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Encountering the More-Than-Human: Narration, Abjection and Pardon in *Three Day Road*

Susan Kathleen Moore (*York University*)*

Abstract

Joseph Boyden's Three Day Road takes place during World War I at the ambiguous boundary between culture and nature, madness and civilization, human and the more-than-human other. I argue that both the story and structure of Three Day Road illustrate and support the crucial link that Julia Kristeva makes between tradition and form-giving in respect of trauma and ethics. Kristeva's thought helps to illuminate what cathartic narration must address in order to bring repressed otherness out of its confinement in nature. Specifically, this paper draws upon Richard Kearney's definition of working-through and Kristeva's psychoanalytic process in an analysis of abjection, the return of the repressed, and a pardon asked for that initiates a reconciliation between ourselves, culture, language and the social.

Working-through the Powers of Horror in Three Day Road

Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* is the powerful tale of the friendship between two Cree snipers, Xavier and Elijah, who are plunged into the horror of the First World War and Xavier's three day journey home after the war accompanied by his aunt Niska, an Oji-Cree healer. My interest in *Three Day Road* is the crucial link it makes between form-giving in respect of trauma and ethics. As Sara Beardsworth writes, an exploration of trauma in ethics needs to attend to form-giving, "without which there is no real otherness, only survival" (Beardsworth 205). Such form-giving, in Beardsworth's view, begins with an "over taxed self, in the path of working out the impact of the strange" (190). Working out involves psychoanalysis (transference and counter transference) which throws light on the uncanny and process of identification with the other, while aesthetics (literature and art) "insure its cathartic eternal return" in a shared domain. (Beardsworth, Kristeva *Strangers*).

**Susan Kathleen Moore, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, HNES 4700* Keele *Street Toronto, Ontario Canada, M3J 1P3* suemoore@yorku.ca

In the novel, working out is structured in the tradition of oral story telling. Chapters alternate between Niska relating her tales as a girl in the residential school, her experiences as a young woman living off the land, and her encounters with the windigo as healer in her tribe with Xavier relating his story of going to war, the atrocities he witnessed there, as well as his estrangement with his childhood friend, Elijah. Niska explains how she tells her story in order to keep Xavier alive on their three day journey back to his homeland—what Julia Kristeva refers to in layman's terms as the "talking-cure":

> He cannot speak to me yet, and so I decide, here on the river, that I will speak to him. In this way maybe his tongue will loosen some. Maybe some of the poison that courses through him might be released in this way. Words are all I have left now….And so, as I paddle him gently with the river, I talk to him, tell him about my life. (Boyden 89)

Only towards the end of the novel does Xavier reveal signs of acknowledgement that Niska is telling him a story: "The story auntie tells me brings a smile to my lips….Niska is a good woman. She is a crazy good woman" (221). The pattern continues in the succeeding chapter:

> I made Xavier smile with my story of smacking the nun with my paddle, and this gives me hope…it is a restless time for him, and his face looks like a scared child's when he cries out. To try and ease him a little, I start talking again. The story is not a happy one, but something in me has to tell it. There is truth in this story that Xavier needs to hear, and maybe it is best that he hears it in his sleep so that *the medicine in the tale* can slip into him unnoticed. (259, emphasis mine)

In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, Richard Kearney provides us with a useful definition of *working-through* which involves a threefold approach a) practical understanding b) working out catharsis and c) pardon (Kearney 100). By practical or phronetic understanding Kearney is referring to the particularity of the testimonial. While we can speak of evil in psychoanalytical or philosophical terms, the particularities of the testimony or personal narrative contain the ethical imperative for action. Kearney draws some of his analysis from Kristeva's work, as her analytical process offers us a language of how repressed somatic forces enter language and culture and how stories of mass violence and individual trauma become political. On this point, I agree with Noelle McAfee's position that stories and testimonies of trauma, as exemplified in *Three Day Road*, "attend to the wounds of the *polis*, giving back to citizens their title as citizens" (123). McAfee further highlights how testimony can act as an ethical-political force: "The trauma story is transformed as testimony from a telling about shame and humiliation to a portrayal of dignity and virtue; by speaking of trauma, survivors regain lost worlds and lost selves" (117). Cathartic narration conceived as working-through offers an account of how unspoken memory and knowledge of the body become linked to language and culture.

Thus, my reading of Boyden's novel relates materiality and the more-than-human to the psychoanalytic disclosure of an alterity-within identity. Psychoanalysis is a practice which I

equate with Kearney's first condition of working-through—phronetic understanding—for giving voice to repressed alterity—to a nature outside our understandings of nature. As such, in my analysis I draw upon the concept of "intertextuality" as originally conceived by Kristeva in 1967 and outlined in "Nous Deux", a lecture delivered at the university of Paris in 2002. As defined in her own words, "Intertextuality is mostly a way of making history go down to us. We, two texts, two destinies, two psyches" (Kristeva "Nous Deux" 10). Textual plurality, "opens the psyche", or unspoken memory of the body, to the creative process (2). At the time Kristeva was developing the concept of intertextuality, she began working out the concepts of the semiotic/symbolic, subject-in-process, abjection, and the strangeness of self and other. Indeed, says Kristeva, "If I were to find a common point shared by all these concepts I would say frontier, or perhaps better threshold" (2). *Frontier* from Latin means "boundary" (especially between countries) and *threshold* means "entrance to a building" and is derived from the Old English *perscold* and *perscan* meaning "Thrash, in the primitive sense of tread, trample" (*Oxford Etymological Dictionary*). Together, these two terms imply an uneasy, even destructive passage through an in-between zone. Kristeva's description of intertextuality as "frontier" is particularly apt then for an analysis of *Three Day Road*, which deals with boundary moments and the transgression of boundaries between the old world and the new, nature and culture, self and other. Moreover, much of the action in the novel literally takes place at the frontier of meaning and non-meaning.

My purpose in recovering Kristeva's original definition of her concept of intertextuality is that it takes seriously the materiality of the body rather than reducing meaning to an "endless play of signifiers" or a study in textual relations. As suggested by Toril Moi, Kristeva's ethics cannot simply be reduced to language and discursive practices. Instead, Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is akin to the analytic situation; it takes real bodies and their particular contexts and realities into account:

> The analyst, who is under the obligation to cure her patients, is not free to say whatever she likes, to engage in a free play of the signifier. Instead there is a truth in analysis; a correct intervention or a mistaken one. That this 'truth' may change from day to day and is utterly dependent on a specific context does not prevent it from existing. The proof of this particular kind of truth is in the cure: if there is not truth in analysis there will be no cure either. Kristeva's notion of the truth, then, emphasizes its effects on the *real*: It is a dimension of reality, not only of the signifier. (Moi 17-18)

Recent feminist scholarship argues for new ways to bring materiality and corporeality back into theory and practice (Heckman and Alaimo 6). As Heckman and Alaimo have noted "Defining materiality, the body, and nature as products of discourse has skewed discussion of these topics" (3). Instead, these feminist scholars argue that we must "radically rethink" materiality as the "very stuff" of bodies and natures (6). In this way the body and nature are reconceived as an "agentic" force. In this respect, I believe Kristeva's analytical process offers a useful account of how materiality of the body can be brought out of repressed otherness. In this sense, working-through is both an aesthetic and ethics in Kristevan thought.

> On the one hand, the sense of strangeness is mainspring for identification with the other, by working out its depersonalizing impact by means of astonishment. On the other hand, analysis can throw light on such an affect but, far from insisting on breaking it down, it should make way for esthetics (some might add philosophy), with which to saturate its phantasmal progression and insure its cathartic eternal return. (Kristeva *Strangers* 189)

Similar to the interaction between analyst and patient, then, the interaction between psychoanalysis and literature provides a site for bringing unspoken language of the body into words. Felman expresses that psychoanalytical reading allows for a kind of "double-reading"—this means not only what psychoanalytical theory says about the literary text, but also what literature says about psychoanalysis (Felman 22). On this view, Felman does not consider literary analysis as the application of psychoanalysis to literature, so much as *the implications generated between the two*:

> The interpreter's role would here be not to apply to the text an acquired science, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to generate implications between literature and psychoanalysis—to explore, bring to light, and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed implicate each other, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other. (216)

Psychoanalytical interpretation deals both with the meaning of texts and what they can *do* in the act of reading, particularly in the sense that psychoanalytical interpretation activates the discourse of the other—the repressed semiotic. In times of personal, social and environmental anxiety—and trauma—psychoanalysis combined with a literary dimension becomes all the more relevant.

Catharsis, Abjection and the Return of the Repressed

> Does one write under any other condition than being possessed by abjection, in an indefinite catharsis—Kristeva

The second aspect of Kearney's working-through involves catharsis. This means facing the other and one's own other and acknowledging the traumatizing effects of the encounter and working-through them. In this sense abjection and confrontation with the strange is something that we must also undergo and work through as readers of texts. Working-through or catharsis allows "the realization that new actions are *still possible in spite of evil suffered*" (Kearney 104).

In a Kristevan interpretation, abjection is a struggle for separation and individuation from an archaic maternal object. According to Kristeva, with the failure of a paternal authority to support the subject's passage into language or the symbolic, the yet-to-be subject is forced to

take an "abject" instead of an object, which establishes a site or territory of abjection as a fragile defense mechanism to prevent the subject from becoming overwhelmed by the original object (the maternal metaphor). Therefore, abjection, conceived of as a struggle with an unstable inside/outside border, protects emerging subjectivity from the threat of nondifferentiation. As Kristeva expresses it in *Powers of Horror*, "On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture" (*Powers* 2). On the other hand, notes Beardsworth, "given separation—the upsurge of abjection as a boundary subjectivity reveals the deepest collapse of selfhood, the 'other', and the world" (82). Ultimately, then, the emergent subject experiences abjection as a spatial ambivalence.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva characterizes abjection as defilement, decay, corporeal waste such as excrement and vomit, menstrual blood, disease, the criminal element and, above all, the two things that most threaten the socio-symbolic—*death* and the *feminine*. In the novel the killing fields of France represent the site of abjection—a territory at the edge of madness and civilization, culture and nature, between the living and the dead—a land of oblivion, or, as stated in the novel, a "no man's land", "strewn with rubble and carcasses of rotting farm animals" (Boyden 96). For Kristeva, the image of the corpse represents the most extreme form of the abject:

> In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse…is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life…it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (*Powers* 4)

This description further elucidates our understanding of the plot of *Three Day Road*, which is the story of the battle of life over death with "no man's land" representing the site of the "utmost of abjection". The descriptions of the killing fields are as relentless as they are terrifying and horrific, so much so that one often gets the physical sensation of nausea reading the text, which is the semiotic force of the abject working on the reader.

> I peer through the scope of my rifle at the magnified images, the craters whose bottoms are filled with water, the splinters of black trees, a blasted wagon, a bloated horse, the belly expanding with gas each day so that it has become grotesque in its size as it bakes in the sun. Old rifles are scattered about, old Hun helmets, the wool coats of soldiers disintegrating into the mud just as their bodies do below the coats. Newer corpses lie out there too. A number of times I'm startled to see a man sprawled out and grimacing at me with big teeth, his lips and gums pulling back, and for a second I think the man is alive and is aiming his rifle at me. But they are dead, all of them. Everything out there is dead. (Boyden 123)

> This crater is deeper, but the bottom too is filled with water. The stench is horrible. Another explosion lights the darkness. Arms stick up from the pool of water, some curled like they are grasping for something I cannot see. A few bare feet stick straight out of the water as well….I slip into a strange half-sleep lying there below the earth's surface with the dead. I know that I am safe here, know that my time to join them is not going to be today. (70)

In the second quotation there is a reference to lying below the earth. It is interesting to note how the earth is depicted in the novel. Instead of as something generative, fertile, a force of renewal, it is associated with the fear of death and being buried alive. There are many references to Xavier and Elijah becoming mud and earth, which suggest the fear of becoming enveloped by the semiotic abject. Or, as Kristeva explains, the fear of being buried alive is a fantasy of intra-uterine existence (*Strangers* 185).

> I want to run screaming but my body is an impossible weight stuck in the earth. I cannot dig deep enough to escape it, but I try anyway, burying my face in the mud. (Boyden 233)

> That is my nightmare, to be wounded and in my agony, sinking into the mud to be swallowed forever. Gone. (303)

Kristeva also expresses that abjection confronts us with "those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" (*Powers* 12), as in this passage where the soldiers are depicted as animal or even insect like creatures that burrow into the ground with only their scopes peering above the earth's surface.

> [Elijah] tells me a story about crawling in the mud and finding the place where he will not be seen. He burrows into the mud like a mole so that just the tip of the barrel of his rifle pokes out, burlap over his scope to deflect the glare. (Boyden 326)

Thus, no man's land not only represents the boundary site or cleft between life and death, inside and outside, above and below, but also a marginal space between human and animal-other. This is highlighted in one of the most extreme examples of abjection in the novel, where Elijah and Xavier come across a German Sniper who is hiding in the gut of a rotting horse. As Elijah expresses, "he must have been a lover of the dead. He could lie with them for long periods. Stay as still as them" (139).

The second extreme form of abjection and cause for uncanny strangeness, in a Kristevan view, is the feminine. Xavier's aunt, Niska, embodies the feminine and wild nature in the novel. In the first pages she describes herself as an "Indian animal straight out of the bush" (2). In one of the earlier chapters in the novel, where Niska witnesses her father strangle a woman and

baby possessed by the windigo, she describes this as the moment she became a woman: "At that moment when the quiet came like a shadow in the room, I felt warmth between my legs….I'd been struck mute by shock, my womanhood had come to me like a tainted thing, a sick animal" (45). In Kristeva's thought menstrual blood is a particular form of the abject—which issues from within threatening the relationship between the sexes and is a danger to sexual and social identity (*Powers* 71). Indeed, again later in the novel, when Niska performs the sacred windigo ritual herself, she feels a rush of blood between her legs.

The novel also describes how Niska was taken from her mother as a child and placed in a residential school where the nuns cut off the pride of her Oji-Cree identity, her long black braid. As a protest, she takes a knife and shears off the remaining hair down to her scalp. The nuns horrified by her "heathen" behavior throw her into isolation, where she is starved and has her first shamanic visions. She explains how her mother rescued her and how they had "walked out of there and back into the time of our ancestors, living on what the land would give and slowly becoming wild like the animals around us" (Boyden 95). In time she "traveled through the bush hunting and staking." Her "hair grew long tangled and wild" (131).

This is also the time Niska becomes sexual and her desire leads her to her first sexual encounter with a French trapper in the woods. Though brief, the scene is explicit focusing on her erotic pleasure as the trapper performs oral sex on her. "Behind my eyelids the world was blue, red, orange. I felt fire in water. I was flame in water. Something inside me ignited…" (135). The focus here being on female genitalia and physical pleasure, both of which are a threat to symbolic law.

When the Frenchman discovers Niska's shamanic powers over the members of her tribe, he stops visiting her. Bereft and lovesick, she goes to the town to seek him out. She believes that he still loves her, but when he sexually degrades her in a church she runs away humiliated and hurt. In this passage she is again compared to a wild animal:

> I made it down to the river, my head pounding, my mouth dry and sour, the world around me spinning…the stink of their tobacco and drink and especially of him wafted up from the clothes that I wore so that I thought my head would split. I stood and tore them from me, ripped every stitch from my skin and flung the material into the river and finally I stood naked under the moon, my head back and mouth open, the howling of a hurt animal constricting my throat. Falling on all fours, I drank deeply from the river to ease the burning in my throat and my pounding head. (175)

Thus, Niska embodies this feminine source of life, but also that which threatens paternal authority (symbolized by the school and church). Indeed as a healer, visionary, and windigo killer, she is positioned at the boundary of the sacred, between semiotic authority and symbolic law.

> Monsters terrify and intrigue…they defy borders…Transgressing the conventional frontiers separating good from evil, human from inhuman, natural from cultural, monsters scare the hell out of us and remind us that we don't know who we are. They bring us to no man's land and fill us with fear and trembling. .—Richard Kearney

Central to the plot of Three Day Road is the Ojibwa myth of the windigo, which is related by Niska. She explains how one very cold winter when she was a child her people suffered from extreme hunger as the men in her tribe went out to hunt for game but were repeatedly unsuccessful. One day one of the tribesmen, Micha, set off deep into the woods with his wife and baby in search of food with a promise to his wife that he would not return to their lodge until he had fed them. Micha, also unsuccessful at finding game and on the brink of starvation, digs a hole in the ice in an attempt to find some fish. The next morning, his wife, finding her husband over the hole in the ice frozen to death, "drew her knife from her shawl and leaned toward her husband. He was keeping her promise to feed her and the child" (42).

Micha's wife returns to the lodge with her baby and her pack full with meat. She offers this to the tribe but they are suspicious and begin to interrogate her. As Niska describes:

> The next days we listened to her fall into madness. She begged and pleaded in a child's voice, first for Micha to help her, then for her child to be brought to her. At nighttime her voice went hoarse so that she sounded like some monster growling in a language we did not understand. Micha and the baby were turning windigo. (44)

The windigo refers to humans who have succumbed to starvation and develop a hunger for human flesh. As Niska explains, they are wild beasts that grow to twenty feet tall and whose insatiable hunger can only be satisfied with more human flesh. The story then, central to the plot, is that Niska's father is a shaman and it is his responsibility to remove the threat of the windigo from the tribe. When Niska is thirteen she watches her father strangle the young mother and her baby. Her father tells her "I allowed you to watch, Little One, because one day I will be gone and you might have to do the same" (45). Niska's father and his decedents belong to this line of windigo killers. As the plot unfolds, Niska's tribe summons her to perform the sacred ritual, and this time her young nephew is the witness. As she explains to Xavier, only a young boy at the time: "Just as I had witnessed it at your age, you had now seen something that you were too young to understand fully. I needed to explain to you that I was a healer, and that sometime healing entailed cutting out the sickness….Sometimes one must be sacrificed if all are to survive" (264-65).

In Kristevan thought the function of religious and purification rituals, such as the one performed by Niska, are to demarcate a border between what is abject and what is socially symbolic. Purification rituals extract an element of filth and abject from within social existence, so that you have filth on the one side and the self and clean (social organization) on the other (Beardsworth 125, Kristeva *Powers* 65). Therefore, social organization is upheld by excluding the abject object. However, and this is key, this gives the appearance that the abject is only there by virtue of being excluded, when in a Kristevan view it was there all along as the repressed other and is what gives rise to the demarcation process in the first place. According to Kristeva these kinds of rituals manifest the effort and failure of the symbolic to fully regulate the members of society (*Powers* 1980). Thus, all societies are founded on the demarcation of what is pure and impure with the impure always on the other side of the sacred and lined with abjection. Moreover, in societies without writing, prohibition and the ritualization of abjection function like a "writing of the real" (*Powers* 84). Writing, in this sense, is understood as a "*second level rite*" at the level of language, which simply reminds us "through linguistic signs themselves, of the demarcations that precondition them and go beyond them" (*Powers* 75).

As the story progresses Xavier relates the horror and madness he has witnessed in the trenches and on the fields and how his friend is increasingly overcome by the windigo illness. To Xavier, Elijah appears to have become addicted to killing, and fearful of this, says, "I see a hunger in Elijah he can no longer satisfy." He continues "The look in Elijah's eyes is frightening….He seems to have no more need for food. He is thin and hard like a rope. He is a shadow that slips in and out of the darkness. He is someone I no longer know" (Boyden 305,308). Indeed, Elijah begins to take on the physical and psychological characteristics of the windigo. Basil Johnston, an Ojibwa scholar from Ontario, gives one description of how windigos were viewed:

> The Weendigo was gaunt to the point of emaciation, its desiccated skin pulled tautly over its bones. With its bones pushing out against its skin, its complexion the ash gray of death, and its eyes pushed back deep into their sockets, the Weendigo looked like a gaunt skeleton recently disenterred from the grave. What lips it had were tattered and bloody….Unclean and suffering from suppurations of the flesh, the Weendigo gave off a strange and eerie odor of decay and decomposition, of death and corruption. (Johnston 221)

In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva characterizes abjection as "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady…a hatred that smiles…a friend who stabs you…" (*Powers* 4). Also, according to Ojibwa myth, windigos took on power and strength of those they consumed. We can compare the above descriptions to this passage where Elijah is speaking to Xavier about the hunt:

> Elijah continues "there are those who will eat the eyes of their enemy to sees what he sees. Thompson told me of it before. Those Frenchmen verified it. And besides, the Iroquois eat their enemy's heart to take his power. We grew up with those stories." He stops as if to consider this. I shake my head. "You are not yourself, Elijah." Elijah goes quiet. Small tremors begin to shake him. His fists are clenched and his face contorts in a sneer. My fear of him returns stronger than before. I do not want any part of this. As if he realizes this, he unclenches

> his fists and a mask of calm falls over his face. He smiles, but it isn't genuine. I must get away. (Boyden 320)

However, Xavier also begins to succumb to the horror and madness around him and is slowly transforming into something other-than-human: "the world is unreal, like it is not me but someone pretending to be me walking alone along the frontline trench and not caring" (308). Uncertain of the warrior-like status Elijah has gained in his unit, Xavier falls into a "depression" and becomes more paranoid: "The others watch Elijah in action, say that he is brave, a warrior of the highest order. To me he is mad. I am the only one now to know Elijah's secrets, and Elijah has turned himself into something invincible, something inhuman. Sometimes, though, I feel as if I'm going mad too" (348).

In a Kristevan view, the abject is the return of the repressed or estranged or inassimilable other, or as Kearney expresses it "The intimate becomes so intimate it becomes strange" (Kearney 74). Owing to this, a defensive position is established in the subject, as if the "fundamental opposition were between I and Other" (Kristeva *Powers* 7). This opposition between an I and an internal other leads to anxiety and the anticipation of injury from external danger, which is manifested in instinct for self-preservation. As Kristeva expresses,

> The narcissistic self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal….In this instance the strange appears as a defense put up by a distraught self: it protects itself by substituting for the image of a benevolent double that used to be enough to shelter it the image of a malevolent double into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain. (*Strangers* 183-84)

What is intolerable opposed to the I is projected onto an external other, which, for Kristeva, is the source of sublime or mystical discourses such as the windigo legend. Thus, in addition to death and the feminine we can add a third occasion for the uncanny—the destabilizing drive (Kristeva *Strangers*; Beardsworth 188).

> The *death* and the *feminine*, the end and the beginning that engross and compose us only to frighten us when they break through, one must add "the living person […] when we ascribe evil intention to him […] that are going to be carried out with the help of special powers." Such malevolent powers would amount to a weaving together of the symbolic and the organic—perhaps drive itself, on the border of the psyche and biology, overriding the breaking imposed by organic homeostasis. (Kristeva *Strangers* 185)

On this interpretation, the climatic scene where Xavier strangles Elijah can be understood as a confrontation with the return of self-as-other through the dynamic of identification-projection. The difficulty we are faced with in the final scene is that we are no longer certain of who has

actually gone mad, as both men have been reduced to the level of mere survival brought on by the trauma of war. There is a moment in the scene leading up to the climatic moment between the two soldiers where Elijah, after going up in an airplane, is confronted with his own mortality, which hints at the possibility of his redemption. But this is vague—and comes too late. Ultimately, abjection is ambiguity. This ambiguity is further highlighted when, afterwards, Xavier assumes Elijah's identity.

In my research on the windigo I was led to the work of Saskatchewan medical anthropologist, James Waldram, who specializes in mental health of North American Aboriginal peoples. According to Waldram, the windigo fable was translated in 1933 by J.E. Saindon, a catholic priest, into a psychiatric disorder known as *windigo psychosis*. Saindon observed that there was "a good deal of hysteria, particularly among women" and thirty years later Seymour Parker described the initial symptoms of windigo psychosis as "feelings of morbid depression, nausea, a distaste for most ordinary food, and sometimes a semi-stupor," which gradually leads to feelings of being bewitched an sometimes homicidal or suicidal thoughts (Waldram 192-3). The afflicted person would come to feel that he or she was possessed by the windigo and would become a fierce cannibalistic monster and therefore must be killed (193).

Although the stories of the windigo were widely dispersed, particularly amongst the Northern Algonquians, there were no reports documented of actual cannibalism. However, as Waldram expresses these stories caused a "tidal wave in transcultural psychiatry" (194). In 1972 and 1981 an alternative interpretation of windigo psychosis was offered which emphasized the existence of melancholia. Windigo psychosis represents "the classical depressive disorder, showing a specifically prominent secondary symptom of self-depreciation and need for punishment with a culturally available explanation. In other words, this was not a culture-bound syndrome but rather a culturally localized expression of a universal condition, depression" (194). Moreover, Waldram emphasizes that "the windigo phenomenon is more of an example of mass suggestibility among anthropologists than among Northern Algonquians" (194).

Indeed, if we follow Melanie Klein, the most primal desire, the desire to devour, is associated with an aggressive death-drive and battle with internal bad-objects. Such a battle, in the Kleinian sense, can either lead to guilt and the reparative act, on the one hand, or a failure in the subject, which would either result in melancholia or in worst case suicide. Interestingly, Niska hints at this interpretation in the novel when she remarks about a deep sadness in one who has gone windigo: "I realized then that sadness was at the heart of the *windigo*, a sadness so pure that it shriveled the human heart and let something else grow in its place. To know that you have desecrated the ones you love, that you have done something damning out of greed for life that you have been exiled from your people forever…" (Boyden 261). Perhaps, in light of this interpretation, we may understand Niska's actions in the novel as the ritualization of defilement, safeguarding her tribe from an external threat, and as an act of mercy on the one afflicted by the windigo disease.

Pardon and the Ethics of Cathartic Narration

Kearney writes, "*Evil suffering can never be explained away by narrative*" (104). Instead we must learn to acknowledge horror that exists in our midst so that we may "outlive" it. This brings us to the third aspect of working-through which involves pardon. At the end of the novel Niska realizes that what Xavier has gone through and suffers from is a horror she will never fully understand. So instead she asks for forgiveness:

> Pain. So much pain. But it is their fear that leaves me weak. The fear of crawling over the sandbags and running headlong into the enemy. *I talk out loud then, ask that men be forgiven for their mistakes.* I sprinkle more water onto the stones so that the steam may carry it away. (Boyden 379, emphasis mine)

In the end Xavier also asks for forgiveness "'*Ponenimin*,' Nephew says. 'Forgive me…'" (380). Forgiveness gives a future to the past—it helps us to understand and therefore prevent atrocities from happening again. Ultimately, this is what Kearney means by pardon:

> And this is where phronetic understanding, attentive to the particularity of specific evil events, joins forces with the practice of patient working-through—their joint aim being to ensure that past evils might be prevented from recurring. Such prevention often requires pardon as well as protest in order that the cycles of repetition and revenge give way to future possibilities of non-evil. (Kearney 105)

With Kristeva, too, through forgiveness we are able to reconcile ourselves to culture, language and the social (Oliver 89). Kristeva's notion of intimate revolt as "cure" associates forgiveness with the transference of unconscious affects between two bodies. In her work on Hannah Arendt, she says that "psychoanalytic listening and analyst's speech within transference and countertransference could be considered an act of forgiveness: the donation of meaning with the effect of scansion, beyond the madness of illness, anguish, or symptom and beyond the disintegration of trauma, allows the subject to be reborn and thus to be henceforth capable of reshaping his psychic map and his bonds with other people. To forgive is as infinite as it is repetitive…" (Kristeva *Hannah Arendt* 235; Oliver 89). For Kristeva, psychoanalysis and literature are the primary domains of forgiveness and transference as the displacement of drives into words. Kelly Oliver helps to elucidate this point, "forgiveness displaces and thereby absorbs abjection, melancholy, and asymbolia within a loving relationship with another for whom they become meaningful through language or some form of communication" (Oliver 88). In this sense Niska's pardon at the conclusion of Three Day Road is not only the gift of love, but can be understood as "the gift of meaning". On this view, pardon is not something that is given by another, but takes place at the level of the semiotic in the transference of affect between two bodies (Oliver 88).

> Re-mission [forgiveness] and re-birth are thus acquired by the putting into words of the unconscious; they are acquired by giving conscious and unconscious meaning to what did not have any—for it is precisely this absence of meaning that was experienced as ill-being. Pardon is not given to me by another. I pardon myself with the help of another, by relying on his [or her] interpretation and on his [or her] silence (on his [or her] love) in order to make sense of the senselessness troubling me. (Kristeva *Intimate Revolt* 29, Oliver 89)

For Kristeva, forgiveness as the transfer of affects and the displacement of drives into words is the ethical act par excellence that makes it possible for us to live in language and to become political beings.

One of the charges that has been laid against Kristeva is that her theoretical formulation confines woman, nature, and its associations with the impure and animality to fantasy (Beardsworth). A similar charge could be made against *Three Day Road*, which may only serve to reify the position of woman, nature, and indigenous peoples as exotic other. My argument throughout, however, has been that at the basis of all language and culture is the abject feminine, death, and the unstable drive, and that the language and literature of abjection brings out and names uncanny strangeness and gives it form. In this sense, form-giving, such as we see in cathartic narration, brings this repressed otherness—what might otherwise have remained silent or silenced—or worse yet, manifested as evil or violence—out of its confinement and into culture. I believe this not only provides a possibility for ethics in environmental thought, it offers us the possibility of reconciliation with that which is other.

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