

Kayla DeWald

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Dr. Rebecca Walsh

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The White Man's Burden or a Colonized Dream? : An analytical approach to the deeper meaning of Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden"

At first glance, a reader might take Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" as a poem directed towards a country deciding whether or not to colonize another country. Historically, this is true. The poem was written in response to America's colonization of the Philippines following the Spanish-American war. There is another way of seeing the words Kipling wrote on his page. "The White Man's Burden" also gives reason for the colonized citizens to believe that it is in their best interest to be colonized. Kipling uses specific word choice and even the title to prove the weakness of the colonized.

Throughout the poem, readers are being informed about the various problems with the people of the colonized country. Kipling refers to them as "half-devil and half-child" (line 8) and as children again in line 80 by saying, "have done with childish ways." Referring to the colonized citizens as children makes it seem like they need someone to take care of them. This is where the colonizing country comes in. They play a sort of parental role for the colonized country.

Children need their parents, just like the colonized country needs their bigger, stronger colonizing country.

Kipling continues with the connotations of parenting in a few more lines in the poem. For example, in lines 19 and 20 he says that the colonizing countries will “fill full the mouth of Famine and bid the sickness cease”. Parents are responsible for taking care of their children, partially by making sure they have enough to eat and also by taking care of them when they are sick. These lines in the poem make the colonized country seem as if they need someone to feed them and nourish them back to health in times of sickness as if they cannot do so on their own. Children cannot be on their own and Kipling is making the colonized country seem as if they cannot be left on their own either. It seems as if the citizens of the colonized country are immature like children, but when the colonizing country comes in and its culture affects the colonized citizens, they advance or “grow up.” This could also come into play for the colonized country itself through the industrialization and development that accompanies being colonized.

Parents are also expected to protect their children in times of danger. This is touched on in line 11. Kipling writes, “veil the threat of terror” in reference to the colonized country coming in and colonizing. This line stands out because of its imagery associated with the word “veil.” When one thinks of a veil, many thoughts come up. An image of marriage, symbolizing unity and love, is one. Another is a darker image of a funeral, symbolizing death and destruction. Both of these connotations can be associated with this line of the poem. The word

“terror” in the line brings readers to the second image of death and destruction. This shows that the colonized country needs the colonizing country to protect them in times of need, such as attacks from other countries, for they cannot do it alone. However, thinking about why Kipling used the word “veil” leads readers to connect the colonized and colonizing countries together as one, such as in a marriage. It shows that the two countries would work well together and, therefore, need each other.

The need shown in some of the words chosen for this poem are contradicted with the title. The connotations and denotations of the title “The White Man’s Burden” do not make the colonized country out to be helpful to the colonizing. It does, however, make the colonized country seem needy and troublesome. This could relate back to the referencing of children aforementioned. Children need their parents and sometimes can be troublesome to them, but their parents take the bad with the good and take care of them anyway. The colonized and colonizing countries can, again, be put into these roles. The colonized country, while a “burden” to the colonizing country, needs their protector and would benefit from their presence. The Oxford English Dictionary supports this with its second definition of the word “burden” by stating “A load of labour, duty, responsibility, blame, sin, sorrow, etc. the white man's burden: a rhetorical expression for the responsibility of the white for the coloured races,” (OED) which is based off of this poem.

Kipling uses his rhyme scheme to enhance this thought surrounding the word “burden.” Every stanza’s first line ends with “White Man’s burden,” making

this statement prominent to the readers. He then begins his rhyme scheme with the second line of the stanzas. He rhymes every other line starting with the second line of each stanza. There are two different sets of rhymes in each stanza. The offset of his rhymes leaves the word "burden" unrhymed each time. While there are other words that are not paired in a rhyme, this matched with the repetitiveness of the word cause it to stand out. This emphasizes that the colonized country is a burden to the colonizing country.

From the title of the poem continuing into the word choice, Rudyard Kipling subtly highlights how much the colonized country needs the colonizing country in his poem "The White Man's Burden." His choices bring up connotations of parent and child relationships that lead the reader to believe that the colonized country is a helpless youngster and needs protection and nourishment from their parental colonizing country.

## Works Cited

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