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C LT 445

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17 December 2008

## **Blue Eyes and Brown Eyes Are Just Eyes in the Dark**

### **Octavio Paz, "The Blue Bouquet"**

Is it possible to discern difference in the dark? Octavio Paz's surrealistic short story, "The Blue Bouquet," explores elements of cultural difference and postcolonial rage through imagery that can only be perceived through sight. It is no coincidence that the story constantly repeats the use of "eyes," as they are an image meant to convey that the difference between two cultures is an optical illusion. Paz shows this through the relationship between the "native," and the "outsider" as they are represented in his narrator and the narrator's attacker.

His nameless protagonist is presented as an outsider because of his placement in the boarding house. This is likely due to the temporary nature of residency in boarding houses, most people that stay in them are usually travelers or in a period of transition in their lives. Yet, his nationality (or origin) is unclear. Paz leads the reader to believe that in a sense he does not belong. By deciding to ignore the advice of the owner of the boarding house who tells him, "hmmm---everything's closed. And no streetlights around here. You'd better stay put," the narrator demonstrates his relative ignorance of local common sense (Paz 163).

The absence of streetlights, the darkness, is Paz's canvas for painting his expression of anti-colonial sentiment within the story. This is primarily evident in two sections of the story. If sight is the medium which Paz uses to convey cultural

difference, when the narrator is “blinded by whiteness,” it is a metaphor for the overwhelming process of colonization by “white” settlers (Paz 164). Paz reinforces this with the attacker’s desire for “blue eyes” (Paz 164). By extension, blue eyes are normally associated with people of Aryan (or white colonizer) descent. The violence inherent in the act of taking the narrator’s eyes represents the anti-colonial rage present within the text. Should the narrator’s eyes be taken from him by his attacker he would be “blinded” by the consequences of colonization. Yet the narrator’s eyes are brown, not blue. This is significant because his eye color not necessarily indicate whether he has descended from colonizers, but rather how his attacker identifies his target. The fact that the attacker cannot tell the difference without “seeing” the narrator’s eyes in the light, shows that the difference between who he is targeting (white men with blue eyes), and who he has found (the narrator) is primarily visual. This is the fundamental connection that Paz makes in “The Blue Bouquet,” that brown eyes and blue eyes are just eyes in the dark.

### **Works Cited**

- Paz, Octavio. "The Blue Bouquet." Short Shorts. By Irving Howe and Ilana W. Howe. New York: Bantam, 1999.