

Three day road

Literature



“ Life is all memory except for the one present moment that goes by so quick you can hardly catch it going” -Williams. Memory plays an important role in one’s life; it is also one of the main themes of the two texts “ Three Day Road” by Joseph Boyden, and “ Simple Recipes” by Madeleine Thein. The role of memory in the two stories is played from the start to the end, and they are made up by memories. Memory has created a unique feeling in the formation of the two stories.

It is obvious that the use of memory telling through the two contexts Three Day Road and Simple Recipes creates a way of healing and purifying the characters’ heart, further falls deep in connection to the characters.

Throughout the novel “ Three Day Road” by Joseph Boyden and the story “ Simple Recipes” by Madeleine Thein, the use of memory telling acts as a way of alleviating guilt for the characters in the two stories. Elijah in “ Three Day Road” chooses to tell Xavier detailed stories about what he has done or how he feels even when their friendship seems to be strained and Xavier mentions that he does not want to talk to Elijah anymore.

However, Elijah follows Xavier around like a pesky child in order to tell him stories about the ways in which he has killed Germans during his solitary night time raids, how he has taken morphine, or how he is feeling when he realizes there is a change within him. Elijah personally feels compelled to tell Xavier every sinful act he has committed because he sees Xavier as holy and pure. Elijah uses his memory telling as a way of alleviating any guilt he may feel about what he has done, as he sees his confessions to Xavier as a confession to a priest or even God himself.

In addition, even after Elijah has been killed and Niska is trying to heal Xavier in the matatosowin, Elijah's spirit arrives and he needs to hear that Xavier has forgiven him " I listen as Nephew accepts forgiveness too" (P398) in order for his spirit to move on. In contrast, Simple Recipes by Thien is also about memory telling and how it is a way for which the narrator is trying to alleviate guilt for her father. The father in " Simple Recipes" has damaged both of his children that his son by beating him and his daughter by allowing her to see him as a violent figure, which set her a different image of him.

The narrator thinks that her childish, uncompromising love for her father is lost and replaced by something more complicated. The narrator writes of how she would like to be able to remove the impurities in her life and be happy. Her childhood has left her full of impurities and complication for her father. Through memory telling of the cooking of rice and the dying fish in the sink symbolize that the narrator is trying to alleviate guilt for her father, that she wants to get rid of her impurities and imperfections of her childhood.

The narrator writes about watching the fish in the sink going through dying, for it symbolizes her watching her own childhood end, and become something complicated and sometimes harsh and painful. In summary, the two stories address the same idea that the use of memory telling is a way of healing and purifying the characters' heart, and further alleviate certain guilt for themselves and their surroundings. As memory continues to highlight the two stories " Three Day Road" and " Simple Recipes", it acts as a healing medicine for the damages of the characters.

In “ Three Day Road”, the memory works as a healing medicine that brings Xavier back to life rather than death. On the surface, it is a novel about a Cree sniper coming home after the First World War. Xavier has come home wounded and addicted to morphine, and his aunt Niska and him together head down the river on their journey home. In the canoe, Xavier sleeps in fits, reliving the battles at the Somme, and Ypres and Vimy Ridge, and remembering Elijah’s slip into addiction and madness and his own decline into depression as the bodies of his friends start to pile up around him.

Xavier’s aunt Niska begins to notice that Xavier is dying or wants to die. The morphine has cut his appetite so that he doesn’t eat, his body feeding on his despair instead. To heal Xavier, Niska begins to tell Xavier stories of her childhood. These stories that Niska have been telling Xavier play an important role within the novel. They contribute to Xavier’s healing process because they allow him to escape from reality and imagine the world that Niska is describing.

It also allows Xavier to get his mind off the war, the horrific events that have recently occurred in his life, and especially the fact that he is harshly wounded. She tells him of his grandparents, of how she escaped Residential School to live in the bush. The trip down the river is about three days, and it is the journey from death to the afterlife, according to the story, is also a three-day road. For Xavier, the three-day road brings him back to life rather than death.

Niska describes how “ sometimes [her father’s] stories were all that [she] had to keep [her] alive” and now she feels that story telling is the “ right

cure" for Xavier (Boyden 34-35). The author alternates Xavier's story with the ones Niska tells, he offers a picture not only of the war horrors and the warfare, but also a light shed on the healing through memory and storytelling. Niska's story telling has a sort of power in reliving these moments through story. In telling Xavier these things, she gains a kind of power over him.

Similarly in " Simple Recipes", the narrator is telling memories throughout the story, and it has further indicated that by telling the memories it helps her to forget about the unpleasant moments of her childhood and instead relief the impurity of her childhood. In " Simple Recipes", the family is obviously living in quietly simmering crises, for things are not quite right. Such as the father beats the son using a bamboo stick just because the son does not want to eat Asian food, and the daughter saw the violent act of her father that leaves a mark in her heart.

Somewhere in the distant past, a mistake was made; a wrong turn taken, and the consequences are slowly carving in the narrator's heart. The narrator in some way wants to make amends, to understand the events that have shaped their lives. The daughter searches back in time for the moment when her family lost faith in itself, and that she remembers the simple ritual she once shared with her father and the moment when her unconditional love for him was called into question. It charts the uneven progress of love and the closest bonds between our very own relationships.

By symbolizing the rice and the fish, and by telling memories of her childhood before the beating of her brother and after, have set out a contrast

throughout the story. It further indicates that by telling such memories, it helps the narrator to heal the scar in her heart and to replace the unhappiness, look forward in life, and stop questioning about her unconditional love for her father. In addition, by sharing good and bad experiences of the narrator's life have helped her to heal, because after experiencing the bad side of things can help her to forgive many things in life and gain a strong heart.

Overall, the damages of the characters can be healed by memory telling and it is obvious that memory is acting as a healing medicine, not only psychological speaking but also physically for the characters in both stories. Memory is also related to cultures, that by telling memories reveal the culture background and help the characters to re-discover themselves and their ways of life through shared suffering. In "Three Day Road", the stories told by Niska to Xavier play a large role in developing the overall story and in the First Nation's way of life.

When Xavier returned home and meets Niska, he is has already become a morphine addict and injured as well. The stories that Niska tells him about the suffering of her family in the winter when "It was as if Micah had discovered the place in the forest where all of the animals had come to winter. [But he]... did not see a single animal" (Boyden, 40). In the First Nation's groups of Canada, wisdom and knowledge is often passed down from the elders of the group to the younger generation in the form of verbal telling.

This is shown in the hunting ritual Niska describes; the “strawberry ceremony”, where the hunters give thanks to the animal that they have just killed for its sacrifice of life (Boyden, 36). These stories that passed down from the elders would have helped Niska and her family survive because her father was providing his family with the knowledge of how to provide for themselves in order to stay alive. Therefore, the stories that Niska have been telling Xavier have helped him to connect himself to his culture background, and further give him a power to be strong.

In addition, the stories also helped Xavier to see that he is not the only one that is suffering, his aunt Niska and elders in his culture have also suffered unfortunate experiences, and these stories help him to regain his own strength to live on. Likewise in “Simple Recipes”, the Malaysian culture has played a vital role in the development of the whole story. The narrator’s father is a traditional Malaysian, who cooks rice and Malaysian food for the family.

The son does not like to eat his traditional culture food and is having conflict with his father, which leads to his father beating him with a bamboo stick. The culture conflicts between the father and the son creates the major theme of the story, and further leads the narrator through a series of up and downs. By experiencing the narrator’s childhood, the narrator has re-discovered herself through her father’s violent act and understands that culture and family are important in one’s life.

By understanding that culture is a part of her life and that her father’s act in her childhood is understandable due to her culture traditions, the narrator

has begin to heal inside and draws in connection with her memories that are in relevant to her culture. In summary, it is important to note that memories are in deep connection with one's culture background, and that by memory telling of culture stories can help people to find a support inside, to heal necessary wounds and know that they belong to a place that they can fall back.

Overall, both stories " Three Day Road" by Joseph Boyden and " Simple Recipes" by Madeleine Thein create a way of healing through memory telling, and that memory has used as a healing medicine for the damages made to the characters in both stories. By telling memories, it alleviates guilt for the characters; it has used as a healing tool, and draws in connection with cultures that help characters to rediscover their inner self.

The idea of memory demonstrates a way of healing from the pain the characters experienced, and healing is one of the primary functions that both stories use memory for. Our lives are made up of different memories, which make us unique in our own ways. Memories not only create a valuable treasure for one's life, but also as a tool to regain strength and power, a way to improve ourselves by learning from the past, and most importantly faith in our future lives. Both stories have used memory as a healing medicine in terms of healing the damages from the past, and purify the characters' hearts.