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# The Real Captivity in Graham's "The Captive"

Amanda Breck

Brigham Young University, [amandabreck95@gmail.com](mailto:amandabreck95@gmail.com)

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Amanda Breck

Professor Watts

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### The Real Captivity in Graham's "The Captive"

There are so many fascinating things about R. B. Cunninghame Graham's short story entitled "The Captive," and indeed about the author himself. Graham was born in London in 1852 to Scottish parents. After attending private schools in London and Brussels, Graham left for South America when he was seventeen, where he was a cattle rancher, a horse dealer, and an explorer (Watts). He married a woman in 1878 who claimed to be from Chile but was actually from Yorkshire. His travels and adventures in South America and other places around the globe had a heavy influence on his writing, which included histories, essays, short fiction, and travel writing.

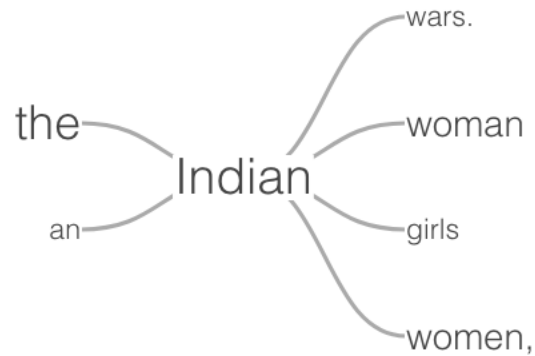
"The Captive" was published in *The English Review* in November 1909, a periodical home to literature, criticism, and political commentary. It was started by novelist, poet, and critic Ford Madox Ford, who published a great deal of talent within his journal, including work by modernist authors like H. G. Wells, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, and Joseph Conrad. Graham, who was close friends with Ford and Conrad, has work in fifteen issues. "The Captive" was published alongside such texts as "Letters from America" by G. Lowes Dickinson, which give impressions of the author's travels.

Graham's personal background, as well as the context of *The English Review* and its associations all shed light on "The Captive" in various ways and open up many avenues for exploration. It is set in Argentina, and the incredible wealth of detail about the cowboys around

their campfire, the plants and animals, and the culture of the time and place are all undoubtedly influenced by Graham’s personal travels and experiences. The woman in the story—an Indian woman who turns out to be a Spanish woman—sounds rather similar to the story of Graham’s wife. It fits in well with the context of the other travel literature it was originally published next to, especially with its interesting and diverse cast of characters that come from Argentina to England, and even Switzerland. The way the story is framed is particularly interesting in light of Graham’s connection to Conrad—it is a story within a story, where the narrator is revealed to be the main character of both at the end, much like “The Tale” (though Conrad’s story was published a few years later). The topic of my paper, however, comes from a digital analysis of the text in Voyant Tools. As I began trying the various tools on Voyant, I was unsurprised to see that the most used word was ‘Indian’ followed by ‘man’ and ‘horses’, as in the following image:



(Breck). I was, however, surprised to see that when I used the WordTree tool to see how ‘Indian’ worked in the text, nearly all of words connected to ‘Indian’ were some variation of ‘woman’ or ‘girl’, as follows:



(Breck). This connection between these words in the text in turn helps to shed some light on who the real captive is in the story, who the real captor in the relationship between the Belgian cowboy and the only woman that plays a major roll in the text—an Indian woman turned-Spanish-turned-Indian again—and why the woman, Lincomilla/Nievés chooses to leave her lover in the end and return to her Indian husband who had taken her captive to begin with.

In a first read through of the text, the view of the natives was unquestionably an unfavorable one. They are almost always referred to in ways that made them sound uncivilized, inhumane, and other, such as when they are called “Infidels” (Graham 589). At one point, when talking about the way they cut their horses’ snouts, one character says, “I would give something to slit the cartilage of some of their Indian snouts...” which again serves to distance the Europeans from the natives and reveals the poor relationship between them (590). The Indian women in general are dehumanized as well, such as when one is referred to as an “Indian mare” that needs to be hobbled so she won’t escape, or as being particularly vicious in gouging another woman’s eyes out (591, 592). This way of referring to these women seems to bode ill for the Lincomilla who is taken captive by the Belgian near the beginning of the story.

Lincomilla/Nievés is one of only two women who are mentioned by name, and she is presumed to be an Indian in the beginning which explains the connection between the words ‘Indian’ and ‘woman’ on a surface level, but I think the ways in which they are connected, as

displayed by the WordTree tool on Voyant, also shed light on the narrator's opinion of the status and role of women in relation to men, as something other. In addition to the negative way in which Indians and Indian women are spoken about throughout the story, women in general are also referred to in a way that makes them seem second-class and subservient. For example, there is a brief mention of a woman named Ché, the only other woman named, being bought and sold (592). The Belgian, when he first sees Lincomilla, explains that he wanted her for various reasons, one being that currently "...he had no woman in his house" after the previous Italian left him (591). Later, when a relationship between him and Lincomilla (Nievés the Spanish woman at that point) is beginning, he "... cursed himself a fool for not having taken advantage of the right of conquest the first day that he led the Indian girl into his home. All would have then seemed natural and he would have only had another girl to serve him... a link in the long line of women who had succeeded one another" (593). This is where the question of who the real captive is begins to come into play.

Lincomilla/Nievés is clearly a captive in in the most obvious sense. Throughout the story, when she is not referred to as the "Indian woman" she is referred to as "his captive". She was taken captive previously by the Indians, before the story even started. It is when she is no longer an Indian woman but a Spanish woman, Nievés, that the roles apparently begin to switch, and the theme of men being captive to their lovers begins to come forth. That is particularly clear in the last quote, and in the following: "...now and then he caught himself regretting vaguely that he had let his captive slip out of his hands. Little by little their positions were reversed, and he who had been waited on by Lincomilla found himself treating Señorita Nievés with all the ... how you say ... *'egards'* that a man uses to a lady in ordinary life" (593). She is still subservient to him—she still cleans his house, prepares his horse, and serves him his *maté*—but she now has

power over him. Though he claims he is “kept back by pride, for he knew after all that she was in his power,” it is she who eventually says ““Take me”” (593, 594). It is she who has power over him.

At first, it seems as if Nievés only has that power over her lover once she is no longer Lincomilla, but there are hints that she is in control even before that. When she is first introduced, the narrator says, “... she might have got away—so said my friend—only the mare...had not long foaled, and either she was hard to drive or the maternal instinct in the woman was too strong for her to leave the foal behind ... or she had lost her head or something—you never can tell” (590). Perhaps the reason the men can never tell is because the women act deliberately, which never occurred to them. It can further be argued that Lincomilla is willingly taken captive when “she did not try to fight or get away, but looked at him and said ... ‘Bueno, I am take prisoner, do what you like’” (591). She allows him to take her, and of her own free will begins to serve him without being compelled. Even early on, though he tries to deny it and keep himself in a position of power, the Belgian says that “somehow vaguely he knew his captive would not try to run away” (591). Later, her power over him is established even more when she becomes unhappy, and “little by little he became alarmed, and feared... that she was tired of him” (594). When she reveals that she wants to go back to her Indian husband and children, her lover lets her without question, admitting ““...you were my prisoner, but ever since I took you captive, I have been your slave...”” (595). This seems to be the twist of the story, the notion that the men are captive to their lovers and that the Belgian was the real captive all along. Or perhaps the twist is that the Indian husband remained the captor all along, that he had this terrible power over Lincomilla that led her to give up her apparent happiness. The language used

to describe the Indians supports this. I think that there is evidence for a true captor beyond the Belgian, Lincomilla/Nievés, or the Indian husband.

Near the beginning of the story, as Lincomilla is explaining her past, she mentions in passing her three sons (592). Later, when she explains to her lover that she is unhappy and that she needs to return to the Indians, she recalls the horror of her previous captivity, as she was “...thrown to an Indian whom my soul loathed, then made by force the mother of his children—his and mine...” (595). Perhaps she feels a tie to her ‘husband’, as is common in cases of abuse, and while this in no way excuses the horrible things done to her, she then says “My children—his and mine—never cease calling me. I must return to them...” (595). It is primarily her children, who she notably takes ownership of twice, who are calling her away from the ‘freedom’ she took for herself. This is even supported earlier in the story when the narrator questions why she didn’t run away, noting that perhaps it was her “maternal instincts” that wouldn’t let her leave the foal.

“The Captive” is a deceptively complex story. At first, it seems nothing more than an ill-fated love story shared for entertainment beside a campfire. The context in which it appears in *The English Review* and Graham’s own experiences add to the interest it holds as a story of globalization. Its interesting framework and Graham’s friendship with Conrad gives it a link to other modernist writing. The way Indians and women are talked about in connection with captivity allows for explorations in questions of race and gender roles. What interests me the most though are the subtle mentions of motherhood and the way that Lincomilla’s children in the end are what calls her back to her apparent captivity. In the end, Lincomilla is the real captive of the story, though it is not either of the men, the Indian or the Belgian, who are the real captors.

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