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Three Day Road and Whale Rider Analyzed through Formalism/New Criticism

Through the literary lens of Formalism and New Criticism, two themes are expressed in both *Three Day Road* and *Whale Rider*. Formalism and new criticism involve analyzing and studying the text without outside influence.

Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* suggests that the evils of war negatively alter the personalities of all its participants. This consequence is presented in multiple forms, such as addiction, shell shock, loss of innocence, becoming windigo, and strained friendships.

Morphine addiction showcases the harmful alteration of one's personality in the novel. The soldiers use the drug to improve their state during the war, to ease their mental suffering and have "all of [their] faculties sharpened" [207]. However, the "pull" of the morphine proves to be another battle in itself for its victims. This idea is reflected through Elijah and Xavier's addiction. Elijah tells Xavier "when the [drug] is in his veins," he becomes an "invisible hunter" and can spot enemies and understand the true meaning behind their words (212); he says morphine is "a very powerful tool" during times of war (128). This exemplifies how war has distorted Elijah's logic and how he justifies his addiction to morphine. The addiction is also compounded by his greed for recognition and leads him to turn to drugs to improve his hunting prowess. However, this drives him mad as he starts to find joy in killing. This illustrates how war destroys Elijah's personality and morals, ultimately turning him into a windigo.

After Xavier kills Elijah, he is haunted by his friend's ghost and protects himself from his memories by "luxuriating in [the] warm grasp"(150) of morphine (346). This demonstrates how war devastated Xavier by tasking him to free Elijah of his madness. This leads Xavier to be haunted by his reality and thoughts and results in him abusing morphine to gain relief. Xavier resorting to morphine shows how war changed his character because of the burden he bears. Before, Xavier was able to resist morphine but saving Elijah was his breaking point and he gave in to the drug. Lastly, when Elijah gets a bad feeling about Breech's plan to "weaken Fritz's wire near the machine gun" (144), he is desperate to take "morphine to wash away a fear that he feels for the first time" [146]. Elijah's need for the drug to calm a new fear reveals that war changes his personality by instilling a destructive terror into him and swaps his bravery into fear.

One of the most significant physiological effects of the First World War is shell shock: a mental disorder experienced by the soldiers. This leads to a change of character in its victims, which is demonstrated through addiction, one's focus on the war, and flashbacks. The novel illustrates the soldiers' use of drugs to cope with stress. At the beginning of the war, Xavier and Elijah have not yet suffered its horrors and are not dependent on drugs. However, as the war progresses, Elijah begins to take morphine to enhance his ability to kill the enemy. This demonstrates his concentration on another task, not caring about his friends. Xavier takes morphine to "drift back to the comfort of old friends" [177]. This illustrates that he no longer cares about life and he does not want to face reality. This destructive habit negatively alters the personalities of those who use drugs as a coping mechanism. Secondly, as the war progresses, Elijah becomes more focused on his work and less on his friends. He starts to enjoy killing and begins to commit atrocities. At the end of the novel, Elijah becomes

a windigo as his spirit is damaged beyond repair. Xavier accuses him of “hav[ing] gone mad” [370], as his state of mind has been destroyed. Lastly, the war is so devastating that many soldiers relive its events. Throughout the novel, Xavier suffers from flashbacks of his time in the trenches [34]. His aunt mentions that “Xavier twitches and moans in his sleep” [34] as if he is back in the trenches. He remembers what happened on the tragic days when some of his friends died. This shows that even after the withdrawal of a soldier from a war, its negative effects change the personalities of those involved forever. This changes Xavier to become more fearful and anxious. Likewise, shell shock caused severe mental damage to all soldiers of the Great War, destroying the character of all soldiers.

Another identity change caused by war is the rapid loss of innocence shown by the characters in the novel. Xavier enters the trenches in France with the excitement of adventure and curiosity. However, when he enters the war, he is immediately greeted by “[his] first dead body” “a small boy” [13]. The remorse and breakdown of Xavier’s loss of innocence is shown after his encounter with the small boy, when he says: “The child confused me. What did he have to do with any of this? Where was his mother?” [13]. At this moment Xavier realizes that the war is not the adventure he had hoped for. Xavier’s concerns illustrates his understanding of the cruelty of life. Graves, a veteran who fought in the Boer War, describes this war as a “hell [he did not sign] up for” [154]. This quote shows Grave’s “innocence” is shattered because of the horrors of the war. Even with his past experience in the Boer War, he is shocked by its cruelty and violence. Sean Patrick, a boy who is barely fifteen, enters the war hoping for a short burst of adventure. However, while the battalion is putting charcoal on their faces, Xavier notes that “the whites of Sean Patrick’s eyes glint in the night and makes [him] think he is afraid. Sean Patrick’s hand shakes a little when he passes the charcoal to Elijah” [67]. Sean Patrick, a boy who Xavier describes as “a gangly moose yearling” [14], faces the fact that he may not return from this war. This realization causes Sean to lose his innocence. These three examples highlight Boyden’s exploration into the loss of innocence as a personality change as an effect of war.

The novel also explores character changes as a result of war through Elijah’s transition to a windigo. As the war progresses, Elijah develops a desire to kill. This is first shown when Elijah and Xavier become snipers; Xavier says, “Elijah goes into another place when he is hunting. He forgets his British accent and his bragging, he is patient. He becomes more watchful. He moves with no wasted movement, like a wolf on some smaller animal trail” [113]. When Elijah is not hunting, we still see the human in him through his British accent and bragging. However, when Elijah hunts, he forgets to be civilized and becomes an animal, hungry for food. Elijah’s hunger to kill goes beyond an animal’s hunt for survival; Elijah kills for satisfaction. As a windigo is never satisfied after killing and consuming one person, Elijah continues to hunt because of the satisfaction that he feels in killing. Elijah’s transition is also shown through his indifference towards killing. This is first introduced when Xavier and Elijah go snipping for the first time. Xavier throws up after seeing Elijah kill the German soldier, but Elijah remains calm and indifferent. As the pair continue snipping, we are further introduced to how Elijah is desensitized to killing. For example, after returning from their post, Xavier says, “Elijah has killed more men than I can count on both hands. It doesn’t seem to bother him” [98]. When Elijah kills, he does not feel any regret or sorrow, which makes it easier for him to continue doing it. Through his relative comfort in killing, Elijah becomes prone to transitioning into a windigo. Elijah’s transformation is further illustrated when he volunteers for burial detail, which is assisting in the burial of dead

soldiers. Elijah's comfort, pleasure, and warmth he feels with the deceased eases his transition to a windigo. According to Xavier, Elijah opens each man's eyes and stares into them, then closes them, giving him a warm spark, knowing that he will be the last thing that they see. Elijah says, "the spark fills his belly when it gnaws for food" [200]. The "spark" that Elijah refers to represents how the deceased fills him with a feeling that cannot be satisfied. When Elijah looks into the eyes of the dead soldiers, he feels pleasure and satisfaction that furthers his transition into a windigo. The pleasure of looking in the eyes of the soldiers symbolizes Elijah feeding on their souls. This is analogous to how Elijah cannot be fulfilled by the spark as a windigo can not be satisfied with one person. In conclusion, Joseph Boyden explores the negative characteristic and personality changes as a result of war through Elijah's transition to a windigo.

Lastly, the author demonstrates personality change through the devastation of close bonds as a result of the insanity of war. Throughout the war, Elijah and Xavier's friendship becomes strained as Elijah's satisfaction in killing increases and he begins to scalp his victims to fuel his ego and pride [305]. Though Xavier is still hopeful Elijah's behaviour is temporary and "believe[s] that the war has made [Elijah] this way" and that "he will get better when" they leave [305]. This demonstrates the close bond between the boys and the falling they experience as a result of how the war severely changes Elijah's personality.

In the novel, Boyden uses the negative experiences his characters endure in war to show the consequences of its participants' personalities. Addiction, shell shock, loss of innocence, the transition to windigo, and strained friendships are all examples of this. The novel illustrates the horrors and destruction of war, specifically its altering effects on personalities.

Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* suggests that a leader must be well-rounded. The qualities of a good leader are embodied through Paikea, who demonstrates selflessness, passion, defiance, and resilience.

Selflessness is the ability to put the needs of others before yours. This is a crucial trait for leaders as selflessness enables them to make decisions for the benefit of their followers. In the movie, Paikea flawlessly demonstrates this quality. One clear example is at the end of the movie when she rides the whale into the water. Paikea saves the pod as by doing so she preserves her peoples' culture and lifts their spirits. Her actions illustrate selflessness as she fearlessly rides the whale into the ocean to save her people despite the lethal position she puts herself in.

Another essential quality of a leader is passion and motivation, both of which are embodied in Paikea. Throughout the movie, her grandfather sets roadblocks in her path to discourage her from becoming the leader of their people, but she uses her passion and love for her tribe to overcome her grandfather's obstacles. She shows this when she ensures her grandmother does not smoke. This illustrates Paikea's love for her people as she cares for their health. Paikea also shows great pride and interest in her culture, unlike her father. She breaks culturally-imposed rules and even tells her father to turn a car around on their way to Germany for her to return home. This demonstrates her passion and love for her people as she will do anything to protect them. Therefore, her strong passion for her community and her

culture is what motivates her. It is her motivation throughout the film that helps her become the next leader of her people.

Paikea earns her role as chief through her acts of defiance against her opinionated and traditionally rooted grandfather, Koro. This is demonstrated through her refusal to let her gender affect her goal to become a chief and earn the respect of her grandfather. Her determination leads her to disobey Koro's command, which was to sit in the back of the class. After she defeats Hemi with her Taiaha fighting skills, Paikea is unexpectedly shut down by Koro. He acknowledges Paikea's determination when he says: "Right from the beginning, you knew this wasn't for you, but you keep coming back." Contrary to Paikea's leadership style, Koro's is strongly based on rules and traditions. Paikea's courage to defy the rules set by her ancestors exemplifies her powerful and defiant nature fit for a leader.

Lastly, the writers of *Whale Rider* explore the qualities of a leader through Paikea's resilience. Throughout the film, Paikea develops a mental capacity to recover from difficulties, adversity, and misfortune. Paikea's resilience is illustrated when she shows an interest in becoming the tribe leader. However, because of her grandfather's traditional beliefs, she was discouraged from pursuing this role. For example, when helping her grandfather with the cultural school, she sits in the front row of students. Her grandfather immediately orders her to sit in the back simply because she is a girl. When she refuses, he orders her to leave the school. Later, Paikea secretly follows Koro's lessons and learns how to use a taiaha from her uncle. As Paikea refuses to fall into her grandfather's beliefs, she demonstrates resilience through her ability to learn something that is traditionally male-dominated. Through her ability to defy her grandfather and recover from hardships and adversity, Paikea demonstrates resilience, an essential quality of a leader.

Whale Rider shows that leaders are well-rounded. The creators use the powerful character of Paikea to exemplify this with her qualities of selflessness, passion, defiance, and resilience of a leader.

In conclusion, through this literary lens of formalism and new criticism, two themes were thoroughly analyzed in both *Three Day Road* and *Whale Rider*. Formalism and new criticism allowed analyzation in both media with a scope that removed outside influence.