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Just Think it Over: A Persuasive Piece penned by Burton Jay Smith

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Bill's Sarcastic Flirtations

Rhetorical Analysis

Bill Henderson displays a predominantly flirtatious attitude while writing to Evelyn. This obvious plea for feminine attention makes perfect sense, seeing as he is in a jungle where "you never see a white woman." Overall, his tone is very lighthearted and a trifle sarcastic. If Henderson's main goal was to leave a lasting impression upon Evelyn - which is a safe assumption to make - then he was probably successful.

Henderson starts his letter with an interesting combination of over-sympathizing and reductio ad absurdum (Heinrichs). It has been a while since Bill has written Evelyn - an understandable thing, seeing as he is fighting in a war. Rather than apologize profusely for ignoring Evelyn or act as if nothing is abnormal, however, Bill utilizes some rhetorical tactics to keep the mood lighthearted while explaining to Evelyn why the situation is not his fault and that he would have written sooner if he were able to. His production of an "alibi" calls to mind an interrogation, an image that is completely incompatible with the current situation. The absurdity of the word "alibi" in this context tells Evelyn that, if she were upset at how long it took Bill to write, she should not be. If Evelyn was not upset, this tactic shows Bill's personality and adds a tone of lightheartedness to the letter: at least he is not in a situation that would require an alibi.
Bill then uses exaggeration to flatter Evelyn. He claims that his "heart jumped about four extra beats" when he opened the letter with her picture in it. He continues to say that he showed the photograph to "everyone in the camp." The assumption here is that Evelyn's picture is so remarkably gorgeous that Bill simply could not keep it to himself. While Bill most likely did show the picture to several of his friends, it is unlikely that he went around the entire campsite to show every single person there a picture of a girl that he barely knows. His exaggerations serve to show Evelyn how remarkable he thinks that she is, a surefire way into a woman's heart.

Towards the end of the first page of his letter, Bill uses his sense of humor to describe his location to Evelyn without dwelling on the unfortunate aspects of living in a jungle. He calls the black, ankle-deep mud "lovely" and "nice" and tells Evelyn that she would love it if she were there. He then points out his sarcasm by writing "what a sense of humor." Bill is not sure if Evelyn will understand that he is joking about liking the mud in the rainy jungle where he has made camp so he tells her that he is in a self-deprecating way. By drawing attention to and making fun of his own sense of humor, Bill allows Evelyn to feel more comfortable with his personality and situation, and with their relationship.

Bill's dry humor ultimately serves to make him memorable in Evelyn's mind. Most of the soldiers that she is exchanging letters with probably do not talk about their own situations in such a humorous way and Evelyn undoubtedly appreciates Bill's ability to
make comfortable conversation with her. If I were Evelyn, I would associate Bill with lightheartedness, laughter, and fun, and I would definitely not forget him very easily.

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**Historical Analysis**

Due to the innate secrecy that being a soldier in World War II requires, Bill Henderson is unable to tell Evelyn anything about his location other than that he is "somewhere in the Southwest Pacific," that his camp is in the middle of a "jungle where you never see a white woman," and that "it rains most of the time." I was curious to know how much rain the soldiers were dealing with on a regular basis so that is what I decided to start my historical analysis with. Since I do not know exactly where in the Southwest Pacific Bill's camp was located, I began my search with average rainfall in the Southwest Pacific theater of WWII. I learned that most of the locations that the Allies and Japan occupied during WWII experienced an average rainfall of **100 inches a year**. By comparison, Iowa City receives an average rainfall of **36 inches a year**.

Reading about the extensive amount of rain that these soldiers lived and fought in, I became curious about what their uniforms were like. Bill mentions in his letter that he worked for the government until he "stepped into khaki and single." I can only assume that the phrase "khaki and single" is referring to the uniform that he wore. Bill makes no mention of what branch of the military he serves in, what rank he wears, or even how long ago he joined. All
that I had to go off of in my research was the term "khaki and single" and the fact that he was stationed somewhere with an extremely rainy climate.

Through my research, I learned that there was only ever one uniform used in WWII that was actually khaki colored, the summer service uniform (Khaki). The summer service uniform was worn by both officers and enlisted soldiers and it was made to be "worn in warm and tropical climates" (Reuscher). If the summer service uniform is, in fact, the uniform that Bill Henderson donned, then he was in the Army. This uniform lines up with the other information that Bill provided us with in his letter. It was issued with a wide-brimmed hat, presumably to keep rain water out of the soldiers' faces, and was made of a light cotton material which was fitting for the heat and humidity common in the tropical climate of the Southwest Pacific (Reuscher).

Bill dedicated 13 out of the 53 lines of his letter to the mosquitoes that were attacking him as he wrote. I began to wonder how big of a problem mosquitoes - and, more importantly, the diseases that they carried - were for the American soldiers during WWII. According to Tropical Medicine News, there were 440,789 cases of malaria reported in the US Army from January 1942 to August 1945. That means that 2% of soldiers suffered from malaria as a result of their time spent fighting during WWII. Odds are that Bill Henderson was not the only soldier who had to fight off the mosquitoes as he wrote home.
Written By: Brenna Oates

References:


"Iowa Average Rainfall." - Average and Year to Date Data. FindTheBest.com, Inc., n.d. Web. 02 Mar. 2014.


