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The Gothic Genre and Indigenous Fiction: A Reading of Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* and Patricia Grace's *Baby No-Eyes*

Carolina Buffoli

This essay contributes to the debate on the connection between the Gothic genre and Indigenous fiction. Specifically, it delves into the applicability of the "Gothic" label and its potential for analyzing and discussing Indigenous fiction. The debate on the contacts, interactions, and intersections between the Gothic genre and Indigenous fiction has garnered significant attention in recent years. From Michelle Burnham's inquiry "Is There an Indigenous Gothic?" to Angela Elisa Schoch/Davidson's exploration of "Indigenous Alterations" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, as well as the meticulous investigations of specific Indigenous communities such as Kathrine Althans's work on "Aboriginal Gothic" and Cynthia Sugars's exploration of "Indigenous Ghost-Dancing" in *Canadian Gothic*, numerous scholars have charted the history of contact between the genre and Indigenous writing. They have also addressed the definitional complexities and epistemic challenges posed by the label "Indigenous Gothic" and problematized a straightforward absorption of Indigenous fiction within the genre.

This essay both acknowledges and aligns with the concerns raised by various scholars, including Michelle Burnham, Jodey Castricano, Cynthia Sugars, Gerry Turcotte, and others, regarding the constraints and ethical dilemmas inherent in applying Western generic classifications, such as the Gothic, to interpret Indigenous texts. However, in this essay, I also seek to explore the affordances that the Gothic genre offers when reading Indigenous literary works in the context of world literary systems and transnational networks of influence and interaction. I am interested in investigating what a transnational reading of Indigenous novels written at around the same time in the context of British settler-colonial histories can reveal about the engagement with the Gothic

genre to address the legacies of colonialism, including transgenerational trauma, collective memory, and silenced histories.

In pursuit of these objectives, I examine two seminal Indigenous novels, each considered a classic within its respective culture: *Monkey Beach*, by Haisla writer Eden Robinson, published in Canada in 2000, and *Baby No-Eyes*, by Māori author Patricia Grace, published in New Zealand in 1998. Set in a Haisla First Nation reserve on the west coast of British Columbia, *Monkey Beach* centres on Lisamarie Hill, a young Haisla woman, and her quest to locate her missing brother after his disappearance at sea. During her solo speedboat journey, Lisamarie experiences flashbacks from her childhood and adolescence marked by her struggle to cope with the violent deaths of family members and her perception of spirits, premonitions, and supernatural presences. *Baby No-Eyes* is based on a real event involving the maiming of a stillborn Māori baby in a New Zealand hospital in 1991. The novel presents this incident in the context of a road accident that claims the lives of the father and the unborn baby girl and leaves the mother, Te Paania, comatose and severely injured. When the family members attempt to claim the bodies, they discover that the baby's body has been discarded in a waste bin; her eyes have been removed without permission and are unceremoniously returned in a supermarket plastic bag. From that moment onward, the ghost Baby becomes a constant presence within the family, interacting with it and particularly with her younger brother, Tawera, born four years after her death. I consider the insights that an examination of the two novels' engagement with the Gothic genre and its literary logic can offer, without equating the different experiences that the two narratives recount and the different cultures from which they emerge.

Transnationalism and the Comparative Literary Method

A transnational and comparative approach effectively unravels the complexities of the dialogue between Indigenous fiction and the Gothic genre, respecting the positionalities of the novels and their authors while facilitating a dynamic conversation across texts, cultures, histories, and processes. This approach aligns with the framework of transnationalism as an academic perspective[1] and especially with its conceptualization in the groundbreaking work of Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney on *Transnational Memory*.

De Cesari and Rigney argue that a transnational perspective best

captures the intricate dynamics of contemporary socio-cultural processes, emphasizing the interplay among local, national, and global contexts. This approach offers a lens through which to examine not simply how historical processes and cultural interactions develop in different places and geopolitical contexts but especially how they are constructed in the movements between those places and contexts, particularly "along the fault lines created by colonialism" (De Cesari and Rigney 2). Situated firmly in the context of memory studies, this horizontal frame of inquiry challenges the centre/periphery model and aptly captures the combined effects of transnationality on the circulation and interactions of cultures, particularly in contexts affected by historical phenomena such as colonialism, which operates across and beyond national borders.

This approach therefore emerges as particularly valuable when looking at how two recent Indigenous works of literary fiction from culturally and geographically distinct contexts — Canada and New Zealand — situated historically at the periphery of imperial influence interact with a genre (the Gothic) and a literary form (the novel) that originated in Europe. Both novels negotiate the importation of the novel form and the Gothic genre as well as the Indigenous epistemologies and views that the two narratives convey and uphold. The choice of the novel as the formal vehicle in the two case studies suggests an engagement with Western narrative forms — as opposed, for example, to oral tradition forms. Both *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* engage with a genre, the Gothic, which originated in Europe and originally was produced in the form of novels. Additionally, as several scholars (Brantlinger; Ilott; Rudd; Smith and Hughes; Wester) have noted, in addressing structures of otherness and monstrosity, the Gothic also points to their frequent alignment in settler and imperial writing, considering the crucial role of such alignment in colonial and imperial discourses.

At the same time, *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* also engage with Indigenous traditions, cultures, belief systems, and ontologies, accommodating competing epistemologies within the Western cultural and physical space of the novel. Both *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* rework Indigenous cultural forms in the spaces of their narratives: the former incorporates oral storytelling of Haisla traditions, and the latter weaves together different narrative voices in a polyphonic structure that "resembles formal speech-making in a hui (Māori gathering, conference) and acknowledges the hui's procedures for respectful listening and dia-

logue" (Timms 632). Although this underscores the novels' resistance to straightforward assimilation into Western explanatory models and schemes of interpretation, it also signals that any reading of *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* needs to contend with the fact that the narratives *do* inhabit the Western form of the novel and *do* engage with Western parameters (often, as we shall see, to subvert them). Ultimately, in this essay, I emphasize how *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* foreground the intersection of different cultural paradigms, offering and operating with/in competing epistemologies.

Why the Gothic?

The Gothic emerges as a valuable aspect to analyze in relation to the two case studies for several reasons. First, as discussed above, both texts need to negotiate their engagement with a Western genre (the Gothic) and a Western literary form (the novel) as well as their underlying connections with settler and colonial histories. Second, both novels have been not only written, marketed, and read as Indigenous texts but also frequently marketed, received, reviewed, and discussed as Gothic fiction and approached as such by mainstream readers, generating a complex set of expectations. Early critical responses frequently read the novels as Gothic texts: Alison Rudd suggested that *Baby No-Eyes* is a postcolonial Gothic novel haunted by the return of "the ghost of an infant" (*Postcolonial Gothic Fictions* 161); the early reception of *Monkey Beach* read it as an example of "glorious northern Gothic" (Thomas) or of "Native Canadian Gothic" (Andrews 21).

More nuanced and by now established readings of the novels understand them as simultaneously inviting and resisting Gothic interpretations. Scholarly assessments of the two texts have widely discussed how in both supernatural elements such as ghosts and monsters point to and articulate the return of ancestral voices, the recovery of cultural memory and traditional knowledge from colonial repression, and their reintegration within the Haisla and Māori communities. As Castricano and Sugars have emphasized in their readings of Robinson's novel, the return of what has been repressed is not necessarily unhomely: it can entail the resurgence of traditional knowledge and practices repressed by the colonial experience. Talking with ghosts and interacting with the spirit world entail for Lisamarie the assertion of a transgenerational inheritance and the reclamation of an ongoing connection to ancestral voices.

Similarly, in more recent scholarly interventions, Keown and Schwab have highlighted that *Baby No-Eyes* emphasizes how belief in spiritual transference, spirits, and supernatural encounters and events are still integral and relevant components of a Māori world view. The presence of the dead child is not frightening or disturbing for family members but comforting: Baby is a companion for Tawera and a figure returned to the material world to alleviate her mother's grief.

These recent critical interpretations understand both *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* as Indigenous texts that productively suggest and simultaneously disavow a Gothic reading, questioning their easy absorption into Eurocentric frames of interpretation while evoking them to defamiliarize them from within. The parallel evolution in how the relationship between the Gothic genre and these two Indigenous texts has been perceived and understood over the past two decades signals a provincialization of Western interpretive paradigms when analyzing Indigenous literature in contemporary criticism. This underscores my rationale for examining these particular texts in comparison and in relation to the Gothic genre and functions as the starting point of my analysis.

I suggest that the relevance of the Gothic as an interpretive framework for these novels also lies in their engagement with a literary logic of the genre. Certain Gothic traditions, and especially contemporary engagements with the genre, exploit the tension between two possible explanations, both equally available to the reader: a supernatural explanation and a psychological one. Narratives that engage with this literary logic of the Gothic simultaneously invite and validate both a supernatural reading of the strange occurrences narrated and a psychological one, explaining those occurrences as delusions produced by an unsound mind or by desperation, as a coping mechanism, as a symptom of alerted mental states, or as the return of trauma preying on a distressed mind. Some traditions of the Gothic question the actuality of supernatural intrusions, of contact with the monstrous and the dead, of ghosts, and of interactions with the uncanny, generating and fuelling this ever-unsolved tension. *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* engage with this logic of the Gothic, questioning the actuality of the supernatural, but, at the same time, evade it by also questioning the validity of the psychological: that is, the alternative pole of this tension.

Questioning the Supernatural

What troubles Gothic narratives is the impossibility of reassuringly ascribing a clear explanation to a strange occurrence: is it "actually" a supernatural phenomenon, or is it a psychological manifestation, a trick of perception? This tension simply might not hold in Indigenous epistemologies and is indeed absent in traditional Indigenous storytelling, in which the "out of the ordinary" or encounters with the preternatural (I think, for example, of the *wendigo* and the *b'gwus* in First Nations cultures or the *ponaturi* and the *taniwha* in Māori traditions[2]) are part of a marvellous reality that accommodates them without challenging their actuality.

Monkey Beach and *Baby No-Eyes* stage the encounter and collision of these two epistemologies: preternatural elements from Indigenous traditions, cosmogonies, and belief systems appear in the narratives (the *b'gwus* in *Monkey Beach*, the spirit of Baby and *kehua* [ghosts] in *Baby No-Eyes*), and their veracity is questioned by the younger generations in both texts — and, more subtly, by the narratives themselves. In this respect, it is significant that both *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* thematize intergenerational connections between family members and problematize intergenerational cultural transitions. Notably, the grandmother figures in both novels, Ma-ma-oo in *Monkey Beach* and Gran Kura in *Baby No-Eyes*, never question the actuality of the *b'gwus*, of spirits and ghosts in the former and of the presence of Baby in the latter. The grandmothers voice and stand for the Haisla and Māori traditions, cultural practices, and ancestral heritage, validating the veracity and legitimacy of spiritual transference, spirits, and supernatural encounters. Conversely, the younger generations in both novels grapple with conflicting epistemologies. They struggle to decide whether to interpret strange phenomena and preternatural occurrences through a psychological lens — explaining them away as symptoms, superstitions, myths, allegories, or coping mechanisms — or to embrace them as facets of a lived reality, the inherited perception of a marvellous real that nevertheless is real. Through this intergenerational interplay, both narratives scrutinize the credibility of supernatural elements and abstain from offering to readers a definitive disambiguation.

In an early passage of *Monkey Beach*, Lisamarie and her brother hear from their father a traditional story "about B'gwus, the wild man of the woods" (7). When Lisamarie's grandmother overhears this storytelling, she remarks on the lack of accuracy of her son's versions:

> "You're telling it wrong," Ma-ma-oo had said once when she was over for Christmas dinner. Every time Dad launched into his version, she punctuated his gory descriptions with, "That's not how it happened."
>
> "Oh, Mother," he'd protested finally. "It's just a story."
>
> Her lips had pressed together until they were bloodless. She'd left a few minutes later. (8)

This passage so early in the narrative exemplifies the tensions structuring the novel: those in the generational divides, those at a metanarrative level between oral storytelling and the novel form (especially significant in Indigenous writing), and those in the epistemological understandings and perceptions of the supernatural.

From Ma-ma-oo's perspective, this is not "just a story": it is the telling of something that did happen in a specific way, complete with facts and events that should not be embellished or altered but related accurately. In contrast, Lisamarie's father questions the veracity of what he identifies as "just a story," a fictitious narrative of supernatural encounters with monstrous figures complete with "sound effects" (9) intended to entertain his children. Lisamarie epitomizes the youngest generation, inheriting both her father's perspective and her grandmother's Haisla beliefs, world view, and knowledge system. She inhabits the constant tension between epistemologies, and her ability to interact with the spirit world further positions her amid this tension.

On the one hand, the supernatural becomes a legitimate source of knowledge in the teachings of her grandmother, a valid tool to interpret the empirical world and to reconnect with the Haisla understanding of the spirit world: as Ma-ma-oo explains her granddaughter, "You don't have to be scared of things you don't understand. They're just ghosts" (265). As discussed, critics have emphasized how Lisamarie's ability to talk with ghosts "is about spirituality and survival" (Castricano 806). On the other hand, the narrative systematically presents readers with characters who question the actuality of the supernatural or frame it within the discourse of mental disorder. Lisamarie is frequently addressed as the "crazy girl" by other characters in the narrative (101, 373), she becomes self-conscious about being considered "nuts" when she recounts her perceptions and experiences (91, 225), and her mother relegates Lisamarie's encounters with the spirit world to the realm of nightmares or considers them as "clearly a sign, Lisa, . . . that you need Prozac" (3).

Lisamarie oscillates between dimissing her ability as "crazy," some-

thing affecting her sanity, and being "deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (315-16). She inherits and inhabits a tension between epistemologies that remains unsolvable in the narrative. *Monkey Beach* portrays a central character constantly negotiating the different epistemologies and world views in which she is enmeshed, significantly possessing a double name (Lisamarie) and inhabiting a territory also doubly named (Kitimat and Kitamaat, as detailed further in Gaertner), a character able to "see things in double exposure — the real world, and beyond it, the same world, but whole, with no clear-cuts, no pollution, no boats, no cars, no planes" (265). In a novel that addresses the coexistence and clash of epistemologies and world views, the generational focus shows how, while "Ma-ma-oo's breath smelled like oolichan grease" (237), Lisamarie's diet is characterized both by the oolichan grease so iconic to the Haisla tradition and by Kraft Dinner (the de facto "national dish" of Canada), summing up what "feeds" the new generations of Haisla people, literally nourished by and raised within both cultures.

Like *Monkey Beach*, *Baby No-Eyes* also foregrounds the encounter between different epistemologies, which becomes especially relevant in relation to the figure of the spirit of the dead child, Baby. As Keown notes,

> Baby's role in the novel invites a variety of interpretations, and throughout the narrative she appears variously as a figment of Tawera's imagination, a literary device, and a palpable spiritual entity that inhabits Tawera's body. She functions as a floating signifier, shifting chameleon-like between different roles as the text progresses. (153)

The narrative refrains from offering a disambiguation while presenting the clash of different perceptions and epistemologies. For Gran Kura, Baby has her place in the *whānau*, the Māori concept of "family." Comprising physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions, the *whānau* is rooted in *whakapapa* ("genealogy") and includes the ancestors, the dead, and the unborn. Gran Kura can neither see nor perceive Baby, yet she never questions the child's function as "spiritual presence, an essence which is transferred between various living family members" (Keown 155).

In *Baby No-Eyes*, only her brother, Tawera, can see and hear Baby, who requires and takes up physical and psychical space, he shifts and

edges away to make room for his sister at the table ("I took crayons from the kitchen shelf and sat up at the table making room for my sister beside me" [93]), in his bed ("I didn't mind making plenty of room in the bed for my sister, didn't mind sharing the blankets and pillows with her" [186]), in every hug that he shares with a family member ("Tawera leaned back making space for the sister — legs seen and unseen, walking" [232]). His teacher, classmates, and Te Paania cannot perceive Baby's presence, prompting readers to consider the possibility that Baby might be just a figment of the child's imagination. As Keown notes (154), the bruises and injuries on Tawera's body after Tawera argues and fights with Baby might align with child psychologist Atle Dyregrov's observation that "children often attempt to ameliorate parental grief by manifesting 'bodily complaints' which divert parental attention from the pain of bereavement." The narrative never favours a supernatural explanation over a psychological one and never disavows either one. Instead, it depicts the convergence and clash of distinct epistemologies. While Gran Kura remains unwavering in her acknowledgement of the presence of Baby despite her inability to perceive her, other adults frequently interpret Baby as a phantasy figure within Tawera's mind. Consequently, the boy needs to negotiate the epistemological differences that he inherits and in which he is enmeshed.

These novels engage with the Gothic genre by placing their Indigenous traditions in dialogue with a logic alien to them (the questioning of the supernatural), exposing how the recovery of their traditional epistemologies and belief systems is hampered by a logic derived from a European framework that the novels cannot evade diegetically but equally cannot evade at the metacritical level of their reception. Indeed, both novels are frequently marketed and read as Gothic and therefore effectively reinscribed within a tradition that they simultaneously evoke (by questioning the supernatural) and evade (by the treating spirits and *b'gwus* in *Monkey Beach* as real and the ghost of Baby as real and having physical presence). *Monkey Beach* and *Baby No-Eyes* foreground the complexities of negotiating both the disconnection from traditional Indigenous systems of knowledge and the exposure to Western frameworks. This predicament also underscores how the novels challenge the universal validity of the psychological as explanatory model.

Questioning the Psychological

Monkey Beach and *Baby No-Eyes* emphasize the ineffectiveness of a psychological approach to heal Indigenous trauma, foregrounding how it is aimed at "explaining away" phenomena whose actuality European traditions question but Indigenous ones do not. Indeed, both novels resist and problematize Western therapeutic approaches in Indigenous contexts. When in *Monkey Beach* her parents take Lisamarie to see a therapist, Ms. Jenkins seeks to impose her own rationalizing interpretation on Lisamarie's belief in the existence of ghosts and in her ability to interact with them:

> "Do you think," she asked me halfway through our first and last session, "that maybe these ghosts you dream about aren't really ghosts, but are your attempt to deal with death?"
> "No," I said.
> Her wide, blue eyes fixed on me. "Then you believe ghosts exist?"
> "Yes," I said. (273)

Although Lisamarie has suffered personal as well as collective and cultural trauma, significant about this exchange is that, in Ms. Jenkins's psychological model of interpretation, there is no room for Indigenous ontology and epistemology, as Castricano and Sugars have argued. The actuality of spirits and the possibility of contacting the dead are simply not open to debate in the therapist's perception. Her final remark, "I'm sure that with a little work you will be back to *normal* in no time" (274; emphasis added), voices the Eurocentric discourse laying claim to the interpretation of reality as well as the establishment of the definition and boundaries of accepted (and universal) "normalcy."

Robinson further complicates the engagement with the therapeutic moment: throughout the session, Lisamarie sees a "thing" sinking "its bony fingers . . . into [the therapist's] arms, its legs wrapped around her waist as it clung to her like a baby," "whispering in her ear," and sliding its tongue "over her neck" (272-73). As Castricano notes, "the fact that Ms. Jenkins is oblivious to the 'thing' would seem to confirm that it is Lisa, not Ms. Jenkins, who is in for some serious psychological trouble" (805). This can also show how Lisamarie's perception reaches beyond what the therapist is (consciously) communicating. During their talk, Lisamarie can hear the "thing" whispering in the therapist's ear, evoking the infidelity of her partner ("screws her? Do you think he thinks of you?

When he puts his hand on your thigh, does he imagine hers?" [273]). When the "thing" becomes aware of Lisamarie's presence, it moves away from Ms. Jenkins and hovers over Lisamarie, suggesting to her the words that "the thing knew Ms. Jenkins wanted to hear," namely that there is nothing "real" about the spirits that she sees and that her claims are only about seeking "attention" (274). Crucially, Lisamarie does not attempt to decode what the "thing" stands for and does not question the veridicality of the supernatural encounter. The creature in her perception is accepted as an entity in itself, a material embodiment of what the other woman is communicating that Lisamarie can actively perceive, feel, hear, and touch in a counter-Eurocentric engagement with the supernatural and the monstrous.

Baby No-Eyes also contends with the inadequacy of the psychological as explanatory model and healing process in a Māori context. Recognizing the harmful impact of intergenerational silence and its potential to perpetuate disruption and new suffering (as exemplified by Baby's death linked to the silenced family history), Gran Kura decides to unveil the suppressed voices and concealed stories of the family past. This telling is likened to the unwrapping of the constricting bandages of repression, complicity, shame, and trauma accumulated over the decades, as Kura vividly explains: "There is a little ball inside me, a core. Round it are layers and layers, like bandages, that I've wrapped it in over the years so that it would remain. Now, because of the children's children, and because my mouth has been opened, I must unwrap the little ball, find it, let the secrets free" (76). Telling is figured as a liberating process, one that facilitates healing.

What is significant in Kura's approach to the telling of traumatic memories, however, is its context and setting. Since medical institutions are marked in the novel by brutal insensitivity, the therapeutic potential of the "talking cure" shifts from the professional guidance of therapists to the domestic space of storytelling. Kura's communal reconstruction is essentially familial: the storytelling is constructed entirely *within* and *for* the family. Telling becomes counterpoint and antidote to silence, a way through which, as Grace explains, Kura "is unwrapping the layers from inside herself. She looks upon it as a poison that she'll get rid of" ("Interview" 119). Telling the stories of trauma, Kura emphasizes in *Baby No-Eyes*, is "ridding oneself of sickness" (148), but it is so in a counter-Eurocentric engagement with the telling of trauma. Breaking the silence becomes a healing process that disavows Western psychological

approaches. In foregrounding a pharmacopoeia of healing stories, the novel allows us to imagine a different relationship with telling, an approach accommodating ambiguity and unresolvability as well as a counter-Eurocentric perception of the dead and of their interaction with the living facilitated by the novel's engagement with the Gothic and its literary logic.

Silence, Trauma, Resistance

Silence emerges as a core concern of both *Baby No-Eyes* and *Monkey Beach*, serving as a crucial motif through which the novels delve into a range of experiences related to colonialism, traumatic memory, and dispossession. In these texts, silence is both symptom of and statement about the incommensurability between Indigenous (Māori and Haisla) and non-Indigenous world views, especially in relation to the perception of the past, time, death, and the supernatural. Silence figures as intertwined with traumatic memory — manifesting the collapse between the unspeakable and the untold — as well as linked to shame, complicity, or self-censorship. In both narratives, silence is also intrinsically connected to the negotiation of telling, trauma, and (collective) memory: exploring silence is instrumental in exposing how in the novels the work of telling is necessary and valuable, yet it does not automatically undo, deny, or erase the work of trauma.

Silence in the novels is instrumental in foregrounding issues of telling, especially the telling of traumatic memories. The narratives can be seen, in fact, as responding to debates on the conceptualization of historical trauma and the curative power of storytelling in Indigenous cultures in the wake of the theoretical and clinical engagement with trauma theory in the seminal work of Lakota scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn. Postulating the trauma of the Indigenous peoples of America as stemming from historical colonial abuses, they foreground the transgenerational, collective dimension of such a traumatic past, locating social issues and pathologies as the result of violence and "unresolved grief across generations" (60-61). This approach has been adopted in studies of Indigenous trauma in Pacific cultures, as seen in the works of Leonie Pihama et al. and Wirihana and Smith. Parallel Indigenous histories of assimilation and land dispossession, combined with the significance of genealogy and ancestry in Māori perspective, further favour this approach, as Irene Visser explores in her pivotal work on Māori and Indigenous trauma.

In *Baby No-Eyes*, silence figures as a defence mechanism and a tool for protection: it signifies a willed withholding of information, forced on the descendants as well as self-imposed. The novel stages the generational clash between those who do not know the collective traumatic past and those who do know it yet choose to keep silent. Until Baby's death and the horrific act of biopiracy on her corpse, the family elders and especially the child's great-grandmother Kura refuse to disclose the family history to their descendants, convinced that "our stories could kill you" (18). The narrative explores the economy of silence and the interconnection between trauma and telling from the perspective of the keeper of ancestral stories, the one who gets to decide what is being told and what is being kept.

Silence is examined as a protective strategy and as a response to the suppression of Māori identity and politics of cultural assimilation. Kura equates Māori silence to complicity with colonial repression and its legacy of obedience and shame passed down through generations: "Goodness and silence had set in amongst the people, and . . . the stories were . . . kept as secrets amongst themselves, to become stories of shame. People became more and more silent, because if they spoke they would harm their children. They had stolen their grandchildren's lives" (150). Dispossession — of identity, land, language, and history — becomes haunting, and the narrative consistently sustains the equation between blindness and silencing: Baby's blindness emerges as symbolic of and parallel to the metaphorical one imposed on the different generations of her family by the silencing of traumatic histories. The tropes of silence and blindness emerge as analogous forms of damaging concealment in *Baby No-Eyes* while also proving to be enabling voices.

The return and presence of the ghost child functions as a catalyst for the repossession of Māori heritage and place through telling, facilitating a realignment of the family past with the present. Significantly, upon discovering the existence of his older sister, Tawera initiates a collective storytelling of the family past: "[A]ll right Mum and Gran Kura and all of us, let's tell everything" (10). Thus, the tension between silencing and telling in the novel is aligned with its main supernatural signifier, Baby. In *Baby No-Eyes*, telling facilitates a reclamation of Māori identity and healing from trauma, significantly portrayed as ensuing from the recovery of a collective past rather than as an outcome of Māori-Pākenā (white settler) reconciliation.

Whereas Grace's *Baby No-Eyes* focuses on those who *know* the traumatic past but deliberately withhold it, Robinson's *Monkey Beach* focuses on a figure who can barely glimpse the unknowable secrets and untold traumas shaping the familial and communal dynamics in which she is enmeshed. Lisamarie confronts the reticence of her community and the censoring of traumatic histories, from the silence on residential school experiences to domestic violence, abuse, and incest, as well as the loss of languages and other historical injustices. The community's active and regular silencing of any attempt at sharing traumatic experiences complicates the legacy of repression and unspeakability that the various generations of Lisamarie's family inherit and grapple with, while accounting for several ellipses in the text. For instance, her uncle Mick is routinely interrupted and prevented from recounting the abuses and brutalities that he and other Indigenous people his age suffered at residential schools (109-10) and is abruptly cut short whenever he attempts to discuss Indigenous politics and conditions (30-31). Comments and conversations on traumatic experiences are fractured and systematically interrupted mid-sentence, suspended before they can reveal painful knowledge.

The intergenerational cultural transition is further problematized in the novel by Lisamarie's very limited knowledge of the Haisla language — both a knowledge system and a receptacle of history since, as Ma-ma-oo explains, it is an essential requisite to understand the old stories as part of a world view inexorably lost to non-Haisla speakers. The erosion and repression of traditional knowledge estrange Lisamarie from stories and a system that would be more recognizable, if not altogether accessible, without the loss of the code of her culture's cognitive map. The novel foregrounds how Lisamarie grows up grappling with the loss of traditional cultural signifiers while remaining largely ignorant of Haisla culture and experience. The unspeakability of the colonial, psychological, and physical traumas, the legacy of denial and silencing, and the loss of the traditional language and cultural signifiers point to the inaccessibility of the Haisla world view and experience for younger generations.

As in *Baby No-Eyes*, in *Monkey Beach* silence operates as a poignant symbol representing trauma originating from colonial encounters and violence, trauma that remains conspicuously unspoken within the narrative. It hampers the sharing of memories that would substantiate belonging, strengthen familial connections, and secure cultural recognition. The exploration of silence in both novels underscores a fascination with the negotiation of telling and with the dynamic between suppression and

revelation. Moreover, this preoccupation with silence resonates with the incommunicability between different epistemological frameworks within postcolonial contexts, a core concern of both narratives.

Indigenous Futures: A Conclusion?

Monkey Beach and *Baby No-Eyes* present a complex engagement with the way in which different epistemological and ontological systems, Western and Indigenous, interact and collide; they remain concerned with how several generations of Indigenous people need to negotiate different cultures and knowledge systems while facing the difficult recovery of a collective past and its repression vis-à-vis the disruptive histories of colonialism. Both novels address the multi-layered complexities of place making and the politics of memory, and the impact of transgenerational trauma and ongoing dispossession, foregrounding the struggle to recover a sense of continuity with fractured traditional heritage and ancestral knowledge while exposing the complexities of their positioning in relation to a Western world view and its knowledge systems.

Monkey Beach and *Baby No-Eyes* remain skeptical, however, about the possibility of a full recovery of ancestral cultures. Although talking to and about one's ghosts emerges as an element of resistance to cultural loss and amnesia, younger generations in both texts (Lisamarie and Tawera) also inherit a legacy of denial and silencing, hampering the recovery of ancestral traditions and histories in a modern context, as well as the need to navigate the coexistence of competing epistemologies. This is a process characterized by fragmentation and silence, and it remains an open question whether it is about the search for the "authentic" or about a negotiation with the ruins vis-à-vis the force of disconnection and rupture from tradition.

By engaging with the Gothic genre, the novels establish a connection to a mode that keeps open the question of the veracity of ghosts, supernatural encounters, and the possibility of contact with the dead. The two novels capitalize on the connection between Gothic elements and psychology to unsettle the assumed universality of psychological approaches to trauma and the telling of traumatic memories. The novels' complex engagement with the Gothic emerges as a powerful tool to explore loss and conflict as well as resistance and recollection, providing a space where cross-cultural negotiations between different ontological and epistemological systems can take place.

Notes

[1] In recent discussions, transnationalism as an academic perspective has developed both as a topic of research, the "cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states" worthy of interest per se (Vertovec 2), and as a hermeneutic perspective "question[ing] and decentralis[ing] the nation as an analytical category" (Vandebosch and d'Haen 1).

[2] Helpful resources to learn more about these figures in Māori traditions are Te Ara, teara.govt.nz/en/taniwha, and Te Aka (Māori dictionary), maoridictionary.co.nz.

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