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Death as Intercultural and Spiritual Encounter in
Lee Maracle’s Ravensong and
Brian Moore’s Black Robe

Par : François Desharnais

Travail présenté à :

Roxanne Rimstead, directrice de recherche, Université de Sherbrooke
David Leahy, membre du jury, Université de Sherbrooke
Antoine Sirois, membre du jury, Université de Sherbrooke

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Composition du jury

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Brian Moore’s *Black Robe*
François Desharnais

Ce mémoire a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

Roxanne Rimstead, directrice de recherche
(Littérature Canadienne Comparée, FLSH)
David Leahy, membre du jury
(Littérature Canadienne Comparée, FLSH)
Antoine Sirois
(Littérature Canadienne Comparée, FLSH)
ABSTRACT

What are the intercultural and spiritual implications of death in literature? How do communities portrayed in two specific novels, Brian Moore’s *Black Robe* and Lee Maracle’s *Ravensong*, handle the conflict that comes with death seen from within and from without? The communities represented within these narratives do not share the same spiritual or cultural background, yet all must face the reality of death on a daily basis. Is there some form of mediation to help these conflicting views on death come together within the stories?

By looking into specific examples from the novels, derived from observations on the afterlife, rituals enacted by the community, power struggles between community leaders and the alienation and isolation that come with death, it is possible to determine what the differences are between the belief systems. Building from psychological and sociological theories on death as much as on notions of contact and identity, we can determine how the views on death come into play between spiritualities and cultures in the novels.

When mediation fails, we see that it is mostly because of a lack of understanding of the Other, either through resistance to or dismissal of the Other’s perceived spirituality. When mediation does occur, we can surmise that the people are accepting the Other’s point-of-view either to supplement their own or to try to understand the strangeness of the Other. In both instances, shared beliefs or experiences become the key element that allows the dialogue to either occur or be denied. Only when context is shared does there seem to be a possibility of bridging the gap between culture and spirituality, and death, as a shared experience, offers this.
RÉSUMÉ

Quelles sont les conséquences interculturelles et spirituelles de la mort dans la littérature? Comment deux œuvres littéraires, Black Robe de Brian Moore et Ravensong de Lee Maracle, gèrent-elles le conflit engendré par la mort au cœur de l'histoire? Après tout, les communautés culturelles présentées dans les romans, amérindiennes ou autres, doivent faire face à la mort sur une base régulière, bien qu'elles ne partagent pas les mêmes origines et le même vécu. Peut-on, à l'aide de réflexion et d'analyse, trouver une manière de conjuguer ces perceptions différentes de la mort au sein des histoires?

C'est en examinant des exemples spécifiques au sein des romans, exemples triés selon les thèmes de la vie après la mort, de rituels communautaires et personnels, de luttes de pouvoir de la part chefs temporels et spirituels dans les diverses communautés et de l'étude de l'aliénation et d'isolement face à la mort, que nous pouvons déterminer les différences qui séparent les systèmes de croyance. On peut aussi bâtir l'analyse sur les théories psychologiques et sociologiques de la mort autant que sur des notions de contact et d'identité. Il est donc possible, en mettant le tout en commun, de déterminer avec précision comment la vision de la mort entre en jeu entre les spiritualités et les cultures des romans.

Quand la médiation entre les partis échoue, on y voit surtout un manque de compréhension de l'Autre, sous la forme d'une résistance ou d'un déni de la spiritualité perçue de l'Autre. En revanche, la médiation se constate lorsque le point de vue de l'Autre est accepté, soit pour améliorer ou amender le nôtre, soit pour tenter de saisir l'étrangeté de l'Autre. Dans les deux cas, les croyances et les expériences partagées deviennent l'élément-clé qui permet au dialogue de s'établir ou de se taire. Seul ce contexte partagé semble engendrer la possibilité de négocier les distances entre cultures et spiritualités. La mort, comme expérience partagée, offre donc cette possibilité.

(Mots-clés: mort, spiritualité, interculturalité, littérature canadienne, contact avec les autochtones)
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To death, because all things have to end some time.
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Introduction

Encounters in Death

"I was made doubly aware of the strange and gripping tragedy that occurred when the Indian belief in a world of night and the power of dreams clashed with the Jesuits' preachments of Christianity and a Paradise after death." – Brian Moore, in Black Robe, Author's Note

"I think I am obsessed with dead people." – Stacey, in Ravensong by Lee Maracle

Death itself needs to be demystified to become a manageable subject matter. Death occurs everywhere on the planet, at any given time; it has occurred in the past and it will occur in the future. There is no denying the fact of death. Yet no one can truly know what death is, because no one lives to tell about it. Edith Wyschogrod, editor of the anthology The Phenomenon of Death talks about the mystery of death in her preface:

It has often been maintained that the refusal to talk about death represents psychological resistance to the most painful and universal reality of human existence. [...] To utter the tautology 'When death is, I am not' not only fails to allay our anxieties but is rather a precise expression of their source. (Wyschogrod, vii)

Johannes Fabian in "How Others Die: Reflections on the Anthropology of Death" elaborates on the impracticality of studying death itself, as opposed to its impact on the living:
Death as an event is the termination of individual behaviour. Therefore there cannot be an anthropological study of death, but only of behaviour toward death as it affects those who survive. It must be a study of "how others die" in more than one sense: examining the reactions of survivors and interpreting these reactions through ceremonies, ritual practices, ideological rationalizations – in short, as "folklore". (50-51)

Another notion to be addressed, when talking about death, is the fact that we can only talk about its corollaries: conceptions of an afterlife, rituals enacted, individuals imbued with power over death and the cultural, and the personal and communal impact death has on those who keep on living. Only through the study of these cultural practices associated with death can we know death and what it means to encounter other cultures through the experiences of the living around death.

The conflict of spiritualities on which we will elaborate during this study serves as the stepping stone that will allow us to understand what kind of intercultural and spiritual encounters with death are depicted in the two novels under study: Lee Maracle’s *Ravensong* and Brian Moore’s *Black Robe*. But there are also many varied spiritualities in the world, and each carries with it its own unique tenets of faith and belief, from the various interpretations of Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions, from native beliefs and traditions, old and new, to more contemporary concepts of energies. Being many things to many people, spirituality is not an easy concept to elaborate.

It is also surprising that such numerous and varying faiths and belief systems do not come into conflict with each other more than they do. The constant struggles that affect human
spiritualities are found seen, even in the daily news. Beliefs thrown against one another can often spark conflict. Literature itself is often a fertile ground for representing spiritual conflicts, and the two novels under study illustrate the importance of death as a site of intercultural study. Maracle’s *Ravensong* and Moore’s *Black Robe* both portray native and non-native spiritualities in conflict. The battleground for that conflict is death, and the novels attempt to show how characters, native and non-native, are pitted against each other in spiritual confrontation. The many relationships, colonial or post-colonial depending upon context, in these modern works of literature define and temper the encounters in the narrative. The differences are first found in the contextual frames of each narrative. *Ravensong* tells the tale of a small native community in 1950s British Columbia, living on the outskirts of a larger white town, a community rocked by disease and death. *Black Robe* revisits the Jesuit missions in New France during the 17th Century through the pilgrimage of Father Laforgue as he attempts to reach a mission where fellow Jesuits are facing turmoil within the native community in which they live. Both narratives bear witness to the deaths of several characters who die under varied circumstances; they also contain many less obvious manifestations of death through the use of various imagery; we also find characters who are more spiritually-oriented than others and who wield power over the encounter with death. In each novel, these spiritual manifestations or the deaths of the characters creates a clash within that particular story, as well as with the other narrative; *Ravensong*’s handling of death differs on many levels from *Black Robe*’s for example, partly because the communities portrayed are not the same (Salish, Huron or Iroquois), even if each novel contains at least one native and one non-native community. These encounters between native and non-native groups are what I wish to explore here, to see how the characters in the novels and the authors negotiate intercultural and spiritual encounters with death. But as Adrian Tanner notes in his essay, "The
Cosmology of Nature, Cultural Divergence, and the Metaphysics of Healing,” determining the nature of the differences between the spiritual realities of two communities is not a simple task:

While it may be easy to show that two systems of metaphysical ideas differ, it is more difficult to demonstrate that any particular problem arising between people of two cultures is due to a deep-seated incompatibility between their metaphysical ideas, rather than some other reason. (Clammer, 189)

In other words, we cannot simply look at cultural differences but we must also contextualize them; we cannot assume that the different spiritualities cannot find common ground for we must look into the specific reasons for conflict, or conversely, in what areas these spiritualities come together. Tanner posits three different elements that prevent metaphysical realities from influencing each other: ideas and assumptions particular to any given cultural group; semiotic structures unique to these same groups which often lead to miscommunication, and are often reflected in translation problems; and an ethnocentric predisposition of every culture to judgement of the other. In truth, all three are manifested in the novels under study, to varying degrees, showing the limitations of intercultural contact.

Every time at least two characters come into contact, an encounter takes shape. But an encounter can also take place when ideas emanating from another character or spirituality are brought to stand against another idea or concept. The encounters that are the focus of this study are those that allow for the exchange or clash of beliefs about death and its related spiritualities, and they are two-fold: intercultural and spiritual.

The intercultural nature of an encounter is determined by the various cultures of the novels. *Ravensong* depicts a native Salish community resting near a nameless white town of
Christian faith (but non-specific); neither group crosses the bridge that connects the two towns (this bridge being as much an actual separation over the river as a symbol of the separation of the communities). Only Stacey (and a rare few others) is given the privilege, through her schooling, to walk back and forth between the two, becoming a form of mediator in the narrative. *Black Robe* depicts the white Catholic French colony of New France encroaching upon not one, but two native territories, the Huron and the Iroquois. Father Laforgue, sent out into the wilderness to spread his faith and his culture among the natives, does his best to walk the path set before him, even though his upbringing, cultural and religious, often fails him in the narrative.

While death also influences some of the intercultural aspects of the study (conceptions of death being cultural after all), it is the conflicting spiritualities portrayed in the two novels that allow the encounters to take on the shape that they do. Ultimately, only the combination of the intercultural and the spiritual allows for the depth of encounter depicted in each novel, and only through contact do the encounters occur.

Physical contact remains the most obvious type of encounter in the novels. It takes on many guises, from the simple proximity of the other to more involved dealings, such as physical confrontation or encounters with sexual overtones. In *Black Robe*, for example, Laforgue is forced to share a crowded tent with the natives during his trip, inviting much physical discomfort; he is later tortured physically by the Iroquois as part of a ritual to steal his powers; he witnesses Annuka and Daniel having sex in the woods, and this deeply troubles him as he himself succumbs to temptation, becoming aroused at the sight, then later feeling strong guilt over the desires he felt, and even self-flogging to atone for the lust in his heart. *Ravensong* has its own examples of physical contact: Stacey's school life in white town, where she studies among the white community on a daily basis; Polly’s presumed sexual encounter with one of her
classmates, an encounter not sanctioned by her community, eventually leads to her suicide; Stacey’s mother has a unique sexual relationship in which her husband’s brother is the father of her children.

Disease also plays a major role as a point of contact in the novels; the relationship each community has with disease and how it leads to characters’ deaths teaches much about that community. Both native communities portrayed are riddled with one sickness or another, one presumably seen coming from the non-native community, and which that community does not seem to have as much difficulty surviving. As characters die in both novels, the native healers try to find spiritual solutions to clean the illnesses away, without much success. The disease challenges their spiritual power, and since the disease is seen to come from outside of the community, the challenge also becomes cultural.

On many levels, the beliefs of the native and non-native communities are alien to one another. More often than not, the characters are shocked when they hear about the other’s understanding of spirituality and death. They usually either dismiss or fear it, depending on the challenge such knowledge represents to their community. Only rarely do they ever acknowledge the potential validity or spiritual value of the belief. Laforgue and the other Jesuit priests, Mestigoit and Old Dominic, all very spiritual characters endowed with temporal powers by their respective cultures, seem to be the most reluctant to change their world views. On the other hand, characters such as Chomina, Daniel or Stacey, being more practical in nature, seem more inclined to allow the Other's spirituality to imprint upon them the possibility that, at the very least, their own perception might be narrow-minded and, at best, that there might be some truth to the beliefs of the Other.
The moment of intercultural contact is therefore where we start our reflection. In the opening of *Ravensong*, Lee Maracle revisits colonization by retelling of the arrival of the European settlers and appropriating the story in the native villagers' voice, giving it a unique perspective, the native's own. What should have been a positive encounter between two cultures becomes corrupted by disease and impacts the community, not just at that moment but for the future as well. Contact becomes destructive here.

Approaching the village was a tall ship, sails billowing in the wind. [...] The ship sent a small skiff out to greet the growing number of people gathering at the shoreline. There were no women on the boat. No women on the ship. [...] Young women were sent aboard the ship – fifty in all. [...] The women were returned to the village. They became the first untouchable victims of disease. [...] What had been the customary gratification of human need had brought death among the villagers. Never again would wolf women serve men in quite the same way.

(Maracle, 10)

These tragic deaths are symbolic of the death of the native traditional way of life and culture and the beginning of colonization. From the moment of contact, the lives of the natives were irremediably altered. Disease is but one of the faces that death assumes in the novels, but it is one that also haunts *Black Robe*. The native girl Annuka, upon reaching the mission where Laforgue will finally carry out his ministry, warns her lover Daniel about the threat she perceives. "The dead. There are many here. There has been a sickness" (Moore, 205).

Colonial and postcolonial experiences have left their mark on the native cultures of Canada. Native and non-native thinkers alike have been wrestling with the politics of contact in
colonial and postcolonial context for quite some time now. Robert Young, author of *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, wonders at the implications of a postcolonial studies. "Postcolonial cultural critique involves the reconsideration of this history, particularly from the perspectives of those who suffered its effects, together with the defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact" (Young, 4). In the works under study, this means that we will need to adjust the lens so that we take into account, insofar as possible, of the native communities portrayed. Both authors manage to effectively illustrate the native perspective; Maracle does it as an insider while Moore does it from the outsider's perspective. This is relevant because, coming back to Young:

> Today, all former settler colonies are doubly positioned: [...] they are colonies who have freed themselves from the colonial rule [...] On the other hand, [...] the settlers themselves became the oppressors of the indigenous peoples who already occupied the land. (19-20)

While Moore may have the best of intentions and may hold no bias against any group, it is important to remember that he writes not only from an outsider's perspective, looking into the native community, but that he also seeks his inspiration from *Les Relations Jésuites*, a colonial document written by the missionaries in the 1600s. But the argument should be brought up for Maracle as well, especially when she speaks of the white community portrayed in *Ravensong*. She stands, as Moore does in *Black Robe*, as an outsider from the other community looking into, trying to understand and come to grips with the Other.

Although the postcolonial approach needs to be considered, it is not the primary focus of this study on intercultural encounters with death. As native author Thomas King points out in
"Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," one should not look at intercultural studies strictly from a postcolonial perspective, mainly because it places the focus on the influence of contact and tends to disregard what existed prior to it: "The idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question" (King, 12). Although it is important to remember the influence of colonialism and post-colonialism while studying representations of intercultural encounter, it is also equally important to remember that there are other influences to take into account. Issues of authenticity, of native and non-native voice and theories on death, for example, can all enhance this study and will be addressed here.

Gareth Griffiths argues in "The Myth of Authenticity" that one needs to be aware, when analyzing Native voices, that there is more than one native voice, as there are many different tribes. In the two novels under study, there are at least three: the Huron and the Iroquois in *Black Robe*, and the Salish in *Ravensong*. Given these varied tribal backgrounds, one would be hard pressed to attempt to define some shared concept of Nativeness without taking these differences into account. Contact with one tribe should be considered on its own and not reduced to contact with all Native peoples. Although the rituals portrayed in the novels are not very descriptive and a specific list of rituals from each tribal background, were such a list available, would be only secondary to the study at hand, seeing as how the specific rituals in the stories are not clearly defined. There is a sense that ritualistic behaviour is embedded in the natives' lives. The emphasis in the study will be placed upon making sure that specific beliefs and rituals, as portrayed in the stories, are explained and differentiated when possible. However, information about tribal rituals are difficult to find, not only because of the silencing and devaluing of native
culture, but also because this knowledge is not always shared with outsiders and native writers themselves must be cautious about depicting tribal beliefs to outsiders.

There is no longer such a thing as "pure" nativeness, if there ever was (Griffiths, 53); what may remain are new hybrid voices, varied and complex enough to bear traces of contact. Griffiths goes further claiming that in order to ensure the survival of the tribe, its literature, oral by nature, had to be adaptive. Oral literature could therefore allow for a change to take place within itself, responding to the necessities of survival and the evolution of its cultures, reinventing itself as it needed and allowing the original meaning of the stories to be altered. We can speculate that although the original meaning prior to contact may be lost, whatever meaning remains after contact is still identified as native, to varying degrees.

In order to better understand the various voices that need to be heard in this analysis, we can look to Gail Guthrie Valaskakis' book *Indian Country: On Contemporary Native Culture*, in which she ponders what marks something as native and what does not. As she explains, some "non-Natives [...] inspired by romanticism, spirituality, alienation or conviction, reconstitute themselves as Indian" (Valaskakis, 221). Her belief is shared by others, like Margery Fee in "Who can Write as Other?" and Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation*. Both authors support Valaskakis' notion that the native identity, seen from a non-native point of view, is a reinvention that is idealized in both its positive and negative concepts, what Goldie calls fear being our distrust of the native and temptation being our desire to identify with the native Other. Maurizio Gatti, author of *Littérature Amérindienne du Québec: Écrits de langue française*, asserts the following: "Un auteur amérindien est celui qui se considère et se définit comme tel" (Gatti, 34). In *Histoire de la littérature Amérindienne au Québec*, Diane Boudreau states: "Les auteurs amérindiens sont ceux qui sont reconnus comme tels d’abord par les Amérindiens eux-mêmes et,
ensuite, par les Blancs" (Boudreau, 16). Moore is not a native author, nor does he claim to be a spokesperson for natives, as opposed to Lee Maracle who is of native Salish origin and claims her tradition.

When reading about the native communities portrayed in the stories, we must remember that they are built on different models than the white communities. There is also a sense that death inside the native community in both novels has much deeper impact on the whole of the community than death in non-native communities where individual redemption is stressed against collective continuity. Traditional native communities are usually much more tightly bound and relationally constructed than non-native communities. Because of the negative impact that contact through colonization has had on the native cultures, the communities have been forced into closing their ideological borders in order to protect their physical and spiritual integrity. It becomes an issue of survival. "In narratives of pain and empowerment, Native people construct both the unity of being tribal and the difference in being Indian" (Valaskakis, 216). Here, Valaskakis lets us understand that it is this unity in difference that has protected the native culture from fading away. This native model for community, shown in the novels and built on a greater need for survival, also instructs the native voices from within the stories.

Robert Hertz discusses how death in all communities has a collective impact: "To the organic event [of death] is added a complex mass of beliefs, emotions and activities which give it a distinctive character" (Hertz, 197). He acknowledges that death is much more than an isolated event: it is also part of a larger cultural concept that helps build communities around shared notions. These notions can claim the existence of a soul, of a resting place for the dead; they can enforce certain ritualistic practices, such as wearing a specific set of clothing during periods of mourning or the particular handling of the body of the deceased. Whatever their specifics, they
serve to bring the community together in a time of great stress. "Thus death has a specific meaning for the social consciousness: it is the object of a collective representation" (197).

If death cannot be known, then we must study the effects it has on the community, and how the rituals and ideologies behind it are shaped within the narratives. We can start by examining the beliefs which are elaborated by the living to help demystify what happens to the dead, and how they are presented in the stories. We can also contemplate how the rituals which surround the death of a community member, either the handling of the body or the funeral rites, for example, help to mediate that encounter; how they allow both the individuals and the community to survive the loss. To know more about death, we can analyze the individuals whose task it is to perform these rituals and what role they play in their respective communities. We can also witness the personal and psychological impact of death on the various characters, and how they cope with its reality. Death also emerges from the works through the complex narrative structure, in metaphors and imagery set up by the authors, or even in the discourse on death held by the narrators and characters, Other ways death should be evident are through tone and mood and genre, and possibly through intertextuality with the Bible, the Jesuit Relations, and allusion to native oral culture.

Throughout the course of history, our perception of death has shifted greatly. Hertz outlined the notion in "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death". He states: "Death has not always been represented and felt as it is in our society" (28). Many scholars have since then looked into the matter, hoping to understand how death has evolved over the years. Philippe Ariès, a historian, has written extensively on the subject of death and its evolution from medieval times to our modern age. In "The Hour of Our Death", Ariès looks at how the European perception of death has been altered by the movements of history. His analysis
presents four aspects to each model of death: 1) the awareness of the individual; 2) society's defences against nature; 3) the belief in the afterlife and 4) the belief in evil (41). In a more comprehensive article, "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Towards Death in Western Societies" (1977), Ariès also explains how the perception of death has evolved over the centuries, such that a reversal has occurred. He gives two examples of taboos: sex and death. It used to be, according to Ariès, that sex was not spoken of, but death was – but in recent years, openness towards discussing sex has been noticeable, while dialogue over death has subsided, to the point that the taboo has shifted from sex to death – at least among sociologists. (Ariès, 135) In popular culture, this taboo results in the use of euphemism: "It is no longer the children who are born in cabbages, but the dead who disappear among the flowers" (151). Ariès argues that ideas and belief systems evolve over time, and that changes in society affect the perception of death. He presents this evolution on several different levels: ways of mourning, shared or private experience, and intended meaning.

According to Ariès, rituals of mourning have generally evolved since the Middle Ages in Western societies. Prior to that period, the tradition was to weep loudly, scream or tear cloth; the ritual was impassioned and this was portrayed in literature published in the Middle Ages. As time went on, mourning became more ritualized and less spontaneous. People were paid to be mourners. Banquets were held for friends whom the deceased had invited prior to his demise. It was also highly recommended that those in mourning shelter their grief from the world, not only to protect those not in mourning, but also to make sure that the deceased was not forgotten too quickly. The 19th century saw the act of physical seclusion replaced by one of moral seclusion; the family of the deceased could partake in the funeral rites and other such activities, but they had to wear special clothing to signify they were still in mourning. Nowadays, most grief is best
kept hidden, so as not to affect others and to deny the power death still holds over us, despite all of our medical and scientific breakthroughs.

Ariès also examines death as a shared experience. He argues that in earlier Western societies death was a communal experience that was intended to bind the community together, to help cope with the loss of a valued member of society. The purpose was also to empower the dying, to give him an ultimate moment of triumph over his own existence – the only moment he could really control in the end (43-44). According to Ariès, the current experience of death has shifted in the other direction on both levels. Death has been removed from the community and placed in the hospital; it has become a private, if not hidden, matter. This isolation is also not done for the benefit of the dying individual but for that of the living, in order to protect them from the reality of death (46-47).

While Ariès' arguments need to be viewed with some scrutiny, since cultural specificity needs to be taken into account, they do find an echo in both works under study. Black Robe, for example, with its narrative set in the 17th century, still has the heroic figures of dying men (Chomina, Laforgue's possible martyrdom), empowered through their sacrifices and heralded as heroes by their brethren. They are given power over their death. Ravensong, on the other hand, set in the modern era, focuses on how isolation in death takes its toll upon the community, severing ties between its members and weakening the community, and on the taboos and interdictions that come with it (Polly's suicide after a forbidden act of lust, or the deaths in the hospitals). Death renders almost everyone powerless in Ravensong.

It would be presumptuous, at best, to claim that by understanding the beliefs and rituals that are built around death, we can avoid its more negative aspects. Death, despite our best
efforts to deal with it, always comes back to challenge us, both as individuals and as communities. How we face that challenge is influenced both by our own individual nature and by the support groups that surround us. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a doctor who worked with dying patients most of her life, writes the following about death and loss: "A man who is facing his death faces the loss of everybody and everything he has ever loved" (Wyschogrod, 32). And it rings true. There can be no more final experience than death, because anything that lies beyond is completely inaccessible. There is nothing to which we can compare death. The idea of death literally challenges our very being. And that same truth applies to the social order. When death strikes any community, the whole is diminished. The community loses something they can never get back.

To resist this challenge, people and their communities have enacted rituals of continuity that are intended to reclaim whatever is lost when someone dies. According to Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, editors of *Death and the Regeneration of Life*: "Religious ideology uses the promise of rebirth to negate the finality of death" (Bloch, 9). If there is something beyond this existence – reincarnation, resurrection, a spirit world, heaven or hell – then the journey of the soul never ends, even if the body withers away. Hertz presents this in the form of the life-cycle. "Every life-cycle ritual implies the passage from one group to another: an exclusion, i.e. a death, and a new integration, i.e. a rebirth" (qtd. in Bloch, 5). Continuation for the community can happen with the transition of the deceased individual from one world to the next, represented by the rituals enacted. In *Black Robe*, the world of night of the Huron, where the dead live on in the afterlife, is a place not dissimilar to the real world. Some of the natives in *Ravensong* share a similar belief that the other world is a reflection of this one. But lack of continuity in the community through rupture is also depicted, especially in *Ravensong* whereby the community is
greatly diminished by the passing of people like Nora and Old Dominic whose unique expertise and knowledge in practical and spiritual matters becomes lost to future generations. Still, even if one individual fades away, his or her influence is carried over into the next generation by the community's spiritual beliefs, and in that fashion, the individual is never really gone. The promise of rebirth in the afterlife is a way to reclaim both the temporal and the spiritual power that has been lost through the individual's death. Since it is impossible to achieve actual victory over death, any such victory can be only symbolic.

The intercultural approach to death which orients my study also stems from the fact that the spiritualities I am contemplating are not my own. As a non-native subject myself, reading books portraying Native individuals wrestling with issues of mortality and death, I am an observer and an outsider. A Native researcher could just as easily stand across from me, looking at my own belief systems in the same fashion. Fabian claims that this happens in part because the other is exotic, even in death, and mostly everyone is drawn to or at least intrigued by what is different (Robben, 51). But there is also another, more personal, reason why most theorists and researchers look outside their own society for answers: the denial of one's own death. People can see other people eventually passing on, but they cannot envision their own demise, according to Fabian. And this brings me back to the moment of contact and the encounters generated in my two selected novels.

By actively looking at the other cultural group, and this is true both in the novels as well as in real life, we cannot help but compare their ideas to our own, and their ideas can influence us. We can accept these values for what they are, but remain detached from them; we can attempt to deny them but we can also allow them to influence our own way of thinking.
Regardless of our reaction, spiritual and intercultural encounters help redefine the parameters of our difficult relationship with death.

The belief in soul and spirit is of paramount importance to this study. The soul is, according to Webster's dictionary, "an entity which is regarded as being the immortal part of the person and, though having no physical or material reality, is credited with the functions of thinking and willing, and hence determining all behaviour" (Webster, 1360). In *Black Robe*, the soul becomes the Jesuits’ most important assignment: saving the immortal but supposedly sinful souls of the natives, so they can be led into heaven along with the rest of Christianity. It is paramount to their presence in North America.

Spirit is a synonym of soul, but it also represents "the life principle, esp. in man, orig. regarded as inherent in the breath or as infused by deity" (1373). But the spirit can also be "a supernatural being, esp. one thought of as haunting or possessing a person, house, etc., as a ghost, or as inhabiting a certain region, being of a certain (good or evil) character, etc., as an angel, demon, fairy or elf" (1360). When referring to the immortal part of being, I will be using the referent soul. But when I study manifestations of creatures or magic, or refer to animism in any fashion, I will use the term spirit.

For example, several characters in both novels are not entirely of human origin and act as spirits in the story. In *Ravensong*, there are quite a few: Raven, Cedar, Water, even the fish act as characters in the story with their own voice. In *Black Robe*, those kinds of characters are much less vocal, but they are no less present: there is the She Manitou and the Wolf spirit, to name only two. These characters usually operate from the Other World, and their voices and their presence bridge the gap between this world and the next, in the form of an extended animistic
allegory where the spirits take on human characteristics, if not human form. Their impact on the worlds of the novels remains subtle, but their influence is undeniable.

Still, having defined the terminology, we need to address the fact that the words 'soul' and 'spirit' are, according to the Dictionary of Native American Mythology, very inadequate to represent the truths of Native culture. Soul, for example, has a clear Christian connotation, and should be limited to the idea of 'life force' in terms of native thought, even though this force might sometimes be personified (Gill, 280). As for spirit, the word remains too vague and can only approximate the breadth of Native American conceptions of the spirit (282). The terms will still be used throughout this work, but their inadequacy in regards to native concepts must always be kept in mind. For example, we now know, thanks to recent research, that the original translation for the word Manitou, Great Spirit, is actually a mistranslation and that the notion of Great Mystery is a more accurate one.

Going deeper into the notions of soul and spirit takes us into the realm of animism. Initially coined by Edward Tylor in the 19th century, the word has since evolved due to research and its treatment by several scholars over the years. Modern encyclopaedias identify it as "the belief that all life is produced by a spiritual force, or that all natural phenomena have souls" (Webster, 1989). Of notable importance to the evolution of the term is Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, who delved greatly into the concept of animism in his book Totem et Tabou. Using theories from previous scholars, Freud helps to determine the origins of animism. "Nous savons déjà que la croyance à l'âme et aux démons, qui caractérise l'animisme, s'est formée sous l'influence des impressions que la mort produit sur l'homme" (Freud, 103). According to Freud and his contemporaries, the sight of the first skeletons provoked the notion of an afterlife and of the soul. After all, most incarnations of death, as an entity or spirit, portray it simply as a
skeleton. As opposed to Tylor, who believed animism was the result of an erroneous mental process, Freud saw a more practical aspect to it: "Le besoin pratique de soumettre le monde a dû jouer un role dans ces efforts" (92). By taking ownership of nature, by imagining his own power over the natural world, early man was able to face the inevitability of death, also prompting him or her to elaborate notions of spiritual entities to explain the unfathomable character of death.

Freud continues: "L’animmisme est un système intellectuel : il n'explique pas seulement tel ou tel phénomène particulier, mais permet de concevoir le monde comme un vaste ensemble, à partir d'un point donné" (92). Animism is more than just simple belief: it is a structured and reasoned, albeit maybe subconscious, process that allows individuals and societies to contextualize those aspects of reality which they cannot explain in any other fashion. Animism is the building block on which religion was constructed; in the animistic phase, humans hold power over nature in that one finds the answers needed within oneself; the religious phase which follows sees humans unable to come to terms with some aspects of the world, and the power is handed to the gods (or God). The power is thus relinquished: if the individual cannot exert his or her own will against the powers of nature and death, then surely someone else can. Freud also states that from there, when the gods fail to account for the world in the same way that the personal power of animism did, science comes to the forefront (Freud, 92-94). But fragments of animism are still present today in many cultures, and those fragments are part of the modern tapestry of myths and beliefs.

In current times, animism is perceived as much more than a simple belief system. Nurit Bird-David explains it well, in "Animism Revisited", when she claims that animism is actually a social and relational construct, and is not simply based on ideas and notions, but is learned and experienced during interaction with the environment (and its perceived spirit). It is therefore
actually influenced by the individual's perception and bias, and although many aspects of it are shared through the community, there is also a very personal aspect to it. Bird-David also claims that animism is actually a process of social cognition, of a reflective process of attempting to understand the world, as opposed to the imagined need for survival exposed by Freud, or mental confusion or erroneous perception as hinted by Tylor when he first introduced the concept. Bird-David argues, like traditionalist natives do, that animism is not an error in judgement, but is actually more of a perceptual and relational experience with nature. This definition explains the animistic views presented in both novels as central to native spiritualities. In *Ravensong*, Cedar, River and Raven are both natural creatures and animistic creations that have relationships with the native community. Raven attempts to provide guidance through her voice, more often than not unheard by most, even though all acknowledge her presence. Cedar shares in the plight of the community as it too weeps for the dead. And River both represents the barrier separating the native community from the white town and serves as a reminder of time going forward.

In "The Politics of Animism," John Clammer takes a similar line of argument as Bird-David when he states that "the somewhat abused concept of animism actually reflects a deep ecological consciousness, one that sees the environment not merely as an object, but as something inseparable from the species-being of humanity" (Clammer, 102). We find that a consciousness of the ecological relationship with the world is depicted in the novels. For example, Stacey's conversations in *Ravensong* with Raven, Cedar or the River, or, in *Black Robe*, the Huron's dependence on nature for food and shelter and the efforts made to respect the spirits of nature that provide such protection.

The underlying spirituality of Christianity, and Father Laforgue's beliefs in particular, can be explained by studying the *Exercices Spirituels* written by the founder of the Jesuit order,
Saint Ignatius (also known as Saint-Ignace de Loyola), for its depiction of the primary elements of faith, especially as it regards the notion of death. Saint Ignatius' teachings are, after all, not only the foundation of the order, but also of the missions to New France at the start of the seventeenth century. They would have been required readings and studies for missionaries such as Laforgue, and would also be reflected in their writings of the period. It is also of note that Brian Moore's story was inspired directly by his reading of Les Relations Jésuites, in itself a collection of letters and documents written by the Jesuits themselves during the period portrayed in the novel. Moore himself was educated by Jesuit priests, so their spiritual doctrine was also known to him.

A good place to start is with what Saint Ignatius calls the fundamental principle: "L'homme est créé pour louer, révérer et servir Dieu, notre Seigneur, et par ce moyen, sauver son âme" (Saint Ignace, 15-16). The first tenet of the faith places man immediately under the purview of God, and all our actions are therefore aimed at pleasing Him, thus insuring that the individual's soul will be granted salvation. That is the essence of the doctrine, and it is repeated later in different words, when, quoting from the Bible, Saint Ignatius claims that in life only one thing is necessary: to serve God. Only that specific action can guarantee the soul's salvation, which should be every Christian's duty. Being saved is a necessity for a Christian. "Car enfin, si je ne SAUVE pas mon âme, je la PERDS infailliblement" (22). And there is nothing greater on this Earth, or in the next life, than one's own soul.

Saint Ignatius draws this conclusion partly from his reflections on death, which he divides into four tenets: knowledge of death, certainty of death, uncertainty of the circumstances surrounding death, and the fact that death can only occur once (75-78). Because of these four ideas, with special emphasis on the last one, Saint Ignatius says that every individual must live
each day as if it were his last, and must therefore be ready to account for the salvation of his soul at any given moment. Everyone will die, but we only get one chance to do it right, and so we must be ever vigilant not to fall into temptation and sin. And in this case temptation and sin are everywhere around the individual who is trying to save his soul. Man must not hope for anything more than what his creator grants him: all of God's creation is there to help man reach his salvation, so man must only cling to the natural world as long as it helps him achieve salvation, otherwise he must distance himself from everything of this world (16-17). This, again, takes us back to the fact of death, more specifically to what happens after the individual has passed on. Saint Ignatius asks the reader of Exercices Spirituels to place himself in the skin of the deceased. As the body dies and the person moves into the other world, three things happen: the body starts decaying, and whatever pleasures it provided in life are no longer accessible; the belongings and riches gathered in life are lost in death and cannot be carried over; those who experienced the loss of the deceased learn to move on, and the world continues despite his the absence of the deceased (79-82). When the individual dies, nothing remains of his or her connection to the physical or natural world; only the soul endures, according to Ignatius, and that is why every effort must be made to save it.

This explains, in great part, Laforgue's seemingly blind devotion to his cause, despite the constant resistance by the natives to his attempts to baptize and convert them before the threat of death. He believes in a spiritual world where nothing is carried over from the physical realm, and only the soul has intrinsic value. He slowly starts to perceive, in the course of the story, that the Huron's animalistic beliefs hold the spiritual world as an echo of the physical world, a concept that does not correspond to his rigorous religious upbringing. Once in the world of night, the
natives believe they carry over their bodies, in a new form, so they can keep hunting, fishing and moving as they did in life. The soul, as understood by Laforgue, does not behave in such a way.

There are also animistic elements in Christian literature and some of them are present in Saint Ignatius' work. A great part of the spiritual task each Christian must submit himself to is "le discernement des esprits" (7). This intellectual process is designed to help the individual better understand the influence that the angels, good and bad, can have on his character and on the salvation of his soul. Saint Ignatius defines two types of spirits, or angels: the good, who serve God, are focused on bringing salvation unto man. Their hand is subtle, quiet and unassuming. The bad angels (or demons) are there to corrupt man into perversion. They are mostly aggressive in their influence, and often will even wear a mask as a deception to fool people into following them, only revealing their true nature once the individual has set out on the wrong path (237-241). They are agents of the enemy of God, and they are present in Black Robe to some extent. Some see the so-called 'Savages' as agents of temptation, while others simply see them as victims. At some point, Laforgue concludes that Mestigoit, the shaman, is a form of demon; later, Laforgue even believes that a demon may have entered his own person, only to be cast out later.

The Christian spirituality of the Jesuits is essential to an understanding of how Laforgue (and the other religious characters in Black Robe) interact with the native belief systems. The dichotomy between their ideals are clearly apparent both in the relationship with nature, which the natives hold in high respect and cherish, but which Christianity places as subservient to man's will, and keeps at a distance unless it allows man to achieve the salvation of his soul. The quasi-magical influence of the angels, who work either for the good or the corruption of man, must
also be taken into account when comparing belief systems. One culture’s demon can be perceived as the other’s benevolent spirit, after all.

In order to investigate moments of intercultural and spiritual encounter, I have structured my analysis according to various aspects of death, not just as suggested by theoretical approaches, but also as death is represented in the novels. It is my belief that by working with both theoretical and textual elements, I will be able to showcase how these encounters develop within the narrative, to highlight some of theoretical approaches presented beforehand and to illustrate the complexities of the intercultural and spiritual nature of said encounters. From this analysis, I will attempt to draw conclusions as to the unique relationships that develop from encounters with death. I have specifically divided my research into four chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of death in the novel: the afterlife, rituals and community, spiritual and social power, and silence and isolation.

The first chapter deals with the existence of an afterlife within the worlds of the novels. The concept refers to those other worlds that are speculated to exist outside of ours, where the souls of the deceased are said to travel after the body dies, or where the spiritual creatures or entities are said to exist. The concept of an afterlife postulates the existence of such a thing as the soul or the spirit and what it can mean. Within that understanding of existence beyond death, we can examine the novels’ treatment of the soul and the soul’s requirements for reaching its intended final destination. Finally, we can also explore the unique relationship that the native communities, in this respect, have with their ancestors. Black Robe, for example, explores the implications of a Native world of night as opposed to a Christian paradise for the Jesuits and those they baptize. Ravensong is populated with spiritual creatures such as Cedar and Raven, whose very presence alters the lives of the citizens. These spiritual creations, creatures from
beyond, also help bridge the gap between this world and the next, as much as the relationship
with the town’s ancestors does.

The second chapter presents the rituals which cultural communities use to shape their
relationship with death. The rituals are usually intended to allow groups to know how to properly
handle the body of the deceased and how to mourn the dead. Rituals also perform vital social and
personal functions to help the communities and the individuals cope with the loss of a member of
their unit. In Black Robe, we will see how the very simplest of rituals, baptism, can become
convoluted when an outsider gives the ritual a new meaning. And Ravensong also brings forth
the question of what to do with the body, before and after death. These rituals impact daily lives
and the understanding of what lies beyond death for those witnessing and enacting the rituals.

The third chapter examines the various individuals that attempt to claim power over death
or those who have died, and how that power allows these individuals to help their communities
in dealing with the uncertainties of death. It also looks into how that power is understood by
native and non-native cultures; that power is then either appropriated or rejected, in order to
protect the spiritual integrity of each community. If this power proves dangerous in any way, it
can be denied; if, on the contrary, it proves helpful, then it can be reclaimed as one’s own, thus
strengthening the power of the individual claiming it. The Other’s power is often perceived as a
threat to one’s own power and beliefs. Black Robe places the conflict squarely between the
shaman Mestigoit and Father Laforgue, as they battle for spiritual control over the Natives. The
native community in Ravensong is held together by its spiritual leaders, and their deaths greatly
alter the power relationships within the community and with the outside world.
The fourth chapter delves into silence and isolation, and how both are manifested in the encounters with death in the novels. Examples include, in *Black Robe*, Chomina's apparent anxiety towards death when he isolates himself for his dying moments, or Laforgue’s self-imposed penance for his sins; or in *Ravensong*, Old Dominic’s unexpected death when he isolates himself so no one can see him wither away or the Old Snake is cast out from the village after the revelation of his abuse of his daughters. Both silence and isolation are instrumental in protecting the integrity of the community from the negative aspects of death, although both can also carry a destructive aspect to them, as they can lead to social death, in the form of exile, or physical and spiritual death, in the form of suicide. While *Black Robe* looks deeply into the notion of martyrdom and sacrifice for the Jesuit priests, *Ravensong* reflects more on Polly’s suicide and Stacey’s reflections on it.

The conclusion examines how through this process of spiritual and intercultural encounter in the face of death, a transformation occurs which allows each culture to adapt to the other or keeps the transformation from happening, in order to protect the integrity of the community. Can Laforgue truly hope to convert the natives, or is his spiritual message lost to them because they cannot understand the spiritual world he is trying to open for them? Can Stacey truly understand the reasons behind Polly's suicide? Can any form of mediation between the various characters arise from the encounters in death portrayed in the novels, and if so, how does this mediation occur? Can common ground be found between the cultures within their spiritualities? I stated at the beginning of this Introduction that death must, to some extent, be demystified in order to be understood. The theories presented here will allow us to compare the intercultural and spiritual encounters with death in the context of each novel.
Each subsequent chapter will bring us closer to the truth we are seeking, to a better understanding of the intercultural and spiritual encounters between the various communities in the novels.
Chapter I:

The Afterlife

A primordial debate in the study of spirituality concerns the existence and elaboration of the afterlife in belief systems. Every faith or religion has its own interpretation and understanding of life after death. Bronislaw Malinowski, famed anthropologist and sociologist, described in "Magic, Science and Religion," the internal debate faced by cultures in the following manner:

And here, into this play of emotional forces, into this supreme dilemma of life and final death, religion steps in, selecting the positive creed, the comforting view, the culturally valuable belief in immortality, in the spirit independent of the body, and in the continuance of life after death. (Robben, 21)

The belief in an afterlife is presented in both Ravensong and Black Robe. The characters construct their faith around an understanding of shared cultural values, which are shaped by their encounters with life and death. The existence of the soul as much as its journey beyond death is seen as an important element of the characters' spiritualities. Each belief system has its own unique characteristics as to how it handles the relationship with death, and this helps to create the intercultural and the spiritual encounters under study.

In both novels, the belief in an afterlife is of great importance to the communities portrayed and to the individuals involved. Moore's Black Robe sees two conflicting views of the afterlife set against each other. On the one hand, Laforgue's view is influenced by his Catholic upbringing and the Christian dogma of which he is the representative. Heaven and hell are real to him (and by association, to his ward, Daniel). Laforgue will find salvation only after absolution,
and he will be granted his eternal place at God's right hand if he fulfills his duties and accepts his potential fate as a martyr for His will. On the other hand, the natives have their world of night, where death is no paradise, but a continuation of their existence, and not necessarily something to look forward to. Laforgue's afterlife beckons to him; the natives shy away from theirs.

Maracle's *Ravensong* mostly dwells on the native afterlife, where all the tribal ancestors are gathered, looking on the current and future generations, providing spiritual guidance and sometimes passing judgement, such as in the case of the wife-beater, Old Snake. There is some concern given to the story about the fate of Polly's soul when she commits suicide, but there is no definitive answer given in that respect, only general inquiries and reflections by Stacey. And although the native visions of the afterlife in the novels share some similarities, they are ultimately different from one another, among the native Salish, Huron or Iroquois communities.

Four aspects of these various interpretations of the afterlife arise from the analysis of the novels. Foremost is the notion of the soul or spirit and its existence, something that almost all protagonists agree upon. The main difference between the non-native and native perceptions in that respect is that the natives believe that everything in nature has a spiritual animistic quality as we saw in the Introduction. This is acknowledged both in *Ravensong*, by all the voices granted to beings that would not be granted voices in other forms of literature, such as Raven, Cedar and Water. We also find the same reflection in *Black Robe*, both in Laforgue's presentation of native beliefs as well as in the dialogue between the native characters. The spiritually relevant characters of both *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*, such as Raven or the She-Manitou, are also given human qualities and insights.

The second aspect showcased is that of the afterlife itself, the other world, and its representations within the various texts. The Christian belief in a heavenly paradise beyond death
clashes directly with the native belief portrayed in *Black Robe* of the world of night; similar reflections can be found in *Ravensong*, as the native characters debate within their own community the differences between their own afterlife and that which is being presented to them by the Christian natives in their community.

A third aspect is the issue of redemption, or what happens to the soul once it is freed from its mortal coil and sent to the great beyond. The Christian faith portrayed in the stories places a great emphasis on the "harvest of souls" (Moore, 232) and forgiveness of our earthly sins. As we saw from the Jesuit perspective in *Exercices spirituels*, the body is to be abandoned in favour of the soul's salvation. In *Ravensong*, however, the Natives see redemption in the afterlife as a way to reconnect with those who have gone away, their past generations, as part of a chain of belonging inscribed within a greater continuity. For instance, their now-deceased ancestors still have a form of physical or ethereal body which allows them to interact with nature and be seen at night, or in dreams.

The final aspect in terms of study of the afterlife is that of lineage, or the link to past and future generations. It is particularly important to the natives in both novels. *Ravensong*'s discourse, for example, seems aimed at restoring the link that is being severed between the current and future native generations, and all the generations that came before. The natives are connected to their families and relations beyond this life and into the next. Here, we truly have a spiritual encounter across generations.

1) Soul and Spirit

The underlying concept behind the spiritual worlds presented in both novels is the belief in animistic forces. It is prevalent from the native point of view, but also finds roots in more
Judeo-Christian faith, albeit under a different guise – after all, current theories in anthropology place animism and religion along an evolutionary path, animism preceding the advent of religion. Animism allows us to grant human aspects to animals, plants and inanimate objects, thereby investing them with a form of spiritual presence and allowing us to relate to them. It is of the utmost importance in traditional native beliefs, because, according to Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, where he draws on ideas by Lévi-Strauss: "Savages[sic] build models of reality - of the natural world, of the self, of society [...] by ordering perceived particulars into immediately intelligible wholes" (Geertz, 352). The personification of nature that is animism serves that purpose. Native mythologies were built to explain the elements of nature that could not be controlled. This touches on a notion presented by Jay Lifton and Robert Olson, in "Symbolic Immortality." They call the idea "natural" immortality: "Whatever happens to man, the trees, mountains, seas and rivers endure." (Robben, 36) A good way to ensure one's immortality is to create a connection with the permanency of creation, and to see ourselves in all natural things. The natives are so connected to their natural surroundings that it becomes more than alive to them: it has a spirit and a will which must be respected.

In *Ravensong*, we have several voices of nature echoing throughout the text. Raven's voice, of course, dominates the discourse, as she becomes the instigator for the entire narrative. It is her will, after all, that the westerners be brought into contact with the locals. "Bring them here to Raven's shore. Transform their ways. Deliver Raven to the whole earth" (Maracle, 191). In the opening paragraph of the novel, we hear Raven singing, and nature chanting along, their melody creating a voice as powerful as music (9). Much later, as Stacey halts beyond the bridge, looking down at the river, she hears water's voice singing, echoing her rage at the cruelty of the world (40). Here, there is an established connection, not only between the spirits, but between the
spirits and the native community, and it is a place where a spiritual encounter takes shape. There is a dialogue, or at the very least nature is trying to speak to the native community, although they sometimes fail to hear its voice.

*Black Robe* handles these voices in a different fashion. The natives in that story still harbour belief in animistic forces, but their voices and personifications are often much bleaker than those found in *Ravensong*. Perhaps that is because their lives seem harsher than those of the native community in Maracle's work. When Mestigoit and Laforgue are arguing over their spiritual conceptions, the shaman tries to explain a spiritual entity, the She-Manitou, to the Catholic priest:

> See? She wears a robe of beautiful hair. It is the hair of the men She has killed.
> Just now, when you were down by the river, I heard Her call your name.
> 'Nicanis?' She called. I knew then that the demon had left you. Look, now. Can you not see Her? (Moore, 87)

Because the two men do not share their spiritual background, the presence of the She Manitou cannot be perceived by Laforgue. The entity belongs to a different spiritual world than the one Laforgue believes in. Annuka has a similar vision when the group is later fleeing from the Iroquois. Death takes on the same face for her as it did for Mestigoit, because she shares his cultural background. "She knew that the She Manitou waited in the trees" (186). But again, she is the only one to perceive Her – neither Laforgue nor Daniel, despite their acceptance of her beliefs, can witness Her presence.

At another moment, Moore's narrative presents the belief that when a Savage drinks alcohol, a demon takes over his body; therefore a drunken Savage is not to be held accountable
for his actions while inebriated (27). Attributing a spirit to the liquor is a belief that the native thinkers and spiritualists of the time invoked to explain a reality that they had not experienced prior to contact, having had no access to alcohol before it was introduced to them by the Europeans.

The most notable mention of a positive animistic figure in *Black Robe* is that of Chomina's reigning spirit, that of the wolf, which guides Chomina in his decision-making (171). The wolf is alluded to only very briefly in the story, when Chomina has to make an important life-altering decision. He consults his spirit guide to find illumination and agrees to go back for Laforgue and Daniel.

To the natives portrayed in both works, nature and all its aspects have a spiritual quality. There is a practical aspect to this, as Chomina points out to Laforgue: "Look around you. The sun, the forest, the animals. That is all we have" (184). Life is a fight for survival to the Huron, so their spiritual life reflects that constant battle. Because nature plays such a vital role in the survival of these tribes, it is important for them to identify with it and learn to negotiate with its forces. Laforgue also complains, through his Judaeo-Christian lens, that the natives "believe that all things have a soul: men, animals, fish, forests, rivers" (101). In his own mind, he associates this belief with that of the demon Belial, who is in himself an animistic creature born out of Christian theology, a demon (100-101). Daniel's reflection takes this even further: "They lie to us as they would never lie to each other, because they do not think of us as men but monsters" (58). The relationship with nature is so dominant and so necessary to the natives that they value it more than the ones they have with the Jesuit priests, despite the Jesuits' being fellow humans. To the natives in *Black Robe*, these newcomers exist outside of the natural order of the world. Their
presence is as disruptive and as dangerous as any other element the natives must battle to survive.

The native spirituality in *Ravensong* works in much the same pattern as in *Black Robe*. When Stacey reflects on the herb Camas, her mother imbues the herb with human qualities and a special purpose: "Camas is here to take care of us. Never forget to be grateful. Don't waste her, remember she sacrifices her life to you. Whisper sweet words to her. Give her courage" (Maracle, 173). Not only does Camas become a part of the community, but her self-sacrifice mirrors that which is asked of the community in their times of trouble. Maracle also gives the rain a powerful and haunting incarnation: "She came softly at first, a woman weeping, delighted at her ability to shed tears for her lost children" (190). The rain's sadness again mirrors the plight and pain of the villagers in the face of looming death.

The relationship between the natural world and the spirit world is perceived differently from the native perspective and the Christian faith. Stacey reflects on the distant relationship of the citizens of white town to the natural world in opposition to that of her own village.

No one in this [native] village even gave thanks for food to anyone except the originator of the food. Salmon was thanked for salmon, saskatoons for saskatoons, and so forth. Thanking the household was a strange European custom. (116)

Because the native faith presented here tends to connect the physical and the spiritual, the native people can clearly see the link between their own spirituality and the natural world, whereas the white community, which places humanity above nature, does not come to the same reasoning. The practicality of the native faith is even more apparent in *Black Robe*, when Laforgue talks
about how the natives' prayers to his God are for the bare necessities, and they do not seem to see beyond their immediate needs. He sees the prayers of the natives as a joke: "Give us each day elk, beaver and moose" (Moore, 38). But even Laforgue, experiencing the trials of the tribe, later comes to understand why their prayers are not for their immortal soul, but for their immediate needs and survival.

Was it any wonder that eating was the Savages' highest joy when, cast out from the sight of God, they dwelled here, in this harsh and unforgiving land, dependent as wild animals on finding prey? Would it ever be possible to convert such people? It is as though this country is far from the sun of God's warmth. (98)

For the natives in Black Robe, the relationship with the soul is the same as the relationship with nature; survival must be prioritized over loftier ideals. This is a completely different perception than the one hinted at in Exercices Spirituels, where man is not supposed to express any need for physical comfort because it does not grant him the salvation of his soul.

In the world of the texts, many natural voices are given a spiritual quality derived from animism. These manifestations help establish a relationship between the natural (physical) world and the spiritual world. Although each author deals with these spirit beings in his own way (Moore presenting a somewhat sombre version of these forces, where nature is seen as dangerous and fearsome, as opposed to Maracle's more quiet manifestations of Water or Raven), they both present strong cases that these spiritual forces need to be encountered and dealt with in order to resolve the problems facing the communities. Animism, as we saw earlier, is a psychological
process that allows a community and its members to bridge the gap of understanding with the natural world, and empower itself against the unpredictable nature of the world.

2) The 'Other Worlds'

Although an understanding of nature as an animistic force remains a key aspect of understanding native spirituality, there is another realm of existence that plays a key role in the spirituality of the stories. Both the native and non-native spiritual traditions presented in these books hint at, if not openly claim, the existence of the 'other world', or the land of the dead, paradise or heaven. Each culture thus presented in the novels entertains its own conceptions of the realm that lies beyond death. In his book *Intercultural Competence*, Myron W. Lustig claims that the handling of death is representative of a culture's spiritual beliefs, because fear of death is a major influence in spirituality (Lustig, 100); sociologist Ernest Becker, in his article "The Terror of Death", agrees with him: "[O]f all things that move man, one of the principal ones is his terror of death" (Robben, 23). In order to appease this fear, cultures create models of an afterlife which often echo the real world in some form or another. Étienne Rouillard explains that the mythology that is created around death helps to explain its incomprehensible aspects and gives meaning to all the uncertainties that surround it (Rouillard, 58).

Moore and Maracle both echo the importance of belief in the afterlife in their respective narratives. Both representations, of native beliefs as well as non-native ones, take stock of perceived signs sent from the other world into this one, from the land of the dead or paradise into the real world. On several occasions, Moore emphasizes the importance of dream for the natives, especially dream which is said to come from beyond and provide guidance to the leaders of the tribe. Neehatin, the Iroquois leader, dreams on the first night of the journey and then consults his
wife, wise in the ways of the dream, to get an understanding of the message that was sent to him from beyond (Moore, 40-41). In some instances, the power of the other world supersedes that of the real world, such as when the elders of the tribe discuss the fate of Laforgue and Daniel among themselves. "I fear the dream. [...] A dream is more real than death or battle" (45-46). The natives are not the only ones to benefit from visions from the other side. Laforgue himself finds solace in signs supposedly sent by his God, albeit not necessarily through his ancestors. Spotting an eagle soaring above his head while praying for guidance, Laforgue sees in it a messenger of God that reinforces his faith and helps sustain him in his quest (43-44). The dead also manifest their power in *Ravensong* through some form of contact with their descendants. Early on in the story, during the funeral, Gramma's voice emerges from limbo to comfort Stacey as she ponders philosophical questions about life and death: "Don't worry, child, it will come when you need to know" (16). These voices from beyond guide and direct the actions of the characters as much as, or even more than, that of any other character from the land of the living.

Both novels show that the power of the dead reaches far and wide. Maracle presents several spiritual beliefs in her novel that showcase the relationship between the village and its dead. "[Stacey] knew no one was supposed to utter the names of the newly dead in case they felt sorry for you and came back to remain forever lost and lonely, waiting for you to take them home" (91). The deceased need to be left alone to their own devices; or else you may end up hurting them and yourself, even beyond the grave. After all, as everyone in Stacey's village knows: "They may haunt people as spirits but their bodies are stock still" (11). The natives in *Black Robe* share similar beliefs about the world of the dead. To them, it is a dark and foreboding place. As Chomina himself says, when comparing this world and the next: "The world is a cruel place, but it is the sunlight" (Moore, 185). The natives do not look forward to their own demise,
even if they embrace it when it finally reaches them. Later on, when Chomina dies and Annuka must leave him behind, she looks back and sees the She-Manitou coming to claim her father's spirit; she knows she must keep away, lest the She Manitou take her as well (189). Death is not to be sought after, and Annuka is very sensitive to the presence of the spirit world. Not long after the death of her father, as the party of Laforgue, Daniel and Annuka reach their final destination and the morning rises, she pauses to contemplate nature and sees the spirits of the dead around her. "They are all around us now. Their day is ending as ours begins" (205). Through dreams, their voices that echo beyond the grave, and their relationship with the real world, the dead find ways to make their presence known to the living.

Maracle's and Moore's novels portray a distinct difference between the native and non-native other worlds. Rena, a native woman in Stacey's village, finds the Christian belief in a paradise of serenity and quiet amusing. "Won't they all be surprised when they get to the other world and find out it is a wonderfully sinfully pleasant place!" (Maracle, 133). Since the Christian vision is so drastically different from her own, Rena tends to dismiss it as laughable. Others, like Dominic, the village healer, have a more respectful attitude towards the other's concept of the afterlife. But even Dominic agrees that the souls of his fellow villagers are not going to the same place as those of the people from white town. "[O]ur other world and [their] heaven cannot possibly be the same place" (132). He does not actively dismiss the non-native belief system, but he does see a distinct separation between the worlds beyond death, and cannot see himself going anywhere but his own other world.

*Black Robe* illustrates clearly the anxiety around conflicting views of the worlds of the dead. When Laforgue offers to baptize the natives in order to grant them paradise upon their death, Chomina speaks up. "What paradise? [...] My people are not baptized with this water
sorcery. Therefore, they are not in your paradise. Why would I want to go to a paradise where there are none of my people?" (Moore, 165). To Chomina, the idea of not rejoining his ancestors is preposterous, possibly even sacrilegious. His sense of belonging to his community is simply too great. Even Laforgue's own assistant, Daniel, reflects on these differences and tries to plead the natives' case, articulating to the best of his abilities the notions he has been learning through contact with Annuka.

Why should they believe in your world after death when they already have an afterworld of their own? [...] They believe that at night, the dead see. They move about, animals and men, in the forests of night. The souls of men hunt the souls of animals, moving through forests made up of the souls of the trees which have died. [...] Is that harder to believe in than a paradise where we all sit on clouds and look a God? Or burn forever in the flames of hell? (102)

By empathizing with the natives, Daniel is showing that despite his own Christian upbringing, he has been able to create, to some extent, a form of understanding of the natives' beliefs. But he only goes so far in his reasoning. He does not claim to adhere to the native faith; he simply argues that it might hold as much truth as his original Christian faith (102). The natives themselves think along the same line, much later, when they plead with Laforgue and try to have him break the sickness that has befallen their town. One of their leaders, Ondesson, does not understand why Laforgue wants to impose his faith on them. "Your ways are not our ways. Why do you not respect that we serve different gods and that we cannot live as you do?" (230). The natives eventually accept baptism, but even Laforgue is forced to admit that they may not be doing it out of a spiritual need, as he would like, but mainly out of necessity and the need for survival which, as we saw earlier, is central to the native beliefs.
The natives and non-natives in both stories all seem to acknowledge the existence of another world beyond this one, a land of the dead, and they may even acknowledge the possible existence of other places where the dead from other cultures eventually turn up (a non-native afterlife for the Huron or Hell for the Christian faith), but the similarity in their belief in the afterworld ends there. The natives in both novels believe in a land where they reconnect with their ancestors and their history, a place that is linked to this world and remains its spiritual representation. The Christian faith believes in a paradise outside of time and space, a place where only the grace of God is necessary to be sustained. These differing worlds do not coincide and cannot be brought together within the context of the stories, creating no possible encounters in the afterlife. Any encounter must therefore be enacted in the land of the living.

3) Redemption

It is one thing to discuss the other world and quite another to discuss the fate of the soul itself, and that is the aspect of the afterlife to which I will now turn. Kimberly M. Blaeser makes the following argument: "[The Natives] are themselves the arena, the good and the evil, the temporal and the spiritual, part of the world soul, making and remaking the universe in all its relations" (Blaeser, 13). She proposes that the balance between good and evil is inherent in the nature of the immortal soul, and as such, because the natives are so ingrained in their own realities, they are the living architects of their own redemption or failure. In Robben's *Death, Mourning and Burial*, Robert Lifton and Eric Olson have argued the case for symbolic immortality, and their theory also applies to the fate of the soul. They present five different types of immortality that construct our beliefs in death. The one that pertains specifically to the soul is that of "theological immortality," or the belief that there is a guiding principle behind the universe, and that it can manifest itself in a moral battle between good and evil (Robben, 35-36).
Redemption is a key theme in *Black Robe*, but it is perceived differently by various characters. For Father Laforgue and most of his Jesuit brothers, as well as for Champlain, the fate of the Natives' souls (and their own) is everything. We know from our reading of the *Exercices Spirituels* that the salvation of the soul is the penultimate achievement for any human being in the Christian faith. Laforgue bears no ill will towards anyone, and honestly, at least at the onset of his assignment, seeks to save the souls of the natives in a very idealistic, if not paternalistic fashion. Previous missionaries from the region have already paved the way for his spiritual quest and have left records of their journeys to inspire him. Champlain preaches to the natives about the Jesuit priests, extolling their virtues: "They have left their friends and their country to show you the way to Heaven" (Moore, 19). Laforgue and his colleagues are, at least according to Moore's narrative, sincere in their belief that they are doing the work of their God by seeking to gather these souls for Him. "For if you travel with a hunting party of men, women and children, there is always the chance that, if a child or an adult falls ill en route, a soul can be gained for God by a deathbed baptism" (23). There is no doubt in the mind of Westerners in the novel that heaven is a much better fate for the soul than anything the natives can imagine for themselves. But Laforgue's devotion to the saving of souls is not limited to the natives, and when he sees Daniel straying from what he deems to be the righteous path, he also calls out to him to rethink his ways. "What is more important than your immortal soul?" (90). Ultimately, Laforgue's spiritual journey for salvation ends with his own, and the possibility of martyrdom in the new land. There is glory waiting for him if he should be killed at the hands of the natives, for "if you are martyred, you receive instant absolution" (33). Redemption for Laforgue is apparent in all of his relations, whether they be with his brothers in the faith, the natives he is trying to convert, his young companion Daniel straying from the path or even with his personal trials. This
redemption comes from the faith that his God will not abandon him to his fate and that his God cares for him. That is the message he carries with him that sustains him through his entire ordeal. "I put my trust in God. He will decide what must happen to me" (183).

However, not every character involved has the same perception of the redemption that is offered by Laforgue in *Black Robe*, or by the Catholic priests in *Ravensong*. The natives perceive the intent behind their eventual conversion to be far less idealistic and far more opportunistic and they do not take kindly to having their spiritual beliefs challenged, ridiculed or cast aside in favour of the outsider's view. Three examples of this mistrust will illustrate what happens when the notion of Christian redemption clashes with that of native redemption. When disease hits the Huron village of Ihonatiria in *Black Robe*, the elders reflect on what has transpired. One of them makes the following argument, which the others seem to share. "They wish our deaths so that they can lead us into some fucking Norman place of the dead as their captives" (Moore, 227). The natives do not see the priests' presence as a solution to their crisis but as a cause, and as such react accordingly, slaying the local priest as retaliation for a perceived spiritual or mystical aggression. The natives apply an internal reasoning to an external problem and this triggers the hostility. The surviving priest himself, Father Jerome falls prey to a kind of backward thinking, wishing ill on the savages in order to save them: "The fever is the tool given to us to harvest these souls" (232). According to him, God's way of turning the natives towards Christianity is to inflict hardship upon them, with solace to be provided by the priests. He is willing to let these people suffer in the here and now for a greater good in the afterlife. In *Ravensong*, Stacey's mother is equally troubled when she goes to church and is questioned about her sexual habits by the priest. She does not perceive him as having any good intentions, and he does not seem to acknowledge the possibility of a faith other than his own. "With arrogant concern, he had
worried over the carriage of [Stacey's mother's] soul to his heaven, as if that were the only destination for the dead" (Maracle, 132). Seeking and providing redemption for all souls may be well-intentioned on the part of the priest, but the distance between the belief systems prevents the supposed act of kindness from being perceived as such, and instead infuriates Stacey's mother.

Redemption is important to each culture in the novels, but how that redemption occurs is drastically different from the native and non-native point of view, as is the failure to achieve it. The issue of Polly's suicide remains the most apparent symbol of the failure of the soul in *Ravensong*. According to Stacey, Polly's suicide was a cry for help, because she sought redemption through her actions, even though Stacey does not agree with the source of Polly's shame or the fact that she needs to be redeemed: "If [Polly] disobeyed, these people might not save her, and she clearly wanted to be saved" (134). Polly's suicide was, therefore, a means for her to save herself, since no one would come to her rescue. Not only did her own culture fail her by being unable to prevent her from taking her own life, but her culture actually precipitated her decision by imposing shame upon her for sleeping with a boy from school, at least, according to Stacey's reasoning. Polly's soul will therefore not go to heaven because of the suicide, and that, spiritually, is the worst fate for all Christians.

The concept of sin, of course, plays a very important part in Polly's decision to end her life, and it is from sin that Polly wishes to be redeemed, given her faith. According to Stacey, almost everything is a sin in the Christian faith: "It was a sin to lust, a sin to divorce, a sin to want to be loved if you were a woman" (132). The backbone of the Christian faith as seen by Stacey, the belief in sin and damnation, is supposedly intended to promote belief in redemption through God, but Stacey believes this to be an unnatural process. In fact, she believes it is a false assumption that causes Polly to kill herself. "This lie of sin lived in their minds, while lust, the
natural passions of the heart, pushed up on their bodies" (30). Polly's transgression is therefore not something that was unavoidable, but something that was engineered through her belief system, a system which ultimately failed her, because it created a negative representation of sexual relations outside of marriage which Stacey believes to be a natural process: "We have no illusions that virginal behaviour is virtuous" (71). It is, of course, a personal judgement that Stacey passes on Polly's faith. Redemption, for Stacey as well as for her community, has nothing to do with sin; the events surrounding the Old Snake, in Ravensong, give us a better image of what it means to be saved in her native community – and what it means to fail the community and lose redemption.

Failure of the soul rears its head many times in Black Robe as well. This failure is expressed differently by the characters in the story, who all foresee either their own potential failure or that of their mission, such as Laforgue's questions regarding the fate of the native souls he fails to claim for God. "Would these children of darkness ever enter heaven?" (Moore, 246). Laforgue sees their isolation and their different way of life and wonders if there is a place for them in his own paradise, or if he is simply taking them away from their own place of rest, uprooting them needlessly. He also questions his own faith and that of his colleague, Father Jerome, who is killed by the natives. "Why did Chomina die and go to outer darkness when this priest, fanatic for a harvest of souls, will pass through the portals of heaven, a saint and martyr?" (241). Laforgue desperately battles, towards the end of the novel, to find the semblance of the divine justice he needs to validate his mission. How is he different from the fanatic he deplores if he does not take into account the sacrifices these natives are making as well? His own spiritual encounter is transforming him, but the process is a painful one. His personal failure is not definitive and we are left with the notion that there may be hope for him.
Daniel himself must fight against his own beliefs when he falls in love with Annuka and sleeps with her. He faces his own crisis of faith, his own potential failure of the soul. "I think I am in love with her, but how can it be love when it will bring me eternal damnation? If I died tonight, I would go straight to hell" (59). Daniel has a hard time reconciling an emotion as strong as love with dogma learned from years of study at church and school. At the same time, he has to consider Annuka's own views on the spirituality of all living things. Daniel is in a unique situation where he is given an opportunity to mediate between his own culture and the one he wishes to be adopted into. He fails spiritually in this fashion, however, as his internal conflict is never actually resolved but cast aside for a more pragmatic worldview. Still, he comes close to achieving an actual spiritual enlightenment.

Finally, Chomina, facing his own imminent death, takes time to speak with Laforgue and share his own insight, in an effort to possibly help Laforgue better understand his people. The failure here is not anyone's in particular, but Chomina presents what he deems are facts that pertain to Laforgue's attempt to convert the natives, and why it is doomed to fail. "You think that, if you die, you will enter a Norman paradise. But if my daughter dies, she will go to the land of Night" (184). Chomina does not seek for his daughter the redemption that Laforgue promises because it conflicts with his own views of the spirit world. He wishes continuity and belonging for his child, and Laforgue's promises are not part of the vision. Failure, in this case, would be to accept the other's proposed salvation. Failure, in Chomina's mind, would be change.

Redemption of the soul is one subject about which a clear dialogue between cultures actually occurs in these novels, primarily in *Black Robe*. The discussion, however, does not foster a spiritual exchange, because despite the good-will intended, an actual meeting of the minds is not possible because of the perception of ill will, the intransigence of established
beliefs, and the rejection of the other's offer of redemption. The dangers of failure for the spirituality of the individual are simply too great and the perceptions of what the soul represents are simply too different.

4) Families and Lineage

The final aspect we need to delve into in matters of the afterlife is the very native notion of relations and lineage. Most native thinkers seem to agree that there is a very close connection between generations within native communities. In Indian Country, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis ponders this unique perspective of belonging and relationship, as she quotes Ojibway writer Calvin Morrisseau: "Community is more than a place. It is part of my history. It is part of me" (Valaskakis, 57). That history is not simply personal; it also extends to the entire community, to include past, present and future. It therefore plunges deep into the spirit world, where all the ancestors are said to dwell.

While the theme of relations with past generations is not as predominant in Black Robe, Moore does present us with a sense of a tightly bound community, one that needs all its members to survive. Since the story is mostly told from a non-native perspective, the elements of community are mostly in the subtext. For example, when it is decided that Chomina will take his family and Daniel back to Laforgue, there are arguments made that his departure will diminish the tribe. Yet the same people also argue that his sacrifice saves the tribe as well, because it leads danger away from the community (145). There is, however, almost no emphasis within the story of any multi-generational connection within the tribe, or one that transcends into the spirit world, other than the spirits of the dead who now hunt there, whom Chomina joins upon his death.
In contrast, *Ravensong* punctuates the relations between past, present and future throughout the narrative. From very early on in the story, we get a sense that the community is very tightly bound to its roots. At Nora's funeral, everyone reflects on her life and all that she contributed to the clan. But they also reflect on who came before her. "Wolf vision punctuated the generations that had contributed to the life of Nora" (Maracle, 19). Here, the wolf, spirit of the clan, is the guide that links the generations across the gap that is the spirit world. Maracle punctuates this even further, when she falls into a semi-linguistic analysis of the word 'child' in the native language of the characters. "The very word 'child' in the language of the villagers conjures images of infinite grandchildren climbing mountains, heroically traversing thousands of years of the emotional entanglements life presents" (21). The narrative gives us a clear representation of the level of intricate interweaving that the community maintains with its entire history. Nora's plight represents a link to the past, while the idea of children connects those generations still to come.

This is something Stacey thinks about many times in the story. She attempts to bridge the distance between the community in her village and the white one from the city, much like Daniel attempts to do when he reflects on the redemption of the soul in *Black Robe*. Unlike Daniel, Stacey actually manages to create an internal dialogue that provides her with answers, even if these answers do not necessarily satisfy her quest for truth. "The lack of connectedness between white folks was difficult to express in her language. Most of the kids at school rarely saw their relatives" (17). Stacey lives in an extended family, and that family is part of a greater community. It contrasts with her friend Carol's life in an isolated picket-fence house, tucked away from all her relatives. This absence of kinship also creates a vacuum, in Stacey's mind, where there is no sense of belonging to a greater community, and partially explains Polly's
suicide, she feels. Walking back from town after school, Stacey stops at the bridge and stares into the river. She sees the fish swimming up it, fulfilling their imperative to mate and to die. She creates parallels between their activity and the bonds and duties that tie her to her community (60-61). There is a need for each individual within her village to fulfill his or her obligations and to endure sacrifice for the greater good of all, just like the fish.

A key moment in the story, where the connectedness is felt to transcend into other realms like the spirit world, occurs when the Old Snake is exiled from the village. A reflection is made upon the impact this decision will have on him, as Stacey wonders why Momma takes the time to save him despite all the trouble he has caused the community:

Saving him was as much a punishment as letting him die. He would go home to the same place as all their ancestors and would have to tell his entire lineage, his infinite grandmothers about the abuse he had heaped on Madeline and her children. He would spend all eternity weeping for his lost self, struggling for the redemption of his twisted spirit. His grandfathers would shun him and add loneliness to his pain. The wind would buffet him about aimlessly, screaming shame in his ear. (162)

Here, the relations make their full influence felt. Through present, past and future, through the generations to come and those that preceded them, through, through all that binds the community together, a sanction is placed upon the Old Snake, both physically and spiritually. The Old Snake will have to bear witness to his crime when faced by his ancestors; he will not be redeemed in this life or in the afterlife. The spiritual power of the community is truly manifested in continuity via past, present, and future generations.
In both *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*, the world of the dead is presented as a complex reality that cannot be easily grasped or explained. What can be understood are whatever the characters in the story think or feel about it. The afterlife is shaped by many perceived and different spiritual forces, but also and mostly by the relationships the cultures portrayed have with it and with each other’s perception of it.

Encounters through spirituality in the novels occur across cultural boundaries whenever the afterlife is involved, mostly in the form of confrontation. Native and non-native spiritualities clash, often failing to achieve common ground, over conflicting ideas on what is spiritual and what is not, on the destination of the soul in the other world, on the fate of the soul and its eventual redemption or downfall, or even on the web of spiritual and communal belonging.

In *Black Robe*, the natives and Laforgue must travel a similar road but their perceptions of that road and the deaths they face along the way are tainted by how they perceive the destination of the dead. Both fail to bridge the gap that separates their spirit worlds, and redemption is not a shared fate, but something that separates the deceased. The natives in the world of the novel do not want to be saved by Laforgue, they do not care for his paradise; yet Laforgue, in his own zeal for spiritual accomplishment, cannot simply accept the refusal of the natives and must carry on and endure their challenge to his spiritual authority over them.

*Ravensong* argues the same case, although it tries to at least bridge the different beliefs through Stacey’s character. But even her open-mindedness comes up short when dealing with the fate of Polly’s soul and its failed redemption, as well as Polly’s lack of connectedness with her family and lineage. The spiritual values Stacey upholds are simply too different from those she
witnesses in white town to be mediated in any meaningful fashion. In the end, she must keep her own faith separate in order to protect her spirituality and identity.

This confrontation of beliefs in the afterlife ultimately leads the encounter between the spiritualities to a failure of mediation. Despite both groups allowing themselves to believe in a spiritual presence beyond death (paradise, the land of the night or an ancestral connectedness), and despite a desire for redemption on both parts, there can be no coming together of cultures over the experience of death because to accept each other's perception of the other world is ultimately to deny one's own. And because to the native characters in the story the link with the past and future generations is so strong, they cannot bear to be separated from their people even at the moment of death.
Chapter 2:

Rituals and Community

The occurrence of death often inspires rituals that enable a community to react to the loss. Each culture has its own unique relationship with the different faces of death, and the rituals that emerge from this relationship are both varied and abundant, reflecting an internal doctrine inherent to each culture or faith system. Literary representations of these rituals and their importance are highlighted in novels such as *Black Robe* or *Ravensong*, which deal heavily with the theme of death.

Penny Petrone argues, in *Native Literature in Canada*, that context is an important key to understanding native literature (Petrone, 5). That logic can also be applied to the analysis of the native understanding of death and the rituals associated with it. According to Petrone, native literature is "utilitarian and functional rather than aesthetic" (Petrone, 4). Do native rituals surrounding death correspond to these criteria? More importantly for our purposes, how are they represented in the novels under study?

According to Kimberly M. Blaeser, in "Pagans Rewriting the Bible: Heterodoxy and the Representation of Spirituality in Native American Literature," native thinking holds within itself something called response-ability, which allows the individual to interact more directly with the universe than is the case with other types of belief systems (Blaeser, 12). The native is an actor in the world and not merely a spectator, sitting on the sidelines, watching her life unfold. The rituals with which native spirituality surrounds itself should therefore showcase that unique relationship; they should allow the individual to connect with the world in which he exists.
There are multiple ways of connecting with the world around us. The most obvious way seems to be with the physical body. In this instance, since we are on the subject of death, we are mostly referring to the body of the deceased and how it is handled by various customs. Thomas King's short story *Magpies*, for example, clearly demonstrates how conflicting ideals of handling the body can create confusion within a single community because different belief systems come into conflict. When Granny dies, her Christian daughter Wilma has her buried in the ground. But her son Ambrose was away, so when he returns, he decides he wants to enact the original native tradition for disposing of the body, which was to hoist the body into a tree. Much confusion arises because Wilma does not want her mother's body excavated, but her son is intent on carrying out his deed, though no one knows when he will do that. The police get involved and Ambrose finally resorts to subterfuge to mislead everyone, albeit without malice, as his laziness actually does the work for him. When the police investigate the trees where the body is to be laid to rest, they cannot find it, because he has yet to dig it up. Only once their suspicions do not point to him does he actually place the body into the tree, granting Granny's final wish. But the crisis between Ambrose and Wilma is palpable through the narrative, as neither trusts the other's handling of the body to be appropriate. Their two belief systems contradict each other and bring about the conflict in the story, despite their shared native cultural heritage. The same can be said for the cultural worlds of the two novels, *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*. The rituals each group enacts is another potential moment of conflict that can arise between the spiritualities portrayed.

One can also connect with the world socially, or in this case, through community. The passage into death leaves a mark on the individuals surrounding the deceased. Sometimes that mark is felt prior to death; at other times, it only becomes apparent once the individual has gone missing from the community and its interrelations. The more tightly bound the community, the
greater the loss of an individual will affect it and the greater that loss diminishes the group as a whole.

Ultimately, though, rituals are enacted as much for the benefit of society as for the individual. An individual who conforms to his society's accepted structures of belief and ritual is better able to integrate socially within the context of his community. Some rituals are personal; others are open to the group, but all help create the shared identity of the collective.

Arnold Van Gennep, a sociologist who has studied the topic of death, presents the following argument, in respect to funeral rites, in "The Rites of Passage".

Funeral rites are further complicated when within a single people there are several contradictory or different conceptions of the afterworld which may become intermingled with one another, so that their confusion is reflected in the rites.

(Robben, 213)

While neither Black Robe nor Ravensong dramatize the intracultural confusion over funeral rites referred to above (with Ravensong introducing some relevant elements at Nora's funeral), Van Gennep's argument remains interesting because both stories present a dialogue over the presence of death within, as well as between, two cultures, and specifically for this purpose, how each community treats its own dead. In a sense, throughout both novels, the characters are arguing with each other or internally in regards to the other community's views on the matter. The physical treatment of the deceased's body is handled very differently from one culture to the next portrayed in each novel, and it is in part those differences which create the conflict within each story.
In this chapter, I will examine three general types of rituals. I will start by finding the various ways in which the body of the deceased is treated in both novels, how the various rituals transform death of the body into something meaningful and how the perception of the ritual is entirely dependent on the cultural context of each person. I will then look at how communities enact rituals and how they use those rituals to ensure their continuity in the face of death. Finally, I will see how personal rituals enable an individual to cope with his or her own personal grief, to bring about stability or change in him or herself, when faced with the grim reality of death.

1) The Handling of the Body

Moore's *Black Robe* contains the most examples of the handling of the physical body of the deceased. From the outset, there is tension between the natives and Father Laforgue, mainly because they believe him to be a sorcerer, despite his protests to the contrary; the ritualistic nature of his practices does not help to break this illusion. The strongest example, and one that repeats itself, is that of baptism, or the 'water sorcery' as the natives call it. It is a simple ritual, the act of pouring water onto a person's forehead, yet it holds great significance to both cultures. For Laforgue, as a last rite, it offers redemption and life ever-lasting in Heaven; to the natives, it is something else entirely. It is a ritual that calls up death. "They put drops of water on the heads of sick people and babies, and the people and babies die" (Moore, 80). There are many other scenes where Laforgue performs a death-bed baptism and its intent is usually misinterpreted by the natives. A native mother bears a child who dies at birth; she therefore takes it outside of camp. Later on, she sees that Father Laforgue performs the water sorcery on her child. Her immediate reaction is to ask herself if "the Blackrobe put a spell on her so that the child came before its time " (Moore, 117). Towards the end of the novel, the same thoughts inhabit the minds of the natives Laforgue has come to help. They look upon his arrival in much the same
way as they look upon the presence of the “Blackrobes” already in their community. The village is sick and the natives are desperately trying to find an answer to explain this occurrence. Blaming the Blackrobes seems a simple and efficient way. "The Blackrobes did not promise a cure but performed an act which led to the person's death" (Moore, 211). Despite the best of intentions when performing their rituals, the Blackrobes are actually endangering their future relations with the natives, because of the misinterpretation of their rituals. This not only causes hostility between the natives and the Blackrobes, but ultimately leads to the death of at least two Blackrobes, Fathers Duval and Jerome, who had been living in the mission prior to Laforgue's arrival.

In all fairness to the natives, the novel shows that Laforgue also has his share of the blame. In his quest to convert the natives and save their souls for Heaven and God, he imposes his rituals upon them on several occasions, without considering the impact these rituals may have on their perceptions of him. When the Iroquois fall upon Chomina's party who have come to Laforgue's rescue, they kill the native's wife. Upon witnessing her death, Laforgue immediately springs into action, disregarding common sense and his own safety for the greater calling: [H]e knelt beside Chomina's wife, and wetting his fingers in the snow, began to say the words of baptism" (154). Unfortunately, she is already dead. To the Iroquois, the man looks mad because he deliberately left his hiding place to expose himself to danger. To Chomina, this is an insult to the memory of his wife; it is, after all, Laforgue's fault if he had to come back and, therefore, that his wife was killed. Later in the story, when Chomina himself is dying, Laforgue again jumps at the occasion to offer Chomina the salvation of his soul through baptism. The native refuses this and instead sends everyone away, wanting to face death alone and on his own terms. This time, Annuka intervenes in favour of her father: "Let my father die in peace" (189). So convinced is
Laforgue that his way of blessing the dead bodies is better, that his rituals have power, that he disregards the fact that Chomina might have his own rituals to bring about his own salvation.

Another incident can be found in *Black Robe* involving the dead body of Chomina's child, at the hands of the Iroquois. It is both unique and savage in its imagery, highly physical and yet fully spiritual. Chomina explains to Laforgue that the Iroquois capture the souls of their victims through cannibalism. In the story, they kill Chomina's boy, cut him up into pieces, boil these pieces up and eat them (160-161). By consuming the body, the Iroquois are trying not only to appropriate the boy's power for their own gains, but also to intimidate their captives into submission. In this case, the ritual consumption of the body serves to both instil fear and promote self-worth, and its effects are evident on both Laforgue and Daniel (161). However, since Annuka and Chomina are more familiar with the practice, they are less traumatized by it, or at least display less of its effects upon them in their reactions. Familiarity with the ritual makes it less troubling, or at the very least allows the witnesses to prepare themselves against it.

A further example emerges in *Black Robe*, one where a ritual practice can be associated with a form of cannibalism, albeit in a different setting altogether. It stems from a lack of understanding, as the Iroquois natives talk amongst themselves about a ritual they have seen performed by the Jesuit priests.

In each of the Blackrobe habitations there is a small room. In that room, there is a small box placed on a high ledge. Inside the box are pieces of a corpse which they brought from France. They say this corpse is the body of their god. They have secret ceremonies in which they eat little pieces of this fucking corpse. (169-170)
The natives are referring to the host in the tabernacle, which to Catholics becomes the body of Christ through ritual transformation, but since they lack the knowledge to understand that it is a symbol and not an actual corpse, they can only surmise that the priests are performing some kind of sorcery in which they actually eat the body of their god. Given the statements presented in the novel about the Iroquois performing actual acts of cannibalism, it is not hard to see why they would associate the Christian ritual of Eucharist with their own practice of flesh-eating. All of this stems, of course, from a lack of understanding of the other's spirituality and culture.

Both works bring to light other methods of disposing of the mortal remains that create situations of distrust. *Ravensong* opens on a funeral, where one of the village elders, Nora, is being put into the ground. Assisting the ceremony are her native peers from both the Christian and native faith. Already, we can sense an adverse reaction to her being put into the ground, as Momma, Stacey's mother, reflects on the situation: "Too deep to do the earth any good. Should've been cremated" (Maracle, 11). The ritual of burying someone in the ground does not have the same meaning for different faiths. As the Christians traditionally return the body of the deceased to the earth (in early Christian belief, it was said that the body needed to be interred in the earth for the resurrection to occur, although that belief has evolved since then), the native rationale wants the body to benefit from the life cycle of the universe. In *Black Robe*, an even more obtuse interpretation of burial is given by the council leader Taretandé. He has witnessed Father Laforgue burying the slain Father Duval near the tabernacle, and immediately fears the rituals behind it. "He was hiding him under the ground so that some new fucking spell can be made" (Moore, 221). If Laforgue and Jerome's intentions were to place the body so it would be near the body of Christ in the tabernacle, the natives see it as an attack on their existence, primed
as they are to find a culprit for the sickness that is afflicting them. A simple ritual therefore becomes a divisive factor between faiths and cultures.

The rituals which the cultures portrayed in *Black Robe* and *Ravensong* use to handle the physical remains of the deceased help us to understand the differences that exist between the different belief systems. We can see how perception of rituals affects one's understanding of them. Without a shared belief system, the most innocent and simple rituals can create mistrust between groups of individuals. Even within a single community, the handling of the body can cause problems when conflicting ideas are pitted against each other. The spiritual encounters between cultures can be fraught with disaster if they are not handled with care, as we witness in both novels.

2) Binding the Community

Beyond the handling of the body, there are rituals around death and its related matters that are shaped by or that help structure the entire community. Bronislaw Malinowski, in "Magic, Science and Religion," sees the death of an individual as a danger to the established native community because of the social necessity of the individual that passes. "A small community bereft of a member [...] is severely mutilated" (Robben, 22). It is therefore important for the community to create rituals that allow it to survive the passing of one of its individuals.

In the first chapter of *Ravensong*, Maracle takes us to the funeral of old Nora, a village elder whose loss diminishes the entire village. There, through Stacey's eyes, Maracle directs us through the funeral process, focusing on the unique relationships with Nora that are now lost due to her passing. The community is a tightly knit structure where every individual's participation guarantees the survival and success of the whole. "Every single person served the community,
each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being
revolved" (Maracle, 26). It is the absence of Nora that breaks the circle and, therefore, creates a
vacuum, which the community must fill, or risk never being whole again. All of Nora's
knowledge and skills are now lost to the group. But Nora's demise and the loss of her abilities is
by no means an isolated incident. The previous generation was struck with an epidemic that
decimated its ranks. That death toll reshaped the community and weakened it.

Maybe the epidemic destroyed their ability to maintain the levels of effort it took
to survive in the way they always had. One less person meant that much less
effort could be spent tending trees who gave up sweetener only with great effort.
There were no longer enough villagers who could spare the time to tend sickening
trees. (Maracle, 141)

The death of many villagers is as problematic, if not more, as the death of a single individual.
The dwindling numbers of the native community could no longer sustain their way of life and
had to adapt to new and harsher conditions. This ultimately means that the community, when
faced with the prospect of death in the world of the novel, must be able to revisit its own
conscience and take drastic measures to ensure its survival. When the flu hits the town, efforts
are made to preserve as many lives as possible. The women of the village go to work in order to
fend off the illness. "Young women spent hours washing out the homes" (Maracle, 79). Of
course, all the effort devoted to saving these lives through the cleansing of the households takes
energy that cannot go elsewhere, and therefore drains the community's remaining resources. And
despite their best efforts, the women soon realize the sacrifices they have to make in order to
survive. "In tears one night the women admitted the illness was too big - the old had to be left in
the interest of the babies" (Maracle 82). Faced with insurmountable odds, the community must
always look towards its future and turn away from its past. The harsh realities of the imminent
deaths plaguing the community hurt it in the process but also reinforce the bonds between
community members. They must band together in order to defeat the sickness, making difficult
life-altering decisions along the way to the best of their abilities. They manage to do so because
they have access to this support mechanism that binds their community together. "It doesn't hurt
to consult anyone, Momma had taught Stacey. It makes people feel connected" (Maracle, 144). It
is that sense of community that protects them against death and the hardships it creates.

Despite the impact that death can have on the community, it can be said that in
Ravensong the natives at least have a community to cling to in times of stress. The natives share
a sense of belonging to each other, something that the individuals in the white town do not seem to have. Stacey reflects on this situation often in the story. "Context, she knew, kindles the
smouldering embers which bind family together" (Maracle, 185). On several occasions, Stacey compares her family life with that of her friends in white town, more specifically with the Snowden family. Her view of things is of course altered by her own perceptions but it does illustrate the differences she perceives between their community and hers, and it forces her to acknowledge that rituals of the non-native are very different from the ones with which she is familiar. When she visits Carol at her parent's place, she notices the white picket fence, the clean garden and the artificial structures, but it all seems fake to her. The Snowden family is living a lie and performing a form of masquerade. She calls it "playing house" (Maracle, 37). They are pretending to be a family but in reality they do not relate in any relevant way to each other. Their sense of community is therefore an illusion to maintain for the sake of appearances, until it shatters. Carol herself is not immune to this reality. "Stacey knew most of the children of white town were transient visitors in the lives of their parents" (Maracle, 35). In her community, every
child has his or her place set for the survival of the community; every child becomes the link to
the next generation that perpetuates the tradition. But children in white town leave their family
and their community to relocate, moving away from their initial attachments. They bear little
responsibility towards their immediate community because their future actions will impact
elsewhere. Stacey does not witness in Carol’s relationship to her parents the same sense of
belonging that she feels with her own family. Once Carol is grown, she will move out of her
parent’s home, but more importantly out of their lives, whereas Stacey’s wish is to be part of her
community when she returns with her education. Their communities and their expectations of
them are very different, which ultimately influences the way these groups perform rituals.

The adoption of ritualistic behaviour allows individuals to connect with their community.
Death impacts any community; it is, however, important to see how the rituals are constructed to
help the individuals cope and manage their grief, both personally and collectively. Maurizio
Gatti claims that belonging to a native group is dependent on two factors: one, a shared cultural
heritage and two, an identification to an ethnic group (which can be an illusion) (Gatti, 36-37).
While the latter is strictly based on ethnicity, the former is generally the discourse of shared
rituals that binds the community together through its cultural heritage.

How do these rituals occur in Ravensong and Black Robe, and how do they go about
strengthening the communities that practice them? The novels present us with several interesting
scenes, but the notion of song is one of the best examples of a ritual that works to unite the
community. In Ravensong, the wailing song sung for Martha’s house is a good example of how a
simple ritual can help the individuals who witness it overcome the grief they feel at the loss they
are suffering. Black Robe also mentions song as an element of ritual, in this instance it is tied to
the daily lives of the natives: "[The native] songs were, as always, monotonous chants, without
gaiety, attuned to the rhythm of their labours" (Moore, 64). The wailing song in Ravensong, however, is uttered whenever the community suffers a significant loss. In the story, Martha's house catches fire and cannot be saved. The villagers can only stare at the burning building and grieve. "Momma took his arm and began a wailing song for the house of Martha" (Maracle, 120). There, Momma expresses through the song the feelings of despair and loss that affect the community. But of course the song is very often shared, when more than one member of the community is present as witness. When Madeline shoots the Old Snake, she is distraught at her actions and what they mean for the community, but also at the crime that the Snake has committed upon her and her daughter. "[Momma] moved to Madeline, breaking into a wailing song. Kate joined her […] Soon, the woman was singing her grief with them" (Maracle, 163). By echoing each other's voices and by singing their pain together, the women are not only validating each other's feelings through the ritual but also giving each other strength to face the difficulties ahead of them. The song provides courage and focus to those grieving. It is meant to be cathartic. "[Stacey] reached inside herself for the strains of their ancient grieving song. Rena, Stacey and Celia joined in wailing the song, expunging the old grief from their insides" (Maracle, 198). By sharing the song and the ritual that goes with it, all participants are reaffirming their shared heritage, their shared strength in the light of their darkest moments.

Rituals such as the wailing song exist within the community to enable the people to manage their reactions in predictable and manageable patterns. More often than not, however, these rituals do not necessarily have a rational or explicable reason for being there. More often than not, they are so integrated into the culture that they are performed spontaneously with little question as to how they came to be. Many times, Stacey provides us with such a reflection in the story. "She wondered why no one ever spoke at funerals until they had shovelled their share of
dirt" (Maracle, 11). In the narrative, there is no explanation given for this behaviour because one is not necessary; the belief in the ritual is as important as its performance, and belief does not require reason or logic. Only Stacey's personal quest for understanding brings it to light, and even she cannot provide an answer. Another example occurs when Stacey reflects on the respective roles between men and women in her native community. Her mother provides an explanation as to why her daughter perceives that women are doing all the work. "Momma had reminded her she never had to chop wood, hunt or swing the dip-net or haul the canning kettle. [...] 'Well, why can't I? [...] 'You can, you just don't" (Maracle, 76-77). Within the community, some roles are assigned according to gender, not because of any prejudice on anyone's part, but simply because things have always been that way; the rituals have translated into everyday life. Furthermore, the Christians in Ravensong also have their own rituals which they do not explain to the natives. When the Old Snake is shot, everyone heads for his home, but reactions are different depending on spiritual beliefs. "Those who were Christian mumbled prayers for the Old Snake as they entered" (Maracle, 156). Ironically, they do so because the Old Snake was shot whereas the non-Christian native's first thought was for his battered wife. Each group sees a different victim; to the Christians, a man was shot; to the natives, a wife and her children were put at risk by an abusive husband. Perceptions of the event are predicated on each group's approach to it; therefore, these differences in perception can create a clash when dealing with any ritual witnessed by members of an opposing culture of spiritual or religious belief.

A good place to start in order to understand how the dialogue between cultures is affected by death is to simply see how each community elaborates and polices its own discourse. For instance, Ravensong has two elders speaking to each other as a flashback, Dominic and Grampa Thomas, his predecessor. The scene portrays the nature of their communication. "Each couched
their words carefully in a complex of courteous positing of their own thinking while exploring and validating each other's" (Maracle, 97). Their dialogue is amicable and friendly, partly because they share a similar context, but also because they ritualize the act of communication to make it meaningful and productive. *Black Robe* has a similar scene at the beginning of the novel, when Champlain is meeting with several native leaders. They let him speak first, then answer by revisiting his arguments, repeating what has already been said on both sides and then adding their own “voice” to the story (Moore, 19). This highly ritualized form of discourse used by the natives is designed to trigger conversation and understanding, and to promote good will between speakers.

Not all conversations are so efficient. Most of the time, we find that ritualized discourse in the novels provides a barrier to understanding. In fact, this failure at communication forms the backbone of each narrative to the extent that conflict arises from it. *Ravensong* recalls the tale of the native villager Benny, who went off to war. Before being shipped out, he had to take a pledge like the other soldiers. "They each held out their right hand, placed it reverently on a Bible, and swore allegiance to the King" (Maracle, 46). But the truth is that this ritual holds no meaning for Benny, because he does not share the cultural background of the other soldiers. He merely complies because it is expected of him.

Laforgue's trip in *Black Robe* is a succession of failed ritualistic encounters, from the performed physical activities that create confusion or mistrust to words that fail to carry the appropriate meaning. Before every departure by canoe, the natives watch Daniel and Laforgue perform their own preparation and rituals (kneeling beside the canoe, praying and making the sign of the cross), but fail to understand their significance, so they give it their own erroneous meaning. "[I]t is some fucking sorcery [...] they make that sign to silence their enemies" (Moore,
And the errors in understanding keep accumulating. When they meet with the chieftain, they place their arms around him, showing a lack of respect, "as if he were some woman" (Moore, 30). It becomes an almost impossible task for Laforgue to bridge the gap of misunderstanding between his fellow travelers and himself, simply because every single action he performs is misconstrued as something other than its intention. And because the meaning is so inherently rooted in Laforgue's own culture, it is not natural for him to explain himself to those around him, especially considering his position of power within his own community. Even when a native tries to accommodate Laforgue's rituals, such as when Neehatin tears a strip of meat and throwing it into the fire to offer it to Heesus, Laforgue's God (Moore, 97), Blackrobe shows the native characters do not understand the ritual they are emulating. The ritual he performs has no real significance to either of them and is therefore ineffective in bridging the gap between them.

The differences in how rituals are perceived across cultures are also apparent in the dialogue that occurs between the characters in these novels. Sometimes, it occurs as part of a conversation; at other times, it appears as if a character witnesses a ritual he cannot explain, and produces an inner monologue to provide an answer to appease his mind. Towards the end of Black Robe, the natives are trying to make amends for the murders they have committed, but the reparations they attempt to make seem to fall on deaf ears. "We did you a great wrong by killing one of you. Now we are willing to give many presents to right that wrong " (Moore, 228). The priest's answer, " We do not take presents," (228) is shocking to the natives because in their culture, this is appropriate compensation for the acts they have committed. It is, however, inappropriate in terms of Christian faith, where the value of the individual cannot be measured in terms of what the community has lost and therefore cannot be reimbursed. And when the natives finally choose to convert to Christianity, they do so out of fear, still not understanding the
reasons behind the priests’ offer of salvation. Their perception is still tainted by the crime they feel they have committed. They are still buying off their salvation. "If you were our God, who would you spare? Your friend or your enemy?" (Moore, 238). The salvation offered by the priests, the redemption of their souls, is not the one sought by the natives, who seek immediate survival of the body and the community. Words themselves betray their true meaning. In the story, Daniel calls Laforgue 'Father'. The sorcerer Mestigoit hears this but gets confused. "This Blackrobe is not your father, I tell you. He is a demon" (Moore, 69). The word itself and its misinterpretation by Mestigoit (who simply takes it as the more literal sense as opposed to the title of spiritual father, of which he is probably unaware) becomes another element that adds to the ambient discord that overshadows the entire novel. Mestigoit even goes so far as to try to exorcise the demon out of Laforgue, because his own rituals tell him that it is the right thing to do (Moore, 71).

*Ravensong* also provides a great number of examples where the different cultures fail to establish a common discourse between their rituals. Stacey remains at the centre of this debate because she attempts to bridge both communities. Her reflections on the Christian faith fuel her understanding, or often lack of understanding, of how the white community performs its rituals. During Nora's funeral at the beginning of the story, everyone is entitled and encouraged to speak about her and tell tales. The final people to take the floor are those natives that have adopted the Christian faith. "[L]ast came the Christians, ever anxious to turn every bit of grief into a frantic search for Jesus. [...] She wondered what this search had to do with real life" (Maracle, 21). Ultimately, because her values are so very different from those of the Christians, Stacey cannot negotiate the relationship between grief and the search for God. In that, she emulates the behaviour of the natives at the end of *Black Robe*, who seek their own form of salvation as
opposed to the one Laforgue is proposing. But Stacey's introspection goes much further. Polly's suicide brings Stacey along a path of understanding, where she actually starts to question the value of a human life in the white community. "No wonder these people kill themselves. [...] They don't value their own children. No small wonder they don't like us if they don't like their own." (Maracle, 153) This realization pushes Stacey into a broader reflection that is brought about by the context of isolation of her own native community. Everything she perceives is filtered through that prism. However, Stacey is not herself immune to the difficulties of miscommunication, as she soon discovers getting home from school. She disobeys the established social order of her community and is severely reprimanded for it by her mother. "The law is simple, Stacey, and this family lives within it. If your schooling persuades you otherwise, don't come back" (Maracle, 124). The simple act of trying to bridge the gap between her culture and that of white town creates friction between Stacey and her own community because she cannot help but be affected by her contact with the other culture, whether she wants to or not.

One of the most telling examples of the misunderstanding is found in both novels, and it deals specifically with how the appearance of death in the community can be blamed on the others' rituals. Black Robe's story has a sickness fall upon the village of Ihonatiria where Laforgue is heading to replace the current priests. But he gets a fair warning as he is traveling there. "It seems there is a sickness in many villages. The savages haven't had this illness before, and they blame it on the sorcery of the Jesuits" (Moore, 198). It is easy for a culture to look at the rituals of the other and to create links between events and these rituals; a simple matter of coincidence is thereby transformed into a matter of belief. Chomina provides a better explanation of how this works when he chastises Laforgue for his actions. He witnesses Laforgue performing several rituals but draws his own conclusion from them. "I saw you do the water sorcery to my
wife. But she was dead when you did it. She could not believe in your god, because she had died already. And some nights ago, you did it to a baby. But the baby was dead. [...] The water sorcery kills" (Moore; 165). The perceived cause and the effect, though completely unrelated in fact, become connected through the mental processes of the thinker, in this case Chomina. His reasoning may be flawed but it holds up as a belief. The same type of reflection and blaming occur in Ravensong when the flu epidemic hits the village, or when people recall the previous epidemic and the tentative efforts that were made to get the sickest people to the hospital in white town. "So far, few who went had ever returned. As a result, the whole village was convinced that hospitals were there to finish them off" (Maracle, 51). The water sorcery has been replaced by modern medicine, but the resulting mental association is essentially the same. The rituals do not allow the communities to come together; in fact, they are more likely to tear them apart and cause much harm in the process.

3) Personal Rituals

Ultimately, rituals serve to give individuals a form of control or power over themselves. By internalizing the meaning of rituals, or simply by performing them, a person can strengthen their own sense of existence and validate it through various beliefs. Native thinker George Sioui claims that the vision quest, a highly personal experience, can help each individual achieve a higher potential for himself or herself and in regards to the entire world. But the vision quest is just one example of ritualistic experiences one can have in order to connect with the universe and one's self.

In Ravensong, Stacey is highly introspective, but the character that best defines the personal aspects of rituals is actually Dominic. Every so often, Stacey's inner monologue will
take us into Dominic's mind. To Stacey, Dominic represents a pure and uncorrupted way of thinking and being, an ideal to aspire to. She idolizes and idealizes him because he represents the best part of her native world. "The world was full of unfairness; somehow, the white man's God fitted in with the unfairness while Dominic's sense of the holy did not" (Maracle, 57). Stacey is on a personal quest of understanding, and in so doing she is confronting harsh realities and ideas that challenge every notion she has ever held in regards to her own existence within her community. Dominic provides a moral compass by which Stacey can steer herself in a direction that will not only bring answers, but also preserve her integrity. "His slow ways, his character gentled by his conduct could not envision the meanness of the outside world" (Maracle, 63). His kindness protects her from harmful ideas, but his presence is both a blessing and a curse. While he serves to shield Stacey and the community from the difficulties of the world outside, he is also ill-prepared to deal with those difficulties when they catch up to him. His rituals are insufficient to cleanse the disease or to save his own life.

Dreams is an important part of the ritual introspection that many native characters in the stories seem to go through. In Ravensong, a dream is hinted at by Raven herself, as she hovers above the village at the opening of the novel during Nora's funeral. Raven tries to awaken Stacey to her presence, but Stacey is lost in the modern world. Raven sighs. "They had not retreated for some time to the place of sacred thought" (Maracle, 22). In other words, the villagers have lost the belief in the power of dreams. Such is not the case in Black Robe. To the natives, dreams are everything, often more important than reality as we saw in the previous chapter. Their leader, Neehatin, is a firm believer in the power of dreams. A vision shows him Laforgue alone in the forest and he translates his dream into fact: "Last night in my dream he walked alone in Huron country" (Moore, 124). His dream becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because he takes actions to
insure that the dream will occur as he has seen it. And his fellow natives agree. "If you dreamt it, it will come to pass" (Moore, 125). Nowhere is there any doubt in anyone's mind that Neehatin might be mistaken. The natives even go so far as to transfer this power to their black-robed companion. This leads to a confrontation when Laforgue himself refuses to acknowledge this power that is given to him. "Tell me, Nicanis, what does your dream say now? - I am too weary for dreams. - But you must dream [...] If you do not dream, how can you see the journey ahead?" (Moore, 183). The mystical quality of the dream belongs to leaders, shaman and thinkers. The dream is a tool used by decision-makers to open their minds to the possibilities that are ahead of them. It provides insight into both the past and the future.

The powerful and very personal Christian ritual of confession is dramatized in *Black Robe*, often occurring before the moment of death. There is a moment in the story when Laforgue and Daniel, as well as their friends, have been captured by the Iroquois, where they will first be tortured and then killed. Death is imminent, "staring them in the face". As part of his duties to the souls of his companions, Laforgue offers Daniel a chance to make a final confession and receive absolution for his sins. Daniel, despite having spat on the face of Laforgue and God earlier in the story, grabs the occasion without a moment's hesitation (Moore, 156). For Laforgue, it is a means of achieving the task of saving souls, which he initially set out to do, thus fulfilling a personal purpose. For Daniel, it is a way for him to reconnect with his own beliefs in the immortality of his soul, which is now threatened with eternal damnation. It is ironic that this brush with death brings Daniel back to his Christian roots, despite his blatant refusal of them earlier in the story. But Laforgue explains it simply: "God is with us [...] it is he who forgives us" (Moore, 157). The encounter with death rekindles Daniel's belief in the Almighty and allows him to find solace in what he believes to be his final moments.
Raven, however, would disagree with Daniel's reaction. Daniel is reclaiming his soul in the name of God, but Raven has a different opinion on salvation. "[U]pholding the law is personal - a thing of the spirit. [...] Only your own spirit counts" (Maracle, 54). According to Raven's worldview, it falls not on God to forgive Daniel, but on Daniel to forgive himself and make peace with his own entity. One's true salvation, according to Raven, comes from within, whereas the Christian faith portrayed in Black Robe places it without, as coming from God.

Several other rituals serve to illustrate the relationship between the individual and his internal power over his own soul. After Laforgue succumbs to the sin of the flesh, he retires from the scene and flogs himself, reciting prayers and making penance for his libidinous behaviour (Moore, 56). He uses the ritual flogging to cleanse his being, albeit in a very physically intense fashion. He becomes his own judge and torturer, but his power is perceived as being a sanction imposed upon him by God. In Ravensong, however, we see that the rituals stem from within the community and for the community. For example, Young Jim must take over the household when his father dies. To this end, he adopts the rituals he witnessed from his father in his daily life. "Young Jim looked up before offering his first bit of tobacco to the glory of earth, uttering his hopes for tomorrow" (Maracle, 190). By taking over the ritual that was his father's, Jim is now assuming the mantle and responsibilities passed on to him due to the unexpected death. The ritual belongs to him now. It is his way of achieving his new status, but also of coping with the loss of his father, by taking his father's role within the family unit.

Possibly one of the most poignant rituals in Black Robe occurs when Laforgue, Daniel, Chomina and Annuka are captured and held captive by the Iroquois. In order to protect their integrity and their very souls, Annuka and Chomina perform an elaborate ritual of song and dance, designed to intimidate their enemies.
Impassive, not looking at his captors, Chomina began to sing a war chant in a loud defiant voice. His daughter shuffled in a circle in a primitive dance step. [...] And then, suddenly, the girl collapsed on the ground; the only sound in the house was Chomina's loud, monotonous war chant. (Moore, 160)

This ritual serves two purposes. The first one is obvious and relational: the act of defiance is intended to let the Iroquois know that neither Annuka nor Chomina will die easily, nor will they be easy to break: their souls will not belong to the Iroquois. The second one, however, is more personal. As they are performing the ritual, Annuka and Chomina are reaffirming their personal belief in their own existence in the face of their upcoming death. By dancing and chanting, they are saying to themselves that they are stronger than death.

Rituals come in all shapes and forms. Death is often surrounded with many varied rituals which are designed to allow the living to cope with the absence thus created. Sometimes, those rituals surround the physical treatment of the body and its ultimate fate. Other times, the rituals are geared more towards the community, allowing it to survive the passing of the individual and the emptiness it creates. More often than not, rituals are somewhat personal, even if they become a shared experience that brings people together. As Achiel Peelman states in "L'Esprit est Amérindien: Quand la religion amérindienne rencontre le Christianisme": "Les peuples autochtones nous rappellent constamment que, dans le domaine de la spiritualité, rien ne remplace l'expérience personnelle et communautaire" (65).

The rituals found in Ravensong share many similarities to those found in Black Robe. Their purpose is essentially the same. But when the cultures clash within each novel, when the natives bear witness to the Christian rituals or vice versa, or when characters like Stacey and
Laforgue try to bridge the gap between the ritualistic practices of different cultures, they mostly fail to negotiate the cultural encounter, because the rituals are ingrained in the local culture, and that culture is neither shared nor explained. The rituals work to connect the people's spirituality, but only within the community that shares them, and not beyond. The resulting conflict between cultures is as much a spiritual as a social failure at understanding.
Chapter 3

Spiritual and Social Power

*Ravensong* and *Black Robe* present several figures who hold significant power over their communities, and this power is manifested around the issue of death and dying. This spiritual and social power takes on many different aspects for a single individual. The relationship between the wielding of power and the community is not a simple one, nor is it simply temporal or social: it is also highly spiritual. To take on that power is to take on a large responsibility towards one's community, or it could be that an individual seeks to assert some form of control or dominance over a group. The power can be given by the community or taken by the individual, and the intentions behind the accumulation of power vary greatly from person to person, from situation to situation.

Power is also pertinent to death and dying, especially in spiritual matters. In order to protect their community and their individual members, groups often rely on specific members who are said to be more in touch with spiritual and religious matters to provide some semblance of understanding and possibly control over the fear of death. It should also be obvious that since several individuals can wield power, struggles for dominance may occur in the process. How much more so, then, will a conflict occur when spiritual figures belonging to different cultural and spiritual communities disagree over the meaning of rituals and death?

In *Black Robe* and *Ravensong*, I will be looking at two different kinds of power: social and spiritual. Social power is also temporal power to some extent. It represents the ability of an individual to provide physical and moral support to his community. The ways in which this power manifests itself are many, but generally include an ability to influence decision-making, if
not to assume the mantle of decision directly, to provide advice and comfort in matters of law and philosophy, and mostly to ensure the continuity of the community through the various hardships which can affect it. Spiritual power, on the other hand, is much more subtle and it involves the supposed handling of those forces that fall outside of the physical realm. Its manifestations are much more esoteric, involving knowledge of things unknown, believed manipulation of the unseen aspects of the world and the perception of things to come. Spiritual power is much more shrouded in secrecy than social power. Ultimately, both types of power require a form of sacrifice from whoever wields them, although the nature of that sacrifice varies greatly from individual to individual. It is important to note that those who wield social power often also wield spiritual power; and the reverse is equally true.

1) The Play of Power

*Ravensong* presents us with several different power figures, not all of them clearly identifiable at first. Old Dominic, the healer of the village, is the most obvious of them. Everyone in the village consults him on a regular basis. Everyone trusts his wisdom because he is an enlightened leader. "Dominic had no authority to make decisions for anyone, yet no one made decisions without consulting him" (Maracle, 67). Having inherited his position from his predecessor, Grampa Thomas, he assumed the mantle of healer with ease. The transition into this position was easy for him. His passing, in the middle of the story, takes a heavy toll on the community. "Dominic had been the caretaker of the law and philosophy of the village" (95). The power he wields, which came from both his predecessor and the community, is lost to them, and it is uncertain if it will or even if it can be reclaimed by anyone. But Dominic's power was much more than social: he was also the keeper of the tribe's spirituality and, as such, was granted powers beyond those of his fellow villagers. "[Stacey] knew he had a way of talking to animals"
No one else in the village has that ability: it is exclusive to Dominic. And it does not really matter whether the ability is fact or belief: the important element is that the villagers believe in that power, thus acknowledging it to the healer. When Dominic dies, a spiritual part of the community dies as well, since no one is now able to communicate with the animals. But perhaps Dominic's most impressive spiritual ability was his "invisibility", which he was not alone in possessing: "Both Stacey's father and Dominic had a kind of invisibility in life that became obvious only in death. Their presence, the hugeness of them, only presented itself in their absence" (84). In truth, that invisibility is what bound the community together. It gave Dominic the ability to move about his community, to exert his influence, both social and spiritual, without disrupting the lives of his fellow villagers. Only in his death does the extent of his power truly become apparent, only then does the community realize how much he meant to them, and how much they have lost.

In the native community of Ravensong, every individual assumes a specific responsibility, and with that comes a form of power. To the villagers, power is not independent from their role inside the community. The generational transference of that power is something that protects their continued existence, but loss is felt throughout the entire novel by the many deaths that plague the village. The funeral of Nora at the beginning of the book sets the tone. The villagers recall her various contributions to the community. "Nora could work... Best fisherman in the village... She could cut and gut half a dozen good-sized sockeye in no time... She was tireless." (18) But Nora is hardly the only person that the community loses along the way. "Sadie had been the keeper of their wild foods. She knew the medicines, the time of year to pick them and all of their uses. She too had died without a replacement" (95). Very often in the story, the community loses an individual and fails to replace him. The loss of the one diminishes the
whole. But there are instances when the transfer of power does occur, despite the suddenness of the death. When Stacey's father, Jim, passes away, it takes some time but eventually, his son, Jim Junior, takes up the mantle of his father for his family. He becomes the man, allowed to speak as an equal to his mother. "I told her culture and law is only good if it keeps people good-hearted and healthy" (180). By being allowed to grow up and fill his father's shoes, he is making sure that the family will be able to move on from the loss they suffered and that it will recover more quickly.

Everyone's function is different, and the power that comes with it reflects that. Stacey goes to school in white town because of what is expected of her, because of her social situation. This puts Stacey in a unique position inside her community: "Because she was a thinker no one expected her to know how to do anything" (138). Her role inside her community is predefined by her intellectual abilities; her power is presumed to be limited to those functions at which she excels, and she surprises several people by being more versatile than anyone imagined. Still, at other times, her uses of that power contradict the rule of her village, and she suffers for it, such as when she disobeys her mother by going to the lesbian couple's home and is threatened with becoming outcast from the family.

*Black Robe* also showcases people with power, but the power struggles between cultures are much more apparent in Moore's work than in Maracle's. The main conflict of the story revolves around the social and spiritual battle that Laforgue, a Jesuit priest, and Mestigoit, a shaman, have with each other, although many other confrontations also take place within the novel.
The characters in *Black Robe* wear their power on their sleeves, in the literal sense. Their costumes and their apparel are all symbolic of their function within their society. When we meet Chomina and Neehatin at the beginning of the novel, we are told:

Chomina, the elder Savage, had shaved his head bald except for a ridge of hair, which bristled across the crown like the spine of a hedgehog. His face was a mask of white clay. The younger, a leader called Neehatin, had ornamented himself for this occasion by drawing rings of yellow ochre around his eyes and painting his nose a bright blue. (Moore, 4)

The paraphernalia and the makeup they wear serve to illustrate their rank within their culture, to draw attention to their person and away from those with less authority. We also meet an Iroquois leader much later, Kiotsaeton. "One of these tattooed figures, tall and gaunt, was adorned in such a profusion of colored shells and beads, and wore a beaver of such splendour, that Laforgue assumed him to be the paramount leader" (158). Laforgue's interpretation, despite his lack of tribal knowledge, is correct: the signs of wealth and opulence are the marks of a leader for the Iroquois in the novel. But the natives are hardly the only ones to showcase their power through their apparel. The Jesuits themselves, with their traditional black cassock, mark their status as powerful beings, both in their own faith as well as for the natives. When the Iroquois who capture Laforgue fall upon his vestments, they immediately identify him. "They are sorcerers [...] Norman sorcerers" (136). The clothing is designed to allow an individual to manifest his power without having to claim it aloud. Laforgue himself “buys into” the power that his costume grants him, especially when he is challenged in his authority over Daniel. "There is a respect you owe my cloth" (90). The spiritual and social power
wielded by the characters in the story is generally not independent from their appearance.

The first chapter of the story opens on a scene with Champlain and the Jesuit priests, who are setting the stage for Laforgue's trip into the wilderness. The scene presents an interesting power play, as power goes back and forth between Champlain and the priests. Not a struggle per se, it is an interesting example of how social and spiritual power can influence each other to benefit a specific group. At first, the Jesuits discuss the matter of the trip with Champlain, putting an emphasis on its spiritual nature, by talking about the souls that need to be saved and the dangers associated with the trek, namely the possibility of martyrdom for Laforgue (Moore, 6-7). When Champlain starts talking and moving away from the topic at hand, the Jesuit priest manages to remind him of his power over him. "Behind him, [Champlain] heard the Jesuit superior cough, a small reminder, deferential, yet impatient" (4). It doesn't take much for Champlain to understand the intent behind the priest's cough, simply because the power he wields is one Champlain believes in. Then, later on, Champlain's speech empowers the Jesuits in return, as he gives them his blessing for the trip in front of the natives (19), an act that is both social and spiritual for the benefit of the natives. It is an intriguing dialogue that accurately shows how one type of power can influence and reinforce the other. The relationship between Champlain and the Jesuits is further delved into, much later in the novel, by the Iroquois, after their capture of Laforgue and his party. As the leaders ponder what to do about their captives, they think of their enemy, Agonha (the name they use for Champlain), and realize the influence his spiritual leaders have on him, despite his own position as temporal and social leader of the European colony. "It is said the Blackrobes hold him in their power" (169). The natives are not blind to the influence that exists between social and spiritual power. Even in the minds of some
fur traders, Champlain has undergone a transformation in recent years, and his social power has slowly been shifting to a more spiritual form: "Champlain was completely under [the priest's] thumb. He was like a priest himself, [...] lecturing everybody on the importance of saving the Savages' immortal souls" (195). In this instance, because of Champlain's position as governor of the territory, his power shifts back and forth between the social and temporal without much problem.

Father Laforgue and the other Jesuit priests represent an entire group dedicated to spiritual power. Their goal is noble in their eyes. They wish to save the natives' immortal souls. How they go about doing it, however, varies greatly from priest to priest. Along the way, Laforgue always seems to remain truthful to his desire to provide salvation to the natives, but he goes about doing it without attempting to openly convert them. He lives with them, follows their rhythms and routines, and tries to avoid being a hindrance on the way to the mission. But Father Jerome manifests his power in a much more fanatical fashion. He believes that the disease that has come upon his mission is a blessing from God, so he may have "[a] harvest of souls" (232). And he goes out of his way to sway the natives towards his beliefs, playing on their superstitions to achieve his goal. Yet again, the power comes not from the priests themselves but from those who believe in his abilities. Daniel himself reinforces Laforgue's spiritual strength when he reflects on meeting Laforgue for the first time. He believes that the priest will immediately know that he has sinned, and that Laforgue has his entire future in his hands (15). Regardless of whether or not Laforgue actually knows that Daniel has slept with Annuka out of wedlock, the fact that Daniel believes he knows is a clear example of the importance of that power. The power bestowed upon Laforgue is fully in the hands of Daniel here.
Neehatin emerges as the leader of the tribe that is travelling towards the mission and taking the priest and his ward along the path. But his power is limited to his own people and to the physical realm. When his dreams warn him of dangers to come, he turns to the sorcerer Mestigoit for validation. And the sorcerer is happy to provide it. "I say we follow the dream [...] Obey the dream" (126). As with Champlain and the Jesuit priests, Mestigoit's spiritual power reinforces Neehatin's social power, and together they emerge stronger than if they had worked separately or against each other. Indeed, they have to work together, because they are up against Father Laforgue, a black robe, in their eyes, a sorcerer. "The Blackrobe may not die. He is a sorcerer, a Norman sorcerer. And they are hard to kill" (108). Neehatin and Mestigoit cannot disregard Laforgue's presence because his own spiritual power challenges theirs. That power must be negotiated in order to be used for the good of the travelers. Neehatin confronts Laforgue about it: "I said, can your god bring us food every day? Mestigoit thinks you can cast a spell on game. [...] If you can do that, we'll follow you anywhere you want to go" (96). Neehatin, as a responsible leader, needs to have Laforgue's cooperation. He needs his power to be wielded favourably. And when it becomes clear that Laforgue's presence is becoming troublesome, this acknowledged power also provides a refuge to clear Neehatin's conscience as he abandons the priest. "Your sorcery will take you up the portage" (132). By acknowledging Laforgue's spiritual power, by using it to his own advantage, Neehatin is showing how one type of power, in essence his own social power, can supplant another's, even if it does help in this particular case that their cultures are different and their powers are, from the outset, mostly incompatible.

Still, the goal of acknowledging the other's power is ultimately to understand and define it, to make it one's own or to use it against its wielder. Terry Goldie, who wrote *Fear and Temptation*, works the entire premise of the book around the notion that fear and temptation are
the traditional reactions for non-native writers incorporating native voices and concepts in their writing (such as Brian Moore in *Black Robe*), in so far as fear tries to exclude the indigene from the process whereas temptation attempts to give a native association to the white characters (Goldie, 215). This definition generally applies to the encounters of power in both novels. It is a temptation to appropriate the other’s culture or power for one’s own. It is fear to refuse or refute it. And both the native and non-native characters perform this appropriation and resistance several times throughout the narratives. It is important to note that, especially for the natives portrayed in the novels, power is the difference between survival and death; that is why it holds such spiritual importance and why the natives are always trying to understand and use the other’s power. But sometimes, it is more important to stand against the other’s perceived power, and to refuse its impact in order to safeguard one’s own. The choice is not always obvious and not always the right one under the circumstances.

2) Understanding Power

Before one can start using power, one must understand how it works. Power does not work in a vacuum. It is wielded by individuals who are mostly aware of the importance they have within their community. In many places in *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*, characters try to understand the nature of the power they witness, in order to better understand where it comes from and what it can do to help or hinder them. In their moments of weakness over hardships presented in the stories, the characters come to rely on the people with power around them, and it is in that power that they find the strength to go on, as subsequent examples will show.

Both native and non-native characters try to understand the other’s power in the face of death, but the interpretation is always tainted by the observer’s established perspective. Étienne
Rouillard, author of the thesis *La Philosophie et l'Amérindien*, working on principles first elaborated by Gadamer, states that the difference between understanding, interpretation and application of knowledge lies in these three steps inherent to comprehension of the other, which distort the original meaning of the concept (Rouillard, 13-15). This means that whoever is witnessing instances where power is demonstrated goes through the process of first understanding how it works, then interpreting its meaning and finally assigning it a function. But a lack of context often creates a flawed perception of how the power works.

In *Black Robe*, Father Laforgue meets with Father Jerome upon arriving at the mission, and he becomes immediately embroiled in the power struggle for control of native spirituality. In Father Jerome's case, it is clearly a battle which is being fought, not strictly a physical battle but a spiritual one as well. "The Savages are under the spell of their sorcerers. And the sorcerers speak against us" (Moore, 218). Father Jerome does not deny that the sorcerers have power over their flock; instead, he fully recognizes that a conflict is ongoing. He understands the predicament in which he finds himself. The natives also seek to understand the power wielded by the "Blackrobes", and for good reason: "They were welcome because the Savages knew they had thrown off the fever. No one else had done so. Therefore, they must be sorcerers of strength" (211). With an epidemic threatening their village, it is important for them to understand why and how these strangers, these priests, have the ability to resist the disease. It is a matter of the information available for interpretation. In that context, there is only magic to the natives, since science is not available to them. The conclusion is perfectly logical from the natives' standpoint. Similarly, when the natives go out on a hunt the sorcerer Mestigoit is quick to walk up to Laforgue to try to enlist his cooperation. "No spells against the hunt, do you hear? Pray to your god. Ask him to send us moose" (93). Acknowledgment of Laforgue's power is a tool which
Mestigoit uses to exert some kind of control over it, and in his mind, it succeeds, because he returns to Laforgue after a successful hunt: "Your god has answered you, Nicanis. Those moose have died for you" (95). In this instance, it is not important for Laforgue to believe that his prayers might have influenced the hunt. It is only pertinent in the eyes of Mestigoit and the natives, since understanding Laforgue's power falls upon them. In this fashion, they project their own needs onto the exercise of power by the "Blackrobes", and one of those needs is to defy death: a good hunt ensures the tribe's survival.

In many instances, however, the power that is wielded is done so in secret, away from prying eyes. Whereas the above examples showcase apparent uses of power, the more subtle manifestations are often even more misconstrued when they are analyzed by outsiders. Again in Black Robe, Chomina's daughter, Annuka notices that during the hunt Mestigoit loses sight of Father Laforgue, despite assurances to the contrary. When the hunters return, she sees that the hunters barely found any food. Her mind makes a conclusion based on her own beliefs: "[T]his afternoon the "Blackrobe" had escaped the sorcerer and, in the forest, had cast a spell on the hunting" (77). Her love for Daniel as well as her mistrust of his companion clouds her judgement. But really, she did not witness any such spell being cast; she only works from an internal logic, which in her universe makes perfect sense. Other natives repeat this process later in the story when Laforgue proceeds to bury one of his dead colleagues in the chapel, near the tabernacle. A native comes upon the scene and reports it to the others. "He was hiding him under the ground so that some new fucking spell can be made" (221). Laforgue's intention and the natives' interpretation are at opposite ends of the spectrum, simply because they do not share the same cultural context, nor do they take the time to explain the reasons behind their actions. There is no real understanding between the cultures in Black Robe: there is only interpretation based on
local belief. In Ravensong, we have a similar situation where, in order to assist his people who are dying from the Hong Kong flu, Old Dominic isolates himself to work his healing. "Old Dominic kept conducting ceremonies in secrecy each night, hoping to cast out the disease" (Maracle, 79). But Old Dominic himself admits that he does not speak the language of this sickness. It is cured in hospitals, and its power is unknown and unattainable to him. He never visits the hospital to try to understand how their power works: he remains isolated in his own world and ultimately pays the price. He falls ill, but fails to let anyone know. When he finally dies, it is without warning, and there is no one to save him.

Annuka's reflections in Black Robe give us a perfect example of an outsider trying to understand another's culture without a shared context. She is influenced by at least two individuals, her father Chomina and her lover Daniel. Her attempts to understand Daniel’s world abound with misconceptions, speculations and half-truths that cloud the reality of it. All that Daniel tells her about his own world becomes tainted by her father’s world views, as the following extract from Black Robe shows:

When she asked Iwanchou why he feared to let the Blackrobe see him fuck, he said it was because of his god [...] He said his god would be angry with him. Why would he be angry, she asked. What is wrong with fucking? Or is it because, as my father says, you Norman have no women of your own? Of course we have women, he said. In our country across the water there are many women. But she wondered if he lied. (Moore, 79)

Annuka has never seen a white woman, since at that point in colonization there were very few of them, and none ever travelled into the wilderness alongside the men. Her father's ideas are
imposed upon her, and then challenged by Daniel, and it falls to her to make up her mind, to see whom she believes. The decision is not an easy one because she is torn between her own world and the world of her lover. And his promises are enticing. "If it is presents you want, I will give you presents you cannot dream of. I will take you to my country, where you will eat every day as much as you want. She did not believe him. There was no place anywhere where one ate every day" (79). Annuka works from her own experience: she has known hunger all her life and cannot fathom a place where it is not part of daily life. Iwanchou's world seems too unrealistic in her eyes for her to acknowledge it, even if she wants to. Her father feeds her fears as well. "The Hurons who accept the Norman god die and starve like other people. [...] When she heard her father say these things she felt afraid" (80). The fear that her father's words create in her is a normal reaction to the power of the images he places in her mind. Ultimately, it comes down to a failure of shared realities. The natives simply do not comprehend how the world of the Europeans operates, and they build their understanding of it accordingly.

"I will take you to Québec," he said. "I will take you to Agonha and ask that I be sent back with you to my country."

"In a wooden island?" she said. "No, no, I would be afraid."

"You need not be afraid" he said. "They are just great canoes." (81)

Having never seen Europe and not having any of their brethren who went there come back, to their knowledge, the natives have come to believe that the Europeans live on these floating wooden islands before they came to this land. And even if Annuka accepts the notion that there is a country on the other side of the water, the boats that the Europeans use are still alien to her, and she does not trust them, because she cannot understand them and make them her own. Her understanding of Iwanchou's world is never fully realized in the world of the novel.
Once the other's power has been identified, once it has been acknowledged, it becomes tempting for the outsider to see if he cannot grasp that power for himself, appropriate it in such a way as to make it useful for his own personal needs or for the needs of his community. A blatant and dangerous use of appropriated power comes in *Black Robe* when Fathers Jerome and Laforgue have been captured by the natives and are about to be executed. Through a monumental twist of fate (and narrative choice by Moore), an eclipse blots out the sun. Immediately, Father Jerome seizes the opportunity to not only save his own life, but also to use superstition to advance his cause. "You have seen the hand of God" (223). A natural event becomes a mystical and spiritual experience, and Father Jerome uses it to full effect: the priests are then released and the natives begin their movement towards their eventual conversion at the end of the novel. What Father Jerome does in this example is to take control of the random occurrence. The eclipse creates an opportunity for him to showcase his power. His academic upbringing allows him to understand the mechanics behind the so-called act of God, and allows him to wield the power it confers on him to great effect.

In *Ravensong*, many characters try to appropriate the other's power in order to help their community. The reasons behind this appropriation are usually more practical than spiritual, though the spiritual element cannot be denied either.

"Momma has taken to lighting a candle at the ill-used church in the village centre. [...] On the road, Momma told [Stacey] she was lighting a candle and saying prayers against any more illnesses. 'Our medicine don't work all that well on their illnesses,' she had rationalized. 'Anyway, it couldn't hurt.'" (Maracle, 117)
It seems perfectly reasonable for Momma to act as she does. The survival of her community is paramount and it has become clear that their own power is limited against this new disease. Why should she not seek some kind of spiritual assistance elsewhere, in the Christian faith for example? She knows that the hospitals are managing to cure people. In her culture, practicality and spirituality are intertwined, so she naturally connects the dots between church and hospital, and in that fashion retrieves the power for her own benefit and that of her community.

Indeed, Stacey's entire life choices have veered towards appropriating the power of white town. Her plans are to go to school abroad and become a teacher and then bring back whatever knowledge she acquires to her community. "She would go forth, collect the magic words of white town and bring them home" (192). Stacey is fully aware that the survival of her community depends on its ability to adapt to the changing world, to its new realities, and she knows that many of the answers she seeks will probably be found elsewhere. Still, Stacey comes to a realization about power as she struggles to help her community cope with the outbreak of disease. She fails in her duties in school and gets sent to the principal's office. Mr. Johnson tries to punish her with detention, which would mean staying over after class, something she cannot afford to do because her community needs her. She makes the decision to refuse her sanction, and to her amazement, she manages to get away with it. "The power Mr. Johnson wielded was illusory to Stacey, yet she knew he was full of this power" (67). The strange power play that happens at school forces Stacey to reconsider its ramifications, and how that power relationship works. She starts comparing her relationship with Mr. Johnson with her relationship with the healer, Dominic, and comes to a conclusion. "It dawned on her now that by her simple faith in
Dominic she had given him power. Her acceptance of his sense of truth was the source of his power. Stacey had just relieved Mr. Johnson of his authority over her" (67). Stacey realizes that any power wielded over her is entirely relevant to her relationship with the person wielding that power. She can appropriate that power at any time by relieving the wielder of it. There are, of course, consequences to this giving and taking of the power in the relationship, as it is rare for someone to willingly abandon their power without a struggle.

That struggle for control is all too obvious in Black Robe when the Iroquois have captured Laforgue, Daniel, Chomina and Annuka. As the Iroquois proceed to torture their captives, they are trying to exert their power over them and break them. Chomina explains the rationale to his companions: "An enemy must be made to cry out. That is why they torture us. [...] If you cry out, then, when you die, they will possess your spirit" (Moore, 164). In essence, a spiritual struggle is taking place: the Iroquois want to claim the spiritual power of their captives for themselves. Their deaths are not sufficient; they must be made to acknowledge the power of the Iroquois, even beyond death. And the Iroquois are confident that the priest and his ward will falter: "They have already cried out. They are weak. When they die, we will eat their hearts and own their powers" (168). The Iroquois have managed to successfully, at least in their eyes, break their enemy's will and are but one step removed from achieving that power.

But this is not the only time where Laforgue is spiritually challenged by the natives. A powerful scene occurs when the sorcerer Mestigoit confronts Laforgue and accuses him of being a demon. Laforgue becomes conflicted as he recalls the words of the sorcerer. "You are not Nicanis, whoever that man was. You are a demon. Can it be
that this man is the devil's agent and sees the mark of my Sin in me?" (70). Mestigoit manages to use his own spiritual power to challenge Laforgue's faith; his spiritual existence is threatened by the realization that his adversary may be speaking the truth. The words of Mestigoit taunt Laforgue for some time, until he manages to appropriate them into his own belief structure and forgive himself for his sins. It is not until that mystical accusation is appropriated that Laforgue can move on.

Appropriating the other's power is really an issue of control. It is about either claiming the power for one's own or simply brushing it aside. This is not resistance but dismissal. In *Black Robe*, Chomina's wife has noticed that her daughter is enamoured with the young Iwanchou. She talks about it to her husband, but his take on it is different. "He has put a spell on her. [...] – It's not a spell, it's his prick" (143). Chomina is much more grounded than his wife in this instance, and he sees no involved sorcery, but mainly the trappings of lust. He does not acknowledge in Daniel any form of magical ability over his daughter. The "Captain Clock" incident in the Jesuit refectory also perfectly illustrates how a ritual manifestation of power can later on be reclaimed and dismissed. In order to get the attention of the natives, the Father Superior of the Jesuits uses a clock to impress them, by calling out when the gongs will stop. The natives seem rather impressed by the feat (11). But a few days later, as Laforgue is setting out on his journey, he tries to get cooperation from the natives and fails. He tries to remind them of the power of the clock, but they start chiming on their own, making fun of him and essentially turning the process into ridicule (24). By refusing to acknowledge the supposed power of the Jesuit over the clock, the natives are essentially defusing its efficacy, reducing it to little more than a parlour trick.
3) Resistance to Power

There can come a time in any power relationship where it is no longer acceptable to acknowledge the other's power, where it becomes preferable to resist. There are no clear cut reasons why one should, and the circumstances vary from situation to situation, but the process of resistance is often driven by fear, one of the most important motivators behind any form of resistance. That fear can also come from many sources. The elder Awandouie, an influential native in Black Robe, reflects on Norman influence and power, and shows us the extent of his fear. "Perhaps that is how the Normans will destroy us. Not in war, but by a spell that makes us like them" (145). The notion of becoming like the other, of losing one's values and virtues in favour of theirs can be a debilitating image. To the natives in Black Robe the Norman settlers represent a challenge to their entire way of life. European customs are different, their beliefs are alien and their technology is superior in many aspects. But the fear of change does not come only from outside. In Ravensong, Stacey's internal monologue has her constantly thinking about her community's way of life, and she soon realizes that it seems doomed to failure given the new context of the world, but that her immediate universe refuses to adapt itself. No one wants to talk about change. "No one wanted to face the fact that life here at the edge of the world was empty for anyone" (Maracle, 13). By refusing to acknowledge the other's influence and by clinging to their traditions, by resisting change, the native community is trying to live in isolation, something Stacey feels is the wrong path for her people. But Stacey herself is not immune to the notion that the outside world is dangerous, and that contact with it can diminish her own community, even if she desperately wants to claim the power it holds. When she thinks of how death is handled in white town, she is mortified. "It wasn't that they didn't feel their people's losses, it was that their losses didn't seem to have much value [...] No wonder they can blithely
watch us die, came into Stacey's mind" (26). Although Stacey wishes to claim the power of white
town to help her people, she has no intention of becoming as cold and callous as she sees them.
She tries to resist some aspects of their power while trying to embrace others.

Spiritual and cultural resistance often occurs when a confrontation emerges between
ideologies. In Black Robe, as soon as Mestigoit and Laforgue meet they are at odds with each
other. Each wields his own personal arsenal of spiritual weapons and each challenges the other's
belief structure. Mestigoit goes so far as to claim that both he and Laforgue are demons (Moore,
68), which of course immediately antagonizes Laforgue, given the station of demons in the
Christian faith. Their conflict reverberates throughout their entire relationship, and each one
resists the influence of the other without being able to completely disregard it.

It is also the case that resistance occurs because one party refuses to abandon the power
he wields. Again in Black Robe, Laforgue is stunned when Daniel starts talking to him about the
natives' spirituality. At first, Laforgue does not believe Daniel; he cannot understand why the
natives would confide their beliefs to him but not to the priest, who is clearly much more suited
to understanding spiritual matters. Daniel's answer shocks Laforgue: "[A]ll Blackrobes are
sorcerers. They would not tell him of their world of the dead" (102). Because Laforgue holds
spiritual power whereas Daniel supposedly does not, it poses no threat to reveal the existence of
an afterlife to him. Laforgue's power might be able to bridge that gap, but the natives do not want
to give the Blackrobes access to their ancestors. In this case, resistance is applied through
secrecy: according to the natives, what the Blackrobes do not know cannot hurt them and cannot
be taken away from them.
Ravensong also explains how it can be impossible for an individual to forego his or her power; resistance can be justified by a need for a greater good. The integrity of the community must be preserved, and alien ideas can often disrupt the established order. Stacey learns that lesson the hard way when she spends time with the local supposedly lesbian couple unchaperoned, something that is forbidden in her village. And Momma lets her hear about it, threatening her with exile. Momma cannot afford to forfeit that control. "Her only authority to govern was her sense of law, her familiarity and her agreement with it, and her ability to bring her children to the same path. She could not be challenged without the loss of family that that challenge represented" (Maracle, 126). Ultimately, Momma has to resist Stacey's challenge of her authority for the sake of the community, because in a time of crisis such as the one facing the village authority cannot bear to be challenged.

The power wielded by the actors in the cultures portrayed is, as was previously stated, both social and spiritual. Social power is to life as spiritual power is to death. It is important to note, however, that neither is entirely independent from the other and that they are often deeply intertwined. Laforgue, for example, holds a form of social power within his own culture, given his status as a Jesuit priest, but he also commands spiritual forces as he connects with his God through his spirituality and acts as intermediary through prayers and rituals. Mestigoit functions in a similar fashion with the natives; he provides social validation by approving the leaders' decisions and spiritual leadership through dream interpretation and mystical consultations. Both have power over the dead. Laforgue performs death-bed baptisms to send the souls of the deceased to heaven, which are seen as water sorcery; Mestigoit can see the She-Manitou in the forest when she manifests herself and can peer into the land of night. Each in his own way weaves a complex array of power, and each challenges the other from the first moment of
encounter to the very last. There is no clear winner in the story as the encounter is never fully resolved. Indeed, each one seems to believe that he has won the encounter. Mestigoit claims that he has cast the demon from Laforgue's body; Laforgue experiences a divine revelation that restores his faith. In the end, their power struggle leads to nothing more. There is no real meeting of the minds; only the confrontation of their respective faiths and beliefs drive them forward, in the same direction but apart.

In the end, one's power, cultural or spiritual, temporal or divine, threatens another's, and demands retaliation. That is why the power in the novel enacts violence upon the other, failing to achieve an encounter through dialogue and exchange. "It was said that [Father Jerome] willed the death of the village but that their own sorcerers had stricken him with the falling sickness and soon he would die" (213). We try to understand what we can, then attempt to bind it to our will; when we cannot control it, we destroy it.
Chapter 4
Silence and Isolation

So far, we have examined the encounters with death as portrayed in the novels through the images of the afterlife which connect it to communities; through the shared rituals that allow those communities to mourn and survive the passing of an individual; and through accounts of power struggles between cultures. But death is, ultimately, a very personal experience, one that is often experienced in silence and isolation. The fact that death remains such an impenetrable mystery forces an individual to reflect upon herself, as Stacey does throughout Ravensong. Her introspection derives from a single event in the book that changes her perspective on the issue: "When had this begun, this looking at every little thing with too much heart and too much clarity? With Polly's death" (Maracle, 127). Polly's suicide becomes a powerful driving force for Stacey's personal search for truth. Many times in the story Stacey stops to ponder her condition and that of her community or white town, often asking a lot of questions but finding few answers, and those she comes up with are usually internal. The people around her do not seem to ponder the same things she does, and if they do, they do not share them. Stacey's internal reflections are given to us through the narrative, but they are not shared with her friends and family for the most part. In this sense, Stacey is very much alone in her process of rediscovery.

The process of mourning the loss of an individual is both a communal and a personal experience. It is communal because the loss is felt throughout the entire community. It is personal because the emotions that are felt vary from person to person, and how those emotions affect a person is a very private matter. This chapter deals with the personal aspects of death and mourning, and delves into the representations of silence and isolation in the various encounters
with death in both novels. Several moments of silence in the novels are tied to the death of an individual or the notion of mourning. Silences are most often uncomfortable and must be negotiated in order to be conquered, and each individual or culture in the novels tries their best to come to terms with these moments when faced with them.

As mentioned in the Introduction, death in the novels can be either physical or symbolic. The native community in *Ravensong*, for example, is greatly diminished every time it loses a member, and although instances abound of people dying due to disease or old age, another loss is experienced in the departure of the Old Snake, when he is exiled from the city. Despite his actions and his disobedience, the community must deal yet again with the loss of another individual. But more important to this study is the way that the Old Snake is exiled from his community, cast out and isolated not only from the living, but also from his ancestors, as we will see later. The Old Snake suffers a symbolic death as opposed to a more physical one, but it is a passing nonetheless.

Silence and isolation lead, in the world of *Ravensong*, to Polly's suicide, an experience both physical and spiritual. As analysis of Stacey's reflection will show, Polly is isolated in her own shame, and she cannot find a voice to express it. In the end, she resorts to taking her own life, and we will look into the way that silence and isolation lead her toward death.

1) Manifestations of Silence and Isolation

Sociologist Ernest Becker, in an essay entitled "The Terror of Death", writes about repression and how it affects the individual's perception of death. "Repression takes care of the complex symbol of death for most people" (Robben, 28). Repression is a psychological tool acquired from our parents' education, according to Becker, which enables us to negotiate our
encounters with death by tucking them far from thought. It is particularly relevant here because the silences found in both novels are a form of repression, a way for individuals or groups to put aside the fear of loss and death they experience in favour of more positive images. They create a silence around the matter by not discussing it out in the open. This partially explains everyone's uneasy reaction in the novel to Stacey's constant questioning, and why she can only seem to find answers within herself.

In “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,” Thomas King compares two native short stories, Ruby “Slipperjack” and “Indian School”. In both, he identifies the following motif: "What is most apparent [...] is not the information received but the silences that each writer maintains" (King, 16). This realization also applies to both Ravensong and Black Robe, in regards to the issue of death since both Maracle and Moore often say much more about death for their characters by not saying much at all.

Silence is something that Stacey is generally at ease with in Ravensong. She lives in a world that is punctuated by silences, that moves at a slow pace and therefore can afford to let the silence creep in. She notices that the situation in white town, however, is drastically different. "They don't like 'dead air space,' so they fill their whole world with needless chatter, even machine noises, as though they do not feel alive unless there is some racket going on" (Maracle, 20). The fear of death has been so hidden in white town that noises and chatter have emerged to drown out the despair and isolation that the people experience. It is a form of silence that prevents dialogue by filling the room with noise. And that noise makes everyone seem invisible. Not only do the citizens of white town refuse to hear, but they also refuse to see, as Ella had once told Stacey. "Don't go to the city, child. Them people die on the streets and people just step over them and keep on walking" (93). Death is removed from conversation as much as it is removed
from sight, and the people go about their daily lives without thinking about it, without realizing that death surrounds them. Its repression is in full force here. Stacey is not surprised when she notices that the epidemic hitting her village is not even mentioned at her school or in white town, despite the many deaths that occur. "In fact, Stacey did not seem to expect white folks to take care of any of the villagers" (69). She simply goes about her business without talking about it, without making a fuss or trying to draw out sympathy from anyone. Her silence here "speaks louder than any words," as she consistently disobeys Mr. Johnson by refusing to go to detention, yet never confronts him directly or in front of the other students.

In Black Robe, a powerful example of silence in the face of death occurs when the Iroquois capture the party and proceed to enact their rituals upon them, torturing them and feeding upon the remains of Chomina's boy. While Daniel, Laforgue and even Annuka stare in horror or try to look away, the boy's father shows no sign of weakness. He remains stock still, staring about him, unflinching (Moore, 160-161). His defiance in the face of of certain death is expressed through his conscious repression of the events occurring before his very eyes and the silence he chooses to enact. And the Iroquois are impressed by his attitude; they do not believe they will be able to break him. His silence makes him strong in this instance, just like Stacey's did.

Laforgue also opts for silence when he falls sick and fears that he might die. He does not want to appear weak and decides to attempt to hide his illness rather than talk about it. But the sorcerer Mestigoit sees through the deception. "Two nights ago, in the forest, the She Manitou smiled on him. The flesh eater" (108). Although Mestigoit sees the sickness in his own unique way, the fact remains that Laforgue knows it is better to hide his weakness from his companions, in part in order not to burden them with it. And no one comes to seek validation: Mestigoit and
Neehatin simply go about their business, allowing Laforgue to continue the charade for the benefit of everyone.

Old Dominic and Stacey's father also choose to hide their weakness and not share it with their fellow villagers in *Ravensong*. They are not as lucky as Laforgue, however, and the disease ultimately claims them, much to everyone's surprise. "Like an odd pair of twins, neither had said anything about their illness. No one noticed they were not well. The two men perished as unassumingly as they had lived" (Maracle, 84). Perhaps, if they had spoken about it, they might have survived. But the fact is that they choose to remain quiet so as not to burden their loved ones and community with the stress of their illness. By attempting to protect the others around them with their silence, they ultimately condemned themselves.

In the end, even in terms of those who have gone, it is better not to mention their passing. Uncle Benny went off and died in the war and his body was never returned to the village. Dominic, as the healer, had tried to provide some spiritual assistance. "Dominic has conducted a ceremony for Benny to help him on his journey to the other world, but even Dominic had not been confident that Benny had heard" (52). As a result, everyone in town is mindful of calling out Benny's name, in case his spirit is still around. His name is never uttered in order not to invite another death, and even if Stacey is not sure she believes the stories, she respects them. The many deaths that have plagued the villagers have taken their toll on them, and now, even those that are taken by the disease are best left undisturbed. "Two lineages were lost in the first flu epidemic and now Ella's sister Sadie joined the line of siblings in some place no one dared define" (94). It ultimately seems better to leave the dead alone so as not to invite further deaths upon the community, and this manifestation of silence, never referring to the dead by name, guarantees it in the native tradition.
In "Symbolic Immortality", Robert Lifton and Eric Olson discuss the ways in which individuals can symbolically survive beyond death. They write: "Death anxiety becomes overwhelming when one has to confront it in isolation" (Robben, 39). In most examples throughout the novels death is a shared experience, something that several individuals can relate to and therefore provide support for. But there are instances when an individual comes face-to-face with death and has to bear it in isolation. Those experiences are usually personal and highly spiritual encounters. Still, according to the same authors, "[the] capacity to live with death is generated by available social forms as well as by forms made available by one's own life" (39). When characters face death in isolation, they can no longer rely on their community to support them; they must face the experience with only their own perspective, and the experience can be utterly frightening. According to Achiel Peelman, author of *L'Esprit est Amérindien*: "La vie humaine ne reçoit de sens qu'à travers les relations que chaque individu entretient avec les autres êtres vivants ou toutes les autres formes de vie à l'intérieur du cosmos" (Peelman, 54). Without the meaning that comes from the interrelations between people, the idea of death can overwhelm any individual that is removed from his communal setting, willingly or through the community's desire.

Stacey's introspections in *Ravensong* bring to her to a realization about the white community and the isolation that some of its people are living in. She gets into a conversation with Judy, an outsider who lives in her village and has become partly accepted as one of their own. Judy explains to Stacey that women in white town cannot own property. Stacey realizes how isolated this makes the women. "In the end, what struck her about Judy's narrative was the lack of support in the white community for Polly's mom. Where was the family in all this? There were no support systems for white women, not among their relatives or in their communities or
in law" (Maracle, 81). And because of that, Polly's mom is forced to live with a husband who beats her or face life on the street and as an outcast. Neither choice seems good for Stacey, understandably.

The Jesuit priests in *Black Robe* also experience much isolation during their travel. On at least two separate occasions, Laforgue isolates himself from Daniel and his fellow travelers, though not necessarily willingly, because he cannot bear to face them. Only in isolation does he find a form of solace. The first time Laforgue retreats into himself is after he witnesses the sexual encounter between Daniel and Annuka and falls prey to his own lust. The shame he feels at his conduct sends him away from accusing eyes. "He was alone. It was as though he were the only living thing in this place" (Moore, 56). Lust is, after all, a mortal sin in his mind: death permeates the air around him because if Laforgue should die before repenting, he would go straight to hell. In his isolation, he proceeds to exact penance upon his body through self-flagellation to atone for the sin he has just committed. Then, later on, as the toils of his journey are wearing him down and the constant confrontation with Mestigoit is draining his resources, Laforgue again retreats into himself, completely shutting out the world around him. "He moved, blind and uncaring, shut out from God's sight as though he, like Chomina, was condemned to live in the darkness of this land" (182). Laforgue has lost his spiritual support and is now walking aimlessly, as if he were already dead. He suffers fully from his isolation and cannot see anything past his own failure.

Isolation comes to Father Jerome as well, but in this instance it is the villagers in the mission who impose it upon him. When the disease strikes the village and its inhabitants start dying, they find a scapegoat in Father Jerome. They choose to shun him. When he himself falls ill, the natives decide not to provide any assistance. "No one would come anymore into this house. The village waited for his death" (210). Through no choice of his own, the priest has been
cast out from sight, isolated until the threat of his presence is removed. Although no one will take action against him, no one will prevent whatever fate befalls him either. He is literally alone and abandoned until Laforgue comes along and precipitates the events that lead to Father Jerome’s death.

Stacey’s inner thoughts provide us with an important understanding of the reason behind the isolation that is felt and that keeps the people separate. It is not purely a personal matter; it is also a social matter between cultures, and as such, isolation is what prevents the intercultural encounters from achieving more than they do. Stacey quickly becomes aware of the problem. "She knew they stayed confined to their villages for false reasons: segregation between the others and her own people had as much to do with how her own felt about the others, as it had to do with how the others felt about the villagers" (Maracle, 43). The initial problems of encounter have created a situation where neither side trusts the other, and where each side chooses to remain indifferent to the other, isolating them in the process. The other is judged by the community's standards, and ultimately fails to be acknowledged as a potential ally.

The story of the Old Snake in *Ravensong* is an important example of a symbolic and social death, where one individual is removed from the collective because of the danger that individual represents to the survival of the group as a whole. The first twist in the narrative occurs when the snake's wife shoots him after she discovers he molested (and possibly raped) their daughter. The villagers manage to save the life of the snake, but it is decided that he will have to leave the village and never return. "The chief had already told him that, as soon as he was strong enough, he would have to leave. He made no objection" (169). His lack of answer here tells much about the power of the community over him. He is being cast out and offers no resistance; he knows he broke the rules. Everyone could tolerate what he did to his wife, but
turning on his children was too much for them. "The children were their children; the snake had to leave" (164) It appears in direct contrast to the lack of support for Polly's mother. In the native community, it is the snake's wife who receives the community's backing, even if she is originally from a different tribe. Whereas Polly's mom in white town has to face her isolation alone, here it is the snake that must bear the burden of isolation. His final departure is uneventful:

The Old Snake left sometime during their fishing time. [...] He had stood upright like soldiers do. The villagers lined the path to witness his departure. The snake struggled with his lost dignity, waving to each of them. No one responded. [...] The snake left without a goodbye from anyone. (181)

Although he is walked out of the village by his former companions, he remains very much alone. The villagers need to let him know that they acknowledge he is leaving, but that they no longer acknowledge him as part of their group. It is a form of ritual and social death. The Snake leaves the community and is never mentioned again.

Stacey comes to understand how her constant quest for answers can lead to her becoming an outcast too. As her reflections on white town take more and more place in her mind, she starts failing to recognize the moral and spiritual authority that her mother and the rest of the villagers have over her. Stacey starts to disregard the traditional authority in her village. As a result, her mother eventually confronts her and tells her to start respecting their ways or be cast out. Stacey realizes that her resistance to the established traditions might have dire consequences: "But she was eighteen and had been threatened with ostracism" (124). If Stacey is not mindful of what she does, she could very well end up like the snake, something which would completely shatter her hopes and
dreams. She cannot hope to encounter the white town's ideologies without taking into account the effect it can have on her status within her own community. There are consequences to contact and she must assume them. "She would have to own her every action" (124).

2) Sacrifice and Suicide

When silence and isolation become overwhelming, or when they take up more importance than the community, it is possible for individuals to want to terminate their existence in order to reconnect with some higher purpose, or simply to make the pain stop. In the world of the novels, we find the notions of sacrifice and suicide to be moments where death is encountered either in spiritual or in cultural form, although the spiritual normally takes precedence. According to Lifton and Olson, suicide reveals a social failure and is not a purely private matter. The despair experienced by the individual committing suicide is manifested in two different ways: it either comes about because of the isolation or lack of contact that the individual suffers, or it becomes a way for the individual to reclaim mastery over his or her own person, in essence becoming a gesture of symbolic integrity: "I am my own person" (Robben, 39). Self-sacrifice shares many characteristics with suicide, primarily in the sense that sacrifice is a course of action which may lead to the individual's demise. The intent behind both differs, as sacrifice is not traditionally a manifestation of despair, which is so often the case with suicide. Yet both may result in one choosing one's own death.

This notion of sacrifice recurs as leitmotif in *Black Robe*. From the first pages of the novel, we are presented with the distinct possibility that the trip the Jesuit Laforgue and Daniel are about to undertake might be the equivalent of a death sentence: "The journey to almost
certain death of a priest and a boy, against the chance to save a small outpost for France and for the faith" (Moore, 7). Champlain holds no illusions as to what awaits the travelers, but Laforgue is resolute in his commitment. He has read the journals of his predecessors and they have inspired in him a desire for adventure and glory, for a chance at providing redemption to the natives and for "the honor of some greater danger in a lonely place" (34). And the journey is indeed fraught with peril, as Laforgue is progressively faced with a challenge to his faith, abandonment and capture by the Iroquois and finally a confrontation with the very natives he sought out to illuminate and convert. Laforgue's desire to become a sacrificial lamb for his cause sometimes bring him insurmountable joy, even during the worst of hardships. "Everything that he did, everything that he suffered, he did and suffered as a Jesuit, for the greater glory of God. God had tested him and would test him further. [...] God is with me. God honors me with this task." This liberation occurs when, after days of suffering from an ear infection, Laforgue finally appears healed from it. Laforgue is pleased not only about his recovery, but also because a test of his faith helped him grow. But earlier in the story is another matter. As Laforgue is pitted against self-doubt, he gets lost in the forest and panics. When the natives find him, he becomes ashamed at his reaction. "I did not welcome death as a holy person should. I was afraid" (75). All throughout the novel, Laforgue faces this issue of his faith being tested; sometimes, he succeeds and sometimes he fails, but it remains a constant with him because of this notion of sacrifice that he must endure in order to achieve his goal. The natives, however, have a different vision of the matter. Chomina makes it apparent when he finally confronts Laforgue about his beliefs, after coming to his rescue and being captured by the Iroquois. He does not mind that Laforgue should want to die, even if he doesn't understand why, but he cares for his daughter. "You, Nicanis, I understand. You Blackrobes welcome death. You think that if you die, you will enter a Norman
paradise. But if she dies, she will go to the land of night" (184). Laforgue does not seem to realize that the fate he has chosen for himself is something that he is not experiencing alone. He is dragging along Daniel and Annuka into his adventures, and Chomina himself is dying. Chomina's accusation is that Laforgue is not taking into account the spiritual difference between them, and he is not far from the truth at this moment of the novel, since Laforgue keeps trying to convert Chomina and his daughter to the Christian faith, regardless of their desires.

Self-sacrifice is not an unfamiliar notion to the natives in *Black Robe*. The Iroquois themselves understand it all too well. After they have captured the Blackrobe and his companion, they wonder what to do with them and sit down in council to elaborate their strategy. They know how important the Norman sorcerers are to their enemy Agonha (Champlain) and they decide to trade his life for weapons and supplies. However, all realize that there is danger in this endeavour, as Agonha is likely not to take kindly to the treatment of the prisoners and whoever goes might end up dead as well. Despite this knowledge, one leader steps up to the task. "Kiotsaeton spat in the fire. 'I am the man'" (171). Clearly, the Iroquois seem to understand the value of sacrifice, if it benefits the community. So perhaps Chomina's problem with Laforgue's sacrifice is really that the priest does not take into account the social aspect of sacrifice. After all, Chomina himself exposes his family to danger when he agrees to go back with Daniel for the Black Robe. He knows he is venturing into enemy territory and might well meet his end there (147-148). His reasons are radically different than those of Laforgue. He agrees to perform the deed in order to protect the rest of his tribe. It may not be a literal sacrifice, but his wife and child get killed at the hands of the Iroquois and he himself dies a little later in the story. And when he senses his time coming, he has no qualms or hesitations about what to do. The others must go and leave him behind. "No I must be alone. I have dreamt this" (186). Chomina is at peace with
his decision, even though it ultimately lead to his own death. Annuka respects her father’s
decision, but Laforgue insists on remaining until Daniel is forced to drag him away from the
scene. Oddly enough, while Laforgue seems perfectly willing to live with the consequences of
his own sacrifice, he tries to do everything to prevent Chomina from suffering a similar fate.
Perhaps he fails to acknowledge the value of Chomina’s sacrifice because he does not
acknowledge the cultural and spiritual motivations behind it, even though, to some extent, they
are very similar to his own.

Sacrifice in the contemporary world of Ravensong wears a different face. It appears in
plain sight throughout the novel, as the natives are constantly forced to compromise in order to
survive. For example, when the flu hits the village, the women scramble to save as many as they
can, but they quickly run out of resources to treat everyone. A decision needs to be made. "In
tears one night the women admitted the illness was too big – the old had to be left in the interest
of the babies" (Maracle, 82). The notion of sacrifice is not a personal one but a communal one. It
more accurately resembles the actions of Kiotsaeton or Chomina who agree to put themselves in
danger for the greater good of the community. In the native cultures portrayed in both novels, the
community always takes precedence over the individuals.

While Ravensong only skims the surface of sacrifice, even if it is apparent throughout the
entire novel, it delves deeply into the notion of suicide with the character of Polly. The young
white girl takes her own life in the second chapter of the novel, and her action echoes throughout
the entire novel through Stacey's reflections, with the reason behind the emphasis coming to light
only in the final chapter. "The story had begun with an answer to her son's question, 'Why had
little Jimmy killed himself?' Her nephew had shot himself." (197). The innocent question from a
boy returns Stacey to her own childhood and the traumatic death of her friend from white town,
Polly. It is the exact same question that she herself asked many years ago, a question to which she had never really found an answer. "What sort of bend in your personal spirit did you have to have to end your life?" (60).

To Stacey, Polly's story is at first full of contradictions so it takes her some time to come up with answers to her many queries. She first learns that Polly and a boy from her class engaged in sexual activities, something that was frowned upon by the white community. She does not understand Polly's shame. "Killed herself because they knew she had enjoyed her body's passion. It all seemed too absurd to be true" (39-40). The mystery deepens when Stacey learns from German Judy that Polly's father was beating up her mother, and that the woman was trying to divorce him. Again, Stacey marvels at the oddness of the white community. "You can't get divorced if your husband beats you?" (80). Stacey is slowly discovering the context that led to Polly's ultimate decision, and the despair she experienced throughout her existence. She slowly begins to unravel the mysteries around the oddity, with a little help from Raven.

Wander around Polly's insides, feel your way through decades, generations of lostness. [...] Discover her spirit, bent, then broken. Re-invent Polly, re-imagine her, hang onto the picture of perfect being letting go, spiralling down into shame.

Picture the rootlessness she must feel. (38-39)

Somehow, Polly seems disconnected from the world to which she should belong. Stacey identifies the difference between herself and Polly as the sense of belonging to a community that needs her. Polly's life does not seem to matter in the white community where she grew up, where she went to school and to Church. And therein lies the problem, Stacey seems to think. "Maybe some white people had no roots in the creative process, so could not imagine being that devoted
to staying alive. If you have only yourself as a start and end point, life becomes a pretence of continuum. [...] Maybe no roots was the problem" (61). Perhaps then, the answer that older Stacey is looking for in the final chapter is essentially that her nephew, young Jimmy, had become disconnected from his community, that he had lost his roots and could no longer envision life as part of a whole where he belonged. Therefore, like Polly, he had committed suicide. "In trying to answer the question with a story she felt the necessity to recapture the lost sense of community that lay wounded in the shape of Jimmy's suicide" (197). That shared notion of a shared cultural and spiritual heritage, one that shapes the community and helps it to thrive and survive, seems to be major factor in resisting the allure of death through suicide. But that heritage can also be shattered through the politics of encounter. Stacey encounters Polly and her culture through Polly’s death, and it challenges Stacey’s understanding of her own traditions.

In both *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*, the notions of silence and isolation work to allow the communities and the individuals therein to maintain the integrity of their community. But this can only go so far. Without an aptitude for sacrifice for the greater good of the community, without some form of support for those that experience the isolation, there is a danger of personal or social death. It can be a frightening sight to confront the other's isolation or to be invested in their silences, and it can lead to more isolation, as is the case of the relationship between Steve, a white boy from school, and Stacey. In the end, Steve's courtship fails to bridge the gap between them. Despite several attempts by Steve, who goes out of his way to visit Stacey’s village and walk alongside her after school, Stacey feels very little connection to his world, because their traditions seem so incompatible to Stacey. "Finally, Steve left. She watched his lonely defeated back, feeling sorry for the whole of white town for the first time" (187). His departure echoes that of the Snake, who no longer shared a context with the villagers. Steve did
not have any to begin with, and failed to acquire the qualities needed to pursue a long-term relationship with Stacey.

Still, what comes out of both novels in terms of the consequences of encounter is a hopeful message, one that makes us believe there can still be some understanding if people take the time to break the isolation and silence that separates their cultures. This hope takes the form of Gramma's voice in *Ravensong*: "We will never escape the sickness until we learn how it is we are to live with these people. We will always die until the mystery of their being is altered" (192). Only through these encounters can some form of peace and understanding be achieved, and this, hopefully, can transform both cultures.
Conclusion

Transformation through Death in *Ravensong* and *Black Robe*

In any form of encounter, two or more parties come into contact and exchange information, overtly or by indirect means, willingly or without being aware of it, and that exchange stimulates a reaction which affects both parties in a variety of ways. It is very rare for contact to occur without some kind of transformation to at least one of the parties involved. No one denies that the encounter between the European settlers and the native populations profoundly altered each group, though the debate is still open as to what exactly those alterations were. It is not a simple issue to resolve.

The very nature of the encounters portrayed in *Black Robe* and *Ravensong* between the non-native and the native characters potentially alter the way the characters perceive themselves and the other cultural groups in the novels. Whether it is Laforgue traveling alongside the natives and discovering their unique way of life, the natives trying to come to terms with Laforgue's strange spiritual behaviour, or Stacey coping with the vast differences that separate her community from white town, everyone is affected by what he or she witnesses the other doing. And since death is so present within the novels, it is partly in watching how the others live and how they die that this contact and eventual transformation occurs. As Raven states: "Death is transformative" (Maracle, 85).

Penny Petrone, in "Indian Literature" in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, states that traditional native beliefs may have been tainted through contact with Christianity early on in the process of colonization. She makes that argument because of the lack of written native
material available from that era. Most of the material collected was in fact collected by Christian agents, or produced by Indians who had converted to Christianity (Petrone, 384).

Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, a native author who wrote *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture*, concludes her collection with the following comment in agreement with Petrone, although she puts a different spin on the idea, stressing the mutability of culture. "Traditions that appear to persist, actually change over time and come to stand in a different relation to the ways people live, define their relations with each other and others, and relate to their conditions of life" (Valaskakis, 256). If we examine the cultures in the novels and the ways traditions evolve, we can see that each culture attempts to influence the other, and what emerges from that encounter is something different than what was initially the case. The shift might be subtle or it might be obvious, but there is a transformation that takes place within the boundaries of the novels. That reaction might be positive or negative, both or neither, but it is there and I have tried to examine how encounters with death have reshaped the spiritual and social existence of the individuals and the communities in the worlds of the novels.

In "Symbolic Immortality," Lifton and Olson argue for something called "theological immortality." It is "the image of immortality [that] can connect with the experience of spiritual death and rebirth which may occur many times during one's earthly existence" (Robben, 35-36). That renewal process which allows an individual to suffer a spiritual death and rebirth is one I have discussed, especially through the characters of Laforgue and Stacey who, as protagonists, find themselves at several crossroads within the narrative that allows them to transform their beliefs and even their being, to some extent.
In order to sum up the transformations that are taking place in the novels, I will revisit how perception of the afterlife can create a dialogue around the destination for the dead; how rituals influence individual and communal encounters; how power plays are consequently enacted between cultural and spiritual groups; and how these confrontations between groups or even within a single can enforce isolation and silence. I will be able to show, along the way, how various transformations take place during these encounters.

On the subject of afterlife in the novels, we rarely find agreement between characters from different cultural communities. There are a few shared notions, but even those notions are challenged by specific details. The encounters in and around the afterlife are not generally resolved, primarily because the belief systems portrayed have constructed the final resting place of the soul on different models.

One way that most characters seem to be in agreement lies in the belief in the existence of the soul, that spiritual part of the being that survives the body. Most of the characters also agree that there is a final destination for the soul, an 'other' world where it goes to rest after the body's journey in this world has ended. But the agreement stops there. The natives believe that all things in nature have a soul, whereas the Christian characters do not acknowledge the spirituality of nature. The natives also give power to entities that dwell in the afterlife, such as Raven or the She-Manitou, the wolf spirit or sacred cedar; all these spirits have power over the land of the living and the people within it. Again, it seems that those of Christian faith refuse to believe in these entities and are unable to perceive them, although the Jesuit priests, and Laforgue in particular, see the invisible hand of God at work in the novel. The natives in Black Robe hold the power of dreams in high esteem as their most sacred form of vision. But the Jesuit priests want the natives to abandon such a belief and instead invest in their god. "Above all, you
must give up your belief in dreams. [...] You will have no need of dreams to tell you right from wrong [...] Our lord will tell you" (Moore, 229). The priests are asking the natives for a complete and possibly irreversible transformation, based solely on faith, a faith that is not shared. While the priests never actually acknowledge the presence of the native afterlife (Laforgue himself is deeply surprised when he hears about it from Daniel), the natives on the other hand fear this 'paradise' that is being proposed to them. Laforgue seems to finally understand, after witnessing Chomina's behaviour and hearing his words: "The world is our sunlight, Chomina says, and for him it is true" (185). This is a rare occurrence of Laforgue actually acknowledging the spiritual reality of the other. Perhaps it comes about because Laforgue finally realizes that their spiritualities are separate, that the bridge between their cultures is too great to be negotiated. Chomina, he understands, does not want to be saved, and he can now understand why: "What consolation can he seek, he who knows nothing of God's mercy? [...] what does He offer to these others, what mercy does He show to these Savages who will never look on His face in paradise[?]" (180). As Laforgue seems to accept Chomina's eventual fate, he still manages to care enough to question his own faith, perhaps allowing some of the native spirituality to rub off on him. Chomina wants to be with his ancestors in the land of night; he needs to remain connected to his past in the sense of continuity that his afterlife can bring him.

The natives who die in *Ravensong* share this same desire. They believe they travel into the afterlife and rejoin their ancestors, in the large community of those that have gone away. They are not drawn to heaven, the other world of the Christians. In the end, their fates are separate. There is no hope in the novel for the 'other' worlds to be reconciled in any way. There are, in essence, no intercultural transformations taking place in the afterlife, because in truth, there can be no real encounters within its domains.
The strength of rituals is, as we saw earlier, entirely dependent on context. The various rituals that the characters in *Ravensong* and *Black Robe* use are directly tied to their own cultural and spiritual realities. Within a single community, the familiar rituals carry meaning that allows people to cope with the death of an individual. When those rituals are seen by outsiders or performed for their benefit, they are too often misinterpreted, misconstrued or taken at face value, which leads to all manners of misunderstanding, up to the point of violence.

The fate of the physical body of the deceased remains a singular moment where rituals clash in plain sight. The body cannot be ignored. In several scenes in *Black Robe*, Laforgue attempts to perform baptisms on the natives. Since the living do not ask for it, he visits the recently deceased in order to offer them absolution and salvation in the other world as part of their last rites. The natives do not know how to handle this ritual and the fear of the other makes them wary of its power and of Laforgue himself. Even the supposedly simple choice of burying or cremating the remains of Nora creates an anxiety within the native community of *Ravensong*. The community is split down the middle because of a spiritual divide, despite sharing a cultural heritage. The threatened loss of community is a powerful motivator in the resistance that the natives in both novels enact in order to survive. In *Black Robe*, Father Jerome offers Christianity to the natives as a new ritual model: "You will have a new life, as Christians" (Moore, 230). But the Huron leaders see his offer as an end to their traditional existence. "If we do these things, and we give up our belief in the dream, then the Huron life, the way we have always known, will end for us" (230). The community feels the need to remain true to its own rituals or else it will collapse upon itself. That is because its rituals are integrated in everyday life. The same truth applies to the native community in *Ravensong*. When the flu hits the village, it prompts a
collective effort for survival; no one in the village can afford to remain complacent in the face of
certain death. Rituals must be enacted in order to preserve the whole.

The whole of ritualistic behaviour is dependent upon good communication. In both
novels, it is in how the people communicate that the rituals achieve their full power. Without this
discourse, there can be no understanding, and this is what prevents the different belief systems
from sharing their rituals in any successful fashion. Laforgue does not manage to achieve it,
despite his high spiritual education. He faces a crisis of faith as his own rituals become
meaningless when he starts to see them through the eyes of the natives.

But the statuette was wooden, carved by men. The hosts in the tabernacle were
bread, dubbed the body of Christ in a ritual strange as any performed by these
Savages. [...] a wooden box and a painted statuette could not restore his faith.

(242)

There does not seem to be any middle ground he can achieve at that moment. The ritualistic
language of the natives is not his own. And words, as Stacey states in *Ravensong*, hold power, as
they themselves become ritualized. "Words are sacred, once spoken they cannot be retrieved"
(Maracle, 167). Communication and understanding are what is missing from the discourses
during the various encounters between the communities in the novels. The only rituals where the
cultures do not clash are those rituals which are highly personal (the dream for the natives or
penance for his sin for Laforgue), and then only when those rituals are experienced in the privacy
of one's spirituality and not shared with the other.

The self-empowerment the rituals provide to those who practice them do not help in any
way to negotiate the cultural distances that remain. And yet, there is a modicum of hope in both
novels that there can be, on some deeply spiritual level, a meeting of the minds. In *Black Robe*, Laforgue and Taretandé argue towards the end of the novel about baptism. The native leader wants the priest, who has now lost his faith, to save them. Laforgue, in the midst of his reflection, manages to find common ground in a most simple expression, as Taretandé asks what could be the most important question for Laforgue: "Do you love us? – Yes. – Then baptize us" (Moore, 245). The encounter is resolved in a positive light, simply because the two groups have managed to find a common bond, a shared context: love for one another, even if the desire for that love, on the part of the natives, comes more from the necessity of survival than anything else.

Nowhere are the spiritual encounters between the cultures more apparent or more direct that in the power struggle that occurs in both novels. The many figures of power wield their respective powers in a manner that corresponds to their function within their society. The most important figures are Dominic in *Ravensong*, and Laforgue and Mestigoit in *Black Robe*. A host of secondary characters are also worth mentioning: Champlain, the other Jesuit priests, Chomina, Neehatin, Kiotsaeton, Nora, Sadie, Momma or even Mr. Johnson. In wielding varied levels of spiritual and social power, they make their influence known to others, in a complex pattern of interrelation.

In an effort to understand the power of the other, characters like Stacey or Daniel reflect upon that perceived power in each novel. In Stacey's case, the goal is very elegantly stated by Dominic, when someone asks why Stacey is going abroad to university: "How else are we to learn how we are to live with them?" (Maracle, 154). Dominic and Stacey both want to step out of the traditional reactions of fear to the other's power and presence. They know their perspective is tainted by their local cultural beliefs, and only by learning how to handle the power in the
other's context can true understanding be achieved. The will for change is strong here. The native thinkers realize that cooperation with the other's power is necessary for survival. Unfortunately, the belief in that power which is required to accept it is not easy.

Acknowledging the other's power means questioning one's own as well. But once that power has been mastered, once it is appropriated, it can come to benefit the group as much as the individual. Yet there is always the chance that the encounter will challenge one's perception of morality, and Stacey suffers from her encounters with the Christian faith, as she learns of how she came to be in this world. Her father is actually Ned, Jim's brother, since Jim could not have children of his own. The judgement enacted by the other's influence hits hard. "No wonder the priests think we are immoral. We are" (102). The power wielded by the other is, in this case, incompatible with the traditional morality of the villagers, and it causes grief and pain to Stacey. She transfers that power to her mother, judging her by Christian standards. "This meant Stacey's mother had no virtue. She was sinful" (132). Stacey's perception is altered by her contact with the other's power, and it indeed manages to instil fear in her. Yet, that same sin she reproaches in her mother is excused earlier in the story, when Stacey defends Polly's actions against the judgement of her peers by judging her with the morality of her own community. Stacey is playing, though maybe not consciously, with the different powers at her disposal, attempting to control each, but not necessarily succeeding. Momma, on the other hand, resists that power with the strength of her own traditions: "Don't use their laws to judge me child, use your heart" (102). Momma has no intention of acknowledging any other power over her own morality: she does not feel shame over her actions. In essence, the act of love she committed created Stacey, her brother and her sister. Momma was using her community's powerful traditions to ensure the continuity of her lineage and family. The other's power has no hold over her, simply because she refuses to
acknowledge its validity, much like Stacey does when she defiantly stands against Mr. Johnson, for the greater good of her community.

In *Black Robe*, Chomina stands very much in the same light as Momma, but for different reasons. He refuses the other's influence and condemns his allies who allow themselves to be manipulated by it. "If we weren't going to keep our word, we shouldn't have taken Agonha's presents. We have become as bad as the Normans themselves" (Moore, 145). His identity is challenged by the other's power, and he clearly sees the change already occurring in his friends. His traditional way of life is threatened by new values that were alien to him beforehand, and he resents the corrupting influence of the power.

The cultural divide creates a conflict between the cultural and spiritual powers; like Stacey, some also attempt to bridge the gap between the influences and attempt to impose their own ideals on the other. But until that power is acknowledged and somehow integrated within the community, the influence remains minimal. Laforgue might be a powerful sorcerer, but he is never included in a native structure of control. Stacey can only attempt to insert white structures of power into her community, and she fails in achieving a balance with her own. The two do not come together to form a shared power structure, nor does any lasting transformation occur within the novels in the power relations between the cultural communities.

The intimate aspects of the personal experiences with death are revealed through the representation of the silences and moments of isolation in both novels. These personal experiences are meant to allow the characters to conduct a search for meaning, a search for truth in light of the grief and loss they experience. Although they remain tied to their community in every respect, on some level, the characters must find some of the answers to the riddle of death.
inside their own personal existence. Silence and isolation allows for this, but it also presents several dangers.

Silence is not absence of sound in this case. Silence is the refusal to speak up in regards to the fear of loss brought on by death. It is a way to avoid giving a voice to the reality until one is ready to cope with it. The natives in both novels adopt an attitude of quiet and reflection. Their world is slow moving and their silences last long, allowing the mental processes involved in thinking to gradually work their way into a form of acceptance. The white community in *Ravensong* hides itself inside a fast-moving, noisy world; one where there is no time to ponder what natives consider necessary questions. Both techniques provide a form of resistance and protection against the uneasiness of death. But drowning out the issue can be detrimental in the long term. Accordingly, Stacey's own inner argumentation eventually has to find a voice. The more she internalizes her question, the more disruptive the silences she erects around her become, until her reflections start affecting her judgment and her behaviour.

Isolation, like silence, can be either a positive or a negative force, and especially in its relationship with death. If isolation is by choice, if it is voluntary, such as Laforgue retreating into himself to pray, away from all prying eyes, it can provide solace and comfort. If on the other hand it is forced, such as the exile of the Old Snake, then it becomes a destructive and disruptive element to the spirituality of the individual. It becomes a social death sentence, effectively cutting off the individual from his roots. Communities are meant to provide a support system to its members; ejection from that system has both cultural and spiritual ramifications, since it can cut one's sense of belonging both socially and spiritually. Stacey is aware of the importance of that link:
She could see the meaning of death in the village. [...] The loss was total. An untimely death meant everyone lost a family clown, an herbalist, a spirit healer or a philosopher who seemed to understand conduct, law and the connection of one family member to another. (Maracle, 26)

When the community loses a member, or when it is forced to cast someone out, the community is diminished. In the case of the Old Snake, his exile is a necessary evil, because the threat he represents to the community as a member is greater than the threat of losing the resources he brings – which in truth are not many in the story. Still, the choice is not an easy one, but it is the right one in the context of the narrative.

The strongest encounters with death tied to these notions of silence and isolation are those involving the sacrifice of one individual, or suicide. In the world of the novels, sacrifice takes on a different light depending on the cultural and spiritual belonging of the character. To Laforgue and the Jesuit priests, sacrifice is a highly personal experience which is manifested in a test of their faith and which can, given the right circumstances and the will of their God, lead them to the glory of spiritual achievement. Laforgue's inner quest for salvation is highly apparent in his wanton disregard for his own safety in many places in the novel; it stands out most when, seeing his friends captured by the Iroquois and seeing Chomina's wife getting mortally wounded, he races up to her, putting his own life in peril for the sake of saving her soul (Moore, 154). To the natives portrayed, however, sacrifice is something communal. Many native characters are capable of sacrifice within each novel, whether it is Chomina, agreeing to go back with his family and find Laforgue, Kiotsaeton agreeing to visit Agonha and try to negotiate a price for the release of the Blackrobe, or old Dominic toiling tirelessly, with no care for his own life, as he fights the Hong Kong Flu. Their sacrifices are not for their own benefit specifically, but for their
community. But sacrifice is not for everyone. The Huron elder, Aenons, refuses to compromise in spiritual matters, despite the attitude of his fellow leader. Taretandé wants to receive baptism but still believe in the dreams. Aenons appears more spiritual and truer to his own faith: in that, his attitude resembles Chomina’s: "If we make the vows, we must keep them" (234). Sacrifice is not for everyone, nor is compromise. And the suicide of Polly is a final act of despair, a failure at social and spiritual belonging within a single culture. It is also a failure to compromise, brought on by a feeling of rootlessness, according to Stacey. It is a failed encounter, like so many others in the novels, but one that has heavy spiritual ramifications as it forces Stacey to confront both her culture's unique belief system as well as Polly's, in a search for meaning and understanding.

Intercultural and spiritual encounters with death affect the transformation of ideas, communities and individuals. We can see that, despite the best efforts from some of the characters (primarily Laforgue and Stacey), very little collective transformation takes place. The most apparent changes occur internally within the characters, whereas the different cultures portrayed remain definitely apart in the novels' respective endings, although Black Robe does show the natives' partial reconciliation with the baptism. Only specific individuals have managed to take a step forward in understanding the other, and only in very limited fashion. Both Laforgue and Stacey have made strides to establish a dialogue with the other and achieved a measure of peace, but their transformation is a personal experience, and not a communal one.

The reality of death, witnessed early in Ravensong, provides us with a possible understanding of how encounters with death can modify patterns of understanding. The mourners at Nora's funeral talk about Nora's qualities when, in truth, it seems that she was not that well liked in life, at least as far as Stacey can tell. Somehow, the talk about her changes after she leaves the village. It is in part a manifestation of silence, of course, that allows people not to
feel guilty about how they treated her in life, but it is also indicative of a shift in the people's attitude towards Nora. "Death is strange. It begs change. [...] When the body is finally laid to rest, the deceased's truth has been stretched to an image of virtue invented by the mourners" (Maracle, 18). Why should her passing alter the people's way of interacting with her? The key here is the transformation that occurs in the society and the people when an individual dies and leaves the community behind. Freud, in *Totem et Tabou*, states that this attitude is a normal reaction to the loss of an individual, and it becomes a way to defend one's self against the guilt one may feel at being content with the disappearance of the individual. All the hostility the people felt in life towards the deceased is turned into a form of kindness that allows the people to accept the passing of the individual without being taken over by too much grief or guilt (Freud, 75). All of these unknowns, all of the fears come back to the surface and elicit a reaction. The status quo is broken every time someone dies. Something must be done to restore the stability of the community and of the individual. This is the process which follows Stacey throughout *Ravensong*; it is the same process which forces Laforgue to reconsider his faith towards the end of *Black Robe*.

Laforgue's encounters with death serve to challenge his faith, and most of the challenges actually come from Daniel, who, due to his affections for Annuka as opposed to his European upbringing, has somehow positioned himself in between the natives and Laforgue. Daniel becomes the interpreter who allows Laforgue to peer into the native soul, as Daniel perceives it. Laforgue watches his companion towards the end of the novel and comes to a conclusion: "Daniel has become a Savage. And I, what am I?" (Moore, 240). The fact that Daniel's spiritual and social allegiance has been altered by another belief system shakes Laforgue to his very core. But what is most troubling to Laforgue is that Daniel seems to hold the natives in higher esteem
than his own culture. Laforgue recognizes his culture's supposed values in the natives' spiritual and social behaviour. "The Savages are truer Christians than we will ever be" (101). This shifts Laforgue's entire perception of both the native and his own spiritual worlds, and forces him to address the issues which he did not have to think about before setting out on this life-altering journey. And from early on in the novel, we can see where this journey can take Laforgue, when we are presented with the figure of Jean Mercier, a fur trader who has fully integrated into the native way of life, at least to the extent that the characters in the novel perceive it (22). In this instance, it is the native who has influenced the settler's life in a rare twist of fate. The journey is transformative, as it allows Laforgue to renew his faith and emerge a stronger person. "It was as though Paul Laforgue no longer existed on this earth but, instead, a body and mind made for Jesus [that] did Jesus' will" (121). His faith is no longer simply based on belief; it is based on a relational experience with the natives' spirituality, and in that respect is more in tune with the animistic notions prevalent in native beliefs. Without the constant spiritual struggle that hounds him, Laforgue could never achieve the serenity he expresses towards the end of the novel.

Finally, Laforgue finds the words he has been looking for his entire trip. "And a prayer came to him, a true prayer at last. Spare them. Spare them, O Lord" (246). Mercy is Laforgue's ultimate reward in the novel. If his original goal was to convert the natives, he achieved something even greater: a personal enlightenment about his role in their society, which is simply to care for them and to love them, to actually try to belong to them. Whether he fails or succeeds remains open from that point, but the story leaves us with the hope that things might work out for him.

Stacey is also challenged throughout her various encounters with death to adopt a different stance from the one she started with. Polly's suicide is a riddle that requires Stacey to walk in the other's shoes, and what she experiences alters her perception. The answer finally
comes to her in the simple flight of a crow, as plain as day: "It's attitude, Raven – attitude" (Maracle, 188). Everything she goes through, the introspection, the hardships, her tentative relationship with Steve and her desire to acquire the knowledge of the other all have to do with her own approach to life, both her personal and her communal context. She can only change if she changes her attitude towards everything, including death. This takes us back to the beginning of the novel and Nora's funeral, and the recollections of the people as they talk about her. "What had changed was their attitude towards Nora's character" (18). Nora is still the same person in death as she was in life; the perception of the village has not changed, but the attitudes of the villagers have. They are now respectful of her accomplishments and bring them out to the forefront, neglecting to mention her crankiness or her cynicism, those things which they disliked in Nora when she was alive. The same is true for the villagers' attitude towards white town and its belief systems. Nora herself, from beyond the grave, reaches out to Stacey to tell her about white people and how their fate and that of the village are intertwined, but she also warns Stacey that change will be hard to come by, and that more must be done before it occurs: "Of course [white people] count, but not right now" (198). Any encounter must therefore stem both from the dialogue between the native and the non-native communities and mostly from the attitudes of everyone, otherwise the healing each group so desperately needs may never begin. Through her willingness to mediate the distances, it will be Stacey's task to achieve this in the future, although the last chapter of Ravensong, many years later, clearly shows how the process of mediation is still ongoing.

At the beginning of Ravensong, the character of Raven states an important fact: "Change is serious business" (14). Change comes to pass in the worlds of the novels, as it has come for the relationships between lived native subjects and non-native communities. Serious issues such as
differing visions of death are at the forefront of the spiritual dialogue that permeates both novels. Raven's voice seems to suggest that change is necessary if any meeting of the minds is going to emerge between the cultures. Liam Gearon, in an analysis of the works of Brian Moore entitled *Landscapes of Encounter: The Portrayal of Catholicism in the Novels of Brian Moore*, comments on the end of *Black Robe*: "There is a decided shift away from a traditional understanding of mission as soteriological conquest toward empathy, compassion, and, finally, at the conclusion of the novel, identity" (Gearon, 157). No longer is Laforgue's spirituality driven by a desire for glory in the sacrifice of his being for God; he understands that his spiritual work connects him to the people he must provide for, and that their well-being is directly related to his spiritual achievement – spirituality and socialization become interconnected. He has entered, as best he can, into a communal spirit with natives through love and mercy; at the very least, he hopes it is so. Their lives and their deaths are in his hands now. Speaker, from *Ravensong*, would be pleased with Laforgue's transformation. After all, at Nora's funeral, he helps to restore that lost sense of communal spirit for his villagers: "Turn your grief into kindness for the young" (Maracle, 20). Only love and understanding can provide a way out of the oppression of death, out of the conflicts that encounters with death create within our communities and with other communities. Only in a shared context can these encounters be resolved, as Stacey finally realizes when she decides not to pursue her relationship with her fellow student from white town, Steve, despite everything else she has understood from her encounters with death. "No context, Steve. There is no context for you and I" (186).


http://www.nwe.ufl.edu/~stripp/2504/pratt.html


Van Gennep, Arnold. "The Rites of Passage". Robben. 213-223.


