

The influence of war: xavier, elijah, and their conflict



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There is no glory in war; it only tears relationships apart and nobody returns home unscathed. In Joseph Boyden's novel *Three Day Road*, the true horrors and realities of war are revealed. Through the characters of Xavier and Elijah, the historical fiction demonstrates that war leads to conflict within one's closest relations. Xavier and Elijah are the best of friends and share a great bond of brotherhood, however, the war brings out the worst in them. They are introduced to the western culture and become exposed to several addictive elements. The most devastating of all is morphine which causes Elijah to lose his morality. This leads to conflict between Xavier and Elijah because of their contrasting beliefs. Xavier is a much more traditional individual who resists the European influence whereas Elijah embraces it. This cross-cultural conundrum leads to disagreement within the two companions sparking their competitive nature. As the two battle out to determine who is the dominant figure, the influence of the war and European ideologies on the two are clearly demonstrated. Although Xavier and Elijah share a deep emotional bond, their relationship is slowly torn apart during the war through the use of morphine, feelings of jealousy, and the division of culture.

Addiction is a destructive disease which festers in individuals, simply shattering one's sense and judgment. Throughout the war, Elijah becomes more and more attracted to morphine. This drug acts both as a sedative and steroid for Elijah, however, this advancement comes at a cost. Elijah becomes addicted to the drug and uses the morphine to escape from the war. The drug dulls his internal struggles. Even when Elijah is not in physical pain and the medicine is not necessary, his, " body screams out for the

needle" (Boyden 337). He is unable to control his desire for the morphine which allures his sense of judgment. This is seen further when Elijah shoots the mother and her child without hesitation. Xavier becomes furious with Elijah's and questions what the reasoning is for his actions, however, Elijah mildly responds by saying, " I didn't know it was a child" (Boyden 306). The morphine has taken a hold on Elijah's senses as he cannot understand his actions have consequences. This clash between Xavier's and Elijah's moral beliefs fuel the conflict they have with each other. As the plot is driven by their rivalry one can understand Xavier is very traditional, whereas Elijah is extremely western minded. Xavier's disagreement with Elijah's use of morphine sparks the beginning of their conflict through the cross-cultural conundrum.

Conflict arises as one's cultural beliefs contradict others actions. Xavier and Elijah are in constant conflict with each other because of their differences in heritage. Xavier is raised by Niska in the bush and has developed Aboriginal beliefs and ideologies. Although Elijah is also of native descent, he is an orphan raised at a residential school. Elijah does not know if he belongs in native society or in the western society. The Europeans value the glory and successes of war whereas the natives prefer peace. Elijah desperately wants to fit in so he tries to prove himself to the other soldiers by going on a killing rampage. Xavier realizes that Elijah's actions have led him to become " something invincible, something inhuman" (Boyden 348). Elijah starts to scalp people after a successful kill and even collect hair and body parts as trophies. His inhumane actions begin the awakening of his Windigo spirit. Elijah continues his killings for the glory, attention, and approval he receives

which builds internal conflict with Xavier. Xavier is known to come from a “line of Windigo killers” (Boyden 348) and he struggles to uphold his family’s legacy. Although the signs are clear that Elijah has indeed transformed into a Windigo Xavier resists the temptation to end Elijah’s life because he values their friendship. Ultimately Elijah betrays Xavier by condemning to the Wendigo spirit to gain fame within the battalion. His actions identify the theme of how far people will go to fit into society. Elijah does not know where he belongs and he sacrifices everything he has including his friendship with Xavier to feel acknowledged. As Elijah struggles with his Windigo spirit and Xavier attempts to hold his legacy as a wendigo killer it leads to utmost rivalry and jealousy between the two.

Jealousy is an emotion that only harms oneself and unleashes one’s dark innermost demons. Xavier has jealousy towards Elijah because everyone believes he is the superior soldier. Although Elijah secretly understands that Xavier is a much better soldier; Elijah is able to manipulate Xavier and make him look like a “useless bush Indian” (Boyden 109). Xavier is virtually ignored by the rest of the battalion because of his lack of communication, therefore Elijah is able to present himself as the superior individual. Although Xavier is able to recognize what is happening he sticks to his ethic of noninterference. This action shows Xavier is so culturally sound and this causes Elijah to develop jealousy towards Xavier. Xavier never has his heritage stripped from him while Elijah has everything taken away from him. Elijah will do anything to redeem himself and become the best soldier. Moreover, Elijah’s ambition to prove himself not places himself in danger but it also endangers the other soldiers. When he leaves his post without

warning simply to gain more kills, his plainly explains that he “ was out there killing fritz” (Boyden 178). This highlights the selfishness within Elijah since he only cares about self-gain because he shows no regard for the other soldiers. Throughout Xavier and Elijah’s conflicts with each other, their differences in character are clearly demonstrated. Furthermore one sees Elijah has a selfish and addictive personality where he is always trying to please others. He tries overly hard to fit. Xavier on the other hand already has an identity and doesn’t care about impressing others. Xavier’s character development is also demonstrated throughout the jealousy because he matures from his conflicts with Elijah and his experiences at war. Xavier finally understands the only way to free Elijah from the windigo spirit and his drive for power is to end Elijah’s life.

Xavier and Elijah share a powerful bond, however war tears them apart from their own jealousy, addictions, and cultural differences. Although Xavier and Elijah share a great bond of brotherhood during their childhood, the war breaks them apart. The European way of life exposes the addictive drug morphine. This drug drives Elijah mad and this introduces great animosity between the two. Their disagreement with cultural values expresses the cross-cultural conundrum. Xavier is a traditional individual who is against the Europeans beliefs whereas Elijah is assimilated into the western culture. Elijah does whatever is necessary to please other and this allows the opportunity for the Windigo to develop. As their differences in opinions clash with each other, it brings forth their aggressive nature. As the two fight out who is the predominant figure, the impact of the war on the two is

unmistakably illustrated. There are no winners in war; war only destroys one's most valued relationships and leaves individuals broken.