BIBLID: 0015–1807, 52 (2025), 1 (pp. 81–93)
UDC 821.111(71).09 Gud M:[376-053:316.485

https://doi.org/10.18485/fpregled.2025.52.1.6

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5340-3805

Natalija Stevanović
University of Niš – Faculty of Philosophy
natalija.stevanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

TRAUMA AND ITS AFTERMATH IN MICHELLE GOOD'S *FIVE LITTLE INDIANS*[1]

Abstract: *Residential schools for Indigenous children are one of the darkest chapters of Canadian history, and their effects are still felt to this day. Unfortunately, these traumatic effects on survivors are not discussed enough. Therefore, this paper analyzes Michelle Good's novel* Five Little Indians *(2020), and the plot which follows five characters and their lives after their stay at a residential school in British Columbia, the ensuing traumas, and their ways of coping in a world where they face daily oppression. The novel provides insight into different characters, and their points of view. This is a fruitful basis for analyzing different ways of coping with the traumatic past and the traumatizing present. The theoretical framework in this paper is based on trauma studies, mainly on works written by trauma theorists such as Judith Herman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, and others. The paper hopefully contributes to a much needed discussion on the horrible mistreatment of Indigenous people in Canada, and sheds light on the lived-through trauma, as well as its aftermath.*

Keywords: *Indigenous children, Michelle Good, residential schools, trauma, trauma studies.*

Introduction

Canadian history has long been a point of contention; priding itself on being known as a multicultural *salad bowl*, where individuals are encouraged to embrace their cultural identity, where multiculturalism is celebrated, Canada is also a site of horrible atrocities done upon people who originally resided in that specific geographical location. Those people are Aboriginal or Indigenous people, the term used to identify First Nations, Métis people, and Inuit. When the treatment they had to endure is added to the historical tapestry, we can say that the history of Canada is also a history of "government imposition."[2] Initially, a

[1] This study was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovations of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-137/2025-03/ 200165).

[2] Naomi Angel, *Fragments of Truth – Residential Schools and the Challenge of Reconciliation in Canada*, Duke University Press, 2022, p. 6.

century before Canada's confederation in 1867, Indigenous people and settlers interacted both through violence as well as peaceful approaches; trade was their most common way of interacting, and many battles, wars, and struggles marked the fight for control of both land and resources.[3] The Royal Proclamation of 1763 stated the need for self-governance of the Indigenous people, and while it primarily meant to "establish the authority of the British over the French" it also recognized "some rights to land for Indigenous peoples."[4] However, with the 1857 Gradual Civilization Act, this claim to support self-governance was turned into a need for assimilation; "Indigenous peoples were seen as an impediment toward a harmonized and modern national identity."[5] The approach to this assimilation was not peaceful, but rather introduced one of the darkest instances of Canadian history – residential schools.

> Canada's residential school system for Aboriginal children was an education system in name only for much of its existence. These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture–the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society, led by Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. The schools were in existence for well over 100 years, and many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured the experience of them. That experience was hidden for most of Canada's history, until Survivors of the system were finally able to find the strength, courage, and support to bring their experiences to light in several thousand court cases that ultimately led to the largest class-action lawsuit in Canada's history.[6]

Despite its claim at education and integration, the system of residential schools, as was explained in the previous paragraph, proved to be a traumatizing experience of cultural erasure and physical as well as psychological abuse, which together came to be understood as *cultural genocide*, or "the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group."[7] Residential schools continued the practice which was employed by the Canadian government, and which, in its essence, served the purpose of destroying "the political and social institutions" of the Aboriginal people, seizing their land, and "forcibly" transferring them to reservations, as well as forbidding their spiritual practices and preventing families from transmitting "cultural values and identity

[3] *Ibid*., p. 27.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. v.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 1.

from one generation to the next."[8] This process of cultural erasure, systemic oppression, and confinement is extremely traumatic, and it is these particular "social components and cultural contexts" which can explain why and how the process itself is traumatic.[9] This is why Michelle Good's novel, *Five Little Indians*, is a wonderful and heartbreaking rendition of aboriginal trauma, which shows how the characters went through trauma and how they are coping in the aftermath of it.

Michelle Good is a Cree writer and a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. In the *Acknowledgments* section of the novel, Good mentions her mother, "who lived through the hell of one of these schools."[10] The plot of the novel follows five characters, Kenny, Lucy, Clara, Howie, and Maisie, who were sent to the Mission School for Indigenous children. The novel is a conglomerate of voices, a polyphonic testament to the horrors of residential schools. Through either first-person or third-person focalization, we follow these five characters as they reminisce about their time in the school, as they leave or escape the school and struggle to find meaning and their place in a society which disregards their plight, and even their existence. They struggle with daily oppression, or the "institutionally structured" harm which is utterly unjust, and performed on groups by other groups"through direct and indirect material and psychological forces."[11] The trauma they lived through remains like a sutured wound, which occasionally re-opens as the numerous ways in which they are oppressed in the society are debilitating, and yet they have to proceed with their lives. We read literature as "a precocious mode of witnessing – of accessing reality – when all other modes of knowledge are precluded."[12] We read this novel as a testimony of so many traumatized Indigenous people, a testimony which is composed of "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance."[13] By reading this novel, we access the truth of the trauma the residential schools left on so many children, and adults as well.The next part is dedicated to definition of trauma, and explanation of the myriad of traumatic instances the five characters went through.

The impact of trauma

When it comes to the meaning of trauma, the most cited psychological definition of it was provided by Sigmund Freud, who recognized that "traumatic neurosis" results from an "extensive breach" of the "protective barrier" – what is thus deemed as traumatic are those "excitations from outside" which are strong

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Michelle Balaev, ed, *Contemporary approaches in literary trauma theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 3.

[10] Michelle Good, *Five Little Indians*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2020, p. 293.

[11] Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 28.

[12] Shoshana Felman and DoriLaub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p. xx.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

enough to break through "the protective barrier."[14] Thus, trauma is "a piercing or breach of a border" which "puts inside and outside into a strange communication" by violently opening "passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound."[15] Cathy Caruth, one of the most prominent trauma theorists, continues this line of thought provided by Freud in her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, and adds that trauma entails an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" which oftentimes results in "delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance" of intrusive phenomena.[16] This violent intrusion brings a sense of "utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent" whichis reminiscent of the effects of colonization, where the "overwhelming" power of the colonizer, their violence and program which consist of "excessive atrocities committed in the course of putting down resistance to intrusion" bring the same effect.[17] Trauma should never be treated separately from the instances which allow it, and it is extremely important to take into account not only individual, but also societal and cultural influences which enable trauma to happen.

Five Little Indians allows the story of trauma to unfold through a shifting focalization approach, focalization being "the perspective, angle of vision, or point of view from which events are related."[18] This polyphonic, shifting narrative, is reminiscent of trauma, which renders a victim feeling helpless, unable to gather pieces and susceptible to memory holes. We can notice the effects of the "inherent latency of trauma" in the "broken or fragmented quality of testimonial narratives."[19] In essence, we may regard their stories as "life testimonies", as points of "conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life."[20] The phrase *life testimony*, coined by Shoshana Felman and DoriLaub, is extremely relevant for the purposes of reading fiction which deals with trauma. It allows us to collect "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance."[21] The very act of knowledge about trauma eludes both characters and readers, and it necessitates construction of knowledge which happens in the act of reading in order to reach the truth of what actually happened.

[14] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 68.

[15] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, Routledge, 2008, p. 3.

[16] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History,* Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1996, p. 17.

[17] David Lloyd, "Colonial trauma/postcolonial recovery?", Interventions 2.2, 2000, pp. 212–228.

[18] Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 48.

[19] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, Edinburgh UP, 2004. Pdf, p. 7.

[20] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 5.

In their testimonies, none of the characters use the exact words for what happened to them. None of the characters use the word "rape", for example, which makes the situation they went through even worse. They merely remember the atrocities without being able, or being willing, to name them. How traumatized people react, or rather, what types of defenses they employ is influenced by "developmental stage, temperamental and contextual factors."[22] Oftentimes, they find themselves unable to integrate "the reality of particular experiences, and the resulting repetitive replaying of the trauma in images, behaviors, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships."[23]

> Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. This tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar situations. When people come to concentrate selectively on reminders of their past, life tends to become colorless, and contemporary experience ceases to be a teacher.[24]

The central trauma in the novel stems from the systemic abuse, which provided the government with the power to take Indigenous children away from their families and place them in residential schools, in the case of the novel, the Mission School. The novel shows how the characters lived through the trauma of forced separation either from first-person or third person focalization. The characters are aware of the fact that they were forcibly taken away, but it is rather blurry in their memory, and what remains are fragments of memories of boats and other terrified children.

We are offered an insight into the process of a child being taken away when Howie talks to Clara, and says that he and his mother were visiting his aunt, when a priest came with a police officer, and Howie was forcibly taken to a boat with other children, not allowing his mother or him to say goodbye. Upon coming to school, a nun welcomed them and said:"Children, this is your home now and you will obey like we are your parents."[25] This cruel replacement of the role of primary caregiver by people who show everything but empathy and care leaves a deep scar in the psyche of the children, and that is apparent in the way Howie's focalization shifts between present moment and flashbacks to the time he spent in the school. When trauma occurs in childhood, it can "disrupt normal developmental process" and this happens because, due to ultimate dependence on "caregivers" and with "incomplete biological development", children require

[22] B. A. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and C., L. Weisaeth. (eds.), *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, New York: The Guilford Press, 2007, p. 7.

[23] *Ibid*.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[25] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

stable structures in order to be able to develop properly."[26] In case of improper care, or even abuse from those people who act as caregivers, children may constantly live in a traumatizing situation which hinders their proper physical and mental, as well as emotional development.

> The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as casualty, sequence, place, and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during, and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of 'otherness', a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both.[27]

This feeling of entrapment is a recurring instance in the novel, and we see these five characters reacting differently to it. Howie, for example, after being released from prison, goes to a wildlife part and an enclosure and sees a she-wolf in a cage. He says: "I […] sat for over an hour talking to the she-wolf, consoling her, letting her know Iknew what it was like to be caged in."[28] Another character, Maisie, even though she manages to find a place to stay, and even though she has a job and a supportive boyfriend, constantly needs to get out of the house, because the presence of Lucy in her apartment, after she is released from the school, reminds her of the claustrophobic atmosphere of the school. Her testimony is written using the first-person focalization which provides the readers with enough contextual clues to weave a narrative of the way the traumatic experience in the school shaped her personality and her life. It had been ten years since she last saw her parents when she was released from the school, and she could not stand being around them, it felt suffocating. So she went to Vancouver. "To be little again, living without fear and brutality – no one gets that back. All that's left is a craving, insatiable empty space."[29] She wants to go back to her childhood and the innocence she felt then, but she is unable to.

When it comes to Kenny, he isalso constantly on the move. He feels restless all the time; he cannot stay in one place. "It was just a matter of days when he was home last before those restless urges were on him. It was not for a lack of love, but something inside him that drove him, something he could never explain to Lucy,

[26] B. A. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and C. L. Weisaeth. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xv.
[27] Shoshana Felman and DoriLaub, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[28] Michelle Good, *op. cit*., p. 172.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

much less to himself. A pressure that only eased up if he was on the move."[30] This is one of the impacts of trauma, which does not only manifest in mental, but also in somatic symptoms, such as "agitation", restlessness, absence of "baseline state of physical calm or comfort."[31] It does not matter if he is at home with Lucy and their daughter, he cannot escape the discomfort. The reminders of trauma, both in the presence of Lucy, who also shared their time in the residential schools, or the constant memories of that time, propel him to seek comfort in walking away, which is something he was unable to do during his time at the school. He could not escape back then, he had to stay and endure, and that left consequences which display themselves in his constant restlessness, and inability to settle.

All of these characters experience flashbacks to their time spent in the school. Howie, for example, even after he is out of prison, cannot escape from the past. "The dreams had faded over the years in prison and I thought forsure, once I was free, I would be free of them too. Why were they back now when everything was looking up?"[32] Flashbacks are sudden images or feelings of "experiencing a past experience, often a distressing one."[33] The dreams and flashbacks of the traumatized bear witness to a survival which exceeds the claims and consciousness of the one who endures it.[34] Most of the other characters as well have sudden flashbacks to that time in the school, they remember the smells, the textures, the fear they experienced, the dread of what was to come next. The omnipresent triggers which appear in their everyday lives constantly remind them of the past they cannot forget, and which they cannot subsume into their consciousness. That spoils their appreciation of the present time, and they unwillingly return to the past feeling of helplessness and pain which they experienced at the hands of the adults who used their power to beat and torture them into submission.

The aftermath of trauma

In the previous part, the focus was on the impact of trauma on the five characters in the novel. Even though their core trauma is the same – the trauma of living in a residential school – their reactions and the consequences of trauma, despite some overlap, still depend on an individual personality. The same can be said about the aftermath of trauma, or the way of overcoming, or rather, *living* despite the lingering and hindering effects of trauma. According to Judith Herman, the most common response to atrocities is "to banish them from consciousness"; however, atrocities "refuse to be buried" and "remembering and telling the truth

[30] *Ibid*., p. 208.

[31] Judith Lewis Herman, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 178.

[33] R. M. Doctor, F. N. Shiromoto, *The Encyclopedia of Trauma and Traumatic Stress Disorders*, *Facts on File*, 2010, p. 124.

[34] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History,* Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1996, p. 65.

about terrible events" are prerequisites for "the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims."[35] However, it would be a mistake to say that all traumatized people suffer the same psychological harm. There is a whole "spectrum of traumatic disorders."[36] Lucy, Clara, Maisie, Kenny, and Howie react rather differently when it comes to remembering and talking about their common trauma. And their lives in the aftermath of trauma are different, mostly due to the approach they chose in their path to, if not overcoming, then living despite, and together with, trauma.

People who survive traumatic experiences are often troubled by a set of disorders, which mostly result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Those people who suffer from PTSD are often plagued by "the compulsive reexposure to situations reminiscent of the trauma."[37] This is rather apparent in the character of Maisie. At night, she goes out, dresses in vibrant clothes and puts on heavy makeup, and meets The Old Man, who has sexual intercourse with her and she asks him to call her using slurs "'Slut. Savage. Filth. Stupid. Cunt. Whore. Slut. Savage.' And then hands her a candy bar, just like Father at the school did."[38] This is Maisie's response to past traumatic experiences, as she re-enacts past trauma in order to find a way to overcome it and survive. However, she still cannot escape the oppressive flashbacks to the days in the school, to the abuse all of the children survived, to the beatings, and humiliation, and rape. She self harms, which is usually associated with "early emotional abuse", in which individuals who experience severe anxiety due to past trauma "feel compelled to make tiny cuts on their skin" in order to relieve anxiety:[39]

> I watched in the mirror as I pressed the scabbed line just below my collarbone. Fresh from last night's drawing, the blood pearled again, red and brilliant against my brown skin. The second-day pain was not the same. No piercing with the knife. It was duller, but still sharp enough to make me feel clean. I looked at my face and pressed the wound: the pain sharpened a little and the tension eased.[40]

However, Maisie cannot find a proper way to live in the aftermath of trauma. Her boyfriend, her friends, the support system, none of it helps. She is unable to find strength, as the past trauma is overwhelming, and the blame is not properly directed at those it should be directed at. She commits suicide by overdosing, and despite it being a heartbreaking moment, for the first time in her life, Maisie seems serene: "I looked, one last time, at the skyline."[41] Substance abuse often-

[35] Judith Lewis Herman, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[36] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[37] B. A. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and C. L. Weisaeth, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[38] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[39] R. M. Doctor, F. N. Shiromoto, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
[40] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[41] *Ibid.,* p. 78.

times results in suicidal behavior, and unfortunately, in the majority of cases, individuals succeed in committing suicide. It usually happens with people who have suffered "from a past or recent trauma" and those who "lose a sense of self and have this 'existential' issue to face."[42] Suicide is the utmost annihilation of a person, self-imposed, due to the inability to find meaning in life when there are constant reminders of the traumatic past. Maisie found solace in abandoning the constant dread of existing by refusing to continue in her attempts to lead a life when the past was overwhelming.

Lucy exhibits symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). This disorder usually occurs when "thoughts or images that intensify anxiety" become persistent and unwelcome, and the person displays compulsions which are rituals "aimed at reducing or eliminating the obsessively driven anxiety", and these compulsions vary from an individual to individual.[43] Her symptoms started in the school, since the first day in the classroom when Sister "had hit her over and over with her pointer stick because she didn't know her letters."[44]

> Now she counted everything, especially when she was nervous, which seemed to be more and more often. She counted the cots in the dorm, the desks in the classroom, the tables in the dining hall, the panes in the windows, the seconds it took for the clouds to cover the moon. It calmed her.[45]

Despite her horrible past, Lucy finds solace in becoming a caregiver, first by studying to become a nurse, and then by becoming a mother to hers and Kenny's child. However, even though she is away from the school which restricted her in every possible sense, the society she now tries to become a functional member of reminds her of the fact that her position as an Aboriginal person requires state interference, albeit unnecessary. A welfare lady visits her after she gives birth and says that Lucy has to prove that she is a fit mother. Clara, her friend, gets Lucy and her daughter Kendra out of the hospital, and she gives a false address because "Kendra would not become a case."[46] Despite the constant wounding from the past, she refuses to let her daughter suffer from the consequences. After all, the fact remains that "how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present."[47]

Despite her OCD, and her flashbacks, Lucy manages to find strength in protecting Kendra, in caring for Kenny; her love is a way of surviving and continuing to live despite the omnipresent reminders of her past trauma. With third-person focalization, we get a more direct approach to how Lucy actually

[42] R. M. Doctor, F. N. Shiromoto, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
[43] *Ibid.,* pp. 187–188.
[44] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 127.
[47] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 4.

understands Kenny and his constant need to be on the move, while at the same time explaining to Kendra, their daughter, that his disappearances are not for the lack of love. After Kenny's death, she tells Kendra:

> "Child, he loved you more than life. Me too. It was himself he couldn't love. They did that to him. Whatever they didn't break in him, they bent. They beat him and beat him so many times I couldn't even count. He never told me this, but I know Brother was bothering him too. That creep went after so many of those little boys."[48]

Living with trauma means living with an "impossible history", history which never leaves the traumatized, history which "they cannot entirely possess."[49] The case of Kenny shows that child abuse has a "much greater potential to disrupt stable relationships" and "the development ofappropriateways ofexpressing affection and tolerating intense emotion, than a circumscribed traumatic event."[50] Traumatic events often disturb basic human relationships, as they "breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community" and render the survivor unable to construct the self "that is formed and sustained in relation to others".[51] Life with a trauma which affected Kenny's core emotional development has detrimental effects on his relationships with loved ones. He leaves his mother who turned to alcoholism because she could not cope with the loss of her son, and he constantly abandons Lucy, and later their daughter as well, because he cannot integrate the past trauma and overcome it, or even find a way to function normally because of the detrimental effects the trauma left on his psyche. Due to alcoholism which he chooses as escapism from the constant plaguing thoughts of the past, Kenny's liver is damaged, and eventually, he dies. There is a shift in focalization, and we can see a serene atmosphere surrounding Kenny. From the first-person focalization, Kenny looks down on Lucy who stays by his deathbed and she says: "No one can hurt you now, my love. No more nightmares, no more heartbreak. You are free. Dance away, my love. I will never forget you."[52]

The most common pathway to a recovery process from trauma involves the stages of "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community."[53] This is the path that Clara and Howie choose. For Clara, it starts when she becomes involved with the American Indian Movement. After running away from the police and being wounded in the process, her friends from the AIM take her to Mariah, an Aboriginal woman who is dedicated to reconnecting her people to their ancestors' way of healing.

[48] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, 262–263.

[49] Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, *The Holocaust: theoretical readings*, Edinburgh University Press, 2003, p. 194.

[50] B. A. Van der Kolk, McFarlane and C., L. Weisaeth. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[51] Judith Lewis Herman, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[52] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[53] Judith Lewis Herman, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Mariah and Clara spend time together, Clara's arm is healed in the process and she asks Mariah if the rest of her is going to heal soon. Mariah says: "You are so filled with rage. It will eat you alive, child. That is not our way."[54] Mariah is to Clara what survivors of trauma need – a listener. A listener is someone who listens to the testimony of the traumatized, and "partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues" of the survivor's traumatic past.[55] Clara eventually decides to follow Mariah to the lodge, which she initially refuses out of misplaced anger toward her ancestors who were not there when she needed them the most, where Mariah performs rituals and:

> There are no English words to describe how one woman walked into that lodge and another walked out. All Clara knew was that it took her back. Back to the birch grove and the angel songs. Back to who she was before Sister Mary, before the school, before they tried to beat her into a little brown white girl. She felt a certainty, from then on, that all the ones who had come before walked with her. Life was no longer just survival. It was about being someone. AnIndian someone, with all the truth that was born into her at the moment she was placed in her mother's womb.[56]

When it is finally time for Clara to leave Mariah with Vera and George to continue their fight, Clara finds out about the Native Courtworkers' Society, she applies, and she starts a six-month training program that would certify her as "part of her training was to observe seasoned Courtworkers speak for Indians who'd been charged and didn't have lawyers."[57] In that process, she meets Howie. Before their encounter, Howie was constantly going to and out of jail, and one of his biggest offences was beating the Brother who harassed the children in the Mission School. When in front of the Parole Board, he is asked to apologize for his offence, but he refuses, stating that what the Brother did was horrible, and that no one was there to protect the children. He refuses to apologize because: "I can't'. Don't you get it? That would be like saying that it was okay for that monster to do what he did to us. I just can't."[58] When he is finally released, he continues to be plagued by flashbacks and nightmares of his days spent in the school, where he almost died after abuse, but escaped with the help of Kenny. Finally, when Clara is introduced as his courtworker, Howie, with Clara's support and a chance to talk about his past, talks before Department of Justice and tells his story. "I am here today for him and for all the others who died far away from home, alone and unprotected. We were just little kids."[59]

[54] Michelle Good, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
[55] Shoshana Felman and DoriLaub, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 199.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 222.
[58] *Ibid*., p. 164.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 279.

Conclusion

Michelle Good's novel *Five Little Indians*is an extremely powerful narrative lens through which the detrimental and long-lasting impact of residential schools and the systemic abuse on Indigenous people and primarily children in Canada can be analyzed. By bringing the narrative threads of the five characters' lives together, the novel both exemplifies different manifestations of trauma and also underlines the ways survivors exhibit resilience in the face of omnipresent oppression and traumatization. Trauma theorists invoked in the paper, as well as quotes from the novel demonstrate that the past traumatic experiences are inevitably intertwined with the traumatizing present of Indigenous people, which in turn reveals a complex landscape of continued defiance in spite of debilitating psychological and emotional drawbacks. Hopefully, this analysis contributes to the rising importance of bringing to light the past atrocities as well as celebrating the voices of those who are brave enough to speak about their past traumas. The stories of these five characters represent the collective endurance, a deep scar which never fades, and a promise for the healing in the future. Only by listening to the testimonies of the traumatized are we able to honor the victims, support the survivors, and prevent the atrocities from happening again. And that is the legacy which Indigenous people of Canada leave to their progeny – a legacy of survival despite cruelty.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angel, Naomi, *Fragments of Truth – Residential Schools and the Challenge of Reconciliation in Canada,* Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2022.

Balaev, Michelle (ed.), *Contemporary approaches in literary trauma theory,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Cudd, Ann E., *Analyzing Oppression*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Doctor, Ronald Manual and Frank N. Shiromoto, *The Encyclopedıa of Trauma and Traumatıc Stress Dısorders*, New York, Facts on File, 2010.

Felman, Shoshana and Laub, Dori, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992.

Freud, Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings,* London, Penguin Books, 2003.

Good, Michelle, *Five Little Indians*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2020.

Herman, Judith Lewis, *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror,* New York, Basic Books – A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015.

Levi, Neil and Michael Rothberg, *The Holocaust: theoretical readings*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

Lloyd, David, "Colonial trauma/postcolonial recovery?", *Interventions*, No 2.2, 2000, pp. 212–228.

Luckhurst, Roger, *The Trauma Question*, London, Routledge, 2008.

Palmer, Alan*, Fictional Minds*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

Said, Edward W., *Culture and Imperialism.* New York, Vintage Books, 1994.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,* Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A., Alexander C. McFarlane and Lars Weisaeth (eds.), *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, New York, The Guilford Press, 2007.

Whitehead, Anne, *Trauma Fiction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2004. Pdf.

Наталија Стевановић

ТРАУМА И ПОСЛЕДИЦЕ ТРАУМЕ У РОМАНУ МИШЕЛ ГУД
ПЕТ МАЛИХ ИНДИЈАНАЦА
(Резиме)

Роман *Пет малих Индијанаца* ауторке Мишел Гуд на врло упечатљив начин приказује последице система резиденцијалних школа у Канади кроз наратив о пет ликова који покушавају да изграде живот после трауматичних искустава у једној таквој школи у Британској Колумбији. Приче Луси, Кенија, Мејзи, Хауија и Кларе откривају различите манифестације траума кроз које су пролазили, истовремено приказујући стратегије преживљавања које користе. Анализа представљена у овом раду заснива се на теоретским открићима стручњака за трауму попут Шошане Фелман, Дорија Лауба и Џудит Херман који указују на то да прошле трауме обликују даљи живот. Појединачне борбе одражавају колективни бол староседелачких заједница, због чега је изузетно важно препознати проживљена искуства како би се боље разумеле историјске неправде и принуде. Гласови преживелих помажу да се даље дискутује о непрестаном злостављању, и на тај начин подстичу емпатију у читаоцима. Овај роман доприноси осветљавању последица резиденцијалних школа, покретању питања о превазилажењу прошлих траума, и корацима које треба предузети како се претходне системске грешке не би поновиле.

Кључне речи: Мишел Гуд, резиденцијалне школе, староседелачка деца, студије трауме, траума.

Примљено 26. фебруара 2025, прихваћено за објављивање 9. јуна 2025. године.