Ryan Saunders June 5, 2014

Synthesis Essay

It is easy to see the differences in people, but the similarities are often harder to find. In the novel Indian Horse, by Richard Wagamese, Saul Indian Horse endures traumatic and painful experiences that have a detrimental effect on him for the rest of his life. Despite the hardships that Saul endures, he still finds the strength to overcome these challenges and may in the end find peace and reconciliation. In the poem “Invictus”, by William Ernest Henley, the speaker is also faced with obstacles and hellish events. Despite this, the speaker is able to conquer and overcome difficulties. Saul Indian Horse differs from the poem`s persona in the way he handles a challenge; however, they are synonymous in how they are able to continue through the most terrible of conditions and the ongoing hardships throughout their lives.

To begin, despite the echoing of experiences in the poem and the novel, the persona of the poem believes that he is able to control his own life, while Saul has somewhat retreated and given up. The speaker describes the terrible circumstances that he has suffered, but in the end concludes that, “I am the master of my fate:/I am the captain of my soul”(line 15-16). The persona is able to completely overcome the detriment in his life. He does not allow the world to swallow him up but instead takes control of his life, and conquers his obstacles. In contrast is the reaction of Saul Indian Horse when faced with a hindrance. As Saul is plucked from his grandmother's dying arms and placed into a residential school he does not fight back nor does he try to take control of his life. He retreats within himself, and allows the world to take advantage of him: “I learned that I could draw the boundaries of my physical self inward, collapse the space I occupied and become a mote, a speck, an indifferent atom in its own peculiar orbit”(48-49). Saul's reaction is dramatically different from that of the speaker of the poem. Saul allows the looming blackness of his life to engulf him, and does not try to fend it off.

Notwithstanding the disparity between two characters` responses to life`s challenges, Saul and the persona of the poem are similar in the hellishness they endure, and how they are able to continue on even through the toughest of circumstances. The persona of the poem is able to carry on after ferocious obstacles, noting that, “I thank whatever gods may be/For my unconquerable soul”(line 3-4). Despite the “night that covers [the speaker]”(line 1), he is undeterred and able to move on. Analogous with Saul Indian Horse who, even after the traumatic and horrendous events that occurred at the residential school, is resolute and able to find peace in hockey. He disregards the terrible events that are occurring in his life, and finds a way to be happy. Despite being stuck in such terrible circumstances, he is able to say that he has “freedom”(115).

Finally, as Saul leaves the residential school, he hopes to enter a better world, but is met by the same, and in some cases worse, mistreatment and racism. This is comparable with the poem, where the speaker says, "Beyond this place of wrath and tears/Looms but the horror of the shade"(line 9-10). The persona has left one place only to find that the new place is equally dreadful. Congruent with what Saul experiences, he only finds more injustice and abuse as he enters the real world. Saul is often oppressed by white people, and in one case kicked of the hockey team because he is a First Nations person: "'they don't want you to play anymore, Saul'...'It's because I'm Indian, isn't it?'...'Yes'"(91). Saul is only met by continuing mistreatment when he leaves the residential school, "the horror of the shade"(line 10). Despite both characters longing for something greater, they both discover that life is only worse on the outside.

In conclusion, Saul Indian Horse and the persona of the poem may differ in how they cope with an obstacle, but they share in their resiliency; their ability to carry on through extreme difficulty, and the unfortunate realities of ongoing hardships throughout their lives. Although these two characters contrast somewhat, their life experiences and strength of character are parallel.