

Louisa may alcott in my contraband essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Louisa May Alcott is an American Novelist best known as the author of the novel “Little Women”. Louisa was born in November 1832, grew up in Germantown- Washington D. C and was known to be an abolitionist, feminist and also a naturalist. Being a naturalist meant that she believed that nothing existed beyond the natural earth i. e. no such thing as spirituality or the supernatural. Her family suffered from financial difficulties and so Alcott had to work to support her family in an early age. She penned the story “My Contraband” (1869) which was formerly known as “The Brothers” (1863).

Contraband was a black slave who escaped to or was brought within union lines (Alcott 759). In “My Contraband”, Louisa May Alcott utilizes the concept of naturalism to condemn racism in the African American community. Bob, who is the protagonist in this story and later on in the story is known as Robert Dane, was a contraband who assisted Miss Dane as her servant in the hospital with a patient named Master Ned. Miss Dane who is the narrator and a nurse, later on discovers that Robert is trying to murder Master Ned.

Miss Dane, who has fallen in love with Robert’s personality is shocked by what Robert wants to do and successfully convinces Robert not to commit murder. Because of this event, Robert reveals the reasons behind his attempt to murder Master Ned. He and Master Ned were brothers (half brothers) and their father loved Robert because he looked just like him except that their skin was colored differently. For this reason, Robert narrates all the sufferings he underwent at the mercy of Master Ned. Later, during the Fort Wagner attack in 1863; Master Ned confronts Robert during the war and kills him.

One of the characteristics of naturalism the author uses to criticize racism in this story is Greed. The author brings out Marster Ned's greedy nature when Robert narrates his story to Miss Dane, I married her, all I could, Ma'am; it warn't much, but we was true to one another till Marster Ned come home a year after an' made hell fer both of us. He sent my old mother to be used up in his rice-swamp in Georgy; he found me with my pretty Lucy, an' though young Miss cried, an'I prayed to him on my knees, an' Lucy run away, he wouldn't have no mercy; he brought her back, an'—took her, Ma'am (Alcott 766).

Master Ned, being a white and already being well placed economically and socially in the society than Robert, still took from Robert the only thing he had and loved: his wife Lucy. Master Ned did this wicked act because Robert was Black. He could not have done this to another white guy. This act of Master Ned portrays how much he wanted everything for himself, irrespective of the fact that Lucy did not want and love him, it did not matter to him. Marster Ned is just a representative of the world today and how people want everything for themselves.

All he cared about was his interest and satisfaction. Apart from being greedy, he was also brutal. The author also uses Brute Beast to condemn racism. By portraying Marster Ned as a villainous and physically abusive character the author shows racism at its most extreme. In the story, one will realize that the protagonist had a baby with his wife Lucy who was not found. " I never saw my baby, Missis" (Alcott 769) said Robert to Miss Dane. When Robert mentioned about his missing baby to Miss Dane her eyes were full of tears, till she could no longer see (Alcott 769).

She did not know that this was the tragedy that Robert had gone through at the mercy of Master Ned. Robert goes further to tell Miss Dane “ They whipped me till I couldn’t stand, an’ they sold me further to the south. Yer thought I was a white man once, — look here” (Alcott 766). He tore his clothes and showed the narrator his back, it was horrible.

This is a sign that Marster Ned was brutal and wicked. Later, Miss Dane made an inquiry about Lucy from the captain; ““Captain Fairfax, where is Lucy? ’ , ’ Dead, Miss Dane. ’ And she killed herself when you sold bob? ’ ’ How the devil did you know that? ’ he muttered, with an expression half remorseful. Half amazed; but I was satisfied, and said no more” (Alcott 769). The sad thing is he took Lucy away forcefully, but not because he loved her, he just wanted to be wicked to Robert. From every indication he did not need her or love her, but all he was interested in was destroying Robert’s life. More to that, there is one last wicked act Marster Ned commits at the end of the story: Robert’s friend narrates to Miss Dane how Robert died, he said Marster Ned and Robert went at each other at the war front and he saw Marster Ned get the sword straight through Robert (Alcott 771).

From the quotes above, one can deduce that Marster Ned was a forceful and brutal beast. He did not care or have feelings for how the other party felt. This kind of treatment despite being horrible and brutal, depicts the actual social treatment towards minorities. Apart from just the antagonist’s behaviors, there is much passion in the text.

Another characteristic the author uses to portray the racial discrimination during this era was Passion. The author uses passion to show that despite

the treatment towards Robert he was no less of a human. Passion was as evident throughout our text as our narrator narrates both on her side and Robert's. From her words " Feeling decidedly more interest in the black man than in the white, I glanced furtively at him as I scattered chloride of lime. I had seen much contraband, but never one so attractive as this.

All colored men are called ' boys,' even if their heads are white; this boy was five-and-twenty at least, strong-limbed and manly, and had the look of one who never had been cowed by abuse or worn with oppressive labor"(Alcott 760). Our narrator expresses how attracted she was towards the Contraband. She still continues in another portion of our text " I was soon back at my post again, anxiously hoping that my contraband had not been too hastily spirited away. "(Alcott 768). Here she calls him " my contraband", she has taken possession of Robert; he became hers.

The text portrays that, because of the racism at the time, Miss Dane had to eat up the emotions she felt for Robert to her herself and all she could do was help him; giving him money and a bible. This passion was not only one sided. Passion was also experienced on the side of Robert when he makes this statement " I thought I'd never see her anymore; I'm glad to know she's out of trouble. I thank yer, Ma'am; an' if they let us, I'll fight fer yer till I'm killed, which I hope will be ' fore long. " (Alcott 769). Robert promises to fight for Miss Dane until he dies.

This shows how much he appreciated her and loved her. Another illustration of his passion was seen when Miss Dane discovers this at the end " such an awful change had come upon him, when, turning to the ticket just above his

head, I saw the name, ' Robert Dane. ' That both assured and touched me, for, remembering that he had no name, I knew that he had taken mine" (Alcott 770). Robert takes Miss Dane's Last name which was very touching to the narrator and this could be interpreted as a sign of an interracial marriage which could not be consummated.

The racial difference could not get these feelings they shared together any further but to end at the level of a nurse and her servant. This reflects our daily lives; how people feel for one another despite their racial differences, but they end at the level of admiration because of racism. There were also so many struggles of the middle class during this era when the story was written. Louisa May Alcott also uses the struggle of the middle class to slam racism. Robert said to Miss Dane "I isn't a white man, Missis, I'se a contraband.

' Yes, I know it; but a contraband is a free man, and I heartily congratulate you'"(Alcott 761). Robert was a freeman indeed, but still living like one in chains because of the ill-treatment that other white men showed towards him, especially his brother, Marster Ned. He talks about the fact that he is not a white but contraband when Miss Dane thanked him for helping her out. He did not think he was worthy of receiving any appreciation for his helping hand because his color made him develop an inferiority complex. He is still fighting to get out of the personality of being a slave and into a freeman.

Also, Robert's friend explains to Miss Dane " I never thought of anything but the damn' Rebs, that scalp, slash, an' cut our ears off, when they git us. I was bound to let daylight into one of 'em at least, an' I did. Hope he liked it!

”(Alcott 771). He tells her how the Rebels treated them during the war, how they slashed their ears off and mistreated them. Therefore, Robert was just an example to the multiple cases of different blacks going through similar situations during that epoch and Marster Ned was also an example of the many whites who maltreated blacks. Class enmity between the whites and blacks was the predicament at the time.

In conclusion, from looking at our text, “ My Contraband”, analytically, one can conclude that Louisa May Alcott utilizes the concept of naturalism during this era to critique racism in the African American community. In our analysis, these four characteristics of naturalism were portrayed: greed, brute beast, passion and struggle of the middle class. One can see that the characters in this story were moved by their passions, instinct, external forces and the role the environment had on them. Louisa May Alcott succeeds in bringing out the racial discrimination in this epoch.