

Tracing the Lost Bodies: Testimony, Witnessing, and Trauma in *Billydéki*

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Abstract

The last residential school in Canada, for Aboriginal students, was shut down in 1996; however, its repercussions has affected not only the survivors but their next generations. By reading literary works, the audience can be informed of what happened in the past. The literary work merges narrativization and history to the extent that literature is involved in the action of creating a new form of narrative testimony to rethink historical incidents. History is transformed by bearing literary witness to residential schools in Canada. Sonia Perron's *Billydéki* (2019), not only bears literary witness to residential schools in Canada but also indicates the transformational relationship between narrative and history. In reading *Billydéki*, there is the possibility of finding out what residential schools have done to Aboriginal

communities. Its language transmits eye witness's direct experience through the various characters at the moment of abuse and, therefore, historicize these incidents. The narrative does not tell, this is what happened, but it shows us through the eyes of various characters who were present at the moment of trauma; either being engaged in it or having onlooker stand. The aim of this paper is applying Judith Herman's concept of trauma and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's concept of testimony and witnessing to Sonia Perron's *Billydéki*, in order to shed light on the historical incidents that happened at residential schools and left unspoken for some time.

Keywords: *trauma, testimony, witnessing, residential schools, aboriginals*

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Introduction

History is a mode of knowledge, while a narrative is a mode of discourse. A narrative is a verbal act, while history represents the facts of the past through narrativization. To understand an event, people should know not only its consequences but also its antecedents. By putting an event into a narrative sequence, one can understand a particular event. Through the help of narrative, history can be conveyed while history can explain the incidents that took place with the help of narrativization; therefore, there are mutual claims between narrativization and history.

Narrative makes possible the birth of history for succeeding generations. One aim of history is inclusion, in two senses: it assembles the important data of experience, and it makes them accessible to an audience, the awareness of whose consciousness is a promise of the historians. (Felman & Laub 1991, 108)

Through the help of history, the next generations can learn about the incidents that happened and try not to repeat them in the present or the future. Felman and Laub also emphasize that “what we call history, we usually conceive of as a discipline of inquiry and as a model of knowledge” (Felman & Laub 1991, 93). As history is a mode of knowledge, some questions arise, such as the impact of residential school incidents on history and narrative. Historically, can contemporary narrative bear witness not only to the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal communities but also to the impact of residential schools on shifting and modifying the relationship between narrative and history? In this chapter, I argue that the survivors create their narratives and give testimonies of the traumatic incidents they underwent at the residential schools by the presence and encouragement of a listener. I will attempt to analyze the selected francophone novel, Sonia Perron’s *Billydéki* (2019), in light of Judith Herman’s concept of trauma and Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman’s concepts of testimony and witnessing.

Why Sonia Perron? Her first novel is dedicated to residential schools. Perron encountered one of the victims of the assimilation process, and she did four years of research to portray the brutal reality of residential school in Ontario in *Billydéki*, Billydéki and Le Petit, who disappear from their residential school in 1945.

Discussion

Billydéki is about the titular character and his disappearance from a residential school in Ontario. Roughly 15 residential schools functioned in Ontario. In 1945, in one of the residential schools in North Ontario, Billydéki and le Petit disappeared. Twenty-five years later, the Good Father, Father Larin, is traumatized by the incidents that he witnessed at the residential school, and he finally decides to confess what Father Herbert committed. He believes that it is time to pay his debt to Billydéki. He confesses to a young investigator, Vaughn, who is curious to resolve the mystery of the disappearance of these two Aboriginal students from the school. Various clues, such as speaking to survivors of residential schools and finding photos and archives, help him in his investigation. He finally succeeds in finding Billydéki alive. And they can arrest Father Herbert.

In her interview with Radio-Canada, with Julie Larouche, Sonia Perron mentioned that she wrote this novel when she encountered a survivor of the residential school who wanted his story to be told (Larouche 2019). *Billydéki* is narrated by different characters who put different pieces of information together to disclose how Father Herbert abused children sexually at the residential school. Besides, we have various timelines; 1941, 1944, 1945, and 1971. The 40s were the years that actual sexual abuse took place, and 1971 is the year that the investigator started to do research on how two students, Billydéki and Petit, disappeared and why no one heard about them for almost thirty years. The novel moves back and forth between the past and present to indicate how students felt at school and that Father Herbert is afraid of being disclosed. In *Le Vent en Parle Encore*, the lawyer encourages Marie to speak with attentive listening. At the same time, in *Billydéki* the investigator intends to find out the truth about the disappearance of two students from the residential school. Trauma, abuse, and the disappearance of students are the key terms in both novels.

As the novel starts, the reader understands how Billydéki lost his mother due to boredom while he was at residential school. “Par ennui! Impossible. Pas ma maman” (Perron 2019, 9). He cannot believe that anyone can die of boredom, especially his mom, but the fact he does not realize is that his mom died as her son was taken away from her by force, for she could not tolerate his absence in her life.

Herman notices that hysterical symptoms can be alleviated if the memories related to traumatic incidents are put into words (Herman 1992, 12), but Billydéki had no listener; therefore, he could not unload his painful memories. Therefore, trauma showed itself as the symptom of “mal au ventre” (Perron 2019, 9) whenever he thought of his mom’s death. It was a traumatic reaction to the news of his mom’s death, especially because he did not receive any reasonable information about it. Billydéki remembered when he was forced to leave his mom, “je crie, hurle, résiste,” he did all he could to avoid going with the

agent (Perron 2019, 10). The short sentences indicated how, out of being desperate, he showed various reactions to stop the agent, but nothing stopped him. Herman mentions the trauma victim speaks in fragmented components of frozen imagery (Herman 1992, 177); therefore, the listener would not be able to understand him fully since his sentences are mechanical.

Billydéki's mom was the one who encouraged him to go, and he still remembered her words as he tolerated the incidents with her words. "Sois le meilleur et arriver a ce jour, je serai là, je te le promets" (Perron 2019, 10). He lived by the promise, and now that his mom died, he could not tolerate the suffering at school anymore. The image of his mom as present and strong remained in his mind powerfully, but her death broke the image. He now feels unprotected since his soothing and protective guardian, his mother, died. Felman and Laub believe that creating the first witness while no one else remained to help the victim helps them to survive the situation (Felman & Laub 1991, 87). By remembering his mom's promise, he is creating an internal witness who substitutes the real witness that is lacking in real life. He survives the abuses at school as his mom's promise of waiting for him keeps him alive. From the time he was notified by his mother's death, he suffers from nightmares that indicate his disturbed psyche.

Les choses s' étaient très mal passées. Dans mon délire, c'est pire encore. Je regarde maman qui pleure de plus en plus fort près du chemin fer. Plus elle sanglot, plus tout s'efface autour d'elle pour ne laisser qu'une mer de larmes. Elle cri mon ancien nom. BILLYDÉKI. Je suis paralysé. Incapable de sortir du train, d'aller la serre dans mes bras, de la sauver. Tout mon corps lutte. Et ma maman se noie. (23)

The moment of separation sticks in his mind so firmly that he has nightmares about this moment. Since he was left with no other choice than to follow the agent, he always felt paralyzed and numb in his nightmare. The inability to stand against what happened to him, in reality, reflected itself in his nightmares.

When he arrived at school, he was so stressed that "la première nuit, j'ai fait pipi dans mon lit" (Perron 2019, 10). The whites intended to assimilate the Aboriginal children into Euro-Canadian culture. However, they ignored the fact that the clash of cultures and the force they put on the parents and the children caused many mental health problems in the community. The children lose their dreams and their path once they are away from their parents since parents are the source of encouragement and hope. Billydéki mentions "mais là, en cette première nuit loin d'elle, à la sortie de la gar, trop difficile d'être le meilleur. Personne n'est le meilleur" (Perron 2019, 12). Now that he is far from his mother, he believes that he would not be able to reach his dreams. He cannot focus on

being a better person as the principals are harsh and do not care about the students and their future. The novel continues with the subtitle of *The One With Whom Bad Things Happened*; the reader does not know the name of the person. The reader can go through his mind and his thoughts, but his identity is kept secret for over half of the novel, giving the impression that it can be generalized to all those Fathers who abused the children at residential schools. This Father is very biased, and he mentions that his mission is to eradicate the Aboriginal culture, but he is ignorant that Aboriginal culture is rich in itself. He calls the Aboriginal students savage.

Les parents ne savent pas les éduquer. Ce sont des sauvages, des dégénérés, et ils le resteront. Plus l'enfant sera éloigné de ses géniteurs, plus grands seront les chances de le sauver. (18)

The real savagery takes place when the same Father punishes the Aboriginal students as he believes that with education, the Aboriginals will find the right path. Only by the help of the whites, they learned to cultivate the lands as based on his view “les Indiens sont paresseux et ne connaissent rien à l'agriculture” (Perron 2019, 19). Even before the arrival of the whites, the Aboriginals were cultivating the land, but he could not see the truth as prejudice blinded him. He is so sure of his own culture and civilization that time and again, he repeats that the Indians “seront imancipiés. Ils seront des Blancs et ils rendront grâce à Notre Seigneur de les avoir mis sur ma route” (Perron 2019, 19).

While the Father thinks about assimilating students, real trauma is happening to them mentally when Billydéki describes how unfortunate incidents happened in his life and how he is traumatized by the loss of his mother and the disappearance of his father before he was born. With all these incidents, he believes there is no chance for him to be adopted by a white family and escape the residential school. As he did not believe the reason for his mom's death, he suffers from nightmares and is unable to talk it over with his friends; the memories are repeated in his mind time and again. Herman notes that in the aftermath of trauma, the victim would show symptoms such as “insomnia, nausea, startle response, and nightmare” (Herman 1992, 31). “Au début, je faisais des mauvais rêves. Des monstres qui mangent mama, ou moi dans son ventre qui s'étire comme un ballon jusqu'à en exploser. Mais le pire cauchemar me ramène à mes huit ans” (Perron 2019, 22–23). His repressed thoughts about his mom's death return to him at night and frighten him as those thoughts are not forgotten, but they are repressed in his unconscious.

In addition to the Father, *With Whom Bad Incidents Happen*, there is another Father, *Who Is Good*. Again, the general title indicates all the Fathers who intended to educate the students without prejudgments, who supported the students and encouraged them. Father Larin suffers from bad conscience because he thinks he could have saved the students, but he missed the chance. He suffers as he knew the truth about the abuse and did

nothing. Later he becomes an alcoholic to forget the incidents and calm his consciousness. Through his testimony, the reader perceives how terrifying the abuse was.

Father Larin confesses how Father Herbert expressed, “cette mère, comme les autres, n’a aucun droit sur son enfant” (Perron 2019, 35). Billydéki assimilated well into Euro-Canadian culture and so, Father Herbert did not allow him to visit his mother since he belonged to the school and not the parents. This incident later led to the death of Billydéki’s mother. He was told that she died of boredom as she was waiting for her son to arrive. The principals did not allow him to leave, and he suffered from bad conscience all his life.

Billydéki believes that no one would help him to get out of the residential school, which led him to consider it as a prison with no way out. He prays to escape school, but nothing works. He is losing hope. The situation never gets better. Now that he lost hope due to the loss of his mom, he also blamed himself for her death. “C’est moi qui l’ai fait mourir d’ennui. Je le sais maintenant. J’ai compris. Je n’en parle jamais. Même pas à confesse. Même pas au Petit. C’est comme un péché qui ne veut pas sortir. Une tache” (Perron 2019, 36). He feels guilty that he did not see his mom while she was alive. Herman maintains that “in the aftermath of traumatic events, as survivors review and judge their conduct, feelings of guilt and inferiority are practically universal” (Herman 1992, 53). The Fathers avoided contact with his mom, but he carries the burden since he feels he could have tried harder to convince them to visit his mother. Billydéki cannot talk about his traumatizing feelings, even with his close friend, as he is not courageous enough to confess the truth about his bad consciousness.

Not only do the students suffer from loneliness, but Father Herbert abuses them sexually at night. Billydéki describes his friends’ advice “si tu le vois s’approcher de ton lit la nuit, fais pipi. Il déteste. Il fâche, te draps souillés, mais surtout, il quitte le dortoir sans toucher à personne” (Perron 2019, 42). They need to pee their beds in order to prevent Father Herbert’s sexual abuse, but they then stay in a wet bed. In his narrative, Father Larin confesses how he observed Father Herbert’s sexual abuse of students but he kept silent. From 1945 until 1971, when he testifies to the incidents, he suffered from the traumatic incidents that he observed. “Je bois trop... cette fin d’après-midi ou, après avoir forcé la porte de son bureau, j’ai trouvé le directeur inerte, couché sur le sol, souante ouverte, son crucifix poiseaux dans une main, le sexe flasque, du sang sur les cuisses, la pièce sens dessous, la fenêtre grande ouverte. Toute ma vie cette image me poursuivra” (Perron 2019, 15). He had the chance to investigate incidents by asking for more information from Father Herbert, but Father Larin did not, and his ignorance has haunted him since. His blindness to reality and his deafness to the complaints of students led him to trauma. The only thing he could think of at the moment of sexual abuse was to save Father Her-

bert as he was hurt and he was bleeding. He confirms “j’ai vu” (Perron 2019, 42). He has his first-hand witnessing position. He saw the incident when Father Herbert was covered with blood and he was nude, but as a witness, he just did not take any action against the inhumanity he observed. Later, he also testifies that “ce cauchemar me hantera toute ma vie” (Perron 2019, 26). The nightmare of keeping silent when he needed to vocalize the danger the children were in at the hands of Father Herbert reveals itself in his nightmares, which he cannot escape.

From that day onwards, “le Petit avait disparu” (Perron 2019, 52) and no one cared to look for le Petit and find him. The reason of his disappearance also was never discussed among the principals. As he mentions in his testimony “pour la congrégation, Billydéki et le Petit ont été rapidement considéré comme morts. Une simple histoire de fugue qui aurait mal tourné” (Perron 2019, 53). Without any investigation, they just closed their records and did not concern themselves about runaways further. He declares that “Le Petit n’était plus là. Billydéki non plus. Ils ne sont jamais revenus. En cette fin de journée du 19 juin 1945, Billydéki et Le Petit ont disparu” (Perron 2019, 63). Once a student ran away from school, the principal would not look for them or notify the parents. Through Father Larin’s testimonies, so many vague moments become clear as he intends to break his silence now that he has the chance after twenty plus years. Investigator Vaughn becomes curious about the case of these two disappeared students since there is no evidence in any document about their death or their living status. “Pas de corps, pas d’indice. Y a-t-il eu enquête? Enquête civile ou religieuse? De la Gendarmerie royale? Existents- ils encore à l’état civil? Vivants? Morts?” (Perron 2019, 70). No one knows and no one appears to actually care. They just never mentioned the runaway students’ names anywhere and that became the end of their story. Father Larin tells investigators that during those school years a student, Jeanne Blacksmith died at a residential school as the result of sadness and his parents were notified two years later. The more he speaks, the more the investigator learns of the horror of residential school days.

Father Herbert sexually abused Petit in his room, and Petit hid it from the other students. The memories of being sexually abused come to Petit at night, and he has a nightmare. “C’est la nuit qu’il m’inquiète le plus. Il fait des cauchemars” (Perron 2019, 45). Billydéki notices that Petit is disappearing at night, and when he returns, his mood is often changed for the worse. While smiling, Billydéki knows Petit is not happy, and he is suffering from something, but he does not know why Petit does not speak about it. “Très tôt un matin. Il y a un peu plus d’un mois, je l’ai vu écrire à nouveau” (Perron 2019, 46). Petit was writing about the sexual abuse in his diary in secret, which serves to create his testimony. When Billydéki asked about the notebook, Petit responded that “qu’il écrivait les choses très graves que c’étaient des preuves, donc que ça pouvait devenir très

dangereux” (Perron 2019, 45). The written testimony of the incidents can testify and consider as proof for further actions against the abuses that Fathers imposed on students. Felman and Laub mentioned that diaries function as historical witnesses (Felman & Laub 1991, 84). If the trauma victim could not express the burden she underwent and testify what she has seen, her writing can testify the incident. Billydéki is witness to Petit’s secret writing. He intends to know the incidents which keep Petit on the verge of depression. Once Petit is out of his room, Billydéki reads the diary and learns the sexual abuse Petit experienced at the hands of Father Herbert. “Je ne sais plus quoi faire. Ce que j’ai lu fait peur. Même si je ne comprends pas tout. Il manqué des mots. Il y a des codes. Des dessins qui font mal au ventre” (Perron 2019, 46). Despite being informed of sexual abuse, Billydéki cannot do much since even if he reveals the truth, no one would believe his words. Billydéki also mentions that Petit could not invent the stories of abuse on his own as they were horrible. The full details of abuse left him speechless.

As Billydéki learns about sexual abuse, Father Herbert also mentions how his physical needs took control of his mind. He does not confess the abuse, but implicitly the reader knows that he refers to his sexual abuse of the children as he mentions how he failed, and demons controlled him. He knew that Petit was aware of sexual abuse the Father had committed and once he got furious at Petit for no reason and beat him very harshly and everyone was scared of the extent of his cruelty.

The reader already knows the reality of events, and Father Larin is preparing his testimony and necessary documents to submit to the investigator about Father Herbert. The article related to the period the two students disappeared and photos related to that time give some idea to the investigator about how the students looked. Not only people but also published articles are the witnesses of the disappearance of those students. “Un article de presse. Deux Indiens de treize et quatorze ans disparus dans le Nord en juin 1945” (Perron 2019, 65). As Vaughn investigates more, he finds out that there have been many cases of abuse; the students were really at risk at residential schools; therefore, he needs to be quicker in finding the results. He is well aware of the fact that “investiguer quand un religieux est impliqué, pas facile. Il y a toujours la loi du silence” (Perron 2019, 69). Religion is the reason why the silence continued, and nobody dared to tell the truth about the abuse. No one believed that a religious figure would be capable of sexual abuse; therefore, many assumed whatever is said would not be accepted by the court.

Throughout his investigation, Vaughn discovered that Father Herbert abused a couple of students sexually more than once. “Sur une période d’au moins six mois, soit de décembre 1944 à juin 1945” (Perron 2019, 69) he abused students. The two students who wanted to tell the truth about sexual abuse disappeared the same day, which makes Vaughn even more suspicious about the case.

Father Larin informed Vaughn that at 17:15, Father Herbert was found unconscious. He intends to find out what happened from 16:45 till 17:15 as Father Larin could hear a thunderous beating from Father Herbert's room before he could open the door. Vaughn needs to find out what happened during those thirty minutes. However, Father Herbert is too traumatized to discuss the incident. He knows his reputation is in danger, and despite his explanation, no one believes his words. "Du grand moi. Pleuré, Presque. Trop bouleversé pour raconter les événement. État de choc. Amnésie. Juste quelques flashes: les coups sur la tête pas le plus grand avec un objet lourd, la fenêtre du bureau béante, les rideaux blancs battus par de forts vents, les deux enfants dehors, au loin, courant vers le sentier qui menait au ravage" (Perron 2019, 73). His fragmented and short sentences indicate a confused state of mind. Father Herbert lost his focus, and he suffered from amnesia since those moments were repressed. Herman pinpoints that "the traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event" (Herman 1992, 34). The repression of the thoughts let him forget what he did before; however, the emotional effect of rage against those students are still there. The moment investigator Vaughn knew about the beating and disappearance of students would destroy Father Herbert's reputation, Father Herbert repressed those memories and now remembering the forgotten moments are disturbing.

As the investigation continues, Vaughn is informed how the students suffered from a lack of sleep, money, course books, and food. Vaughn found Petit's notebook, in which he wrote how many students, younger than seven, were sexually abused by Father Herbert. Petit had written about the positions, the dates, the names, and the number of sexual encounters Father Herbert had with each student. That is the main reason why Petit and Billydéki were traumatized by the harsh reality. The Father, who was supposed to be their caretaker, broke their trust through sexual abuse, and the students had no shelter to escape to. Therefore, they just escaped the school after Petit was harshly beaten and sexually abused by Father Herbert. After the investigation, Vaughn found a reliable witness after going through documents, articles, photos, and Petit's diary.

Father Herbert is aware of the reliable witness through Sergeant Deschene, his friend. George Moar gives his testimony to Vaughn. "Ensuite, les caresses partout sur les corps. Et ce sexe presque mauve, trop gros, que je devais toucher, mettre dans ma bouche" (Perron 2019, 102). He explains in detail how Father Herbert abused him sexually at different times. He would never forget those moments.

Moreover, investigator Vaughn encounters another witness, Paul Michel, who also mentions the same physical, sexual, and mental abuses that Father Herbert imposed on the students. There is no space for denial now that there is more than one witness. Besides all those witnesses, "des photos, des films dans une maison en Ontario" (Perron

2019, 137) could help investigator Vaughn deeper into his research and find more details about the residential school. In his defense, Father Herbert claims that the Aboriginals are liars and lazy so he sometimes punished them severely, but he denies any form of sexual abuse despite the presence of witnesses. In the end, Vaughn found Billydéki as he had been acting in the movies. Billydéki explains the incidents in detail not only for himself but for the sake of Petit, who died a short while after they escaped the school.

Le Petit trouve le tour de me faire un clin d'œil. Pour me rassurer. Celui par qui le mal arrive ferme la porte sans me remarquer. J'espère qu'il ne lui causera pas plus de douleur qu'à l'habitude. Des minutes interminables. Un cri sourd. Des hurlements. La solide porte en bois empêche de bien entendre. Des bruits de course, de bagarre, d'objet qui tombent. D'autre hurlements. Pas normal. Pas capable d'ouvrir la porte. Il l'a barrée. J'ai peur qu'il le tue. (Perron 2019, 145)

Since Petit had witnessed Father Herbert abusing those students, the Father beats Petit very harshly, and then he abuses him so severely that blood ran from Petit's organs. "Mon ami pleurt, gémit. Il a mal. Il se débat de moins en moins. Je vois du sang. L'autre le maintient de force. Avec d'horribles mouvements de va-et-vient. Une abomination" (Perron 2019, 145). Paradoxically, the Father was performing a devilish action; however, he told Petit that he was trying to get the devil out of his body. Through a window, Billydéki entered Father Herbert's office to defend Petit. He hit the Father's head. "Le Petit ouvre les yeux, gesticule. Il a mal. Il est nu. Il tremble. Il faut que je m'occupe de lui. Je ne sais pas quoi faire. Sous le choc" (Perron 2019, 146). Short sentences indicate his shock at being a witness of sexual abuse and beating. His sentences break into fragments as he cannot focus very well, and he cannot decide how he can save his friend's life.

In addition to Father Larin, investigator Vaughn finds a new witness. When Petit and Billydéki went to school, he was a student, and Vaughn could find him based on the images he found from that school. Their photo was taken in 1937, and the photo is evidence of the existence of those students at the school. As photos are evidence, some of the churches even now avoid opening their archives to journalists and the public. They do not intend to reveal information that might indicate guilt nor accept their faults. "Ici encore, la disponibilité des archives pose problème, l'Église anglicane n'ayant conserve, selon l'archiviste nationale à Toronto, aucun dossier sur les pensionnants sous son autorité" (Goulet 2016, 11). Either the churches do not have archives, or they just do not let people access the records. Despite lack of an archive, when there is a witness, the research can go on since through one witness, evidence can be discovered. As Rick Picard introduces himself as a student at residential schools, he recognizes his brother in the

photo. “C’est son frère sur la photo, Simon” (Perron 2019, 81). One by one, the students’ identities can be discovered one photo at a time, and one witness can either find them alive or dead.

When the witnesses talk about their past, there are moments in which they cannot continue speaking as the depth of catastrophe cannot be mentioned in words. “Après sa desposition, Thomas a arrêté de parler. Ne restaeint que le regret, les remords, les contritions. Il était vidé, épuisé. Il a signé sa dépsposition. Il était muet, quelque part dans sa tête” (Perron 2019, 83). Thomas’ body language expresses the trauma he is going through.

With all the given testimonies, Father Herbert is in trouble; he asks all the other Fathers to help him. Among all the Christians, he can find Sergeant Deschênes. Still, he does not know how investigator Vaughn finds his trace, “Raymond-Marie Lacharité et son foutu carnet?” (Perron 2019, 85). Petit’s notebook is the best evidence of those historical moments as they provide evidence of unspoken moments. Father Herbert receives a new identity as Father Jean-Joseph Lalonde so he can hide from Vaughn. Vaughn sends Father Herbert’s photo everywhere in Canada, the United States, and Europe to locate him. They also asked Billydéki to narrate the history of those days, but he could not “encore tout dire” (Perron 2019, 148). Billydéki still struggles with his past since he has not dealt with his memories. He mentions that “pour l’instant, je contrôle l’histoire” (Perron 2019, 148). So far, the church and residential schools controlled the history by hiding evidence of the past, now Billydéki is in charge of history to reveal what remained silent. He confesses how he intended to erase the residential school days from his memory to save himself. However, Billydéki has a debt to Petit, and he should tell everyone how Petit suffered, could not survive the trauma, and died after running away from school. Petit painted all the sexual abuse scenes he observed, he provided testimony to incidents through his drawing, and now the survivors are in debt to him. They could finally find Father Herbert, and he would be punished as he deserves.

Through various witnesses, survivors of residential schools, or photos, journals, and magazines, investigator Vaughn is capable of shedding light on the mysterious disappearance of two residential school students. The traumatic moments that these students underwent could only be dealt with through the presence of the law. Through Vaughn’s help, Father Herbert is sentenced to prison for the abuse he imposed on students. The principals might have kept silent before and betrayed those students, but the next generations, thanks to investigator Vaughn, would always remember the history.

Conclusion

Billydéki deals with the disappearance of students from residential schools. Those who survived those years came forward and cleared the way for the investigators. Despite being traumatized and having fragmented language, the survivors can express themselves once the trust between them and their listener is established. The investigator helped survivors to reveal the historical moments which were left silent for a long while. The debt to the dead urges the survivors to go beyond silence and vocalize their pain. Through self-expression and testimony, the survivors gain healing, and they can join their community again.

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