

Titel der Diplomarbeit

**„The Coming-of-Age Narrative by Indigenous
Writers in Canada: Eden Robinson’s *Monkey
Beach* and Lee Maracle’s *Ravensong*”**

Verfasserin

Martina Rössler

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Winning Paper of the
“4th Scientific Award of the Austrian-Canadian Society” 2009
© Austrian-Canadian Society (www.austria-canada.com)

Wien, im Mai 2009

Betreuerin / Betreuer:

Univ. Prof. Dr. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz

I would there were no age between ten and
three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep
out the rest; for there is nothing in the
between but getting wenches with child,
wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting.

– William Shakespeare,
The Winter's Tale. III.iii.59-63.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, who shared with me his expertise in the field of Canadian Studies and provided me with valuable advice throughout the stages of my project. I am indebted to the University of Vienna which partly funded my research in the fields of Aboriginal and Literary Studies in Toronto, Canada.

At the University of Toronto Daniel H. Justice was a devoted and patient teacher who offered generous words of encouragement and valuable insights into his academic research. His cheerful and positive outlook gave me great strength and I cannot thank him enough for his scholarly support. I am grateful to the writers Lee Maracle and Eden Robinson who generously lent me their time to conduct personal and email interviews. My project benefited from the assistance I received at the University of Toronto libraries, where I was able to draw on excellent resources. Moreover, my month of intensive research in Canada would not have been possible without the cordial welcome and warm hospitality offered by the Sisters and the Dean of Loretto College.

I thank my close friends in Vienna and Canada who have offered abundant companionship. I want to express my gratitude to several colleagues of the department for their academic advice and inspiring discussions. Thank you very much to you all.

I owe many thanks to my partner Richard. Words cannot express my true appreciation for the tremendous patience and the understanding you demonstrated during the time of the composition of my thesis. Always stay as you are.

I cannot finish without saying how grateful I am to my family who always believes in me. Thank you for your moral and financial support throughout my time at university.

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. INDIGENOUS LITERATURES IN CANADA.....	3
1.1. THE KARL MAY HERITAGE – CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS, STEREOTYPES, AND RESULTING CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIA	3
1.2. APPROPRIATION AND AUTHENTICITY	6
1.3. LABELS, POWER, AND POLITICS.....	9
1.3.1. <i>Categorizing and/or Pigeonholing?</i>	9
1.3.2. <i>The Politics of Being a “(Native) Writer”</i>	11
1.4. LITERARY THEORIES.....	13
1.4.1. <i>Non-Aboriginal Literary Theories...</i>	15
1.4.2. <i>... and Their Problems</i>	16
1.4.3. <i>Aboriginal Literary Theories</i>	18
1.5. ORAL LITERATURE OR ORATURE.....	21
1.5.1. <i>What Is Orature?</i>	21
1.5.2. <i>Storytelling, Sacredness, and Power</i>	22
1.5.3. <i>Orality and Languages</i>	23
1.5.4. <i>Orature Then and Now</i>	24
III. BILDUNGSROMANE?	26
2.1. THE STRUGGLE FOR A UNIVERSAL DEFINITION	26
2.2. THE BILDUNGSROMAN AND ITS SUB-GENRES	28
2.3. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES	30
2.4. TRANSLATING THE UNTRANSLATABLE	31
2.5. THE HERO AND THE MISSING HEROINE	33
IV. INTRODUCING THE WRITERS AND THEIR NOVELS.....	35
3.1. LEE MARACLE’S RAVENSONG	35
3.1.1. <i>Brief Biography</i>	35
3.1.2. <i>Plot Summary</i>	37
3.2. EDEN ROBINSON’S MONKEY BEACH	38
3.2.1. <i>Brief Biography</i>	38
3.2.2. <i>Plot Summary</i>	39
3.3. BILDUNGSROMAN OR COMING-OF-AGE STORY?	41

3.3.1. <i>The Aboriginal Bildungsroman or Coming-of-Age Narrative</i>	41
3.3.2. <i>Ravensong and Monkey Beach</i>	44
3.4. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE	50
3.4.1. <i>Structure</i>	50
3.4.2. <i>Narrative Situation</i>	54
V. COMING-OF-AGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN RAVENSONG AND MONKEY BEACH	61
4.1. COMMUNITIES – TIES THAT BIND?	61
4.1.1. <i>Sketching Stacey’s Social Surroundings</i>	61
4.1.2. <i>The Family Unit as a Central Element</i>	61
4.1.3. <i>Stacey’s Encounters with People from Other Communities</i>	66
4.1.4. <i>Outlining Lisamarie’s Social Surroundings</i>	72
4.1.5. <i>The Hills’ Family Dynamics</i>	73
4.1.6. <i>Lisamarie’s “Gang” and the Transformations of Its Members</i>	80
4.1.7. <i>Comparison</i>	84
4.2. CHALLENGES DURING ADOLESCENCE	85
4.2.1. <i>Formative Years</i>	85
4.2.2. <i>Initiation Rites</i>	87
4.2.3. <i>Love and Sexuality</i>	89
4.2.4. <i>Search for a Suitable Occupation</i>	94
4.2.5. <i>The Journey from Home as the Rite of Separation</i>	98
4.3. SPIRITUALITY, THE SUPERNATURAL, AND THE TRICKSTER	101
4.4. NATURE	107
VI. CONCLUSION	114
VII. APPENDIX	117
I) INTERVIEWS	117
II) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BILDUNGSROMAN	129
III) CHARACTER CONSTELLATIONS	130
VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	131
IX. INDEX	136

I. Introduction

The examination of coming-of-age narratives created by authors of Aboriginal origin poses challenges on numerous levels. The dangers of reinscribing colonial notions by literary analyses and the marginalization of literary works by Indigenous authors are real and ever present. Therefore, an investigation of the aspects of appropriation, categorization, and literary theories shall precede the engagement with the pieces of literature on a deeper level. Maracle, an ardent advocate of Indigenous self-empowerment, initiated a movement against appropriation, aiding other Aboriginals to reclaim their rights of voicing their stories themselves while condemning appropriation as a colonial practice (e.g. *I Am Woman* 89). Maracle's political activism expressed in her writing stands opposed to Robinson's subtle allusions to a colonial fracture line between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, deliberately blurring the border between those two "worlds" in her works. The preliminary discussion on Indigenous literatures in Canada will be concluded by a brief section on orature which constitutes a crucial form of verbal transmission of stories frequently ignored or forgotten despite their intellectual, cultural, and artistic richness.

The dynamic interaction between the young individual and society has been of utmost interest to authors and writers for quite some time, regardless of culture or geographical region. An exploration of the traditional *Bildungsroman* and the application of this German expression to a plethora of novels throughout the centuries will constitute the basis for the subsequent examination of Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*. The struggle of agreeing on a universal definition for the genre of the *Bildungsroman* illustrates the diversity of this literary field, which has recently brought forward specific sub-categories, such as the "transcultural" or specifically "female *Bildungsroman*", mirroring a growing awareness of cultural diversity, migration, and gender equity. The alterations regarding the concept of *Bildung* during the previous two centuries are equally reflected in various literary representations of the genre, while the cultural background has mostly remained centered on the European heritage. With regard to *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach* it will be examined in how far the novels "establish their individuality by transgressing or subverting the conventions of their genre" (Millard 1) by analyzing individual components regarded as pivotal to the traditional *Bildungsroman*. The discussion

concerning a distinction between the *Bildungsroman* and the coming-of-age novel will remain a major thread throughout this thesis.

This theoretical investigation will then merge with a literary analysis of the two narratives by Maracle and Robinson, incorporating diverse components central to the process of growing up, especially considering the female protagonists' ethnic heritages which pose additional challenges to their surviving in European-Canadian environments. Both young women featured in the novels struggle with various blows of fate, having to cope with natural catastrophes, disease, and complications in their family relationships. Their formative years are thus marked by various challenges which need to be overcome in order for them to be regarded as members of the adult communities. Bonds to other individuals with diverse personalities as well as spiritual encounters and the forces of nature will manifest themselves as the most significant influences during their adolescence. Due to the protagonists' ethnic heritages, these *rites de passage* partly differ from European perceptions of rituals which mark the beginning of adulthood while some rites obviously transgress cultural boundaries with parallel customs existing in non-Indigenous societies (e.g. the rite of separation).

Therefore, in the present thesis I attempt to dwell on Indigenous literatures in Canada while highlighting past and current challenges in this field incorporating various viewpoints and opinions. I will then continue to briefly trace the development of the *Bildungsroman* with relevance to both Maracle's and Robinson's literary works, suggesting that their novels differ from the conventional concepts of the genre, which I will illustrate in a subsequent literary examination. It will be demonstrated how the two Indigenous authors' coming-of-age narratives undermine the traditional genre of the *Bildungsroman* by incorporating elements specific to their geographical location, history, political situation, and ethnic heritage.

II. Indigenous Literatures in Canada

1.1. The Karl May Heritage – Cultural Assumptions, Stereotypes, and Resulting Challenges in Academia

Culture-specific presumptions, assumptions, expectations, and interpretations are brought to each reading by every student, scholar, and bibliophile. Despite the obviousness of this fact, one's "cultural baggage" is frequently neglected or forgotten during the reading process, even in university settings. This delicate aspect emerges more plainly when works by writers identifying with ethnic minorities are approached and a problem arises which is twofold: firstly, the reader's cultural, historical, and literary knowledge needs to be examined while simultaneously – and secondly – he or she is required to actively engage with a (literary) culture not his or her own. Should this engagement with oneself and the foreign culture be disregarded, numerous drawbacks arise for readers and writers alike: Frequently, while common themes will be recognized in Aboriginal¹ literature by non-Aboriginal readers, many other elements are missed due to a lack of cultural knowledge – parts referring to the Native world, the land, traditions, humor, as well as figures of speech (Grant 125). Aboriginal writers, on the other hand, will oftentimes regard the critics' responses as complete misunderstandings of their work. Padolsky underscores the importance of becoming familiar with aspects other than the literary work itself when he says that "the study of minority writing must encompass the full range of historical, social, and cultural realities which have an impact on issues of individual (and group) ethnicity" (34-35).

While it certainly is impossible to be acquainted with the plethora of cultures which exist, a certain awareness of cultural difference should be present permanently when engaging with literary works. As scholars we tend to forget to analyze or consider our own ideologies which we take too much for granted (Episkew 54). Challenging one's own cultural standpoint is as essential as increasing one's knowledge about foreign cultures and unfamiliar contexts. As a European, writing from the point of view of an ethnic majority about an ethnic minority is a difficult task. Stacey, the protagonist

¹ A note on terminology: I will be using the terms "Indigenous", "Aboriginal" and "Native" to refer to the autochthonous peoples of North America. The term "American Indian" is often regarded as offensive since this label was clearly assigned by Europeans. The terms "Native" and "Indigenous" imply the place of birth, in this context North America, and the term "Aboriginal" is widely accepted in academia. I use the word "Indianer" only in connection with the German term "Indianertümelei", as introduced by Lutz (Cf. e.g. *Approaches* 99ff).

of the novel *Ravensong*, alerts the non-Aboriginal reader to this aspect when she realizes how challenging it is to bridge the gap between two cultures and asks, “Where do you begin telling someone their world is not the only one?” (*Ravensong* 72).

The complexity of the relationship between the Aboriginal author and the non-Aboriginal reader is palpable. The aspects which are intermingling and interchanging are multifaceted and numerous: hierarchies of privilege, power relationships, authenticity and identity are just some of them (Monture-Angus "Native America" 25). Literary colonization does exist, and since scholars of European background are the voices of authority it is necessary that “[they] examine the ideological baggage they bring to their readings” (Episkenew 57). Writing from a position of privilege first of all requires a great amount of self-reflexivity and self-questioning before one gets started with a research project.

The situation of the white scholar conducting research in the field of Aboriginal Studies is, as Hoy describes, a “fraught and suspect one” (16) due to colonization and literary as well as cultural appropriation. Therefore, an awareness of one’s relation to the colonization process is of utmost importance before attempting to approach the field of Aboriginal Studies (Brant, qtd. in von Berg 19). Accepting and coping with one’s own history and stereotypes is a painful process which nonetheless needs to be undertaken especially by members of academic institutions. It has been frequently criticized that countless students and scholars are unwilling to incorporate opinions of Aboriginals into their research projects and even initially reject considering them at all (Mihe-suah 46-47, 74-80). This is the reason for the development of numerous novels which “document” the lives of Native tribes and individuals incorrectly. W. H. New informs us of a great danger, “Sometimes people are willing to listen only to those voices that confirm the conventions they already know” (4). People are thus oftentimes more likely to believe in reinforced stereotypes than reality.

The scholar undertaking research in Aboriginal Studies should also be aware of a phenomenon which Lutz has labeled “*Indianertümelei*” or “Indianthusiasm”. He notes correctly that “the process of de-colonising the European mind remains what is it: a process” (*Approaches* 5).² He refers to the still existing romanticized vision of the *Indianer* in the prairie. He continues to elaborate on this phenomenon which originated in the nineteenth century in conjunction with the concept of a German nation, when the idea of the *Indianer* was an exotic one. This connection with politics has contributed to

² For “*Indianertümelei*” see e.g. *Approaches* 99ff., “Ten Theses” 85ff. Lutz also establishes a connection to the Nazi Regime, see “Ten Theses” 85-88.

the continuing belief in certain stereotypes until today. Even though Lutz quotes this phenomenon as being specifically prominent in the German nation, I believe some of his observations also mirror Austrian thoughts and sentiments.³ Frequently, Germans and Austrians see “Indianness as an ethnic identity independent of historical contexts” and thus prefer to focus on the image of the wild savage, ignoring colonization, historical change, and the recent situation (“Ten Theses” 86). Lutz continues to explain that Natives of North America exist in the fantasies of many people today as they did before settler contact. Nonetheless, as Lutz suggests, a look at Aboriginal Studies from the perspective of a European scholar might be not as intermingled with feelings of guilt over colonization as a Euro-Canadian scholar’s point of view (*Approaches* 105). The crucial and most important point is to be aware of one’s own cultural background, irrespective of identifying as an Indigenous or non-Indigenous person.

Thus, self-criticism and reflection are vital for every student and scholar approaching Indigenous Literary Studies. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize one’s own limitations. However, one should avoid a phenomenon which Lutz has labeled “umgestülpten Ethnozentrismus” (*‘Indianer’ und ‘Native Americans’* 20) which implies an exaggerated negative critique of one’s own culture. Therefore, it remains essential to seek the right balance between self-criticism and objectivity. Lutz summarizes the functions non-Aboriginal scholars should aim to fulfill:

- firstly, they should assist non-Indigenous readers to see beyond stereotypes and distortions;
- secondly, they should “serve as mediators, translators, disseminators and publishers of what Native peoples have given and are giving the world, for example in literature” (*Approaches* 110).

The second aspect clearly focuses on supporting the publishing of literature by Aboriginal writers as well as promoting Aboriginal publishing houses. Monture-Angus notes that “relying on non-Indigenous scholars cannot help me make sense of Indigenous writing and patterns present in our traditions” (“Native America” 42). Writers such as Young-Ing, who does acknowledge the work of non-Aboriginal

³ At the moment of the composition of this thesis, an exhibition entitled “Indianer” takes place in Schloss Schallaburg, Lower Austria. Even though the exhibition critically considers stereotypes, an “Indian weekend” is featured, where children might dress up as *Indianer*, visit a tipi, and eat “traditional” food, with “‘Echte Indianer’ auf Schloss Schallaburg” constituting a catch phrase with regard to these events. The exposition itself critically examines Native Americans in the past as well as in the present and despite the efforts to replace the romantic image by a realistic one, the promotion of events such as the one mentioned above is problematic and overshadows the efforts of telling a history different from well-known clichés.

scholars, argue that non-Indigenous critics inhibit Aboriginal writers from getting published (Young-Ing, qtd. in Lutz "Ten Theses" 100-101). Does research in the field of Aboriginal Literatures by non-Aboriginals thus harm the Indigenous voice and does it produce the reverse effect from the one desired? Constantly reminding oneself of one's responsibilities – responsibilities to the Indigenous peoples in North America, and especially the tribes and individuals one intends to focus on in one's research – and avoiding objectification constitute part of a solution. At the time when Indigenous peoples had finally been noticed as subjects, they were subsequently turned into the objects of European interest (Murray 34). This process needs to be reversed in order to write a scholarly paper or thesis on Aboriginal aspects while respecting Aboriginals' points of view.

Numerous Indigenous authors, writers, and publishers have fought against appropriation of their stories, histories, religions, and various other aspects. Maracle⁴ was one of the pioneers of this struggle, claiming her right to her own stories, raising her voice against literary appropriation by non-Aboriginals, stressing the lack of authenticity, and criticizing the distorted view which inevitably results from these acts.

1.2. Appropriation and Authenticity

During the previous two decades "cultural appropriation" has emerged as a prominent term in debates and discussions focusing on Aboriginal Literary Studies in Canada. Oftentimes it cannot be avoided that the ongoing discussions concerning this aspect climax in an emotional and heated disputation.

The expression "cultural appropriation" describes the adaptation of another culture's artifacts, stories, traditions etc. to one's own culture, incorporating specific changes which are alien to and differ greatly from the culture in which these artifacts, stories, or traditions originated. Appropriation can be said to stem from racism and ignorance, and occurs within a colonial structure (Lutz *Approaches* 75). Godard warns, "The danger is when [...] we take our fabrications, our partial knowledges for the Truth, and generalize to make it a Truth-for-all" (192). Thus, it is the ideology underlying these adaptations of various culture-related concrete items or abstract thoughts which is essential. It becomes a necessity to differentiate appropriation from a cultural exchange

⁴ See interviews with Williamson, 1993, and Kelly, 1994, or *I Am Woman*, in which Maracle acts as a strong advocate for Native women's rights.

of ideas and practices; the latter is not based on power hierarchies, and continues to occur worldwide in a positive way through mutual agreement while avoiding indoctrination (Lutz *Approaches* 75).

The plenitude of examples of appropriation mirror the vast range of areas which are considered to be culturally influenced. For the literary scholar, literary appropriation is certainly the most prominent form. Native stories, which are often solely meant for the specific community in which they originate, are copied or recorded by non-Aboriginals to be published and made available to a wide audience. Various Native writers have voiced their concern, frustration, and anger concerning appropriation, as, for example, Maria Campbell in her interview with Lutz:

I don't think that you have any right to come into my community and tell my stories for me. I can speak for myself. I share them with you, and you can read them. And if you come into my circle, and I tell you the stories, then you should respect that you've been invited into the circle. (Lutz *Challenges* 57).

Additionally, individuals like Grey Owl, who identified himself later in his life as a Native and wrote stories about living as a (self-denoted) Aboriginal, act in appropriative ways. These and other forms of literary appropriation of which numerous authors are accused even today are reminiscent of stories written by Karl May, in which a romanticized version of the *Indianer* is created by blending a lack of cultural knowledge with stereotypes. Monture-Angus warns that appropriation poses a serious threat to Native literatures and states, "Appropriation is a concern because it tends to reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes of Native American peoples as well as to exclude authentic writers from the field" ("Native America" 41).

Additionally, scholars eager to "help" Natives have stepped into their place – writing by an ethnic majority carries more authority than marginalized writing and the non-Indigenous authors' opinions are thus more widely accepted, pushing Native writers to the side. Monture-Angus is of the opinion that the question whether non-Aboriginals can validly critique Aboriginal works is connected to "the hierarchy of authenticity and hierarchy of privilege" which exists between those two groups ("Native America" 22-23). This hierarchy, which includes the notion of the superior white man of European ancestry opposed to the inferior colonized Native man poses a barrier for writing, publishing, and reading in an intercultural environment. Trying to deconstruct this barrier of power is thus essential, and suggestions to foster this process have been made above.

Scholars acknowledge that the debate about appropriation in Native literature started with Maracle asking Anne Cameron⁵ to “move over” (Lutz *Approaches* 90). Maracle implied that non-Aboriginal scholars should grant more space to Aboriginal scholars, writers, and critics. Contributions to this debate are being made constantly. Many Indigenous writers strongly and loudly voice their opinions against the use of their stories or traditions by non-Indigenous people for the purpose of acquiring money. Furthermore, Lutz argues, “Non-Native users of Native myths do not generally know or master the appropriate methods of rendering such texts without destroying them” (*Approaches* 91).

One factor which has been positively influencing the publishing situation of Aboriginal authors is an increasing awareness of the issue of literary appropriation. As Lutz noted in the year 2002, a “tremendous progress [was made] within the last five years”, and I argue that this progress has continued until today and will continue in the future (*Approaches* 125). However, countless non-Native readers, writers, scholars, and critics still do not comprehend the extent and subsequent consequences of literary appropriation. Many choose to ignore this issue, others are not aware of the debate. “Stolen stories” are still to be found in much writing by non-Native authors, and appropriation still looms large after centuries of colonial oppression. Forms of creative as well as non-creative writing by non-Aboriginals *about* Aboriginals are thus frequently either dangerously close to a form of appropriation or outright appropriative. Therefore, Aboriginals frequently question the intention of non-Aboriginal scholars and writers who choose this field of study, being aware that “help” from outside might aggravate the problem. The questions thus raised are: who is allowed to speak, how, about what, and under which circumstances (Donovan 7).

The publishing situation for Native writers has improved during the last decade, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century Aboriginal writers still have to fight ignorance, discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization. Some writing is turned down because it is too “ethnic” and not “Canadian” enough (obviously “Canadian” here means white), other texts because they are “too much Indian” or “not Indian enough”.⁶ The demand for books including aspects of Native culture steadily increases, with the issues of authorship, authenticity, and appropriation oftentimes being ignored.

⁵ Anne Cameron is a British Columbian author who was born in 1938. The winner of numerous awards has included Native myths in her writing as well as accounts of Aboriginals struggling to survive despite numerous (political) disadvantages. As a non-Indigenous writer, she was therefore asked by Maracle to step aside so that Native authors writing about similar themes would be heard.

⁶ Cf. Mukherjee 158, and Conway, qtd. in Godard 187.

The hierarchy of power is strongly felt by Indigenous people and Boehmer observes that “[Indigenous writers] see themselves as still colonized, always-invaded, never free of a history of white occupation” (229). Literary appropriation thus enforces this form of colonization. For this reason, writers and critics such as Boehmer and Maracle argue that post-colonialism is something unreal, since the process of colonization is still underway (Maracle, qtd. in Kelly 83). Concerning the topic of power relations it is also of utmost importance to note that the incorrect images white people formed in their minds in former times were a means to justify the exploitation and subjugation of North America’s earliest inhabitants (Ruffo 112-113). This connection might also be established today.

Ruffo partly offers a solution to the problem of literary appropriation when he states, “To address Native people themselves so that they can empower and heal themselves through their own cultural affirmation, as well as to address those in power and give them the real story: this too is the answer” (120). The empowerment of the Indigenous communities is undoubtedly of special importance, but the problem of literary appropriation will continue to exist until this empowerment will have taken place.

1.3. Labels, Power, and Politics

1.3.1. Categorizing and/or Pigeonholing?

Labels and categories are a recurring point of discussion not only in literary studies. Grouping literary works into categories is an oftentimes criticized means literary scholars employ to facilitate interpretations and analyses. While pigeonholing does have negative connotations, categorizing literary works may indeed be of advantage in analyses. *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach* are two novels which are investigated in detail, and similarities as well as differences will be shown, which indicates both the diversity but also the resemblance of the two novels featuring young adults as protagonists. Thus, it can be assumed that similar novels will also exhibit these traits.

Nonetheless, when discussing “labels”, “categories”, and “groups” in connection with Aborigines and their cultures, it is important to pay attention to the differences among the tribes which need to be distinguished from each other. Krupat explains the notions of essentialism:

[I]t is entirely legitimate to invoke the category of “American Indians” as a historically and geographically specific population of colonist-settlers; [...] What I am arguing against is the essentialized version of the general, the type of statement that is not historically and geographically specific in its assumption that to be an Indian (whatever that may mean) is always and everywhere to be this, that, or the other foreknown and fixed thing, that to be of European background (whatever that may mean) is to be this, that, or the other foreknown thing. (*Turn 5*)

Krupat explains that one individual and his or her character traits, physiognomy, and other unique aspects cannot be seen as representative of a whole group. Moreover, it is not possible to find “the single authentic Native American voice” (Monture-Angus “Native America” 30). Just like Krupat, Monture-Angus also emphasizes not only the individuality of tribes and tribal groups but also the uniqueness of each person – the “typical Native American” does not exist, and nor does the “typical European”.⁷ Ruffo remarks that identities are erased by neglecting individuality when he says, “We only have to consider the term *Indian*, which as an imperial construct serves to wipe out any trace of a unique culture and history among individual First Nations” (Ruffo 113).

The questions which should be asked are thus: What does the category “Native writing” really denote? Is there a “Native canon”? What does one include in the canon, and what can be classified as English or Canadian literature?⁸ These questions are difficult, if not impossible to answer. It is Thomas King then who explains this delicate subject matter:

When we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature when, in fact, we do not. And when we talk about Native writers, we talk as though we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not, when, in fact, we don’t. (King, qtd. in Monture-Angus “Native America” 31)

King illustrates the difficulty of defining “Native literature” and deciding which definition is accurate. Since the views of Robinson and Maracle differ concerning the

⁷ The “pan-Nativeness” is a subject of discussion in itself. It cannot be avoided in this thesis to talk about “the Indigenous” or “the Aboriginal peoples”, but wherever possible I have distinguished between tribes and individuals by mentioning their names.

⁸ Cf. Monture-Angus “Native America” 22-23. She also ponders these questions, but fails to provide answers.

use of the expression “Native writer”, this aspect shall be investigated in more detail in the following section.

1.3.2. The Politics of Being a “(Native) Writer”

Some people argue that one can never be not political. In most things we say or do, a political undertone is constantly palpable. Especially the writing of an author identifying with an ethnic minority is automatically deemed political (Godard 198). Some writers, such as Robinson, disapprove of the label “Native writer” – she wants to be known as a “good writer” – and she continues to explain, “I’m also not a political animal, and I think it’s reflected in my focus on the personal and family dynamics as opposed to writers who are interested in telling broader power structure narratives” (“Email Interview”, cf. Appendix). Robinson does often not mark her writing as specifically Native, as some of her short stories could take place in an Aboriginal, Italian or Chinese neighborhood. She specifically chooses to avoid being labeled a “Native writer”.

In my personal interview, I inquired if Maracle wanted to be known as a “Native writer”, and she strongly agreed. For her this term is politically implicated and she is a political activist. Therefore, Maracle can be said to be one of the writers Robinson refers to above, and these two opposing stances on the interrelationship between politics and writing will be of great importance in the subsequent literary analysis.

Both Robinson and Maracle make political statements when they identify as a “good writer” or as a “Native writer”, respectively. Petrone states:

The literature of Canada’s native peoples has always been quintessentially political, addressing their persecutions and betrayals and summoning their resources for resistance. The political dimension is an inherent part of their writing because it is an inherent part of their lives. (182)

Ruffo confirms this, “[I]t is said that one cannot be a Native writer and not be political; it comes with the territory” (118). Both scholars claim that any writing by an Aboriginal person automatically has political connotations. Therefore, it could be argued that *Ravensong* as well as *Monkey Beach* are pieces of political writing.

While Maracle strongly affirms in the interview that she wants to be known as a “Native writer”, Hoy reads Maracle’s *I Am Woman* and *Sojourner’s Truth* differently – according to her, Maracle states that “her Indigenusness, her location quite specifically

as ‘Native writer’, ‘Native woman’, not as a ‘writer’ or ‘woman’, is the restrictive grounds of her authority” (6). Maracle does assert in her political writing that the term “Native woman” restricts her in certain areas due to existing stereotypes, and thus this term sometimes lessens her credibility.⁹ I would like to argue that as society’s attitude has changed over the years, so has Maracle’s view on this topic, and the interview underscores my claim. While Maracle might have once rejected the term “Native writer”, she now embraces it, “I’m an Aboriginal writer. [...] I write because I want people to see who we are” (“Personal Interview”, cf. Appendix).

The use of the term “Native” as a defining prefix is also context-dependent, but nonetheless always politically implicated. Maracle explains how the expression “Native woman” is viewed in the context of sexuality, “We are the females of the species: ‘Native’, undesirable, non-sensuous beings” (*I Am Woman* 20). While a similar kind of racist stereotyping might occur in the literary context as well, terms such as “Aboriginal” or “Native” might draw attention to this group of minority writing: when a non-Aboriginal audience discovers the diversity of various genres and writing styles, they might reconsider any bias they might have harbored about what constitutes “Native writing”. This point of view is criticized by many scholars, who believe that “the ghettoizing of disparate writings under the category ‘Native’ limits public access to relevant material” (Hoy 6). Nonetheless, by choosing to write from their own ethnicity, Aboriginal writers oppose “the universalist stance adopted by white Canadian writers” (Mukherjee 164).¹⁰ Therefore, the great variety of the diverse field of literary studies can be acknowledged.

This complex discussion has numerous implications. The reduction of an individual to his or her ethnic origin alone is potentially xenophobic and discriminatory. Additionally, the author’s ethnic background cannot explain why he or she has chosen to include particular storylines, issues, or aspects in his or her writing. To harbor expectations about the content of a novel, for example, on the basis of its writer’s ethnic identity is potentially racist and a result of “marginalization by literary category” (Harris, qtd. in Hoy 20) and Grant underlines that “[a] literary style [...] cannot be defined by ethnography alone” (125). Furthermore, when talking about “ethnic

⁹ Cf. Maracle, *I Am Woman*. This aspect is mentioned repeatedly.

¹⁰ Points of view have shifted since Mukherjee wrote this article almost a decade ago. Canadian literature is not anymore defined solely from a euro-centric point of view, but today includes ethnic minority writing. This should, however, not depreciate the struggles minority writers have to still undergo in the publishing business. Additionally, some Euro-Canadian writers’ opinions still represent the universalist stance mentioned above. The situation has improved but slightly.

minorities” and “ethnic majorities”, the first group is often immediately associated with an ethnicity, whereas the second group is regarded as lacking it (Padolsky 27).

Nonetheless, it can be of advantage to employ the label “Native writer” or “Austrian author” etc. Ethnic identity might not always connote a hierarchy of power, and should not constantly be regarded in a negative light. Ignoring one’s own or other people’s racial identities might be neglectful and undesirable. The dilemma, which is the result of various differing opinions, is described in her poem “For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to Be My Friend” by Pat Parker, “The first thing you do is to forget that i’m Black. / Second, you must never forget that i’m Black (Parker, qtd. in Hoy 11). Every writer has to decide which expressions to use to identify him- or herself in the literary world. One fact remains, namely that “the act of writing is a political act that can encourage de-colonization” (Acoose 140).

1.4. Literary Theories

Approaching the coming-of-age story or any literature written or spoken by Aboriginal people from the point of view of European literary theory can be problematic. One reason might be the non-conformity of Aboriginal literary works with European literary conventions. Additionally, Native literature and orature often transcend the notion of genre, and “the work of many Aboriginal academics also stretches the boundaries of accepted academic form in such a way that they are not easily categorized” (Monture-Angus "Native America" 22). Lutz affirms the importance of considering critical positions other than European ones when he mentions, “Time and again, Native authors and critics have argued to try to understand Native literature on its own terms, rather than labeling it according to standards developed from eurocentric traditions in literature” (Lutz *Approaches* 123) .

Much too often have literary scholars of European background imposed their analyses of Indigenous literature on others – and, being the voices of the authoritative ethnic majority, they have been heard by a wide audience. The result has been a neglect of literary critics of Indigenous background, who are approaching Indigenous texts with knowledge and information much different to those of non-Aboriginal critics. When trying to avoid such a form of appropriation as this type of denial and neglect, one should consider scholarly texts on Aboriginal Literary Theory. In numerous cases the

Aboriginal texts students and scholars are dealing with require analytic approaches which differ from the ones applied to non-Aboriginal texts.

Consequently, there are three ways for literary scholars, critics, students, or readers to approach texts by Indigenous writers:

Firstly, the scholar of European background may choose to ignore the origin of the text (and its author), applying a strictly euro-centric theory to it. Representing the voice of the authoritative ethnic majority, these analyses tend to be heard more often than analyses by Aboriginal critics, which reflects the concept of appropriation.

Secondly, critics of European background might devise theories which they then apply to Aboriginal texts. Therefore, they acknowledge that a differentiation in the interpretation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous texts is required. Questions such as the following remain: How familiar are these scholars with the notion of orality and orature? Have they studied the history and tradition of the tribe the writer identifies with?

Thirdly, Indigenous scholars may be granted the space to voice their own considerations, and their voices are not suppressed by non-Indigenous critics. This form of literary analysis of works by Aboriginal writers is for many Indigenous people understandably the form they desire most. The significance of this third form of literary analysis has only been realized lately, simultaneously with an increased awareness of literary scholarly appropriation.

The following discussion can clearly not be exhaustive. I have opted to discuss the thoughts and comments on literary theory of Aboriginal texts of Löscher, Blaeser, Grant, Maracle, and Ruffo. The following discussions on literary theory by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals are therefore exemplary. Scholars like Lutz and Eigenbrod¹¹ are not going to be elaborated upon here; they can certainly be grouped in the second category mentioned above. Both scholars demonstrate awareness of the scope of their theoretical writing and the responsibilities these writings necessarily imply, due to their close contact with Aboriginals in Canada.

¹¹ See e.g. Eigenbrod, 2005.

1.4.1. Non-Aboriginal Literary Theories...

Lösch attempts to assign functions to Aboriginal texts according to their cultural value for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Lösch 69-71). He creates three different categories and especially focuses on their discursive functions. For him, texts written by Indigenous authors might create three forms of discourse:

Firstly, “an autonomous tribal or Native American discourse” might be established:

Native American texts that refer to a specific tribal culture as their primary frame of reference [might be considered] as affiliated with an autonomous tribal discourse. [...] [I]t is not to be denied that Native American literature is partly intended to be – and may truly function as – a form of intracultural communication that aims at the enhancement of group solidarity and cultural pride by affirming the value of Native culture and by celebrating its survival against all odds. (Lösch 70)

An Aboriginal text might thus function as a form of communication within the tribe or the Indigenous community alone. Intentions that the writings or stories should be made available to a non-Indigenous audience do not exist; rather, they often remain within the closed circle of the tribal community. Additionally, references to other cultures are avoided.

Secondly, an Aboriginal text might have connections to “a counter-hegemonic discourse”:

Native American literature has discursive affiliations with a counter-hegemonic discourse that in large parts revises, reworks, and deconstructs the dominant or hegemonic constructions of its Self and Other, and thereby destabilizes the legitimizing function of this discourse. Novels with this affiliation often tend to essentialize cultural difference. (Lösch 70-71)

Those works which belong, according to Lösch, to this second category underscore cultural difference by critically considering the culture of the settlers. The tribal culture is celebrated as superior to the settler culture, and thus these texts offer an intra- as well as intercultural way of communicating.

Thirdly, in certain texts by Aboriginal writers “a discourse of hybridity or transculturation” might be discovered:

The third affiliation is with a discourse of hybridity or transculturation. Unlike [the second form] this discourse directs its deconstructive efforts toward the binary logic of inclusion/exclusion and toward hierarchical constructions of self/other relations in general. (Lösch 71)

The last form of discourse addresses Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal alike, as it focuses on a mixture or combination of cultures, stressing the advantages of transculturation.

The dividing lines between these three categories are vague and blurred as some literary works might transcend the groups. Lösch' approach is very much culture-dominated as he considers the texts imbedded in their cultural, historical, and social backgrounds and contexts. While the consideration of these aspects is clearly necessary, some other essential issues are evidently being neglected. What about (short) texts which are sometimes void of cultural references? Robinson in her short story collection *Traplins* specifically avoids providing the reader with clues as to which cultural background the characters come from. Poems often do not even allude to cultural aspects at all. Thus, Aboriginal texts (and, in fact, even non-Aboriginal texts) do not necessarily contain any specific cultural markers. Moreover, the culture a writer identifies with might differ from the culture described in his or her work, and contradictions might arise.

1.4.2. ... and Their Problems

Another non-Aboriginal critic, Grant, also reflects on Indigenous Literary Theory. She admits that critical literary theories by scholars of European background often only allow a very limited view on Aboriginal literature. Furthermore, some scholars have fixed ideas of what constitutes a "good" work of literature and approach an Aboriginal text with this criticism in mind, which is highly problematic (Grant 124). She stresses that the concepts taken from a European written tradition cannot be applied to the Aboriginal oral tradition, and are frequently unsuitable for the analyses of Indigenous literature. Moreover, the European ways of analysis are often removed from the cultural background of Aboriginal North America. She hence concludes that this problem "effectively precludes members of other culture groups from holding influential literary positions and also ensure a continuation of existing criteria" (Grant 124). She alludes to the hierarchies of power mentioned earlier, and refers to the

problem of the authoritative European critic's voice which suppresses the Indigenous critic's. Grant thus claims that different criteria of literary analysis oftentimes apply to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal texts. It is furthermore argued that the consequences of colonialism and the simultaneous destruction and eradication of Native cultures play a role in the neglect of Aboriginal literatures (and their criticism) today (Grant 125).

In Maracle's *I Am Woman*, which was written specifically for Native people ("Personal Interview", cf. Appendix), the author underlines the importance of Native literature being considered and read not by Europeans but by other Natives and expressly underscores this claim in the introduction.¹² By writing about the situation of Native people and especially women during the second half of the twentieth century, Maracle draws not only attention to the lives of her people but to the perception of them by non-Aboriginals and demands that Aboriginal voices be heard primarily.

Non-Aboriginal scholars such as Grant, who argue for an acceptance of Aboriginal literary criticism, may also analyze works by Aboriginal authors themselves. This apparent discrepancy of views, or inconsistency, can be elucidated. Not only do scholars such as Grant, being fully aware of the situation of Aboriginal writers as well as publishers and aiming to support their struggles, strive for extreme accuracy in their own critical comments, but they also incorporate Aboriginal viewpoints. They reflect on their own writing critically and a dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities can be developed. A responsibility of the non-Indigenous scholar is to be aware of the issue of appropriation and thus correctly express Aboriginal viewpoints while simultaneously affirming his or her own position. The problem, for which some attempts at solutions have been presented by numerous scholars, is a challenging one to be solved to the utter satisfaction of everybody involved:

I believe it is the case that in recent years academic researchers have wanted very much to take seriously, even, indeed, to base their research upon not only Native experience but Native constructions of the category of knowledge. Still, as I have said, the question remains: How to do so? It is an urgent question.
(Krupat *New Voices* xix)

This problematic issue will most certainly be of great importance in the years yet to come. But how do Aboriginals themselves see their literature and topic of literary criticism in general?

¹² "It is inevitable that Europeans will read my work. If you do not find yourselves spoken to, it is not because I intend rudeness—you just don't concern me now. [...] [My book] addresses Native people in desperate circumstances, those who need to recover the broken threads of their lives" (Maracle *I Am Woman* 10).

1.4.3. Aboriginal Literary Theories

Blaeser, an Indigenous writer and critic, points out that some stories are endowed with the power to change one's view of the world as well as the world itself (53). In fact, the past consists of nothing but stories and most of us are taught a certain point of view of these stories – of *history* – in school. Stories are indeed powerful tools. The creation and interpretation of so-called “Native stories” by non-Aboriginals may not only change the literary canon, but might even (negatively) influence the way Aboriginals view themselves and their history. Blaeser mentions that a necessary requirement in Aboriginal literary studies is

a critical voice and method which moves from the culturally-centered text outward toward the frontier of “border” studies, rather than an external critical voice and method which seeks to penetrate, appropriate, colonize or conquer the cultural center, and thereby, change the stories or remake the literary meaning. (53)

It is thus argued that the “external critical voice” of a non-Aboriginal cannot adequately represent an Indigenous voice. Even though it could be claimed that each reader brings his or her own specific reading to a text, a lack of cultural, historical, or social knowledge might in the long run contribute to the demise of Aboriginal literature (or more adequately, hinder its rise) as it remains misunderstood and thus disliked by the authoritative ethnic majority. The Native critic elucidates what pressing a European literary model onto Aboriginal texts implies, “The insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest” (Blaeser 55). Blaeser thus also refers to the literary appropriation and re-colonization process by European and European-American/Canadian writers and scholars. At the same time, she concedes that a mixture of literary criticism, both euro-centric and Aboriginal, might be valid at times (55). She stresses, though, that certain (euro-centric) theories should not be seen as the only valid models for establishing the value of a literary work, especially concerning works by Indigenous writers. Blaeser concedes that many Native scholars, including herself, have until recently taken the approach of applying European literary models to Indigenous writing for lack of Native literary theories. Since the recent formation of the latter, however, this mode of criticism has changed, even though there is not yet one established model of Indigenous literary theory (55). Correctly, she indicates that the

situation for literary works by Aboriginal writers is still more complicated. The problems which thus arise concerning Aboriginal literature are manifold:

Though [the literary works by Native writers] may come from an oral-based culture, they are written. Though their writer may speak a tribal language, they are usually almost wholly in the language of English. And though they proceed at least partly from an Indian culture, they are most often presented in the established literary and aesthetic forms of the dominant culture (or in those forms acceptable to the publishing industry). (Blaeser 56)

Blaeser terms this condition “bi-cultural” (56). Therefore, the interpretation of Aboriginal texts and the application of literary theories pose challenging and complex tasks.

While arguing for an Aboriginal literary criticism, it becomes fairly obvious that most critics, even if their heritage is Indigenous, compare, intentionally or unintentionally, Native American literature to European literature; with the latter undeniably maintaining the dominant position in the literary world. The identity of Native American literature is thus frequently constructed “by its relationship to [the European literary] master template” (Blaeser 57). How this phenomenon can be avoided, however, is a question which yet needs to be answered. Grant summarizes, “It is imperative that we look more closely at Native literature and judge it not within a European cultural paradigm but from the points of view of the culture from which it springs” (126). But she cannot tell us precisely how this goal could be achieved.

Maracle has found an explanation why European norms can be discovered in works by Aboriginal writers (“Skyros Bruce” 85). Maracle argues that through colonization and the resulting suppression of Aboriginal cultures and languages, European norms have invaded Aboriginal stories and original meanings have been obscured. This interference occurs in creative as well as in critical writing. According to her, Aboriginal stories have not only been stolen through appropriation, but have been influenced so much by Europeans and their narratives that a comparison with European norms occurs spontaneously and involuntarily and European elements can automatically be found. Furthermore, racism itself may deform the Aboriginal story (Maracle “Skyros Bruce” 85). Maracle continues to argue that it has become very difficult for Indigenous writers to study older orature and literature due to this distortion. Learning lessons from old stories has thus become an oftentimes unsuccessful or misleading adventure. She also discusses how time and its chronology according to European standards has been influencing Aboriginal literature and argues that this aspect is hardly understood by Europeans. A different notion of time, not focusing on the present but endowing the

past, present, and future with the same amount of power and importance is a concept difficult to grasp for people of European background (Maracle "Skyros Bruce" 88).

In her interview with me, Maracle very strongly affirms that certain techniques and strategies exist which differentiate Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal writing. She mentions that an intimacy is present in Aboriginal writing which non-Aboriginal writing lacks. Furthermore, she remarks that Aboriginal writers tend to focus on people and relationships rather than on the plot, as non-Aboriginal writers do ("Personal Interview", cf. Appendix). Robinson is of the opinion that it is the dark and dry humor which distinguishes Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal writing ("Email Interview", cf. Appendix). Moreover, much of Native writing is described as having a cyclical or circular form instead of a linear structure (Blaeser 57-58). This enumeration of differences is not intended to overemphasize the division line between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literature, but should rather indicate that Maracle and Robinson themselves see such a division and acknowledge its existence.

The last Aboriginal literary critic whose ideas I would like to investigate is Armand Garnet Ruffo. In his article "Why Native Literature?" he discusses the issues of identity, community, as well as the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Ruffo suggests that Aboriginal writers should claim their own voice in order to fight appropriation. However, the situation will not improve but rather visibly deteriorate if the oppression of literary works by Aboriginals continues, while non-Indigenous writers conquer the market with "Native stories" (Ruffo 109-110). For Ruffo, therefore, "Native literature [...] is no less a call for liberation, survival, and beyond to affirmation" (110). He continues to remind us that each image Europeans, Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans have of Aboriginal people "has been projected and readily imposed upon Native people for the purpose of subjugation, whether it be physical, psychological, or spiritual. What makes this all the more insidious is that these projections have taken on a life of their own" (112). Ruffo thus discusses the difficulty of Aboriginal writers to discover their own identities, disregarding European influences. He mentions the appropriation of language and the relationship between discourse and power, suggesting that Native literature is a form of resistance literature.¹³ Moreover, he stresses the importance of community and the connection to the family, notions which are visible in the literary realm as well. The Indigenous critic also discusses the

¹³ Cf. Ruffo, "Native literature represents a response to an experience that literally turned life and milieu upside down" (113). I am of the opinion that this comments reflects the idea of Native writing as resistance literature.

relationship between community and identity, mentioning that “the return to community [signifies] the protagonist’s recognition of himself as a Native person” (116). Living in a community of Native people thus strengthens one’s own perception of self – one’s place in life, past, present, and future. The element of the circle or center from which everything emanates is a recurrent aspect and Ruffo stresses the importance of the oral way of transmitting stories. His answer to the question in his such entitled essay “Why Native Literature?” is provided to the reader at the end: Native literature exists “[t]o address Native people themselves so that they can empower and heal themselves through their own cultural affirmation” (120). Ruffo provides the reason for the importance of Aboriginal literary critics and the acceptance of their views. The empowerment is greater, if the criticism and, foremost, the understanding, comes from one’s own people.

1.5. Oral Literature or Orature

1.5.1. What Is Orature?

The concept of oral literature, or orature¹⁴, might be unfamiliar to anyone who has only been immersed in the study of European (written) literature. Lutz provides a definition of the expression “oral tradition”:

Under this label come all traditional forms of Native literatures before and during contact [...]. The oral tradition encompasses all kinds of formats and genres, ranging from large public dramatizations to private and personal tales, and encompassing a ceremonial as well as a popular mode. (*Approaches* 112)

While Lutz stresses this all-embracing classification, van Toorn offers a more precise definition of another word, “ ‘Orature’ is a term widely used to refer to forms of oral discourse such as stories, songs, and various kinds of ritual utterance. The word was coined because ‘oral literature’ was a contradiction in terms” (van Toorn 24). Monture-Angus even distinguishes among four different forms of orature: sacred stories, oral history (which include stories which are passed down to the following generation), oral tradition (a way of teaching through stories), and stories told for enjoyment (“Native America” 36).

¹⁴ I use the term “orature” to refer to all types of spoken stories in an Aboriginal context.

The fact that orature is not “primitive” and thus inferior to European literature because of its oral format has only been recognized in the last few decades. This misunderstanding arose because Native literature and orature is being looked at and analyzed by European literary standards. The labels “pagan”, “savage”, and “childlike” literature were applied during the studies of Aboriginal orature and – where it existed – literature. A drastic change in these literary considerations has occurred during the last years and Indigenous orature has been deemed appropriate for literary scholarship (Petrone 4-5). Petrone therefore suggests “[to approach] oral literatures [...] from the religious, social, and literary traditions that influence them” (5). One should thus acquire knowledge concerning the contexts in which the stories were and are created, as the listener him- or herself then gains greater understanding and enjoyment from these stories.

The assumption that the written tradition has simply evolved from the oral tradition as the cultures themselves have evolved is erroneous. However, orature was suppressed by the colonizers and thus stories and languages have been lost (van Toorn 24). It has been neglected that both the oral and the written traditions may coexist and that they are intermingling in different ways. As a result, traces of the oral way of transmitting stories, rhetorical devices such as repetition, for example, might be discovered in Indigenous literature. These texts are then judged according to European literary conventions by readers and critics who lack the appropriate cultural contexts, and misinterpretations are a very real threat and danger to this particular type of literature.

1.5.2. Storytelling, Sacredness, and Power

For most Indigenous people in North America the oral method of transmitting stories is of utmost importance, and oftentimes storytellers are held in high esteem. Lutz stresses “die Untrennbarkeit von Sprache, oraler Tradition und Geschichte, geographischem Raum und ethnischer bzw. nationaler Identität“ (“Mündliche Literatur” 1-2). Language, stories, and orature are tied to the land and history of the people. The term “stories” in this context has numerous implications; the expression refers to historical as well as cultural aspects and processes which are conveyed through stories, which often enables the listeners to acquire a more thorough understanding of the present situation (Cruikshank 155-156).

Stories are handed down from generation to generation, and the art of storytelling needs to be learned and cultivated – a good memory is a necessity as well. People who do not belong to the respective tribe might be excluded from ceremonies or storytelling events, since oftentimes these parts of the culture are regarded as sacred. The sacredness of these stories is also the reason why scholars, writers, anthropologists and others should not publish these stories without the consent of the respective tribe. Moreover, if a person is invited to witness a ceremony or listen to a story, this offer does not automatically imply permission to share this story with others. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Aboriginal storytellers, writers, and editors decide themselves which material may be published by whom and with which (financial) interests in mind (Lutz *Approaches* 113). By the act of colonization and the simultaneous destruction of Aboriginal languages and cultures, stories were obliterated. As a consequence, Natives have become suspicious of non-Indigenous persons wishing to explore their heritage and orature. This consideration underlines the need of Native control over Native stories (Lutz *Approaches* 112-113).

For Native Americans, the spoken word is endowed with much power, and the truth value of the orally transmitted words is never doubted. Once an expression has been uttered, it is irrevocable. In cultures in which the written word is predominant, the power thus attributed to the spoken word in Aboriginal cultures of the U.S. and Canada is either unknown, neglected, or rejected (Lutz "Mündliche Literatur" 2). For a European critic it would therefore be appropriate to rethink this problem and reconsider the importance Aboriginal tribes attribute to the spoken word as opposed to the power of the written word in European cultures. Literature by Indigenous writers and orature by storytellers should not be judged by Western criteria of structure, style, and aesthetics (Petrone 184).

1.5.3. Orality and Languages

Language death poses a great threat to the oral tradition. Whereas knowledge and stories are stored in books and libraries in cultures in which the written tradition dominates, the oral tradition is being kept alive by handing down knowledge from generation to generation. Ever since English and French became the predominant languages during colonization, Native languages have been on the decline, with many people identifying English or French as their mother tongue. An increased awareness of

language death and the simultaneous loss of culture and tribal histories has triggered a movement to prevent languages from disappearing, and while bi- or multilingual education is enforced, many adults who speak English or French as a first language later on decide to learn the Native language of their tribes as well. The three Native languages in Canada which exhibit the highest number of speakers are Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut (Fettes 119). Other Aboriginal language groups are much smaller, yet often active and alive (Lutz *Challenges* 7). The danger remains, however, that Aboriginal languages, histories, and traditions are one generation removed from extinction.¹⁵

An aspect linked to the one mentioned above concerns the use of English as opposed to Native languages. After all, English is the colonizers' language. As Monture-Angus states: "We have taken a language that does not speak for us and given it a new life" (*Thunder* 34). She implies that much writing by Aboriginal authors nowadays occurs in English, a language forcefully disseminated among many Indigenous tribes of Canada and the U.S.¹⁶ However, Aboriginals have succeeded in adapting this language for their own purposes. In order to be understood across tribal language boundaries, many Indigenous writers choose to write in English, which is used "to create powerful messages which convey to you our experience. [...] I call [this] creativity" (*Thunder* 34). The English language thus becomes a form of creativity which can also empower Native writers and storytellers.

1.5.4. Orature Then and Now

Until the 1960's explications on orature and the stories themselves have mainly been recorded in written form and then published by non-Indigenous individuals (Lutz "Mündliche Literatur" 4). This situation has changed, as non-Aboriginals exhibit a higher sensitivity concerning literary appropriation, and many now seek permission for the act of recording and publishing Native orature. Moreover, Indigenous people are finally granted at least some space for their own publications, and, most importantly, their right to negate the recording of orature has finally been recognized by many non-Indigenous scholars. Publishing houses in Canada which specialize in the publication of

¹⁵ Cf. the title of Basil Johnston's essay "One Generation Removed from Extinction".

¹⁶ Works existing in the French language should not be ignored. However, they are not relevant for my thesis, and remarks concerning language will only refer to English.

works composed by Indigenous writers include Kegedonce Press, Pemmican Publications, and Theytus Books. Due to language loss and language death, older generations feel the need to preserve their (hi)stories in writing, to make them available for their children and grandchildren (Cruikshank 157).

Misinterpretations and rejections of orature often arise due to the styles of expression and rhetorical devices employed by Aboriginals which might differ from works written by authors adhering to European writing conventions, and a mixture of literary genres or devices is not uncommon in Aboriginal stories. General characteristics of the oral way of telling a story may include repetitions, a graphic quality of the language, certain rhythms, and, in the delivery of the story, the use of gestures as well as specific facial expressions (Lutz "Mündliche Literatur" 3).

III. Bildungsromane?

2.1. *The Struggle for a Universal Definition*

As the title of my thesis already suggests, I have chosen the generic approach in analyzing the present works of literature, which implies that the genre of the *Bildungsroman* will constitute the starting point for my analysis of the novels. However, it is of utmost importance to note that the novels should not be judged solely by their generic value, i.e. how they fit into the category of the (European) *Bildungsroman*. Rather, I want to demonstrate that a subtle blend of characteristics both of the prototypical European *Bildungsroman* and of other coming-of-age narratives can be discovered in *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*, with particular themes, which will be investigated in detail in the fifth major part of my thesis, featuring prominently. When referring to the works by Maracle and Robinson, I prefer the term “coming-of-age story” to “*Bildungsroman*”, since the latter evokes associations with German works by writers such as Goethe. I thus deem the former more accurate, even though it seems to resist a definition even more than the German expression. Some literary scholars, however, prefer the term *Bildungsroman* even in the context of Aboriginal writing, thus this term will be used – very sparingly – in this thesis also in Indigenous contexts.

Already during the early stages of my research it became obvious that my original hypothesis, namely that *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach* show no characteristics of the traditional *Bildungsroman* at all, has proved to be false. While these two works transgress and undermine the traditional definition of the *Bildungsroman*, particular elements of the conventional genre can be found as well.

In order to underscore this argument it is necessary to define the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to subsequently conclude what this genre is and is *not*. Sammons mentions why a definition of the *Bildungsroman* is so important:

When [terms such as *Bildungsroman*] are not only generic but carry with them implications of literary history, it is necessary to be alert to the sources and soundness of the literary history they purport to order and not merely accept them as received opinion. (28)

It is essential that we arrive at a definition, being mindful of the lengthy history of this genre and the alternations and changes which it has undergone over time. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* with all its subcategories (and sub-genres) remains one of the most challenging ones to be defined exactly, and a consensus on what the term signifies

precisely has not yet been reached. Not every work which focuses on the protagonist's formative years can or should be labeled "*Bildungsroman*", as this term can be highly misleading (Hardin x-xi). The difficulty of definition arises when considering the context of European novels – and therefore it seems even more difficult to apply the term to specific novels which originate in the cultural and literary contexts of Native North America.

The complex literary phenomenon of the *Bildungsroman* has been discussed ever since its first appearance, and the genre has successfully resisted a rigid definition. Instead of judging the value of certain novels according to how easily they may be categorized as *Bildungsromane*, attempting to define this genre will demonstrate which essential points need to be considered in a subsequent literary analysis.

Numerous definitions for the "*Bildungsroman*" exist. The term originated in the early nineteenth century, when the concept of *Bildung* had bourgeois and humanistic implications (Sammons 41). This notion of what constitutes "good" education has of course undergone several changes since 1800 and therefore it is challenging to define which novels might be placed in this category at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Whether the theme of the *Bildungsroman* is "the development of the protagonist's mind and character" (Abrams, s.v. *Bildungsroman*), the "innere Entwicklung (Bildung) eines Menschen von einer sich selbst noch unbewussten Jugend zu einer allseits gereiften Persönlichkeit" (Schweikle, s.v. *Bildungsroman*), "der Bildungsgang eines jugendlichen Protagonisten zumeist von der Kindheit bis zur Berufsfindung oder Berufung zum Künstler" (Gutjahr 7), or "the process by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs in life" (Cuddon, s.v. *Bildungsroman*); these definitions are accompanied by lengthy explanations or clarifications. No all-encompassing yet brief definition of the *Bildungsroman* seems to exist.

Nonetheless, these short descriptions provide an idea which elements a *Bildungsroman* could comprise. Selbmann offers a detailed discussion on the *Bildungsroman* and its numerous aspects.¹⁷ While it is generally agreed upon that the *Bildungsroman* features the physical and mental development of a young adult, several questions arise: Which sub-genres of the *Bildungsroman* exist? Why is the German term

¹⁷ Cf. Selbmann, 1994.

retained in anglophone literature? To avoid confusion, it might be best to describe what a *Bildungsroman* is not, and how it is differentiated from its sub-genres. Only then can we discuss how and why a German expression for a literary genre exists in the anglophone world.

2.2. *The Bildungsroman and Its Sub-genres*

Characteristics of various genres are interweaving to form the genre of the *Bildungsroman* – which resists, for this very reason, a precise definition. Therefore, elements of the adventure novel, the travelogue, or the love story might be found in the *Bildungsroman* (Gutjahr 11-12). Nonetheless, certain differentiations can be drawn. Frequently, different definitions for the expressions “*Bildungsroman*”, “*Entwicklungsroman*”, and “*Erziehungsroman*” may be found.

The “*Entwicklungsroman*” or “novel of development” is concerned with the development of the physical, mental and spiritual capacities of the protagonist, considering also conventions of society. Private experiences are recounted but historical truth is neglected (Gutjahr 12). According to Sauer is “das Ziel [des Entwicklungsromans] eher ein greifbar-materielles” (85).¹⁸ Furthermore, “*Entwicklungsroman*” is often described as the term which comprises all other forms of the biographical novel (Wagner 13).

The “*Erziehungsroman*” or “pedagogical novel” emphasizes the importance of pedagogical means of education and development. The young protagonist is “educated” and led through life by an authoritative figure according to a pedagogical concept. In the *Erziehungsroman* it is most obvious that the protagonist is influenced by other people who want to educate or raise him or her according to certain rules and regulations (Wagner 14). Oftentimes, those means of upbringing, such as forms of punishment, are considered critically, suggesting that new and alternative ideas of education could be of greater value (Gutjahr 13).

Gutjahr formulates an important difference between the *Bildungsroman* and the two sub-genres mentioned above, namely “die Fähigkeit, das eigene Gewordensein und damit gerade Erziehung und Entwicklung kritisch zu hinterfragen“ (13). Hence, she stresses the importance of the development of the protagonist’s own ability to reflect critically and form and discover his or her own notions of morality and values. The

¹⁸ Whereas the goal of the *Bildungsroman* is “mental and moral” development, cf. Sauer 85.

protagonist's personal, inner development constitutes the central theme. This argument also implies that *Bildung* is not a linear process, and the goal which should be reached by the protagonist is not precisely defined beforehand (Gutjahr 13-14). The novel of development as well as the pedagogical novel do not focus on critical thinking – rather, the pivotal point is the education of the protagonist by outward forces, such as parents or educators, but also including society at large and various personal experiences.

By considering these definitions and differentiations the elements which constitute the *Bildungsroman* slowly begin to emerge. Yet another sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* exists, which may be helpful in forming a valid definition of the former, namely the artist-novel.

The “artist-novel” or *Künstlerroman* which is, according to Abrams, “an important sub-type of the *Bildungsroman* [...] which represents the growth of a novelist or other artist from childhood into the stage of maturity”, focuses on the development of creative abilities necessary to work in the artistic field (Abrams, s.v. *Bildungsroman*). The artist-novel thus puts the artist and his work in the center of its narrative (Schweikle, s.v. *Bildungsroman*).

Gutjahr argues that the concept of the *Bildungsroman* has been modified during the past centuries and she stresses the contemporary notion of *Bildung* and cultural change. She then suggests one definition applicable to all novels which touch – even if only peripherally – the concept of *Bildung*:

Unter dem Gattungsbegriff *Bildungsroman* kann demnach eine nach literaturwissenschaftlichen Kriterien zusammengestellte Gruppe von Romanen gefasst werden, in denen die erzählerische Darstellung des Bildungsweges eines Protagonisten strukturbildend und die Frage nach Bildungsmöglichkeiten in kulturell innovativem Sinne zentral ist. So verstanden ist der *Bildungsroman* nicht nur ein Roman über die Bildung des Protagonisten, sondern immer auch ein Roman über die Möglichkeiten von Bildung und kulturellem Wandel in einer Gesellschaft. (Gutjahr 14)

In her definition, she emphasizes the cultural component of the protagonist's education, the narrative account, as well as the connection with society; elements which can be found – albeit in an altered form – in *Monkey Beach* and *Ravensong*.

The dominant themes of the *Bildungsroman* yet remain to be examined. Thematically, a *Bildungsroman* is comprised of the following elements: self-realization (identity), gender roles, formal education, inner and outer directedness, religion, career,

love and marriage, as well as philosophical questions.¹⁹ Sauer affirms these categories when he mentions certain predominant “areas of experience”: nature and landscape, art, religious and cultural traditions, history, science and technology, and love (39). Therefore, the themes of the *Bildungsroman* seem to be straight-forward. However, not all of these themes are necessarily featured in one single *Bildungsroman*. In my subsequent literary analysis the occurrence of these and additional themes in Aboriginal coming-of-age stories will be focused on.

2.3. *Characteristic Features*

The plethora of definitions makes it nearly impossible to grasp the concept of the *Bildungsroman*. Therefore, it is more useful for the subsequent literary analysis to consider certain elements or characteristics of which a *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age narrative is comprised. A typological summary with respect to this genre may include the following elements²⁰:

- A young person’s story of development is recounted, and the novel thus features a “hero” (Sauer 39) or heroine.
- School, or formal education, may be described as a frustrating element.
- During the process of maturation conflicts and crises arise which might involve resistance to educators, parents, or elders.
- After the years spent as a child at home the protagonist experiences wanderlust, often in connection with a search for a vocation, and decides to explore the world, having contact with socio-cultural contexts yet unknown to him or her.
- In this new environment the learning process begins.
- The protagonist’s abilities are tested and refined and their validity for the further way of life examined, while he or she simultaneously experiences a process of maturation and self-reflection.
- The protagonist’s personality and attitudes might be re-invented and re-defined in a way as to better integrate into new social and cultural contexts. His or her self-realization and inner life are important elements in the developmental process.

¹⁹ Adapted from Labovitz 8.

²⁰ Adapted from Gutjahr 8, and Labovitz 3-4.

- Only the years of formation are depicted instead of a detailed account of the protagonist's life from birth to death.

It shall now be examined in how far these characteristics also apply to the novels which I chose to study in this thesis. These elements prove to be more useful for the analysis of literary works than any other precise definition. Swales claims that this very failure to come up with a definition of the genre is an important feature of the type of *Bildungsroman* (Swales 12). It is even argued that “it is the very refusal of the *Bildungsroman* to resolve all tension that makes for the high artistic quality of the genre” (Kontje 74).

2.4. Translating the Untranslatable

The most obvious aspect, namely the lack of an equivalent English term for the expression “*Bildungsroman*”, shall now be examined. David H. Miles, writing about the *picaresque*, describes this difficulty in a footnote:

Obwohl es ganz offensichtlich englische Bildungsromane gibt (*Tom Jones*, *David Copperfield*, *Sons and Lovers*, und *A Portrait of the Artist* wären alle gute Beispiele) und auch eine Reihe von Übersetzungsvorschlägen des Begriffs „Bildungsroman“ gemacht worden sind (*educational novel*/Erziehungsroman, *novel of education*/Roman der Erziehung, *apprenticeship novel*/Lehrjahrsroman, *pedagogical novel*/pädagogischer Roman, *novel of development*/Entwicklungsroman, *novel of adolescence*/Roman des Erwachsenwerdens, ja selbst *philosophical*/philosophischer oder *psychological*/psychologischer Roman), hat sich keine dieser Übersetzungen in der englischen Literaturkritik durchsetzen können; deshalb bleibe ich bei dem deutschen Begriff. (377)

This argument names the reason why the term *Bildungsroman* has been the preferred expression to describe an account of the formative years of a young person even outside the German-speaking region – no translation has been deemed adequate and instead a majority of scholars opt to retain the German original, others choose whichever English terms they deem most fitting. Sauer mentions that this problem of finding an equivalent English term may be of significance:

Bezeichnend ist die Unsicherheit, mit der die angelsächsische Forschung die deutschen Begriffe behandelt, indem sie entweder Zusammensetzung mit „education“, „paedagogical“, „adolescence“ oder „development“ wählt oder den deutschen Begriff „Bildungsroman“ unübersetzt lässt. (36)

It might prove even more challenging to find an equivalent English term at the beginning of the twenty-first century than in the 1800s, since Anglo-Saxon scholars are well aware what the original concept of *Bildung* connoted and how this notion has changed. Hardin mentions that in the early nineteenth century, *Bildung* “implied ‘cultivation’, education and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense, certainly not merely education with all the current institutional connotations of the word”. He furthermore stresses the importance of two definitions of *Bildung* which are applicable also today, mentioning “first, *Bildung* as a developmental process and, second, as a collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch” (xi). Does the *Bildungsroman* of the twenty-first century exhibit the same characteristics as the *Bildungsroman* of the nineteenth century? And if not, is this expression not obsolete?

The term “*Bildungsroman*” was coined at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Karl Morgenstern, after having read not Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, but novels by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger.²¹ Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* was translated by Carlyle in 1824, entitled *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (Wagner 13). Therefore, the expression “apprenticeship novel” is derived from this translation. The desperate search for a corresponding English term for “*Bildungsroman*” can therefore be said to have originated at this point of time.

Gutjahr even argues that the term *Bildungsroman* connotes a literary genre of narratives written in the German language only (7). She later admits that even though the *Bildungsroman* is a “spezifisch deutsche Literaturgattung” the term might also be applied to novels written in a language other than German, and even English (7). Finding an English expression does not seem to be a necessity for her; in one sentence only does she mention the terms “apprenticeship novel”, “novel of formation”, and “*roman d’éducation*” as well as “*roman de formation*” for French novels (7-8). Another scholar mentions that the *Bildungsroman* is frequently defined in very broad terms in the anglophone world, as “the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life novel” (Buckley vii-viii).

²¹ See Selbmann 9-10. He says the *Begriffsfindung* happened in the year 1803.

2.5. *The Hero and the Missing Heroine*

It has been taken for granted for several decades that the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is male. After all, why should women, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, strive for *Bildung*, education, development? In the 1960s the attitude of an author- and readership used to male protagonists only changed after political alterations took place and feminist movements became active – and finally novels featuring female protagonists were accepted by a wide audience, as the idea of women gaining access to higher education spread. Female *Bildungsromane* existed before this time, but only during the last fifty years have they gained popularity. The female heroine, missing from the *Bildungsromane* of the nineteenth century, when this genre was at its height, can thus be found mostly in twentieth- and twenty-first-century coming-of-age writings, for example in *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach* (Gutjahr 68; Labovitz 1).

This process of “finding the missing heroine” might be explained by investigating the transformation which the notion of “*Bildung*” has undergone. Labovitz helps to clarify the problem, “The tradition of *Bildung*, itself, was described by Wilhelm Dilthey, whereby ‘a young male hero discovers himself and his social role through the experience of love, friendship, and the hard realities of life’ ” (Cocalis, qtd. in Labovitz 2). Since the women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were expected to live up to a very different standard of education than men, being mainly taught skills deemed necessary for housework or being trained in the beaux arts, the female heroine does not appear in the early *Bildungsroman*. A significant change occurred when very similar concepts of *Bildung* applied to the education of both men and women in the twentieth century, “when cultural and social structures appeared to support women’s struggle for independence, to go out into the world, engage in careers, in self-discovery and fulfillment, the heroine in fiction began to reflect these changes” (Labovitz 7).

Therefore, it can be observed that a political change concerning the status of women in society was followed by literary changes, and female protagonists were featured in the *Bildungsroman*. In the “novel of self-discovery” young women are trying to find their “selves” and a focus lies on female identity (Felski, qtd. in Kontje 108). Felski also points out that this new feminist genre of the novel of self-discovery, which she ascribes to the coming-of-age narrative of contemporary American fiction, shows a “coming to consciousness of female identity” (Felski, qtd. in Kontje 108-109). While

she insists on a differentiation between the male- and the female-oriented *Bildungsroman*, she admits that a few important features are shared by both, namely that they are both biographical, dialectical, historical, and, according to her, optimistic (Felski, qtd. in Kontje 108-109). The characteristic last element might, in my opinion, rather be found in the contemporary female *Bildungsroman* than in the earlier coming-of-age narratives primarily featuring male protagonists.

Hardin criticizes the approach of many scholars who judge the value of a *Bildungsroman* featuring a female protagonist by the same standards as a *Bildungsroman* presenting a man as the main character. By looking at themes such as the first sexual love affair, it becomes obvious that different societal conventions applied and still apply to men and women, therefore a female coming-of-age story cannot be evaluated by the same criteria as a male one (Hardin xvii). It is no surprise then that few female *Bildungsromane* fit the genre. Since the term *Bildungsroman* carries many implications and associations, a “female *Bildungsroman*” might not even exist, and a new term might be necessary (Hardin xix). This is another reason why I suggest the term “coming-of-age narrative” when discussing the works of Robinson and Maracle.

In this section entitled “*Bildungsromane*?” I have elucidated the difficulty of finding a precise definition for the literary genre and instead offered a list of characteristics which I will continue to examine in the subsequent literary analysis. The briefly mentioned thematic conventions of this genre will form the basis for further detailed examinations of the novels *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*.

IV. Introducing the Writers and Their Novels

An in-depth interpretation and close-reading of a literary oeuvre should be preceded by a reflection on the writer's life and the biographical context in which the work of literature was created. This consideration proves to be of particular importance as Maracle's and Robinson's careers as writers differ quite significantly from each other. Situating their works in the authors' lives helps creating suitable contexts for the analyses of their narratives.

3.1. *Lee Maracle's Ravensong*

3.1.1. Brief Biography²²

I think I was a storyteller when I was born – somehow. I don't have an explanation, but I've always been a storyteller. So I've become moved myself to write the stories that I like to tell. (Maracle, qtd. in Kelly 76)

And Maracle has recounted an abundance of tales and stories.

The well-known writer of the Stó:lō nation was born in 1950 and is of Cree and Salish ancestry. Lee and her siblings were raised and tended to by their mother and grandparents in a poor neighborhood in North Vancouver. The company of her grandparents was of utmost importance for the young storyteller, as they conveyed the traditional ways and knowledge of her people to her. Chief Dan George, Maracle's grandfather, was an influential figure during her formative years, since his talent as a storyteller and his poetic eloquence immensely inspired the young woman.

During her adolescence her struggle against racism and discrimination began, and, rebelling against a system she despised, Maracle dropped out of school and joined a variety of movements and groups throughout Canada, supporting herself by accepting casual employment. Maracle's turbulent years in the Red Power movement are documented in her as-told-to autobiography *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, which is based on eighty hours of tape and was first published in 1975. The writer recounts, "I was one of the first Native people in this country to articulate a position of sovereignty, back in

²² Unless otherwise stated, the biographical information is derived from: David; Bataille and Lisa; "Lee Maracle", University of Windsor.

1969. I have this reputation of being a pioneer of sorts, I suppose. Just after Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, *Bobbi Lee* came out" (Kelly 73).

While Maracle has, until today, acted as an untiring political activist, teacher, and writer, engaging in a strenuous struggle against oppression, discrimination, racism, and sexism, her writing became more prominent from the 1980s onward. "Poetry and the comfort of my diaries – my books of madness I called them – where truth rolled out of my inner self, began to re-shape me. [...] I became a woman through my words" (Maracle *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* 230). Her second book, entitled *I Am Woman* and published in 1988, is regarded as an empowerment of Natives throughout Canada, depicting Maracle's personal struggles and thus inspiring Aboriginals to challenge the stereotypes of the oppressive ethnic majority. The book contains elements of the tradition of Big House oratory, feminist ideas, and de-colonization issues.

Sojourner's Truth, a collection of short stories, was published in 1990, and her first novel *Sundogs* followed two years later. The novel centers on a female protagonist who rediscovers her Aboriginal roots during the summer of 1990, the time of the Oka crisis, thus establishing a link between the political and the personal.

Ravensong was first published in 1993, shortly after *Sundogs*. Set in the British Columbia of the 1950s, the constant presence of the trickster Raven and the change she attempts to initiate with the protagonist's and Celia's aid are the central themes. Being Maracle's second novel after a range of overt political writing, the tension of the (historical) relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is clearly palpable. She felt compelled to write this narrative, "I heard Raven's song, that's why I wrote *Ravensong*" (Kelly 85).

Bent Box, a collection of poetry, followed in 2000, with *Daughters Are Forever* being published in 2002. In the latter, Maracle focuses on self-empowerment by reflecting on oneself and one's culture. Maracle's latest novel, *Will's Garden*, created for young adults, was first available in print in 2002 as well. The male protagonist's coming-of-age in a Stó:lō community is recounted, and several thematic similarities with *Ravensong* may be discovered despite the alternate setting.

Maracle, a graduate of Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, has, among others, held academic posts at the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph and the University of Toronto, Ontario. In her vocation as a teacher and writer, she has traveled to the United States, China, the Caribbean, and Europe. Maracle has edited and

co-edited other Aboriginal writers, and contributed to magazines, journals, and anthologies.

3.1.2. Plot Summary

In *Ravensong*, Lee Maracle depicts the disastrous events with which a Salish community in British Columbia has to cope during the summer of 1954. The author highlights Raven's function as a transformer initiating change with regard to the reconciliation process between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. The Salish village and the town of Maillardville with its non-Native population are separated by a river, and while a bridge closes this spatial gap, a cultural gulf remains – the bridge as symbol of connection is disregarded by the inhabitants of both communities as they seldom interact with each other. At first, the trickster is hopeful that Stacey, the seventeen-year old protagonist of the novel, will be able to unite the two communities. However, Raven sadly realizes that Stacey alone will not be able to achieve this goal and resolves to intervene by sending a plague to both communities. The influenza epidemic is thus to initiate change by uniting the two groups through healing each other's physical and spiritual diseases with their respective knowledge, therefore discovering a way out of their self-induced isolation.

Stacey's mission as a border crosser and her interactions with non-Aboriginals contribute significantly to the fulfillment of Raven's plan, raising the trickster's hope once again. When the influenza epidemic hits the village, numerous deaths have to be coped with due to a lack of medical supplies, and the neglect of this disastrous situation by non-Natives is particularly striking. It is then that Stacey plainly perceives the differences concerning interpersonal relationships in the town and the village, understanding that the focus on material possessions in Maillardville suppresses the importance of each individual as a significant element of a community. The suicide of Polly, one of Stacey's classmates, contributes to her sociological reflections on connections among the individuals in the two unequal communities. As the epidemic spreads, Stacey's younger sister Celia frequently converses with the spirits but is unable to decipher their specific mode of storytelling. The crisis of the plague which claims numerous lives of beloved ones is followed by a drought and a fire. Meanwhile, Stacey has to cope with several problems on an interpersonal level, including troubles in her family, as the truth about her biological father is revealed to her. Additionally, Steve, a

young man from the village, appears as her suitor and Stacey struggles between different commitments she has made, finally rejecting his advancements. The relationships to non-Aboriginals in the town of Maillardville continue to be problematic and Stacey also loses her friend Carol due to the latter's dishonesty and disloyalty. When an instance of domestic abuse in the village becomes public knowledge, Stacey's family attends to the affected woman and her children by supporting them in times of need. The protagonist's interaction with such a plethora of diverse personalities influences her own emotional and spiritual development during her formative years.

These events of the summer of 1954, the last summer Stacey spends at home before her departure for the university in Vancouver, leave the protagonist facing various challenges simultaneously. The epilogue finally reveals how the village is viewed some twenty-five years after this ill-omened summer.

3.2. *Eden Robinson's Monkey Beach*

3.2.1. Brief Biography²³

Whereas Maracle's political intentions are clearly prominent in her life and writing, Robinson does not consider herself a political activist, and consequently, this issue is of relatively little importance in her literary works. Instead, her short stories and novels revolve around the theme of family dynamics, both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous surroundings.

Robinson, who was born in 1968 on the Haisla Nation Kitamaat Reserve and raised by a Haisla mother and Heiltsuk father, is considered the first Haisla novelist. Being rooted in a culture which celebrates its orature, she describes how she uses writing as a form of psychological catharsis and continues to elucidate which personal rewards creative writing offers:

With writing, the pay-off is more in actually doing it. It's quite different from telling a story. [When] something I've been working on for weeks and weeks and weeks [...] finally becomes clear and you have that rush, that incredible moment of total creativity and everything else in the world disappears. ("Discovering Eden")

²³ Unless otherwise stated, the biographical information is derived from the following electronic sources: Twigg and Jensen; Methot; "Discovering Eden".

Robinson's career as a writer began at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, where she enrolled in the Creative Writing program. She recalls her first three years at university as a challenging and strenuous time during which the young writer struggled to develop her skills. In retrospect, Robinson explains that it was the lack of contact to other Native writers which slowed down the process of developing her talent. She succeeded in establishing these contacts and graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Master's degree, finishing her short story collection *Traplines* in 1996. It is this prize-winning work of short fiction which established her high profile and her first novel, entitled *Monkey Beach* and published in 2000, was, among others, nominated for the Governor General's Award. The female protagonist's coming-of-age on a Haisla reservation is described, focusing particularly on family ties and the forces of nature, including trickster figures and supernatural elements. After short stories featuring violent characters in the harsh surroundings of urban Canada, her first novel appears to focus on spirituality. Robinson, very conscious of her responsibility to her elders and her people, explains her concern, "I can't write about certain things. [...] General ideas I felt very comfortable using, but I feel uncomfortable [detailing specific native traditions]" (Methot). While the writer thus occasionally feels the urge to describe certain cultural practices, she respectfully resists it, omitting topics such as ceremonies from her writing.

Robinson's family, which has constantly been supportive of her writing, values humor and wit, and the dark side of her literary work is thus even more unexpected. Having always been interested in horror, Robinson's second novel entitled *Blood Sports* from 2006 centers on violence, addiction, and revenge, and is considered a sequel to one of her short stories. In her latest work Robinson thus leaves the spiritual world and the reserve she has described in *Monkey Beach* to return to the glum cities, in which a mentally disturbed cousin tortures other family members. Her audacious boldness in her exploration of the dark side of life has been praised by reviewers and earned her several awards.

3.2.2. Plot Summary

In her coming-of-age narrative *Monkey Beach* Haisla writer Eden Robinson provides a colorful illustration of life in the Native community of Kitamaat which is situated on the British Columbian coast. The protagonist, nineteen-year old Lisamarie

Michelle Hill, revives the memories of her childhood and adolescence as she and her parents find themselves in a state of utter distress after having heard the news of Jimmy being lost at sea. The young man is seventeen years old at the time of his disappearance and his parents and sister cling to the hope that he will survive due to his extraordinary swimming skills.

Lisamarie recalls her first encounter with the b'gwus as she drifts into a daydream due to her emotional and physical exhaustion, a reverie which thus stresses the novel's focus on spiritual elements from the beginning. As her parents, Albert and Gladys, leave their home in search for their son, the young woman's memories intermingle with the present and future while her mind and body oscillate between the natural and supernatural worlds. As Lisamarie resolves to follow her parents by boat in order to support them in their search for Jimmy, she relives the wonderful times she spent with her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, and describes the unconditional love and guidance the wise woman provided to her. As an essential figure in the conveying of Haisla culture, Ma-ma-oo introduces her granddaughter not only to her heritage but also teaches her about spirituality and supernatural phenomena. Lisamarie recalls her uncle Mick's arrival and his influence on her life as well as his untimely death due to a boat accident. Losing her beloved relatives triggers Lisamarie's period of depression and misery as she tries to flee from the guilt she perceives by escaping to Vancouver. The young woman undergoes a period of intense isolation, indulging in substance abuse and self-pity. After her return to Kitamaat, Lisamarie is determined to change her life in order to reintegrate into society. While she adopts a more optimistic outlook, her brother Jimmy seems to topple into disaster concerning both his relationship with his girlfriend Karaoke as well as his swimming career. Lisamarie's connections with fellow students in Kitamaat are overshadowed by her colleagues' exploitation of her friendship and ties with other young people are slowly crumbling, prompting Lisamarie to realize that her family remains as the only haven providing unconditional love. During these events, Lisamarie's encounters with the supernatural are a recurrent and essential theme. Her memories are interrupted by descriptions of her current search for her brother by boat, and when she lands on Monkey Beach her spiritual development reaches a climax, but the fate of her brother is only alluded to.

3.3. *Bildungsroman* or Coming-of-Age Story?

3.3.1. The Aboriginal *Bildungsroman* or Coming-of-Age Narrative

Having situated both authors' works in their respective artistic careers, including their personal histories and experiences, both of political and artistic nature, the creative contexts for *Monkey Beach* and *Ravensong* have been established and might have altered the reader's original perspective on these works of literature. The two authors' biographies differ tremendously: on the one hand Maracle emerges as the political activist and "Native writer" who challenges the treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada in her writing; on the other hand Robinson, the "good writer" ("Email Interview", cf. Appendix), intends to show that she, a writer of Indigenous origin, can create narratives with non-Indigenous content, as demonstrated in *Traplines* (Methot). Despite the authors' dissimilarities, as revealed above, the description of a protagonist's formative years in narrative form unites them in their creative writing. Which aspects of the *Bildungsroman* can be discovered in Maracle's and Robinson's novels, and which elements distinguish a coming-of-age story devised by a non-Aboriginal author from the narrative created by an Aboriginal writer?

While I have reflected on the concepts of *Bildung* and consequently the aspects of the *Bildungsroman* above, I primarily focused on the European origin of this literary genre. However, since both *Monkey Beach* and *Ravensong* were composed in surroundings which clearly differ from a European (literary) environment, contemplating the issue of ethnic minority writing and its correlation with the *Bildungsroman* is indispensable. This reflection should particularly include the aspect of the heroine, or female protagonist, as opposed to the hero, or male protagonist, featured in traditional coming-of-age narratives.

One difference between the European *Bildungsroman* and the coming-of-age story originating from the pen of a writer belonging to an ethnic minority is related to political affairs, beliefs, and principles. While in Europe the female protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* were and are involved in emancipation processes, fighting authoritative education and up-bringing, questioning gender roles and notions of ideal femininity, a different situation has presented itself in coming-of-age stories set in Indigenous communities in Canada. Recurring themes of discrimination, identity crises due to the recognition of the huge disparity between Native and Euro-Canadian communities,

struggles for survival of the protagonists themselves as well as of their families and tribes, and finding one's place in the tightly-knit network of families, relations, and tribal members are of utmost importance.

While some similarities might be detected between a coming-of-age story created by a writer of Aboriginal background and an intercultural *Bildungsroman* (Gutjahr 69), the most significant difference should always be borne in mind: while the latter is concerned with the socio-cultural contexts of (im)migration and living in a country different from the one of one's origin, the coming-of-age story by a Native writer oftentimes focuses on living as an alien in one's *own* country. However, "das Zwischen-Zwei-Kulturen-Sein als ständiges Unterwegssein im Sinne neuer Identitätsfindung" can be seen as a point of similarity between those two forms of the novel (Gutjahr 70).²⁴ In an article composed in 1983, Braendlin writes of "an alternative *Bildungsroman* written by 'disenfranchised Americans—women, blacks, Mexican American, native Americans, homosexuals' in which *Bildung* is judged by 'new standards and perspectives'" (Braendlin, qtd. in Hardin xix).

Coming-of-age stories by writers of European ancestry are the ones most strongly featured in literary discussions. In the wealth of material I have encountered on the *Bildungsroman* and its related genres, it was merely in Millard that Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* was identified as a "good example of the coming-of-age story"; Millard, however, did not mention that this work was written by an Aboriginal author (182).

The essential question to be investigated is: Why or how should one use the term *Bildungsroman*, derived from eighteenth century Europe, to describe texts which do not correspond any longer to the historical or cultural context in which the expression was formerly created (Millard 3)? The historical and cultural removal from the original context of the *Bildungsroman* is one reason why this genre description only partly applies to the books by Maracle and Robinson.

However, also the term "coming-of-age narrative" poses certain difficulties. "Coming-of-age" implies "to reach full legal adult status" (Millard 4). Should the literary scholar in his or her analysis thus refer to the legal definition only? Do certain rites of passage have to be lived through in order to be considered of age? Does coming-of-age necessarily apply to teenagers only? As Millard points out, "full legal adult status varies between cultures, especially in relation to such cultural markers as alcohol, sexual

²⁴ Gutjahr argues that this term can be applied to migration literature. However, she does not consider novels written by Indigenous writers worldwide.

consent, driving license, marriage” (5). The reader of non-Aboriginal ethnic background will quickly notice cultural differences concerning the passage into adulthood when studying *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*. These differences are even more obvious when considering the year in which *Ravensong* is set, namely 1954, and comparing it to European cultural and societal conventions of the twenty-first century.

Moreover, it is claimed that, while it is commonly acknowledged that the years between the ages of twelve and nineteen can be termed “adolescence”, the passage into adulthood increasingly occurs only during the early twenties (Millard 5). This is also connected to socio-cultural phenomena: in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, an increasing number of young people decide to attend institutions of higher education, and oftentimes opt to found families once they have a fixed income, i.e. after graduation. The process of finding a stable place in the world has thus shifted to the early to mid twenties, which underscores the claim made above.

Millard emphasizes repeatedly that historical contexts need to be considered as well. He mentions that in contemporary coming-of-age novels a contextualisation of the protagonist’s consciousness with historical events takes place (Millard 10). Wagner also stresses this point, and mentions one characteristic common to all *Bildungsromane*, namely that those novels are “[n]och mehr als der gewöhnliche Roman [...] mit dem jeweiligen Leben der Zeit verflochten” (15). This point is illustrated by the never-ending philosophical contemplations about political and historical events which are undertaken by the protagonists in *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*. Stacey questions the rights of Aboriginals, the treatment of her people in the past and present, and Lisamarie experiences a conflict with the Haisla tradition and her Euro-Canadian way of life.

This discussion clearly demonstrates that both of the above mentioned terms describing literary works dealing with the maturing process of young adults are subject to criticism. However, for reasons outlined above, I still prefer the term “coming-of-age” and its implications as well as its applicability will be investigated in detail.

3.3.2. *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*

Drawing on the characteristic features of a coming-of-age story established in section 2.3., the present novels, *Ravensong* as well as *Monkey Beach*, shall be investigated in reference to these elements.²⁵

Firstly, it can indisputably be established that both novels feature adolescent women as their protagonists and thus heroines, and that the young women's mental and personal developments are the true foci of Robinson's and Maracle's narratives. While this first characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* can thus be discovered in both works of fiction, Tolchin's argument that all *Bildungsromane* "feature beleaguered protagonists who turn inward, indulge in self-pity and angst, and experience pain" (10) does not apply to the novels under investigation. These statements shall be demonstrated in detail.

Both Stacey and Lisamarie turn inward to consider their own lives as well as those of their families and relatives; however, their ultimate decisions involve going out into the world, as Stacey intends to pursue a degree in education in order to establish a school in her village and Lisamarie embarks on a journey to search for her lost brother. Subsequently, the protagonists do not "indulge" in self-pity, and do not become silent and solitary philosophers, but actively engage with the world. Instead of pitying herself, Stacey energetically attempts to create a brighter future for the youngsters in her community. Despite the fact that Lisamarie does experience some moments of self-pity, she quickly recovers from her lethargy and resolves to actively engage in the search for her lost brother Jimmy herself. While people commiserating with themselves can be described as passive, both protagonists very vigorously engage in activities which they hope can alter their situations. The pondering of events which haven taken place during their childhood or onset of adolescence is not so much an act of self-pity as a mature reconsideration of incidents they were too young to understand at the time of their occurrence. Tolchin's claim does thus not apply to Robinson's and Maracle's novels even though the first characteristic, namely the featuring of the protagonist's development, is true.

In both *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*, school and education are depicted as exasperating elements for the protagonists. Their despair stems from the fact that both

²⁵ For an easy reference to these characteristics' occurrence cf. the table in the Appendix.

Stacey and Lisamarie attend public schools which are mostly composed of non-Aboriginal students. They are both faced with having to study biased accounts of historical events which depict Natives and their deeds incorrectly. Stacey, who is held in high esteem by her community, nonetheless decides to continue her education at university, ultimately for the benefit of her own people. She thus chooses to leave the safety of her village in order to learn more about non-Aboriginal ways of life, knowing that during this challenging period she will have to face discrimination, unfairness, and intolerance.

Lisamarie, on the other hand, dislikes and even despises both school in particular and studying in general. She quits high-school, but returns after a period of contemplation, resolving to graduate, “It’s amazing what a goal will do. Mine was simple, but not very admirable. I didn’t want to graduate after Jimmy did” (*Monkey Beach* 326). Her younger brother Jimmy, who has always been a particularly diligent and intelligent student, encourages his elder sister’s plan and continually offers his help. Despite Lisamarie’s efforts to succeed, she finds herself sometimes struggling with her resolution, and eventually does not show any ambition to continue higher studies at college or university.

Naturally, conflicts with parents and other figures of authority arise during adolescence. This is described as the third characteristic of coming-of-age narratives in the above mentioned section. In *Ravensong*, numerous instances of these conflicts are recounted. The most significant one occurs when Stacey leaves with Rena and German Judy to go berry picking without having asked her mother for permission. Stacey, who is at that point of time not yet aware that this trip is considered an unchaperoned one due to the homosexual relationship between the two other women, is faced with an outraged mother who snaps in response to her daughter’s misbehavior, “ ‘The law is simple, Stacey, and this family lives within it. If your schooling persuades you otherwise, don’t come back’ ” (*Ravensong* 124). Stacey, shocked by her mother’s remark, feels deep shame, “That remark, that single remark had changed her whole place in life. [...] Never again would her mother ever talk to her about conduct. No more patience. She would have to own her every action” (*Ravensong* 124).

This conflict marks an important point in Stacey’s maturation process. She realizes for the first time that she is fully responsible for her own actions and their consequences.

Another conflict with a person of authority occurs when Stacey, after having been up endless hours fighting the flu in her village, arrives late for her class and is sent to the principal's office. She is bold and insolent when she talks to him:

“You have the power to cut my dreams short and expel me,” she said simply, “but I will not serve any detentions for lateness.” [...] “You have not been dismissed,” [the principal] retorted sharply, to which she raised her eyebrows, smiled condescendingly and replied “That’s true” as she closed the door. (*Ravensong* 68)

Ravensong describes numerous conflicts between Stacey and various figures of authority: conflicts which arise due to her will to resist and rebel; others because she is ignorant of traditions and customs of her tribe and family. Realizing that these conflicts exist and openly facing them instead of choosing to retreat, is one important factor in Stacey's mental and personal development.

In *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, the conflicts which arise between Lisamarie and her parents and educators can be identified as acts of teenage rebellion, rather than as an inner examination of values. These forms of misbehavior include abusing drugs and alcohol, smoking, skipping school, and running away from home. She answers her parents in bold and impudent ways, and receives punishment for actions which are deemed improper by her family. One day, the protagonist is discovered by her mother while smoking, “ ‘Lisamarie Michelle Hill, what the hell do you think you’re doing?’ The first thing that popped out of my mouth was, ‘What the hell does it look like I’m doing?’ ” (*Monkey Beach* 245). As a consequence, the young woman is grounded, “ ‘Young lady, you are not leaving this room until you promise me you are never smoking again’ ” (*Monkey Beach* 255). Hence, even though she violates the rules of society as well as the regulations of her family, Lisa is never threatened with ostracism. Additionally, she does not ponder her misbehavior, but rather impatiently lingers in her room until she has served her time – she does neither learn from her misconduct nor from the punishment and continues committing wrongful acts. When returning to her community after having fled to Vancouver, where she explores the effects of drugs on her body until she discovers their harmfulness herself, she is welcomed with open arms instead of being banned, the punishment which would have been executed in Stacey's community.

A resistance to a version of history written by European scholars, as taught in school, can be observed in *Monkey Beach* as well. Lisamarie's argument with the

principal is not described in detail, however, it is recounted that she resisted the request by her teacher to read out loud certain lies:

She had forced us to read a book that said that the Indians on the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices. My teacher had made us each read a paragraph out loud. When my turn came, I sat there shaking, absolutely furious. (*Monkey Beach* 68)

The conflicts which Lisamarie and Stacey encounter differ greatly from each other, which could be traced back to their age difference; while Stacey is threatened with expulsion from school and ostracism from her community at the age of seventeen, Lisamarie is between the ages of twelve to fifteen when rebelling against figures of authority. As Stacey is deemed more mature, she is expected to accept responsibility for her deeds as well as to recognize the resulting consequences, while the protagonist of *Monkey Beach* is considered too young to fully understand the scope of her actions and thus has to accept punishment which desperate parents deem proper in their attempt to educate their child. Stacey's ability to self-reflect is therefore more fully developed than Lisamarie's, who, nevertheless, noticeably grows more mature toward the end of the narrative, when her rebellious acts subside.

As mentioned above, Stacey does experience "wanderlust", which constitutes the fourth characteristic of a coming-of-age story, as described in section 2.3. The young protagonist believes that she has found her vocation in teaching, and intends to obtain the schooling necessary for this profession. Undoubtedly, she will have to explore various surroundings and cultures, which will differ greatly from the ones she has grown up in. New socio-cultural contexts will have to be discovered by her, as she faces the challenge of living in the city of Vancouver.

However, the maturation process does not commence in this new environment (characteristic number five). Instead, Stacey already begins her passage into the adult world long before her actual departure, which signifies the irrevocability of this journey of maturation. While the process starts earlier in the village, it will be completed at university, where, living for the first time outside of her community, she will learn to integrate into a different culture while simultaneously fighting for her own people's rights. Stacey is confronted with this conflict of identity during her last summer in her community and consequently already faces struggles at home which many of her Native friends and family never even think of. Maybe she is considered the "thinker" of her community not only due to her education, but also due to this experience, "[Stacey] was a thinker, like Dominic and Grampa Thomas. Everyone in the community indulged her

fancy for wandering off to think or joining the old people in their endless debates over philosophy, white folks' ways and their own" (*Ravensong* 138).

The summer before her departure signifies an important stage on the road to adulthood. During this time she re-invents and re-defines her personality and attitudes (characteristic number seven); she does not only discover the differences between her people in the village and the non-Aboriginals in the town of Maillardville, but begins to reflect on them, contemplating these dissimilarities:

"I can't stop taking stock of the way everything looks – it's like an obsession. I do this grocery list of the differences between white town houses, buildings, and our own." [...] "Why?" Rena asked, a hint of disapproval in her voice. "Why what?" "Why compare us to them?" (*Ravensong* 115)

German Judy is an important character as she facilitates Stacey's passage into a world yet unknown to her. While the protagonist does almost constantly compare the lives of people in the town and in the village, she also realizes that moving to a big city is a step with which she needs help in order to be able to integrate.

The reader of *Ravensong* does once have the opportunity to observe Stacey's skills as a teacher, when her mother and Madeline demand to be taught to read. This positive experience then strengthens Stacey's decision to pursue her vocation as a teacher, and, due to her knowledge of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, she is probably very able to succeed in what she plans to do (characteristic number six).

Lisamarie also feels the urge to leave her community of Kitamaat in order to spend some weeks and months in Vancouver (characteristic number four). She thus begins to explore an environment yet foreign to her, experiencing joy as well as grief, and emotions alternating from bliss to numbness to depression. It is in an environment in which no rules exist that she discovers her boundaries – emotional, personal, and financial. The purpose of the protagonist's relocation remains obscure; she might flee from her depression following Mick's death, from her family, from school; she might search for a job, or for an opportunity to party and indulge in forbidden substance abuse in order to paralyze her brain and emotions.

Consequently, the learning process, which, similar to *Ravensong*, also already starts while Lisamarie lives in her community at the beginning of her adolescence, is accelerated and intensified during her sojourn in British Columbia's most populated city. At home, the protagonist of *Monkey Beach* constantly acquires traditional knowledge by accompanying her grandmother on various expeditions. Experiencing loss, grief, affection to family and friends, failure as well as success triggers her

maturation process even before she ventures to live in Vancouver. The fifth characteristic of the coming-of-age narrative thus remains unfulfilled, as it is not the *new* environment which is the initiating factor in Lisamarie's developmental process. Nonetheless, the protagonist's attitudes evidently change upon her return from the city, which marks a turning point in her young life. For instance, she resolves to restart school and now abstains from alcohol and drugs, and thus re-integrates into her community. She reflects on her attitudes and re-defines them (characteristic number seven), but not to fit better into new, but into old contexts. However, her psychological, emotional, and personal development will yet undergo numerous changes until the end of the narrative.

The sixth characteristic can only partially be found in *Monkey Beach*. While, as argued above, Lisamarie experiences the development of her ability to self-reflect during her sojourn in Vancouver, it cannot be argued that the validity of her skills and capacities for her further life are examined, as is the case when Stacey's abilities as a teacher are affirmed.

The last and eighth element mentioned in section 2.3. concerns the narrated time. In *Ravensong*, the events of one summer are recounted, and an epilogue, being set some twenty-five years after the events, explains the reason why this story is being told. In *Monkey Beach*, Lisamarie's memories focus on the formative events during her childhood and adolescence, while the time during which she relives these memories spans only roughly forty-eight hours. Even though she begins to recount her memories, which start when she is only at the age of six, not a detailed account of her life is offered, but rather a depiction of incidents which shaped and influenced her personality and explain why she has grown into the young woman she is.

It can hence be demonstrated that for *Monkey Beach* as well as for *Ravensong*, most of the characteristics I have established in the previous section concerning the coming-of-age narrative are applicable. As a consequence, it can be argued that both novels fall into this genre. My findings are supported by a scholar who, in her discussion of various novels by Aboriginal writers, concludes:

Along with Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* and Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, [Armstrong's *Slash*, Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun*, Maracle's *Ravensong*, and Robinson's *Traplins*] could illustrate, expand, and challenge the category of the *Bildungsroman*, the narrative of maturation. (Hoy 185-186)

Hoy believes it necessary to explicate the term *Bildungsroman*, which underlines the significance of attempting to define this category or of at least providing certain characteristics, considering the novels which are oftentimes subsumed under or excluded from this literary genre. She includes various narratives by Aboriginal writers in her enumeration, which emphasizes that the realm of the coming-of-age story does not exclusively apply to works by writers of European provenance.

3.4. Narrative Technique

3.4.1. Structure

An author may employ various techniques to structure his or her literary work. This process can be done formally, by the division into chapters or sections, and subchapters or subsections, for instance; or narratively, by using an introduction, climax, pro- or analepsis, for example. As a detailed analysis of the structural devices employed by Robinson and Maracle is not intended in the present thesis, only a brief overview will be provided.

At first glance, the structure of Maracle's novel is, opposed to *Monkey Beach*, simple and linear. The events occurring during the summer months of 1954 are recounted, from late spring to the beginning of fall. While the novel is divided into fifteen chapters of about equal length and a brief concluding epilogue, notions of time within the time frame of the summer months are indistinct and frequently remain imprecise. Time gaps can be found between chapters and also between paragraphs, and the passing of days and weeks is repeatedly only marked with line breaks. These very subtle indications of time shifts may serve as reminders of the differing perceptions of time as understood by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

The linear chronology of the narrative is – except for a few brief flashbacks – never disrupted, although a significant time gap can be observed between the main text and the epilogue at the end of the novel: “ ‘That was 1954,’ Stacey heard herself say some twenty-five years later” (*Ravensong* 197). It is revealed that the previous story is actually told by four women, namely by Stacey, Celia, Momma, and Rena, to another younger family member, Stacey's nephew. This ending was only inserted by Maracle after some deliberation, as she explains:

When I wrote [*Ravensong*] it was finished when [Stacey] crossed over the bridge to me, because it was from the moments of this decision making; she starts her

decision making at the beginning of the story and then she's turned out into the world, that's the end of the story. ("Personal Interview", cf. Appendix)

However, the need for a stronger ending prompted the writer to add a type of conclusion to the main plot. The epilogue changes the perspective on the novel as a whole as it becomes clear that the main characters of the story recount it themselves some twenty-five years later. MacFarlane stresses the relationship between structure and agency, when she argues that Stacey moves away from "being 'storied' to having, creating and telling her own story", and that "[l]inear order, causal relations and narrative divisions are disrupted as the narrative present in Stacey's story is revealed, in the epilogue, to be an active re-membering (storying) of the past" (119-121).

As some further clues about the diminishment of the community are inserted, the uplifting hopefulness which is established at the end of the narrative as Stacey's ventures out into the world is almost eliminated as a feeling of sadness about the failure of the protagonist's initial plans replaces the optimism. However, it has also been argued that the structure of the novel "stresses spiritual recovery", as the four women mentioned in the epilogue convey "the values of their cultural heritage to young Jacob", making a "destabilization of colonial fixity" possible (Kaltemback 52-53). Therefore, the ending could again be read as optimistic and cheerful.

Just as in *Monkey Beach*, memories are also recounted in *Ravensong*. However, these episodes of Stacey's childhood and adolescence are usually very brief and do not constitute separate entities, as they do in Robinson's text. In one of the few extended memories, Stacey, now mature and knowledgeable, recounts the "naturalization" of her uncle, looking back at a then immature young girl who is ignorant of Canadian bureaucracy and the political implications of "naturalization" (*Ravensong* 46-49). Other memories include traumatic incidents of innumerable deaths in her community due to illness, or infamous stories about "the old snake" (*Ravensong* 95-96; 148-150).

While the narrative as a whole is hence structured in a linear manner with few flashbacks, the past, present, and future occasionally merge and intermingle, a phenomenon quite similar to the transcendence of the worlds of the living and dead in *Monkey Beach*. Such a fusion can be observed in particular during passages in which Celia acts as the mediator between the supernatural and the natural worlds, grasping the meaning of signs which others are too busy to recognize or unable to see, or which they simply ignore. "Dominic had also mentioned that Celia was spending much time alone in cedar's shadows, but the family had paid little attention to it" (*Ravensong* 63). The

place under this tree is where Celia most often establishes contact to the non-human world. Despite her young age, the girl's gift is of utmost importance, as it is the trickster Raven who communicates and discloses her plans and intentions concerning the future to Stacey's younger sister, "[Celia] was already situated at her usual spot behind the band hall watching Raven. The song that was customarily suspended in the air surrounding Raven hadn't arrived. She waited patiently for it [...]" (*Ravensong* 125).

While she may occasionally grasp the scope of these visions, she is, due to her age, yet unable to alter the course of events. In Celia's dreams and nightmares, whose contents she is yet unable to associate with historical episodes, events of the past recur, such as the settlers' landing on the American continent, which constitutes a life-altering event in her people's history (*Ravensong* 9-10; 41-42). These "visionings with the past" are pivotal points, even though the young girl does not realize it immediately, because cultural survival can only be assured by remembering the experience of colonization (Horne 119).

In Robinson's narrative, which the author has structured in a more complex manner, episodes of the past, present and future (in the form of premonitions) are intermingling to form a multifaceted web of storylines.

The book opens in the present tense, and as the story of the missing seiner with Lisamarie's brother onboard slowly unravels, the readers are able to catch the first glimpses of the Hill's family dynamics. Lisamarie, who is in a state of trance after she has learned the news about her brother's disappearance, relives distinctive memories which start around her sixth birthday and date to the present. These episodes, which allow the reader to become acquainted with her childhood, surface every time the protagonist drifts into a state of (day)dreaming due to the excessive emotional strain, food deprivation, and lack of sleep. The memories, which are chronological and recounted in the past tense, alternate with episodes of Lisamarie's and her parents' search for their lost family member, and these two aspects constitute the major part of the novel. While these changing points of view are generally clearly distinguishable, it becomes increasingly more challenging to find clear demarcation lines between the past, the present, and even the future in the last section of the novel, when memories combine with the present and intrusions of the supernatural (*Monkey Beach* 360-374). The wish or need to draw these lines, however, might be typical of a non-Aboriginal reader, as

“[f]rom Lisa’s indigenous perspective the supernatural and the fantastic constitute another dimension of reality not separable from everyday experience” (Howells 184).

The novel, which is divided into four chapters whose lengths differ extremely from each other, features three larger recurrent literary interludes which alternate irregularly with the present search and the past memories as exemplified above. The first one offers instructions on how to contact the dead, which is inserted four times²⁶ and climaxes at the end of the novel, when Lisa manages to establish a very intense contact with individuals existing beyond the world of the living. In particular, it has been argued that conveying to the readership this sense of connectedness with the spirit world is essential:

Though Lisa’s perception of the spirit world is fragmented, the poetic structure of the novel provides a web of connections between the human and nonhuman worlds, which is figured through the language of dream and vision as she tries to bridge cultural gaps, reconnecting with ancient customs while being a modern teenager. (Howells 190)

In other passages, the heart is explained in anatomic detail, but careful attention is paid to make this vital organ’s function comprehensible to the medical layman.²⁷ The last medical insertion ends with the description of a myocardial infarction.

The third of the above mentioned literary interludes refers to the instructions or teachings which are presented to the reader in the course of the novel. These instructions include geographical descriptions, such as locating Lisamarie’s home town on a map or discovering certain places in the towns themselves, cooking recipes, and accounts of Haisla history. However, the reader should not be led to believe that Haisla culture is explained through the text, but rather that further research by him- or herself is requested (Appleford par. 35).

The time gaps between the different episodes in Lisamarie’s memory are oftentimes substantial. However, Robinson provides clues and evidence which let the reader usually rather effortlessly explore which stage in Lisamarie’s physical and mental development is recounted, whereas occasionally it does indeed prove difficult to locate the story in narrative time and space. Considering political and historical implications concerning Aborigines in Canada, it is of interest to the attentive and considerate reader at which point in time precisely Robinson’s narrative is set. This aspect might constitute the very reason for both Maracle’s and Robinson’s explicitly stating the exact year in which the main actions in their novels take place, even though

²⁶ Cf. *Monkey Beach*, 139, 179-180, 212, 366.

²⁷ Cf. *Monkey Beach*, 163-164, 191-192, 268-269, 275.

the latter chooses to reveal it to the reader only towards the end of the novel, giving the year 1989 (*Monkey Beach* 296). A repetitive image, which is also employed to hold all these episodes and glimpses of Lisamarie's and her family's lives together, is "the sound of the speedboat", which, most notably, marks the beginning as well as the end of the narrative (*Monkey Beach* 2, 374).

Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach*, which the writer divided into numerous shorter and longer passages, therefore offers a structure with several time gaps which ties events together in a rather complex manner.

3.4.2. Narrative Situation

The following brief account of the narrative situations encountered in *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach* provides a glimpse of narrative methods employed by the writers. As a detailed analysis of the narrative techniques in both novels would by far exceed the scope of this paper, the introduction to this topic will describe in a few words the narrative situations and the points of view Maracle and Robinson used in their literary works.

The narrative situation in *Ravensong* consists of various points of view. Unexpected, yet oftentimes subtle shifts in narrative voice are common and frequent, and Maracle creates an unanticipated change in the narrative situation at the end of her novel, initiating a reconsideration of the narrative viewpoints. Therefore, my analysis will firstly be concerned with the narrative situation excluding the epilogue, and secondly including these last few pages of *Ravensong*.

The novel commences with an account by an authorial narrator, describing Raven, Cedar, Cloud, and "a small girl", whom the reader later recognizes as Celia, and, after having introduced the girl, shifts into the perspective of Celia as a reflector character²⁸:

From the depths of the sound Raven sang a deep wind song, melancholy green. Above, the water layered itself in stacks of still green, dark to light. [...] Below cedar a small girl sat. She watched for some time the wind playing with cloud. Above, she felt the presence of song in the movement of cedar's branches. [...] Her body began to float. Everything non-physical inside her sped up. (*Ravensong* 9-10)

²⁸ For these terms cf. Stanzel, 1995.

For the major part of the novel it is not Celia but Stacey, the protagonist, who acts as the reflector character through whom the story is told. Points of view are shifting occasionally, and Maracle carefully alternates between authorial and figural narration, which constitutes a form of narration which was widely used in the mid-twentieth century, and, I argue, later on as well (Stanzel 7). The reader finds him- or herself inside Stacey's mind, voyeuristically being able to discover her innermost thoughts and feelings. The protagonist faces great emotional turmoil after a quarrel with her mother, an incident which simultaneously constitutes a significant turning point in her maturation process, "She awoke with Momma's words burning in her ears. She didn't want to think about them, to consider the hardness contained in them or their significance to her as a responsible adult" (*Ravensong* 125).

The writer's predominant use of Stacey as a reflector character can certainly also be traced back to the fact that she intended to raise the readership's sympathy toward the protagonist, "The more a reader learns about the innermost motives for the behaviour of a character, the more inclined he tends to feel understanding, forbearance, tolerance, and so on, in respect to the conduct of this character" (Stanzel 128).

While the bulk of the novel is told by Stacey acting as a reflector character, other passages remind the reader that also an authorial narrator, who is omniscient, exists, "Village life resumed its pace without any hint of its feelings about Ned taking up with Momma. Stacey supposed it was because they decided it was inevitable, Momma being how she was and all. No one could have guessed that they just couldn't care anymore" (*Ravensong* 181). This passage juxtaposes two different spheres of knowledge: Stacey's limited perspective and her assumption about the villagers, and the omniscient narrator's point of view, who provides the reader with information about the sentiments of the community, sentiments Stacey is ignorant of. Therefore, the reader is offered more information than the protagonist has. The limited point of view which is conveyed through figural narration is emphasized when the reader is reminded not to completely trust Stacey's judgments: "As is sometimes the case with cynical thoughts, Stacey was wrong" (*Ravensong* 182). This comment acts as a very forceful reminder that the reader is given a limited view on events occurring in the course of the novel. Almost all incidents and, perhaps more importantly, each of the characters' personalities are filtered through Stacey as a reflector character.

Occasionally, the limited point of view is expanded by the authorial narrator, who even offers glimpses of the future, and thus provides the reader with additional

information. Somehow apologetically, he or she concedes that Stacey cannot be aware of everything that is happening around her: “It was the last time for a long time that anyone in the village would offer tobacco, but Stacey could not know that” (*Ravensong* 190).

Thus, it is those two perspectives which dominate in Maracle’s novel, if one chooses to ignore the epilogue. However, the complexity of the narrative situation is intensified in this part of the book, when narrative conventions are suddenly subverted and undermined. The claims I have just made above only remain valid when considering the novel excluding the epilogue. The very last part of the novel provides a totally new perspective on the narrative situation when re-reading the novel, “ ‘That was 1954,’ Stacey heard herself say some twenty-five years later. [...] It took all winter for Celia, Stacey, Momma and Rena to recount that summer. Young Jacob sat in silence listening to the women” (*Ravensong* 197).

The epilogue therefore explains the narrative situation – or attempts to explain it. The very last part of the novel surprises the reader by revealing the identities of the narrators, as the anonymous narrator is transformed into four narrators, with whom the reader is then already well acquainted, as they are also featured as characters in the main story. Initial assumptions concerning the narrative situation are destabilized, and Stanzel explains why this can happen:

A teller-character always functions as a “transmitter,” that is, he narrates as if he were transmitting a piece of news or a message to a “receiver,” the reader. Communication proceeds differently with a reflector-character. [...] In this case the mediacy of presentation is characteristically obscured by the reader’s illusion that he is witnessing the action directly – he feels he is perceiving it through the eyes and mind of the reflector-character. (146-147)

Therefore, this solution or supposedly simple elucidation of the narrative situation offered in the epilogue complicates rather than facilitates an understanding of the narrative condition. Certain passages in the book, especially those referring to the world of the trickster, could – applying European standards of interpretation, as mentioned above – only be told by an omniscient narrator. Since the story is recounted by four women who take part in the plot themselves, in the end, it is suggested to the reader that he or she has been exposed to four strands of narration from four limited points of view – which does offer a variety of insights from different viewpoints. Nonetheless, these viewpoints remain limited, and the question is raised from which point of view passages

such as the following are recounted, if only the four women tell the story – is there an omniscient authorial narrator after all?

It has taken Raven almost a century to drive the people from the village, still the villagers would not communicate with the others. Epidemic after epidemic had not birthed the shame Raven had hoped for among the people of white town, so the villagers remained staunch in their silence. (*Ravensong* 191)

Even though it might be argued that Stacey is valued highly by her community due to her education, she does not have the ability or willingness, at the point of time the story takes place, to listen to and understand the spirits and tricksters of the supernatural world. Celia, who notices them, is in 1954 still too young to understand their signals. Two explanations are possible: on the one hand an omniscient authorial narrator is employed by Maracle for passages such as the one above; on the other hand Stacey or Celia have matured and gained tremendous knowledge by the end of the novel, so that in remembering the events of the summer, looking back, they are able to reconstruct the trickster's plans and all other events which occurred in the community.

Consequently, the epilogue contributes to the complexity of the narrative situation in Maracle's *Ravensong*, and poses questions to the reader of European literary background which are challenging to answer.

The narrative situation of Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* is marked by a first person narrator, who is also the protagonist of the novel, namely Lisamarie Michelle Hill. The narrative situation is of significance, in particular as it is the more mature Lisa who recounts certain passages of her younger life, in the form of memories; the situation is similar to *Ravensong*, where also a grown-up Stacey looks back at her adolescent life. However, whereas in *Ravensong* the time period between the actual events and the time at which the account is given spans twenty-five years, Lisamarie is at the end of her teenage years when she informs the reader about her young life and very recent events. In fact, in the first memory she shares she recounts a telephone call by the Coast Guard inquiring about her lost brother, and thus it is a very powerful and emotional and – most importantly – a very recent episode, which happens only three days prior to the point in time at which she tells the story (*Monkey Beach* 5).

Investigating the first person narrator and the function of memory in connection with the narrative situation, Stanzel differentiates between the “narrating self” and the “experiencing self” (212) and observes:

The shorter the narrative distance, the closer the narrating self stands to the experiencing self. The horizon of knowledge and perception of the experiencing self becomes narrower and the effect of memory as a catalyst capable of clarifying the substance of experience is correspondingly limited. (214)

This observation indicates that the narrating and experiencing selves of Lisamarie in *Monkey Beach* are much more closely related than Stacey's, due to the short temporal difference between the events taking place and the point in time at which the account is given. The narrative distance is of utmost importance, as it generally indicates the extent to which the character/narrator has undergone a process of mental and physical development. The narrator might identify with the experiencing self as he or she recounts his or her life, or might feel a form of complete estrangement – these two instances being diametrically opposed points on a scale, with various possibilities in between (Stanzel 213). This explanation supports my claim made above that Stacey, looking back at her teenagehood after twenty-five years, is able to explain phenomena and complex relationships which she was too young to understand as an adolescent.²⁹ Accordingly, while Lisamarie has undergone a maturation process by the end of the novel, she is still emotionally very much connected with the accounts she gives or memories she re-experiences, and can therefore be described as having a close link between the narrating and experiencing selves. Additionally, her memories become more and more blurred towards the end of the novel, due to her physical exhaustion.

This consideration prompts doubts about her reliability as a narrator of her memories. Sometimes, Lisamarie does not succeed in recalling the events which she wishes to share with the readers: “I *try to remember* a story she told me, but I am distracted. [...] I *think* it was grade seven when I learned that wind starts as a difference in temperature between the air and the ground” [my emphasis] (*Monkey Beach* 154). Expressions like these create some doubt as to Lisamarie's ability to remember the stories correctly. The reader is thus also reminded of the limited point of view and the subjective viewpoint from which the major part of the story is told (or rather, remembered). The use of terms like “I try” or “I think” and thus the emphasis on the act of recollection pushes the narrating self into the foreground (Stanzel 217). In other passages, the narrating self retreats to the background, and the experiencing self is predominant; frequently, the reader becomes so immersed in Lisamarie's memories that the sudden transition to the present comes as a surprise (*Monkey Beach* 290). Memories

²⁹ Stanzel uses these terms for the first person narration. Although most of *Ravensong* is told from the point of view of a figural narrator, considering the epilogue which identifies Stacey as a narrator, I apply his terms now considering Maracle's novel as well.

are employed by Robinson as a creative device: “Remembering itself is a quasi-verbal process of silent narration by which the story receives an aesthetic form, primarily as a result of the selection and structuring inherent in recollection” (Stanzel 215-216).

However, it is not always memories the reader is allowed to observe. In certain instances, the narrator addresses the readership directly, a phenomenon which is also observed by Stanzel (56-57). Lisamarie, the protagonist and narrator, performs in those passages as a mediator of culture, and as a teacher of geography, history, and supernatural phenomena. The reader first encounters her mode of teaching when Lisamarie describes exactly the location of her Haisla community in the vast province of British Columbia: “Find a map of British Columbia. Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. Drag your finger across the map [...]” (*Monkey Beach* 4). The use of the imperative clearly indicates the direct address to the readership, including a request to explore in detail the history and culture of the Haisla community, also beyond the scope of the fictitious novel. The narrator furthermore provides a recipe to prepare oolichans (*Monkey Beach* 85-87), and in various passages, suggests ways to contact the deceased, “Contacting the dead, lesson one. Sleep is an altered state of consciousness. [...] To contact the spirit world, you must control the way you enter this state of being that is somewhere between waking and sleeping” (*Monkey Beach* 139). Thus, Lisamarie explicitly tells her story to an audience, even providing instructions. The specific target audience is, however, not identified.

One feature of first person narration is free indirect discourse, which can also be encountered in Robinson’s novel. Free indirect discourse cannot only be used to convey thoughts, but also to render speech (Stanzel 221). An example of this technique can be given from the beginning of the narrative, when Lisamarie is on the phone:

The man said he’d like to ask me a few questions. I gave him all the information I could [...] Josh has been planning to move the seiner closer to his favourite Area 8 fishing point. No, I didn’t know where the point was. [...] Did I know of anything else that could be helpful? No, I said. (*Monkey Beach* 5-6)

This short passage features two sentences in free indirect discourse towards the end. As is demonstrated in the sentence before last, “free indirect style within a first-person narrative situation can also be used to reproduce the speech of other characters” (Stanzel 221). The question of the man on the phone is expressed in this particular form. An example of a passage in which Lisamarie’s thoughts are communicated through free indirect discourse can be given below: “I should have gone with them. I should have

gone. [...] Why didn't I think of it before? God, I have no brain in the morning" (*Monkey Beach* 136). As Lisamarie embarks on the search for her lost brother alone, many instances of free indirect discourse and interior monologue can be observed.

One instance of the use of Jimmy as a reflector character can be detected, "The waves have washed the blood from the oar tip but he can see the dents in the wood where he hit Josh [...] For what he did to Karaoke, he knew that Josh deserved to die" (*Monkey Beach* 369). Robinson chooses this way of conveying what none of the other characters in the novel know, namely what happens shortly before the boat sinks. Even though Lisamarie is aware of Jimmy's intentions after having found the photo of Josh and the priest, she remains in the dark as to what has occurred on Josh's boat, and the shift to a figural mode of narration is thus made necessary, breaking the pattern of first person narration.

The narrative situation in *Monkey Beach* is thus marked by a first person narration, and hence differentiates itself from the mostly figural narration in *Ravensong*. Therefore, the novels give two very different examples of the narrative modes authors of coming-of-age stories may employ.

V. Coming-of-Age and Its Implications in *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*

4.1. Communities – Ties That Bind?

4.1.1. Sketching Stacey's Social Surroundings

At first glance the members of Stacey's family appear to have formed very strong bonds of affection and love. However, this apparent closeness lies at the core of a problematic ambivalence with regard to intimacy and detachment.

The nuclear family consists of Stacey and her siblings Celia and Jimmy, Momma, and her husband Jim. After the tragic death of the latter, it may indeed be argued that Ned, who is revealed to be the protagonist's biological father, integrates into and is slowly accepted by the family unit. The family is thus the most central community in the lives of its members, while distant relatives and the community of the villagers constitute wider communal circles:

Every single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced. White people didn't seem to live this way. No one individual was indispensable. Their parts didn't seem bonded to their whole. (*Ravensong* 26)

Outside of these circles other communities are featured in Maracle's coming-of-age narrative; Aboriginals who are members of other tribes, the non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Maillardville, or "the town", and the academic community including the city of Vancouver (see figure 1). The dynamics of these groups, the maintenance or destruction of social bonds and ties as well as Stacey's involvement in those immensely diverse communities will now be considered with regard to their importance for the protagonist's process of coming-of-age.

4.1.2. The Family Unit as a Central Element

The closeness of the nuclear family unit as mentioned above may be questioned when certain incidents and events involving Celia and Stacey are more closely investigated. The ties that bind these family members manifest themselves not so much in acts of affection but rather in Stacey's abhorrence of the indifference and hypocrisy the inhabitants of Maillardville exhibit regularly. Maracle explains, "Every time you look at someone else's culture who you really see is yourself" ("Personal Interview", cf.

Appendix). By observing the inhabitants of Maillardville, their morals and attitudes as well as their behavior, Stacey discovers her own people's culture more and more intensively, especially appreciating her people's sense of community. The truth value of this assumption is rarely asserted by explicit utterances but rather by appropriate actions. Stacey recounts how she is supported in her academic endeavors not only by her family but also by the community as a whole, since the villagers show great confidence regarding Stacey's plans for the near future, namely the establishment of a school in the village with the goal to bestow her knowledge on the children. The protagonist informs the readership of an incident involving her younger sister who has compromised her own needs in order to support her intellectual sibling. Additionally, the passage below illustrates the solidarity within the community, a solidarity which is experienced also by the protagonist:

Her younger sister Celia had shouldered the heavy work that would normally have passed on to her during canning season because Stacey wanted to study. [...] Not this time. Stacey knew she couldn't get by without helping fight an epidemic. Her sense of family wouldn't allow her to leave it to everyone else. (*Ravensong* 27)

Gradually, however, problems and secrets of greater proportion interfere with various characters' senses of family and unity, including the protagonist's. Despite crumbling bonds of affection within Stacey's family, the solidarity to the other villagers manifests itself repeatedly in times of crisis, "Even Judy and Rena rolled their sleeves up, donned Momma's make-shift masks and joined the other women who felt it was their duty to try to save the community. Stacey too felt this duty. She pulled at her youthful strength night after night" (*Ravensong* 82). These instances of unity described above are repeatedly overshadowed by episodes of isolation, separation, uncertainty, and anger.

The narrator explains the significance of the relationships between siblings, "In their family structure older brothers and sisters are as important as parents when children are young. As much of the care is provided by sisters and brothers as by the parents" (*Ravensong* 144). However, the emotional (and spatial) distance between Stacey and her siblings Young Jim and Celia is frequently striking, challenging the narrator's statement cited above. For instance, the protagonist does not contemplate the whereabouts of her sister when she is not present (*Ravensong* 126), nor does she speak to her brother on a regular basis (*Ravensong* 161). Especially Celia oftentimes remains outside of any community and separates herself willingly from her family and the

villagers. As a consequence, her family (involuntarily) neglects the young girl's significance for the community for "she is a kind of conduit between past and present" (MacFarlane 117). Celia's position as the individual who perceives the trickster's song might cause this effect of positioning the young girl as an outsider of the family. She does not utter a single word during the summer of 1954 – or at least the narrator does not record it³⁰ – she seldom plays with other children and is rarely seen in family interaction. While other members of the village do perceive the young girl's solitude, her parents and siblings seem to remain ignorant of her self-induced isolation, "Dominic had also mentioned that Celia was spending much time alone in cedar's shadows, but the family had paid little attention to it. Stacey gave his comments no thought" (*Ravensong* 63). When Celia senses difficulties or dilemmas in her surroundings, she prefers to distance herself from her family and the village, listening to herself and the trickster while exploring her visions. The young girl's mental pictures of the European settlers' arrival also foreshadows Stacey's quest to the unknown "world" of Vancouver and UBC (Leggatt par. 28). These visions are of utmost importance, since "Celia resists the alienation and disconnectedness that has resulted from colonization because she re-establishes linkages with her ancestors and rememorates traditional ways" (Horne 119-120). Had the villagers spent more attention on the young girl and her spiritual gift, the village might have been saved from various catastrophes.

Stacey seems to be in a constant state of contemplation which isolates her – similar to Celia – from others, including members of her family. She critically considers information conveyed in school by her teachers, while simultaneously attempting to ascertain "a middle way" between an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal world view, which initiates her reflections on numerous individuals, conversations, and actions. Sometimes these intensive contemplations can lead to a self-induced isolation from the people around her, affecting them likewise:

Stacey's too-serious quiet diminished the joy in the house. [...] The isolated presence of Stacey beleaguered the oneness of family, creating an unnamable pain for everyone. Celia took to leaving early and returning late. She hung about the village square looking for things to do which would keep her from going home. Celia had no idea that she was alienating herself from the family fold just as surely as was Stacey. (*Ravensong* 169)

³⁰ The only sentence uttered by Celia is a sentence in the epilogue, i.e. the last sentence of the novel, some twenty-five years after the events of the ominous summer of 1954.

Consequently, Stacey's periods of reflections, which are undeniably of utmost importance for her further development, affect her family members in ways she is not aware of, and Celia's periods of isolation increase perceptibly.

These episodes of detachment among the family members climax in the most serious of these incidents, when Stacey is threatened to be ostracized by her own mother due to her not adhering to the rules of the village (*Ravensong* 124, see also 2.2.2.). Momma's anger expressed in this passage mirrors her irritation at the non-Aboriginal people in town and their influence on her adolescent daughter. She refuses cross-cultural negotiation, fearing – maybe rightly – that Stacey is already infiltrated with “their” values and principles, neglecting her own people's (Hoy 130). Her treatment of Stacey is harsh and even brutal, which, however, offers the young woman the opportunity to grasp the importance of her decisions and actions which might affect not only herself and her family but the entire village and its moral and ethic codes. This fight with her mother, which does drive a wedge between mother and daughter at first, is definitely of great significance in Stacey's life as she finally contemplates her behavior and realizes her mistakes, comprehending also her mother's decision of threatening her with such severe punishment. Prior to this incident, the protagonist “proves unable to share the context or perspective even of her own mother”, which highlights the importance of Stacey's transgression and her realization of the consequences (Hoy 187).

The relationship between Stacey and her mother is tested once more when Momma reveals the truth about Stacey's biological father to her:

Grampa Thomas told a story of twin brothers, one the father of children, the other the woman's husband. Stacey choked. She isn't going to tell me that Jim is not my father. Momma's monologue softened, became reverent, telling Stacey precisely what she did not want to hear. (*Ravensong* 101)

While at first infuriated, Stacey's anger subsides as she is able to perceive her mother's suffering in the past and present. The young woman also comprehends Polly and the morals of the non-Aboriginal society more fully after hearing her mother's story (MacFarlane 120). The protagonist, even though aware of the non-Natives' hypocrisy concerning sexuality, has become “infected by their morality”, looking at her mother's “indiscretion” through the judgmental eyes of the non-Aboriginals, and, realizing this pattern of thought, tries to negotiate different world views, withdrawing her premature judgment of her mother's actions (Leggatt par. 21). Additionally, Stacey begins to realize the positive effects of Ned's acceptance into her family and especially into her

life. The young woman notices the improvement of her mother's mood due to Ned's company and enjoys the physical familiarity which is fostered in her family, with Madeline, a Manitoba Saulteaux woman living in their community, significantly contributing to this development (*Ravensong* 178). Especially the trip to Yale fosters more intimate and affectionate bonds among the family members, strengthening ties which are sometimes extremely fragile.

Hence, the family grows together through the tragic events of the summer, working jointly in a community and demonstrating solidarity with the sick and needy, while in return receiving advice and help in times of uncertainty and insecurity themselves, sharing the experiences of survival and death, joy and sorrow, regret and forgiveness. All of these factors contribute to Stacey's process of emotional maturation, and restore weak and strained ties.

The relationships among the members of Stacey's family are thus marked by great ambivalence; while Stacey's own views in the beginning reveal her sense of family, the actual family ties are fragile and loose, and isolation and neglect are common phenomena. In the last parts of the coming-of-age story the bonds among the family members strengthen. This claim is confirmed in the epilogue in which it transpires that while the village has meanwhile fallen apart, strong family ties still bind Stacey, Celia, and the others. The disruption of the village's community structure nonetheless leaves gaping wounds in the lives of Stacey and her family. In the epilogue, which is set some twenty-five years after the events of the summer of 1954, Stacey tries to find an explanation for her nephew's suicide concluding that the lost sense of community was the trigger for his decision to end his life:

“[O]ver the next decade the village fell apart. Women left to marry after that. They left in droves. No one knows why; it was as though the whole consciousness of the village changed at the same moment. The women lost the safety of family. The village lost its clan base because of it. Now we are caught in an epidemic of our own making and we have no idea how to fight it.”
(*Ravensong* 197)

The bonds of the community, so vital to the survival of each villager, have thus slowly crumbled until they dissolved entirely. The resulting separation and isolation has taken its toll on the lives of the former villagers, climaxing in the suicide of Stacey's nephew a quarter of a century later.

4.1.3. Stacey's Encounters with People from Other Communities

Three greater communities which shall be discussed in the context of Stacey's development exist outside the group of the villagers: the town of Maillardville, Vancouver and the University of British Columbia, and the Manitoba Saulteaux, a tribe of which Madeline is a member. The adolescent protagonist is the only character who entertains ties with all three of the above mentioned groups in addition to her own people. These multiple bonds often prove to be of great complexity, especially as the novel is "built around the Native/White fracture line" (Kaltemback 47).

Stacey's connection with the town of Maillardville manifests itself through her acquaintance with adolescents her own age. Polly, a young woman from her class in school who commits suicide, plays an important role in Stacey's development even though she attempts to distance herself from her class-mate at first, "Polly is one of theirs, she told herself: 'Nothing to do with me'" (*Ravensong* 29). The "we-they" dichotomy is employed (unconsciously) several times by the protagonist, who repeatedly draws comparisons between the inhabitants of the town and the people of her own village, compiling a "grocery list of the differences" (*Ravensong* 115). Identity is constructed through opposition, as Maracle appears to "reinscribe the divide between Indians and 'white folk'" (Hoy 128-129). The attempt to eliminate Polly and her suicide from Stacey's mind by trying to convince herself that the adolescent non-Aboriginal woman is of no concern to her provides a means of protecting herself from the emotional impact of this incident. The emotional turmoil which her class-mate's suicide stirs in Stacey surfaces perceptibly several times in the coming-of-age narrative, "It was exactly one month from the day Polly had hung herself. Stacey still couldn't pass by the bridge without thinking about it" (*Ravensong* 60). As Stacey ponders repeatedly the question of how a young person could take her own life because she had been discovered to be sexually active, the protagonist concludes that there does not only exist a hierarchy of power between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but between women and men as well. This realization initiates a feeling of sympathy for white women in Stacey, "There were no support systems for white women, not among their relatives or in their communities or in law. No wonder Polly killed herself" (*Ravensong* 81). As Stacey contemplates Polly's death, she slowly realizes that her initial reaction, namely to suppress thoughts about her classmate, constitute a means to protect herself. When she deconstructs her emotional and mental barrier in order to experience these

diverse sentiments, she commences to perceive their significant impact on her personality. In fact, “her empathy for Polly and settlers enables her to articulate and affirm her culture and community relations. This affirmation process enables her to resist colonial constructs and shame” (Horne 123). This realization highlights the importance of Polly’s character for the development of Stacey’s personality.

Carol is a young non-Indigenous woman with whom Stacey is acquainted as they attend the same high-school. The two young women study together every Friday evening at Carol’s house in Maillardville, which constitutes a time the protagonist usually truly enjoys due to the surroundings, “Everything about Carol’s house sang comfort” (*Ravensong* 30). The emphasis in this regard lies on material possessions, while the defective interpersonal relationships in Carol’s family create a tense atmosphere Stacey tries to avoid by spending time alone with her friend. While the exclusive possessions in Carol’s home might be comforting for the protagonist in one way, the anxiety and unease which linger in the air during dinner with Carol’s family are abhorrent to Stacey. On the day the Salish girl learns about the upcoming influenza epidemic, her view concerning the wealth of material possessions shifts considerably. She comprehends that the material goods which she strives to own are worthless without sharing them with people she loves and cares about. By becoming “more critical of settler society” Stacey “further articulates and validates the ways of her people” (Horne 118). The protagonist slowly realizes that the relationships among the members of Carol’s family and the inhabitants of the town in general are more distant and superficial than in her village. Although Stacey is unable to suspend her comparisons of material objects in the town and her village, she realizes that the superficiality of the relationships and the lack of social networks in Maillardville would be unbearable for her, and reflects upon this condition when she visits Carol’s, “I am obsessed with living like these people but I can’t stand them anymore. The house felt so empty [...]” (*Ravensong* 37). The security of the village and the inhabitants’ solidarity and unity increase in importance while her longing for material wealth diminishes. The lack of a social network in Maillardville is emphasized by Carol’s (first!) visit to the village in search for comfort after the announcement of her parents’ divorce. When Stacey gains more insight into the “vulnerability of white women within their family structures” through Polly’s and Carol’s blows of fate, she is troubled by her confusion over “cultural/racial allegiance” (Hoy 146). Ethnicity and gender intermingle in a

complex web of discrimination and inequity, utterly confusing the young woman, who is desperately attempting to understand the morals of Carol's fellow inhabitants of the town. Not succeeding in this endeavor, she remains puzzled by Carol's behavior and emotional outbreak over – for her – such a trivial occurrence as her parents' divorce, and ponders her alternating emotions, "Stacey wondered how she had managed to stick it out as [Carol's] buddy for so long. *I must be different when I am out there*, she decided" (*Ravensong* 134) [my emphasis]. Stacey becomes conscious of her different identities due to Carol's visit to the village, realizing that she has adopted various identities depending on her location. Finding herself unable to continue her friendship with Carol, who comes to the village looking for comfort while ignoring the villagers' miseries, the protagonist's realization of her differing identities paves the way for her quest to find her "self".

Steve, a young man from Stacey's high-school, exerts great influence on her personal development as he is in love with Stacey, who, however, does not harbor the same feelings for him. The young man, who during their first encounter accompanies Stacey home, casually chats with her – much to her annoyance, "She could tell him she didn't want him on her side of the river, that he didn't belong there. Instead, she just didn't look at him. Maybe he would get the hint" (*Ravensong* 72). As they finally exchange their thoughts on different subjects and themes of current relevance, Stacey's resentment against non-Aboriginal philosophy and way of life repeatedly surfaces in their conversations. She snaps at Steve or gives cantankerous replies, challenging him to defend himself and his whole community. While the young man fails to understand the significance of those remarks at first, Stacey's sharp comments trigger the process of his reflection on cultural differences, finally admitting his community's failures in establishing intercultural bonds (Horne 124-125). Steve exhibits interest in Stacey's culture and community and visits the Aboriginal village regularly, also engaging in conversations with the wise Ella. The young man, who demonstrates genuine interest in the other culture, "accommodates himself to the role of listener and learner, makes himself useful to Ella, and discovers that from his side of the river, he will be unable ever to experience Native life adequately" (Hoy 147-148). Stacey finally rejects Steve as her suitor, constantly pondering her sentiments and attitudes with regard to the topics of amorous relationships and sexuality. Yet Steve, who truly admires the young woman, exerts great influence on her thinking and behavior, while Stacey affects him in similar

ways. She discloses to him her thoughts about the inhabitants of Maillardville and their neglect of the crises in the village. On their – probably – final encounter, Stacey is enraged by Steve’s ignorance of the events in the village, “ ‘How did it feel to watch us die, Steve?’ she asked” (*Ravensong* 186). By uttering these words, the young woman instills shame and embarrassment in him, but also overlooks the fact that her own people have neglected to cross the bridge and demand help. While Stacey’s accusations are justified, she needs to realize that Raven’s plan also includes that her own people take a step forward to encourage reconciliation between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals of her surroundings. Therefore, Steve does not only act as an important character in terms of Stacey’s development with regards to love and sexuality, but also functions as an essential figure in Raven’s plan of crises and reconciliation.

Madeline, a Manitoba Saulteaux woman, lives in the village together with an abusive man who is later ostracized for his deeds. The scandal of his abusing his wife and children only becomes public when Madeline shoots at her husband in an act of self-defense (*Ravensong* Chapter 13). The woman is at first not integrated into the daily activities of the village since she comes from another tribe – she is merely tolerated. The villagers’ treatment of Madeline illustrates that a distinct differentiation is made between the Salish and members of other tribes. When the news of the physical and sexual abuse spreads among the inhabitants of the village they decide to ban the man from their community in order to save the children – and Madeline. The importance of the children is obvious, “While the woman was not one of them, the children were” (*Ravensong* 159). The dichotomy of “us” and “them” manifests itself once again, emphasizing that ethnicity and geographical origin serve as significant indicators of difference in the novel (Eigenbrod “Stranger” 267). Hoy explores this notion further, “[Maracle’s] strategy explodes the category ‘Indian,’ with ‘Indian’ becoming a signifier of racial difference rather than of a given racial group. And it signals the presence of systems of racial inclusion and exclusion even within that carefully circumscribed category of identity, the village” (144). However, Momma, who intervenes before Madeline can kill her husband, develops a passion for this “foreign” woman and a friendship is about to grow. Madeline’s children find a new playmate in Celia and Stacey slowly accepts the frequent presence of Madeline’s family in their house. The protagonist’s initial opposition of Madeline’s and her children’s joining them on their

trip yields to a feeling of warmth and delight, when she cherishes the change which these “foreign” people initiate in her own family, “After three weeks with Madeline, the girls and the books, change came to the family. Madeline was so effusive, it was contagious. [...] Stacey liked this easy physical familiarity that Madeline was cultivating in her family”(Ravensong 178). Stacey thus learns a lot not only about Madeline and her character and personality, but also discovers differences which exist among the diverse Indigenous tribes. The emphasis on Madeline’s difference (Ravensong 173) underlines the cultural diversity among Native peoples (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 267). The banishment of the Old Snake and the villagers’ support offered to Madeline and her children teach Stacey an important lesson: “Community [...] cannot be affirmed simply by a banding together against outsiders but entails the harder *internal* work of balancing the different needs and obligations of the various participants in the tragedy and of the group” (Hoy 145).

German Judy is yet another character who lives in the Native American community and remains an outsider due to her non-Native background. Her “ethnically constructed otherness” is underlined by her name and her sexual orientation contributes to her status as an outsider (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 266). Nonetheless, she acts as a significant figure due to her being a border crosser, providing Stacey with information about the university she is about to attend and generously helping when Stacey’s friend Carol comes to the village drenched in tears due to her parents’ divorce. Momma, however, rejects the notion of considering Judy even a member of the community, and while Stacey at first does not understand her mother’s sentiments towards Judy she comprehends them during Carol’s visit:

Rena couldn’t stop laughing about [Carol]. After the first outburst, Judy didn’t think it was all that funny. Seeing Judy switch from laughter to offence on Carol’s behalf reminded Stacey of what Momma had said about her whiteness. She began to see some truth in Momma’s remark – she’s white so she don’t count. (Ravensong 135)

Stacey feels anger due to the non-Aboriginals’ neglect of her village in times of crisis and eventually projects this anger on Judy as well.

German Judy does not try to “become Native”, but rather functions as a link between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. She is aware of her status as an outsider in the village, yet chooses to remain there with her partner Rena of her own free will. She demonstrates loyalty to the villagers and participates in activities which

are foreign to her Euro-Canadian culture and silently tolerates her not being accepted by the other villagers:

[Stacey] wondered why this woman chose to live in a village that virtually ignored her. She was white. No one we know, Stacey told herself. Judy hadn't once intruded on the space of any of the villagers. She went to work and returned home to Rena's, accepting the village's silence about her presence. She didn't belong but no one said that. (*Ravensong* 79-80)

Despite Stacey's resentment against Judy, the German-Canadian woman constitutes a link between the village and the "outside world" of Vancouver as well as the University of British Columbia. Both she and Madeline indirectly act as teachers and mentors for the adolescent woman, gently guiding her along the border zones of different cultures, cultivating in her reflections on individuals and the society as a whole (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 267). When Stacey asks German Judy for help in the process of getting acquainted with university politics and life in the city, German Judy's little knowledge of Aboriginal cultures surfaces, "The absence of knowledge of the other world was so vast that Judy could not conceive of its size. [Stacey, Rena, and Judy] sat in a complete state of unknowing. In an odd sort of way they were all equal in their lack of knowledge" (*Ravensong* 113). This passage also highlights Raven's plan to force both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants to take a step toward reconciliation, so that slowly cultural knowledge can begin "to move in both directions" (Leggatt par. 28).

Through all these encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds Stacey acquires a better comprehension for cultural diversity, made possible due to "a process of self and cultural individualization" (Horne 123). When Stacey leaves for university in order to be able to teach her people's children, her departure marks the beginning of the accomplishment of Raven's plan: "[Stacey] doubted for a moment the value of her departure. Raven panicked. Raven brought Gramma's voice to Stacey's ears: 'We will never escape sickness until we learn how it is we are to live with these people'" (*Ravensong* 191-192). Stacey's vision affirms her resolution to learn about non-Indigenous ways of life in order to save her own village – a plan which ultimately fails, as the reader is told in the epilogue.

4.1.4. Outlining Lisamarie's Social Surroundings

Lisamarie, the protagonist of Robinson's coming-of-age narrative *Monkey Beach*, spends her childhood and part of her adolescence in a small town situated on the British Columbian coast. The young woman's family structure exhibits a complex network of bonds in which various emotions combine, ranging from affection to extreme dislike. The relationship between the young woman and her parents is subject to constant changes and alterations, especially as Lisamarie experiences a period of open and partly aggressive rebellion against figures of authority. While the motives of her parents' beliefs and behavior frequently remain obscure and ambiguous to the adolescent girl, she gains considerable knowledge about her parents' history with the help of her wise and generous grandmother, Ma-ma-oo. This bond of affection between the old woman and her granddaughter strengthens visibly during the course of the novel and increasingly gains significance. Furthermore, the unexpected appearance of the protagonist's uncle, Mick, contributes to an inevitable change in the family dynamics. Lisamarie's brother Jimmy is already at the beginning of the narrative announced to be lost at sea, which triggers the reader's interest in the events leading up to his disappearance. While often engaged in verbal and physical fights during their childhood and early adolescence, the siblings have shared their thoughts and feelings in their late teenage years during intimate moments, developing their ability to empathize with others.

Except for these most significant members of Lisamarie's family mentioned above, various friends and acquaintances play major roles in the protagonist's years of maturation. Her friendship with three young men named Frank, Pooch, and Cheese oscillates between positive and negative events in which Lisamarie experiences diverse emotions including a sense of belonging, happiness, sorrow, anger, and extreme hatred. Lisamarie and her cousin Tab remain inseparable, creating what constitutes the most important friendship between girls in the novel. Karaoke, her brother's girlfriend, and her uncle Josh will be of such importance in Jimmy's life that these characters hugely impact other individuals, such as Lisamarie, as well. Lisamarie is thus connected via various ties to numerous people in her town, "Kitamaat Village, with its seven hundred Haisla people tucked in between the mountains and the ocean" (*Monkey Beach* 5).

Although Lisamarie does spend some time outside of her community, reports about her interaction with other individuals outside of Kitamaat are limited in the novel.

The description of her encounters is restricted to short explanations of her social life in Vancouver, a crucial racist incident at the mall, and her interactions with non-Aboriginals at school, which usually constitute negative experiences.

In the following section, Lisamarie's interactions with several of the above mentioned characters will be sketched. The constant change in the relationships between the protagonist and members of her family and the wider community mirror Lisamarie's development from an immature child to a mature young adult.

4.1.5. The Hills' Family Dynamics

As Lisamarie's contemplations and reflections on her life are triggered by her brother's disappearance, the description of the characters' relationships shall commence with an analysis of the bond between the siblings. The reader is introduced to the narrative by the news of Jimmy considered lost at sea, his fate being "fraught with ambiguity", which creates an atmosphere of suspense, sparking the reader's curiosity of the events leading up to this tragedy (Appleford par. 35). While Lisamarie and her parents are anticipating the coast guard's telephone call, each of these three characters finds him- or herself in a state of sleeplike wakefulness and emotional turmoil, especially as images of the past involving Mick's and Ma-ma-oo's deaths are conjured up, intermingling with Lisamarie's twinges of guilt for ignoring her premonitions (Castricano 804). During this phase of shock and stupor the protagonist of *Monkey Beach* begins (day)dreaming about her childhood and early adolescence, meditating on her family, her friends as well as on her own successes and failures.

The relationship between the two siblings can be characterized as distant at first, as their childhood is marked by frequent fights and practical jokes:

He was too wiry to throw down on the floor and tickle like I used to do when we were younger. [...] As [Jimmy] opened the door [of the closet], I hopped out, roaring and waving my arms. Jimmy's expression of horror, his complete and utter terror, was beyond anything I'd expected. [...] "You're gonna get it!" Jimmy said. (*Monkey Beach* 168).

Lisamarie rejects assuming responsibility for her brother when she refuses babysitting him and both children omit playing with each other. Lisamarie often experiences phases of envy as Jimmy does not only enjoy a vibrant social life while simultaneously

succeeding at school, but is also, in her opinion, loved more by their parents than she is. Jimmy, who attracts many girls due to his swim training and physical appearance, embodies everything the protagonist strives to possess: success, attractiveness, intelligence, and the love of their parents. Lisamarie is filled with bitterness and contemplates to leave home as this concept of belonging to a family unit has no more value for her, “[...] I was going to pull my own weight. In fact, I was going to be giving them a break. With me gone, they could devote everything to Jimmy’s swimming. I’d go my way and they’d go theirs” (*Monkey Beach* 278). In this quote, Lisamarie’s wish to isolate herself from her family due to her envy of her brother is illustrated clearly.

However, the two siblings, whose age difference only spans a year and a half (*Monkey Beach* 10), grow continuously closer together as they mature. Lisamarie’s envy subsides as her self-respect as well as self-esteem grow, even intending to support and comfort her brother who entertains doubts about his relationship with Karaoke. Similarly, Jimmy attempts to comprehend his sister’s reasons for her escape to Vancouver and assists in the process of re-adapting to school and family life when she returns to Kitamaat. The incident which is pivotal to their relationship is described in chapter three of Robinson’s novel. Jimmy has to cope with the blows of fate of his shoulder injury as well as his girlfriend’s leaving the town of Kitamaat, her reasons for this escape remaining obscure to Jimmy at first. The young man tries to drown his problems and depression in alcohol, and Lisamarie decides to take him to Monkey Beach, a location of great spiritual power, to support her depressed brother. The siblings’ initial “roles” – the successful son and the doomed daughter – are now reversed, his tragic narrative forming “a kind of shadow narrative” to Lisamarie’s own (Howells 195). Jimmy’s initial fury for having been brought to the Beach while he passed out drunk yields to a feeling of gratefulness as the siblings commence discussing intimate thoughts later on (see *Monkey Beach* 348-350). Lisamarie is deeply impressed by her brother’s devotion to the girl he loves, and the profundity of his feelings will later contribute to the events leading up to Jimmy’s disappearance. Readers who are aware of Robinson’s short story “Queen of the North” have the advantage of being acquainted with details concerning this special relationship between Jimmy and Karaoke, and, most importantly, are aware of Karaoke’s sexual abuse by her uncle Josh. The short story which is recounted by Karaoke as the first person narrator presents a version similar to the one the reader is provided with in *Monkey Beach*, in which the storyline about Karaoke’s abuse is sometimes alluded to. Despite Lisamarie’s late

realization of Jimmy's true intention, Karaoke comprehends immediately that her boyfriend intends to revenge her suffering, and considering the danger the young man is in, experiences shock and disbelief, "My tongue stuck in my mouth. My feet felt like two slabs of stone. 'So he's on *Queen of the North*?' 'Of course, silly,' [Lisamarie] Michelle said. 'We know you pulled strings. How else could Jimmy get on with your uncle?'" (*Traplins* 214). After Karaoke's silent departure due to her state of shock, Lisamarie fears for her brother's relationship, assuming that Karaoke is convinced of having been abandoned by Jimmy. Frantically searching for Jimmy's promise ring in order to show it to Karaoke, Lisamarie discovers clues to Karaoke's disturbed relationship with her uncle, and therefore realizes the reasons for Jimmy's decision to go on a ship with Josh as it presents the perfect opportunity for retribution (*Monkey Beach* 365; Andrews 12-13). While Jimmy seeks revenge for Uncle Josh's terrible crime, he simultaneously fears that judgment will also be passed on himself (Appleford par. 24).

This course of events reveals various important points about the relationship between Jimmy and his sister Lisamarie. The protagonist is torn between admiration for his strength, courage, and determination, while she simultaneously curses his foolishness and injudiciousness. Despite initial rivalries, the siblings share a strong bond of love and affection and Lisamarie's concern about her brother triggers her plan to take a boat to join her parents in the search for him while simultaneously realizing that her initial supposition "Jimmy would never hurt anyone" (*Monkey Beach* 40) is incorrect. The boat ride Lisamarie undertakes in her search for her lost brother is "her meditation on longing and loss", a narrative of present moments and memory, blurring the "boundaries between human and spirits worlds" (Howells 195-196).

The relationship between the protagonist and her parents is marked by phases of intense rebellion in which she rejects the notions of "family" and "home" and intends to lead her life as a loner. Lisamarie's escape to Vancouver, which may have been initiated by several occurrences but is mainly triggered by the deaths of Mick and Ma-ma-oo, is the most apparent indication that she has decided to turn her back on her relatives, even on her parents and brother. Dalsimer argues that creating a distance between the parents and the teenager in order to develop into an independent individual is a necessary stage during adolescence, and that the need to do so "underlies much of the behavior that gives offense to the older generation: the flouting of parental authority, and indeed of all

authority” (6). The strength of the family connections and their endurance can, however, be observed when Lisamarie decides to return to Kitamaat where she is warmly welcomed by her family. Her phase of rebellion has ceased after her experiences in Vancouver and especially after the death of her friend and cousin Tab, who appears to her as a ghost:

“But you can’t be dead. I just saw you last week...” [...] “I just got bumped off by a couple of boozehound rednecks and I’m pretty fucking angry at you right now.” “At me?” “Don’t look at me like that. You and your fucking problems. Get your act together and go home.” (*Monkey Beach* 301)

The complexity of the relationship between Lisamarie and her parents is furthermore marked by their denial of Lisamarie’s supernatural abilities – they identify the supernatural phenomena as temporary phantasms, dreams, or hallucinations, which complicates the young woman’s understanding of them:

Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in Haisla. *La’es*, they say, *La’es*, *la’es*. [...] *La’es*—Go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, but I can’t remember what. [...] “Did you hear the crows earlier?” I say. [...] “They were talking to me. They said *la’es*. It’s probably—“ “Clearly a sign, Lisa,” my mother has come up behind me and grips my shoulder, “that you need Prozac.” (*Monkey Beach* 1-3)

Despite her parents’ disbelief in her supernatural abilities, the young woman continues to communicate with the spirit world, encouraged to do so by Ma-ma-oo (Andrews 17). The reasons for her parents’ denial are mainly rooted in their past; Lisamarie’s father has seen two of his siblings undergo the ordeal of residential school, a place where the denial of their Native roots, and therefore the renouncement of Aboriginal traditions, customs, philosophy, and myths, was cultivated and stimulated, impressing upon the young students Euro-Canadian ways of life. The denial of the existence of supernatural phenomena therefore constitutes for Lisamarie’s father a means to protect his daughter from falling into the clutches of Euro-Canadian modes of forced assimilation. The protagonist’s mother possesses, as the reader learns through Ma-ma-oo’s accounts, the same gift as her daughter, but realizing its negative effects denies its existence – in her as well as in her daughter (Appleford par. 22). During the formative years of her life, her parents thus support the protagonist very little in regard to coping with her spiritual gift.

The most significant issue for Lisamarie’s parents during her teenage years is Lisamarie’s graduation from high-school as they regard this diploma as the key to the upper echelons of Euro-Canadian society. Lisamarie complains, “[My parents] went on

for another half-hour about how I could be a doctor or lawyer or whatever I wanted, then they sent me to my room to think about it" (*Monkey Beach* 278). Lisamarie feels therefore misunderstood by her parents, who do not respond to their daughter's needs. The young woman suffers from her parents' "hybridized identities" and their position in between Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal "worlds", which confuses the young woman completely as her parents want to encourage her daughter's success in Euro-Canadian society while ignoring her insistence on the occurrence of supernatural phenomena (Howells 184). The relationship between Lisamarie and her parents alternates between contempt, disrespect, distrust, and admiration, confidence, and pride. Constant deep affection and unconditional love between parents and their children underlie these emotions.

The bond between Ma-ma-oo and Lisamarie perceptibly strengthens and gains affection and intimacy during the course of the novel. Due to Lisamarie's awareness of her grandmother's wisdom she frequently visits her elder in search for help and advice concerning her supernatural gift. Ma-ma-oo aids her granddaughter "to mediate between what others see and what she can access" (Andrews 14), gently providing guidance and counsel. She encourages Lisamarie to appreciate these signs of her Indigenous heritage and "to face the challenge of learning to develop her spiritual gift across the disruptions of history and her modern English-Canadian education" (Howells 192-193). Ma-ma-oo acts as a source of knowledge in regard to family history, and the protagonist gathers essential information about her parents, which is vital for her understanding and comprehending their feelings, motives, and actions. Furthermore, Ma-ma-oo introduces her granddaughter gradually to Haisla customs and traditions and therefore acts as the pivotal character in the transmission of Aboriginal culture in *Monkey Beach*. She encourages Lisamarie to accompany her on excursions through the wilderness, teaching her important lessons concerning survival skills, such as locating animals and identifying fruit and herbs. Additionally, Lisamarie joins her when the old woman honors her late husband, performing Haisla rites of contacting the dead. In this sequence of Robinson's coming-of-age narrative the aspect of language emerges as an issue of particular significance. The protagonist observes her grandmother perform certain rites at the burial site of her husband and remarks that her grandmother "said some words in Haisla that [she] didn't understand" (*Monkey Beach* 78). The tight link between the

aspects of language and maturation has been explored in detail elsewhere³¹. However, let me underline the significance of these connections among Lisamarie, her grandmother, and the Haisla language and culture. The protagonist also slowly recovers “matriarchal power and knowledge” through her bond with her grandmother Ma-ma-oo, and Robinson thus emphasizes female strength (Lane par. 5). As Lisamarie grows from knowing little Haisla to understanding the language fully, so does her character and personality grow from feeling lost and abandoned to finding an identity, finding a place to belong in her community at the end of the novel. Ma-ma-oo is the crucial figure in this process of development. The bond of affection and intimacy shared by Ma-ma-oo and her granddaughter can, moreover, be illustrated by the following quote: “As I was getting ready for school that night, Mom asked me what I did and I told her about everything except Ma-ma-oo and the [burial site]. I was uncomfortable sharing it with her. It felt like it was something private” (*Monkey Beach* 80). On the other hand, Lisamarie’s thought also demonstrates the distance between her mother and the girl. The frailty of relationships and community ties, failures of the individual to maintain those ties, and the re-establishment of these important bonds constitute central themes in Robinson’s text (Hoy 188). Due to the strong relationship between the protagonist and her grandmother, the young woman is deeply shocked to find out about her grandmother’s death. Feeling responsible for her passing, she remembers how ghosts had provided her with signals of her grandmother’s impending death, the old woman also being aware of their presence, “When I arrived at Ma-ma-oo’s house that afternoon, the house was filled with the sound of ghosts murmuring. [...] ‘You see [the ghosts]?’ [...] ‘They came this morning’ [Ma-ma-oo] said” (*Monkey Beach* 289). Lisamarie blames herself repeatedly for her grandmother’s death, “If I had listened to my gift instead of ignoring it, I could have saved her” (*Monkey Beach* 294). Despite Ma-ma-oo’s demise, Lisamarie has gained valuable knowledge from her grandmother who has most significantly conveyed elements of Haisla culture to the young woman. Lisamarie has thus found a place to stand between the Euro-Canadian life style of her parents’ and her uncle’s and grandmother’s appreciation of Haisla culture. The notion of continuity has been established, and the young woman realizes that passing on one’s heritage or “the wholeness of a society” is of the greatest importance (Dawson 48).

³¹ Cf. Rössler, Martina. “Homewards: Language and Identity in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*.” Coll. of essays. Eds. Christa Knellwolf-King et al. Konstanz: U of Konstanz, forthcoming.

Lisamarie's uncle Mick appears unexpectedly for Gladys's birthday when the protagonist is at the age of six and from that point of time onwards exerts a significant influence on the young girl. Due to his intimate connection to Haisla culture, he instils pride in his niece to embrace her Native heritage, acting as an important conveyer of Aboriginal culture (Andrews 17). He is, as opposed to Lisamarie's parents, politically very active and recounts events of his past:

On hot days, [Uncle Mick] wore his message T-shirts: Free Leonard Peltier! or Columbus: 500 Years of Genocide and Counting. Usually, he wore a Levis jacket with Trail of Broken Treaties embroidered in bright red thread on the back. For this feast, he'd changed into his buckskin jacket with fringe, his A.I.M Higher—Join the American Indian Movement! T-shirt and his least ratty pair of jeans. (*Monkey Beach* 56)

Having borne witness to the oppression Indigenous individuals had to endure from his childhood in residential school to his adult life, he assumes the position of a political activist and tries to initiate critical thinking in his niece who should therefore challenge conventional non-Aboriginal accounts, history, and attitudes (Andrews 15-16). He conveys his political stance to Lisamarie, who, admiring Mick and his way of life, readily adopts his opinions. When Lisamarie gets into trouble in school for singing a song entitled "Fuck the Oppressors" in class (which she had picked up when visiting Mick), preceded by her refusal to read a "historical" passage about cannibal Aboriginals in British Columbia, Mick frames the teacher's note and hangs it on the wall, "He put his arm around me, swallowed hard a few times and looked misty. 'My little warrior'" (*Monkey Beach* 69). The girl intends to impress her uncle, foregrounding her "tomboy" attitude while suppressing her feminine sides (Lane par. 7). For Lisamarie, Mick is the father whom she longs to have: fun, cheeky, ready to fight for his rights – simply an idol. Mick likewise enjoys spending time with his favorite niece, but rejects being regarded as a parent:

"I wish I could live with you." "No, you don't." "You're fun. They never let met have any fun." [...] "Your mom and dad are fun too," Mick said. I gave him a doubtful look. "They are. But with you, they have to do parent things. They have to keep you fed and clothed and pay the bills and watch out for you. That kind of stuff. We can just hang out like this. You understand?" (*Monkey Beach* 96)

Tragic events have also left traces in Mick's life. He has never forgiven his mother for sending him to residential school, the traumata experienced there still penetrating his everyday life (Castricano 802). Additionally, the murder of his wife Cathy, also known as Cookie, is re-experienced by him in a dream during a camping trip, conveying utter

terror to Lisamarie, who, being still a small child, does not understand her uncle's nocturnal aggressive behavior (*Monkey Beach* 108-110). The episode of Mick's emotional outbreak is also of importance concerning its aftermath, more specifically, the comforting words and actions of Lisamarie's mother. After a time of playful flirting, Mick becomes more concrete, wishing for physical closeness, not knowing that he is being watched by Lisamarie, "Mick was sneaking up on [Mom], and I stepped back onto the porch so I wouldn't ruin the surprise. He came up behind her, encircled her waist with his arms and gave her a gentle kiss on the neck. She pulled his arms off, slowly, then pushed him away, eyes downcast" (*Monkey Beach* 122). The protagonist unravels family secrets, unearthing some dysfunctions (Appleford par. 17). Soon after Lisamarie's discovery of her mother's and Mick's feelings for each other, for which she forgives both her family members, Mick perishes in a boat accident leaving behind a niece who cannot cope with his death. Lapsing into a serious depression, life for the protagonist after her uncle's death becomes dull and boring, "Some days, it was hard to do anything. Even eating seemed like too much trouble. I'd lie in bed and stare at nothing, and hours would pass in a flash. [...] It wasn't even painful. I felt nothing. Blank" (*Monkey Beach* 156). A lengthy phase of misery and gloom begins, in which Lisamarie changes into an angry and aggressive young woman, pushing her family and friends away through her hostile behavior and attitude. It is then that she slips into drug abuse, and, after Ma-ma-oo's death, flees to Vancouver in order to drown her anger and misery in alcohol while suppressing her problems with extensive partying.

With regard to the family members mentioned above, Lisamarie's grandmother and uncle exert the greatest influences on her during her adolescent years, acting as her mentors (Howells 194). Their deaths are transformative as they change Lisamarie's perception of herself, the people around her and her Haisla heritage. Ma-ma-oo's and Mick's passing intensify the protagonist's contemplations about her origins and her family's history (Dawson 49). Strong bonds, which are maintained despite various crises, characterize the ties that bind the Hill family.

4.1.6. Lisamarie's "Gang" and the Transformations of Its Members

As opposed to *Ravensong*, interactions between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals are rare in *Monkey Beach*. Therefore, I will now describe the ties which

bind Lisamarie to other members of her own community. In this analysis of Lisamarie's "gang" I will include her cousin Tab and the three young men Frank, Pooch, and Cheese. Questions of gender due to the protagonist's alternative enactment of roles arise throughout Robinson's novel as well as in her collection of short stories published earlier (Hoy 189). Lisamarie attempts to undermine preconceived gender boundaries, subverting constrictive roles with the (involuntary) help of her friends. Despite the fact that numerous other characters emerge as Lisamarie's acquaintances in the course of the novel, the individuals chosen are the ones which are most influential during the protagonist's adolescence.

Tabitha, who prefers to be called Tab, is Lisamarie's cousin and the daughter of Aunt Trudy, who has attended residential school with her brother Mick (see figure 2). Suffering from alcoholism, Trudy simply neglects her responsibilities as a parent. Tab has to cope with her mother's episodes of drunkenness and insobriety, phases in which the household lacks food while furniture and clothes are messily scattered throughout the home. Trudy slurs verbal attacks at her daughter who is not afraid to defend herself using swear words. Tab, enjoying her solitude and having cultivated the image of a loner, is glad to have only few friends. Lisamarie admires her cousin for her coolness and for her freedom from parental restrictions and thus enjoys her company, "I liked playing with her because she wasn't worried about ruining her clothes and she taught me how to play poker and crazy eights" (*Monkey Beach* 42). Lisamarie appreciates her cousin and friend, and values her company also because her self-esteem is stimulated, as "[i]t is in the relationship with the friend that the young adolescent feels enhanced, participating in the qualities possessed by (or attributed to) the other" (Dalsimer 8).

Lisamarie is "protected from" her family's history by her parents who deem it necessary to conceal certain secrets from their daughter – for her own good. Tab, on the other hand, is well acquainted with her family's history, a reason for her knowledge constituting her drunken mother who likes to share secrets during her phases of insobriety. Consequently, it is Tab who conveys to the protagonist the sufferings of Mick and Trudy at residential school, and from her aunt's babbling during her drunkenness Lisamarie can discern news about Mick's being an alcoholic and his dating Lisamarie's mother. These secrets were never supposed to reach Lisamarie's ears, and although she later discovers the truth value of these claims, her first reaction is disbelief, " 'I can't believe she says things like that. What a liar' " (*Monkey Beach* 129). Tab

introduces Lisamarie to drug abuse and partying, and smokes her first joint with her cousin (*Monkey Beach* 204). Additionally, Tab initiates the protagonist's desire to escape the solitude of Kitamaat, instilling Lisamarie's wish to work in a cannery (*Monkey Beach* 81). Thus, for Lisamarie, her uncle Mick and her cousin Tab, who are both rebels, act as her idols at certain times. She often strives to live their lives, to act like them, be like them, and – especially – experience the freedom the two characters have been experiencing all their lives. Tab's sexual encounters as well as the sexual abuse she has suffered by Trudy's partner Josh are repeatedly alluded to. She lapses into a phase of misery and indifference – similar to the episode Lisamarie experiences after Mick's and Ma-ma-oo's deaths. Consequently, Tab flees to Vancouver, cuts all ties with her home community, and – maybe also due to her traumatic experiences with Josh – develops an intense dislike for her mother. She acknowledges that residential school is partly responsible for Trudy's psychological state, as she explains to Lisamarie, “‘You're really lucky that your dad was too young to go to rez school. [...] Just Mick and my mom went and it fucked them up’ ” (*Monkey Beach* 254). However, Tab – the “biker chick” who is ultimately unable to save herself – cannot forgive Ma-ma-oo nor her mother for what she has had to go through and cope with (Howells 195). She leaves her community and appears to Lisamarie as a ghost after her premature death, prompting her to return home (*Monkey Beach* 297-304). Lisamarie, shocked by this experience, contemplates her life and is determined to break out of the circle of drug abuse, partying, and the resulting state of semi-somnolence. The novel's passage presenting the protagonist's isolated time in Vancouver underscores the claim that this seclusion “provides the clearing with which she can communicate with the spirit world”, namely with Tab's ghost (Lane par. 9). Her cousin's death triggers Lisamarie's return to her community and strengthens her belief in her own supernatural abilities.

Lisamarie first gets acquainted with Frank when he and his friends circle her on their bikes, mocking her. The protagonist, however, aware of her strength and knowledgeable about fighting techniques, uses her fists to underline her verbal attacks. Stunned by the girl's resistance, Frank and his buddies flee the scene, “His bike tipped over and he yelped. [...] I sank my teeth into the closest part of him, which happened to be his butt. He howled and tried to punch me off, but I dug my teeth in harder, until I could taste his blood through his shorts” (*Monkey Beach* 65). Despite this incident the two children's anger evaporates soon and after their reconciliation Lisamarie joins

Frank's group of friends. Lisamarie's "switch of allegiances and gender-roles" is – ambiguously – a sign of her self-confidence as well as her confusion over her identity (Lane par. 8). After having been transferred to Lisamarie's school due to his expulsion from his former one, Frank begins to openly admire Lisamarie's bitterness and constant anger. While the girl distances herself more and more from her girlfriends due to her depression, her tomboy behavior makes her more attractive as a friend to Frank and his buddies Pooch and Cheese. Lisamarie decides to join them since she "hadn't played with anyone in months" (*Monkey Beach* 177), and the four of them form delicate bonds of friendship. They start to spend their free time together frequently, play games, contemplate the future, and undertake various adventures together. Lehnert explains,

Die Adoleszenz gilt als diejenige Phase im menschlichen Leben, in der einerseits eine endgültige Anpassung des Individuums an gesellschaftliche Normen stattfindet und vor allem die Geschlechtsidentität sich endgültig herausbildet; in der aber andererseits auch eine Abweichung vom scheinbar festgelegten Pfad möglich scheint, in der das Bestehende herausgefordert und verändert werden kann. (Lehnert 7)

Lisamarie's alternating attraction to girls' and boys' groups is consequently a particular effect of her confused identity, cutting certain friendship ties while establishing new ones alternatively with individuals from the same or from the other sex.

Lisamarie notices Pooch's interest in the supernatural and discovers items in his home which are connected to voodoo magic and similar phenomena. His ouija Board gains particular significance during the course of the novel, with Lisamarie and Pooch strongly believing that the questions they pose are indeed answered by spirits (*Monkey Beach* 230-232). Lisamarie thus finds a soul mate in Pooch, who shares at least some of her thoughts and beliefs. Pooch's life ends tragically, as he decides to commit suicide at the end of his adolescence. His death comes as a shock to the protagonist, having cut the ties to the three young men a long time ago, " 'So. How you been doing?' I said. 'It's been kind of tough since Pooch.' 'What about Pooch?' 'Didn't you hear?' Frank said. 'He shot himself' (*Monkey Beach* 311). The reasons for his suicide remain mysterious, but sexual abuse by Josh might have played a role (Appleford par. 17). The fragile friendship ties which appear to have bound the four characters start to crumble a long time before Pooch's death, the trigger being Cheese's rape of Lisamarie (*Monkey Beach* 257-258), and Lisamarie has to realize that for the four of them, friendship cannot really exist.

Lisamarie's friends play an important role in the shaping of her personality and several tragic events as well as joy and laughter are shared by them. Alternating circumstances in Lisamarie's life make a simultaneous change in her friendship allegiances inevitable, cutting ties with former friends due to various reasons, including physical violence or geographical relocation. Finally, Lisamarie acknowledges the significance of her family and relatives, who remain as the only individuals she can rely on despite her mistakes.

4.1.7. Comparison

Whereas the grouping of characters into distinctive units presents no challenge with regard to a literary analysis in *Ravensong*, the uniqueness of each individual dominates the narrative in *Monkey Beach*. Not only the division between "the town" and "the village" is repeatedly emphasized in Maracle's work, but also groups within the village itself are formed and outsiders are specifically mentioned and distinctly treated as such by others. In Robinson's narrative, however, the individuality and freedom of each character is highlighted as each individual follows his or her own path: Lisamarie focuses on her spiritual gifts with the help of her grandmother; Jimmy concentrates on his swimming career; and the protagonist's friends of early adolescence disperse, breaking the ties which bound them.

The bonds among the members of Lisamarie's and Stacey's families appear at first weak and fragile. However, during the course of the novels both families provide unconditional love to their daughters as well as security nets – or "homes" – the young women are always invited to return to in order to seek refuge. Stacey and Lisamarie acknowledge that ties of friendship may crumble within short periods of time but that one's family's affection never vanishes in spite of mistakes and errors committed by its members.

In both novels, wise elderly people are deeply respected and the significance of their wisdom is conveyed to the two protagonists. While Dominic and Ella provide advice and share the experiences of their lives with the younger generations, it is Ma-ma-oo in *Monkey Beach* who fulfills this responsibility towards her granddaughter. While Stacey learns about Salish customs and traditions from several members of her family and other villagers, Ma-ma-oo acts as the main bearer of Haisla culture which would otherwise be lost to Lisamarie.

In Maracle's novel *Ravensong* the dichotomy of "us" versus "them" is highlighted repeatedly and the existence of the town of Maillardville is essential to the plot. Its non-Aboriginal inhabitants are constantly being contrasted to the Indigenous population of the village, as Stacey acts as a border crosser and mediator, her interactions with non-Aboriginals being pivotal to *Ravensong*. In Robinson's coming-of-age narrative *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, the focus concerning social interactions centers on the area of Kitamaat and its Native residents and except for a few brief episodes non-Aboriginal communities are hardly mentioned.

Concluding this section on interactions among the numerous characters and the influences these individuals exert on the protagonists' developments it should be underlined that their families are of special importance to both Lisamarie and Stacey. Despite their occasional questioning of their parents' authority or their rebellion the unconditional love of their parents reassures them of "home". However, the solidarity among the villagers is more highly emphasized in Stacey's community. The protagonist of *Ravensong* faces a great challenge daily as she ventures into the non-Native town to attend school, becoming increasingly aware of differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population whereas the narrator of *Monkey Beach* recounts only few interactions with non-Indigenous people. The protagonists' encounters with other individuals, similar or dissimilar from them, are either joyful or unpleasant, but are all affecting their personalities during their adolescence. Both Maracle and Robinson therefore stress the crucial function of community, probing "difficulties or breakdown within the group (alienation, violence, substance abuse, despair)" (Hoy 188) and attempting to discover means to resolve these problems.

4.2. Challenges during Adolescence³²

4.2.1. Formative Years

The theme of adolescence has been researched by various scholars worldwide and its repeated presentation in literature led to the formation of a genre labeled "*Bildungsroman*". The fascination with this theme might stem from the universal experience of this age period and the multiple ways of perceiving this phase of development due to cultural specificities. In societies worldwide age is an indicator for

³² Adapted from Schaffer 28-46.

social roles, cultural characteristics and the construction of joint relations and common activities (Eisenstadt 29).

A plethora of analyses of these formative years focus on the development of the male adolescent of European descent, and it seems as if “female adolescence, if it exists at all, does not create problems equally worthy of the sociologist’s or the psychologist’s interest” (Bettelheim 76). However, it has been widely realized that this sexist treatment of the seeming unimportance of the female adolescent is erroneous and discussions about the maturation processes of young women and ethnic minorities have been gaining importance, rejecting the view that it is purely a “Western” phenomenon, as propagated by many authors (e.g. Mays 165).

The period of one’s teenage years is a time of change, development, and growth. Using the image of the bridge, which is featured so prominently in *Ravensong*, a scholar explained during a conference on Native Adolescents, “[...] I see [adolescence] as a transitional time and being in the middle of the bridge. [...] The elders call it, the prime time for spiritual development” (Kennedy-Kish 299-300). The term “elders” already connotes the importance of age regarding the social standing in a community as well as the allocation of roles; Ma-ma-oo, Dominic, Ella, and other old characters in both authors’ novels illustrate that their age signifies also wisdom, and “age and seniority constitute basic criteria for allocating social, economic, and political roles” (Eisenstadt 35). Young people are therefore obligated to meet certain expectations – not only those they create for themselves, but also those their community, or society in general, poses; finding a place in society, founding a family, and discovering a suitable occupation constitute just some of them.

The subsequent chapters will illustrate processes which could also be termed “rites of passage”, namely certain challenges which have to be overcome during one’s youth as well as expectations which are to be met by the young people. Family and friendship ties, which are essential during adolescence, have been illustrated above but their pivotal role in the shaping of the adolescents’ characters will be emphasized again. The spiritual developments will be illustrated in another chapter below due to its special significance to the novels, but may be regarded as an additional “challenge” to the ones mentioned in the present section.

The psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson conducted extensive research on adolescence and formulated the goal of these years of formation, “Adolescence is the last stage of childhood. The adolescent process, however, is conclusively complete only

when the individual has subordinated his childhood identifications to a new kind of identification [sic]" (155). On the last pages of both Maracle's and Robinson's novels it becomes apparent that the protagonists have indeed put their childhood identifications to the side, accepting adult responsibilities simultaneously with adult privileges.

4.2.2. Initiation Rites

The most expressive articulation of the onset of adolescence is illustrated by certain rituals which are performed, indicating the transition from a child to a young adult. These rites can be found in earlier times as well as nowadays, though their nature might differ not only among cultures but also concerning time and space. The onset of puberty, or the biological beginning of adolescence, marks sexual maturity which was accompanied by certain rites in the Salish communities. These rites were frequently associated with honoring the young persons by providing special care and were preceded by spiritual ceremonies (see e.g. Carlson 22). Due to the interference in the process of coming-of-age by non-Aboriginal policies such as residential school, these particular practices diminished (Carlson 22). It remains unclear if Stacey has undergone such initiation rites in her community, as *Ravensong* describes only several months during which she is seventeen and eighteen years of age, already having passed the onset of puberty. Additionally, no further initiation rites can be observed in Maracle's novel if the expression is considered in its narrower sense. Stacey and her community have to cope with various catastrophes during the summer months, facing an epidemic, a drought, domestic violence, and numerous deaths of beloved people. While these occurrences remain crucial in the protagonist's further development to maturity, initiation rites *per se* cannot be detected. Maracle, however, does stress the significance of coming-of-age ceremonies, and describes Stacey's last month in her people's village as "the days of decision":

I do know that when you enter your teenagehood you have a becoming-woman or becoming-man ceremony and those ceremonies signify the beginning of making decisions. We call the whole of teenagehood your "days of decisions", and when you're ready the girls are honoured, and then the boys are actually given over to the girls, two different ceremonies I think. All my children went through it and I did too. But it's the days of decision that *Ravensong* is about, just before she goes out into the world. ("Personal Interview", cf. Appendix)

Therefore, the process of making numerous decisions for one's further life indicates, according to Maracle, the passage into adulthood.

In Robinson's novel, on the other hand, the protagonist Lisamarie does undergo various non-culture-specific initiation rites which mainly include her first use of substances such as nicotine, cannabis, and alcohol. When researchers argue that modern society has been eliminating rituals of initiation (Blos 10, 203-204), not only religious rites or initiation rites of indigenous people abundantly recorded by anthropologists in the early twentieth century should be considered; acquiring one's driver's license or the right to vote ought to be regarded as initiations into the world of young adulthood as well, whereas smoking the first cigarette and similar rituals mark the entry into young adult peer groups.

Concerning rites of initiation, one must therefore differentiate between initiation into peer groups and initiation into the responsibilities of the adult world. Consequently, Lisamarie's consumption of the substances mentioned above can be regarded as an initiation rite in the context of her friends and fellow peers. The following passage describes Lisamarie's first encounter with cannabis,

I nervously followed Tab outside to the back of the rec center and across a ditch to the elementary school. We sat in the swings. Tab pulled out two joints and handed me one. Tab put her joint to her mouth and hunched over to hide it. [...] The stuff tasted as good as skunk cabbage smelled, was harsh and scratchy on my throat, and I ended up coughing most of it out. (*Monkey Beach* 204)

Succumbing to peer pressure, she is accepted into the group of young adults by imitating their behavior, demonstrating also power by knowingly trespassing certain rules established by persons of authority. These "friends" thus acquired by the initiation rites may sometimes prove to be temporary acquaintances rather than friends for life (*Monkey Beach* 296). Initiation rites instigated by adults are not featured in Robinson's novel, even though Eisenstadt would regard Ma-ma-oo's, Mick's, and Gladys' storytelling to Lisamarie as a *rite de passage*, since it opens the doors of understanding to her own people (33). However, the perception of various stories does not automatically endow the young person with adult rights and responsibilities, and as such cannot be regarded as a rite of initiation but more as a facet of a constant learning process. Therefore, Eisenstadt's *rites de passage* established some forty years ago do not remain valid for the majority of communities today.

Lisamarie as well as Stacey cannot be said to participate in initiation rites or ceremonies established by adults during the course of the novel. Lisamarie is initiated into the world of young adulthood by her peers through illegal substance abuse, which constitutes a common ritual in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

4.2.3. Love and Sexuality

The awakening of one's sexuality during adolescence triggers a considerable change in one's emotions and feelings, accompanied by insecurity, confusion, and uncertainty regarding one's own body. Stacey refuses love relationships with men and is disinterested in the other sex, rejecting admirers and prospective boyfriends. Lisamarie shares this reluctance at first, but at the age of fifteen or sixteen, her strong longing for being loved becomes evident. I will illustrate below in how far the protagonists' sexual developments differ, taking into account not only their age difference but also their dissimilar circles of friends.

Maracle explores the roles of women in both the Native and non-Native communities, considering "divorce, suicide, sexuality – straight and lesbian – domestic abuse, childbearing and child rearing, and independence within the norms and power relations of their societies" (Hoy 190). This explicit exploration of gender roles provides the basis for Stacey's emotional and psychological development as a young woman. In the novel *Ravensong* the reader is first introduced to Stacey's attitude toward sexuality when it is discovered that two of the protagonist's classmates have been sexually active. The girl, Polly, is mocked and teased by her classmates, and, not being able to bear the shame, flees into suicide to end her emotional suffering. Stacey, deeply shocked by these events, cannot grasp why an individual would kill herself over such a bagatelle. "The blood in [Stacey's] head pounded with the effort of trying to sort out Polly's suicide. Killed herself because they knew she had enjoyed her body's passion. It all seemed too absurd to be true" (*Ravensong* 39-40). This episode reveals important aspects of the moral codes which the inhabitants of Maillardville and the villagers follow – moral codes which widen the gulf between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in *Ravensong*. Stacey's stance toward sexuality manifests itself during this episode and is therefore one of the first illustrations of her personality in the narrative. The community of Maillardville thus lives by a double standard "and a hypocrisy that

tolerates sexual expression, so long as it is kept hidden” (Leggatt par. 18). During the course of the novel, several brief interjections by different characters highlight the villagers’ liberal stance concerning this topic even more (e.g. *Ravensong* 50).

Steve, who attends some of Stacey’s classes, demonstrates his interest in the young woman and is willing to learn about her culture as well as her culture’s codes of etiquette, thereby showing respect. Stacey is utterly confused by Steve’s open admiration for her, and while she trusts the young non-Indigenous man in certain moments, she completely rejects his presence in other instants. The collision of two different “worlds” is maybe best illustrated by the two young people’s encounter. However, Stacey also realizes that relationships of people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds may indeed work, as she observes Rena and German Judy’s relationship, “They must really love each other, [Stacey] thought, to have somehow climbed all the hills of complete misunderstanding” (*Ravensong* 114). Stacey cannot deny her ambiguity concerning her feelings for Steve – might their relationship indeed have a future? Will Steve, just like Judy, add to the “combined wisdom” of the Native community instead of constituting a nuisance (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 267)?

When Steve accompanies the young woman home, they discuss various topics, among which the death of Polly constitutes a great controversy due to their dissimilar attitudes towards sexuality, family life, and social networks. When they stop at the Snowdens’ house to gather some herbs, Stacey has a crucial moment of realization:

Steve helped her sort out the weeds. [...] For some reason she started telling him what each plant was and what the villagers used them for. [...] It was the first time she had taken any white boy into her confidence. Steve did not seemed [sic] to be affected by her taking him into her confidence. She had lurched onto dangerous territory without realizing it. (*Ravensong* 73)

Stacey is painfully aware of the risks which becoming involved with a non-Native partner may bring: a relative of hers had ended up in the slums of Vancouver, having lost her Indian status; and the contempt of the other villagers would be unbearable. Stacey, who considers all the negative consequences which inviting Steve to her home or even talking to him could imply, abandons him at the bridge and decides against letting him into her life (*Ravensong* 75), as “this bridge becomes the symbol of division, it marks the spot where intrusion or exclusion begins” (Kaltemback 49). However, Steve is not discouraged and visits the village repeatedly, conversing with Stacey’s biological father, Ned, and the wise Ella, willing to be taught by the elders and determined to explore Stacey’s culture and way of life while hoping to earn her respect.

The young woman, on the other hand, demonstrates disinterest in Steve and in having a relationship in general. She contemplates this situation, “Stacey began to wonder when all this passion would be cut loose in herself. When would her body come alive over someone?” (*Ravensong* 180). Ella’s well-intentioned advice to Steve includes her suggestion to return to woo Stacey after her graduation from UBC. Steve, much in love with Stacey, ponders Ella’s words. During Stacey’s and Steve’s last conversation before her departure, the young woman reveals her anger at the inhabitants of Maillardville, informing the young man that a relationship will never be possible. His ethnic roots constitute a problem for Stacey, a barrier which cannot be overcome, “ ‘Is it because I am white?’ he asked without bothering with the first part of the question. ‘No,’ she said softly, ‘it’s because you aren’t Indian’” (*Ravensong* 185). With this reply, the protagonist rejects Steve’s and the settlers’ internalized colonialism and attempts to provoke a shift in their thinking (Horne 124). The empathy which Stacey experiences and which constitutes one of her best qualities enables her to understand the settlers, but such empathy needs yet to be fostered in the minds of the non-Aboriginal population. Stacey informs Steve that the abdication from their responsibilities of helping the villagers during that summer’s catastrophes has fuelled her anger. Steve leaves defeated, experiencing “constructive shame” as he definitely reflects on Stacey’s words (Horne 124-125). With her words, Stacey reminds Steve that his people need to take a step forward, a step toward reconciliation. However, she simultaneously has to realize that her own people need to follow her own advice by crossing the bridge to unite two “worlds”.

Through the eyes of Lisamarie, the reader is offered glimpses of her own as well as her friends’ and relatives’ attitudes toward sexuality, and is also being confronted with sexual abuse. The protagonist’s stance towards love and sexual relationships changes very slowly as she grows older. Her “emotional immaturity” might constitute an additional reason for her feeling confused about her identity, making “it hard [for her] to hold on to [her] true [self]” (Pipher 58).

At the beginning of Lisamarie’s adolescence a sex-education class is conducted at her school. The young protagonist as well as several of her classmates consider this kind of teaching not only ridiculous but unnecessary, since they cannot envisage having sexual relationships with boys. Therefore, Lisamarie entertains thoughts reminiscent of Stacey’s feelings toward young men:

I couldn't really imagine having sex with a boy. From the look on Tab's face, I could tell she felt the same way. According to every *True Story* I'd ever read, sex led to misfortune. Girls in our class had become very silly, standing around the playground and whispering about this boy or that. I was glad I didn't have to be a part of it. (*Monkey Beach* 127)

Lisamarie is at the age of ten or eleven when this episode occurs and is yet unaware of the sexual awakening which will take place fairly late during her formative years. Stacey, on the other hand, who has reached the end of her adolescence at the age of eighteen, chooses not to have a relationship with Steve after rational contemplation; similar to Lisamarie, however, the matured protagonist has also not yet experienced sexual desire. While Lisamarie's girlfriends' attitudes concerning these topics of love and sexuality change rapidly, the protagonist herself prefers joining a boy-gang in order to spend her free time with Frank, Pooch, and Cheese. Consequently, she flees from her – in her eyes – constantly chuckling and terribly boring girlfriends and considers her new circle of male friends as her playmates without entertaining thoughts on amorous relationships. Lisamarie therefore willingly isolates herself from her former female friends and rejoices in having escaped their talks about good looks and the giggling which accompanies the discussion about prospective boyfriends (Lane par. 8). However, the protagonist fails to consider that their awakening sexuality also influences the three boys' behavior toward her. Frank's eyes linger longingly on her person repeatedly, exhibiting a behavior which Lisamarie ignores along with his Valentine's card. She suppresses thoughts of Frank's desire, wishing to maintain friendship ties with him, Pooch, and Cheese, and is still unable to comprehend the flirtatious behavior between the boys and girls at her school:

I didn't understand the games the girls played with boys. Watching them disappear behind bushes or chase each other and pretend to give hickeys, or spin bottles at birthdays just didn't make sense. I liked smoking. I liked hanging out and goofing around. The rest of it seemed a waste of time. (*Monkey Beach* 234)

Frank's desire, however, does not diminish and due to Lisamarie's disinterest in him he dates another girl, attempting to suppress thoughts of Lisamarie by replacing her. The protagonist's indifference to love relationships evidently manifests itself when Cheese asks her for a date: Lisamarie's initial reaction to this question is laughter, followed by a rejection, hence hurting Cheese deeply, who considers this rebuff as a blow to his ego as well (*Monkey Beach* 248-249). Cheese seeks revenge in a terrible manner, being responsible for Lisamarie's most traumatic experience during her adolescence: he rapes her (*Monkey Beach* 258). In an attempt to deal with this trauma, the protagonist burns

the clothes she wears that night. In her anger and hatred for Cheese, she also “struggles with her own responsibility for her misfortunes” when she considers her “desire to judge those who have wronged both her and her family” (Appleford par. 30-31). Through these events, friendships are destroyed, leaving the young woman even more isolated, lonely, and confused. It is during this time of solitude that Lisamarie longs for closeness, for physical contact with someone else, seeking a shoulder to lean on. Lisamarie ponders her first sexual encounter out of free will with Pooch,

He wasn't in love with me and I wasn't in love with him, but it was nice to be held and to have someone there. It does make a difference when you're feeling alone. It takes the feeling away for a few minutes, a few hours. Then It's over and nothing's really changed. [...] If you never fall in love, you never get your heart broken. (*Monkey Beach* 287-289)

Therefore, Lisamarie does indeed feel a need to love and be loved and for the first time she describes a physical longing, which surfaces as a strong emotion during this time of utter isolation and depression. However, she still regards closer relationships as undesirable due to their complexity and intricacy. Pipher recalls a survey in which she observed these patterns of behavior and emotion, “[The girls] felt obligated and resentful, loving and angry, close and distant, all at the same time with the same people. Sexuality, romance and intimacy were all jumbled together and needed sorting” (35). The confession of the protagonist’s longing for a devoted relationship toward the end of the novel is hence unexpected and surprising. Fully realizing the extent to which her brother Jimmy and his girlfriend Karaoke love each other, she feels a sting of jealousy when she sees them and observes, “Someday, I thought; I want someone to look at me like that, like there’s no one else in the world” (*Monkey Beach* 358). Lisamarie does not anymore long for a physical relationship only, but desires a committed relationship with a young man, illustrating a decisive change in the protagonist’s emotional development. This wish for a committed relationship does not surface in Stacey’s life, even at the age of eighteen. She is very much concerned with the well-being and future of her community, making a commitment to her family, relatives, and fellow villagers which is more important to her than any other emotional or sexual relationship.

4.2.4. Search for a Suitable Occupation

The search for a suitable occupation proves to pose a greater challenge to Lisamarie than to Stacey. At the age of seventeen the protagonist of *Ravensong* expresses the wish to graduate from high-school and subsequently attend the University of British Columbia in order to return to her village with a degree in Education, being able to act as a teacher to the children of her own people. Lisamarie, on the other hand, exhibits a considerable lack of interest concerning her future occupation. She quits school and abandons her home community to live in Vancouver, leaving her parents – who had already made plans for their daughter’s future – in shock and despair. Both Stacey and Lisamarie thus make decisions during the course of the narratives which encompass far-reaching consequences for their further lives.

Stacey devotes much of her time to studying, enthusiastic for knowledge in general, but particularly eager for information on non-Indigenous people’s history, customs, tradition, and culture. This interest stems primarily from the need to succeed at a Euro-Canadian university in order to receive a teacher’s certificate rather than from genuine interest in the other culture. Therefore, attending school in Maillardville offers Stacey the opportunity to acquire skills necessary to succeed in the non-Aboriginal “world”, which would in the long term benefit her own people – but not them alone. Raven repeatedly emphasizes that border-crossing is necessary for “[o]nly by sharing knowledge and by crossing the physical and metaphorical bridges that separate the two communities can either society become healthy”, both physically and spiritually (Leggatt par. 12). Stacey’s vocation as a teacher therefore serves multiple purposes, most significantly the education of her people’s children and the bridging of cultural differences.

For her dream of teaching, the young woman has accepted many long years of misery in the Euro-Canadian school system,

For almost twelve years she had moved beyond the indignity of school—the insults, the loneliness, the silence of others who preferred the pretense of her non-existence—and buried herself in their strange books. She had wandered about in their crazy sense of self and logic, memorized passage after passage of seemingly meaningless information so she could go to the place where millions of books resided. She really wanted to shape a life for herself that was different from her parents’ lives. (*Ravensong* 26)

Stacey's community respects her as a "thinker", accepting her study habits and thus frequent isolation from village life, often admiring Stacey for her knowledge and philosophical input on current situations in their community. They support her not only morally but also financially, "Every spare cent of every single one of Stacey's relatives had been put in jars for Stacey's dream" (*Ravensong* 27). Stacey herself, however, has not yet learned how or when to use her knowledge wisely and by frequently comparing Natives and non-Natives she causes discomfort among her people, occasionally even rage. Her knowledge of non-Indigenous culture – though limited – is particularly striking as her ignorance of her own people's etiquette and philosophy surfaces numerous times throughout the novel.

The protagonist of Maracle's coming-of-age narrative can be characterized as introverted, preferring to keep certain thoughts to herself, pondering them, only seldom asking for advice from elders. When she therefore reveals her plans in regard to the opening of a school in her own community, her fellow-villagers are astonished and overjoyed, "Stacey surprised them all. She knew exactly what she was going to do. [...] She wanted to start her own school, right here in the village. [...] The possibility that the horror of residential school and shipping out their children would be over excited them all" (*Ravensong* 59). The sacrifices the villagers have made for the sake of the young woman's education are therefore regarded as extremely valuable. Stacey's plans raise their spirits and the members of the community are grateful to Stacey's mother for keeping her in school. The protagonist's abilities as a teacher are never questioned, especially as she demonstrates her excellent teaching skills during her family's fishing trip to Yale. It is during these weeks in the woods that she instructs her mother and Madeline in reading. This passage clearly illustrates how Stacey is able to bridge tremendous cultural differences: she adjust her style of teaching to her mother's and Madeline's cultural notions and their little previous knowledge about being taught skills such as reading, writing, or arithmetic,

[Stacey] decided that the way she had learned wouldn't work for these women. They wanted to know now, not some five years down the road. She concocted a story about a family namd [sic] Alphabet, gave them names and work to do. She even threw in trickster behaviour for those moments when none of the Alphabets would do the right work. (*Ravensong* 175)

Stacey, who has acquired an awareness of cultural differences, is truly compassionate with her students and it is her empathy which "succeeds as a teaching tool precisely because it does not ignore existing power imbalances in the colonial relationship, but

addresses them” (Horne 123). The protagonist is considerate and patient in her teaching, confirming her mother’s estimation that she has chosen the right profession. Therefore, Stacey’s intelligence and abilities instill hope and pride in Momma who, while she does not comprehend the necessity of attending university to become a teacher, experiences the joys of reading herself and approves of her daughter’s decision concerning her future profession. Stacey, who has applied to the University of British Columbia earlier, receives the letter of her acceptance to this institution, delighted by the prospect of attending university despite the many obstacles which she will have to face due to her ethnic heritage. The last chapter of Maracle’s coming-of-age narrative recounts Stacey’s departure for Vancouver where the young woman can follow her dream at UBC. This dream comes to an abrupt end as the epilogue illustrates, when Stacey some twenty-five years later recounts, “ ‘In the end, they would not let us build our school. No one in white town would hire me either’ ” (*Ravensong* 198). The young woman’s dream remains unfulfilled, as she fails to build her own school since she returns to a shattered village, which makes the execution of her previous plans impossible.

A recurrent topic in regard to discovering one’s vocation and finding a suitable occupation in Robinson’s novel *Monkey Beach* is the children’s dream and the teenagers’ wish of being wealthy. Affluence, it is believed, will initiate a movement away from the village of Kitamaat to more promising realms, facilitating the acquisition of material possessions and consequently the improvement of one’s life style. Jimmy manifests his intention of accumulating great amounts of money at the beginning of the narrative, aiming for a reward presented to the person who is able to prove the existence of a sasquatch by photographing it (*Monkey Beach* 9). The dream of affluence and wealth resurfaces several times throughout the novel and is expressed by various characters of different age groups. Lisamarie’s family represents a typical middle-class household, where, nonetheless, the wish for additional monetary gain is stated repeatedly, as they strive for a better standard of living. Consequently, the characters “negotiate the relationship between Haisla culture and the pervasive presence of popular culture”, and Robinson repeatedly stresses the hybrid identities of various characters throughout her novel, indicating how material and spiritual wealth intermingle, while the latter is sometimes ignored as the wish for material possessions increases (Andrews 13-14).

Lisamarie and her three male friends discuss their future plans which include Frank's "getting the hell out of here" as well as Pooch's buying "a big truck", and Cheese's uttering his strategy, "I'm gonna have a big house, six cars, shitloads of money and marry a model [when I'm famous]" (*Monkey Beach* 199). Even Ma-ma-oo advises her granddaughter to marry "someone rich" (*Monkey Beach* 172), emphasizing this quality in a husband more than any others. Lisamarie, however, is indifferent to her future and lacks any specific plans, contemplating after the discussion with her friends, "It would be easy to go along with Mom and Dad's plans, since they were assuming I'd go off to university. Then again, I couldn't see myself going in for another four years of school after I graduated" (*Monkey Beach* 199-200). Despite her parents' intentions of having their daughter attend an institution of higher education to become a doctor or lawyer, Lisamarie has little self-confidence in her abilities and abhors school as well as studying. Regardless of her parents' pleas and for lack of a better alternative – in her opinion at least – the protagonist discloses to her mother and father her plans of working in the cannery, leaving the parents totally stunned and shocked by her daughter's job plans (*Monkey Beach* 277); Lisamarie exhibits a fierce determination to quit school and commence working in the plant as soon as the opportunity arises. The young woman's laziness manifests itself in a lack of future plans and her rejection of making long-term commitments concerning her prospective job. She is yet too immature to integrate into the working world of society, pushing the responsibilities of adulthood into the background of her mind by choosing to assume a monotonous and forlorn position in a plant (Dalsimer 9-10). The adolescent girl does not yet grasp the range of consequences which may result from her premature decision to quit school. However, she does regret her decision after her visit to Vancouver and decides to recommence grade eleven, realizing the value of a good education and comprehending her parents' worries. She returns to school highly motivated and is able to study in spite of phases of poor motivation which she overcomes with the help of her brother. The young woman has matured as she now accepts help thankfully and considers her future in a realistic light especially with regards to a potential profession. Additionally, she has taken a more positive stance toward education and schooling in general now, appreciating its importance. Her more positive outlook on life and her self-sacrifice for being successful in school demonstrate her growing ambition. Nonetheless, even at the end of the novel her precise plans for the years following her high-school graduation remain obscure and undefined. One of the reasons for this uncertainty concerning her education (and

ultimately her entry into non-Native society through university) could be that “Haisla carries echoes of meaning from an indigenous cultural inheritance that disrupts Lisa’s acculturation into white society. She is on the borderline” and has to endure various challenges because of it (Howells 189). The confusion over her identity combines with the feeling of responsibility to herself and her family, creating a dilemma. Nonetheless, it seems that the young woman is finally more ambitious in her academic endeavors and strives for higher achievements.

Concluding this section on the theme of future plans and professions let me emphasize that Stacey continually follows a very clear goal, namely that of establishing a school in her Native community. She accepts several sacrifices to achieve her aim and is constantly supported by her family and friends. Lisamarie, on the other hand, remains uncertain about her future; at the beginning of her teenagehood she lacks interest in her future career, suffering from low self-esteem and little trust in her abilities. As time progresses, however, the young woman realizes the value of a good education as her ambition for high academic achievements surges.

4.2.5. The Journey from Home as the Rite of Separation

As mentioned above, the journey from home in Maracle and Robinson’s novels does not mark such a distinctive rite of passage as in the traditional *Bildungsroman* since the protagonists’ transformation and maturation already commence in their own home communities (cf. chapter 2.2.2.). The departure from one’s home or even the decision-making process of leaving a location which is so familiar to oneself is nevertheless one facet of the process of growing up, becoming independent, and relying on one’s own judgments and abilities.

Stacey’s departure for the University of British Columbia marks the beginning of a four-year time span during which she will be separated from her own community for the first time. Her education will therefore begin “in a new setting”, namely in Vancouver, “an urban center as contrasted to [her] early provincial life”(Labovitz 4). Stacey has to learn to integrate completely into a different culture while simultaneously facing discrimination and oppression far away from home. The existence of border spaces is foregrounded during Stacey’s departure, constituting an attempt to deconstruct obvious cultural, social, and spatial boundaries (MacFarlane 111). The day of her departure is particularly strenuous for her as well as her family and especially the

separation from her mother constitutes a painful experience, “Momma touched both sides of Stacey’s face. Stacey swallowed. The rain poured over the two women, hiding the tears sneaking out from both their eyes” (*Ravensong* 195). Even though the young woman knows that she will be returning to the village, the moment of her departure marks the beginning of a new chapter in her life – she leaves with the hope but also with the responsibility of establishing a school in her own village after graduation. Additionally, Stacey partly fulfills Raven’s plan of building a bridge between the Native and non-Native “worlds” when she initiates a transformation of her own and the settlers’ society (Hoy 138). Early in the novel, Stacey wonders why the inhabitants of the town seem to care so little about each other and finds the following answer,

The question, how could they be so dispassionate about one another? began to shape into answers in her mind. Since their children know they are temporary they must distance themselves from their parents long before the moment of departure, otherwise leaving would be too painful. (*Ravensong* 34)

Stacey has never created this distance, which thus complicates the departure from her community. Due to their emotional separation from their families long before they actually leave their homes, the young citizens of Maillardville see no difficulty in leaving their parents or families (behind). Stacey’s bonds to the members of her family are very strong and affectionate at the moment of her departure, ties which were strengthened through moments of crisis as well as joy. Even though the protagonist realizes that she will return in four years’ time with valuable knowledge gained, the day of her departure depresses her, with “the fear of being estranged from her mother” constantly present (Kalttemback 51). This “journey from home” is undeniably of great importance for the protagonist’s maturation process and the decision alone to leave her community demonstrates her strength and determination to change the present situation in her community.

The protagonist of *Monkey Beach*, on the other hand, resolves to spend several months in Vancouver during her teenagehood. Her escape to the city is preceded by the deaths of Uncle Mick and Ma-ma-oo, as well as various other tragic or traumatic incidents which trigger the phase of her depression and misery, as she is also trying to flee from the overwhelming guilt she feels. Lisamarie experiences the city of Vancouver in a constant state of delirium and drunkenness, finding herself “on a self-destructive course of alcoholism and drug abuse” while spending part of her grandmother’s inheritance (Howells 195). The young woman does not realize that she merely

suppresses her problems without attempting to discover solutions for them. Days and weeks pass as the young woman lives in a psychedelic world of partying and forbidden substance abuse.

Additionally, her stay in Vancouver may be regarded as a crossing of cultural borders which, however, is of little importance to Lisamarie herself. Her acquaintances spend her money ignorant of her ethnic roots, and the superficial relationships the protagonist establishes and experiences in Vancouver are focused on her financial exploitation rather than on interest in her person. Lisamarie, who has been constantly “oscillating between the values and traditions of two cultures”, therefore misses an opportunity to define her identity during her visit to Vancouver (Howells 196). In contrast to Stacey, who leaves her community in order to learn about the ways of life of non-Indigenous people, Lisamarie does not use her visit to the city to learn about herself and others, but rather wastes her time (and health).

This period of separation from her home community defines her maturation process as she recognizes the value of family ties and is determined to return to her home community. However, this period of time in Vancouver is not comparable to that which is usually termed “*Wanderjahre*” in the *Bildungsroman*; firstly, her psychological, emotional, and spiritual developments have already been triggered by various events in her home community; secondly, it is really the encounter with Tab’s ghost which initiates her return home rather than the other experiences she has had in Vancouver. Without this crucial spiritual meeting Lisamarie might have continued eking out her existence in Vancouver, not learning from her own mistakes, such as drug abuse. The young woman herself admits, “I would have stayed that way for years if it wasn’t for Tab” (*Monkey Beach* 297). Due to this “generous intervention” (Howells 195) she admits her mistakes and realizes the extent of damage she has brought onto her own body as well as the pain she has caused her family with her departure. Consequently, the protagonist rejoins her family in Kitamaat, recommences school and hence slowly regains her parents’ trust. The events in Vancouver cause Lisamarie to reconsider her phase of rebellion as she acknowledges that drug abuse and violence contribute to already existing problems rather than help diminish them. After her return to Kitamaat, her life seems to improve while her brother’s is disaster-prone.

These “journeys from home” illustrated in the two coming-of-age stories therefore differ greatly from each other, while both contribute decisively to the further developments of Lisamarie and Stacey. Despite these challenges mentioned above, I do

not intend to present adolescence as a time of conflict only; young people may indeed thrive during this period of time, growing because of the challenges they are faced with. The spiritual aspects of this growth period will constitute the focus of the next chapter.

4.3. Spirituality, the Supernatural, and the Trickster

The trickster is featured frequently in literature by authors of Aboriginal descent in North America, and already the title of Maracle's narrative emphasizes the essential role of this figure in her writing. It is Raven who instigates change in Stacey's community, and as the initiator of this tremendous movement toward reconciliation of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities this figure of transformation shall be examined in the light of the protagonist's spiritual development. Similarly, the title of Robinson's novel connotes the location which holds great spiritual power for Lisamarie and her family, underlining the young woman's supernatural gift while simultaneously focusing on the significance of nature. An analysis of the spiritual elements occurring in *Monkey Beach* shall be preceded by examinations of the trickster Raven in Maracle's narrative.

A definition of what the expression "trickster" precisely connotes and denotes is difficult to discover, as a plethora of varying literary figures and characters exists. The following brief depiction of the trickster's qualities therefore offers only a glimpse of this figure's nature:

Much has been said and written about the Trickster, partially due to the fact that to provide a meaningful definition of him is next to impossible. Such impossibility is then given by the very nature of the figure: the Trickster is an amorphic and metamorphic being, concurrently creative and destructive, generous and malicious, dangerous and laughable. It is a creature beyond gender, beyond the generally accepted ethical values, and also beyond the possible. (Kolinská 28)

The creative and destructive qualities of Raven will be highlighted in reference to *Ravensong*, as the change initiated by this figure leads up to the events of the portentous summer of 1954. Raven therefore acts as a "transformer", contributing to the communities' changes with her dynamism (Fee and Gunew 212). Raven has been observing how the self-induced isolation of the Native and non-Native communities as well as their unwillingness to reconcile has damaged the communities themselves as

well as the lives of individuals. Therefore, Raven reflects on a drastic plan to transform the situation, “Change is serious business—gut-wrenching, really. With humans it is important to approach it with great intensity. Great storms alter earth, mature life, rid the world of the old, ushering in the new. Humans call it catastrophe. Just birth, Raven crowed” (*Ravensong* 14). Raven is therefore convinced that certain crises can cause beneficial effects for the communities, regarding the plague which she is about to bring upon the Salish people as the sole cure for a serious disease which has infected Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike. Raven regards the physical sickness as a means to bridge the gulf which separates the two communities in order to heal physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses (Leggatt par. 8). Instilling shame in the non-Aboriginal population of Maillardville and creating the Salish people’s need to ask for medical support demonstrates Raven’s wish that both communities take steps toward reconciliation.

The interrelatedness of the spiritual and natural worlds manifests itself repeatedly throughout Maracle’s novel. The intensity of Raven’s influence on the villagers’ daily routines can be observed in frequent comparisons with characters, situations, and stories to trickster qualities; sometimes there is “too much Raven” and occasionally, there is “not enough Raven”.³³ While the first expression can symbolize courage and determination while simultaneously implying risky behavior, the latter term can signify either overcautiousness or a “wise course of self restraint” (Horne 121). The young members of the Salish village are expected to find out themselves in how far the trickster Raven influences their own lives, and straight-forward explanations by adults are usually replaced by cryptic stories which require contemplation on the part of the listeners. When, in the epilogue, young Jacob is thus unable to decipher Raven’s message, an optimistic outlook is provided as the hope is present that the following generation will unravel the mystery of Raven in their own time (*Ravensong* 198-199).

Raven, who “mediates between the town and Stacey’s village, between the members of each community, and between the past, present, and future” incessantly attempts to make herself heard by the adolescent protagonist (Horne 111). Stacey, however, is unable to perceive the trickster’s song due to her alienation from her own heritage, her cultural rootlessness. Throughout the novel numerous indications with regard to the protagonist’s ignorance concerning the trickster’s message highlight Stacey’s spiritual immaturity which overshadows her intellectual abilities, “Stacey, the

³³ For some examples cf. *Ravensong* e.g. 107, 114, 179.

child who had all the advantages of Dominic's and Nora's good sense and the knowledge of the others, was unable to hear Raven sing, no matter how obvious her song" (*Ravensong* 44). Raven is not the one who bridges the chasm between the two communities, but merely acts as a "catalyst for change" encouraging the people to become agents of their own future (Horne 117). The slow alteration in Stacey's spiritual development is therefore crucial for the survival of her own people. At the beginning, unfortunately, it is only Celia who perceives the voice of Raven but finds herself unable to comprehend the words, as Raven's song is "forming a web of knowing she was too young to understand" (*Ravensong* 14). Celia is unable to comprehend Raven's function as the "harbinger of transformation" (Kelly 47), and the responsibility to decipher the trickster's message consequently rests on Stacey alone.

The protagonist's long journey of self-discovery and self-fulfillment requires the prior acceptance of her own cultural heritage. Weeks and months pass during which Stacey remains deaf and blind to Raven's song due to her cultural insecurity. Stacey's final acceptance of her part in Raven's plan toward the end of the novel constitutes a moment which marks an important turning point as optimism and confidence are conveyed in a time of utter despair. The protagonist's shaming of Steve is pivotal in initiating the settlers' deconstruction of their colonialist thinking structures, "It was not until this last 'flu epidemic that finally the seeds of shame were sewn [sic]. Raven grew excited. Stacey had been the one to sew this seed in the heart of young Steve" (*Ravensong* 191). Ultimately, Stacey contributes to the execution of Raven's plan, which is most clearly illustrated on the day of her departure: Stacey comprehends that her studies at UBC are a necessity in order to understand how to live in harmony with the non-Aboriginal population (*Ravensong* 192). "Cross-cultural communication" is about to take place on a more intensive level (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 263). Stacey's awareness of having to comprehend the non-Aboriginal people's philosophies and ways of life in order to establish a dialogue and live peacefully with them is one goal of Raven's plan, and this "[u]nderstanding is possible because Stacey has undergone a process of self and cultural individualization" (Horne 123). For the execution of her plan, Raven chooses an Indigenous individual, namely the intelligent, courageous and insightful eighteen-year old Stacey, and prompts the young woman to guide both non-Aboriginals and Aboriginals in their approach to find the cure for their physical, emotional and spiritual diseases. The protagonist's relationship with the trickster is thus pivotal in establishing the process of reconciliation between the two communities.

The supernatural weaves itself as a thread through Robinson's novel, thus emphasizing that "the supernatural and the fantastic constitute another dimension of reality not separable from everyday experience" (Howells 184). Lisamarie's whole life mirrors this thought and the inseparability of the two spheres is highlighted repeatedly in the narrative. Due to the prominence of the *Bildungs*-theme, I disagree with Lane, who terms Robinson's novel "trickster writing" (par. 5). Rather, I consider the trickster and the spirits as essential elements in Lisamarie's development during her formative years, but reject overemphasizing their importance by categorizing the whole novel just because of their appearance.

The girl's first encounter with the supernatural occurs at the age of six when she sights the b'gwus on an island close to Monkey Beach, "I turned back and saw him. Just for a moment, just a glimpse of a tall man, covered in brown fur" (*Monkey Beach* 16). By using a figure such as the sasquatch, "whose power resides in its ability to mimic humans, Robinson heightens the sense that the characters are constantly confronted with (and seduced by) distorted reflections of their own desires and fears" (Appleford par. 32). This interesting observation supports my claim that Lisamarie's emotional, spiritual, and psychological developments are greatly influenced by her encounters with the supernatural, especially due to the spirits' ability to mirror and reflect the young woman's behavior back at herself. Since Lisamarie's first encounter with the supernatural at the age of six she has found herself unable to fully decipher the messages which the spirits send and laments, "I wish the dead would just come out and say what they mean instead of being so passive-aggressive about the whole thing" (*Monkey Beach* 17).

Lisamarie regularly witnesses supernatural phenomena: she sees ghosts and perceives the liveliness of the nature that surrounds her, simultaneously experiencing fear as well as a fascinating feeling of attraction. Although the horror of misinterpreting the spirits' messages never completely subsides, Ma-ma-oo knows that monsters "are not necessarily destructive" (Andrews 9). While the help of her parents would enable Lisamarie to better comprehend her supernatural gift, her mother not only denies this assistance but the existence of such phenomena in general. By emotionally abandoning her daughter, who feels insecure and anxious, Gladys hopes to have avoided malicious gossip – she intends to evade being labeled a "crazy person" by the members of her community. When Ma-ma-oo discovers her daughter-in-law's denial of supernatural

phenomena, she supports Lisamarie and acts as a gentle guide in her granddaughter's discovery of spirituality, offering an essential piece of advice, " 'Never trust the spirit world too much' " (*Monkey Beach* 153). Fostering Lisamarie's spiritual development, Ma-ma-oo intends to demonstrate to the young protagonist that the ability to talk with ghosts "amounts to a transgenerational affirmation of an inheritance, thus involving a call to responsibility" (Castricano 812). The discovery of Lisamarie's Aboriginal heritage and Haisla roots is therefore strongly connected to spirituality and supernatural phenomena. The young woman occasionally experiences ambiguous feelings since she sometimes abhors her ability to communicate with the spirit world – the death sendings she perceives place great responsibility on the young woman, resulting in a feeling of extreme guilt if she does not succeed in interpreting the messages correctly and quickly enough. Therefore, her "ability to see and hear beyond the events of daily life is, ironically, both a gift and a curse" (Andrews 16).

Lisamarie's incessant allusions to her supernatural experiences as well as her sleepwalking prompt her mother to seek medical help by consulting a psychologist in the hospital. The ever present fear of ridicule in their community fuels Gladys's almost desperate hope that her daughter can be "cured" from her "illness" (Lane par. 8). Lisamarie, however, is familiar with the Euro-Canadian means of treating her "disease" and provides the answers which the psychologist expects during the session, thus simulating enormous progress concerning her "condition" – the young woman herself is certainly well aware that her encounters with spirits will continue but can convince the psychologist otherwise. This episode emphasizes differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world views: the psychologist is trained in a Western tradition which does not leave room for encounters involving spirits or the dead (Castricano 804), and thus believes to have discovered the cause for Lisamarie's behavior in excessive emotional stress or familial problems. Regarding ghosts and spirits as forms of mental disorders mirrors a eurocentric worldview which completely ignores Aboriginal beliefs, as in "Native spirituality [...] the boundaries between the human and nonhuman (or more-than-human) worlds are drawn differently than in white culture" (Howells 184). Robinson repeatedly crosses cultural borders in her text, and in the above-mentioned passage refers to differing perceptions of illnesses and medicine according to cultural heritage.

Due to feeling misunderstood by almost everybody around her, Lisamarie is intrigued by the idea that her friend Pooch might share some of her insights in the

supernatural world. Visiting his home with Frank and Cheese, she discovers Pooch's attraction to voodoo and magic. Participating in a ouija board session, the whole group experiences how the board's magic positively captivates but also scares them. When the spirit of the board alludes to the death of Lisamarie's cat as well as to Pooch's (or Karaoke's) sexual abuse by Josh, Lisamarie is immediately convinced of the ouija board's truth value. The supernatural therefore manifests itself also in the form of "conventional magic" in Robinson's novel, which, however, does not imply that Lisamarie's supernatural experiences are simply a New Age trend.

One of the most influential encounters with spirits and ghosts occurs during Lisamarie's stay in Vancouver. The ghost of her cousin Tab successfully persuades the protagonist to return to her home community instead of eking out an existence in the slums of Vancouver. Lisamarie is deeply disturbed by her cousin's appearance and resolves to return home to rejoin her family and reintegrate into society. Therefore, "speaking with ghosts is less about pathology than it is about spirituality and *survival*" (Castricano 806) [my emphasis].

On her way to her home community of Kitamaat Lisamarie suddenly sights a sasquatch scurrying across the road. Even though the sasquatch "leads an ambiguous existence on the borders between reality and myth" (Howells 193), it is very real for the protagonist, and the creature acts as an affirmation of her Aboriginal inheritance. The protagonist experiences intensive relief after this encounter, as "[she feels] deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (*Monkey Beach* 315-316), a feeling she has missed during her stay in Vancouver. Throughout Robinson's narrative, Lisamarie is faced with "a multi-dimensional representation of reality", a reality experienced only by those characters who accept their identities with regard to their Native roots and heritage (Howells 184).

The passages mentioned above are exemplary of Lisamarie's spiritual development which reaches a climax at the end of the novel when she searches for Jimmy and lands with her boat on Monkey Beach. Hoping to find an answer to her brother's fate, she sacrifices her blood to the spirits. As the present, past, and future intermingle, dream and reality merge, and Lisamarie finds herself reunited with deceased family members such as Mick and Ma-ma-oo. Having found her roots in Haisla culture and heritage, she comprehends the interrelationships of the past and present and her emotional maturity manifests itself in her understanding of her ancestors' language. As Lisamarie listens to the Haisla farewell song of her dead

relatives, she is saved from drowning by the ghosts of her family. Since Robinson's novel resists closure, the fate of Jimmy remains subject to speculation, but the intensive connection between Lisamarie and the spiritual world manifests itself as the most essential one in her life, which is emphasized during this crucial spiritual encounter. As Castricano summarizes,

[T]he spirit world of Haisla culture [...] offers Lisamarie a means of 'learning to live' by teaching her that talking *with* ghosts is transformational because, for Lisamarie, it involves the recollection as well as the reintegration of a spiritual dimension of Haisla culture in spite of its negation in the wake of European contact. (802)

Both *Ravensong* as well as *Monkey Beach* thus clearly focus on spirituality, the supernatural, and the trickster, elements which exert great influence on the adolescent protagonists and their maturation processes.

4.4. Nature

Nature and the land are traditionally of great significance to the Native inhabitants of the North American continent due to numerous reasons including ecologic and political ones. In both *Ravensong* and *Monkey Beach*, the environment initiates several processes of change and alteration in the lives of Stacey and Lisamarie, which underlines its significance once more.

Already on the first page of Maracle's coming-of-age narrative, the importance of nature is stressed by the personification of natural phenomena as well as of plants and animals. The expressions "wind", "cloud", and "rain" are used as proper names, endowing these natural occurrences with their own personalities, "Wind changed direction, blowing the song toward cedar. Cedar picked up the tune, repeated the refrain, each lacey branch bending to echo Ravensong. Cloud, seduced by the rustling of cedar, moved sensually to shore" (*Ravensong* 9). These personifications demonstrate the importance of these elements to the Aboriginal community and recall that these elements should be treated with respect due to their strong power and force which may both positively and negatively influence people's lives. Maracle herself claims that since Cedar signifies a stable and sacred house in her culture and Raven symbolizes change and movement, the two elements have to cooperate in order to create harmony (Kelly 86-87). Stacey oftentimes ignores the signals which these parts of nature and the spirit world send, but her younger sister Celia is very much aware of them, perceiving

subtle changes in these elements' attitudes and behavior, sensing their plans and communicating with them. Therefore, Stacey is connected to these environmental forces through her younger sister Celia, herself being too blind or too preoccupied with other affairs to comprehend what her sister perceives. Throughout Maracle's coming-of-age narrative these natural occurrences are personified and their closeness to humankind manifests itself in the expression of human emotions and behavior, "In the dark on the eve of Stacey's departure the rain came again. She came softly at first, a woman weeping, delighted at her ability to shed tears at last for her lost children" (*Ravensong* 190).

The river and the bridge serve various functions in the novel, also acting as border spaces. The stream can be regarded as a line of demarcation, separating the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities from each other, Stacey acting as a tie between them. Crossing the bridge marks the transition from one culture into the other one and Maracle herself confirms that it is of utmost importance to consider "the arc of the bridge between the main character and white people" (Marsden 45). When Steve accompanies Stacey home one day after school the protagonist decides to walk alone from the arc of the bridge – thus from its middle – toward her village, conveying to the young man that he is forbidden to cross the imaginary border and thus enter the village (*Ravensong* 75). Besides the river's function as a boundary, it serves the purpose of Stacey's source of recuperation and constitutes for the protagonist a powerful site of reflection and contemplation contributing to her emotional as well as spiritual development. Walking across the bridge with Steve, the young woman wonders if she should stop for her "habitual private vigil" but then decides against it as Steve "might disturb the peace of the vigil, contaminate its peaceful nature by disrupting its privacy" (*Ravensong* 75). During these "vigils", as Stacey terms them, she contemplates different phases of her life, current events, and explores her emotions and thoughts concerning these occurrences. However, by refusing to share this source of strength with Steve (or others) and by considering "the others' search for knowledge only a nuisance" her "limitations as a bridge builder between two cultures becomes most obvious [sic]" (Eigenbrod "Stranger" 265). Watching the reproduction processes of the fish and their connection to the world around them, she realizes why the non-Aboriginal students in school and the inhabitants of Maillardville in general seem to constantly feel a kind of desperation, "Maybe some white people had no roots in the creative process, so could not imagine being that devoted to staying alive. [...] Maybe no roots was the

problem” (*Ravensong* 61). Stacey perceives the links among her people and all other beings of the earth and realizes that non-Indigenous people might lack this understanding of all organisms being connected to nature, therefore suffering silently from a constant anxiety. The stream functions not only as a boundary but triggers Stacey’s understanding of the non-Aboriginals around her. In fact, the river and the bridge can, at least in Maracle’s narrative, only exist together – they are interdependent (MacFarlane 119), and thus Stacey’s being a boundary crosser gains significance.

As most of the villagers live from what the land provides, berrypicking and fishing are of high importance in their daily activities. Of particular significance is the comparison between Mrs. Snowden’s and Momma’s gardens. Stacey collects herbs which the non-Native woman has sorted out as “weeds” and brings them home to her mother who is overjoyed to receive them:

“Oh good, where did you get them?” “White folks pull them from their gardens and throw them away.” “Really? you’re kidding. Oh, you can’t fool me, my girl,” her mother let go a hearty laugh. Stacey just looked at her—the laughter stopped dead in its track unfinished. “You aren’t kidding are you?” “No,” and her mom shook her head back and forth. (*Ravensong* 76)

The gifts of nature, especially plants, herbs, fruit, and vegetables, are perceived differently by the two groups of people, the inhabitants of the town enjoying such an abundance thereof that they can choose to discard great amounts, living in a “neat little throw-away world” (*Ravensong* 33). Mrs. Snowden’s ignorance of the plants’ healing powers constitutes another reason for her classifying them as “weeds”. Stacey and her people, who are unable to afford medication, value the medical value of herbs highly, transmitting the knowledge of their healing powers from generation to generation. Mrs. Snowden’s weeding of the garden also signifies her “lack of connection to the ground” which she and her fellow inhabitants of Maillardville occupy (Leggatt par. 17). Moreover, Stacey describes how she enjoys the sensation of “black earth between [her] fingers” (*Ravensong* 73), underlining her conviction that earth is part of nature, opposed to Mrs. Snowden’s belief that it is soil which one should avoid to touch (Leggatt par. 4). Additionally, the importance of fishing is best illustrated by the trip to Yale which lasts several weeks. Stacey and her family as well as Madeline catch and dry fish, pick berries, and gather so much food that they are able to share the goods with their fellow villagers. These and other activities with regard to hunting and gathering underline the importance plants and animals have to the villagers who regard them as gifts from Mother Earth.

Therefore, the drought during the summer has devastating consequences as the Salish community of which Stacey is a member relies heavily on their own fishing, hunting, and gathering. Old Dominic, honored and respected in the village due to his wisdom, predicts a long and hot summer, therefore warning the villagers to prepare (*Ravensong* 63, 93). After the flu epidemic the drought constitutes yet another catastrophe:

Despite the village's proximity to the West Coast, the earth had begun to crack and dry. Drought, so unusual in this part of the world, now scorched the village. [...] Water was scarce [...]. Rain, the tears of woman-earth paining to give birth, was not forthcoming. The earth was barren. (*Ravensong* 103)

The drought leads to a food shortage and the villagers have to ration their supplies in order to survive. The author clearly emphasizes that nature may not only offer her gifts but may also strike relentlessly, even killing the people depending on her supplies. By describing this power, Maracle recalls the fragile connections of human beings with nature (Kelly 74).

The destructive power of the environment is also underlined in *Monkey Beach*. Nature and especially the sea play major roles in Robinson's narrative. Lisamarie realizes in retrospect how various allusions concerning Jimmy's fate – allusions which she should have interpreted as death sendings, she believes – lead up to his disappearance. The strong forces of nature and the power of the sea in particular are repeatedly evoked during the course of Robinson's narrative. The proverb at the beginning of the novel³⁴ “frames the narrative and overtly acknowledges the power and danger of the natural world” (Andrews 10). The sovereignty of nature over humankind is recalled in the narration of a tsunami, which highlights the power of the sea even more clearly:

One of the boats had swirled like a toy boat caught in the bathtub's drain. The tide had risen so high, the ocean leaked and slid over the roads. Then the docks went underwater and the boats were floating over them [...] Later, [Uncle Geordie] found his seiner on the beach with half its keel scraped off. (*Monkey Beach* 33)

Lisamarie's family as well as many of the inhabitants of Kitamaat partly depend on the food which the land provides. Therefore, the practice of fishing is widespread and traveling by boat constitutes a common means of transportation. The account of a nearly fatal boat accident involving Mick, Lisamarie's aunt Edith, and her mother, highlights

³⁴ “It is possible to retaliate against an enemy / But impossible to retaliate against storms” (no page).

the risks of working or traveling at sea (*Monkey Beach* 123). Lisamarie herself almost drowns but is rescued by her brother in an unexplained occurrence demonstrating that even the gifted ones “can fall victim to the spirits of the environment who judge and punish sinners” (Appleford par. 31). The destructive force of the sea is constantly contrasted with Jimmy’s successes in his swimming tournaments. He gains self-confidence and Lisamarie remarks that Jimmy had been fearless even at the beginning of his swimming career, “I never understood Jimmy’s implicit trust that the water would hold him safely” (*Monkey Beach* 46). The meaning of this remark is ambiguous concerning the eventual fate of Lisamarie’s brother; has his “implicit trust” let Jimmy survive in the end or does Lisamarie’s brother underestimate the force of the sea? Jimmy, training in the chlorine water of swimming pools, also exhibits no signs of fear when he indulges in recreational swimming in the sea, even gliding along in the water with whales (*Monkey Beach* 353). Lisamarie’s feelings toward Jimmy’s swimming skills are a mixture of admiration of and fear for her brother. It seems as if she suspects even early in her adolescence that her brother will meet his fate in the waters of the ocean.

Jimmy was waving to me from the breakwater logs, thirty feet from the dock. [...] They ran to the end of the breakwater, leaping across the space between the logs, the space that opened and closed with the waves and the length of the chains that held the logs together. Every time they jumped, I imagined Jimmy falling. [...] He dived in. I waited. He didn’t surface. Long after his friends came up, he was still underwater. The skin on my arms and legs goose-pimpled. I didn’t move until I saw his head. (*Monkey Beach* 44)

Therefore, allusions to survival and death with regards to water and the sea alternate continuously in Robinson’s novel and the reader is confronted with both positively and negatively connoted images of the ocean. The question connected with Jimmy’s disappearance thus posed is: Will life conquer death or vice versa? The novel’s open ending offers every reader the opportunity to ponder Jimmy’s fate.

The land, the earth, and the woods are of significance in Robinson’s novel as well, especially concerning their connection to Haisla culture, customs, and myth. Lisamarie’s “lyric representations of the natural environment of the northwest coast bear witness to her relatedness to a wilderness that is awesome but more than merely terrifying, for it is her home place” (Howells 190) – and she increasingly discovers new aspects concerning the environment and Haisla culture. Mick and Ma-ma-oo are both close to nature, and Lisamarie is taught numerous important lessons; both relatives convey to the girl the names and functions of fruit, herbs, and vegetables, introducing

her to their Haisla names as well (*Monkey Beach* 73-78). The adolescent girl enjoys the tours on which she accompanies her relatives through the woods, and the protagonist's strong bond with nature surfaces as she eagerly absorbs the information which is provided to her. The characters' strong relationships to the wilderness including its (spiritual) population is of great importance (Andrews 9-10). During the journeys into the wilderness with Mick and Ma-ma-oo, some crucial points concerning Haisla culture are conveyed to the protagonist, often triggered by her curiosity which manifests itself by repeated questions. While strolling through the woods with her relatives "she learns to see the spiritual within the material landscape" (Howells 189). Therefore, Lisamarie learns about Haisla culture as well as about her ancestors' language (*Monkey Beach* 159-160), communicating with the spirit world (*Monkey Beach* 151-153), and is told stories about her family, which she follows with great interest (*Monkey Beach* 160-162). Lisamarie's growing relationship with nature therefore significantly contributes to her maturation process as Haisla culture, her family's history, and spirituality in general are emphasized through her encounters with the environment and its (spiritual) inhabitants.

Various detailed descriptions of the landscape underline the importance of the British Columbian coast for the protagonist and her family as well as her community, and specifically locate the novel "in present place and time" (Howells 193). *Monkey Beach* is a site of highest significance, especially considering the numerous spiritual episodes which occur there: Jimmy appears in a dream to Lisamarie on *Monkey Beach*; it is furthermore the location where the bond between Jimmy and his sister strengthens and where it gains affection; and it is the site where Lisamarie ends her journey in search of Jimmy, offering herself up to the spirits. The description of this location given at the beginning of the novel resembles a romantic portrayal of a relatively untouched piece of nature, focusing on haptic and visual sensations, "I loved going to *Monkey Beach* because you couldn't take a step without crushing seashells, the crunch of your steps loud and satisfying. The water was so pure that you could see straight down to the bottom" (*Monkey Beach* 13). The depiction the protagonist offers at the end of the narrative centers on the spirituality of the site, which demonstrates the matured young woman's spiritual and emotional development, "I want to stay here on *Monkey Beach*. Some places are full of power, you can feel it, like a warmth, a tingle. [...] 'Lisa,' the first voice whispers. 'We can help you'" (*Monkey Beach* 316). *Monkey Beach* is "remote from the rest of the worlds and populated by mysterious creatures whose existence in her mind reflects her psychological confusion about who she is and what

powers she possesses” (Andrews 19). This location is therefore definitely crucial in Robinson’s coming-of-age narrative, as it highlights the importance of the connection between human beings and the environment.

Repeated portrayals of the landscape around Kitamaat underscore the attention the protagonist pays to her surroundings which stands opposed to many non-Aboriginals’ complete ignorance of the environment. These descriptions therefore also underline a trait of Lisamarie’s personality and show her relatedness with the natural world, as she continually learns from family members to live in harmony with her surroundings.

Robinson stresses the aspects of nature and the power of natural phenomena highly in her narrative, incorporating numerous descriptions of the landscape as well as underlining the relentlessness of the natural forces. The author also emphasizes the significance of the environment in the process of the protagonist’s search for a place to belong and her discovery of her ancestors’ (and her own) culture. On the other hand, the environment is featured in Maracle’s coming-of-age narrative mostly as a provider of food for the Aboriginal community, who respect nature but has had to cope with droughts and political restrictions of fishing rights. Maracle thus stresses the role of “Mother Nature” who nourishes her children, underlining also how human influence might destroy the regulated environmental circle of giving and taking, disturbing the relationship between humankind and nature. This aspect is of less importance in *Monkey Beach*, in which the influence of Euro-Canadian food products is oftentimes featured. However, both authors choose to intermingle spiritual with environmental aspects, hence stressing the relationship between those facets. In *Ravensong* nature is regarded as a mediator between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous community, trying to bring those two parties together through natural catastrophes or political conflicts. Therefore, nature acts as a way of uniting two sides separated by a huge abyss – be it Lisamarie and her Haisla heritage, or the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in *Ravensong*.

VI. Conclusion

The challenges posed to young people during the time of their adolescence are diverse and numerous. The preceding literary analysis has highlighted particular obstacles which need to be overcome by the protagonists Stacey and Lisamarie during their formative years, complications which thus contribute to their psychological, emotional, and spiritual developments. The transition from child- to adulthood is specifically marked by the young women's interactions with their surroundings, including members of diverse communities, spirits, and natural elements.

The strength and endurance of the ties which connect Stacey and Lisamarie to their family members are illustrated by both Maracle and Robinson who underscore the resilience of these bonds which defy even severe attempts of separation. These powerful family ties stand opposed to the fragile connections which exist between the protagonists and their friends and acquaintances; bonds which tear under the slightest strain. Each of these ties, strong or weak, affects the young women's processes of maturation decisively, forming their personalities and shaping their identities. "A strong sense of self," psychologists claim, "is essential to healthy development. However, self-esteem and self-confidence do not develop in a social vacuum" (Holmes and Silverman 11). This observation stresses the significance of interpersonal relationships for the young women who are searching for their "selves" – their identities.

Both main characters struggle with the responsibility of having been assigned the function of border crossers, for their challenge is to bridge the gulf between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal "worlds". Lisamarie's life mirrors a balancing act between her parents' embracing material possessions and Euro-Canadian ways of living, and Ma-ma-oo's fostering the discovery of her granddaughter's Haisla roots. The acceptance of her thus hybrid identity poses a great challenge to Lisamarie who is undergoing phases of distress and confusion. Stacey is repeatedly challenged to question Indigenous and non-Indigenous morals and ethics, and by thus scrutinizing various philosophies and even reflecting on ontological issues she becomes more rooted in her own culture. The protagonists' searches for their identities, which are "among the profoundest [experiences] in human existence" (Blos 12), are therefore shaped decisively by their surroundings, with identity confusions and identity crises constituting additional challenges.³⁵

³⁵ Cf. Stacey's thought, "I must be different when I am out there [in Maillardville]" (*Ravensong* 134).

The protagonists' developments differ decisively with regard to their abilities to cope with emotional pressures and failures. Both Stacey as well as Lisamarie explore the boundaries of their families' as well as their communities' rules and regulations by violating them, unaware of the consequences they might have to face. The main characters' occasional rebellion, however, contributes significantly to their sense of family and community, aiding in the process of discovering their "selves". Blos states, "The oppositional, rebellious, and resistive strivings, the stages of experimentation, the testing of the self by going to excess—all these have a positive usefulness in the process of self-definition" (12).

As Stacey and Lisamarie discover and comprehend the relationships and connections between all living elements of the earth, the supernatural world merges with the natural one, forming a synthesis of spirituality and materiality. Raven, the transformer, is a central character herself, even though she operates in the background. The b'gwus in *Monkey Beach* remains an element of the wilderness with which Lisamarie can identify – after all, she is Mick's "favourite monster" (*Monkey Beach* 67). As the spiritual and natural worlds intertwine, the significance of the land and the sea with regard to the protagonists' development becomes obvious.

Even though both novels resist closure, the developments of Stacey's and Lisamarie's personalities are undeniable. Having matured visibly during the course of the novels, the young adults have grown to cope with disaster while embracing the joys which life offers. They have become self-confident and strong characters who are able to function on their own as well as in a group. MacFarlane notes, "Stacey's movement from childhood to adulthood is represented as a movement away from being 'storied' to having, creating and telling her own story" (119). This observation describes the development of the main characters as a whole, moving from being passive individuals to becoming active agents in their own lives.

The divergence of Stacey's and Lisamarie's maturation processes from the conventions of the European *Bildungsroman* has been illustrated by the analysis offered in the present thesis. With regards to culture- and history-specific aspects of the novels, it can be demonstrated that employing the expression "*Bildungsroman*" to *Monkey Beach* and *Ravensong* would distort the literary works. In fact, the two narratives "problematise the issue of genre, often by subtly transforming our idea of what constitutes the genre in the first place, or by changing our understanding of what is possible or permissible within the genre" (Millard 2). The novels presented in this thesis

therefore contribute to a better understanding of the limitations of a traditional literary genre and the diversification of a new yet similar one, namely the coming-of-age narrative.

Studies in the field of Aboriginal literature by non-Indigenous scholars have partly been welcomed since they contribute to an intercultural dialogue, and partly been rejected due to their disrespect for and insensitivity toward Native Americans. Hence, when performing such research, the most important elements required are respect for the Indigenous population worldwide, accuracy in the study conducted, and an awareness of one's own cultural position as well as of the general responsibility such research entails. As mixed-blood writer Louis Owens rightly states, "More and more we will be required to read across lines of cultural identity around us and within us." (11) .

VII. Appendix

i) Interviews ³⁶

Interview with Lee Maracle on February 15th 2008 at her office in the First Nations House, Spadina Circle, Toronto.

Martina Rössler (MR): The topic of my thesis concerns the coming-of-age-narrative which many people call *Bildungsroman*. I think this term is inappropriate because I associate German literature of the 19th century with it. Would you say *Ravensong* is a *Bildungsroman* or would you rather call it something else?

Lee Maracle (LM): Coming out of the house.

MR: Coming out of the house.

LM: Yeah, but more than “out of the house”. You know, you’re getting turned out into the world really. But “house” is also like the village, too. Get out of this world now!

MR: So you see “*Bildungsroman*” also as a European term?

LM: Well, I don’t know what that means. I guess I could see it as Austrian terms.
[laughs]

MR: Yeah, it’s from the German language.

LM: Ok, so it’s in German, [laughs] but I don’t know what it means to them. I do know that when you enter your teenagehood you have a becoming-woman or becoming-man ceremony and those ceremonies signify the beginning of making decisions. We call the whole of teenagehood your “days of decisions”, and when you’re ready the girls are honoured, and then the boys are actually given over to the girls, in two different ceremonies I think. All my children went through it and I did too. But it’s the days of decision that *Ravensong* is about, just before she goes out into the world. You know, the last moment when she’s crossing over the bridge to go to UBC. When I wrote this it was finished when she crossed over the bridge to me because it was from the moments of this decision making – she starts her decision making at the beginning of the story and then she’s turned out into the world, that’s the end of the story.

MR: That’s what I thought too, actually, but then I saw the epilogue and thought, “Oh, there is something else!”

³⁶ Lee Maracle as well as Eden Robinson agreed that their answers be reproduced in this diploma thesis.

LM: It was already over and then we needed a stronger ending. So I wrote an epilogue. We tell our stories in the winter, I decided that I would tell this little story with the prefaces while she told the story. But really, you know, it's kind of a step further.

MR: At what age would the ceremonies happen?

LM: Well, she's about the right age, she's just finishing her teenagehood. She has made her decisions. It doesn't matter what age it is, it's not about the age. It's about when they want to have their becoming-woman or becoming-man, and they let the world know at that point. I think in *Will's Garden* he's sixteen, and what direction their questioning and their decision making is going to take, and then, once they've made those decisions, they're ready. That's why she's considering all that stuff and is talking to herself all the time. [laughs]

MR: Let's talk about Celia. I think that Celia is a part of Stacey, like an alter-ego, because Celia is younger but understands a lot more than Stacey. On the other hand she's not there so often, she's away during the epidemic –

LM: She doesn't understand anything actually, she sees and hears more in a different way, and she's not an alter-ego of anything. Stacey's created for a couple of reasons, one is that I wanted to do her story separately. Secondly, the grandmother never had access to Stacey in the usual way, so the grandmother gets Celia. Celia is the gifted one, not Stacey. Celia can see and hear, and so she has a special place. But the people who would have educated her are dead. So she's going to have a very different kind of life, and I wanted to write at some point about what happened to those gifted children that were never educated by their elders. So I created her in *Ravensong*. But also because we didn't allow children to see people die. So she goes to live with her grandmother. But the last reason I created her was I wanted to create someone who was very powerful and very memorable and remove her 'cause that's what happened to us. So that everybody would miss her. And almost everybody who's read *Ravensong* wants to know about Celia. And they missed her. And I didn't want to locate it in a residential school 'cause it wouldn't have worked. So I created this completely fictitious village. And in fact, where it is, is on an island where everybody's dead. There was already nobody left there. And my people know that. So they say, "Hmm, these people are ghosts!" So for them it's a completely different story. It's the dead still living here.

MR: Yes, that gives a different perspective.

LM: You know, everybody else thinks it's a real village. Not that anybody has actually checked to see if it's still there. [laughs] They know there is a reservation in New

Westminster, though. But they just don't know about this one, where everybody died. You can see it on the map, it's a little tiny village and there used to be a little bridge too, but there isn't anymore 'cause, you know, there's nobody around.

MR: Well, I should look it up too, I guess. [laughs]

LM: You get to see the whole reserve map. And I think it's called, Kwanglem, K-w-a-n-g-l-e-m. Kwanglem Reservations. There's, I think, four. But there's only one with living people on it.

MR: Is there a specific reason for making Judy "German Judy"? Because, you know, I think of Hartmut Lutz and he writes about the German people –

LM: That was one, but also [laughs] I know Hartmut, and I thought of him when I called her German Judy, but also because we had this woman in our reserve who we called German Judy because she was German, and people loved her. Because if you are called by your real name, you are not really family. No one gets called by their real name. Mine is Nini and Sweetheart. [laughs] Those are my names. Or Rusky is another one. I have several of these names. But everybody makes up a name for you to indicate how much they care about you. So you can have a lot of different names.

MR: Is that the reason why Stacey's mother also says she was called Momma?

LM: She has the name Momma. And that happened to us too [laughs]. Because, I don't know why it's striking me now, it didn't when I was writing it, ten, fifteen years ago. But now it's just hilarious. As we learned the English words for girls, or English words for boys, we took on those names. And because they always used to say, "How's your Momma?" she got called Momma. [laughs] Remember when she goes over the bridge and she says, "What's your real name, Momma?" "Momma."

MR: Yeah, I remember that.

LM: I remember cousins that are older than me named girl and girly-girl. [laughs] Because one little girl they thought was two-spirited, they just called her "girl", but the other was very definitely feminine, you know, all girl, so they called her "girly-girl". She was a girly-girl. So it describes who she is, too.

MR: That's a nice way to describe them?

LM: Yeah! [laughs]

MR: In *Will's Garden* was it difficult to write from the point of view of a boy as opposed to *Ravensong*? Is there any difference for you?

LM: No, it's never. I think character is about hearing people and seeing them very, very deeply. And I think of myself as having all those tests of vision. I've been very gifted, I

think. I mean gifts that were given to me too, you know, so that I could see people very, very clearly. And when you're creating a story, the biggest thing you have to do, first of all, is to have the audacity to make the story happen. But once you are at the machine like this, then you have to become subservient to the story; to be inside and underneath, underneath the story and inside the character. And if I had thought that I couldn't see inside Will for a second, I would have stopped writing it. But I never. There are so many men in our villages that are very like Will, and easy to craft. You can see them, they are very diplomatic and beautiful, deep thinking young men. Serious and fun at the same time. Very many like Thomas too. Of course my brothers, I've heard my brothers tease and torment each other for years, I have lots of brothers and sisters and cousins, too. And then, you know, my own children. So, no, I don't think it was very hard, but the writer always has to be subservient. I think where it gets difficult is when you can't get inside the characters, you know. Then it gets difficult. And you struggle with it. I did *Will's Garden* in a week.

MR: It was the first book I read by you. I read it because when I was here two years ago. I was in Daniel H. Justice's class, so that's where we read it.

LM: Yeah. I like him, he sees things, too. From a historical perspective rather than a kind of magical one, like Celia. Celia is a healer. But he is seer, a visionary, so he's always looking back at his grand-dad.

MR: And when you write, do you already know the end at the beginning?

LM: No, I don't even know the next word. I know what I've said after I've said it, because I read it, but I don't have anything on my mind to start. I had an award when I wrote *Will's Garden* and it was in this retreat called [pause] what was it called? Hetburge Village. So the first I did was write a story for my granddaughter, a child story, I haven't published it yet. The second one I did was Will's when I got to the computer. And someone had asked me for a young adult novel, and so I was sitting there. I started. [laughs] Oh my God, I just had a baby as boy, and then I went through it to correct all the little mistakes and I think I went through it twice, 'cause there were a few other problems, which happens when you write. It was a hundred and fifty pages, I think, I decided to stop at because it was for young people. [laughs]

MR: Do you think there are techniques or strategies which differentiate Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal writing?

LM: Oh yeah! I think the intimacy is there, first of all. And I don't know if that's a technique or strategy or it's neither. But I think that most Aboriginal writers, including

Eden Robinson, who, you know, really wants to get known as a writer and not an Aboriginal writer, but even her is subservient to her characters. And it's easy to see. I think when white writers write, their stories are plot-based. And it's the plot that's the main thing. And for Aboriginal people it's the people and the relationships, see? You can see that right away, in almost every Aboriginal story. It's about the people and their relationships with each other, with the world, with the way things work and that sort of thing. Yeah?

MR: Would you also call yourself only a writer or would you be comfortable –

LM: No, no I'm an Aboriginal writer. Mostly, I'm a teacher. I write because I want people to see who we are. And I want to take our mythology and make it work for today. That's why I write. Otherwise I'd be happy just being a teacher, you know.

MR: In an interview with Hartmut Lutz he asked you if it were better that European critics would just be silent. You negated, and then you said something about reading Zola and Dickens and I was wondering if you could explain a little bit more about that because –

LM: Who? Dickens?

MR: Dickens and Emile Zola.

LM: Oh, yeah, Charles Dickens!

MR: Yes, Charles Dickens. [laughter]

LM: You know his son [Francis Dickens] was head of the RCMP that repressed the Riel rebellion?

MR: Oh, I didn't know.

LM: [laughs] Sorry, what's the question again?

MR: About your reference to Charles Dickens... In *Ravensong* you write about the wife of Jake and Stacey says something about a "Dickensian waif". So I was wondering if Dickens plays a special role in your life?

LM: No, with that one I just wanted people to know that I'm well-read. I studied Aboriginal story a lot. But I also studied European literature, you know, and I think both of those things are necessary to write. We don't come from a written culture so it's new. And I want everybody to pay attention to our story, but I also want them to study literature so I just thought, Dickens and Zola for that matter. I think Dickens' sense of justice and his focus on children affected me, though, because I think you're only affected by things you already are. I don't think actually other writers really influence you, I think you are affirmed by writers, I think you can grow from that affirmation and

become clear about yourself through other writers. And I think that's the value of studying writers but I don't think you become someone else, you know, in the sense of being influenced to do this. It's just not me. I was already a heartfelt little child when I read Charles Dickens and I said, "Yeah, this is good, this is good". [laughs]

MR: I know you write for a Native audience, but what sort of reaction do you expect from a non-Native audience?

LM: Well, I think the only book I ever wrote for a Native audience was *I Am Woman*, all the rest are written for anybody who wants to read it. I think people have taken that which I have said in *I Am Woman* and have applied it for the rest of my days and all my grandchildren too. That's their problem, not mine. I write because I want people to see who we are. I suppose who we could be, too.

MR: Apart from Charles Dickens are there any authors and writers you really liked to read during your childhood?

LM: Oh yeah, I read all the classics, from Shakespeare right up to the Russian classics. I love Chekhov, I love Dostoyevsky, I love Zola, I love Thoreau, Emerson, that crazy guy who wrote *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but I can't remember him, that's a tremendous book. I love Toni Morrison and Michael Ondaatje, but I love everything I've ever read and I've read hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of stories. But mostly I think I grew up with story. We've always been challenged to make up story so I have this endless imagination. There's never a moment empty, it's always there, it's always available, so it's the business of storying itself. And it's really the classics, you know. Pushkin, I read him too. [laughs] Sorry, Tolstoy, sorry, I should stop. [laughs] Who's the guy who wrote *Shaboom*, he's Indian and Armenian, he's Canadian-Aboriginal and Armenian. *Hot Night in the City*. *Hot Night in the City* is magic. First of all he tells the long house creating stories which are happening right now, so that's exactly what I'd like to do, but also he tells this story from a woman's perspective and from a man's.

MR: Yeah, that sounds interesting. [pause]

LM: Go ahead, sorry.

MR: [laughs] Maybe another thing about *Ravensong*. I was puzzled because Stacey often wonders about her own people's tradition somehow. At one point she wonders about her own people's etiquette –

LM: Thinking, tradition, etiquette, everything, life!

MR: I have the feeling that she is the only one who questions her people's traditions. Is it because she spends so much time in town?

LM: No, I don't think so. I think she is being turned out into the world, so she's gone through her becoming-woman, she's already decided she's going out into their world to become a teacher. So that decision has her looking at them, and of course once you look at someone else you automatically look at yourself. If you look at *Ravensong* and give it a really good go you'll understand Austrians. Because every time you look at someone else's culture, who you really see is yourself. So that's what happens, she starts looking at them and then looks at herself and back and forth, and it goes that way all through the story, but ultimately she is seeing herself for the first time. Because she has had to really look at them, because she's going to spend five years away from her people with only them around her. So she wants to be standing on firm ground. She wants to be grounded in herself. But the more she looks at them, the more challenged by herself she is. She goes off wobbling on the bridge, not standing on firm ground at all, but anyhow. That's the fun part of life. [laughs] My mother used to call it, "There you are, going out into the world, feet planted firmly in mid-air!"

MR: I was questioning Austrian traditions when I was in Canada. [laughs]

LM: That's what happens when you study somebody else. So don't study anymore people.

[laughs] I'm just joking.

MR: Do you have any plans for new writing?

LM: Yeah, I've been working on a couple of stories, or three right now. I have just turned in a collection of short stories to a publisher who's having a look at them. They're not ready, but they are, you know, deciding whether to work with me and do them. So that was done last summer, they should be deciding what they're going to do with them. But I just finished a first draft of a novel and I sent it to a friend cause I think I'm kind of stuck on it and I'm not really happy with it. So when he sends me back some advice I'll probably pursue it in the summer, and write it in the summer. And I have a draft, a collection of essays. I do things in groups. *Ravensong* was written at the same time as *Sojourner's Truth* but they came out at different times.

MR: So you have time periods when you write really a lot?

LM: Yes. I get tired of working and then write. No, I think I'll do it every summer.

MR: Do you do a lot of teaching?

LM: Yeah, I'm a teacher all year long. Getting older I like to have summers off.

MR: I like to take the summers off. [laughs]

LM: I like working, I've always liked working. [laughs] This is work, this is teaching.

MR: Well, I don't have any more questions. Do you want to add anything?

LM: No, I don't have any comments. But, you know, one of the other things I'm working on is a piece called *Raven Understood*. It's an understanding of Raven itself and what *Ravensong* is really, the song of the transformation of the earth and a period of 1954, the last epidemic, the last time we were not allowed to go to hospitals, were not allowed to vote, all that sort of stuff. It's a period of tremendous fatigue that washed over us, and it's when we gave out and turned over to alcoholism, craziness and all that sort of stuff, and [pause] that's when we dropped our cultural bundles. We couldn't carry on anymore, we didn't pick it up again for another generation in the '70ies. So in *Celia's Song*, which is the next one, the first story is about finding that energy. It's about the revival, it's a poem. I love poetry. And then what happens to the father and boy 'cause we don't hear about them.

MR: Yes, there are some open endings.

LM: [laughs] There are a lot of open endings, now I get to tie them all up and that's it and I'll be done. I committed to writing those stories in the 70's. I committed to them in a little ceremony with my friends. So I'm at the end of that. I don't know what I'll do after.

MR: Are the stories connected?

LM: Well, they are connected to a commitment we made as young people for ourselves. We made those commitments to each other. But we succeeded in keeping our commitments, I think that's part of why we're still alive. [laughs] Because, you know, I think what they say is "the dead carry you" if you've something important enough to do, if the decision you've made is important enough to hold you up. Yeah. That's why I think I'm alive. I've made good decisions along the line. [laughs] All right, no, I don't have anything more.

MR: Well, thank you.

LM: O.k.

Interviews with Eden Robinson via email communication during the years 2008 and 2009.

1) My topic is concerned with the coming-of-age narrative which many people also call “*Bildungsroman*”. This is a term derived from 19th century German literature, and therefore I do not deem it fitting for contemporary Canadian literature. But would you describe *Monkey Beach* as a “coming-of-age story”? As a “*Bildungsroman*”?

I would. I think most first novelists tackle a bildungsroman on their rookie book and I was no exception.

2) Do you think there are techniques or strategies that differentiate Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal writing?

Humour. Usually dark and dry, but I do enjoy the rage-y stuff happening with the younger writers these days.

3) If I understood correctly, you want to be known as a “writer”, not as an “Aboriginal writer”. Could you elaborate on that?

I’d actually like to be known as a good writer. I’m glad people respond to the material, but as a writer, I adore editing and re-editing and playing with different styles. I’m also not a political animal, and I think it’s reflected in my focus on the personal and family dynamics as opposed to writers who are interested in telling broader power structure narratives.

4) Who is your target audience? Which reactions do you expect from an Aboriginal and from a non-Aboriginal audience?

Depends on the book. I’m obsessive-compulsive when it comes to material so I follow that impulse. Most of the time I have a specific person in mind when I write a book or short story as I can’t really grasp an audience, but I can picture telling a story to one person. I’ve noticed different audiences choose to focus on different parts of my writing. Most of the people who grew up in large, integrated communities see the nuances of the relationships (Mick is actually Lisa's father, etc.) while people who are from more urban settings tend to focus on the characters relationship with the wilderness.

5) While reading your novel *Monkey Beach* in the light of a coming-of-age narrative, I was pondering certain rituals that mark the transition from child- to adulthood. Would you say that such rites of passage take place in Lisamarie's life? I see her smoking, for example, as one of the "rituals" by which she is accepted into the group of her adolescent peers. But would you say that there are also rituals initiated by adults?

There are mainstream rituals – learning about your period, learning about boys, etc, and then there are the cultural specific coming of age rituals. When you are expected to help deal with the dead (bringing them home, burning for them, helping with the feasts) and to take your place in the potlaching society.

6) Are there any ceremonies concerning the onset of puberty or the passage into adulthood in Haisla culture today?

Not so much as there used to be. The onset of puberty means more responsibility in your family and your community, but there aren't any ceremonies for them.

7) I have been wondering about the target audience of *Monkey Beach*. I cannot decide if the reader is more or less a voyeur of Lisamarie's life and innermost thoughts, or if the protagonist – as the narrator – specifically addresses a readership. And if she does, which one? Which audience did you want to address with your novel?

I was originally writing this with my cousins in mind and what I thought they'd enjoy reading. Most of the books up to this point didn't seem to have characters who were just 'getting by'. Native characters were either very poor or very rich, super achievers or ghetto. The spectrum didn't include middle-class or even blue collar workers who went to work and had careers or just had childhoods.

8) Concerning these, what I term "instructions" or descriptions, I sometimes have the feeling that it is not Lisamarie who tells us how to imagine a human heart etc. but that it is rather another narrator. Lisamarie does not, at the end of the novel, possess a high-school diploma, and therefore these detailed anatomic descriptions as well as the use of Latin and Greek terms seem unlikely for her.

That was an older voice, and my inner geek. I love anatomical studies and gave that love to my character, but since she's older looking back, it didn't always fit. My editor adored it, though, so it stayed.

9) In regard to the future lives of various characters, accumulating money seems to be of great concern. Even Ma-ma-oo advises that Lisamarie should find herself a rich husband. Why do you stress materialistic possessions repeatedly?

In traditional Haisla cultural, the family and clans saved quite a lot of material to host a potlatch to increase their social standing. Most of the high ranking families are quite frugal and this has passed itself along to our generation as a need to stockpile money and goods. Feasts typically run between \$10,000 and \$50,000, while a potlatch will run \$25,000 to \$75,000.

10) Which specific negative experiences does Lisamarie's mother have that she feels the urge to deny her own as well as her daughter's supernatural gifts? I have tried to pin down certain instants, but do not succeed.

Being mocked by family and friends, much the same way people are mocked and ridiculed if they claim they've seen Elvis or a UFO. Gladys would want Lisa spared the pain of people thinking she was fruitcake or an attention-seeker.

11) We had the privilege to welcome Richard Pickard from the University of Victoria as a guest speaker recently. He focused in his talk on ecocriticism. Would you regard your work as a piece of ecocriticism? What do you think of these categories, such as "the coming-of-age novel" or "the ecocritical novel"?

No, I wouldn't regard it as a work of ecocriticism. Unintentionally, yes, but it wasn't my focus.

12) I have repeatedly read about the presence of German characters in books by Aboriginal writers (e.g. Lee Maracle, Thomas King, ...). Why do you choose to mention that the tourists which appear in the novel are German? I understand that specifically people of German background have held numerous stereotypes about people of Aboriginal heritage in North America (as discussed by Hartmut Lutz). Did you want to point toward this problematic phenomenon?

Very few European countries are interested in Aboriginal people or characters, so the German, Austrian and French tourists who make the effort to come to Canada and then up the small, remote reserves that even Canadians don't bother to visit stand out to us, even if the exchange is culturally awkward. We also have Japanese tourists interested in Native cultures, but not as many.

13) In regard to your own cultural background, did you feel that there were certain elements you could or should not write about because sharing them would be inappropriate?

Definitely. I could write about attending a potlatch, but not about the potlatch itself. Haisla spiritual beliefs are regarded as something deeply private, to be shared only by your family, clan and community. Discussing them with strangers is like discussing your income or your last colonoscopy – distasteful and something only low status people would do.

14) Were there any important coming-of-age novels that you read in your childhood?

The curriculum at the time was limited, so the ones in school were usually Judy Bloom or S.E. Hinton [The Outsiders]. We also read Catcher in the Rye and Anne of Green Gables, but I was really into horror for most of my childhood, so was reading a lot of Stephen King, Clive Barker and Eric McCormack.

15) Where do you see yourself going? Do you have any plans for new writing?

At the moment, I'm coming to grips with the first stages of perimenopause, and its effects on my short-term memory (or lack thereof). I took for granted being able to hold entire novels in my head and play with them but now I have sticky notes to remember what I went upstairs to get. I think whatever I work on will have to be short.

ii) Characteristics of the Bildungsroman

	Characteristics	Ravensong	Monkey Beach
1	Hero or heroine featured	✓	✓
2	School as frustrating element	✓	✓
3	Conflicts with persons of authority	✓	✓
4	Wanderlust, exploring the world	✓	✓
5	Learning process begins in new environment	Begins earlier	Begins earlier
6	Protagonist's abilities tested	✓	-
7	Protagonist's personality and attitudes re-defined	Occurs already at home	Occurs both at home and away from home
8	Only years of formation depicted	✓	✓

Table 1. Characteristic Features of the *Bildungsroman* and Coming-of-Age Narrative

iii) *Character Constellations*

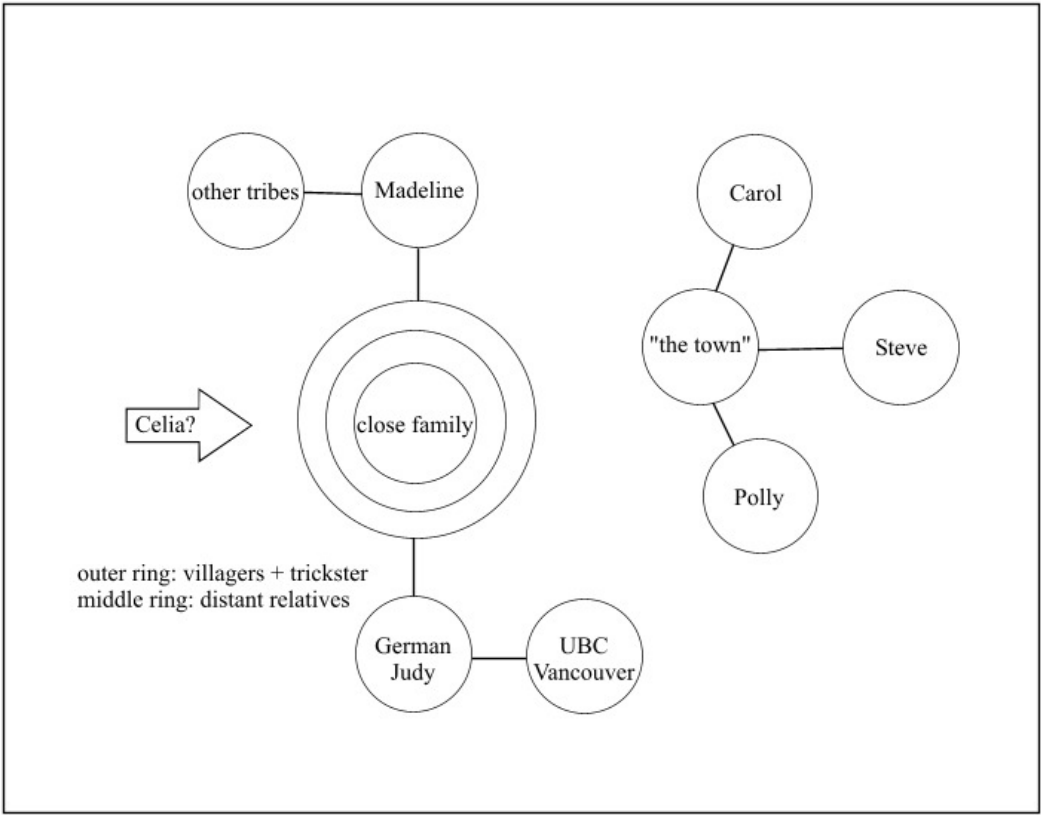


Figure 1. Communities in *Ravensong*

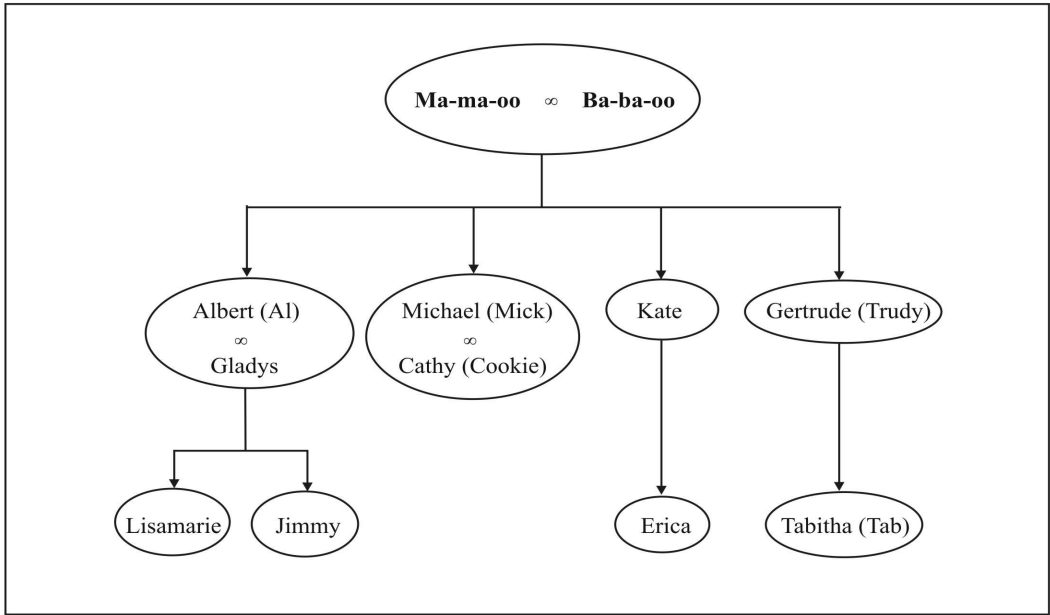


Figure 2. The Hill Family (Lisamarie is unaware of the fact that Mick is her biological father)

VIII. Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H., ed. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace College, 1999.
- Acoose, Janice. "Halfbreed: A Revisiting of Maria Campbell's Text from an Indigenous Perspective." *Looking at the Words of Our People*. Ed. Jeannette Armstrong. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1993. 137-150.
- Andrews, Jennifer. "Native Canadian Gothic Refigured: Reading Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (Spring 2001): 1-24.
- Appleford, Rob. "'Close, very close, a b'gwus howls': The Contingency of Execution in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." *Canadian Literature/Littérature Canadienne: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* 184 (Spring 2005). *Literature Online*. 28 November 2007. <<http://lion.chadwyck.com>>.
- Bataille, Gretchen M., and Laurie Lisa. "Lee Maracle." *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2001. *Online version*. 16 February 2008. <<http://www.myilibrary.com/browse/open.asp?ID=2432>>.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. "The Problem of Generations." *The Challenge of Youth*. Ed. Erik Erikson. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965. 76-109.
- Blaeser, Kimberly M. "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center." *Looking at the words of our people: first nations analysis of Literature*. Ed. Jeannette Armstrong. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1993. 51-62.
- Blos, Peter. *On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. New York: Free, 1962.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Braendlin, Bonnie Hoover. "Bildung in Ethnic Women Writers." *Denver Quarterly* 17 (1983): 75-87.
- Brant, Beth. *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1994.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974.
- Carlson, Keith Thor, ed. *You Are Asked to Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific History*. Chilliwack, BC: Sto:lo Heritage Trust, 1997.
- Castricano, Jodey. "Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75.2 (2006): 801-813.
- Cocalis, Susan L. "The Transformation of Bildung from an Image to an Ideal." *Monatshefte* 7 (1978): 339-411.
- Conway, Sheelagh. "Women Writers in Canada: 'A bleak picture'." *The Globe and Mail*. 26 May 1989.
- Cruikshank, Julie. "The Social Life of Texts: Keeping Traditions 'Oral' in a Time of Textual Studies." *Mirror Writing: (Re-)Constructions of Native American Identity*. Eds. Thomas Claviez and Maria Moss. Berlin: Galda und Wilch, 2000. 155-170.
- Cuddon, J. A., ed. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 4th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Dalsimer, Katherine. *Female Adolescence: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Works of Literature*. New Haven, MA: Yale UP, 1986.
- David, Jennifer. *Story Keepers: Conversations with Aboriginal Writers*. Owen Sound, ON: Ningwakwe Learning, 2004.
- Dawson, Anthony B. "Coming of Age in Canada." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 11.3 (1978): 47-62.

- "Discovering Eden." *The National Magazin -- CBC Television*. 8 February 2000. CBCA Current Events. 16 February 2008. <<http://www.proquest.com>>.
- Donovan, Kathleen M. *Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1998.
- Eigenbrod, Renate. "'Stranger and Stranger': The (German) Other in Canadian Indigenous Texts." *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*. Eds. Colin G. Galloway, Gerd Gemünden and Susanne Zantop. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2002. 259-280.
- . *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2005.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. "Archetypal Patterns of Youth." *The Challenge of Youth*. Ed. Erik Erikson. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965. 29-50.
- Episkew, Jo-Ann. "Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology and the Literary Canon." *Creating Community: A Roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal Literature*. Eds. Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkew. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 2002. 51-68.
- Erikson, Erik. *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*. New York: Norton, 1968.
- Fee, Margery, and Sneja Gunew. "From Discomfort to Enlightenment: An Interview with Lee Maracle." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 83 (2004): 206-221.
- Felski, Rita. "The Novel of Self-Discovery: A Necessary Fiction?" *Southern Review* 19 (1986): 131-148.
- Fettes, Mark. "Life on the Edge: Canada's Aboriginal Languages Under Official Bilingualism." *Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities*. Ed. Thomas Ricento. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998. 117-149.
- Godard, Barbara. "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers." *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*. Ed. W. H. New. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1992. 183-225.
- Grant, Agnes. "Contemporary Native Women's Voices in Literature." *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*. Ed. W. H. New. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1990. 124-132.
- Gutjahr, Ortrud. *Einführung in den Bildungsroman*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007.
- Hardin, James. "Introduction." *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1991. ix-xxvii.
- Harris, Claire. "Why Do I Write?" *Grammar of Dissent: Poetry and Prose by Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand*. Ed. Carol Morrell. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 1994. 26-33.
- Holmes, Janelle, and Eliane Leslau Silverman. *We're Here, Listen to Us! A Survey of Young Women in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1992.
- Horne, Dee. *Contemporary American Indian Writing: Unsettling Literature*. New York: Lang, 1999.
- Howells, Coral Ann. *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. New York: Macmillan, 2003.
- Hoy, Helen. *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001.
- Johnston, Basil H. "One Generation from Extinction." *Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Eds. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie. 3rd ed. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1992. 92-97.
- Kaltemback, Michèle. "The Native Community and the Colonial Fracture in Lee Maracle's Novels." *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies*. 1 (1997): 47-54.

- Kelly, Jennifer. "Coming out of the House: A Conversation with Lee Maracle." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 25.1 (January 1994): 73-88.
- Kennedy-Kish, Bambi. "Native Adolescents: Stepping Stones to the Future." Eds. C. C. Brant and J. Ann Brant. Halifax, NS: Canadian Psychiatric Association Section on Native Mental Health, 1988.
- King, Thomas, ed. *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*. Toronto: McClelland, 1991.
- Kolinská, Klára. "Trickster Fictions and Subversive Storytelling." *Individual and Community: Canada in the 20th Century. 2nd International Conference of Central European Canadianists. Proceedings. 26-28 October 2001. Bucharest, Romania*. Brno: Masaryk University, Central European Association for Canadian Studies, 2004. 27-32.
- Kontje, Todd. *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*. Columbia, SC: Camden, 1993.
- Krupat, Arnold, ed. *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*. Washington: Smithsonian Inst., 1993.
- . *The Turn to the Native*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1996.
- Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century: Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf*. New York: Lang, 1986.
- Lane, Richard. "Performing Gender: First Nations, Feminism & Trickster Writing in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." *The Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9.1 (2003). 27 November 2008.
<<http://web.viu.ca/richardlane/lane%27s%20online%20essays.htm>>.
- "Lee Maracle." *Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies*. Windsor, ON: U of Windsor, 2007. 16 October 2008. <<http://www.uwindsor.ca/units/womens-studies/speakers.nsf/>>.
- Leggatt, Judith. "Raven's Plague: Pollution and Disease in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*." *Mosaic* 33.4 (December 2000). *Literature Online*. 30 November 2007.
<<http://lion.chadwyck.com>>.
- Lehnert, Gertrud. "Einleitung." *Inszenierung von Weiblichkeit: Weibliche Kindheit und Adoleszenz in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. Gertrud Lehnert. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996. 7-14.
- Lösch, Klaus. "Cultural Identity, Territory, and the Discursive Location of Native American Fiction." *Imaginary (Re-)Locations: Tradition, Modernity, and the Market in Contemporary Native American Literature and Culture*. Ed. Helmbrecht Breinig. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2003. 63-80.
- Lutz, Hartmut. *Approaches: Essays in Native North American Studies and Literatures*. Augsburg: Wißner, 2002.
- . *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991.
- . "Die mündliche Literatur der Ureinwohner, Literatur der First Nations, Inuit und Métis." *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*. Eds. Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Kloof and Reingard M. Nischik. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005. 1-5, 324-336.
- . *'Indianer' und 'Native Americans'*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1985.
- . "Nations within as Seen from Without: Ten Theses on German Perspectives on the Literature of Canada's First Nations." *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives: Essays*. Eds. Patricia Monture-Angus and Renée Hulan. Toronto: ECW, 1999. 83-108.
- MacFarlane, Karen E. "Storying the Borderlands: Liminal Spaces and Narrative Strategies in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*." *Creating Community: A Roundtable on*

- Canadian Aboriginal Literature*. Eds. Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkenew. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 2002. 109-124.
- Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*. Women's Press, 1990.
- . *I Am Woman*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996.
- . "Personal Interview." 15 February 2008.
- . *Ravensong*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1993.
- . "Skyros Bruce: First Voice of Contemporary Native Poetry." *Gatherings: The En'owkin Journal of First North American Peoples* II (1991): 85-91.
- Marsden, Rasunah, ed. *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction*. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 2000.
- Mays, John Barron. *The Young Pretenders: A Study of Teenage Culture in Contemporary Society*. London: Joseph, 1965.
- Methot, Suzanne. "Spirits in the Material World: Haisla Culture Takes Strange Shape in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." 1 January 2000: 12. *Quill & Quire*. 16 February 2008. <<http://www.proquest.com>>.
- Mihesuah, Devon Abbott. *So You Want to Write About American Indians? A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2005.
- Miles, David H. "Pikaros Weg zum Bekenner: Der Wandel des Heldenbildes im deutschen Bildungsroman (1974)." *Zur Geschichte des deutschen Bildungsromans*. Ed. Rolf Selbmann. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988. 374-405.
- Millard, Kenneth. *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007.
- Monture-Angus, Patricia. "Native America and the Literary Tradition." *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives: Essays*. Eds. Patricia Monture-Angus and Renée Hulan. Toronto: ECW, 1999. 20-46.
- . *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks*. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood, 1995.
- Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. "Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature and Racial Minority Women." *Floating the Borders: New Contexts in Canadian Criticism*. Ed. Nurjehan Aziz. Toronto: TSAR, 1999. 151-169.
- Murray, David. "From Speech to Text: The Making of American Indian Autobiographies." *American Literary Landscapes: The Fiction and the Fact*. Eds. Ian F. A. Bell and D. K. Adams. London: Vision, 1988. 29-43.
- New, W. H. "Editorial: Learning to Listen." *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*. Ed. W. H. New. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1992. 4-8.
- Owens, Louis. *Mixedblood Messages*. Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 2001.
- Padolsky, Enoch. "Cultural Diversity and Canadian Literature: A Pluralistic Approach to Majority and Minority Writing in Canada." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajay Heble, Donna Palmateer Pennee and J.R. (Tim) Struthers. Peterborough, ON: broadview, 1997. 24-42.
- Parker, Pat. *Movement in Black: The Collected Poetry of Pat Parker*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1989.
- Petrone, Penny. *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Ballantine, 1994.
- Robinson, Eden. "Email Interview." 2008-2009.
- . *Monkey Beach*. Toronto: Knopf, 2000.
- . *Traplines*. London: Abacus, 1996.
- Rössler, Martina. "Homewards: Language and Identity in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." Coll. of essays. Eds. Christa Knellwolf-King et al. Konstanz: U of Konstanz, forthcoming.

- Ruffo, Armand Garnet. "Why Native Literature?" *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives: Essays*. Eds. Patricia Monture-Angus and Renée Hulan. Toronto: ECW, 1999. 109-121.
- Sammons, Jeffrey L. "The Bildungsroman for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at a Clarification." *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1991. 26-45.
- Sauer, Paul Ludwig. *Geleitete Leben: Pädagogische Studien zum Bildungs- und Entwicklungsroman. Teil I: Figuren und Strukturen*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000.
- Schaffer, Franz. "Aspects of the Bildungsroman and the Sea Novel in William Golding's *To the Ends of the Earth* Trilogy." Diploma thesis U of Vienna, 1992.
- Schloss Schallaburg. "Indianerwochenende." 26 March 2008.
<<http://www.schallaburg.at/veranstaltungen/veranstaltungen/08/indianerwochenende>>.
- Schweikle, Günther, ed. *Metzler-Literatur-Lexikon: Begriffe und Definitionen*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990.
- Selbmann, Rolf. *Der deutsche Bildungsroman*. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994.
- Stanzel, Franz K. *A Theory of Narrative*. 6th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Swales, Martin. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.
- Tolchin, Karen R. *Part Blood, Part Ketchup: Coming of Age in American Literature and Film*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007.
- Twigg, Alan, and Vickie Jensen. "Eden Robinson." 2005/06. *BC Bookworld Author Bank*. Accessed on March 7 2008.
<http://www.abcbookworld.com/view_author.php?id=2556>.
- van Toorn, Penny. "Aboriginal Writing." *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Ed. Eva-Marie Kröller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 22-48.
- von Berg, Stefanie. "'Uncomfortable Mirror': (De-)Kolonisation in Gedichten zeitgenössischer indigener nordamerikanischer Autorinnen. 1973-1997." Dissertation. Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald, 2000.
- Wagner, Hans. *Der englische Bildungsroman bis in die Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten. 27. Bern: Francke, 1951.
- Williamson, Janice. *Sounding Differences: Conversations with Seventeen Canadian Women Writers*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993.
- Young-Ing, Greg. "The Estrangement and Marginalization of Aboriginal Writers in Canada." *Paragraph* 15 (1993-94): 23-27.

IX. Index

A

abuse 38, 40, 48, 69, 74, 80, 82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 99, 100, 106
 Acoose, Janice 13, 131
 adolescence 2, 31, 32, 35, 40, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49, 51, 72, 73, 75, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 91, 92, 101, 111, 114
 Andrews, Jennifer 75, 76, 77, 79, 96, 104, 110, 112, 113, 131
 Appleford, Rob 53, 73, 75, 76, 80, 83, 93, 104, 111, 131
 appropriation 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24
 authenticity 4, 6, 7, 8

B

Bataille, Gretchen 35, 131
 Bettelheim, Bruno 86, 131
 Bildungsroman 1, 2, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 41, 42, 44, 49, 50, 85, 98, 100, 115, 117, 125, 129, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135
 Blaeser, Kimberly 14, 18, 19, 20, 131
 Bos, Peter 88, 114, 115, 131
 Boehmer, Elleke 9, 131
 Braendlin, Bonnie Hoover 42, 131
 Brant, Beth 4, 131, 133
 British Columbia 8, 36, 37, 39, 47, 48, 59, 66, 71, 72, 79, 94, 96, 98, 112, 132, 134
 Buckley, Jerome Hamilton 32, 131

C

Carlson, Keith Thor 87, 131
 Carol 38, 67, 70, 132
 Castricano, Jodey 73, 79, 105, 106, 107, 131
 Celia 36, 37, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 69, 103, 107, 118, 120, 124
 Cocalis, Susan 33, 131
 colonialism 9, 17, 91
 colonization 4, 5, 9, 13, 18, 19, 23, 36, 52, 63
 coming-of-age 1, 2, 13, 26, 30, 33, 34, 36, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 60, 61, 65, 66, 72, 77, 85, 87, 95, 96,

100, 107, 113, 116, 117, 125, 126, 127, 128

Conway, Sheelagh 8, 131
 Cruikshank, Julie 22, 25, 131

D

Dalsimer, Katherine 75, 81, 97, 131
 David, Jennifer 31, 35, 131, 132, 134
 Dawson, Anthony 78, 80, 131
 death sendings 105, 110
 Donovan, Kathleen 8, 132

E

education 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 41, 43, 44, 47, 57, 77, 91, 94, 95, 97, 98
 Eigenbrod, Renate 14, 69, 70, 71, 90, 103, 108, 132, 134
 Eisenstadt, S. N. 86, 88, 132
 Entwicklungsroman 28, 31, 135
 environment 7, 30, 41, 47, 48, 49, 107, 110, 111, 113, 129
 epilogue 38, 49, 50, 51, 54, 56, 57, 58, 63, 65, 71, 96, 102, 117, 118
 Episkew, Jo-Ann 3, 4, 132, 134
 Erikson, Erik 86, 131, 132
 Erziehungsroman 28, 31
 ethnicity 3, 12, 13, 69

F

Fee, Margery 101, 132
 Felski, Rita 33, 132
 Fettes, Mark 24, 132
 free indirect discourse 59

G

gender 1, 29, 41, 67, 81, 83, 89, 101
 German Judy 45, 48, 70, 71, 90, 119
 Godard, Barbara 6, 8, 11, 132
 Grant, Agnes 3, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 132
 Gutjahr, Ortrud 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 42, 132

H

Haisla 38, 39, 40, 43, 53, 59, 72, 76, 77, 79, 80, 84, 96, 98, 105, 106, 107, 111, 113, 114, 126, 127, 128, 134
 Hardin, James 27, 32, 34, 42, 132, 135

Harris, Claire 12, 132
 Holmes, Janelle 114, 132
 Horne, Dee 52, 63, 67, 68, 71, 91, 96,
 102, 103, 132
 Howells, Coral Ann 53, 74, 75, 77, 80,
 82, 98, 99, 100, 104, 105, 106, 111,
 112, 132
 Hoy, Helen 4, 11, 12, 13, 49, 50, 64,
 66, 67, 68, 69, 78, 81, 85, 89, 99, 132

I

indianthusiasm 4
 initiation 32, 87, 88, 89

J

Jimmy 40, 44, 45, 60, 61, 72, 73, 74,
 75, 84, 93, 96, 106, 110, 111, 112
 Johnston, Basil 24, 132
 Josh 59, 60, 72, 74, 82, 83, 106

K

Kaltemback, Michèle 51, 66, 90, 99,
 132
 Kelly, Jennifer 6, 9, 35, 36, 103, 107,
 110, 133
 Kennedy-Kish, Bambi 86, 133
 King, Thomas 10, 78, 127, 133, 134
 Kitamaat 38, 39, 40, 48, 72, 74, 76, 82,
 85, 96, 100, 106, 110, 113
 Kolinská, Klára 101, 133
 Kontje, Todd 31, 33, 133
 Krupat, Arnold 10, 17, 133
 Künstlerroman 29

L

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord 30, 33, 98,
 133
 Lane, Richard 78, 79, 82, 83, 92, 104,
 105, 132, 133
 Leggatt, Judith 63, 64, 71, 90, 94, 102,
 109, 133
 Lehnert, Gertrud 83, 133
 literary theory 13, 14, 18
 Lösch, Klaus 14, 15, 16, 133
 Lutz, Hartmut 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14,
 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 119, 121, 127, 133

M

MacFarlane, Karen 51, 63, 64, 98, 109,
 115, 133

Madeline 48, 65, 66, 69, 71, 95, 109
 Maillardville 37, 48, 61, 66, 67, 69, 85,
 89, 91, 94, 99, 102, 108, 109, 114
 Ma-ma-oo 40, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 80,
 82, 84, 86, 88, 97, 99, 104, 106, 111,
 114, 127
 marginalization 1, 8, 12
 Marsden, Rasunah 108, 134
 Mays, John Barron 86, 134
 Methot, Suzanne 38, 39, 41, 134
 Mick 40, 48, 72, 73, 75, 79, 80, 81, 88,
 99, 106, 110, 111, 115, 125
 Miheuah, Devon Abbott 4, 134
 Miles, David 31, 134
 Millard, Kenneth 1, 42, 43, 115, 134
 Momma 50, 55, 56, 61, 62, 64, 69, 70,
 96, 99, 109, 119
 Monture-Angus, Patricia 4, 5, 7, 10, 13,
 21, 24, 133, 134, 135
 Mukherjee, Arun Prabha 8, 12, 134
 Murray, David 6, 134

N

narrator
 authorial narrator 54, 55, 57
 first person narrator 57, 74
 omniscient narrator 55, 56
 reflector character 54, 55, 60
 nature 2, 30, 39, 41, 87, 101, 104, 107,
 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113

O

occupation 9, 86, 94, 96
 orality 14
 orature 1, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
 38
 Owens, Louis 116, 134

P

Padolsky, Enoch 3, 13, 134
 Parker, Pat 13, 134
 Petrone, Penny 11, 22, 23, 134
 Pipher, Mary 91, 93, 134
 politics 4, 11, 71
 Polly 37, 64, 66, 67, 89, 90
 post-colonialism 9

R

rape 83

Raven 36, 37, 52, 54, 57, 69, 71, 94,
99, 101, 102, 103, 107, 115, 124, 133
residential school 76, 79, 81, 87, 95,
118
rites of passage 42, 86, 126
Rössler, Martina 78, 117, 134
Ruffo, Armand Garnet 9, 10, 11, 14,
20, 135

S

Salish 35, 37, 67, 69, 84, 87, 102, 110
Sammons, Jeffrey 26, 27, 135
sasquatch 96, 104, 106
Sauer, Paul 28, 30, 31, 135
Schallaburg 5, 135
Schweikle, Günther 27, 29, 135
Selbmann, Rolf 27, 32, 134, 135
sexuality 12, 64, 68, 89, 90, 91, 92
spirit 53, 59, 76, 82, 105, 106, 107, 112
Stanzel, Franz 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59,
135
stereotypes 4, 5, 7, 12, 36, 127
Steve 37, 68, 90, 92, 103, 108
storytelling 23, 37, 88

supernatural 39, 40, 51, 52, 57, 59, 76,
77, 82, 83, 101, 104, 105, 106, 107,
115, 127
Swales, Martin 31, 135

T

Tab 72, 76, 81, 88, 92, 100, 106
Tolchin, Karen 44, 135
trickster 36, 37, 39, 52, 56, 57, 63, 95,
101, 102, 103, 104, 107
Twigg, Alan 38, 135

V

van Toorn, Penny 21, 22, 135
von Berg, Stefanie 4, 135

W

Wagner, Hans 28, 32, 43, 135
Williamson, Janice 6, 135

Y

Young-Ing, Greg 5, 135

German Abstract / Deutsche Kurzfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der so genannten *coming-of-age* Erzählung in literarischen Werken indigener kanadischer Schriftstellerinnen. Der einführende Teil dieser Arbeit beleuchtet einige Kernfragen, die sich im Zusammenhang mit der Analyse indigener kanadischer Literatur stellen. Der darauf folgende Abschnitt widmet sich dem Begriff des „Bildungsromans“ in der deutschsprachigen sowie anglophonen Literatur und beschreibt den Versuch, dieses komplexe Genre zu definieren. In der Folge werden in der Literaturanalyse die zwei Werke *Monkey Beach* von Eden Robinson und *Ravensong* von Lee Maracle unter Einbezug der zuvor genannten Aspekte untersucht.

Ein Literaturwissenschaftler europäischer Herkunft sieht sich mit einigen Herausforderungen im Bezug zur Forschung indigener Werke konfrontiert. Diese Schwierigkeiten ergeben sich teilweise aus der Geschichte der Unterdrückung der genannten Völker durch europäisch-stämmige Siedler und der Gefahr, diese Art der Kolonialisierung durch ein Aufzwingen literaturkritischer Meinungen zu wiederholen. Teilweise wird Forschern europäischer Abstammung auch Misstrauen entgegengebracht, welches aus der wiederholten unüberlegten Aneignung indigenen Kulturgutes durch nicht-Indigene resultiert. Die oben genannten Herausforderungen für den Literaturwissenschaftler sind also (selbst verursachte) Konsequenzen politischer und sozialer Ereignisse der Vergangenheit sowie der Gegenwart. Ein stetiges Hinterfragen der eigenen Position in diesen postkolonialistischen Völkerbeziehungen und die Bereitschaft, seine Recherchen vor sich selbst und indigenen Völkern verantworten zu können, stellen Ansätze zur Lösung des Problems dar. Im ersten Abschnitt der Diplomarbeit wird die historische Entwicklung dieses Verhältnisses in ihrem entsprechenden Kontext beleuchtet.

Die Verwendung des Begriffes „Bildungsroman“ als Genrebezeichnung gewisser Werke indigener Autoren und Autorinnen, welche sich aus den schon oben kurz erläuterten Schwierigkeiten offensichtlich als problematisch erweist, wird im zweiten Teil der vorliegenden Arbeit kritisch untersucht. Dabei wird das Augenmerk insbesondere auf die geschichtliche Entwicklung dieses Begriffes gelegt sowie das Aufkommen einiger Subgenres erörtert. Diese Begriffsdefinition dient der späteren Analyse der Werke Robinsons und Maracles im Kontext der *coming-of-age* Erzählung. Es wird nachgeprüft, inwieweit der deutsche Begriff der Beschreibung dieser Werke

gerecht wird und ob jüngste Neologismen des Englischen nicht passendere Definitionen für beide Romane liefern.

Schließlich wird im dritten Teil der Diplomarbeit zunächst eine Einführung zu beiden Romanen gegeben, wobei auch Erzählstruktur sowie Erzähltechnik analysiert werden. Eine detaillierte Betrachtung der von mir zuvor definierten Charakteristika der *coming-of-age* Erzählung stellt den Großteil der Arbeit dar. Hierbei werden Aspekte wie Personenkonstellationen oder Initiationsriten behandelt, sowie die psychischen, emotionellen und sexuellen Entwicklungen beider Protagonisten untersucht und im Vergleich analysiert.

Durch die literaturkritische Betrachtung von *Ravensong* und *Monkey Beach* werden jene Herausforderungen augenfällig, denen sich die Protagonisten Stacey und Lisamarie während ihrer Adoleszenz stellen müssen. Diese werden sodann mit den charakteristischen Aufgaben eines jungen Menschen im traditionellen Bildungsroman verglichen. Die Analyse zeigt, dass der „indigene Bildungsroman“ *per se* nicht existiert, wohl aber eine abgeänderte Form, welche durch historische, kulturelle und soziale Phänomene geprägt ist. *Ravensong* und *Monkey Beach* können daher als *coming-of-age* Erzählungen angesehen werden, die sich als eine eigenständige Form des Bildungsromans verstehen.