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Character Analysis of a Character in *The Mission*

In the movie, *The Mission*, the character played by Robert de Niro underwent an amazing transformation. He began the movie as a ladies' man and slave trader and ended the movie as a Jesuit priest and martyr for those who he had once enslaved.

An the opening scenes of *The Mission*, a Jesuit missionary makes first contact with a village of Indians who live "above the falls." The first meeting with this group of people is going well until the arrival of a second European. This European nets a number of the natives and kills off a number of the witnesses to this capture. This European is the character played by Robert de Niro. De Niro's character comes close to the village; the missionary recognized the presence as a European and calls out to him.

This was just a chance encounter and it was unlikely that these two paths were to cross again. That is, until, de Niro kills his brother in an altercation over a woman whom they both loved. During his imprisonment, de Niro's character begins to wish that he were dead. While making rounds the same missionary whom de Niro met in the jungle comes to speak with the prisoner. The missionary manages to secure a pardon for the prisoner on the condition that de Niro's character agrees to come to the mission with them.

This is the beginning of de Niro's transformation. As part of his initiation de Niro is required to drag along the armor and weaponry of the conquistador. This requirement is very symbolic, for the same armor and weaponry that is now dragging his body down was once dragging his soul down. Though some of the monks of the order request the chief missionary remove this burden from de Niro's character he insists that de Niro continue in his toil.

De Niro carries this load up hillsides and up river and is forced to climb the cliffs at this falls with his load. Finally, the monks enter the village of natives—the same village where de Niro and the missionary had met earlier. The natives are happy to meet the missionaries, but are alarmed when de Niro arrives. The movie implies that the natives recognize de Niro as the person who once enslaved them.

One of the natives cuts the load loose from de Niro and throws it over the edge of the cliff. This is one of the most symbolic moments of the movie. The natives were the reason for his toil and in the end they are the ones who free him from his burden.

From this point on de Niro lives as a Jesuit priest. At one point, de Niro comments that he was, "trained as a mercenary, not as a cook." Of all the things de Niro left behind the one thing he cannot leave behind is his training as a mercenary. When the mission is under attack, de Niro's instinct is to fight in defense of the mission, even though chief missionary insists that they stage a peaceful response. De Niro cannot be a pacifist. In the final battle scene of the movie there is one moment where one can see that de

Niro's transformation is complete. There is one shot of him firing a musket very similar to the shot that de Niro fired at a native earlier in the movies, except that this time he is firing at a European.

De Niro's character underwent an amazing transformation. Long before he forced to be burdened by carrying the armor and weaponry of the conquistador, this armor and weaponry was weighing him down. It was up to the people that he was trying to capture to free him from this entrapment.