

## Juxtaposing Art and Personality Development Through the Convergence of First Nations: A Reading of Drew Hayden Taylor's *Girl Who Loved Her Horses*

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the present psychic issues experienced by First Nations / native children that hinders many young individuals which lead to major issues in the present-day society. First Nations children encounter many physical and psychological hurdles in their lives, and such obstacles either cripple their personality development or help them channelize their inherent potential. Hence, the study focuses on Drew Hayden Taylor's play, *Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, which stages the difficulties that are faced by the native children, and how they overcome it positively. The critical intervention of this paper is limited to the protagonist, Danielle, a girl who resorts to drawing horses in order to give vent to all the distress that stifles her life. It also emphasizes on the significance of the horse in the lives of native people whose lives are embedded with the non-human being, respecting the cosmic forces that governed their lives. The paper finds that art plays a significant role in shaping Danielle's personality which otherwise would have been stunted on account of the inaffable living conditions of the First Nations.

**Keywords:** First nations children; Horse nation; Psychic agony; Art; Personality development.



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### 1. Introduction

*The contemplative, interpretive dialogical process that art can provide is one way we may connect with and validate this healing, self-creating force within us. The languages of the arts need to have an equal voice in our life as they can link us with different aspects of existential and ontological reality. The symbolic realm of the image-making process can provide avenues through which we can get in touch with the greater whole and restore internal and external balance. This dialogical process with the creative forces is not without its own risks. There is a risk of being swept away by the process if the experience becomes disconnected from the other life forces, the physical reality of the world, and the community that one inhabits (Schnetz, 2004).*

Art has its zenith power in any individuals' lives. It embodies the disembodied representations of inner desires and skills, that one assimilates at different stages of life experience. While exploring the art of action one cannot deny the endowment of the society. Thus, social relations and societal norms that an individual share has had a great influence in one's behaviour and personality development. Yet, it is an implausible claim to frame the action of art for all age groups and communities. Art acts as an alternative means that leads an individual to express their experiences, and the essence of one's aesthetics. Stephen K. Levine in the article entitled "Art Opens to the World: Expressive Arts and Social Action" throws light on the importance of art-making. According to Stephen K. Levine, art is self-expression and a representation of one's inner desire and surreptitious thoughts.

*Art-making is itself a sensory-affective experience that gives participants a experience of their own capacities for action. Because it affects us through the body and the emotions, art-making can provide experiences that restore us to a feeling of being fully alive. And in making the work, by acting within the limited frame of the materials and the time and space available, we recover our capacity to be effective in the world, something that we have lost in the helpless situation in which we find ourselves (Levine, 2011).*

According to Stephen K. Levine, art breaks the demarcation of verbal expression which are concealed within one's innate capacity, that creates a vibrant society, by depiction of the aesthetic experience despite all differences. It does not only highlight ones' experiences but also showcases the limitation of "time and space" that individual shares in a society. Drawing towards the objectives of the paper, art plays a significant role specifically for the minority groups whose lives are intensely neglected and oppressed. Hence, the paper attempts to examine native Canadians' lived experiences, and how they use "art-making" as a platform to promulgate their concerns and voices in the realm of the dominant communities. Thus, this study draws upon the parallel representation of the artistic creation of the art in action (drawing, carving, sculpture, etc), and the theatrical representation of the First Nations artists through which they enunciate their voices, values, traditions, and identity.

Native Canadian (that includes First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) children experience extreme difficulties and mental agony as they are looked down upon by the dominant settler community. For many decades the native

people have been denied their rights and values. The colonizers' propagation of negative stereotypes about natives have had negative impacts on the psychological development of the young native minds. The native people, specifically, children internalize the negative stereotypes propagated by the dominant power, and such negative propagation leads to low self-esteem and loss of self-affirmation. In the article entitled "Personality Development: Stability and Change" Avshalom Caspi, Brent W. Roberts, and Rebecca L. Shiner address the emotional differences and its effects on children and adults in a society, where minority groups are subjected to various types of atrocities and violence: "All temperament and personality taxonomies include a trait that encompasses the tendency to experience the world as distressing or threatening. Children and adults who are high on Neuroticism/Negative Emotionality (NEM) are anxious, vulnerable to stress, guilt-prone, lacking in confidence, moody, angry, easily frustrated, and insecure in relationships; individuals low on this trait are emotionally stable and adaptable" (Caspi *et al.*, 2005). This "Negative Emotionality" the authors refer to is relevant to the native people who are the original inhabitants of Canada, as they experience their own land as "distressing and threatening" on account of the dominant settler community. Thus, it results in an increasing strong "Negative Emotionality" which in turn leads to physical and psychological hurdles in their lives, and such obstacles either cripple their personality development or prevent them from unleashing their inherent potential.

In the contemporary scenario, there is an increasing predicament and injustices that many First Nations peoples face in Canada. They become the prime focus of any kind of discrimination and oppression in the realm of the dominant settlers. Nevertheless, native artists use different kinds of art as a constructive tool to protest against the settler's prejudice and bigotry. Karen Estrella in the article entitled "Social Activism within Expressive Arts 'Therapy' What's in a Name?" highlights the role of art that is used as a tool to strengthen one's propensity to express, whose values and potentials are driven down by the colonizers:

*Expressive art's capacity to strengthen and support individual, family, and community resilience in the face of personal, societal, and global forces of oppression and injustice continues to be at the heart of expressive arts-based therapy and practice. It is the art's capacity to give voice to suffering and to act on the hearts, minds, and souls of those who enter the sacred space of the imaginal realm that gives expressive arts practitioners hope and direction in their practice (Estrella, 2011).*

Karen Estrella underscores a strong affirmation and validation of an "expressive art" which provide the power to withstand against the derogatory attitude towards the weaker individual or group within families and communities. And this is pertinent to the discussion of many native children, specifically, the survivors of the residential schools' systems, who have experienced various types of oppression and discrimination that affects them physically and psychologically. The native children use art as a healing apparatus to express their inner desires and distress thoughts that are hidden within them. Previous study has examined that "equine assisted learning" Adams and Cindy (2015) has implemented in treating the wellbeing for the native youth, as the native people uphold the belief that horses give power and strength. However, this study examines how Drew Hayden Taylor displays intentionally the hurdles and atrocities of the native people in reserve who utilizes art in order to unleash their sufferings through a native credo (artistic skills). The paper focuses on the atrocities and relentless experiences of a native teenage girl, and how she tries to establish her position / individuality in a complex scenario.

Contextualizing within the frame of "expressive art therapy" (Estrella, 2011), the study explores Drew Hayden Taylor's play, *Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, which showcases the difficulties and obstacles that are faced by the native children who live in the reserve. The play stages the lived experiences of native children. The psychological agony undergone by native children is represented through the emotional imbalance of the protagonist, Danielle. Danielle resorts to drawing horses in order to give vent to all the distress that stifles her life. The plot of the play interlinks the present and the past: Ralph's (a character in the play) experiences and memories of the past events make the play realistic as it interweaves the lived experiences of the reserve children. The playwright emphasizes the "aesthetic representation" (Gagnon, 2000) of the reserve children on stage, as Taylor states in an introductory note to the play that the *Girl Who Loved Her Horses* "cover the spectrum of the issues and experiences that our young native people face every day" (Taylor, 2008). The impact of the imperial power upon the living condition of the reserve children is brought into the limelight by the playwright.

## 2. Representation of Native (Inuit) Art and 'Horse Nation'

Amidst all hurdles and difficulties, native people survive with humour that helps them overcome their anxieties and sufferings. Art becomes a medium to release one's anger, even though not a complete substitution to humour. The play exhibits to an extent the significance of the traditional artistic ability of the Inuit (native) people who are "famous for their carvings" (Taylor, 2008), as art plays a vital role in establishing personality development. Art springs out from an individual's experiences and inherent potentialities. For the native people, art is a medium to release their mind and express their beliefs, and it also fulfils their desire to express their emotions. Ralph, a native teenager in the play says: "To the traditionally minded Inuit, the purpose in carving was to let free the image or spirit trapped within the stone" (Taylor, 2008). Taylor attempts to showcase the potential of art in setting free the inexplicit thoughts and emotions that swell in native people. Danielle's artistic creation is the prototypical example that establishes the healing power of art.

For the native people in Canada, the image of a horse is an important element of their history, and it is revered and engendered to keep their tradition alive. In the article entitled "North American First Nations and Horse Nation have a revered bond" Brandi Morin brings out the close relationship and bonding between the native people in North America and horse. "Many still practice the horsemen way of life and strive to keep the tradition alive. As Oglala

Lakota Elder, Emil Her Many Horses said in 2009, "For some Native peoples, the horse still is an essential part of daily life. For others, the horse will always remain an element of our identity and our history. The Horse Nation continues to inspire, and Native artists continue to celebrate the horse in our songs, our stories, and our works of art" (Morin, 2014). For native people, horse is not considered as a mere image of animal, but they have a sheer history and identity which is very much part of their daily lives. It also showcases native peoples' close connection with nature that "naturally harmonized the two spirits into one" (Morin, 2014) and their beliefs of horse as a sacred being. By exploring the historical events, the native artist celebrates its diverse cultures and beliefs, which is also a means of reclaiming the lost traditions that are distorted with the influences of the settlers.

In "The role of the Lac La Croix Indigenous Pony for First Nations youth mental wellness" Angela Snowshow and Noel V. Starblanket instigate the native history by reinforcing the relationship between native people and horses.

*The process of decolonising the history of the horse may be viewed by many First Nations peoples as an overt act of resistance by reframing, renaming, and reclaiming the horse as their own. Such counter-narratives serve to validate and support Indigenous histories and land rights, which reflect the larger movement towards Indigenous self-determination. While there are different types of Indigenous horses with their own historical and social origins, there is one particular breed that retains an intrinsic foundation with the Ojibwe Nation in Canada: the Lac La Croix Indigenous Pony (Snowshow et al., 2016).*

The article affirms that reclaiming the history of the horses is as an act of conspicuous resistance, and decolonization. Horse is marked as significant among native people and history, hence, the North American are known as "Horse Nations" (Morin, 2014) as horses' dwell among them, and serve many purposes that contribute to the wellbeing of the First Nations people.

The play at one level discloses an enormous parallelism of the horse and Danielle. Danielle prefers to draw her horse on a big wall so as to fulfil her dreams of transforming a pony into a horse that is stronger, and bigger. This is also a process of retrieving indigenous history where they have a harmonious connection with wild animal. Specifically, horses are the life force for native people in their daily lives and in warfare, and thus horses are "revered as being a spiritual or mythical creature by many Indigenous tribes" (Adams and Cindy, 2015). The representation of the symbol of horse in the play could be also a way of celebrating and validating native history which are denigrated by the colonizers. The role of Canadian "visual culture" (Belton, 2001) and symbols is emphasized as an attempt to establish one's artistic ability in reinforcing history and identity in the play.

Besides the protagonist, as aforementioned in the introduction, the paper examines the art of theatrical representation of native artists in different art forms. Drew Hayden Taylor as a representative of native artists, used horse as a prime focus in exploring the healing process of a young native girl from her distressful isolation. The horse is projected as a "symbol of survival and hope" (Lynn, 1995) for the native people. In the article, "Horses Important to Cultural Healing," Damon Badger Heit propagates the connection of horses, culture and spirituality among the Arrow First Nations, a Cree community.

*The horse is a powerful spirit entity in Cree culture," writes Chief Dwayne of One Arrow First Nation, "The horse gives us strength and symbolizes freedom." The horse, or mistatim which literally translates as 'Big Dog' in the Cree language, has a special place of honor in the cultural heritage of First Nation Peoples.... The horse greatly enhanced capabilities in hunting, travel and trade and to this day, this bond between human and horse is considered sacred (Heit, 1995).*

Damon Badger Heit stresses on the image horses to elevate the notion of native peoples' close connection and respect towards horse, which in turn establishes to restore native history, and identity. Drew Hayden Taylor employs the image of horse as a symbol of strength and freedom as he is aware that it would ignite the young native minds who struggles to overcome various kinds of obstacles in life.

Foregrounding art as a medium of expression does not limit only to displaying images / signs, it has a greater impact in conveying message representing a specific purpose or aim through different art forms. In the book entitled *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* Monika Gagnon brings out the impetus of art making among Canadian artists.

*Aesthetic re-presentation is the process and products of making signs in various media such as art, literature, film, and video. It also refers to discourses or systems of knowledge, such as that of history, or education. Further, a politics of representation suggests an ideological dimension to images, texts, and discourses: representations do not simply 'communicate' or 'express' ideas, but rather are also 'constitutive,' in the sense that they contribute to the formation of subjectivities; they are ideological, in the way they privilege dominant values of a society (Gagnon, 2000).*

Gagnon underscores the essential needs of "aesthetic representation" in order to establish a diverse ethnic identity by representing one's values and traditions that are much underrated by the dominant values and cultures. The playwright brings in the reserve young native people in the play to expose the innate abilities and potentials which are unveiled. Besides, it is also a way of celebration of native history through telling stories, bringing in the image of horses that are continental to the native people in Canada.

### 3. Trauma: First Nations Children's Traumatic Experience

While determining the native people in Canada, especially children, trauma is one of the key concept that establishes a topical assertion represented in the play. In the article entitled "(Neurobiology Creative Interventions Childhood and Trauma, 2015)" Cathy A. Malchiodi put forth the definition of trauma: The term "'trauma' is defined as an experience that creates a lasting, substantial, psychosocial, and somatic impact on a child. Traumatizing events

can be single occurrences such as an accident or witnessing injury to another (person) or several experiences that become traumatic in their totality. Extensive exposure to neglect and abuse; experience of terrorism or war; or survival of a disaster and subsequent loss of home, possessions, and/or family members are examples of repeated or chronic trauma experiences” (Malchiodi, 2015). Danielle in *Girl Who Loved Her Horses* is the archetype of the trauma and its occurrences put forth by Cathy A. Malchiodi. She undergoes an “extensive exposure to neglect and abuse” from her alcoholic mother and a cruel step-father, and the experience of the death of her biological father from whom she experienced love and affection leads her to a “chronic trauma experiences”. And this persistent suffering and the difficulties that Danielle endures as a child eventually leads her to the severity of trauma. Hence, the playwright stages Danielle’s hardships and trauma which are distinct to native and non-native audience.

The playwright pertinently stages an alarming effect of trauma upon the native children through the protagonist. The play displays a strange behaviour of Danielle so as to make the audience aware of the prevailing reality among children. In the article, “Dispositional Emotionality and Regulation: Their Role in Predicting Quality of Social Functioning,” Nancy Eisenberg, Richard A. Fabes, Ivanna K. Guthrie, and Mark Reiser remark on the internalizing behaviour of children:

*Shyness, especially when it involves behavioral inhibition when confronted with novelty (including people who are not well known), is generally viewed as an internalizing behavior. We predicted that children high in internalizing negative emotionality (intensity and frequency of emotions such as fear and anxiety) and low in emotion regulation (e.g., the ability to shift attention) would be viewed as shy by adults (Eisenberg and Nancy, 2000).*

The play throws light on Danielle’s shyness and nervous feelings that stop her from expressing her thoughts and emotions. Danielle internalizes the “negative emotionality” which results from her experiences as a child, and the cruel treatment she experiences from her mother and stepfather. This prevents her from interacting with her peer group eventually as she keeps herself aloof from her parents and friends.

DANIELLE. Its not my same mommy. She’s changed. She used to be so nice. Now I’m afraid.

SHELLY. Afraid of what?

DANIELLE. Mommy. Her boyfriend. They make fun of me. I don’t like being made fun of. Mommys aren’t supposed to do that.... (Taylor, 2008).

*Girl Who Loved Her Horses* unravels Danielle’s strange behaviour. The playwright portrays Danielle as a disturbed child who tries to overcome her distress by drawing the horses. However, Danielle’s bitter experiences and memories of her lost father govern her emotions and outward appearance. She is even addressed as “the poster girl for shyness”: “DANIELLE, the poster girl for shyness, doesn’t respond. The other kids look, surprised to see her” (Taylor, 2008). Taylor depicts skillfully a native girl’s psychological disproportions which prevent her from mingling with the peer group and society. Danielle finds hard to express her thoughts with Ralph, Shelley, and William. According to the stage direction, “DANIELLE mumbles something but it’s impossible to make it out” (Taylor, 2008) “DANIELLE struggles to speak louder” (Taylor, 2008) as she is anxious and disturbed. The playwright brings a shy and disturbed child into the limelight to portray the psychological state of many a native child who is out of tune with her family and community.

In “Art Therapy, Trauma, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” Annliese Hanson remarks the ill effects of trauma which would lead to a more complex situation in one’s life. “Trauma can cause memory problems; behavioral problems, flashbacks, sleep disturbances, and can even change the chemistry of the brain. A child’s brain can become “programmed” for stress and anxiety at an early age, and these tendencies can lead children to exhibit damaging or abnormal behaviors later in life” (Hanson, 2013). Hanson reaffirms the danger of the severity of trauma that are detrimental to children and adolescents. The reason for Danielle’s awkwardness, and “behavioral problems” are brought to light by Taylor, where she expresses her thoughts with the help of her friends who initiate Danielle to draw what she wishes. However, in the play, she represents an escapist of extreme anxiety and traumatic experiences by overcoming her psychic trauma by drawing the image of the horses, without which Danielle would have been shunned her life otherwise.

#### 4. Transformation of Thoughts into Symbols / Images

Another important aspect of the paper is the representation of the native people and their tradition that highlights the living condition of many native families in a reserve, and how they use art for their survival, which are part of their traditional beliefs. In the article entitled “Social Activism within Expressive Arts “Therapy” What’s in a Name?” Karen Estrella observes that expressive arts are closely connected to the culture and tradition of a specific society, and it emphasizes on the importance of art in today’s complex world which is used as a form of resistance towards the social injustices:

*Expressive arts practitioners have partnered with communities, agencies, and institutions in ways that were models for activist and advocacy projects that promote social change today. At other times these practitioners worked within more conventional systems to promote social change from within – within themselves, within their clients, and within the system. But either way, the work of social change via the expressive arts is not new in practice, only perhaps in emphasis (Estrella, 2011).*

The exposure of the native art displayed in the play attempts to retrieve their traditional practices and beliefs in order to bring in a long-lasting social change. The outcome of “expressive art” is evident in the play where Ralph put his efforts to make Danielle express her thoughts.



Ralph's curiosity and concern towards Danielle's strange behaviour draw the attention of the audience towards her idiosyncrasy. Ralph ensures that Shelley, his sister, invites reserve children to come and draw on the "Everything Wall" (Taylor, 2008), where children are allowed to draw anything they wish. Ralph says, "Mom wants us to draw things on our kitchen wall. She's calling it the Everything Wall because we're supposed to put everything we can think of on it" (Taylor, 2008). This initiative taken up by Ralph's mother helps Danielle to draw her mind and to release her distressed thoughts. Danielle's artistic expression mirrors her mental and physical confinement.

*RALPH. What's that got to do with your horse?*

*DANIELLE. A couple months later my dad died. And things got different at home. And I never stopped thinking of that pony, thinking how sad its life must be. I wondered if it dreamed of better things when his eyes were closed. Then it began to change when I'd think of him, he grew bigger, got stronger, got real beautiful. And I began to wonder if all things could change, be different if they had better places to live, people who loved them. That makes me want to draw the horse even more. It makes the horse happy (Taylor, 2008).*

Danielle expresses her actual experience of the old pony that she encountered at Campbellford. The description of the old pony directly refers to Danielle's situation who longs to release all her pent-up emotions that have constrained her freedom to express her experience.

In the book, *The Healing Flow: Artistic Expression in Therapy: Creative Arts and the Process of Healing: an Image/Word Approach Inquiry*, Martina Schnetz points out the significant role that art plays in an individual's life. She says, "...creativity and our ability to deal with traumatic experiences in a transformative manner are perhaps vital to our ability to survive in a very complex world. Fragmentation and dissociation within an individual, as well as on a cultural level, are not sustainable in the long run" (Schnetz, 2004). Schnetz asserts that art sustains a fragmented mind to "survive in a very complex world" (Schnetz, 2004). It is the artistic creation that helped Danielle to develop her personality. When Ralph and Shelly ask Danielle about the horse she drew on the wall, Danielle says:

*DANIELLE. When I was six, back when my dad was alive, he took me to that fair they have in Campbellford. They had pony rides there. I remember this big line up of kids, and there was only one pony for all those kids.*

*SHELLEY. Yeah, we had one of those at Indian days, remember Ralph?*

*DANIELLE. We had to stand in line for a long time before I got a chance to ride, and I kept watching that pony. They put one kid after another on its back and it would go around in a circle, and around and around, wearing out a path in the grass. Sometimes its eyes weren't even open. That's all it ever did. ... I felt very sad for it. It looked old, unhappy, and its back was bent. When it was my turn to ride, I started crying. I felt so sorry for that poor pony, I didn't want to ride it. (Taylor, 2008).*

Hence, Danielle's strong empathy for the horse and her repressed feelings are liberated by drawing the image of the horse. The audience are made aware of Danielle's association with the horse, whom she finds a better companion than human beings (her friends and parent): *Across the sloped and planked ceiling is the drawing of THE HORSE, majestic and strong, and perhaps bigger. In the corner of the fort on the floor is DANIELLE, nestled happily in the presence of the protective horse. It is a relationship of love and security. She is singing, or more accurately mumbling, an inaudible song as she basks in the warmth of THE HORSE. They are playing a hand game* (Taylor, 2008). Taylor sincerely portrays how a child finds protection and solace in its own artistic creation, and how it directly contributes to the constructive development of her psyche.

Robert Keith Sawyer in an introductory note to *Creativity and Development* establishes that art plays a significant role in the cognitive development in children. He emphasizes that "...the arts can contribute unique developmental benefits to children – general skills related to creativity such as higher level thinking, analytic ability, problem solving, reflexive thinking, and self-regulation" (Sawyer, 2003). A child's inner desire that is expressed via art manifests reality, and in the play, Danielle's artistic creation is a reflection of her true self. By drawing the horses on the wall, she tries to unleash her desires which she represses for fear of the people around her.

One of the key features that the playwright emphasizes in the play is the theme of transforming thoughts into symbols or images. Darcy Lynn in the article, "Healing Through Art," remarks on the positive aspect of art as it has the singular ability to make one resilient and optimistic: "The painting is about the realization that life is a gift, and the image became such a positive one that I carried the seals motif into other works. I felt the seals were my symbol of survival and hope" (Lynn, 1995). The horses that Danielle draws on the "Everything wall" (Taylor, 2008) is similar to the seals that Lynn refers to. The image of the horse gives a momentary joy and fulfilment for Danielle which would eventually enable her to bloom into a full-grown person with a positive outlook towards life. Art and art therapy have such incredible transformation and wholesomeness in individuals and societies.

The playwright has aptly chosen horse instead of any other animal to express the powerful urge in Danielle to share her true entity. The playwright endeavours to bring the attention of the audience towards a native child's attempt to connect herself to the community and society at large. Art supersedes its basic purpose, when it used as a therapeutic medium for the mind to break its shell that confines one to one's self. Art has an upper edge over any other medium of communication as art can "restore internal and external balance" (Schnetz, 2004) which Schnetz emphasizes to explain the process of a healing flow. However, the following section of the paper examines the significance of native art and the symbol of horse among First Nations people which contributes in an in-depth analysis of the play.

## 5. Art Over Writing or Talking Therapy

In the article entitled “Creativity in the Making: Vygotsky’s Contemporary Contribution to the Dialectic of Development and Creativity” Seana Moran, Vera John-Steiner, and R. Sawyer probe into Vygotsky’s *The Psychology of Art* (1965/1971) which examines the role of art in social milieu: “Art is the social within us, and even its action is performed by a single individual it does not mean that its essence is individual. . . . Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life. . . . It would be more correct to say that emotion becomes personal when every one of us experiences a work of art: It becomes personal without ceasing to be social” (Moran and Vera, 2003). The article emphasizes the constructive usage of art which helps not only an individual to express one’s experiences, but also provides an opportunity to develop a healthy relationship in a society. In the *Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, Danielle as a representative of native children exposes her personal experiences and feelings by drawing the images of horses on the “Everything Wall” (Taylor, 2008). Hence, it is through art that Danielle accomplishes in expressing her experiences and thoughts that helps her to share about her childhood experiences with Ralph.

In the first five scenes of the play, the plot narration is dominated by the other characters such as, Ralph, Shelley, and Williams; whereas Danielle’s character is projected through stage direction where her gesture and behaviour are described vividly. According to the stage direction, “*Danielle wraps the blankets around her tiny body and crawls into a corner, her body racked with shivers. The noise of a violent argument can be heard on the other side of the wall. Each loud bellow makes her shiver in fear*” (Taylor, 2008). She feels insecure within her family and among peer group, and her life seems threatening as Danielle’s life is constrained by fear and her inability to express her thoughts. Judith Pizarro, in the article, “The efficacy of art and writing therapy: Increasing positive mental health outcomes and participant retention after exposure to traumatic experience,” points out the importance of art therapy that swapped verbal expression. According to Pizarro (2005),

*One advantage of art therapy over writing or talk therapy is that art products (e.g., sculpture or drawings) do not require literacy or verbal fluency, yet they can convey emotion, relate a story, and stimulate verbal expression. Thus, individuals who lack the skills to communicate through writing, or are uncomfortable about verbal expression, may be encouraged to disclose by first engaging in an art project about their stressful or traumatic experience (Pizarro, 2005).*

Danielle’s attempt to express herself made it possible when she drew a horse on the wall: “*She slides down the front of THE HORSE slowly, her back against him, her face glowing. She makes a huge sound of joy and release. She laughs and giggle like the child she has a right to be*” (Taylor, 2008). The audience witness a transformation of Danielle’s real expression on stage. Art is in a way more powerful than verbal communication, which an individual could express their distress thoughts and find solace in art. Nevertheless, in examining a person with traumatic stress, it is vital to encourage and engage “an art project” as Pizarro spotlights its endorsement which also attempts to bring a positive change in a society. Drew Hayden Taylor has honestly depicted the quintessential of the reserve children whose lives are neglected, and their needs are abandoned which are often liable to psychic agony.

One method that has been employed by the playwright is the portrayal of spontaneous expression of art. In Psychoanalysis, Analytic, and Object Relations Approaches Cathy A. Malchiodi underscores the use of object relations art therapy as a useful artistic creation that are beneficial in helping the development of early childhood: “Art expression, an activity of early childhood, can be used at any age to reflect unfinished stages of development. Observing and facilitating art expression in therapy can help to amplify unresolved interpersonal issues that may need to be addressed in treatment” (Malchiodi, 2003). The article engenders and validates the use of art therapy in treating the children whose repressed thoughts are unresolved.

## 6. Conclusion

Representation of native history and tradition on stage becomes an effective way of showcasing an explicatory reality of the lived experienced of reserve children and adult. The play revolves around the characters as adults, and moves from present to the past through their memories which is a semi-stream of consciousness techniques. It is through the memories of Ralph that the protagonist’s character is brought into the light. This artistic creation of Taylor represents Danielle as a subject of discourse, and it also paves way to a larger extend in understanding the hardships and needs so as to construct a better position for an individual in a society. Hence art, specifically, theatre plays a vital role by incorporating the traditional and contemporary practices which are prominent to a native and non-native audience.

In the book, *Healing through Art: Ritualized Space and Cree Identity*, Nadia Ferrara remarks on art therapy and its healing power. “According to my Cree informants, the healing process does not necessarily refer to mental health alone. It entails an approach in which one is healed when one experiences a sense of harmony and balance within the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms” (Ferrara, 2004). In the play, the girl overcomes her difficulties as she “experiences a sense of harmony and balance” through her art in drawing the horses. Art channelizes Danielle and helps her to balance and actualize her inward and outward world, and it enables her to find her true self that she has hidden from herself. The paper finds that art plays a significant role in shaping Danielle’s personality, which otherwise would have been stunted on account of the inaffable living conditions of the First Nations people in their own land.

Taylor’s awe-inspiring masterpiece in portraying Danielle’s character, and his technique of plot narration provides a positive insight to both native and non-native audience that would help in dealing with the victims of extreme stress and trauma. Yet, it is a way of exploring and celebrating native beliefs and historical events to

instigate native spirits in resisting and challenging the impropriety of the dominant settlers in Canada keeping intact their true entity through art.

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