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C LT 445

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## **The Joke's on You**

### **Augusto Monterroso, "The Eclipse"**

Like Octavio Paz's "The Blue Bouquet," Augusto Monterroso's short story "The Eclipse" deals with issues of anti-colonialism and the ignorance of the colonizer (or outsider), albeit Monterroso's approach is decidedly more comedic in nature. Where Paz exercises subtlety in his examination of the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, Monterroso's use of biting sarcasm to express the same relationship is the strength of his story. "The Eclipse" reads almost as if it were a joke, where the target audience is clearly those who would associate with the colonizer's position. Brother Bartolome Arrazola is introduced with the suggestion that it was his "topographical ignorance" that led him to his unfortunate predicament (Monterroso 179).

Yet the point of the story is not that he was lacking knowledge of his surroundings, but rather his faith in the ethnocentric superiority of European knowledge that is his downfall. Arrazola's "steep knowledge of Aristotle" is entirely unaware of the "infinite dates [of] ... solar and lunar eclipses, that the Mayan community had foreseen ... without Aristotle's valuable help" (Monterroso 179-80). The "three years in the land had given him a fair knowledge of the native tongues," but hardly any knowledge of their history, culture, or scientific progress (Monterroso 179). The comedy of "The Eclipse" lies within the actions of the natives. They know that Arrazola is trying to frighten them using "superior" knowledge, and they toy with him as a result. By leading Arrazola to

believe that he has a chance at survival sets the stage for the punch line where “one of the natives [recites] ... one by one, the infinite dates in which there would be solar and lunar eclipses” (Monterroso 180). Ultimately, Monterroso’s short story serves as a darkly humorous warning against the dangers of ethnocentric attitudes (specifically in the case of European colonizers), and a moral guideline to approach other cultures with respect, lest you wake up on somebody’s “sacrificial altar.”

### **Works Cited**

- Monterroso, Augusto. "The Eclipse." Short Shorts. By Irving Howe and Ilana W. Howe. New York: Bantam, 1999.