

Traumatized Body And Mind : A Study On Joseph Boyden's 'Three Day Road'

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Abstract

Traumatic studies have emerged in literature only in the recent decade. Delineating the traumatic experiences through literature is not an achievable one. Even the traumatic mind itself cannot examine the experiences accurately. The traumatic therapies are also not enough to cure the traumatized minds. The Canadian soldiers witnessed many atrocities in the war fields had been treated as animals not even as human. Joseph Boyden portrayed the lives the Indian Gypsies of Canada who participated in war. They were haunted not only by the atrocities of war but also their customs and traditions. The repetition of pathetic experiences of them resulted psychological crisis and made them unfit to survive.

Key words: Trauma, Jingoism, , morphine, killing spree, Psychological crisis, neurosis.

Canada, the land of mosaic culture, known for its peace and prosperity. In order to attain the nationality, many Canadian soldiers sacrifice their lives due to their jingoism. Canadian war fictions have one thing in common: they never fail to make the readers feel visual, auditory and sensual. By participating war, Canadian soldiers hoped to achieve the identity and nationality. Every soldiers fought for his own country due to patriotism; but in the case of Canadians, they fought for others (Canadian Soldiers in British Army) to attain their nationhood. Though they fought with spirit, they were denied to get recognition and felt hollow identity. Northrop Frye analyzed: "Canadians are conditioned from infancy to think themselves as a citizen of country of uncertain identity, a confusing past and hazardous future" (186). The pathetic experiences of soldiers and their shattered expectations resulted psychological crisis. They were haunted by the traumatic experiences that demand their transformation.

Trauma is the result of experiencing the stressful events that make one feel insecure. Traumatic experiences can be released through the best way of writings. But it is highly impossible to write the traumatic past experienced of ours as it was. Cathy Caruth in her 'Unclaimed Experiences' pointed out that "Trauma is not locatable in simple violent or original event of an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very assimilated nature" (4). Joseph Boyden, prolific Canadian novelist delineated the sufferings of Indigenous people (Cree Indian People) of Canada in the novel *Three Day Road*. Cree Identity had been neglected even by the Canadians. Canadian soldiers Xavier and Elijah who were brought up by Cree People witnessed the racism; they were considered as typical/ low class people. Xavier who never transformed his Cree Indian identity, was identified as a low class soldier, fit for nothing, and a lunatic amidst the trenches. Elijah experienced everything to get power but he met his sudden death only at last because of his traumatic neurosis.

Niska, the Canadian medicine woman waited for a long time outside the Moose factory for Elijah who returned from World War I. No sooner did she notice Europeans (Wemistikoshiw), she hid herself to avoid unnecessary happenings. Being Cree Indian, the Europeans consider her as 'animal'. Niska questioned the attitude of her own people and haunted by the feeling of not accepting the indigenous people as human. Niska said, "They stare and point and talk about me as if they have not seen one of me before. I must look a thin and wild woman to them, an Indian Animal straight out of the bush". (Boyden 3)

Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* is the journey between life and death, present and past and expectations and disappointments. Xavier and Elijah are young and inexperienced Canadian soldiers, fought in World War I. They experienced the impact of war: the noisy trenches, poisonous gases, fire, and foggy land. They have to open their eyes always by sacrificing their sleep; their higher officials demanded their wide opened sharpened eyes always. The lack of food and water are also made the circumstances tensed one. Xavier told that, "water and the sound of night animals feeding on all sides, thick mud sucking at boots, threatening to pull them from the soldier's feet with each step" (Boyden 20). They considered war field as the bloody hell. They were perturbed not only by physical sufferings but also mental sufferings who questioned their reason for their deed and its results.

Xavier and Elijah were brought up in the Cree culture. They had faith on their rituals: skill to hunt in the bush; ensure the spirit of Windigo killing (killing with care) and believes in the power of storytelling to cure. They enriched the art of hunting only for survival; they have to pray for every prey before they eat; they kept in their mind that they killed the animals only for survival not for power; they considered animals as holy one. But in the war field, the Cree Indian Soldiers experienced vice versa. They found hard to follow the tradition and culture of their own.

Language itself is the barrier to Cree Indian Soldiers. Elijah was fond of learning western language though he was a Cree Indian. He often remembered the sexual bullying of nun who kept her hand inside his pants in the Boarding School. Elijah remembered his traumatic past very often in the war and felt disturbed. He forgot about his Cree Language and spoke in English who dreamt of acquiring power by assimilating western language. He was appreciated for his hunting ability of killing many without mercy and forgot the spirit of killing with mercy. Witnessing the transformation of Elijah (the spirit of killing many without mercy and care), Xavier is perturbed and felt psychological crisis because of the lack of Cree culture. Like Robert Ross in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, Xavier also witnessed the mistaken identities due to language.

Both Xavier and Elijah addicted themselves to Morphine. Xavier utilized the morphine to avoid the killing pain of who suffered physically and mentally. The loss of his leg in war, the transformation of Elijah and the indifferences by other soldiers made Xavier feel traumatic. Elijah used the morphine to increase the power of killing many in order to get power and recognition. Xavier said' " He becomes the hunter at these times, the invincible hunter who can lie still for hours, for days, only moving to refuel his body with the medicine, using his osprey's vision to spot the enemy". (Boyden 240). Elijah was proud of counting the numbers of killing of many lives by forgetting the spirit of Cree Identity.

The duty of soldier in the war is to kill. He must kill; otherwise he will be killed. But in the case of Elijah, we witnessed injustice only. Witnessing Elijah's herculean power of killing many without mercy, the French soldiers felt angry and ego. Many of them complained against the killing spirit of Elijah because of jealousy. Due to the racism, the French were not ready to accept and recognized him. The killing many without mercy by French soldiers was known as war. But killing

of many without mercy by Elijah was known as atrocities. Elijah was complained against his spirit of killing spree. His commander warned him against his killing atrocities. Haunted by the traumatized experiences, Elijah's psyche demanded him to avoid the inquiry and punishment of his commanders for his valor. His psychological crisis made him kill both Grey Eyes and Breech to avoid court enquiries. The morphine and the madness of killing many without mercy and forgetting of Cree power of spirit made him kill his friend Xavier also.

The experiences of trauma repeatedly occurred to Elijah and Xavier. In 'Gerusalemme Liberta', Tancred killed his beloved Clorinda unknowingly. Like him Elijah also killed the fellow comrades unconsciously and tried to kill his friend Xavier too. Both Elijah and Xavier also felt the trauma (wound) by their repeated experiences and memories like Tancred who heard the voice of his crying beloved. Tancred, Elijah and Xavier were themselves not only the reasons for their deeds but their traumatic memories repeated themselves made them act against his will.

The war engulfs not only the life of soldiers but also the people. Through the characters of Elijah, Xavier and Niska, Joseph Boyden lime lighted the life of Cree Indian People of Canada. Xavier suffered both physically and mentally, injected himself with morphine for survival; but experienced only the traumatic neurosis at last. Elijah injected himself with morphine to get power and identity; but he met his own death. The pathetic experiences, memories of traumatic past and the psychological crisis within himself resulted his own death. Due to the addiction of acquisition of mind, Elijah and Xavier lost the ability to think and act.

Even after the war, the memories of traumatic past in the Warfield made Xavier as arrogant and patient who suffered from incurable disease of neurosis. Though the healing spiritual power of Niska made him calm for a moment, the traumatic experiences imprinted in his mind cannot be taken away by any one. Xavier remembered the care of his friend Elijah, his hunting ability, his expectation of achieving power by killing many and his fond of killing many by forgetting Cree rituals. He also questioned his sudden violent deed of killing his friend Elijah, his Cree Indian rituals and true meaning of participating war. In the end Cree Indian soldiers of Canada who fought in the War were labeled as patient only who suffered from traumatic past.

It is not the enemy to kill others in the War; but it is the war only that demands the lives of soldiers. The war is not only made the soldiers as patients who suffered from traumatic memories but also the people. Let us pledge to save our nation by spreading the war of peace among the nations. Every nation is fond of getting the power. But the real power lies in giving the power to others not in getting it. We have to realize that 'the power to give is better than the power to get'. All the countries in the world should realize the vitality of humanity and make the world as the best place to live with safe and secure. If it is happened, everyone will value the importance of humanity, identity and nationality.

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