge of Cree, which he could not speak while in the residential school, as for some time after his return he did not speak Cree at all. When he trips and goes on a spree of Cree, "The family

breathed a collective sigh of relief” (Highway 2005: ch. 6, para. 45), demonstrating the depth of concern Mariesis and Abraham held over their son's separation from their culture and language. Had the year of physical separation had more of an impact, the parents would be incapable of communicating with their son, which was also a concern of Ooneemeetoo, who was worried that he and his brother could no longer play together as they could not understand each other if his brother only spoke English, while he only speaks Cree (Highway 2005: ch. 6, para. 45). Physical, linguistic and cultural separation were all considered essential in order to fully assimilate young indigenous children (Sam and Berry, 2006: 27), which also had the partially intended consequence of emotionally separating the children from their community and family unit, thus degrading intergenerational relationships.

Even after being joined by his brother in the residential school two years later, the isolation from their culture continues despite their closeness as they are forced to speak English ““Now, Jeremiah. You know you’re not to speak Cree once you’re off the plane.” Jeremiah felt a choke breaking against his throat. Small brown suitcases in hand, the Okimasis brothers silently trudged up the grassy slope, past a dying clump of fireweed” (Highway 2005: ch. 7, para. 18). While acculturation and christianization were clear consequences of the residential school system, after years of separation from their parents, Champion’s and Ooneemeetoo’s relationship has become emotionally and mentally distant, as they no longer trust their parents to support them: “Do ‘machipoowamoowin’ mean what Father Lafleur do to the boys at school?” and following an eerie silence, Champion answers “Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur” (Highway 2005: ch. 10, para. 22-24) and avoid telling their parents the whole truth regarding their time in the residential school in order to maintain communal harmony. Champion thus speaks to his brother in English, knowing that their mother will not understand, and therefore

purposefully excluding her from the conversation between him and his brother. As the brothers are isolated from Cree language and culture, they grow closer to one another, yet farther from their family, as can be seen when they return to Eemanipiteepitat and do not trust that their experiences in the residential school would fit into the world view of their parents, who are Catholics, so they choose not to speak of it. As suggested by Craps and Buelens (2008: 3), trauma reactions may differ, depending on cultural contexts, and as Fagan (2019: 209) argues, for indigenous peoples, communal harmony may be prioritised over speaking against moral wrongs. While the brothers hide the full truth, however, they unwittingly distance themselves from their parents by showing distrust.

After Residential School

Due to his musical ambitions, Champion moves to Winnipeg to continue his studies instead of moving back to his family. The young man attempts to make use of his father's lessons on solitude, connecting to his cultural heritage, but finds that the lessons do not apply to a large city like Winnipeg "“Yes, but Father,” he wanted to say from the back seat of a rapidly filling bus, “you never told us how to spend time alone in the midst of half a million people. Here, stars don’t shine at night, trees don’t speak.”” (Highway 2005: ch. 12, para. 18), showing that despite the physical distance between father and son, Champion regardless attempts to connect to his father in any way possible, even if unsuccessfully.

Years later, Ooneemeetoo has returned after residential school and is fishing with his father, who asks him if he will miss the residential school, following which Oonemeetoo grows resentful and angry, realizing that he cannot stay with his family after his father says “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” (Highway 2005: ch. 13, para. 10-12). As Ooneemeetoo has become emotionally distant from his parents, not telling them the

realities of his lives in the school and as his father has missed out on increasingly more events in his son's life, they further drift apart. While Abraham attempts to connect to his son, the acculturation efforts have clearly affected Ooneemeetoo as he feels little attachment to his family, community or culture, implying that the attempted "overwrit[ing]" of indigenous culture (Ashcroft et al 2007: 188) has been successful. The intergenerational relationship is further damaged by Abraham not understanding and being aware of his children's experiences in the residential school, as the forced physical distance caused an emotional divide between father and son.

As Ooneemeetoo is leaving for Winnipeg, because he feels that he does not have a home or community in Eemanipiteepitat and chooses to move in with Champion in Winnipeg, the family member with whom he has spent the most time in the last 9 years, his mother Mariesis attempts to convince him to stay, pleading "'You have been away since you were five. You'll be fifteen next January. For Jeremiah, it's too late. But you, you're our youngest'" (Highway 2005: ch. 13, para. 21). The parents attempt to connect to Champion and Ooneemeetoo, but unsuccessfully, as neither feels they have a space in Eemanipiteepitat. The younger brother feels isolated due to his father's religious views and the fact that he does not feel close enough to his family to trust them to support and understand him after the long period of physical and emotional separation.

The parents attempt through any means necessary to connect to their children, however, without success, as they themselves admit when they receive a recording of Jeremiah performing on the piano: "And we are gonna listen to the tape that Jeremiah sent us one more time because we like his music and because that's as close as we are ever gonna get to spending New Year's Eve with those two boys so long as we live and breathe. [...] But, at least, Jeremiah Okimasis was playing the piano for his parents" (Highway 2005: ch. 17, para. 6). When Champion and Ooneemeetoo return to Eemanipiteepitat, their

parents again try to convince them to return home now that they are done with school, while Champion struggles to explain to them that he wants to attend university, not knowing how to describe ideas and concepts essential to his everyday life, but absolutely foreign to his parents “Jeremiah shivered. How to reply? “But I’m not finished school yet”? Or, “I’m going back to play the music of Chopin like no Eemanapiteepitatite has ever played it”? How, for God’s sake, did one say “concert pianist” in Cree?” (Highway 2005: ch. 27, para. 12). As his love for music, which had once been intimately attached to his family and culture, has become detached from it as he has separated from and become ashamed of his Cree heritage. Language or its loss, is also a tool of oppression (Essen 2012: 112-113) and acculturation, as due to the overtime growing language barrier between generations, the emotional, mental and cultural connection between generations and family members deteriorates.

Simultaneously, their father asks Ooneemeetoo if he has continued to pray. As Ooneemeetoo struggles to respond and lies to his father, he wonders how his father would react if he was aware of his homosexuality, also noting his father’s “impeccable Cree”, presumably noticing his own lack of proficiency from years of disuse (Highway 2005: ch. 27, para. 14). Ooneemeetoo is aware of the fact that he is culturally and emotionally disconnected from his family, not sure how his father would react to his past and present. This cultural disconnect is also noted by their father, who sees his sons drift apart from the ideals and lifestyle of their family: “ The signs had not escaped him: visit by visit, word by word, these sons were splintering from their subarctic roots, their Cree beginnings. Yet he knew that destiny played with lives; the most a parent could do was help steer” (Highway 2005: ch 28, para 6). Abraham attempts to reconnect his sons to Cree culture when on his deathbed, while his sons attempt to tell him about their lives in the residential school, Abraham instead tells them the story of the son of Ayash, about the rebirth of the evil

world (Highway 2005: ch. 35 para. 30). Their father's tale surprises both brothers, who had known him as a devout Catholic and which marks Champions return to the Cree community.

The conclusion to the conflict between the brothers and their mother comes in the final chapter of the novel, as Ooneemeetoo is dying and Ooneemeetoo stands up to their mother, who wants Ooneemeetoo to go through Catholic funeral rites by refusing entry for the Catholic priest during his brother's final moments: "Jeremiah yanked the door, reached under the fire chief's armpit, shoved the midget priest away, pulled Mariesis inside, and slammed the door a third time" (Highway 2005: ch. 49, para. 28). While their mother was throughout the novel more skeptical regarding Catholicism and the rules imposed by governing systems, she becomes more susceptible during Abraham's death, and especially insistent on Catholic rites during the death of Ooneemeetoo. As Champion stands up to their mother, putting his brother's wishes above their mother's, he is able to reject Christian influence.

To summarize, intergenerational relationships in KFQ are characterized by increasing emotional and cultural distancing, as Ooneemeetoo and Champion are suffering from traumatic acculturation and assimilation events and hide the fact from their parents. While the parents' attempt to maintain and improve the relationship between them, they are unsuccessful, because they do not know or understand their children's experiences.

Intragenerational Relationships

In his novel KFQ, Tomson Highway describes the Okimasis brothers' lives as they move from and between their home in Eemanipiteepitat in northern Manitoba, a residential school and beyond. From their early childhood, Champion has seen and prided himself as his brother's protector, yet he is unable to protect him from the acculturation and

christianization traumatic events they both suffer from in the residential school. While they grow close due to their time in the residential school and the shared trials there, their responses to the experiences is what eventually forces them apart, as Champion represses his trauma and rejects their heritage, while Ooneemeetoo becomes angry at having gone through the traumatic events and falls back on their heritage. As neither understands the other's thought process, the brothers' constant conflicts cause them to drift apart emotionally, mentally and even culturally.

Before Residential School

In their youth the brothers grew close and the dynamic of their relationship was established when Champion saved his younger brother's life during a large caribou stampede, after which the older brother became more protective of their sibling (Highway 2005: ch. 4, para. 36-41). As Champion internalizes a need to take care of his brother, Ooneemeetoo comes to trust in his brother in return, as is shown when he explains to his parents that "Champion would swim back and be home by sunset" (Highway 2005: ch. 4, para. 56) after Champion left for his first year at the residential school. The brothers' close relationship is diminished due to the physical distance between them after Champion begins attending residential school and as the younger brother worries about how they will communicate with the language barrier (Highway 2005: ch. 6, para. 45).

During Residential School

Champion continues to feel responsible for his younger brother, as he on multiple occasions tries to comfort his brother, ignoring the rules prohibiting such a thing. His brother is not adjusting well to life at the residential school as can be seen when he is upset during the night, "Jeremiah barely remembered, earlier that night, shuffling drowsily over to his brother's bed, to see if the sniffing he had heard was Gabriel's, which it was. Jeremiah had only meant to hold him until he fell asleep" (Highway 2005: ch. 7, para. 36).

In the process of Christianisation, the residential school organizes Christianity themed plays for the children to act out, and as the residential school children are practicing for a play, Champion is part of a group of kids that strip Ooneemeetoo and leave him “nailed” to a cross (Highway 2005 : ch. 9, para. 15-19), something that Ooneemeetoo would relive later in his life (Highway 2005: ch. 25, para. 29-31). The event is one of the first examples of Champion attempting to assimilate, rejecting his Cree community and culture. During their time in the residential school, both children were purposefully separated from their culture, language and families in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture. Through the prohibition of speaking Cree (Highway 2005: ch. 7, para. 16-18), physical separation from the family unit for long periods of time (Highway 2005: ch. 4, para. 7-8), emphasis of Western culture (Highway 2005: ch. 8, para. 1-4) and the depiction of Indigenous people’s as sinful (Highway 2005: ch. 6, para. 8-10), there was an attempt to mould the brothers into what was determined to be an assimilated Canadian citizen. While these traumatic events create a bond of shared experience between the brothers, their dissimilar reactions create multiple points of conflict and resentment for one another.

As the brothers return to their home when they are older, their relationship with their parents grows more strained as both Ooneemeetoo and Champion must deal with the events that took place in the residential school and feel that their parents would not side with them if they told them all that happened there, as can be seen when Ooneemeetoo attempts to make a joke to his brother by asking “Do ‘machipoowamoowin’ mean what Father Lafleur do to the boys at school?” and following an eerie silence, Champion answers “Even if we told them, they would side with Father Lafleur” (Highway 2005: ch. 10, para. 22-24), creating a secret which the brother’s both hold. As the brother’s feel

separated and apart from their parents, they grow closer due to the shared trauma in the residential school.

After Residential School

Champion originally attempts to live according to his father's teachings when he begins to feel lonely in Winnipeg, only relenting when he finds that his father's teachings do not apply in a place with so many people and where "the stars don't shine at night and the trees don't speak" (Highway 2005: ch 12, para 18), afterwards attempting to "transform [...] himself into a perfect little "transplanted European"" (Highway 2005: ch.15, para. 5-6). Champion rejects his Cree upbringing and culture, instead attempting to assimilate completely, even going so far as to avoid associating with other Indigenous peoples. Champion experiences "culture loss" and subsequent anxiety due to "uncertainty about how one should live in the new society" following the postcolonial acculturation trauma as described by Sam and Berry (2006: 43). While Champion moved to Winnipeg, Ooneemeetoo continued attending residential school and upon seeing one another again two years later, it is clear that they have not seen each other in that time, as Champion is stunned by his brother and how much the latter has grown, looking much older than he actually is. Following the physical separation, both brothers are happy to see each other, as Champion is finally able to speak Cree with someone, and Ooneemeetoo is happy to be spending time with someone who knows and accepts his lived experiences.

However, only days after his arrival in Winnipeg, Ooneemeetoo begins to feel as if he does not belong and wants to return home, Champion persuades him to stay (Highway 2005: ch. 15 para. 21-28). Champion is convinced that with enough effort to assimilate, they can become a natural part of the city population, while Ooneemeetoo begins to feel a sense of inherent difference between himself and the people around him in Winnipeg.

While Champion feels that assimilation is the correct way forward, Ooneemeetoo doubts that, instead feeling out of place, as if he would not be accepted.

As the brothers are living in Winnipeg, they come in contact with other indigenous peoples - Champion rejects the cultural heritage, remembering the consequences for non-compliance and “devil worship” from his time in the residential school (Highway 2005: ch.24, para. 34-36). Champion does not feel proud to be Cree (Highway 2005: ch 24, para 24), and is ashamed of his heritage, finding it satanic. Meanwhile, Ooneemeetoo grounds himself with anger and instead rebels against the established system of Christianity, desiring a connection to his own religious heritage (Highway 2005: ch. 26, para. 16-18).

While the relationship between the brothers is clearly affected by their difference of religions, it is further complicated by the fact that they have come to different religious conclusions following the events which caused their trauma and circumstances. Both fail to understand the other’s logic (Highway 2005: ch. 26, para. 23-26) as Champion questions what else there is besides Christianity and denies the existence of Indian religion when his brother replies that “There’s Indian religion. North American Indian religion” (Highway 2005: ch. 26, para. 13-14). They both grow angry and restless due to how the other handles the traumatic events that have happened in their lives. Champion’s response to the traumatic acculturation events in the residential schools was to assimilate as completely as possible, while Ooneemeetoo instead grew angry, demonstrated by him asking Champion “how can you still listen to their sick propaganda? After what they did to us?” (Highway 2005: ch. 31, para. 23), when just before, Champion had been reprimanding his brother by asking him what their father would think of his activities (Highway 2005: ch. 31, para. 22), as he has much like his parents, internalized the ideas of Christianity.

While previously the brothers had been an isolated unit, standing together and holding a secret from their parents, Ooneemeetoo takes up dancing in Winnipeg, hiding the fact from his brother, who admonishes him for being so secretive (Highway 2005: ch. 22, para. 30-33), and later admits that he did not want to tell Champion as he was scared of what the others at school would call him (Highway 2005: ch. 28, para. 24). From the scene it is clear that just as the brothers attempted to maintain communal harmony when hiding the realities of their residential school experiences, Ooneemeetoo has begun to hide his own secrets from his brother.

The relationship between the brothers only starts to recover as Champion begins to work through his postcolonial trauma and begins to embrace and accept his Cree heritage (Highway 2005: ch. 33, para. 21). He faces his past with the help of Amanda, a woman with aboriginal heritage, who was also instrumental in Ooneemeetoo becoming more knowledgeable on Cree culture, as she tells him that he is “born an artist” and Champion thinks of his past self “a worm was inside him. Or a ... No, no, Champion-Jeremiah, we won’t think about that. Not now. Not ever. That door is closed.” (Highway 2005: ch. 40, para. 33-34). With the support of Amanda and his brother, Champion begins to accept Cree culture, incorporating it into his art and performance (Highway 2005: ch. 46, para. 33-49), after which the relationship between the brothers improves substantially.

To sum up, the intragenerational relationships in KFQ are characterized by conflict between the brother’s as they attempt to find their place in Canada and in their cultural community, yet throughout their lives come to very different conclusions and interpret and understand their heritage and experiences with acculturation and christianization very differently. However, because neither of them understands the other’s perspective, their relationship is tense, until the end of the novel when the brothers begin to reconcile through creating art, which embraces their heritage and past traumatic experiences.

Conclusion

Canada has a long history of inhabitation which is linked to its history of colonization and has resulted in the death and suffering of many indigenous peoples throughout history. According to modern trauma theory, trauma can be caused by traumatic experiences that are either isolated events or constant presences in a person's life, both of which can occur in the lives indigenous peoples in Canada, as they were intended to be completely assimilated into the dominant Christian western culture through above all, the residential school system. The purpose of the residential school system was to teach the indigenous population about western civilization and to ease their integration into it, which was done by separating children from their culture and community.

The postcolonial trauma experienced by the indigenous peoples has doubtless affected the relationships between the peoples, and especially the relationships between individuals and their indigenous community following the acculturation and christianization efforts. One way in which these traumatic experiences can be processed is through literature, as both the writing and reading process can provide insight into and understanding of past events, which has been done by Cree author Tomson Highway in his novel *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. It follows two Cree brothers, Champion and Ooneemeetoo Okimasis, who experience acculturation and christianization in their home communities, in the residential school they attend as well as large cities where they live during their adult lives. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* depicts their lifelong struggle with the trauma of these experiences as they attempt to integrate into Canadian society and carve a place for themselves there, meanwhile losing touch with their heritage while their relationships with each other and their parents degrade due to acculturation and christianization.

The brothers over time lose contact with their culture and language, which causes them to feel disconnected from their parents, which further disconnects them from Cree

culture and language. Despite the parents' efforts to connect to their children, the acculturation efforts of the residential school, which had a goal of assimilating the children in attendance so that they would integrate into Canadian society as opposed to returning to their indigenous communities, reigned supreme. The intergenerational relationships are further damaged by the christianization that both generations have gone through, as the brothers feel increasingly unwelcome in their family due to their parents' Catholic views and statements.

The intragenerational relationships in the novel also deteriorate due to the christianization and acculturation experienced by the brothers, as they initially feel isolated from their communities during their residential school years, yet remain emotionally close to one another due to their shared experiences and lack of physical separation. The brothers' relationship begins to deteriorate when they interpret their past differently, and as one brother embraces their Cree heritage and the other attempts to assimilate and integrate according to what they have been taught.

Both intergenerational and intragenerational relationships were deeply damaged by Canadian acculturation and christianization efforts, as the physical separation caused a lack of emotional connection between parents and children, the cultural and linguistic suppression of the brothers led to their feeling further disconnected from their parents, and the brothers' different reactions to their residential school experiences caused an emotional and mental rift to be created between them.

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Resümee

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Kristel Tosheska

The Effect of Postcolonial Trauma on Familial Relationships in Tomson Highway's Kiss of the Fur Queen (Postkoloniaalse trauma mõju peresuhetele Tomson Highway romaanis *Kiss of the Fur Queen*)

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Vaatamata sellele et Kanada koloniseerimine algas 15. sajandil, on sellel laialdased tagajärjed tänapäevani, sest põlisrahvaste esindajad pidid kohanema Kanada valitsuse ja misjonäride akulturatsiooni- ja ristiusustamise meetmetega. Oluline osa Kanada põlisrahvaste akulturatsioonipüüetest oli internaatkoolide süsteem, kus õppimine oli kohustuslik ja mis eemaldas lapsed oma kodukeskkonnast peaaegu aastaks igal õppeaastal. Need katsumused on kahtlemata mõjutanud mitte ainult üksikisikuid, vaid ka nendevahelisi suhteid, eriti nende perekondades ja kogukondades. Internaatkoolide võrgu eesmärk oli põliselanikele Lääne kultuuri propageerimine ja põliselanike lihtsam integratsioon Lääne ühiskonda. Selle jaoks eraldati lapsed oma kultuurist ja perekonnast, et suurendada tõenäosust, et noored ei naaseks enda kogukonda.

Käesolevas lõputöös argumenteerin, et Tomson Highway poolautobiograafilises romaanis *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, milles käsitletakse kahe Kanadas elava krii venna, Champion ja Ooneemeetoo Okimasise elukäiku, on põlvkondadevaheliste ja põlvkonnasiseste suhete areng romaanis kujutatud akulturatsiooni ja ristiusustamise tõttu tugevalt häiritud. Romaani varasemad käsitlused on keskendunud vendade traumajärgsele taastumisele ja nende krii pärandiga suhte taastamisele. Analüüsides romaani peamisi pöördepunkte, kasutades lähilugemise tehnikaid, kaasaegset traumateooriat ja postkoloniaalset traumateooriat, argumenteerin käesolevas lõputöös, et romaanis esinevaid põlvkondadevahelisi ja põlvkonnasiseseid suhteid mõjutab suuresti nii vendade kui ka nende vanemate kogetud akulturatsioon ja ristiusustamine, kuna laste füüsiline ja kultuuriline eraldatus oma perekonnast ja kogukonnast põhjustab pikaajalist kahju põlvkondadevahelisele emotsionaalsele ja vaimsele sidemele.

Kuigi vennad on lapsepõlves lähedased, eemalduvad nad teineteisest noorukieas ja täiskasvanueas, sest tõlgendavad ja mõistavad oma lapsepõlve traumaatilisi kogemusi erinevalt, mis põhjustab nende vahel konflikte. Samal ajal on vendade suhted vanematega vastuolulised, sest vennad olid füüsiliselt eraldatud, kui nad käisid internaatkoolis, mistõttu Champion ja Ooneemeetoo tunnevad end oma perekonnast ja krii kogukonnast lahutatuna. Nii põlvkondadevahelised kui ka põlvkonnasisesed suhted said akulturatsiooni ja ristiusustamise käigus sügavalt kahjustada, kuna füüsiline eraldatus põhjustas emotsionaalse sideme puudumise vanemate ja laste vahel, vendade kultuuriline ja keeleline vaigistamine viis selleni, et nad tundsid end oma vanematest veelgi enam eraldatuna ning vendade erinevad reaktsioonid oma internaatkooli kogemustele põhjustasid nende vahel emotsionaalse ja vaimse lõhe tekkimise.

Märksõnad: Kanada kirjandus, trauma uuringud, põlisrahvaste uuringud

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