African Passions Study Guide

African Passions by Beatriz Rivera

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Introduction

Beatriz Rivera's short story "African Passions" first appeared in the *Bilingual Review* in 1995. In the same year, it was published by Arte Público Press in Rivera's first full-length book, a collection of short stories titled *African Passions and Other Stories.* The reaction to this collection, as well as to her subsequent books, has been very positive, with most critics praising Rivera for her sense of humor and intelligence, as well as for her memorable characters.

"African Passions" is a story about an ambitious and loving thirty-four-year-old woman, who, despite her lover's ambiguous nature, believes that she and he will one day be married and have children. The tale covers one day in the couple's life—a significant day, as by the end of the story they will have ended their fourteen-year-long relationship.

This is no ordinary story about relationships, however, unless a cat being pushed out of the window to its death by Afro-Cuban gods that are conjured up to guide the protagonist through a difficult challenge is considered a commonplace occurrence. Woven through this plot are themes of love, compassion, and the ability to laugh at those unexpected details that add both sorrow and a better understanding of what is really important in life. Rivera has created lovable characters, both real and fantastic, with the out-of-the-world gods sometimes appearing more bona fide than the human beings.

Author Biography

Beatriz Rivera was born on September 27, 1957, in Havana, Cuba, but at the age of three, she immigrated to the United States (soon after Castro's rise to power) with her parents, Mario Lorenzo and Aida (Rufin) Rivera. She lived with her family in Miami, Florida, until her high school years, when her parents sent her to Switzerland to complete her early education.

When it was time to go to college, Rivera chose to live in France, where she attended the Sorbonne, majoring in philosophy and eventually receiving her master's degree in 1979. Upon graduation, Rivera decided that she was not yet ready to return to the United States, so she found a job teaching English and Spanish in French schools. It was during this period that she also began writing her first novel.

Rivera lived in Paris for ten years, believing that she would never return to the United States. However, she reached a point in her life when she realized that as a writer she did not have a clear identity—she wasn't French, although she was living in France; she didn't really relate to being an American, although America was where she had spent much of her early years; and, although her ancestry was Cuban, she had left Cuba at such a young age that she didn't really associate herself with that country either. In the end, she decided to reestablish herself in the United States.

Upon her return to the United States, two of Rivera's short stories were published. "Paloma" appeared in *The Americas Review* and "Life Insurance" was published in *Chiricu.* Three years later, in 1995, both of these stories, along with the titled short story, were later collected in *African Passions and Other Stories,* Rivera's first book-length publication. Rivera followed this book with the novel *Midnight Sandwiches at the Mariposa Express* (1997) and the novel *Playing with Light* (2000).

Besides her creative writing endeavors, Rivera has also worked as a reporter for the *Jersey Journal* in Jersey City, New Jersey, and as a newspaper correspondent for the *Daily Freeman* in Kingston, New York. She has also taught at Fordham University and at Borough Manhattan Community College, both in New York City. In 1996, she enrolled in a Ph.D. program at CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, majoring in Spanish literature.

On June 21, 1988, she married Charles S. C. Barnes, with whom she has two children. She currently lives in the Hudson Valley region of New York.

Plot Summary

Rivera's "African Passions" opens with the protagonist Teresa making readers immediately aware of two important aspects of her life: the dishonesty of her live-in partner Armando, who is pretending to be sleeping, and Teresa's lack of self-confidence, as when she refers to herself as "an ugly brown bear," a description influenced by Armando's lack of attention to her.

Teresa tries to make Armando realize that his game of pretense is ineffectual, but Armando refuses to give in. Even though Armando continues to pretend to be asleep and thus not talk to her, Teresa continually asks him, "Do you still love me?" When her question arouses only more silence from Armando, Teresa half-jokingly contends that if Armando does not pay attention to her soon, she will "do something crazy."

Again, not receiving any reaction from Armando, Teresa calls on the "African Powers that surround our Savior" to help her find pleasure. "And," she adds, "I want it right away!" She then goes on to reveal that she really doesn't believe in Santería, an Afro-Cuban religious practice, but that she just likes to call on the African deities as "her private game, the way she liked to pray when she really wanted something."

After calling the gods, unbeknownst to the characters in the story, they materialize and begin taking matters into their own hands to answer Teresa's prayers and bring more pleasure into her life. The deities include an ever-hungry god and a fun-loving, sensual goddess, as well as several other funny characters. The gods watch as Teresa unsuccessfully tries to stir some affection from Armando. Armando, finally acknowledging that he is awake, suggests that Teresa go feed the cat, which she does. Before returning to bed, she also opens the window in the kitchen so her cat can enjoy the warm sun.

After feeding the cat, Teresa slips back into bed as the narrator fills in information about the couple. They have been together for fourteen years but have never married. They are both busy professionals who often find themselves living in separate cities, sharing only their weekends together, until recently, that is. As this narration continues, Teresa does not stop her efforts to snuggle up to Armando. Armando, on the other hand, refuses to be affectionate.

Teresa then reminisces about her cat. She found the cat out on the street the day that she and Armando began living together. At that time, Teresa was twenty years old and about to enter law school. She was also a paralegal in Armando's law firm. Armando was thirty at that time, and he and Teresa had often discussed their plans for the future in those earlier days, a future that included getting married and having babies. Armando was very attracted to Teresa back then, despite the fact that his parents did not approve of Teresa because she was a ' lower-class Jersey City, New Jersey, Cuban girl." Although Armando had broken up with her in the past, he could not stand the fact that Teresa was seeing other men, so he made up to her and came back. However, fourteen years later, their relationship is again waning, and there are no signs of either the

wedding or the babies. Instead, Armando has recently been distancing himself from Teresa.

The African gods, in the meantime, see things about Armando that Teresa refuses to recognize. One of the goddesses, Yemayá decides to give Armando a stomachache because of Armando's deceitfulness. When Armando feels uneasy, he asks Teresa to get him something from the medicine chest. He then tells Teresa that he needs to make a phone call and that she should not disturb him.

Teresa, who appears to love Armando blindly, does, however, become somewhat suspicious of his mannerisms when she inadvertently interrupts his phone call. She says to him, "every time I ask you a question you look so embarrassed!" But she dismisses the thought when one of the gods blows Teresa's suspicions away. Meantime, in the kitchen, the gods are watching the cat that is greedily eating all the leftover chicken. The gods are hungry, as well as angry that the cat is getting the best food, so they push the cat out of the window to its death. The cat, having existed in Teresa's life for the exact amount of time as her relationship with Armando, thus takes on the semblance of a metaphor for Teresa and Armando's relationship. In other words, the relationship is now dead, and the middle of the story takes up the quest of Teresa and Armando finding some place to bury it.

Armando's reaction to the death of the cat appears authentic to Teresa, but she is confused about the other signals that she is receiving from him. She states that "he looked sex-guilty even when he said they should take the car and find somewhere in the suburbs to bury that poor cat." They both want to give the cat a decent burial, but there are not many places in New York City where they could dig a hole in the earth. So they decide to drive out into the suburbs. At this news, the gods become very excited. They are anxious to go along for the ride.

Teresa and Armando study a map of the area, discussing the places nearby that offer some open land. They talk about going to a golf course, a college campus, and a few state parks. When they try each of them out, they are always interrupted in their attempts by a police officer or a guard who shoos them on their way.

To give Armando and Teresa time to talk, the African gods first slash one of the car's tires; then later they make the couple get stuck in a traffic jam. The first delay causes Armando to tell Teresa that he'll not be home next weekend. He is going to a golf seminar in Virginia, and his parents are going to meet him there. Teresa reminds him that he had originally told her that his parents were coming to visit them in New York next weekend. Armando tells Teresa that he thought she would not be interested in spending time with his parents, so he made a change in their plans.

During the second delay, Armando turns to Teresa and says, "I have something to tell you. You know how much I love you and how devoted I am to you. But I can't marry you." To this, Teresa responds that she's known that for a long time. Armando then continues by telling her that he has great ambition and that he's always had this dream of having his future father-in-law take him to an exclusive golf club. This is something

that Teresa's father could never do, and therefore Armando has become engaged to a woman whose father will be taking him to this exclusive club next weekend. When Teresa reacts with sarcasm, Armando says, "Somehow, I knew you wouldn't take this well."

The gods are all sitting in the back seat of the car during the above discussion. Some of them are disgusted that Teresa is taking Armando's declaration so unemotionally. "This woman's got no blood in her veins," one of them says. "After what he told her! And she hasn't even cut him!" another god says. "This is like the end of a bullfight ... and with a very polite bull." But when Armando further confesses that he also became engaged over the previous weekend, the god Shangó unsheathes his sword, and Yemayá starts "running all over the world looking for another man for Teresa."

Armando and Teresa find no place to bury the cat and return home with the dead animal. The last scene of the story finds Armando and Teresa in the elevator of their apartment building, with Armando holding the cold cat in his arms. Armando shoots a side-glance at Teresa when the goddess Oshún puts lust and jealousy into his body, making him think about Teresa being with another man. Teresa, meanwhile, wipes a tear from her face and says another prayer to the gods, asking them to help her "get over this man."

Summary

The beginning lines of Beatriz Rivera's *African Passions* reveal that Teresa knows that Armando, her live-in Cuban boyfriend of 14 years, is pretending to be asleep. Armando continues to ignore Teresa's attempts to wake him when she threatens that she will do something crazy. Teresa does nothing physically. She instead prays to the African powers of Santeria, a religion she abandoned when she moved from her old, poor neighborhood to the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Although Teresa is torn between anger and sadness at Armando's behavior, her prayer is only for immediate pleasure. The African powers of Santeria are a group of eight powers that are invisible and unheard by human beings. They emerge from spices and jewelry into the unseen world of Teresa and Armando. Each has its own personality and human characteristics. They use their power to cast spells that influence the tangible world of humans to help Teresa.

Babalu Aye is a jealous power intent on making Teresa miserable. He complains about Teresa's last-minute request that he help her and often attempts to do horrible things to Teresa, like trying to make her die of gangrene. Eleggua is a decent power that has always tried to help Teresa. He also has a hunger problem; he wants to eat everything he sees. Orula is the clairvoyant power married to the feminine power Yemaya. Shango, accused of trying to rape Oshun, the free spirited, party-loving power, loves fire. Obatala is the power described as a virile warrior. Ogun, the eighth power Teresa calls upon, is the power described as bloodthirsty.

These powers show up in Teresa's apartment just as her cat, Gato, bothers her for food. Teresa puts Gato's food dish on the windowsill, and Gato eats from the window. Teresa admits the windowsill is a dangerous spot for a cat to eat, but she believes that cats don't fall. Teresa is not worried about Gato. Gato has been living with Teresa and Armando since they moved in together. Gato was in the middle of the street when Teresa and Armando started moving their things into their apartment. Both she and Armando fell in love with the cat that day, so they keep him.

While Gato is eating in the kitchen, Teresa takes this opportunity to enjoy Armando's presence and find out whether anything is bothering him. After spending every weekend for almost six months alone while Armando traveled for work, Teresa misses Armando and tries hard to get him to open up. A month earlier he told her to reserve this weekend so that they could talk, and so far Armando has not had much to say. She hopes they will talk about finally going through with the plans to marry that they had first discussed when they moved in together. Armando continues to ignore Teresa with his sleepy act.

Teresa wants to marry Armando. Although they are ten years apart in age and come from very different backgrounds, Teresa is still madly in love with him. Armando comes from a rich Cuban family. Teresa comes from a poor New Jersey neighborhood. Her mother was a maid and her father a plasterer and toilet cleaner before they decided to buy a Laundromat. Armando has brought up several times that his family does not want him to marry Teresa because her family is from a lower socio-economic level. At the

beginning of their relationship, Armando did not care that Teresa's family was poor, but as time passed, it started to bother him. At one point in the relationship Armando even broke up with Teresa to marry someone else. After seeing Teresa begin to date other men, Armando went back to Teresa. Since that time he has made excuses to keep from taking Teresa to be his wife. To avoid hearing her parents' disapproval of her and Armando's living together, Teresa tells her parents that she and Armando are already married.

During Armando's sleeping act and Teresa's thoughts about all that has happened in their relationship in the past, Yemaya gives Armando a stomachache. Teresa offers to fix Armando coffee. Armando agrees and uses Teresa's absence as an opportunity to make a phone call. He tells Teresa not to come in until he is off the phone. Three of the African Powers, Orula, Ogun, and Babalu, push Gato off of the windowsill. Teresa is horrified to find that Gato had fallen off of the windowsill and down nine floors. The super calls and tells Teresa that Gato is dead but still intact. Teresa, forgetful of Armando's request to stay out of the room, walks into the room while Armando is still on the phone. Armando is whispering and smiling into the phone's receiver when he discovers Teresa has walked in on him. For a split second Teresa thinks she sees a "sex-guilt" look on Armando's face. In her mind she starts to question why he looks so guilty if he is taking a business call, but the power of Orula erases Teresa's need to question Armando about it.

Teresa leaves the room and picks up Gato from the super downstairs. When she returns to the apartment, she tells Armando that Gato is dead. Armando is upset and suggests they drive some place and bury him. After shooting down Armando's suggestions to bury Gato on a golf course or in the Bronx, Teresa and Armando head to Robert Moses State Park. Teresa comments, "This weekend's turning into a funeral."

While on the ride to the state park, Teresa asks Armando what his mother's message on the answering machine was about. Armando's mother seemed happy to be visiting Armando. Teresa does not understand why she is happy because she has always shown hatred toward Teresa because of her poor upbringing. Armando dismisses Teresa's questions, saying that his mother likes Teresa, contrary to what she thinks. He did not tell her his parents were coming into town because he thought she didn't want to see them. Teresa suggests that Armando stop and get a shovel and box to bury Gato in. After buying the shovel and box and fixing a flat tire caused by the powers, Armando casually tells Teresa that his parents are meeting him in Virginia. While Teresa is questioning this, Armando suggests that Teresa dig the grave for Gato. He will stay in the car and keep a watch out for police. Once Teresa has dug the grave, he will go bury Gato. This frustrates Teresa but she agrees.

Three different policemen stop Armando in the car while Teresa is attempting to dig a grave for Gato at different sites. Teresa and Armando head down the road further in search of a place to bury Gato without being stopped by police. Armando is following the map. When the roadmap changes colors from blue to orange, he tells Teresa that he is getting married to someone else. He says he has always dreamed of getting engaged and playing golf at an exclusive country club with his future father-in-law. He tells Teresa

that this dream would not come true if he married her because her father works at a Laundromat. He goes on to tell her that he has had the opportunity to play golf with his new fiance's father in Virginia, and he loved it. Armando's parents are coming to Virginia to meet his new fiance.

The only reaction Teresa has to Armando's news is silence. Teresa and Armando look for a place to bury Gato until it gets dark outside. Teresa and Armando have no luck finding a burial site. They take Gato back to the apartment with them. In the elevator on the way up to their apartment, Armando is holding Gato and wondering how soon Teresa is going to find another man. Teresa stands next to him in the elevator praying that the African powers help her get over Armando.

Analysis

Beatriz Rivera's *African Passions* is a story about class discrimination, unhealthy relationships, and the use of religion for personal gain. Teresa is in denial. Armando showed many signs that he was up to something, but Teresa continued to love him. He ignores her to the point of pretending he is asleep, has secret conversations when she is not in the room, and a month ago reserved this weekend to talk with Teresa. Although Teresa and Armando have been together 14 years, Armando still has no desire to marry Teresa. Teresa saw the guilt Armando felt about being with someone else, and she did not acknowledge it. Teresa gave 14 years to a man who was not committed to marry her. She lied to her parents so she wouldn't hear them bring up what she is unconsciously thinking.

Armando was not willing to acknowledge he wanted a rich woman. Armando and his family discriminate against Teresa because of her poor upbringing. Teresa's mother is a maid and her father was a plasterer and toilet cleaner before owning a Laundromat. Teresa is very successful in the legal field, the career field Armando is also in, but her parents' careers are all Armando and his family sees. Teresa is from New Jersey--a state Armando and his Cuban family look down on.

Teresa prays to the African powers about Armando. Armando acts strangely throughout the entire story before his confession, but Teresa does not pray for his love or a better relationship. She prays for pleasure. When Teresa finds out at the end of the story that Armando is marrying someone else, she does not get angry, try to commit suicide, or lash out. She prays for help to get over Armando. Her behavior suggests that she is either using the African powers for her pleasure or is a very strong and resilient woman. The title of Rivera's work shows which of these options is true. Teresa is using the African powers to fulfill her personal passions.

Teresa and Armando's cat Gato symbolizes their love and relationship. Gato is a Spanish word for "cat," which is a generic term that is not considered a name. Teresa and Armando have been living together for 14 years but have not labeled or specified their relationship. Gato shows up the day Teresa and Armando move in together. Teresa thinks cats do not fall and that she and Armando's love will not die, but both things

happen. Teresa and Armando's love dies the day Gato dies. Gato's favorite spot is on a high and dangerous kitchen windowsill. Teresa's love for Armando is dangerous because he has not made a commitment to her. Teresa and Armando do not find a place to bury Gato. They also have no place to bury their love. They bring Gato back to the apartment and, at the same time, come back to the same spot in their relationship. Armando is left holding the Gato. He is the one responsible for ending the relationship. In the end, Teresa's hands are too full to hold Gato or their love for each other.

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Characters

Armando

Armando is Teresa's boyfriend. He is forty-four years old and a junior partner in a law firm. He is ten years older than Teresa. In the first lines of the story, Armando is covertly described as a fake. He is pretending to be asleep. Shortly afterward, he also pretends to have to make a business telephone call when, it is suggested, he is probably calling another woman.

Although Armando and Teresa have been living together for fourteen years, Armando has never proposed marriage. Teresa believed that they would eventually get married, but Armando has always made excuses to avoid taking vows to make Teresa his wife. Armando is referred to as a "'country club' Cuban," a reference to his family having money.

In the beginning of their affair, Armando did not mind that his parents did not approve of Teresa. They thought of her as a "lower-class Jersey City, New Jersey, Cuban girl whose family owned a laundromat." However, by the day on which the story takes place, Armando has fallen in love with another woman and has asked this other woman to marry him. In breaking the news to Teresa, Armando says, "First I really want you to know how devoted I am to you, but you know I've always had my dreams and ambitions." Then he tells her not to take it personally, but his "axiom" for the day on which he would become engaged was that his "future father-in-law would take me to a very exclusive golf club." He then goes on to remind Teresa that her father could never do this.

Armando is a shallow character without real emotions. He looks at Teresa lustfully but without understanding or appreciating any of her traits that run deeper than her skin. For Armando, ambition means rising up the economic ladder. He wants power and prestige that he believes will come to him only through money.

Babalú Ayé

Of the African gods that Teresa summons, Babalú Ayé is most arrogant. He is angry that she has summoned him last, and he also believes that Teresa is too arrogant. In his anger, he says bad things about Teresa and doesn' t like her cat because Babalú's body is covered in wounds and the cat's tongue is too rough to lick him. He accuses Teresa of using her race to get into top colleges and into top law firms. When he gets angry with Teresa, he spills sesame seeds on the kitchen floor so that she will get gangrene. Babalú is one of the gods responsible for pushing Teresa's cat out of the window.

Eleggua

Eleggua is the African god who lives under the sugar bowl in Teresa's kitchen. He is said to be the one who has "opened roads" for Teresa. Eleggua is also a bit distracted by food, always sniffing it out, and he makes Teresa's cat do things toward his goal of getting Teresa to open the refrigerator so he can get at the food inside.

Obatalá

Obatalá is a "virile warrior" and lives in the marjoram. He slashes the tire of Armando's car, placing obstacles in Armando's way as he and Teresa try to bury the dead cat.

Ogún

Ogún is described as bloodthirsty and lives in the rosemary in Teresa's kitchen. Ogún is one of the gods responsible for pushing Teresa's cat out of the window.

Orula

Orula, another of the gods, lives in the pepper shaker, and he is clairvoyant. He is also the husband of Yemayá. Orula blows thoughts out of Teresa's mind when Teresa becomes suspicious of Armando's love for her. He does not want her to be prepared for what Armando will tell her later.

Oshún

Oshún loves Teresa's jewelry box. She is described as a "beautiful" and "fun-loving" goddess. Oshún likes to protect Teresa, and she also declares her sexual attraction to Armando. At one point, she says, "I love his genitals!" Oshún makes Teresa ask questions of Armando, helping Teresa understand that Armando does not love her. In the end, Oshún puts lust and jealousy into Armando, reminding him "that Teresa would probably find someone else soon."

Shangó

Shangó loves fire and lives in the bay leaves. Shangó is the god who is protective of Teresa and wants to burn Armando because Shangó knows that Armando only pretends to love Teresa. When Armando tells Teresa that he is engaged to another woman, Shango "unsheathed his sword," symbolizing the death of Teresa's love for Armando.

Teresa

Teresa is the protagonist of the story. She is intelligent, as reflected in the fact that she has graduated from the "top colleges" and has found jobs with the "top law firms." She is thirty-four years old at the time of the story.

Teresa loves Armando, the man with whom she has been living for fourteen years, more than he loves her, but she loves him to a fault. Even though she is suspicious of his actions, she keeps herself in a frame of mind that does not allow those suspicions to enter her conscious thoughts. Therefore, she is hesitant to take action that would root out the story behind Armando's reluctance to marry her. She is also totally unsuspicious of Armando's unfaithfulness.

At the age of thirty-four, Teresa is thinking about having children. She has lied to her parents about her arrangement with Armando. Her parents believe that Teresa and Armando are married. Teresa told her parents that she and Armando secretly eloped several years ago. She seems content with Armando and their relationship, but she is growing a little wary of his lack of commitment and looks back at the beginning of their relationship, wondering why Armando has not kept his promise of having babies. Although she does not seem to suspect Armando's affair with another woman, she does keep asking him if he loves her.

Teresa is a complex character with beliefs that conflict with one another. Although she does not appear to question Armando's lack of compassion for her, she does use all her forces to try to make him pay more attention to her. Teresa also does not truly believe in the powers of the African gods that she conjures, and yet she calls upon them to make fate turn in her direction. She uses the gods to make decisions for her that she cannot make alone. The gods represent her subconscious will. She is a woman who lives outside of what she feels is her natural culture, and yet, the culture in which she does live does not quite feel her own. As the narration states, "She lived on the Upper East Side of Manhattan ... it had been years since she'd belonged to the old neighborhood." However, when she "really wanted something," she reclaimed her ancestral culture by calling up the gods who were familiar to her.

Teresa may have moved away from the old neighborhood, but she remains fond of her parents, even though Armando puts them down for their lack of education and money. When Armando describes Teresa's father as a man who's been "working in that laundromat all his life," Teresa responds, "Oh, no, not all his life . . . before that he was a plasterer, but he could paint, too." She is using sarcasm here, putting Armando down for his highbrow attitude, but she is also standing up for her parents as well. Her parents are proud of her, and she cherishes them for that.

At the end of the story, Teresa once again conjures up the African gods, as she brushes away "a tear" (her only show of emotion) upon digesting the news that Armando is engaged to another woman. She asks the gods to "help me get over this man."

Yemayá

Yemayá is a goddess who lives in the cilantro. She is also the wife of Orula. When she gets angry with Armando, she makes him have a stomachache. Yemayá, after Armando tells Teresa that he is engaged to another woman, starts "running all over the world looking for another man for Teresa."

Themes

Passivity

One of the strongest characteristics of Rivera's protagonist, Teresa, is her passivity. Despite the fact that she intuitively acknowledges that her lover is avoiding her, lying to her, and refusing to pay any attention to her, she remains faithful to him. She waits on him, fetching medicine for his aching stomach and making him a cup of coffee while he makes a phone call that Teresa suspects is to another woman. She never directly confronts him on any issues. She also waits on him in another sense: the passage of time. For fourteen years she swallows his lame excuses for not marrying her, accepting the insults that he heaps onto her and her family's economic and social status without much more than the nodding of her head.

However, Teresa's passivity is somewhat misleading. Although she accepts Armando and his excuses on a conscious level, on a subconscious level, she conjures up the spiritual powers of her beliefs, in the form of African deities, to wreak havoc on her lover and expose his false-hearted intentions that she, herself, is not outwardly strong enough to face. Though she suspects that Armando does not love her, it is through the actions of the gods that Armando is forced to confess that he has been scheming to leave her. When Armando does declare that he has become engaged to another woman, even the gods are disgusted by Teresa's lack of emotional aggression, comparing her to a "very polite bull" in the middle of a bullfight.

Social Hierarchies

The first sense of hierarchy in Rivera's "African Passions" actually appears with the materialization of the African deities. When Babalú Ayé is summoned last in Teresa's prayer for pleasure, he becomes so indignant that he tries to put a curse on Teresa that will lead to her death. Later, this same awareness of a perceived pecking order becomes apparent when the gods push Teresa's cat out of the window because the cat was eating too much of the leftover chicken.

Rivera uses this more comical sense of hierarchy of the gods to heighten the awareness of the social hierarchy that pollutes Armando's search for a lover. Although Armando is attracted to Teresa, albeit more of a physical connection than an emotional one, he is more committed to his ambition to rise in the social ranks than he is to love. He constantly reminds Teresa that she comes from a more common stock than he because her parents' only claim to fame is their ownership of a New Jersey laundromat. Armando, in the meantime, dreams of belonging to exclusive golf clubs, of marrying into money and status. He is ambitious, he tells Teresa, believing that this explains his leaving her for another woman. He could never marry her, not because he doesn't love and adore her, or so he says, but because his parents would never approve of his marrying beneath his social class.

Teresa's parents also play into the system of social hierarchy as they tell Teresa how proud they are of her for "having found an upper-crust Cuban, or a 'country club' Cuban." Whereas her father "only got to see the inside of those clubs" when he cleaned the toilets, he is glad that Teresa, by virtue of her supposed marriage, would belong to the country club set.

Grace

The theme of grace lies underneath the overall plot of Rivera's story. It is somewhat subtle but nonetheless very visible at the same time. From the opening paragraph, Rivera sets up the theme by presenting Armando as corrupted deceit and Teresa (coincidentally the name of a popular Roman Catholic saint) as loving innocence. It is through Teresa's innocence that she receives the grace of the gods that she summons, whereas, it is suggested, Armando will receive only the sword.

Teresa prays for pleasure, and the gods immediately respond. Although they kill her cat, this appears as a symbolic gesture meant to show Teresa that her love affair with Armando is dead. The rest of the story contains a series of actions that expose Armando's shallowness in comparison to Teresa's patience and understanding. As a consequence of Teresa's saintly virtues, she is, in the end, rewarded with an answer to her prayers, as the gods chase away the deadbeat Armando and then scour the world for a new lover, appropriate for Teresa's ability to love.

Spirituality

Although Rivera's narrator states that Teresa doesn't really believe in Santería but only uses it when she really wants something, some of the beliefs of Santería pervade this short story. Santería is a combination of beliefs, incorporating the spiritual practices of several African religions with the rituals and saints of the Roman Catholic religion. In "African Passions," Teresa is now living "on the Upper East Side of Manhattan where there are gourmet delis instead of live poultry markets and those religious stores called *Boánicas,"* and thus she is very much removed from her Cuban cultural heritage. However, she has not forgotten her past, and when she is in need, she turns to the spiritual beliefs—her Santería, with its mostly benevolent gods—that have been handed down to her. The confidence that she lacks in herself presents itself in a more robust form in the gods that she conjures.

It is through her spiritual beliefs that Teresa is able to withstand the pain of a failed relationship, the humiliation of an unfaithful lover, and the trauma of losing her cat. She might not be strong in herself, but she is strong in her belief that if she prays, her supplications will be answered. When she feels herself faltering, she prays for guidance. Rivera makes spirituality playful, but this should not be taken as a sign of disrespect, for in the end it is due to her spirituality that not only will Teresa bear the breakup of her fourteen-year-long relationship but that the gods will direct her fate.

Style

Magic Realism

Rivera's "African Passions" is written in a style referred to as magic realism. This term was coined to define the way in which art forms, especially literature, display odd and dreamlike anomalies as if they were commonplace events. Thus, there is the mixture of what might be termed magical with what is deemed everyday reality. Rivera's use of magic realism comes about with the materialization of the African deities. Although the characters themselves are not aware of the presence of the gods, the depth as well as the fun of the story relies on the reader knowing that it is the gods who are controlling the fate of Teresa and Armando.

That gods can be jealous, hungry, sexually aroused, and petty (in other words, that they can have human qualities) is taken for granted. As a matter of fact, it is this display of their human side that makes the story so enjoyable. By using magic realism, Rivera adds more than just humor, however; she also adds depth by proclaiming her belief that there are underlying powers in everyday affairs. The tire of Armando's car does not become flattened by accident but rather because the gods want Armando to stop and think. The cat does not fall out of the window by chance but because the gods want Teresa to have a physical symbol of the death of her and Armando's relationship.

Point of View

"African Passions" is told in third person omniscient point of view. This means that the reader is privileged to know not only what is going on in the story but also some of the thoughts of the characters. A third person narrator tells the story, filling in background information as well as hinting at the motivation behind the actions of the people involved.

In using third person omniscient point of view, Rivera gives the reader a look into Teresa's insecurities about herself. More importantly, this point of view also allows the reader to know that there are spiritual beings involved in the plot, whereas the characters themselves are not aware of their presence.

Symbolism

The cat in this story symbolizes the relationship of Teresa and Armando. Teresa found the cat in the streets on the same day that she and Armando moved into their apartment, which marked the beginning of their living together. Both characters appear to have feelings for the cat, although it is Teresa who feeds it and must retrieve the dead cat from the alley below when the gods push the cat out of the window.

By having Teresa appear as the caretaker of the cat, Rivera also demonstrates that it is Teresa who is the caretaker of Teresa and Armando's relationship. By having the gods push the cat out of the window to its death, Rivera symbolizes the death of Teresa and Armando's union, with the burial of the dead cat signifying the ritual burial of the same relationship. In the end, it is Armando who is left holding the dead cat's body. In other words, Rivera is suggesting, Armando is responsible for having killed the relationship.

Setting

The setting of Rivera's short story is New York City. It is New York as adopted by a woman from New Jersey. Because she was raised in New Jersey, as opposed to having been raised in New York, Armando makes fun of her. He puts her down. New York is considered more sophisticated, maybe even more aristocratic. New Jersey, in comparison, symbolizes to Armando the blue-collar worker and the lower class.

It is also New York City as adopted by Cuban immigrants who have had to adjust their lives to the busy northern streets. They have given up their homeland and have tried to acculturate themselves to the life that the American city dictates. It is also a cemented city, where there is no place to bury a cat. There is little nature left in New York City. What is left is regulated by park police. This cemented city stands in contrast to Cuba, which is known for its lush countryside.

Historical Context

Magic Realism in Latin American Literature

Although not restricted to Latin American literature, magic realism holds a strong court in the writings of Hispanic authors. Some of the more famous examples of such writing include Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate,* and Isabel Allende's *Love and Shadows.*

The term magic realism was first coined by German art critic Franz Roh in the late 1920s, but the phrase did not really catch on until Miguel Angel Asturias (from Guatemala) used the term to describe his writing when he received the Nobel Prize (1967) for his life's work in literature. Many of Rivera's stories take on the style of magic realism, such as the appearance of African gods in "African Passions."

Fidel Castro and Cuban Emigration

The United States occupied Cuba from 1899 to 1901 under a military governor, General John Brooke, who blocked Cubans from governmental service. Brooke also disbanded the Cuban army. He was eventually replaced, under supervised elections that gave Cuba its first elected president, Tomás Estrada Palma. The United States at this time envisioned a Cuba that would serve U. S. economic needs. In 1901, the Platt Amendment gave the United States the right to determine Cuba's economy, international and internal affairs, as well as the right to establish a military base at Guantánamo Bay.

Between 1901 and 1959, the United States set up several puppet administrators in Cuba, none of them very successful in appeasing the needs of the Cuban people with the dictates of the U.S. government. On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro, a young lawyer invested in radical politics, who had at one time been a political prisoner, rose to power on the backs of poor peasants, urban workers, and young and idealistic Cubans. With Castro's victory, the Communist Party of Cuba assumed political control of the government, becoming the first socialist country in the Americas.

These were not easy years for Cuba. Castro represented change, but many of the changes were difficult. With the 1960s U.S. trade embargo imposed on Cuba, food and other material shortages became prevalent. Added to this was Castro's strong campaign against the ownership of private property. Private businesses were nationalized. These conditions led to the emigration of thousands of Cubans to the United States.

Santería

Santería is a religion of Caribbean origin. It combines the beliefs of Roman Catholicism with those brought over to the Western world by Africa slaves, mostly the Yoruba and

Bantu people from Southern Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea Coast. Historically, the African slaves were forced to suppress the religions of their homelands, as they were baptized into the Roman Catholic Church upon their arrival in the New World. To maintain their more familiar spiritual concepts, the slaves covertly wrapped the names of the new Catholic saints around the African deities they truly believed in. For instance, this resulted in having St. Lazarus take on the persona of Babalú Ayé, the patron of the sick; St. Barbara became representative of Shangó, the one who controls fire; and St. Anthony was the cover name for Eleggua, he who controls all the roads.

The religion was active in Cuba but was suppressed by Fidel Castro in the 1950s. However, a resurgence in the religion was witnessed in Cuba in the 1990s, and with the emigration of Cubans to the United States, there are growing communities of people practicing Santería in Florida, New York City, and Los Angeles. It has been reported that there are over 300,000 practitioners of Santería in New York alone. The religion is also very active in Brazil.

Although there is very little definite information known outside of the practicing circles of Santería, some general details can be offered. Secrecy is a very important element of the religion, with rituals, symbols, and practices not divulged until a practitioner is initiated into the group. There is no book of guidance associated with this religion as it is based on ancient practices handed down by oral tradition. A typical ritual is usually accompanied by the beating of African drums with a special rhythm assigned to each god and goddess. An integral, as well as a most controversial, element of the religion is ritual animal sacrifice, with chickens being most commonly used in sacrifice. A statement concerning this ritual from one Santerían group asserts that the animals are killed in a humane manner and later eaten.

Each of the Santerían gods has a special calling, somewhat similar to the myths about Greek gods. Eleggua, for instance, is the god who opens doors. He is also the guardian of the crossroads and the messenger to the all-knowing God. Eleggua corresponds to Mercury in Greek mythology. Oshún is considered the goddess of love, sexuality, beauty, and diplomacy, much like her Greek sister, Aphrodite. Shangó is the god of storms and lightning, just like the Greek Mars.

Critical Overview

Although Rivera has received critical praise for her writing, her introspection, and her development of strong characters, there is little mention expressly applied to her individual short story "African Passions." This story has not yet received a lot of attention outside of the Latino/a and Afro-Cuban reading community. *African Passions and Other Stories* was her first full-length published work, and although she has written two novels since then, she is still very much considered a newcomer in the literary world.

In general, however, Rivera has received some commentary on her eccentric characters, her sure-handed writing, and the energetic entanglements in her stories. Critics refer to her writing as inventive and provocative. Adrienne A. Bendel, writing for the *Denver Post,* states that Rivera "explores universal themes .. . spiced with the uniqueness of the Cuban-American experience." This reviewer also states that Rivera writes with "humor, irony, affection and zest."

Sybil S. Steinberg, writing for *Publishers Weekly,* refers to some of the characters that Rivera creates as "endearingly self-absorbed." In a specific review *of African Passions and Other Stories,* M. V. Ekstrom writes in *Choice,* "The stories touch on many aspects of Latin American history and cultural identity, yet the themes are universal." He then adds, "This is a fine collection."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing. Her published works are of literary themes. In this essay, Hart examines the way that Rivera uses the materialization of gods and goddesses to express the subconscious desires of her protagonist in his story.

It does not take Rivera long in her story "African Passions" to divulge the truth about her protagonist. Teresa is a woman of contrapuntal desires - a deep-seated passion to love and a self-defeating compulsion to remain passive. She cries outwardly for attention and affection, but her only action in the direction of love is to serve her lover and to pray. It is when she prays that her emotional energies are most nearly aligned with her desires; and it is through these suppressed emotions that the ancient gods of Africa are brought forth to seek, in her name, the bridge between her desires and her submissiveness.

From the first paragraph, readers are told that Armando, Teresa's love partner, is a fraud. Teresa knows this as well, but she is forever forgiving. Teresa knows many things about Armando, but as soon as a truth enters her mind, she finds something else to distract her so she does not have to think too hard about the status of her relationship with this man. The relationship is on shaky ground, but Teresa continues to tiptoe around the facts, hoping that she is wrong, not wanting to wake up to the realization that the relationship is more than not going any place; the relationship is dead.

"Do you still love me?" she asks this man in her bed, who is pretending to be sleeping; but deep down, Teresa already knows the answer. She envisions a picture of herself from what she imagines to be Armando's view: "He was on the alert, as if she were an ugly brown bear ready to pounce if he didn't play dead." In this thought of hers is the essence of her definition of their relationship. She thinks of herself as ugly and threatening. She thinks of him as an actor. She excuses his pretense by telling herself that Armando is afraid of her, possibly afraid that she will take something from him: his status, his life, or maybe just his love. In truth, Teresa is really afraid that she does not deserve his love. However, something is missing in her life. This she knows, and she is looking for that something. She, like the god Eleggua, is hungry. "If you don't pay attention to me soon," she says to Armando, "I'll do something crazy!"

The crazy thing that she eventually does is conjure up the African gods with whom she has played games ever since she was a child. She prays to them, although she denies believing in them. Her game is to call the gods when she is frustrated and needs to acknowledge her emotions. She tells the gods what she wants and then waits to see if they answer her requests. She has needs but does not have the confidence to trust that she can find the means to satisfy them on her own. Teresa is passive about life because she is insecure, but her passivity does not satisfy her desires; it merely shoves them into a back closet until they are ready to explode. It is this suppressed energy that imbues the psyche with the power to bring the gods forth. The gods thus represent Teresa's emotions.

Somewhere in her personal history, Teresa learned to believe that she was not worthy of the kind of love that she craves. Her poor self-image could be the result of her feeling as if she lives on the fringes of American society - in the society but not truly of it - due to her bi-cultural status. It also could have arisen from the pressures placed on her to excel economically, a sure sign of success in the eyes of her parents. Even though she has made remarkable accomplishments, Armando is present in her life to remind her that no matter what she does, she cannot erase her heritage, which, in Armando's eyes, is that of a daughter of lower-class parents. So Teresa turns to love, hoping that those warm, fuzzy feelings that are romantically linked to the concept of love will somehow fill in all the empty places in her soul.

Toward this goal, she turns to Armando. She's been turning to him for a long time, and she's always come up empty, especially lately. Teresa is locked into a mode. She can turn toward Armando, but she cannot turn away. Although she and Armando have talked of marriage, he has always put it off, telling her he couldn' t marry her because his parents did not approve of her. Then later, he says that he doesn't believe in marriage. Teresa is ever hopeful that Armando will change, at least she is hopeful on a rational level. On a subconscious level, however, Teresa is a bit more aware. There, in that secret place where she hides her emotions, she begs the gods to bring her pleasure, the thing she is missing in her life. Interestingly, readers should note that Teresa does not specify in her prayers that she wants this pleasure to come from Armando. She does not demand that the gods make Armando love her. Her prayer is a more generic: "I want pleasure! And I want it right away!"

The god Babalú Ayé is the first god to reveal some of Teresa's hidden feelings. Babalú Ayé is the god of healing. In the story, a side note enlightens readers that Babalú Ayé does not like cats because their tongues are too rough for his skin. Babalú Ayé's "body was covered with open wounds," an empathetic symbol of his healer status. He is aware of Teresa's emotional wounds caused by her insecurities and exposes her ambivalent feelings about having used her Hispanic culture to help her get into "top universities, top law firms, and top floors." Through Babalú Ayé it becomes apparent that Teresa is not totally confident in her intelligence and skills. There are lingering doubts inside of her as to whether she could have accomplished as much on her own without using her minority classification. These fears feed her low self-esteem, which in turn keeps her in a dissatisfying relationship.

It is through the goddess Oshún that readers become aware of the fact that sexual passion is also suppressed in Teresa. Oshún is the goddess of love and sexuality. Sexuality is very important to Teresa, as this is how she defines love. She repeatedly tells Armando that she loves him as she snuggles close to him in bed and gently caresses his stomach and thighs and chest. There are several mentions of Teresa caressing Armando's thighs, whispering, "I love you. I adore you." When she thinks back to when she and Armando first began living together, she recalls, "he adored her, he couldn't take his hands off her." However, Teresa is not overtly sexual. She only displays gestures that hint she is aroused and would like to share a passionate moment with Armando. He, of course, is not interested and thus, much like all the rest of Teresa's desires, her sexuality must be suppressed. So Rivera has the "fun-loving" goddess

Oshún speak for Teresa when Oshún openly declares: "I'll get his genitals! I love his genitals!" Later, while Armando is making his secretive phone call (presumably to another woman), it is Oshún who makes the telephone receiver too hot for Armando to hold. "I feel like burning him," Oshún says, voicing Teresa's suppressed anger. Teresa intuitively senses that Armando is cheating on her, as she notices that he had "an embarrassed look on his face." Teresa refers to this as Armando's sex guilt. She confronts him briefly: "Armando, every time I ask you a question you look so embarrassed!" However, several seconds later, after Armando tells her to leave him alone, Teresa is back to telling Armando that she loves him.

Yemayá is the goddess who represents the archetype of mother. She is the goddess of the sea and the moon and is often invoked in fertility rituals. After Armando refuses to acknowledge Teresa's passionate gestures, as well as ignoring Teresa's desire all these years to have children, Yemayá gives Armando a stomachache, symbolic of menstrual cramps or preliminary birthing pains. Yemayá strikes back at Armando when Teresa is incapable of standing up to him. Yemayá is also the goddess who, at the end of the story, "started running all over the world looking for another man for Teresa."

Ogún, the god of iron and metals and a fierce warrior, also wants to lash out at Armando but in an even more drastic manner. When Ogún hears Armando talking on the phone to another woman, he responds, "And I'll cut him." Minutes later, Armando cuts himself while shaving. Ogún is also partially involved in pushing Teresa's cat out of the window, but it is Eleggua who is the mastermind behind this endeavor.

Eleggua is the guardian of the crossroads, the god who opens the doors to all endeavors. He is also known as the trickster, a character common to many aboriginal faiths. The trickster figure is credited with creating calamities in order to teach lessons. He pushes Teresa's cat out the window, giving Teresa a symbolic manifestation of the death of her and Armando's relationship.

When Teresa walks into the bedroom to tell Armando that the cat is dead, she gets mixed signals from Armando. "He seemed ashamed of himself." She wonders about his reaction, asking herself how she could be so confused. "Didn't she know him by heart? .. . but he looked so guilty! And how can you look sex-guilty when you're on the phone talking business?" However, when Teresa starts thinking more deeply about Armando's reaction, the god Orula, a clairvoyant who is associated with the future and fate, blows the thoughts away. He does not want her to be prepared for the day, probably an allusion to Teresa's tendency to forgive Armando. Orula wants Teresa to be so devastated, so caught off guard by Armando's announcement that he is engaged to another woman (at the end of the story) that she will finally "get over this man."

Obatalá is the next god to enter the dialogue. He is the god of peace and harmony. While Armando and Teresa are driving around New York to find a place to bury their cat, it is Obatalá who slashes the tire of the car. He wants to place Armando and Teresa in a stalled position, where they will have nothing to do but talk to one another. He is disturbed (much like Teresa) when Armando hints at being irritated. But even Obatalá, the god known for his coolness of thought, wisdom, and clarity, becomes irritated with

Teresa's passivity. After Armando tells Teresa that he cannot ever marry her because she comes from such poor stock and that he has in fact met a man who would make a much better father-in-law than Teresa's father ever could, Obatalá, reacting to Teresa's complacency states: "This woman's got no blood in her veins. After what he told her! And she hasn't even cut him!" If Obatalá represents Teresa's cool-headedness, he also represents her disgust and frustration for having put up with Armando's disloyalty and criticism all these years. Having noticed, while the couple is driving around the city, that they have driven to Queens, a neighborhood that is removed by both distance and economic opportunity from Manhattan, where Armando and Teresa live, Obatalá declares that he is getting out of the car right there and staying there. The last thing he wants is to go back to Manhattan, back to the couple's old life. Suggested here is that Teresa, too, has finally made this decision. Maybe she has finally realized that she wants something entirely different in her life.

The story continues, but Armando has not yet told Teresa everything. At last, he drops the most startling news. He tells Teresa that he is engaged to another woman. After this announcement, Shangó unsheathes his sword. Shangó is the god of storms and lightning. He is the god who brings a purifying moral terror to those at whom he lashes out. He often reduces his enemies to ashes. It is through Shangó that Teresa finally feels appeased. However, the gods are not finished with Armando.

Oshún, the goddess of love and sexuality, fills Armando with lust for Teresa so he will always be aware of what he has left behind. Also, by the end of the story, Babalú Ayé has finally gotten over his anger at Teresa, because she now summons him first (previously she had summoned him last). With Babalú happy, readers can assume that Teresa may now be healed. Also, Eleggua, the god who opens the doors to all endeavors, has finally satisfied his hunger, as he sits on top of a bucket of chicken wings that Teresa holds in her arms. It is at this moment that Teresa again summons the African gods to help her "get over this man," ending the story with the hope that Teresa has learned her lessons and has finally unlocked her passions.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "African Passions," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Kryhoski is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, Kryhoski considers the influence of Santería on Rivera's work.

"African Passions" is the signature piece in a collection of stories by Beatriz Rivera. This story, like others in the collection, is about a woman preoccupied with the possible infidelities of her live-in lover. Rivera cleverly captures, with humor and great insight, the struggle her protagonist, or central character, Teresa, goes through to realize her lover is unfaithful and ill-suited for her. She accomplishes this by drawing on Santería, a practice closely linked to her own Cuban ethnicity. Without a basic understanding of Santería, it is difficult for the reader to appreciate Teresa's plight, as well as Rivera's message regarding the power of feminine intuition.

"African Powers that surround our savior: Eleggua, Ogún, Obatalá, Shangó, Yemayá, Oshún, Orula, Babalú Ayé. I want pleasure, and I want it right away!" states Teresa at the beginning of the work. The "African Powers" she is drawing on are, as she reveals, related to the practice of a religion with Caribbean roots that was influenced by Catholicism as it was spread through Central and South America. In Cuba, this religion evolved into what is known as the practice of Santería, or the Way of the Saints. The foundation of the religion rests on the belief that the world is not tangible or material but is simply a function of energy, of forces in continual process. By adding and removing energy, it is believed such movements can be changed. More specifically, Ashe is an energy or force moving towards completeness and divinity. An understanding of these principles of energy enables an individual to control his or her environment. Likewise, an understanding of Ashe enables an individual to control his or her true destiny.

The African Powers that Teresa calls on - namely, Eleggua, Ogún, Obatalá, Shangó, Yemayá, Oshún, Orula, Babalú Ayé-are collectively called Orisha, beings who represent the forces of nature and serve as guardian angels. How these powers relate to an individual is a function of consciousness. Santería advocates the notion that everyone's fundamental personality and character are attributable to an underlying pattern of energy. Returning to the story, specific energy patterns of Teresa's consciousness are represented by Orisha. The Orisha function as an extension of the true self, and by working with them and understanding them, it is believed one can learn lessons sufficient to live in harmony with nature, with creation as well as self. For Teresa, the Orisha are a vehicle for expression. They act in her defense, working behind the scenes, expressing themselves in various ways that Teresa would not consciously choose, and in this way they seem to represent the movement of her subconscious.

A consideration of those of the Orisha that Teresa calls on throughout the story illuminate this movement of Teresa's subconscious. Eleggua is identified as the owner of roads and opportunities. He confirms this, commenting on his role in Teresa's relationship by claiming he had "opened all the roads for Teresa." As in Teresa's summons, Eleggua is always called upon first because he serves as the link between humans and other Orisha. He is not evil; rather, his tricks are to be received as

opportunities for learning and growth. Upon examination of the text, Eleggua actually does support Orula, the seventh Orisha summoned, in his efforts to push the cat out the window. This action, however seemingly cruel and unjust, is not an evil act, but instead "opens all roads" for Teresa, leading her to the truth about her relationship with Armando. Eleggua's protectiveness also shines through in his response to others of the Orisha who criticize Teresa for her inability to stand up to Armando. He defends her, commanding the other Orisha to "cut it out," because Teresa is "a sweet girl."

Ogún, the god of war and iron and labor, in contrast to Eleggua, is frustrated by Teresa's flimsy backbone. When Obatalá says, "I'm staying here in Queens, guys," Ogún chimes in supportively, responding, "me too, I'm getting off." Obatalá is described as being the father of all humanity and Orisha. He created humanity and the world, and is deemed the owner of all heads/minds. Purity, peace and compassion are the primary elements comprising or making up his character. Ogún is outwardly frustrated with Teresa and her response to Armando's infidelities, claiming, "this woman's got no blood in her veins. After what he told her! And she hasn't even cut him!" This expression of frustration only comes after the reader has witnessed Obatalá's own efforts to escalate the conflict between Armando and Teresa. Obatalá is responsible for slashing Armando's tire - his intentions are to create a diversion big enough to drag out the day, thus giving Armando ample opportunity and time to confess his infidelity.

Shangó rules over lightening, thunder, drums, and dance. He is hot-blooded, strong willed, and loves all the pleasures of life, particularly drumming, dancing, song, women, and eating. In an amusing moment in the beginning of the story, he is quick to negotiate the terms of the relationship between Armando and Teresa. In an aside, another Orisha, Shangó bargains with Oshún, asking, "what about a once a week affair," between the couple, demonstrating his unwillingness to surrender the more pleasurable aspect of the relationship, i.e., his desire for sexual gratification. But Shangó has rage similar to lightening striking a tree, and in the end his temper gets the best of him. He reacts to Armando's call to another woman by making the phone receiver too hot for Armando to touch and, wishing Armando would burn himself, makes his coffee too hot as well. As Armando speaks of his engagement, revealing his betrayal to Teresa, Shangó is quick to unsheathe his sword.

The next two Orisha that Teresa summons are females: Yemayá and Oshún. Described as the mother of all, Yemayá rules over all seas and lakes. Her reign is built on association, those involving the environment of the womb, which, by extension, is related to the sea in terms of its watery, amniotic environment. She is described as being the root of all paths and manifestations, demonstrated also during Armando's confession at the end of the story. While Armando is revealing the truth to Teresa, Yemayá begins to run around the world, looking for another man for Teresa. Oshún also rules over the waters of the world, but those of the rivers and streams, known as the sweet waters, and she embodies or symbolizes love and fertility. She is also a playful seductress, characterized as "the beautiful, giggling, party-loving Oshún," demonstrated in a moment when the Orisha are ganging up on Armando. In this particular scene, she offers, "I'll get his genitals. I love his genitals." Later in the text, "party-loving Oshún" makes Teresa inquire about Armando's parents' upcoming visit. Finally, it is Oshún who

delights at the notion of Armando's demise, having "just reminded him that Teresa would find someone else soon." It makes Oshún "laugh so hard to notice that she'd just put lust and jealousy into his body." She then exclaims, "I am having the time of my life!"

The last two Orisha to come to Teresa's aid are Orula and Babalú Ayé. Orula is described in the text as "the clairvoyant," and in addition to being able to predict the future, is in charge of destiny. In the case of Teresa's destiny, Orula pushes the cat out the window, a tragedy that sets off an entire chain of events leading to Armando's confession. In addition, Orula pushes all thoughts of possible infidelity out of Teresa's mind before Armando's announcement, betrayed in a reminder to herself (Orula): "Teresa was about to really start wondering what was going on when Orula, the clairvoyant, blew the thought away. 'Don't let her be prepared for this day!'" This comment suggests that the shock value of Armando's admission would perhaps prevent Teresa from succumbing to apathy and to instead take action, the desirable action being her termination of all relations with Armando. Babalú Ayé is the only Orisha to express any compassion for Armando, and naturally so, for it is in his nature. He is a known healer, full of compassion towards human suffering. In the confusion about where to bury the cat, Babalú Ayé assures Armando that his efforts are noble.

The Orisha are assigned to an individual and collectively act as parents would towards a child. Teresa's Orisha indeed demonstrate some protective qualities akin to parenting. In keeping with the nature of Orisha, it is important to note again that these "saints" or "spirits" are functioning as individual elements comprising her consciousness. The spiritual aspect of Santería involves Teresa's own realizations, that is, at the point at which she is aware of and in harmony with the activities of the Orisha, which comprise her personality. In this case, such harmony would be achieved in her rejection of Armando, inferred by her final statement, in which she summons the Orisha a final time, asking them to "help me get over this man." Awareness and actualization (the end result of realizing through action) are achieved, granting Teresa control over her environment and her true destiny.

Such religious beliefs driving the story are also easily related to elements of Jungian psychology. Robin Robertson, *in A Beginner's Guide to Jungian Psychology,* mentions Carl Jung's archetypes. In the text the term "archetype" is used to mean "formless patterns that underlay both instinctual behaviors and primordial images." They are a function of both images and behaviors collected as a result of personal experience, shaping basic ideas/ concepts of mother and father, for example. These archetypes serve individuals just as Orisha might, by providing a frame of reference or mode of operation in which individuals effectively approach or deal with the world around them. As in Santería, Jung was interested primarily in those archetypes dealing with inner healing and growth, which he called individuation - the Shadow, the Animal/ *Animus,* and the Self.

The importance of understanding Santería in relation to Beatriz Rivera's "African Passions" is of major importance in order to adequately understand the story. Teresa's discovery of Armando's infidelities does not constitute a moment of anguish for her. Instead, as the Orisha gather to her aid, this discovery clearly culminates in victory of

spiritual proportions. The reader concludes that Teresa will be alright as she draws, in response to Armando, on her own inner strength, asking the Orisha to "help me get over this man." Teresa's spiritual shift is also evidenced in Babalú Ayé's closing comment, in which he joyfully exclaims, "she summoned me first, did you hear that?" One is left to conclude that all is right with the world.

Source: Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on "African Passions," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

In Rivera's story "African Passions," parental approval of their child's marriage partner is largely determined by economic status. Create a survey that asks specific questions about factors that are important to parents in approving a mate for their child. Hand out the survey to as many people as you can, then compile the data and write a report on the conclusions that you find. What were the most prevailing issues? Were they economically based? What role does religion or education play? Were there any concerns about same sex or bi-racial marriages? Were issues of culture raised? How often were abstract concepts such as love, beauty, peace of mind, or happiness considered?

One of the challenges that face the characters in "African Passions" is finding a place to bury their pet cat. Research the laws in your state governing the burial of pets. What are the options available to pet owners? Include in your research the industry of pet cemeteries. Is there a pet cemetery in your area? Conclude your study with a personal annotation of what you would do if you had a pet that died. Would you bury the animal? If so, where? Or would you take the pet to an animal shelter or veterinarian's office?

Aspects of Santería play a role in Rivera's story. Write a paper on the origins of this religion. Gather information about the belief systems of the Yoruba people and combine this with historic facts concerning African slaves having to give up their native creeds once they arrived in the Western world. Conclude your paper with a detailed description of how Santería combines the African deities with the Roman Catholic faith.

Fidel Castro's rise to power has caused great changes in Cuba. Write a paper on this communist leader, giving a full account of his political beliefs, a description of the people who most influenced him, and the changes that Cuba has incurred during his long tenure. Conclude your paper with your personal assessment of what Cuba's political future might be upon Castro's death.

The character Armando in Rivera's story comes across as a rather shallow person. Although "African Passions" is written in the third person omniscient point of view, the story is biased toward Teresa. Pretend that you are Armando. Describe yourself. Explain why you are ending this fourteen-year-long relationship. Defend your reasons for marrying someone who matches your parents', as well as your own, economic status. In other words, give readers of this story the other side of the story. Create some redeeming qualities for Armando.

What Do I Read Next?

Cristina García's debut novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) follows the stories captured in the diary of the protagonist Pilar. Readers are privy to Pilar's internal thoughts as she and her family face the challenges of a family torn between two countries when Pilar's parents emigrate to New York to escape the Castro regime. The novel covers the emotional effects on her parents, herself, and her siblings, as well as on her relatives who remain in Cuba.

Playing with Light (2000) is Rivera's second novel, in which her central theme explores the pitfalls of human vice and the redemptive power of literature. When Rebecca, the protagonist, tries to bring a group of her women friends together in a reading group, they experience strange time warps. This contemporary group of women reads a book set in the late nineteenth century about a group of women reading a book set in the future; and slowly the lives of the two groups of women begin to entwine. The theme of this book centers on the exploration of the circumscribed role of women in both centuries.

Rivera's novel *Midnight Sandwiches at the Mariposa Express* (1997) is told through the voice of Cuban immigrant Trish Izquierdo, a New Jersey town councilwoman, who tries to instill civic pride in her town's mostly Hispanic population. Told with humor and wit, the story unfolds through wisps of gossip that filter through the Mariposa Express, a cafeteria that acts as the unofficial town hall. The book is filled with a large cast of endearing, self-absorbed characters, who come alive in Rivera's thought-provoking first novel.

Julia Alvarez wrote *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) in order to tell the story about three sisters who were brought up in the United States by their immigrant Dominican Republic parents. In an attempt to ensure their children's success, the parents try their best to acculturate their daughters to their new country. However, in looking back at their lives, the sisters second-guess their parents' choices, because despite all their efforts, emotionally the women's lives have been a mess. Told with humor and psychological insight, this is a fun book to read.

The Voice of the Turtle: An Anthology of Cuban Stories (1998), edited by Peter R. Bush, offers an excellent introduction to Cuban literature. Included in this collection are classic authors Reinaldo Arenas, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Lydia Cabrera, and Calvert Casey, as well as modern Cuban writers Senel Paz, Zo Volds, and Jess Vega.

Further Study

Behar, Ruther, ed., *Bridges to Cuba,* University of Michigan Press, 1996.

This is a collection of art, poetry, personal essays, and fiction written by Cubans living both in Cuba and in the United States. The book captures the diverse experiences, thoughts, emotions, and conflicts caused by living in exile and by living in Cuba and undergoing the pain of being separated from family members.

Cabrera Infante, Guillermo, *Three Trapped Tigers,* Marlowe & Company, 1997.

This is a fictional account of life in Havana before Castro. Through the skillful writing of Cabrera Infante, one of Cuba's classic novelists, readers are taken on a joyful literary and linguistic ride as four friends meet each night to tell stories. Through the use of puns, tongue twisters, and palindromes (a word or sentence that reads the same backward and forward), these four characters parody classic European literature as they make their comical and clever way through the nightlife scene in Cuba.

Matibag, Eugenio, *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience: Cultural Reflections in Narrative,* University Press of Florida, 1996.

Through an interpretive reading of modern Cuban authors, this book examines ways in which the twentieth-century texts reveal the belief systems of Afro-Cubans. Explored are the cultural origins, the rituals, and the doctrines of the four major Afro-Cuban religions: Santería, Nanguismo, Palo Monte, and Voudou.

Perez, Louis A., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture,* University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Perez traces the social and cultural impact of North American culture on Cuba during the period of 1860 through 1950, the pre-Castro era. This book offers an historical perspective on life in Cuba as well as a study of Cuban identity during this time frame.

Quirk, Robert E., *Fidel Castro,* W. W. Norton, 1995.

This biography traces Castro's evolution from marginalized student radical to communist dictator of Cuba. Castro, a student protester throughout his college years, eventually abandoned his law practice to devote himself full-time to his radical politics, culminating his efforts with the fall from power of Fulgencio Batista, a United States supported politician. The book covers the details leading up to Castro's leadership, including his friendship with Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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