

“Something in Between” *Monkey Beach* and the Haisla Return of the Return of the Repressed

You don't have to be scared of things you don't understand.
They're just ghosts.
—Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

“**R**epression” can be a dangerous word in Indigenous literary criticism. The baggage it carries, from Christianity, from the Enlightenment, but most of all from Sigmund Freud, immediately raises hackles. And the suspicion is well deserved. To begin from the assumption that psychoanalysis always can be smoothly immigrated into an Indigenous text is an act of *literatura nullius*, an erroneous belief that a given book is not populated with its own systems of knowledge and hermeneutics. Because it rings so loudly with the white noise of European culture, repression analysis risks writing over Indigenous voices even as it attempts to forefront those experiences.

Still, while his grasp on it is tight, repression is not the sole domain of Freud. Indigenous authors have conceptualized their own formulations of repression in their own communities, from their own experiences, and, perhaps most pointedly, in their own relationships to settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is the movement of colonists into a territory with the intention of making that territory their home. What is at stake in this formulation is the repression and appropriation of “Indigenous” presence, which retroactively (and fallaciously) validates the colonialists’ “belonging” to place. Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson argue that “the typical settler narrative [has] a double goal. It is concerned to act out the suppression or effacement of the indigene; it is also concerned to perform the concomitant indigenization of the settler” (369). The settler colonial logic of “suppression” is based on a concept of progress that attempts to erase the “inferior” colonized in the service of social advancement. According to Patrick Wolfe, “these are the dying races, whose fragile bloodlines readily dissolve into

the settler stock under post-frontier policies of Native assimilation” (274). Of course, “suppression” and “repression” have different implications: being the difference between conscious and unconscious “forgetting,” respectively. However, in suppressing Indigenous cultures and rights from the Canadian imaginary—for instance, by employing legislation such as the 1885 Potlatch Ban—colonial governments have also aimed to repress Indigenous knowledges *within Indigenous peoples*, which is to say that they have forced culture, knowledge, and language to be practiced and shared in secret, away from the settler gaze.¹ In its attempts to erase all signs of “Nativity” in Native subjects, settler colonialism alienates individuals not only from their families, communities, and cultures, but from themselves, enforcing, under threat of violence, a subsistence of *suppression* that began with the *repression* of self-identity and self-determination.

Within the complex system of settler colonialism, then, repression, as a North American literary trope, is significant because it promises the return of Indigeneity out of the ashes of colonial repression. Indeed, as the majority of gothic literature critics agree, “the repressed always returns” (Fowler 96). Given that there is never complete erasure within it, “the return of the repressed” resists settler colonial models that attempt to permanently erase Indigenous presence and proffers instead a future bursting with the potential of Indigenous resurgence. Re-centering the literary analysis of repression from the perspective of Haisla and Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson, this article thus aims to provide a localized means to consider repression and its return as they are represented in the award-winning gothic novel *Monkey Beach*.

In the psychoanalytic tradition of gothic literature, the return of the repressed is traditionally structured around a strict delineation between repressed content and the subject that represses it. For Freud, repression is comparable “to ordering an undesirable guest out of [the] drawing room (or front hall)” (“Repression” 2983). Freud asserts that “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a safe distance, from the conscious” (2978). However, it is not simply the case that the repressed content is relegated “outside” of the home, but rather that it is buried *within* the psychic structure. The repressed then returns, according to Freud, because it requires a large amount of psychic energy to keep it “barred” from re-entry. The longer repressed content is contained within the unconscious, the more pressure it puts on the psychic mechanism, allowing the incursive content to “proliferate in the dark” (2980) before it explodes back out into the “drawing room.”

In order to prevent the psychic mechanism from overloading, some of the compounding pressure must be released but in such a way as to protect the ego from further damage. As such, the discharged content must be altered (which, according to Freud can occur through an array of processes) to mask its appearance.² For Freud, “if these derivatives [of the repressed moment] have become sufficiently far removed from the repressed representative, owing to the adoption of distortions . . . they have free access to the conscious” (2980). In this sense, what returns is always already “for” the repressor, inasmuch as the repressed content is delimited by the borders of the ego. The *object* of repression remains dehumanized, voiceless, and often, as the European gothic has illustrated, monstrous.

The “monstrous” connotations of the gothic have very real consequences for the representation of Indigenous peoples. Scholars before me have illustrated that Indigenous peoples and communities are often the objects of repression and return in the North American gothic, and are therefore subjected to the dehumanizing effects that the return of the repressed inflicts on those relegated to the margins.³ Perhaps the most popular examples of this are Stephen King’s “Indian” horror stories, particularly *Pet Semetary*, in which vengeful “Indian” (more particularly Míkmaq) ghosts return to torture and haunt settlers. As Kevin Corstorphine writes, “every horror story needs some kind of monstrous Other to provide the threat, and while in *Pet Semetary* the fear King plays on is ostensibly the return of the dead as monster, there is also a symbolic Other [the “Indian”] that appears in shadowy form throughout the story” (n. pag.).

While the return of the repressed may conventionally be portrayed (and analyzed) in North American gothic literature as the chilling revenant of Indigenous peoples to complacent homesteaders, a more radical contention with repression in a settler colonial context explores *the impacts of repression as it returns to the repressed*—i.e., Indigenous peoples. I argue that Robinson’s unique intervention into gothic literature, and settler colonial studies, lies precisely in this turn. It is through an indigenization of the return of the repressed (that is, a repressed that returns to the repressed) that critics of Canadian gothic literature can deconstruct “psychoanalytic” readings of Indigenous literature and re-centre readings of “the return of the repressed” on Indigenous texts, cultures, and communities.

Of course, this is not to say that Freud is entirely superfluous to the work we do in Indigenous literature. As Warren Cariou suggests, within the deep system of Indigenous repression enforced under settler colonialism, return is

always already immanent. According to Cariou, the prevalence of the return of the repressed trope in settler novels and films “reflects a widespread and perhaps growing anxiety suffered by settlers regarding the legitimacy of their claims to belonging on what they call ‘their’ land” (727). He goes on to suggest that “this fear can be described in Freudian terms as a kind of neocolonial uncanny, a lurking sense that the places settlers call home aren’t really theirs” (727).

Cariou deftly illustrates that despite Freud’s marginalization from certain parts of the modern academy (particularly psychology departments), the models he provides for reading “unconscious” signifiers and narratives remain vital tools for analyzing, historicizing, and contextualizing gothic literature. Freud’s work provides one way for critics to read for what isn’t explicitly represented in the text, to analyze silences and omissions, and to give voice to the voiceless: “horror appeals to us because it says, in a symbolic way, things we would be afraid to say right out straight . . . it offers us a chance to exercise . . . emotions which society demands we keep closely at hand,” writes Stephen King (see Valdine Clemens 213). In Cariou’s analysis, horror novels and films can become, with careful reading, unexpected sites of colonial resistance that generate space for Indigenous voices and decolonial critique.

Building on the work of Cariou, the critic currently bringing the most critical insight to intersections between psychoanalysis and Indigenous literature, I argue that a schematic of repression does not have to begin or end with Freud. We do not need to start by attempting to redeem a man and a set of theories that are, in many ways, beyond redemption.⁴ My suggestion is that there are better and stronger representations of “the return of the repressed” in communities that have been subject to the effects of their own repression in a colonial state. Indigenous representations provide insider perspectives on the living effects of repression and generate localized ways to consider its return. They take the representation of trauma out of the hands of the detached observer and put it into the hands of the individuals who experience it. What I am suggesting is not so much an “indigenization” of psychoanalytic criticism, which assumes that psychoanalysis came first; rather, I am arguing that “the return of the repressed,” as a North American literary trope, is in fact the provenance of Indigenous storytellers and authors. As such, a study of the “return of the repressed” in Canadian literature would benefit tremendously if critics *began* with Indigenous authors and stories, rather than German theorists and the Enlightenment Establishment.

At the heart of my argument is a reconfiguration of the economy of repression and its return. Rather than looking at how repressed subjects (Indigenous peoples) return to haunt the repressor (Settlers), this article considers the implications of a return that *comes back unto itself* and can therefore be considered within the framework of what Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson calls “resurgence”: “a flourishing of [an] Indigenous inside” (17). In my configuration resurgence means, simply, that the return of the repressed is not destined or ordained only for the settler-repressor. Or, to put it differently, return is not always unhomely. Taken from this point of view, the return of the repressed need not be a nightmare; it can also be a means to reconnect with the traditional knowledges and cultural practices that have been buried beneath violent colonial histories. Marlene Goldman sums this point up nicely when she asserts that the Indigenous gothic “emphasizes the *repatriation and renewal* of Native people’s sacred objects, beliefs, and culture” (243 emphasis added).

Read as a kind of resurgence, Indigenous gothic novels speak to the return of Indigenous culture across the repressive forces of settler colonialism. According to Simpson, the strategic shame inflicted by settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples continues to impede those communities even in the era of purported reconciliation. For her, resurgence is a means to reconnect with the traditional practices and knowledges that settler colonialism has attempted to repress. Simpson writes: “[t]hrough the lens of colonial thought and cognitive imperialism, we [Indigenous peoples] are often unable to see our Ancestors. We are unable to see their philosophies and their strategies of mobilization” (15). Resurgence, Simpson goes on to argue, “re-establish[es] the processes by which we live with who we are within the current contexts we find ourselves” (17). She continues,

building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly reinvesting in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions. (17-18)

In Simpson’s framework, resurgence is a process of generating space for traditional Indigenous knowledges and traditions to flourish and grow in the destructive wake of settler colonialism. It is not a practice of retreating to the past, but of bringing the strength of ancestors to bear in the present. Simpson’s formulation of resurgence is particularly generative because it insists on the strength and resilience of Indigenous knowledge as it

exists *across* time and *against* settler colonialism, which is not to say that colonialism did not inflict a violent interruption on traditional practices, but rather to emphasize the strength of the people—particularly women—who carried on those traditions despite the threat of colonial violence. Resurgence insists on a power that is present in the histories and traditions of Indigenous people, which survived, as Simpson makes clear, because of the strength and resilience of her Ancestors: “they resisted by taking the seeds of our culture and political systems and packing them away so that one day another generation of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg might be able to use them. I am sure of their resistance,” she continues, “because I am here today” (15).

The return of the repressed in *Monkey Beach* is addressed in the critical literature, but the focus is on the effects of the return of trauma, rather than the resurgence of ancestral knowledge.⁵ While these readings correctly address the directionality of the return (locating it in the repressed subject rather than the repressor), they emphasize the repression of *the effects of colonial violence* and elide the subtle ways in which, through this violence, *Haisla knowledge and culture* are also subject to repression and—more importantly—return. These “trauma” readings, in their ready application of Freudian theory, risk imposing interpretive colonization on the text in the tacit assumption that psychoanalysis is ahistorical and acultural. While Freud’s work may provide insight into the distorting mechanisms of settler colonialism, I argue that Robinson herself offers a much more concrete and localized account of the return of the repressed in her community, which focuses not on the displacement of trauma, but on the return of traditional knowledge.

The shift to Indigenous perspectives on repression and its return is a necessary one, and far too long in coming. With good reason, the application of psychoanalytic theory, which is itself heavily rooted in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, is, to say the least, exceptionally problematic.⁶ In “Learning to Talk with Ghosts,” Jodey Castricano illustrates the continued work of imperialism that is implicit to levying psychoanalytic critique against Indigenous literature. It is not only “the longstanding history of government attempts to wipe out Native populations in Canada,” Castricano writes, “but also the discursive import of that history via a certain *interpretive* model that continues to do the insidious and coercive work of colonization” (809 emphasis added). For her, the interpretative violence of Western theory is nowhere more evident than in the “European, psychoanalytically inflected gothic” (809).

Robinson herself cautions her readers against the desire they might feel to glibly transpose psychoanalysis onto her novel. The author's reticence towards Freudian models is made most evident in a scene in which Lisamarie's parents send her to an analyst for help with her "problem" seeing ghosts. Lisamarie arrives home from school one day to find that her parents have booked her an appointment at the hospital. When they arrive, Lisamarie is introduced to Ms. Jenkins, a white psychiatrist. Ms. Jenkins is described as looking "more frazzled than [Lisamarie] did" (272) and after a quick greeting she sets into the rationalizing work of psychoanalytic analysis:

"Do you think . . . that maybe these ghosts you dream about aren't really ghosts, but are your attempts to deal with death?"

"No," I said.

Her wide, blue eyes fixed on me. "Then you believe ghosts really exist?"

"Yes," I said. (273)

While Ms. Jenkins attempts to read Lisamarie's "ghosts" through psychoanalysis, Lisamarie is also caught up in an interpretive act of her own here: a creature that only she can see clings to the analyst's shoulder, whispering in her ear: "Do you think he thinks of you? When he puts his hand on your thigh, does he imagine hers?" Is he—" (273). The short scene with the psychiatrist is a critical engagement with a therapeutic model that attempts to rationalize the supernatural by connecting it to a traumatic incursion in the psyche and rendering it "symptom," but Robinson further problematizes the European model by making Lisamarie an active participant in the analytic moment.

Lisamarie is both analyst and analysand in this scene. Not only does she push back against Ms. Jenkins' Eurocentric interpretation, she simultaneously reads the psychiatrist's own repression against the interpretation she portions out, and she does so, importantly, from a position uniquely counter to the "rationalizing" work of psychoanalysis. Rather than reducing the creature to a metaphor for psychic or emotional disruption, and therefore to a fiction, Lisamarie understands the monster as a thing unto itself: a material manifestation of anger and jealousy. In this, Ms. Jenkins' "monster" is similar to Basil Johnston's depiction of the (Anishinaabe) Weendigo,⁷ a creature driven by the unrelenting desire to consume and destroy. For Johnston, the Weendigo is more than simply a metaphor for (or symptom of) greed. Rather, the figure is a much more complex and literal means of seeing and interpreting the wide spectrum of human behaviour. He writes:

Even though a Weendigo is a mythical figure, it represents real human cupidity. However, as time [goes] by, more and more learned people declared that such monsters were a product of superstitious minds and imaginations. (235)

While we should not be too quick to conflate Haisla and Anishinaabe cultures, Johnston's Weendigo helps to clarify a counter-colonial engagement with "monsters" that does not reduce them to mere symptom. For Johnston, "monsters" are defined by the ways in which they are alienated from the family and community circles that define "human." Moving outside of the circle of one's relations in order to pursue self-interest is therefore "monstrous" inasmuch as it is the community that provides for the definition of humanity. Monsters, in this sense, are not metaphors for behaviour, or symptoms of history, but very literal examples of "humans" that are no longer connected to the sociocultural web that can guarantee them as such.

Like Johnston, Robinson does not employ "ghosts" and "monsters" as a means to aestheticize repression and its return; rather, her "ghosts" are articulations of traditional knowledge crossing the barriers of colonial repression in their return to Indigenous communities. Helen Hoy illustrates that Robinson has inherited her love of horror and the gothic not just from the throng of Stephen King novels she read as a young woman, but, more importantly, from the Haisla history she comes from. Writing before the publication of *Monkey Beach*, Hoy, drawing on Gordon Robinson's *Tales of Kitimaat*, points out that

a variety of monsters . . . inhabit Haisla stories, the most prominent one being the one protecting the Kitimaat Arm. This monster with a huge opening and closing mouth, which had to be braved for the founding of Kitimaat village, proved to be millions of gulls rising and settling, feeding on herring roe or small fish. (172)

Hoy demonstrates that the Haisla gothic, in terms of monsters and the supernatural, has a long and storied history that reaches far back beyond colonialism and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.⁸ Indeed, this piece of Haisla gothic is key to the "horror" of *Monkey Beach*. For instance, Lisamarie, in asking her mother about the history of the Douglas Channel, is introduced to the gull story that Hoy notes above: "she [Lisamarie's mother] said that a long time ago, people were afraid to go up the Douglas Channel because this great big monster guarded the entrance. . . . The monster turned out to be just a huge flock of seagulls" (114). The incorporation of this traditional narrative grounds Robinson's gothic in a Haisla worldview and sets the stage for her own story within that framework. In this way, Robinson establishes that at least part of Haisla horror is built around the distortion of the familiar, which stems directly from traditional stories passed from generation to generation.

Of course, Haisla horror is not only of the past. Yet another “monster” that plays an active role in the present tense of *Monkey Beach* is the b'gwus, the “wild man of the woods” (7), also known as a Sasquatch. During her childhood, Lisamarie’s father, Al, tells her and her brother, Jimmy, variations of a traditional Haisla story about this figure. Al’s b'gwus tales are inflated ghost stories told with the intent of spooking his children: they usually end with him donning a wooden Sasquatch mask and chasing Lisamarie and Jimmy around the living room while they squeal in delighted fear. In *The Sasquatch at Home*, Robinson illustrates how the b'gwus stories are deeply connected to her home: “the Kitlope is famously home to Sasquatch. The territory bordering on Bella Coola or Nuhalk lands is mountainous and remote. Many of the stories passed down the generations talk about the elusive b'gwus” (36). Like the gull narrative, the b'gwus stories connect the “horror” of *Monkey Beach* to a longstanding tradition of Haisla storytelling highlighting the delicious “terror” that arrives out of the easy slippage between ghosts and humans (here Al and the b'gwus): a shift that sparks a sense of wonder and fear in Robinson’s characters and firmly establishes her as the author of “some of the most disturbing fiction that Canadian literature has ever seen” (“Playing Rough” n. pag.).

Robinson’s conception of the “slippage” between monsters and humans, which she explicitly connects to Haisla storytelling, folds directly into Lisamarie’s perception of the world and land around her. She informs the reader, “[w]hen I dreamed, I could 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” (*Monkey Beach* 265 emphasis added). The doubling effect represented here illustrates the spatial distortion that occurs for the Haisla protagonist as she simultaneously occupies two worlds: her pre-colonial inheritance and the colonial reality of the everyday.

The disjunction represented in this “double exposure” also spills out into a larger representational field. For instance, Robinson illustrates the impact of colonial doubling on Haisla homes, manifested in the dissonance created between the two “Kitamaats” in the text (Kitimat and Kitamaat): the *Kitamaat* Village, where Lisamarie lives with her family, is traditional Haisla territory. But right next door to the village is the town of *Kitimat* (also located in Haisla territory), built and named by the Alcan Aluminum company as “a city of the future” (*Monkey Beach* 5). In the most literal sense, this is an example of the home made unhomey as a result of settler colonialism. The doubling of Kitamaat/Kitimat (being both familiar and

foreign, indicated in the hasty colonial amputation and substitution of vowels) draws attention to the ways in which the repressed returns in the settler colonial imaginary and the spatial dissonance that arises out of that return for Haisla people—one of the primary points of struggle that Robinson's protagonist must contend with while she attempts to re-connect with certain elements of her culture.

This same doubling effect also interferes with Lisamarie's ability to engage with traditional Haisla knowledge, culture, and language—although she is learning the Haisla language, Lisamarie infers, “even at one word a day . . . I'd be an old woman by the time I could put sentences together” (211). For Lisamarie, this repression is inherited, passed down matrilineally from her mother, Gladys, to Lisamarie and Jimmy as an intergenerational effect of colonialism. *Monkey Beach* makes plain that the repression enforced in residential schools on Gladys' generation spills out beyond those walls into the community at large. In Gladys' case, repression is most evident in her refusal of the Haisla supernatural. Ma-ma-oo, Lisamarie's grandmother on her father's side, tells Lisamarie that the ability to contact the dead runs strongly in her family. Gladys' own grandmother (Lisamarie's great-grandmother) was a “real medicine woman” (154) whose skill set included being able to talk with the dead. Gladys has also inherited this gift. However, while Ma-ma-oo establishes that Gladys is powerfully connected to this knowledge set, Ma-ma-oo also makes it clear that Gladys is unwilling and/or unable to accept this particular gift because of the residential school system that prohibited and demonized Indigenous practices.⁹ Ma-ma-oo informs Lisamarie that Gladys “doesn't tell you when she sees things. Or she's forgotten how. Or she ignores it” (154). She then goes on to explain that Gladys represses her gift because of the death, disease, and suffering brought on by colonization, which was particularly rampant in Kitamaat when Gladys was a child (which would have been at the end of the Sixties Scoop).¹⁰ In this colonial space, the ability to contact the dead was simply too much of an emotional and physical burden for her: “when Gladys was very young, lots of death going on. T.B. Flu. Drinking. Diseases. She used to know who was going to die next. But that kind of gift, she makes people nervous” (153).

Ma-ma-oo's explanation of Gladys' repression helps to clarify one of the earlier scenes in the novel, when Lisamarie asks her mother about “the little man”—perhaps the most significant “monster” in the novel. Here, Gladys insists that Lisamarie's early encounters with this figure “were just dreams and they couldn't hurt [her]” (21). In relegating the little man to the realm

of nightmares, Gladys makes clear her intention to lock this portion of her traditional knowledge outside of her home and away from her family. However, through her assurances that the little man can cause no harm, Gladys also underestimates the potential of the repressed as it returns to Lisamarie. She particularly misjudges the fear it might provoke in her daughter—who, aside from bits and pieces gathered from her grandmother, does not have the skills or knowledge to identify or engage with it. Indeed, inasmuch as Lisamarie is alienated from traditional knowledge in her inheritance of colonially enforced repression, the repressed double is invited directly into her life, in the figure of the little man.

For Lisamarie, the little man, like the Kitamaat/Kitimat double, is represented as a split signifier: “sometimes he [comes] dressed like a leprechaun,” but other nights he wears a “strange cedar tunic with little amulets dangling around his neck and waist” (*Monkey Beach* 132). Ma-ma-oo explains that the cedar tunic connects the little man with traditional Haisla stories about tree spirits: in “[o]lden days, [these spirits would] lead medicine men to the best trees to make canoes with” (152). When Lisamarie inquires, “what would it mean if you saw the little man,” Ma-ma-oo half-jokingly retorts, “Guess you’re gonna make canoes” (153). Ma-ma-oo’s “joke” here resonates with knowledge of the repression of Haisla cultural practices, and therefore the unlikelihood that Lisamarie will be building a canoe at that moment, while also foreshadowing a resurgence of such knowledges that might provide for this actuality in the near future.

As a signifier of Irish culture, however, the little man, figured as a leprechaun, is also attached to a complicated history of colonization in Canada—Irish immigrants representing the fourth largest immigrant group in Canada (Smith 219). The Irish played a fundamental role in building the colonial state and the nationalism that supports it, particularly in British Columbia, where conquering the “wild” (a category that historically included Indigenous peoples) also meant establishing the Coast’s identity as white, Anglo, and male.¹¹ Irish immigrants represented nearly a quarter of the South Mainland population in 1881, and 55% of those listed their employment as railway work (Smith 218)—the railway being a significant contributor to the displacement and diaspora of Indigenous peoples (Hanson n. pag.). Of course it should not be overlooked that Irish immigrants are also a historically marginalized group in the context of Great Britain, and it is only in the “colonial tilt” (Coleman 94) of Empire that they “become” British. Indeed, in Canada the Irish were often exploited for their labour and treated

as “wild” themselves for their beliefs and “superstitious” ideas. As Angèle Smith notes, in order to survive in the colonial environment in which “Englishness” was privileged, many Irish immigrants “passed” as “White,” and were thus in opposition to First Nations and later Asian identities (225). In her engagement with this particular set of signifiers, Robinson adds yet another layer to the slippage and repression of identity that Indigenous people and other non-English immigrants were forced to navigate within settler colonialism.

Inasmuch as he represents Haisla tradition (as tree spirit) and the complexities of its repression (as immigrant iconography), the little man’s leprechaun persona positions him as what Robinson, again highlighting the easy slippage between “human” and “ghost,” calls “something in between” (374): a signifier oscillating amid seemingly mutually exclusive binaries, man/animal, death/life, or, in this case, Native/Immigrant. The fluid movement between this latter double thus renders the little man monstrous for Lisamarie when he returns across her mother’s repression. This is specifically evidenced when the protagonist refers to him as “a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare” (27) and when, after her uncle’s death, Lisamarie is unable to understand that the little man is attempting to comfort her (132).

It also illustrates why, according to Gerard Moore, it appears at the end of the novel that the supernatural is “praying on Lisamarie’s vulnerability” (51): repression has estranged Lisamarie from what would be, without the distorting effects of settler colonial repression, recognizable (if not still disturbing) Haisla figures. To refer back to the epigraph that I open this article with, for Lisamarie, “ghosts” are inextricable from a fear of the unknown, which has been enforced by a system of colonial repression. While there may be, as Ma-ma-oo suggests, no need to be afraid of ghosts, the little man is caught up in a system of signifiers that Lisamarie cannot entirely place but which feel simultaneously familiar and foreign. As such, they offer a particularly discrete sense of terror in their disquieting intimacy and generate a sense of fear that precludes her engagement with them as traditional knowledge.

The *resurgent* potential of the return of the repressed in *Monkey Beach* is made explicit in its final section, “Land of the Dead,” when Lisamarie finally overcomes her struggle with “double vision” to reclaim her Haisla ancestry and culture. Here, in her fevered attempt to locate Jimmy, who has gone missing during an ill-fated fishing trip, Lisamarie blurs the boundaries

between the repressed and the conscious, disrupting the binary that has contributed to her alienation from her Haisla culture and further clarifying a Haisla conception of repression and its return.

To this end, the novel's culmination also closes a plot circle that Robinson introduces in its very first lines. *Monkey Beach* begins with six crows waking Lisamarie from a restless sleep: "Laès, they say, Laès, laès" (1). The narrator informs readers that "Laès" in Haisla means, "go down to the bottom of the ocean" (1), suggesting from the onset an implicit objective for Lisamarie, made all the more significant because it is communicated in her traditional language. At the end of the novel, Lisamarie, now standing on the beach that gives the novel its name, returns to the crows, who now stand "as far as the eye can see, waiting" (370), as if to bear witness to her arrival at their prefatory imperative. At this point, Lisamarie is travelling in her uncle's motorboat to rejoin her parents in their search for her brother. Upon returning to the crows, she is standing on the shore of Monkey Beach, appealing to a supernatural force for assistance (365-66). In these final scenes she answers their call when, full of fatigue, she slips from her boat and sinks semi-conscious beneath the waves: *Laès. Laès.*

Lisamarie's descent into the water here can be read as resurgence inasmuch as the ocean, and what lies beneath it, represents a topography of repression throughout the novel. Midway through *Monkey Beach*, Lisamarie recounts an early experience on the water illustrating precisely how the ocean functions as an allegory for the repression experienced by her community: "Old logs stick out of the water like great, bleached finger bones. The ones you can see aren't as dangerous as the ones submerged just below the surface, the deadheads, which can puncture your keel" (112). The connections between the ocean and repression have been thoughtfully analyzed and unpacked by Sam McKegney in *Magic Weapons* in which he locates repression not just in the hearts and minds of the Haisla community, but in the land itself. In closing, I would like to build on the work McKegney began in order to tease out the nuances of Robinson's Haisla return through the metaphor of the ocean.

Contending with the legacy of residential schools and their continuing impact on Indigenous communities, McKegney argues that what lies beneath the surface of the ocean in *Monkey Beach* is the repressed itself:

Eden Robinson examines this danger [of repression] through a metaphor of nautical navigation. . . . That which is unseen, as that which is unspoken, poses the greatest threat because the sailor cannot react to it; she or he is literally at its mercy. (11-12)

This analysis is Freudian, I would argue, insofar as it addresses repression spatially, highlighting the potential trauma of a return that has been locked away or buried. Whereas Freud uses the metaphor of the drawing room and its “outside,” McKegney uses the ocean as a metaphor for the unconscious—where the “unsaid” lies in wait “proliferating in the dark” (2980). Similar to Freud’s theorem, then, the repressed returns in the form of the deadhead that eventually breaks the surface, inflicting damage on the “keel.”

In shifting the analytical focus point from Freud to Robinson herself, we can extend McKegney’s analysis yet further and locate an articulation of repression that is germane to the text itself, rather than an outside source: if the ocean represents the repressed and the repressed has become, under the imposition of settler colonialism, a space encompassing traditional knowledge and culture, *Làès* is therefore a moment of return for Lisamarie to family, language, and Haisla ways of knowing. Indeed, underwater, Lisamarie encounters the “ghosts” of her ancestors: first Ma-ma-oo, who helps her to rise to the surface, where she struggles to catch her breath before “the water pulls [her] back down” (372), and then her brother Jimmy, who is at this point confirmed to have died at sea. Jimmy does not speak, but he also pushes his sister to the surface, saving her once again from drowning. Coming up from the bottom of the ocean this second time, thus doubly following the crows’ imperative to “return,” Lisamarie is finally able to experience the resurgence that has been bubbling behind the narrative from page one of the novel. Upon breaking the surface, her uncle, her grandfather, and Jimmy are all on the beach dancing, celebrating, and speaking Haisla—more *supranatural* than *supernatural*—and Lisamarie is, for the first time in her many encounters with “ghosts” in this book, unafraid: “I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. They are blurry, dark figures against the firelight. *I can understand the words even though they are in Haisla* and it’s a farewell song, they are singing about leaving and meeting again” (373-74 emphasis added).

In returning to the repressed at the end of the novel, Lisamarie finds herself finally at home with her “ghosts” and the connections to Haisla culture and knowledge they represent for her. In this final scene, the binary that once alienated Lisamarie from traditional knowledge collapses in on itself, inasmuch as Lisamarie’s descent into the repressed disrupts the delineation between unconscious/conscious, bringing the latter into the former and vice versa. While the figures of her relations are dark and blurry, their indistinct representation is no longer an effect of colonial repression, but of Lisamarie’s rebirth into her Haisla inheritance, made most explicit

in her sudden ability to comprehend the language. The metaphor of the ocean—which stands very much opposed to Freud’s very European metaphor of the drawing room—allows Robinson to represent a localized, land-based, inflection of repression and its return, one that ensures that Indigenous peoples are reunited with their histories, languages, and cultures in a mental and physical space that escapes the distortions of settler colonialism.

Quite rightfully, gone are the days when psychoanalytic criticism could be applied *carte blanche* to Indigenous literature. Castricano notes that the uncritical application of Freudian literary theory to Indigenous texts recapitulates and reinforces settler colonial ideology in the arrogant and fallacious assumption that psychoanalysis (or Freud himself) “knows better” about Indigenous peoples than Indigenous peoples know about themselves. To begin from the assumption that psychoanalysis can, without careful consideration of its interpretive biases and historical contexts, be imposed on an Indigenous text is a clear reiteration of colonial violence reenacted in the name of “close reading.” But we do not need Freud to read repression in this novel, at least not to grasp its significance. Robinson’s skilled detailing of Haisla “horror” and the ideological violence of settler colonialism provide a much richer and more pertinent context from which to begin this work. It is right there in the book itself.

What I have aimed to illustrate in this article are the ways in which Indigenous authors are themselves employing what we might have previously called “psychoanalytic” tropes that in fact pre-date Freud and are built out of their own histories, cultures, and experiences. Re-centering repression to illustrate the distorting effects settler colonialism has had, and continues to have, on her community, Robinson establishes a rigorous Haisla conceptualization of the return of the repressed and emboldens the resurgence of Indigenous knowledges in the next generation. The repressed is returning. And Robinson compels her readers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to prepare for and welcome it: “you don’t have to be scared of things you don’t understand. They’re just ghosts” (265).

NOTES

- 1 “The Potlatch Ban, legislated by the government of Canada in 1885 under the Indian Act, forbid the practice of potlatches under penalty of imprisonment. It remained in effect until 1951. In 1921, Namgis Chief Dan Cranmer held a now famous underground potlatch in Alert Bay. The event resulted in 50 arrests (Hanson n. pag.)”
- 2 Displacement, condensation, reaction-formation. See Freud, “Repression” 2986-87.

- 3 For instance, see Sugars and Turcotte; Cariou; Goldman.
- 4 For more on the disabuse of Indigenous peoples in psychoanalytic criticism, see Julia Emberley in *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal*.
- 5 See most particularly Jennifer Andrews.
- 6 Freud's *Totem and Taboo* is perhaps the most troubling example here in its subjugation of "primitives" as the primary rhetorical tool used to advance the author's argument. Indeed, the opening chapter of *Totem and Taboo* is entitled "The Savage's Dread of Incest." For more on Freud's "primitivism," see Emberley.
- 7 Alternative spellings include "wendigo," "windigo," "wīntikō" (Anishinaabe), and "wihtikōw" (Cree). See Brightman.
- 8 Largely considered to be the first gothic novel.
- 9 For more on the repressive impacts of residential schools depicted in Indigenous literature, including *Monkey Beach*, see McKegney.
- 10 The term "Sixties Scoop" refers to the Canadian practice of apprehending high numbers of Aboriginal children and fostering or adopting them out to white families.
- 11 See Ward, *White Canada Forever*.

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