



Captivity of the Mind:

A Postcolonial Analysis of “The Man Who Liked Dickens”

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“The Man Who Liked Dickens”

- ✦ Henty, a rich Englishman, decides to go on an expedition to Brazil.
- ✦ Series of misfortunes leaves Henty alone in the Jungle.
- ✦ “Rescued” by Mr. McMaster, an English-speaking half native.
- ✦ Forced to read Dickens stories while held captive.
- ✦ Drugged and hidden when a search party comes to rescue him.

Thesis



- ✦ In this story, Henty's captivity provides a physical representation of the inverted consequences of Eurocentric and universalistic thinking generally recognized by postcolonial scholars. Instead of those whose culture is being perceived through Eurocentric or universalistic lens experiencing oppression through "othering" and manipulation, Waugh places those consequences on those who hold the malignant mindsets.

Eurocentrism and Universalism

✦ Eurocentrism:

- ✦ “An inordinate emphasis on the cultural achievement of peoples of European ancestry” (Lewis).
- ✦ An attitude that uses “[European] culture as the standard for what any culture should be” (Dobie 212).

✦ Universalism:

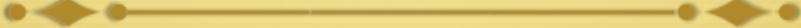
- ✦ An attitude or belief that assumes European ideals and experiences are universal (Dobie 211).

A Warning



- ✦ While recounting the troubles that preceded the initiation of Henty's journey to the Amazon, the narrator foreshadows the negative outcomes that Henty and the other European characters will experience due to their universalistic attitudes and ignorance of Brazilian culture.

A Warning



- ✦ The mother of one of the team members reacts violently to her son's departure.
- ✦ She “was on the ship before them [and]...carried a missionary journal in which she had just read an account of the Brazilian forests. Nothing could induce her to permit her son's departure...” (Waugh 2821).
- ✦ Fear expressed by the only character who studied Brazilian culture.
- ✦ Later, her fears are confirmed.

Eurocentrism and Universalism Expressed

The Eurocentric and universalistic patterns of thought in the other British characters of this text reveal themselves early on:

- ✦ Henty's wife accompanies him while he is "choosing his equipment" (2821) and she "[insists] on his purchasing a worsted cummerbund" (2821).
- ✦ The wife's parting gift: "a pale blue, extravagantly soft blanket, in a suede case of the same colour furnished with a zip fastener and monogram" (2821).
- ✦ Henty's own attitude: "somewhere in Brazil" (2821).

Inversion of Consequences

- ✦ Though during the beginning stages of his expedition Henty demonstrates the typical effects of Eurocentrism and universalism, the details of his captivity demonstrate an inversion of the consequences of such negative mindsets.

Inversion of Consequences

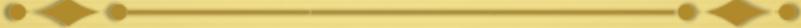
Drawn into Captivity:

- ✦ Henty allows himself to be taken captive because Mr McMaster earns his trust by reflecting aspects of English culture.
- ✦ Henty: “But surely you are English?” (2823)
- ✦ Warning signs: McMaster’s readiness to use a gun, reluctance to speak of Henty’s departure, and brief threats.

Inversion of Consequences

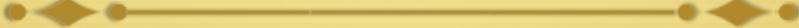
- ✦ Continues to trust Mr. McMaster despite having previously feared the natives, and the many warning signs.
- ✦ Reveals Henty's readiness to trust what he views as similarities between himself as Mr. McMaster.
- ✦ Captivity represents the narrowness of Henty's mindset.

General to Specific



- ✦ Henty's captivity not only represents the general oppression of Eurocentric and universalistic thinking on those who hold them, but also the specific consequences of these mindsets that Waugh inverts.

General to Specific



Oppression: “Othering”

✦ Definition:

✦ “viewing those who are different from oneself as inferior beings” (Dobie 212).

✦ First, Henty “others” the natives.

✦ Lists “snapshots of naked, misanthropic Indians” (Waugh 2822) along with his collection of “bottled snakes”(2822).

General to Specific



- ✦ Henty is “othered” by Mr. McMaster.
- ✦ Dobie’s explains that othering often “justifies hierarchies”(212).
- ✦ Henty’s acceptance of reading the Dickens books aloud, a pastime he “had always rather enjoyed” (2824) while in Britain, allows Mr. McMaster to treat him like a pet.
- ✦ Mr. McMaster sets up an “unvarying routine” (2827) for Henty.

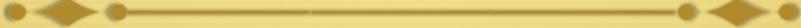
General to Specific



Oppression: Manipulation

- ✦ Instead of those who hold the Eurocentric ideas oppressing and manipulating those who are different from them, they themselves are manipulated because of the narrowness of their own mindsets.
- ✦ Henty: assumes Mr McMaster has been keeping him out of kindness.
 - ✦ He had “imposed [himself] on [his] hospitality for too long” (2825).

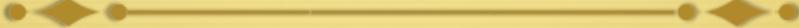
General to Specific



Henty

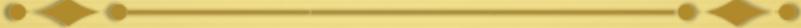
- ✦ Assumes Mr. McMaster has been keeping him out of kindness.
 - ✦ He had “imposed [himself] on [his] hospitality for too long” (2825).
- ✦ Mr. McMaster takes advantage of this:
 - ✦ “My friend, any kindness I have shown you is amply repaid by your reading of Dickens. Do not let us mention the subject again” (2825).

General to specific



- ✦ “The Indians will not make a boat during the rainy season” (2825).
- ✦ “Did I not mention it? I forgot” (2825).

General to specific



The Search Party

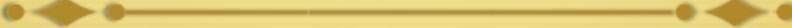
- ✦ When they come into Mr. McMaster's village, they take from him "a little souvenir, [Henty's] watch" (2828) and "some photographs of the little cross [Mr McMaster] put up to commemorate [Henty's] coming" (2828).
- ✦ Mr. McMaster never lies to the Englishmen, they misinterpret what he shows them.
- ✦ Leads to their disappointment over Henty's "death."

Final Thoughts



- ✦ Henty's captivity truly originates in his own mind.
- ✦ The European characters cause their own oppression.
- ✦ This tale, as viewed through postcolonial eyes, serves as a cautionary tale to those who hold narrow-minded assumptions about and evaluations of those who are different from themselves.

Works Cited



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- ✦ Lewis, Thomas T. "Eurocentrism." *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (2014): *Research Starters*. Web. 22 Nov. 2014.
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