

Calm and conceited –
the white male
traveler in film, from
classic to propaganda



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The portrayal of the white male traveler in classic film is best described as serenely calm, yet also seemingly superior to any person of another gender, class, and or ethnicity. Through the classic Hollywood film *Black Narcissus* (1947), the infamous Nazi-Germany propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* (1940), and the white male traveler is created into an amicable, ignorant being with an extreme superiority complex issue. These traits of the white male traveler suggest similarities of European colonial expansion and the racial conquest both outside and within Europe. He, the white male traveler, mimics these same behaviors which author Ann Kaplan juxtaposes through the combination of male and imperial gaze in her analytical piece "Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze".

In *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), there is only one character that fits the description of the white male traveler; Mr. Dean (David Farrar), who accurately portrays the stereotype of a confident, cool-minded figure who also shows his superiority through the Hollywood filmmakers' cinematic use of the male gaze. Accompanying the Anglican nuns, who are establishing the school and hospital in the middle of a village in the Himalayan mountains, Mr. Dean remains the calm, cool-headed strong male protector of the nuns. He separates himself apart from the natives, but also from the women working at the convent. His isolation from these very different groups of people does not confine or limit him, rather it allows him to continue to be a superior male figure, in the same way that he would in his homeland. Mr. Dean can be described as the stereotypical male traveler, a confident and adventurous individual who commands attention, and refuses to be ignored. As depicted in the cinematography of the film, Mr.

Dean's importance is especially portrayed through the "male gaze". While his behavior is not particularly demeaning, the male gaze that is depicted by Mr. Dean shows the almost sexist and racist outlook of not just the filmmakers, but of society as a whole.

In Ann Kaplan's article, she analyzes how the the male gaze, especially that of men of white, European descent, sexualizes women in film, "The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize ('naturalize') sites/ sights immediately upon contact (Pratt 1992, 30-31)". One specific scene that exemplifies the male gaze is when Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr) reaches out to Mr. Dean, looking for his comforting spirit to console her troubled soul as she deals with unloyal sisters who are being driven to madness from the exotic atmosphere of the Himalayas. Here, Mr. Dean's physical actions and words to Sister Clodagh are kind, but the male gaze depicted in the cinematography of the scene makes it seem as though he is looking down upon her, not valuing her as an equal but rather as a less superior being. This superiority complex that Mr. Dean experiences could also be derived from the fact that he is of British descent, and the Himalayan village he is staying in is part of the British colonized region of India. Additionally, the male gaze of this scene continues to sexualize Clodagh, even though she is devoted to the Church. While Mr. Dean seems to be protective and supportive, especially to Sister Clodagh, the cinematographers depict him to have underlying sexual inflections in his mannerisms, speech, body language and overall behavior. As a character in classic Hollywood film, Mr. Dean perfectly fits the description of the cool-headed and pretentious white male traveler.

The Nazi-Germany propaganda film *The Eternal Jew* accurately portrays the White Male traveler not through an individual character, but rather the male German race as a whole. Throughout the film, the propagandist filmmaker Eberhard Taubert emphasizes the stereotype of the white male traveler by creating an ideology among the German people of the mid 20th century that the only acceptable race is the white, blonde-haired and blue-eyed German. Additionally, the German male was even more valuable to society when he served his country and the Nazi regime by joining the military force against diversity. The film idolizes the white male traveler by imparting the imperial gaze, especially when the film is showing the lifestyles of the Jewish communities of Poland. This cinematic technique depicts the Polish Jews as “dirty, corrupted” people, and juxtaposes them with that of the perfect white male traveler: the German Nazi soldier. Ann Kaplan’s piece on the imperial gaze explains how the white male traveler is selfish, and judges others for being different than they are “They (the white male traveler) mainly went to dominate, exploit and to use the Other for their own ends”. The superiority complex depicted in the Nazi film is one of the most infamous examples of white superiority, and is the main principle in which the film depicts its “heroes” as white male travelers.

In the films *Black Narcissus* and *The Eternal Jew*, the white male traveler is depicted in two very different settings, yet the similar traits of calmness, confidence and superiority are induced through the cinematic techniques of the male and imperial gaze. The depiction of the theme of racial conquest in and out of Europe in both films accurately portrays the white male traveler as an individual who is characteristically calm and cool but also conceitedly

believes himself to be superior to those around him. Kaplan's analysis of the male and imperial gaze perfectly consociates the cinematic techniques to the social and cultural portrayal of the white male traveler.