

The Tower of Babel

Racialism--a doctrine or teaching, without scientific support, that claims to find racial differences in character, intelligence, etc., that asserts the superiority of one race over another or others. Throughout time, conflicts between contrasting races and cultures have been apparent. From the racial tension between blacks and whites to the persecution of the Jewish by the Nazis, one common ideal has been sought after over and over from the beginning to the end of time. This goal can be summed up into one phrase, "Why can't we all just get along?" In much of literature, many authors have addressed this issue of racialism, and with persistence and much sweat, it has been realized that these practices of racism are morally incorrect, and that the mentality of the public must be subjugated to reprogramming. Robert Louis Stevenson is one of these authors who revealed to the public its moral and cultural disrespect towards other human beings that are equal and parallel in all ways except beliefs. In doing so, he created the novel *Kidnapped*. In the novel *Kidnapped*, Stevenson carefully molds his theme of duality and character's personal and cultural conflicts to narrate a story about a kidnapped boy, named David, who, through his growing cultural tolerance and open-mindedness, matures from a naive adolescent to a young man capable of dealing with crisis and accepting his role in the culturally divided world.

Despite extensive cultural differences, the Highlanders and Lowlanders represent two halves of a society that must intermingle in order to reach their summit of individual and group possibilities. These two definitive cultures of Highlanders and Lowlanders are represented respectively by Alan and David. In the story, David is frequently portrayed as one who dislike Highlanders, and his adventures show why. His first guide tries to cheat him, with the belief that all Lowlanders are easy targets. The second guide believing too, that Lowlanders are easy targets, questioned David extensively with "Where I came from, whether I was rich, whether I could change a five shilling piece" (Stevenson 102-103). Perhaps the worst fault shown by Stevenson in the Highlanders is the treachery and murderousness in much that they do.

Despite David's personal conflicts between the two cultures, much of his own attitudes change. For through these cultural conflicts, he learns not to be judgmental and realizes the virtues of the corresponding faults that the Highlanders possess, thus paving the way to an everlasting friendship. David realizes that although they tried to cheat him as a stranger, they help him unhesitatingly, refusing to take any money at all, once he is under Alan's protection. Their treachery is also an intrepid resistance to superior force. However, all in all, David and Alan, representatives of two enemy powers, come to respect and even love each other like two brothers. Many critics have even commented on this friendship, and at least one critic has compared *Kidnapped* with Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (Saposnik 114).

The contrast between David, a Lowlander and a Whig, and Alan, a Highlander and a Jacobite, for example, is well drawn. Ignoring their differences, the two, like Huck Finn and Jim in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), prove that their friendship is more important than geographical and political differences.

(Eckley 3194)

Another theme of the story is the idea of duality, and through this use of duality, Stevenson has left a sense of vagueness about a true villain. For example, Mr. Shuan had two moods, one being kindly, meaning he was sober--or violent, meaning he was drunk. The latter mood was the cause of death of the cabin-boy, Ransome. So wholly different were Mr. Shuan's two moods that he was completely unaware of his actions. Captain Hoseason, another example of this contradiction, is shown to be a slavedriver and a murderer. However, Stevenson tells us also that he is genuinely religious and kind to his mother. This duality of Captain Hoseason's moral nature is so well defined that even several critics have noted about it "Captain Hoseason has his challenging moral ambiguities"

(Daiches 433); "In Captain Hoseason . . . we have a character ready to play two role, shedding one and assuming that other as the situation requires" (Kiely 437). Stevenson through the use of this duality has left a "Weakness of the villain--or, more accurately, would-be villain" (437). Another critic even states that "Good and evil is more subtly defined, more ambiguous" (Fiedler 435). With this lack of a true definite villain, one may be able to consider that perhaps the real villain is not a person, but a thought or an idea, and that idea or thought being the malignant evil named racism.

Throughout the book David's growing cultural tolerance and open-mindedness has come to mark his coming-of-age, appropriately noted in the end by the recovery of his estate. This book can be marked as a milestone in literature, for Stevenson, after his realization of the malignant disease called racialism. He used his pen to conjure a compromise between two feuding cultures and brought together two sides of the same culturally diverse coin rendered by the friendship of Alan Breck and David Balfour. Only until more writers continually create new novels showing racialism as the corrupt disease that it is and reveal that racialism is morally and ethically wrong. Only then will our society be on the way to a cure of the curse that has plagued us since the tower of Babel.