

tomson highway kiss of the fur queen

tomson highway kiss of the fur queen is a seminal work in Canadian Indigenous literature, authored by the acclaimed Cree playwright and novelist Tomson Highway. This novel intricately weaves themes of identity, trauma, and resilience, exploring the complex experiences of two Cree brothers growing up under the oppressive conditions of residential schools. Recognized for its profound narrative and rich cultural representation, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* offers a unique fusion of Indigenous storytelling traditions and contemporary literary techniques. This article delves into the novel's background, themes, characters, and its significance within Indigenous and Canadian literature. Through a detailed examination, readers will gain insight into Tomson Highway's narrative artistry and the broader socio-cultural contexts reflected in the book.

- Background and Author
- Plot Overview
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- Character Analysis
- Cultural and Historical Context
- Literary Significance and Reception

Background and Author

Tomson Highway, the author of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, is a celebrated Cree playwright, novelist, and musician from Canada. Born in 1951 on the York Factory Cree Nation in Manitoba, Highway has gained recognition for his contributions to Indigenous literature and theatre. His works often address Indigenous identity, colonialism, and cultural survival, blending traditional storytelling with modern narrative forms. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* was first published in 1998 and stands as one of Highway's most acclaimed works, marking his transition from drama to novel writing. The book reflects Highway's deep understanding of Indigenous culture and history, especially the traumatic legacy of residential schools. His unique voice and perspective have made him a pivotal figure in Indigenous literary circles.

Plot Overview

Kiss of the Fur Queen follows the lives of two Cree brothers, Champion and Ooneemeetoo (also called "Oonie"), who are taken from their Northern Manitoba reserve and sent to a residential school. The narrative chronicles their struggle to maintain their cultural identity in the face of systemic oppression inflicted by the Canadian government's assimilation policies. As the brothers grow, they face physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges, but their connection to their Indigenous heritage and the mythical figure of the Fur Queen sustains them. The story traverses

themes of survival, family bonds, and artistic expression, culminating in their pursuit of music and healing in adulthood.

Themes and Motifs

The novel is rich with themes and motifs that reveal the layered experiences of Indigenous peoples. Several key themes include:

- **Identity and Cultural Survival:** The brothers' journey reflects the struggle to preserve Cree traditions and personal identity despite the erasure attempts by the residential school system.
- **Trauma and Healing:** The narrative explores the lasting impact of abuse and cultural dislocation while highlighting the potential for healing through art and spirituality.
- **Family and Brotherhood:** The bond between Champion and Ooneemeetoo serves as a source of strength and resilience against adversity.
- **Spirituality and Mythology:** The Fur Queen, a symbolic figure in the novel, represents Indigenous spirituality, resilience, and the connection to the land and ancestors.

These themes are intricately interwoven to provide a profound commentary on the Indigenous experience in Canada.

Character Analysis

Champion

Champion, the elder brother, is portrayed as a gifted musician and a symbol of hope and resistance. His artistic talents provide a means of personal expression and cultural reclamation. Champion's character embodies the pain and resilience of Indigenous people affected by residential schools, as well as the transformative power of art.

Ooneemeetoo (Oonie)

Ooneemeetoo, the younger brother, is characterized by his sensitivity and vulnerability. His experiences reflect the emotional and psychological toll of colonial violence. Despite his struggles, Oonie's relationship with Champion and their shared cultural roots help him navigate the challenges they face together.

The Fur Queen

The Fur Queen is a mythical figure who appears throughout the novel, symbolizing Indigenous spirituality and the protective forces guiding the brothers. This character represents the enduring presence of Indigenous culture and its capacity to inspire hope and resilience even in times of hardship.

Cultural and Historical Context

Kiss of the Fur Queen is deeply rooted in the historical realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada, particularly the devastating effects of the residential school system. These schools were established to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children by severing their ties to their languages, traditions, and families. Tomson Highway's novel provides a narrative that humanizes this history, shedding light on the physical and psychological abuses endured by many. Furthermore, the novel situates Cree mythology and traditions within the contemporary world, emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and revival. The interplay of history, politics, and spirituality enriches the novel's narrative and underscores its significance as an educational and activist text.

Literary Significance and Reception

Since its publication, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* has been praised for its groundbreaking approach to Indigenous storytelling in Canadian literature. The novel's fusion of traditional Cree narrative elements with modern literary techniques has been recognized as innovative and influential. Critics and scholars have highlighted Tomson Highway's eloquent portrayal of Indigenous resilience and the nuanced exploration of trauma and healing. The book has been incorporated into academic curricula and has contributed to greater awareness of Indigenous histories and cultures. Its critical reception underscores its importance as a work that challenges colonial narratives and offers a powerful voice for Indigenous peoples.

- Innovative blend of Indigenous oral storytelling and literary fiction
- Recognition for addressing the residential school legacy
- Contribution to Indigenous cultural resurgence in literature
- Enduring influence on Canadian literary and cultural studies

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Tomson Highway, the author of 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

Tomson Highway is a renowned Canadian playwright, novelist, and musician of Cree descent, known for his works that explore Indigenous experiences and culture.

What is the central theme of 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

'Kiss of the Fur Queen' explores themes of Indigenous identity, colonialism, family, trauma, and the power of storytelling and spirituality.

When was 'Kiss of the Fur Queen' first published?

'Kiss of the Fur Queen' was first published in 1998.

What is the significance of the title 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

The title refers to the Fur Queen, a mythical figure in Cree culture who serves as a protector and symbol of resilience, reflecting the novel's exploration of Indigenous spirituality and survival.

How does 'Kiss of the Fur Queen' address the impact of residential schools in Canada?

The novel portrays the traumatic experiences of two Cree brothers in residential schools, highlighting the cultural loss, abuse, and lasting effects of these institutions on Indigenous peoples.

What narrative style is used in 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

'Kiss of the Fur Queen' is written in a poetic and lyrical prose style, blending storytelling with elements of Indigenous oral tradition.

How are music and art portrayed in 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

Music and art are portrayed as healing forces and means of cultural expression for the brothers, helping them cope with trauma and reconnect with their heritage.

What role does spirituality play in 'Kiss of the Fur Queen'?

Spirituality is central to the novel, illustrating the connection between the characters and their Cree beliefs, which provide strength and guidance amid adversity.

Why is 'Kiss of the Fur Queen' considered an important work in Indigenous literature?

The novel is important for its honest depiction of Indigenous experiences, its critique of colonialism, and its celebration of Indigenous culture and resilience, making it a seminal work in contemporary Indigenous literature.

Additional Resources

1. *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King

This novel intertwines contemporary Indigenous life with traditional Anishinaabe storytelling. It blends humor, myth, and social commentary to explore themes of identity, colonization, and cultural survival. Like **Kiss of the Fur Queen**, it highlights the resilience of Indigenous peoples through the power of narrative.

2. *The Orenda* by Joseph Boyden

Set in the 17th century, this historical novel delves into the complex interactions between

Indigenous peoples and European settlers in Canada. It presents multiple perspectives to explore themes of cultural clash, spirituality, and survival. The book's vivid storytelling and focus on Indigenous history resonate with the cultural depth found in **Kiss of the Fur Queen**.

3. *Jonny Appleseed* by Joshua Whitehead

A contemporary novel that explores the life of Jonny, a Two-Spirit Indigenous man navigating identity, love, and trauma. It blends poetry and prose to address themes of colonization, queerness, and resilience. This work's exploration of Indigenous identity and personal struggle parallels many elements in **Kiss of the Fur Queen**.

4. *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson

This novel follows a young Haisla woman as she grapples with family, loss, and supernatural experiences on the West Coast of Canada. It combines Indigenous mythology with contemporary issues, creating a rich narrative about culture and survival. Its blend of the mystical and real echoes the spiritual undertones in Tomson Highway's work.

5. *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg

A powerful story of a Cree woman's journey toward healing after trauma, this book explores Indigenous identity, resilience, and the search for belonging. It is deeply rooted in Indigenous culture and traditions, much like **Kiss of the Fur Queen**, and offers a poignant look at the impact of colonialism on personal and community life.

6. *Half-Breed* by Maria Campbell

An autobiographical memoir that chronicles the experiences of a Métis woman growing up in Saskatchewan. It reveals the harsh realities of racism, poverty, and cultural loss but also celebrates Métis culture and strength. The themes of cultural survival and personal struggle connect closely with those in **Kiss of the Fur Queen**.

7. *Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese

This novel tells the story of a young Indigenous man who embarks on a journey with his dying father to discover their shared history and identity. It explores themes of reconciliation, forgiveness, and connection to land. The emotional depth and focus on family bonds align well with the themes in Tomson Highway's novel.

8. *The Break* by Katherena Vermette

Set in a Winnipeg neighborhood, this novel addresses the impact of violence on Indigenous communities, especially women. It offers multiple perspectives and a compelling narrative about trauma, resilience, and healing. Its focus on community and Indigenous experience complements the social themes in **Kiss of the Fur Queen**.

9. *Kiss of the Fur Queen: A Play* by Tomson Highway

This theatrical adaptation of the novel brings the story of two Cree brothers to life on stage, emphasizing music, language, and performance. It deepens the emotional resonance of the novel's themes of identity, abuse, and cultural survival. Experiencing the story in this form provides additional insight into Highway's artistic vision.

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