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Thoughts on Mister Taylor

A reader cannot help but notice the way that heads are treated in a utilitarian, businesslike fashion in *Mister Taylor*, by Augusto Monterroso. The narrator adopts the lingo of businessmen in order to mock it, for example in the passage, “with the help of just a few small cannon, the first tribe was neatly beheaded in just under three months” (8). Thus, the reader is sarcastically invited to share in the company’s enthusiasm that the company has proceeded in such an efficient, cost-effective manner. As in many aspects of modern society, the violence is totally removed from the consumer. The head is delivered to them not by a naked Indian in the jungle, but by an American company, perhaps in a fancy box, just as one might receive a box of expensive cuts of meat.

The situation strongly resembles the situation of prisoners in China, who are often killed and their organs harvested for sale to wealthy foreigners. This real life situation is not quite as absurd as the story because the organs are used to save lives instead of simply for decoration. But the fact that foreigners see fit to exploit the inhumane practices of the agents of power in China is similar to the scenario found in the story.

The absurdity of the entire situation is similar to Machado de Assis’s *The Psychiatrist*, only the elements of the plot have been adapted to the violent realities of the 20th century. With the same ease with which the psychiatrist would commit people to the asylum, in this version, Mr. Taylor sends people to a firing squad.

The story is rife with allegorical possibilities. One may be found when the narrator explains that following the donation of a very “rare” head with Prussian

excellent point ✓

a very smart connection

absolutely

whiskers, "an immediate grant of three and a half million dollars to further the development of this exciting cultural manifestation of the peoples of Latin America" (p.

6). This line suggests the relationship between culture and capitalism. Latin America must literally sacrifice itself in this story to merit the appreciation of North Americans and Europeans. A connection may be made to the international expectation of violence in contemporary Latin American literatures. ✓

The narrator also treats the story as though relating the facts of history, as the text says, "Some months later, in Mr. Taylor's country, the heads had gained the popularity we all remember" (5). This gives the fantastic aspect of the story a realistic quality, causing the reader to realize that such an event could actually happen. After the events of the 20th century and considering the history of colonialism, such a situation would not be entirely unrecognizable.

*You are so smart!
You know, if you decide not to
become a doctor, you could have a great
career as a literary critic.
This is a fabulous analysis*

*and making
the reader
forget it*