

New criticism, also known as formalism, is a way to interpret literature by focusing solely on the book's content. The main idea of this approach is that authorial control is not important. This means that while critically examining literature the author's message, their background, their life story, and the time period the book was written in does not matter. This method of analysis places emphasis on the themes and topics of the work. Although there are usually many themes and topics, critics focus on the main ideas and the development and elaboration of evidence in the story.

Some of the key topics found in the movie *Whale Rider* are family relationships and sexism. One thematic statement that can be derived from these topics is: *Whale Rider* suggests that the actions and attitude of one family member can negatively affect the household and ruin relationships. This is exhibited through both Pai and Hemi's family and how it affects their character.

The film first shows the audience this with the interactions between Porourangi and Koro, Pai's father and grandfather. During the first hospital scene, they do not get along because when Koro enters the delivery room, where his daughter-in-law lies dead, all he cares about is his expected grandson. His response hurts Porourangi because it seems as if Koro does not care about his wife's death. This reveals to the audience that the only thing that matters to Koro is the family lineage and the boy who receives Paikea's ancient powers. Koro's responsibility to find the new leader of the clan starts to threaten his relationships with the rest of his family. Another breaking point for Porourangi is when Koro tells him to "...come home. Start again", as Koro shows little sympathy for his daughter-in-law's death along with his grandson and treats them like pawns in the process of keeping his clan's traditions alive. Unable to reach an agreement, the father-son relationship is severed and the audience can infer that the main reason Porourangi decides to go overseas is due to the disrespectful behaviour of his father.

*Whale Rider* also shows the audience multiple instances of Koro and Pai's grandmother arguing over Pai and it forces Pai's grandmother to bring up divorce. This again shows that Koro's attitude can destroy a family's unity.

Subsequently, the audience learns that Uncle Rawiri is also a victim of Koro's high expectations. Being a talented boy amongst his generation, he wins an award for his expertise with the taiaha but is unable to become the leader of the tribe because, according to Koro, he is the second born male in his family. Even though he is more skilled than anyone in the clan, Koro does not give him a

chance to prove himself and sets him aside. After the rejection, the readers see that Rawiri becomes obese and lethargic since he feels he has no use for the community.

Similar to Pai's relationship with her father, Hemi's father does not spend much time with him, and for the rare times when they reunite, it is never for a long time. Although Hemi shows indifference towards the fact they barely have time to converse, the movie reveals that it affects his mental health and behaviour as he is seen crying outside after his father leaves. This shows that a person needs family support to go through a variety of experiences and in Hemi's case, his father can bring him a sense of encouragement in his path to being the leader of the clan. It is also shown in the movie that Hemi does not have any other significant family members which leads the audience to believe that he is always on his own, unable to have a guardian who applauds his hard work. Ultimately, without a supporting familial character, Hemi is lead to fail in his course to achieve greatness.

*Whale Rider* also communicates another theme throughout its story. The film suggests that when people are discriminated for their sex, it often motivates them to break away from the stereotypes. This film displays this theme through Koro's attitude towards the protagonist, Paikea, and how she reacts to inequality.

At the beginning of the film, after learning that Porourangi's only living child is a girl, Koro tells his wife, Nanny Flowers, to take Paikea away and chants for the dead grandson. Afterwards, Nanny Flowers tells Koro to acknowledge his granddaughter, in which he responds, "He [Porourangi] 'll have another child". This reply shows Koro's discrimination against Paikea and not giving her equal attention just because she is a girl and instead hopes that Porourangi will have another boy. He chants for the dead male baby but not for the female baby who has survived the birth. This is reinforced when Nanny Flowers says that Paikea is "not good enough" for Koro and Paikea's voice-over narrates, "My Koro wished in his heart that I'd never been born." That Koro dislikes Paikea when she is born because she is a girl and not a male descendant of Paikea causes him to discriminate against her throughout the film. Another reason to suggest Koro discriminates Pai for her sex is during the first class of Koro's chief training program. When all the firstborn males and Pai enter and sit down, Koro tells Paikea, "Pai. You are a girl. Go to the back." Koro is telling Pai that she does not deserve to sit at the front of the students section because she is a girl. Koro does not believe girls are able to surpass men as leaders and, therefore, he brushes her off to the side. Again, Koro is discriminating against

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Paikea for being born a girl and treats her less because he does not believe she can contend against young boys.

This causes Paikea to start defying her Koro's orders and expectations in order to win his respect. When Koro tells Paikea to sit at the back, she proceeds to sit in the front, defying her Koro's sexist beliefs. Paikea then sneaks around the side of the temple and eavesdrops on Koro's first lesson, which is learning the chant of the ancient Paikea. This shows the audience that Paikea is willing to go against her Koro's wishes and learn how to gain his respect, even if that means disappointing him first. The next lesson the audience sees from Koro is when he teaches the boys the Taiaha, an ancient fighting tool. Paikea watches from a distance and tries to follow along with a stick but her Koro notices and scolds her. Afterwards, Paikea goes to her Uncle Rawiri and he agrees to teach her how to use the Taiaha. The viewers see the progress of Paikea training with her Uncle and her dedication to impress her Koro, despite her being a girl and not suitable in her Koro's eyes. Pai trains enough with Rawiri and beats Hemi, one of Koro's best students, in a Taiaha fight. This shows that Paikea is so motivated that she surpasses her Koro's own teaching and she now dedicates herself to earning his respect. Koro overlooks her abilities and the only thing he cares about is that a girl is using the Taiaha.

After this, Koro tests his boys for their spirit. He throws a whale tooth into the ocean, but none of his boys retrieve it. This means that none of them are qualified to be chiefs. While Koro is grieving his own failure, Paikea attempts to get the whale tooth and succeeds, again proving that just because she is a girl does not mean she can't do a man's job. However, Koro is unaware of this. At the climax of the film, Pai is able to move Paikea's ancient whale back into the water while her whole community could not. She rides the whale's back into the water, sadly looking back at her Koro. The film is showing Paikea's dedication and commitment to prove to her Koro that she can be a chief and that just because she is a girl it does not mean she is not capable of becoming the head of the tribe. Nanny Flowers then gives the whale tooth back to Koro. He asks "Which one?" implying he thinks one of his boys got it and Nanny Flowers answers with "What do you mean, which one?". Koro then realizes how much Paikea put into proving herself and at that point, Pai gains her Koro's respect. The film backs this up at the end when Paikea is rescued and Koro speaks, "Wise leader, forgive me. I am just a fledgling new to flight." Finally, Koro acknowledges that he did not give Pai a chance and regrets discriminating against her for being a girl. He realizes all the hard work Paikea has done to prove herself against his discrimination. The story in *Whale Rider* is driven by Paikea's determination to prove herself against her Koro's sexist views.

These two thematic statements drive the story of *Whale Rider* and its protagonist, Paikea. With a New Criticism/Formalism lens the audience can get a deep understanding of what this film is trying to communicate.

A shared topic in *Whale Rider* and *Three Day Road* is the importance of sacrifices. The two works have their distinctive perspective on the significance of this subject.

*Whale Rider* suggests that leaders are highlighted by their sacrificial determination. Pai sacrificing her safety and security demonstrates this message. Having an illegitimate claim to the clan's leadership because of her gender, Pai steps away from her comfort and questions the traditions. In addition, she performs the challenging duties that are expected of a strong guide. For example, Pai takes the initiative of retrieving her grandfather's tooth pendant to prove her worth. Although Pai has limited information of the location of the pendant, she recognizes that obstacles are a part of her role-fulfillment to help her grandfather. Through this event, Pai sacrifices her comfort on dryland and dives into a more unpredictable environment to restore a loss. Koro does not immediately recognize Pai's achievement and assumes that one of the boys from his training found the whale tooth. However, Pai's actions lead Koro to start to recognize her abilities.

Pai's decision to lead the whales back to the water is also an example of her sacrificial initiative. Pai rides on a whale to guide the other beached whales back into the ocean, even though she is aware she could lose her life in the water. Her hospitalization after riding the whale reinforces the risk she took to make a change. This event also parallels the first Paikea: the man who led his people to New Zealand on whale back in spite of all the uncertainties of their migration. The shared attributes between the two Paikeas are the signatures of a responsive and progressive leader.

In the face of threat and danger, Pai rises to take headship risking her security. Her willingness to sacrifice and rescue her clan are the traits that ultimately crown her with respect and power from the community.

The significance of sacrifice is also evident in *Three Day Road*, which suggests that freedom and peace require violent sacrifices. *Three Day Road* presents this theme through the two executions of Windigos: the first being Micah's wife by Niska's father; the latter being Elijah Whiskeyjack by Xavier.

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In the wake of a resourceless winter and the death of her husband, Micah's wife chose to cannibalize the remains of her spouse. Her decision reflects the desperation of her situation: she was either to die of starvation with her child or to violate her morals. When Micah's wife became a Windigo, she was doomed to be plagued by the guilt of her actions. However, she could not change her behaviours for the better and therefore is cursed to inflict her cannibalistic urges on her tribe. Niska's father kills Micah's wife for protection and sacrifice. Through her death, Micah's wife was no longer a threat to her community or to herself. The price of her life is an exchange to free the Cree tribe from the danger of a Windigo. In addition, Micah's wife is free from enduring a lifetime of remorse for her crime. This event demonstrates how Niska's father had to sacrifice lives to maintain peace within the community.

Elijah's death illustrates the importance of sacrifice because his passing frees him from the insatiable void of warfare. During the battles, Elijah's transformations permanently alter his identity: his addiction to morphine and bloodshed erases his sensible judgements. Elijah believes that with his drugs, he has the ability to destroy and consume others' lives at will. An example of such a distorted mindset includes Elijah's murder of Breech and Grey Eyes when they discover his habits of scalping and frequent substance abuses. In spite of recognizing that his actions are unacceptable, Elijah justifies his crimes with the Canadian army's potential punishments. Xavier follows Elijah in reluctance because the Lieutenant and Private were a threat to their security. This event, however, is a sign that Elijah no longer held his humanity and moral principles as his priorities. To maintain his glory and fulfillment from blood and morphine, Elijah was willing to obliterate any possible opposition that he could encounter. Therefore, Xavier's decision to kill Elijah is a sacrifice to liberate his friend from his monstrous development. Death is the only solution to freedom from the war's mutilations on his identity.

Therefore, the thematic topic of sacrifice plays an important role in both *Three Day Road* and *Whale Rider*. However, the novel paints sacrifice as a mode of liberation from regret and cruelty; the film displays it as a sign of leadership and empowerment.

In *Three Day Road* there are many themes that appear throughout the novel. However, the main theme that was chosen is the topic of war. *Three Day Road* suggests how people can never escape the trauma of war. This theme consists of three different types of trauma: physical, psychological, and emotional trauma.

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In *Three Day Road*, an example that supports this recurring theme is the physical trauma Xavier experiences when he loses his leg. In the first chapter, the reader discovers that Xavier returns from the war with only one of his legs. It is not until the end of the book that people learn that Xavier's leg was badly injured in the war and had to be amputated. Additionally, due to his damaged body, Xavier can no longer return to the life he had before the war. Xavier is a very independent person and likes to do things by himself. However, he needs help to stand up and cannot even travel on his one leg without someone to assist him. The leg also brings Xavier excruciating pain and he struggles to cope with it without using medicine. Xavier is also a hunter and hunting in the bush is a significant part of his identity. During the course of the war, Xavier falls into a state of depression and sadness. The only thing that keeps him going is that he will one day return home to the bush and hunt once again. Hunting is something Xavier loves in his life because it is something Niska taught him and he and Niska bonded over when he was little. Hunting also gives Xavier purpose in life because he hunts to find food for him and his aunt to eat. However, due to Xavier's disability, he can no longer hunt like he used to because without two legs he cannot move quietly and efficiently. Xavier's inability to hunt means that he has lost a huge part of his life. This change in Xavier's body impacts him considerably and is a constant reminder of all the trauma he suffered because of the war. As a result, Xavier will never truly escape the war because even though the war has ended, Xavier's amputated leg will continue to affect his life because he can no longer hunt, walk properly, or do basic everyday tasks without a struggle.

*Three Day Road* establishes how a person may survive a war, but can never escape the psychological trauma of war. One of the major psychological impacts of war is post traumatic stress. Throughout Niska and Xavier's canoe trip, Xavier is too mortified to even speak to his aunt. In various parts of the story, Niska continuously tries to make Xavier speak to her about what he is experiencing, but he remains mute. Xavier is always thinking of his past experiences in the war and never has a reprieve from the constant flashbacks and images in his head. When Xavier stops thinking about the war he is dreaming about it. He has restless nights with disturbed sleep and goes so far as to mumble to himself. Readers know that when he sleeps or closes his eyes the memories of war come back to him. Xavier thinks about the terrible conditions of the physical environment, the way he was treated by all the other soldiers, and especially the danger of the war. Constantly being shot at and bombed every single day during the war makes Xavier either constantly fear for his life or simply accept death as a constant. When he wakes up in the morning, he does not even know if he will survive the day. This

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perpetual fear turns into a traumatic experience affecting his psychological health. The post traumatic stress he experiences from the war never stops. Although Xavier is safe with Niska on the canoe he is still consumed by the war. *Three Day Road* illustrates the pain this type of trauma causes as readers empathize with Xavier during his emotionally distressing flashbacks. This shows how he is not able to escape the trauma and it may stay with him for the rest of his life.

*Three Day Road* explores emotional trauma, which is a form of trauma that also makes the war seem perpetual. In *Three Day Road*, an example of emotional trauma is the guilt Xavier feels after killing people. Throughout the novel, the readers see how Xavier does not take pleasure in killing humans regardless if they are friend or foe. There are two people in the war who Xavier feels the most guilty for killing. One of these people is a woman he kills while in Passchendaele. Xavier accidentally kills this woman because as he is searching a building, he sees movement and shoots at it. Xavier feels culpable for killing the woman because she was innocent and there was no need to shoot her. In the following days after this incident, all Xavier can think about is the person he accidentally murdered. This haunts him and he cannot believe he has done something so morally wrong. The reminder of Xavier's wrongdoing traumatizes him so that he keeps thinking about what he could have done differently to have spared an innocent life. The guilt Xavier feels causes him emotional trauma, which will stay with him for the rest of his life, trapping him in the moment of the war when he killed the woman. The other person Xavier kills that causes him emotional trauma is his friend, Elijah. Elijah is Xavier's best friend, but throughout the war Elijah changes and becomes a bloodthirsty soldier who lives on morphine. At the end of the book, Xavier and Elijah are pinned down by gunfire. Elijah then tries to grab Xavier and a fight starts. Xavier ends up on top of Elijah and kills him realizing he has gone Windigo. Xavier feels guilty for killing Elijah because Elijah was his best friend and was not someone he was expecting to kill while in the war. Xavier cries while strangling Elijah knowing he has to kill him because he has gone mad. Xavier did not want to kill Elijah, but realizes he has to for Elijah's own good. Even after the war, the memory of ending his closest friend's life stays as clear as day to him. He can never forget this moment of the war because it is such a traumatic memory. This emotional trauma that Xavier suffers will never let him escape the war because of the tremendous amount of guilt he feels for killing one of his own.

Another way *Three Day Road* expresses the everlasting anguish of war is through the characters' development of morphine addiction. At the beginning of the story, the readers discover that Xavier is taking morphine to ease his pain. Readers also learn that Xavier will soon run out and

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believes he will die without it. The reason he is taking the morphine is because of the physical pain he experienced in the war. The amount of pain that the soldiers experience is too much to deal with on their own. Xavier is not the only victim; other soldiers including Elijah utilize morphine to ease their pain. The soldiers who are introduced to this drug are constantly using it and truly believe that they need it to survive. Although the reason they have started taking morphine is because of the physical pain from injuries, there is a large psychological aspect of addiction. Drugs as strong as morphine have impactful psychological effects on people. This substance makes people's brains believe that if they do not take it, it will make them sick to the point of death. As readers learn from the end of the novel, Xavier has serious withdrawal symptoms. The addiction and the withdrawal adds to the overall trauma Xavier is experiencing from the war. Furthermore, the fact that Xavier is experiencing this while not in the war shows that the trauma of war follows you.

In *Three Day Road*, we see how the physical, psychological, and emotional trauma of war plays a big role in affecting Xavier's and other people's lives. The examples in support of the theme show how the trauma of the war is everlasting. This trauma is something that is inescapable and in a way is what keeps people in the war without physically being there.

The themes that were drawn from both *Whale Rider* and *Three Day Road* are some of the most dominant themes present. With a New Criticism/Formalism lens, audiences and readers can easily understand complex themes and know where the story is going and what it is trying to communicate.