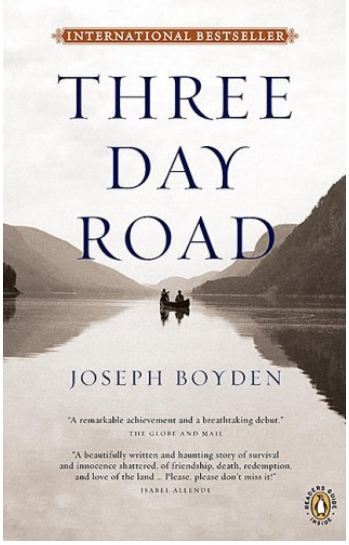
Three Day Road



I read a review of *Three Day Road* [1], Joseph Boyden?s first novel of World War I, which mentions that this isn?t necessarily an anti-war novel. I had to read the sentence in that review several times to make sure I wasn?t misreading or misunderstanding. Does a war novel have to come out and specifically declare a stance?
Really, Boyden includes anti-war elements right up to the breathtaking ending: senseless killings, madness, morphine addiction, shortsighted military leadership, dehumanization, and the day to day terror. The characters in this book do seemingly impossible and horrible things in the name of combat. Is that not stance enough? Is it even important?

It is true that this book is about more than the descent into the hell of trench warfare. It is a really poetic story of Xavier Bird and Elijah Whiskeyjack, Cree Indians who have grown up in Canada near Hudson Bay. They have spent their childhood patiently hunting, skills which serve them well as snipers in some of the worst battles of World War I, including around Vimy Ridge and the Somme. Maybe it needs to be said, but being good at killing moose to survive the winter is different than being good at killing Germans. Xavier and Elijah react differently, but equally destructively, to war.

The novel flashes back between their time spent in France and Belgium to Xavier?s return from war where he is collected by his remaining relative, his aunt Niska. The three day journey by canoe proves most difficult for Xavier who is crippled and addicted to morphine. Niska?s stories to distract Xavier pull the arc of the stories together and create a thoughtful and character driven war story versus one of all action. This is not a page turner and can be rough going emotionally at times, but I thought it was wholly worth it in the end.

Two other excellent novels, *Deafening* [2] by Frances Itani and *The Stone Carvers* [3] by Jane Urquhart also pair World War I stories with strong female characters and life in rural Canada.

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Posted by Sarah B. on Dec 31, 2012

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