
Murder for Survival: Windigo in Three Day Road

In Joseph Boyden's novel "Three Day Road," the *windigo* killer plays an important role within the central characters' Cree community. Through their separate, individual experiences, both Niska and Xavier struggle to assert their place within this community through attempting to kill an augmented version of their own *windigo*. For Niska, her Frenchman lover represents this *windigo* in a metaphorical sense. Niska's murder of the Frenchman is a blatant attempt to feel she belongs as a *windigo* killer in her community.

In her first story, Niska implicitly tells Xavier that she wants to fulfill the windigo killer role within her tribe. Niska first introduces herself as an outcast, who distinctly does not fit in with anyone. She is not akin with the other children, who think she is "damaged" and "crazy"(Boyden, 35), and feels "too young to be accepted by the adults"(46). Seemingly, Niska is only accepted and comforted by her father who she wants to "watch over" and "stay close to"(36). Even with the possibility of discovering the world for herself before her "first blood of womanhood," Niska chooses to have "nothing of that" and instead "[stays] close to [her] father"(36). Because of her lack of self-discovery, her father very heavily influences Niska's sense of self, including how she belongs within her tribe. This effect is most strongly demonstrated when Niska discovers her and her father belong to a lineage of *windigo* killers. This is done through example when Niska's father allows her to watch as he suffocates Micah's wife and child because they have consumed Micah's flesh, and therefore turned *windigo*. Afterwards, he tells Niska that his identity within the tribe must become the role she assumes when he says, "one day I will be gone and you might have to do the same"(45). Because this is only told to Niska, this quotation concretely establishes that descendants of Niska's family are the only ones who can fulfill this role within the community. Thus, the *windigo* killer role defines belonging within the tribe for Niska and members of her family. This quote is also important because it is the only time in the novel in which Niska's father speaks directly to her. The fact that Niska recalls her father's exact words in this moment speaks to the importance Niska places on honoring the *windigo* killer role in relation to her father. Niska expresses her desire to meet the expectation placed on members of her family when she says, "I desperately wanted to possess [his gifts] for myself"(46). This asserts that Niska desires the aforementioned sense of belonging that the *windigo* killer role will bring her. She witnesses that her father's gifts allow the adults in the tribe to "[walk] with purpose"(46), and allows the color to return to the children's faces. This gives another purpose to Niska's desire to become a *windigo* killer, which is contributing to the collective health of the tribe. Niska feels she will be able to attain a position of belonging, and contribute to the wellbeing of the tribe if she emulates her father by killing a *windigo*.

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)

Niska's Frenchman-lover is a symbolic representation of Niska's own *windigo*. The Frenchman is not a *windigo* as has been described previously in the novel. He does not "eat other people's flesh" or "grow into [a] wild beast,"(44) but meets the description in a much less literal sense. Similar to a *windigo* consuming flesh, an organ sacred to the physical body, the Frenchman violently takes Niska's "ahcahk, [her] spirit"(174), which is obviously very sacred to her metaphysical, spiritual body. Just as a *windigo* can "be satisfied only by more human flesh"(44), the Frenchman "has a taste for red meat that he can't satisfy"(169). In this quotation, "red meat" is taken to mean having sex with Cree women and producing "little half-French, half-Indian children"(169). Both the *windigo* in the traditional Cree tale and the Frenchman have an insatiable appetite for consuming something that is sacred to another person. In the Frenchman's case, he consumes sex with multiple Cree women, promising to take them "to be his forever"(173). This promise is a sacred act, but instead of committing to one woman, he produces multiple children "that he refuses to claim"(169). When Niska becomes a victim of his consumption, the Frenchman consumes two sacred pieces of Niska, one physical and one spiritual. As a result, he becomes an obvious target for Niska's first *windigo* kill.

Niska's murder of the Frenchman, then, is her first act as a *windigo* killer. Just before Niska goes to visit the Frenchman in town, she comes across "an old woman, [whose] face [is] as wrinkled and round as a dried apple"(168) who foreshadows Niska's *windigo* killing. When the old woman says "Happiness is not yours to have. You are a *windigo* killer,"(169) she is alluding to Niska's perceived happiness as the lover of the Frenchman and how that happiness will soon come to an end as Niska fulfills her role as a *windigo* killer. The old woman's prediction is conceived when Niska "[asks the lynx] to go out and find the source of [her] hurt and extinguish it"(176). When she hears that the Frenchman "ran to the top storey of the hotel [...] and flung himself through the window" because he "could not escape" the "pursuing demons,"(176) this prediction is realized. Niska purposefully uses her Cree spirituality (the lynx) to cause the Frenchman to go mad and kill himself, thus intending and committing her first *windigo* killing. The fact that Niska is not actually present when the *windigo* Frenchman dies is significant in comparison to the example set by her father. When Niska's father kills Micah's wife, he "[covers] her face with a blanket" and "[looks] up"(45), which is an obvious attempt to depersonalize the *windigo* as she dies. Similarly, by not physically going and killing the Frenchman herself, Niska is attempting to depersonalize him in death because of the "fear and anger"(175) thinking about him brings her. Finally, much like how Niska's father's *windigo* killing causes the tribe to feel a sense of peace because "something unwanted"(46) had left, Niska killing the Frenchman brings her "A sense of peace"(176). Because Niska's murder of the Frenchman is intentional and committed in a similar manner as her father's *windigo* killings, it is an obvious attempt to fulfill her generational role as a *windigo* killer within her community.

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

From the beginning of the novel, Niska clearly demonstrates how she wants to belong. Her concept of what it means to belong is heavily influenced by her father's role as a *windigo* killer, as she witnesses how it allows him to contribute to the safety and security of the tribe. This, coupled with a lack of a sense of belonging as a child drives Niska to attempt to insert herself into her father's role as a *windigo* killer. She does so for the first time in the novel by killing her Frenchman-lover. This extreme action is Niska's attempt to meet the expectations her community places on descendants of her family and in doing so, find a sense of purpose and belonging within this community.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)