And of Clay Are We Created Study Guide

And of Clay Are We Created by Isabel Allende

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Unlike many novelists, Isabel Allende did not train as a fiction writer by creating short stories before moving on to novels. Her first three works of fiction were novels, and she did not turn to the short story form until readers of *Eva Luna* asked to see the stories the title character refers to. "And of Clay Are We Created" was written specifically for the 1989 collection *The Stories of Eva Luna.*

The story is about a young girl who is trapped in a mudslide, and a reporter, Rolf Carlé, who is sent in his television helicopter to cover her rescue. Unable to maintain his reporter's objectivity, he joins in the unsuccessful rescue attempt, and then stays with the girl until she dies. As he talks with the girl over a period of days, Carlé remembers and begins to address his own youthful suffering, which he has repressed for many years. At a further remove, the girl and the reporter are being watched on television by the narrator, Carlé's lover, who experiences the pain of both.

Allende has often spoken about "And of Clay Are We Created" and its importance to her. The characters of the television reporter and his lover are both based on Allende's own experiences in journalism. In an interview with Marilyn Berlin Snell, she explains that the plot of the story is also based on fact: "This story really occurred. In 1985, we saw her on every television screen in the world, the face of Omaira Sánchez, one of the thousands of victims of Colombia's Nevado Ruiz volcanic eruption. The black eyes of that girl have haunted me. . . . She is telling me something. She is talking to me about patience, about endurance, about courage." Reviewers of *The Stories of Eva Luna* have praised Allende's ability to adapt historical events into fiction, as she does in "And of Clay Are We Created."

Author Biography

Although she has traveled around the world, and has lived in the United States for more than a decade, Isabel Allende considers Latin America her true home, and sets her fiction there. She was born on August 2, 1942, in Lima, Peru, where her Chilean father held a diplomatic post. After her parents divorced, Allende and her siblings went to live with her mother's parents in Santiago, Chile. She had no contact with her father for the rest of her life, but kept close ties to his family, including his cousin Salvador Allende, who became president of Chile in 1970.

As a child, Allende read eagerly and traveled widely. Her mother remarried, and the family lived in Bolivia, Europe, and the Middle East before returning to Chile when Allende was fifteen. Her life was rather ordinary for the next several years: she went to school, married, had two children, and worked as a journalist on television programs and documentaries, much like her character Eva Luna, the narrator of "And of Clay Are We Created." Years later she credited her journalism experience with helping develop her skills as a storyteller. In 1973, Salvador Allende was murdered and the military took control of Chile's government. For a time, Isabel Allende continued her journalism work and also worked secretly against the new government, but this became too dangerous and she moved to Caracas, Venezuela, in 1975.

Six years later, she received word from Chile that her grandfather was dying and sat down to write him a farewell letter. That letter eventually became her first novel, *La casa de los espíritus (The House of the Spirits),* 1982. The novel traces three generations in a Latin American family, focusing on the women, and draws heavily on Allende's own experiences. *The House of the Spirits,* like all of Allende's fiction, was written in Spanish and translated by others into English and other languages. It has sold over six million copies in Europe, Latin America, and the United States, and it has made Allende an international literary star.

Allende's second novel, a story of political killings in Chile, was *De amor y de sombra (Of Love and Shadows)*, 1984. This was followed in 1987 by *Eva Luna*. Of all Allende's characters, Eva Luna is most like her: a feminist, a journalist, and a storyteller. In fact, the character Eva Luna often refers to stories that she never tells; it was readers' clamoring for those stories that led Allende to try her hand at short fiction and produce the volume *Cuentos de Eva Luna (The Stories of Eva Luna)*, 1989, which includes "And of Clay Are We Created." She has repeatedly stated since then that she finds short stories much more difficult to write than novels, and her subsequent books have been in the full-length novel or memoir forms.

Plot Summary

The story opens abruptly, with a startling line: "They discovered the girl's head protruding from the mudpit, eyes wide open, calling soundlessly." As soon becomes clear, the girl is thirteen-year-old Azucena, one of thousands of villagers who lived on the slopes of a mountain in Latin America. A volcanic eruption has created enough heat to melt the ice on the mountain slopes, leading in turn to tremendous mudslides that have buried entire towns and killed more than twenty thousand people. The narrator, who is never named, watches pictures of the devastation on the television news, described by her lover, Rolf Carlé, the first television reporter on the scene.

Carlé and his assistant film the first attempts to rescue the girl, but when volunteers are unable to throw a rope to her, he wades up to his waist in the mud to tie the rope under her arms himself. He smiles a charming smile and assures her that she will soon be out. But when the volunteers begin to pull on the rope, Azucena screams in pain; the mud has created such a strong suction around her that she cannot be pulled free. She can feel some kind of debris holding her legs, and while others suggest that it must be the rubble from her crushed house, she insists that it is the bodies of her dead brothers and sisters.

The narrator has watched Carlé countless times as he has covered important stories, and she has always admired his ability to be strong and detached in the face of terrible events. This time, however, she can tell by watching his eyes and hearing his voice that his objectivity is slipping, and that he is responding emotionally to Azucena. The catch in his voice is one she has never heard before. Abandoning his task as a reporter, Carlé tries everything he can think of to get the girl free, but with no success. He manages to get a tire slipped under her shoulders so that she will not slip down any further in the mud. Finally he radios for a pump, with which he could drain the water around the girl, but none will be available until the next day. He stays beside the girl all night, giving her sips of coffee to warm her and telling her entertaining stories of his adventures to keep her calm.

Back in the city, the narrator keeps her watch, moving to the television station so that she can see Carlé's satellite transmissions unedited. She phones all of the important government and business people she can think of to try to locate a pump and makes appeals on radio and television, but to no avail. Watching the screen, she feels Carlé's pain and frustration, and weeps for the girl. She sees that Carlé has reached a kind of tiredness he has never reached before, and that he has "completely forgotten the camera."

Meanwhile, the story has been picked up by other news agencies, and a crowd of reporters and cameras has surrounded Azucena and Carlé, sending pictures of the girl to millions of people around the world. A doctor briefly examines the girl, and a priest blesses her, but no one in the crowd can do anything to help her. Although the area is littered with generators and lights and wires and other technical equipment for the television crews, no one can locate a pump.

As the second day closes, Azucena and Carlé are still together, talking quietly and praying. Carlé has run out of stories of his own, and turns first to the stories the narrator has told him, and then to Austrian folk songs he learned as a child. While he continues to talk to the girl, he remembers scenes from his youth that he has repressed for decades: burying bodies at a concentration camp, his father's abuse, his retarded sister's fear, his mother's humiliation. He does not share these memories with the girl, but turns them over in his mind and examines them as he has never done before. He realizes that like Azucena he is trapped, and that his brave adventures have been a way to escape his fear. His experience with the girl has exposed him to feelings he has pushed aside, and he is closer to her emotionally than he has ever been to anyone else.

On the morning of the third day, Azucena and Carlé are both cold, hungry, and exhausted. The president of the Republic comes to be filmed with the girl. He praises the girl for being "an example to the nation" and promises to personally send a pump. But it is too late. As she watches on the screen, the narrator can tell the precise moment when the girl and the reporter give up hoping for a rescue, the moment that they accept the inevitability of death. For both, it is a moment of peace; they stop struggling. The narrator has managed to locate a pump and arranged a way to ship it, but on the third night the girl dies. Carlé takes the tire away from under her arms, and she slips down under the mud.

The last scene of the story occurs after Carlé has returned home. For some time he has not worked, but he has watched the film of himself and Azucena countless times, wondering what he might have done to help her. The narrator addresses him directly, assuring him that the wounds opened by his experience with the girl will heal in time.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Her name was Azucena, which meant Lilly. Only her head was showing from the mudpit. Her eyes were open and she called out, mouthing the words silently. She was a victim in a great volcanic tragedy, a tragedy that scientists had predicted but had been ignored by the local populations. Owing to the courage and pugnacity of distinguished reporter, Rolf Carle, Azucena's image was viewed by millions. The author of the short story is Rolf's companion and lover who watches him share the young girl's tragedy. She tries to intervene to help them both.

The geologists knew that the volcano would awaken. They set up their seismological equipment to record the impending eruption. They warned that the ice on the slopes of the volcano could be dislodged and the results could be disastrous for the populations below. However, these people who had lived below the volcano for so long, did not believe them and did not want to change their lives. The villages that scorned their predictions heard a great roar one day from somewhere beneath their cotton fields and were buried in the avalanche of stones and clay that fell on top of them along with the endless flood of molten lava. Twenty thousand human beings were said to have perished along with an infinity of animals. Forests, river disappeared. All that was left was hardened clay soup- mud and the endless bodies floating in it, some dead and some alive.

During the early morning of the tragedy, Rolf Carle is awakened with the author and begins his rapid helicopter flight to the scene of the tragedy. His assistant pans the enormous devastation on the ride there along with his ultimate destiny to wade knee high in the muck and debris with the cries of the lost and wounded. He reported all this in his calm news voice. He is a media professional seldom shaken by the events around him, armored against all tragedy by some strength of mind or heart within him. Rolf Carle was a man noted to report from dangerous places. He was a man who seemed oblivious to difficult surroundings.

He got to Azucena at the beginning and filmed those who found her. He took close-ups of her mud-smeared face and large eyes. Later, others would join in, but at the beginning, it was only Rolf. In his first attempt to rescue her, he threw a rope but she sank when she raised her hand to get it. He tried other things. Finally, he walked into the mud to save her, commenting on the smell of the corpses in the endless mud. He got her to tell him her name. He got them to throw a rope around her, but it didn't work. Was she trapped by the rubble? No, it was partially due to the corpses of the children holding on to her legs. He promised her he would save her.

No matter what Rolf did, he could not pull her out. She had problems breathing. She could not move but Rolf kept trying. Everything he tried caused her excruciating pain. Whatever was holding her had a firm grip on her body. He even tried to dive in the

horrible muck but came up coughing gravel. He finally concluded that he needed a pump. They would have to pump the debris away. A doctor said she might live until the morning if she didn't get too cold at night. There were no antibiotics to give to her. She was not really that badly wounded like many others. She was afraid to be alone that evening so he fed her coffee and talked to her throughout the night. He thought of what he could give her if she recovered. He thought of her afterlife beyond the mud.

Meanwhile, Rolf's lover pulled every stop to help the little girl. She called all the great and important people in the country- legislators and army officers, ambassadors; the head of an oil company- anyone, anywhere- just go get a pump. She felt for her and she felt for him. She was drained by her helplessness. No one seemed to care despite her national exposure. Still, while her life was fading away, thousands of volunteers combed through the mud searching for others; families offered help to orphans; doctors begged for anesthesia to lighten their grisly chores freeing the trapped. The clay did its deadly work, contaminating those who were living with the poison of decomposing bodies.

Azucena kept alive during this period. She wasn't trying to be any trouble as she waited. Rolf's beard thickened and the bags below his eyes darkened as he waited. She was simple and humble. Rolf began to forget his assignment and concentrated on comforting her, on saving her- rather than reporting on her. Besides, there were so many others to take up the task. He tried to feed her corn mush but she vomited.

It began to rain. Other reporters came. Thousands of dollars of equipment and dozens of movie and television personnel came to visit her to ask her questions, to televise her now silent lips as Rolf Carle begged for a water pump. As the pictures grew sharper, the author found herself somehow nearer to those two, who now suffered together.

Rolf began to sing her some of the songs he remembered from Austria. They talked to each other. For Rolf, the exhaustion and futility and suffering broke open his past. He told her some of it. He could not tell her when he was led by the Russians to bury the starving dead from a concentration camp. He could not tell her about the ovens where the turned people to ashes or the gallows where they hung them. Nor could he tell how they dressed his mother in a prostitute's shoes and stripped her naked and watched her sob in shame. All that he forgot, all that he repressed came alive again.

He remembered the pain of punishment by his brutal father, the belt that endlessly whipped him. He remembered his sister, Katherena, who he had abandoned and the powerful web of guilt that had engulfed him and prodded him to a courage that somehow buried it all in a tiny flame of danger. For so many years, he stood in a commanding moment of presence that made him forget his past. He began to cry. Not for sweet Azucena but for himself.

When the President of the Republic came to see her, he promised Rolf he would get it for him. Rolf beside the girl for hours but the pump never came. Finally, he knew there was nothing left. He heard her stories of how she had never been loved and told her how much he loved her. He kissed her tenderly on the forehead. He experienced a primal love for her. He told her that he loved her more than he loved his mother, his

sister or the author herself. He sees her pain and knows she will die. He prays for her death- that it will be swift, like lightening.

Although the author finally found a pump, it did not arrive in time. Rolf stayed with Azucena to the end. When she had passed out of this world, he let her slip into the mud.

The author watches him now. He is alive. He breathes. He functions as a normal man in many ways. However, inside of him, Rolf is not the same. His experience in the mudpit has changed him. He and the author often go to the station and watch the footage of Azucena again and again looking for the magic road to salvation that he had missed. He stares through windows at mountains that cannot answer him. He cannot use his camera any more. He cannot write or sing. Things have changed. His past has now crushed him. The death of the little lily of the clay field has broken him into pieces.

The author is patient. She believes he will heal and they will be together again.

Analysis

This is a sad, complex little story about the death of a very young girl. In another way, it is the story of lack of focus, the ignoring of appropriate detail in the wake of impending disaster. It is the story of our age, which is consumed by voyeurism and is rendered ineffective by its advanced technology. The sturdy focus of the camera can distort and overwhelm the capacity for human focus and the ability to function well in the face of tragedy. This story is a lesson for a society consumed by its electronic capacities and crippled by its human deficiencies, a society that has lost its priorities, a society that lacks attention.

Actually, the story of lack of attention begins when a group of small villages ignore scientists' warning about an impending volcanic eruption. Why does this happen? Perhaps it is just a fear of changing their lifestyle suddenly- of trying to escape when generations have lived happily under the shadow of a quiet volcano. Perhaps it is a lack of belief or concern about science, a superstitious reason for lacking focus. Perhaps it is simple laziness. It is too much trouble to evacuate. Whatever the reason, the lack of focus on this little detail causes thousands to die.

How much is made of this by the seismologists is not really known. They go and set up their equipment anyway. Their science is not infallible. Neither probably is their agility at public relations but not much is disclosed about this by the author.

The author focuses on one object of media attention.

The girl, Azucena, is a victim of a great national tragedy from which she is flung into the limelight only to be ignored by the authorities who capitalized on her slow death. It is a media tragedy, a life and death struggled that magnetized millions of dollars of special television equipment, helicopters and personnel but fell short of a simple water pump, necessary to save her life.

It is also the story of how a hardened, professional newsman, Rolf Carle, who has hid his own personal tragedy behind the comfort of a camera is broken by the events surrounding a simple, tragic story. The horror of his childhood in Nazi Austria comes pouring out of him in the middle of a dark night while he is trying to comfort a dying child.

The author characterizes herself as the life companion of Rolf. She is there with him, though at a distance, through the whole of the tragedy. She works at the core of the dilemma, which is the absence of a water pump and the labyrinth of unfeeling beaureaucrats who she tries to contact.

The author watches Azucena drown in the mudpit of media overexposure, where someone in desperate pain is so saturated by media that their plight becomes the icon of attention and their solution is lost. Thousands of dollars are poured into a little girl to chronicle her suffering and death when the solution is difficult but rather simple. Even the President of the Republic fails her. Even when he makes his own promise under the glaring lights. We all spend our lives hiding from pain. We are indifferent to things that we love because if we touch them to profoundly we may see the pain underneath them.

On a personal level, this story is a three-way tragedy- three lives lost in the glaring lights, abandoned, in a way, by millions of voyeurs and blind, unthinking officials lost in their public personaes in the midst of unthinkable tragedy. The story is about how the news, in shaping a story, can lose its focus. In the wake of this obvious lack of basic human concern, the professional handling the story is affected by this obvious imbalance. His professionalism is consumed by his compassion. Part of the story is how this compassion breaks him, cripples him, at least temporarily. For his life, as a child, was also part of a human nightmare.

When he was trying to save Azucena, Rolf was probably trying to save himself- as a child, when he was drowning in the nightmare of holocaust. No one had been there for him. No one had showed him how to save his sister. No one had brought him out of the darkness.

Perhaps only God can be everywhere. But it seems strange the terrible suffering of a little child watched by so many could produce so little help. Still, despite her suffering, there were thousands and thousands who died because someone didn't hear a muffled scream or passed by the edge of a mudpit and didn't see a body floating at the edge of a dislodged boulder. Perhaps some of it was lack of focus and some of it was due to the sheer quantity of human suffering and the shortage of resources.

Although we could lose ourselves like Rolf in the guilty tragedy of life, losing ourselves does not necessary help others or ourselves in our quest for survival. Sometimes a premature surrender to despair can also result in a lack of focus. Focus is what we need to get us through life- to choose what is good and important, to define our priorities.

Characters

Azucena

Azucena, whose name translated into English would be "Lily," is a girl who has been buried up to her neck in a mudslide. The rest of her village has been destroyed, and she says that the bodies of her dead brothers and sisters are holding her legs. As the story opens, the girl has just been found, and a rescue effort is underway. She has also been discovered by the national news media, and soon a crowd of television reporters comes to interview her on camera. While her story is broadcast around the world, she quietly talks with Rolf Carlé, the first reporter on the scene, about her life. Although she is thirteen years old, she has never traveled outside her small Latin American village, and she has never known love. She does not understand that she is being featured on international television, nor does she understand why the president of the Republic himself comes to call her "an example to the nation." After three days and nights trapped in the cold mud, she dies, and sinks away beneath the surface of the clay.

Rolf Carlé

Rolf Carlé is a middle-aged television reporter, the first reporter to reach Azucena's side. He has gone to her to cover the dramatic story of her rescue, but, for the first time in his career, he is unable to maintain his professional objectivity. He joins and then leads the attempts to rescue the girl; he stays beside her for three days and nights to keep her calm. As the reporter and the girl talk, Carlé begins to remember long-repressed memories: folk songs from his native Austria, his abusive father, and how he and his retarded sister lived their lives in fear. Just as he realizes that he is trapped in his pain just as Azucena is trapped in the mud, he also realizes that the girl will not be rescued. Before she dies, he tells her how important she has been to him. As the story ends he is grieving for Azucena and for his own wasted youth. But confronting the girl's death has shown him how to confront his pain and his healing has begun.

Female Narrator

The narrator (also known as Eva Luna) is Rolf Carlé's longtime lover, a woman who has many times said goodbye to him as he has gone off to cover important stories. Though she is never named in this story, readers of the entire collection from which the story is taken know that she is Eva Luna, a maker of television documentaries. As she watches Carlé on television, she can tell that the girl has touched him in a new way. She can read every emotion in his face and begins to feel what he feels. For three days she watches every bit of coverage she can, stopping only to make phone calls, trying to locate a pump to help with the rescue. She believes that she and Carlé can communicate through the screen. She knows when he begins to confront his past, and to tell the child things he has never told her or anyone else. She knows when he and the

girl finally accept the reality of death. And, as she reveals in the last paragraph of the story, the only one addressed to Carlé, she knows that when he has recovered from the painful experience, he will be stronger than ever before.

Lily

See Azucena.

Eva Luna

See Female Narrator.

Themes

Memory and Reminiscence

For Rolf Carlé, the most important thing that happens during his days with Azucena is his confrontation with his long-buried memories. For years he has refused to think about the horrors of his own past: having to bury concentration camp prisoners, and living with an abusive father who sometimes locked young Rolf in a cabinet. Throughout his professional life as a journalist, he has taken extraordinary risks, choosing to cover wars and natural disasters and placing himself in danger. Talking with Azucena, he comes to realize that these risks have been attempts to build up his courage so that one day he might face his memories and his fears.

The process of remembering is a painful one, bringing this brave, rugged man to tears. Azucena thinks he is crying because of her suffering, but he tells her, "I'm crying for myself. I hurt all over." The pain continues long after the girl's death. When Carlé returns home, he has no interest in working, or writing, or singing. He distances himself from everything he loves, including the narrator, and spends hours staring at the mountains and remembering. The narrator understands the process. She knows it will take time "for the old wounds to heal," but knows also that when the process is complete Carlé will return to her.

Individual versus Nature

The theme of people battling with nature runs through "And of Clay Are We Created." Time and again, humans set their smartest minds and their most advanced technologies against the indifferent forces of nature and each time humans are defeated. The story is set into motion by the tremendous eruption of the volcano. Using scientific instruments called seismographs, geologists have been able to predict that the mountain is about to erupt, but their technology can only take them so far. They cannot stop the eruption, they cannot say precisely when the eruption will occur, and they cannot convince the inhabitants of the mountain slope to believe their warnings. In spite of ever more sophisticated technology, the forces of nature are far more powerful than the forces of humans.

Allende makes the point clearer when Azucena is trapped. In spite of all the technology at their disposal, a large crowd of people cannot get one small girl free from the grasp of the mud. The news media can assemble an impressive collection of "spools of cable, tapes, film, videos, precision lenses, recorders, sound consoles, lights, reflecting screens, auxiliary motors, cartons of supplies, electricians, sound technicians, and cameramen," but they cannot deliver and operate one pump to get the girl out. The narrator phones every important person she can think of, and makes appeals on radio and television, but even her superior communications network produces no results. And

while millions of people around the world are watching the girl's struggle on television, they are all helpless against nature.

Cycle of Life

From the beginning, Rolf Carlé is determined to rescue the girl, to "snatch her from death." But although she is trapped and can barely breathe, the girl does not struggle and does not seem desperate. She seems to know that she will die and to accept her fate. Some of her attitude may come from her Roman Catholic faith, which teaches that life and death are both gifts of God. Faith does not seem important to Carlé, who never mentions God or religion in his long talks with the girl, and he believes that he can defeat death.

Eventually, the adult man learns from and is consoled by the young girl. She teaches him to pray, and gradually he comes to accept her fate. When he leans over to kiss her goodbye, both are saved from despair, and they are figuratively "saved from the clay," or from the bounds of life and the earth. A few hours later, Azucena dies, and her body literally sinks back into the clay. Through the story, she has been in the clay, above it, and below it. The title's statement that "of clay are we created" holds out a promise that new life will be created from the same clay that took Azucena, and that the girl's slipping into the clay is part of the cycle of life.

Style

Point of View and Narration

Point of view is handled in an unusual way in "And of Clay Are We Created." The narrator tells most of the story in the first person, and yet most readers would say that she operates only on the edges of the action—she is an observer more than she is an actor. While it is common for a narrator to relate events she has witnessed, rather than participated in, it is unusual to have a narrator who reports what she has seen on television. On the one hand, the narrator shares with millions of others the experience of watching Azucena and Rolf Carlé on television; on the other hand, she has intimate knowledge of Carlé and access to unedited transmissions, and these set her apart from the other viewers. The television screen brings her closer to the reporter and the girl, and yet she is separated from them by hundreds of miles.

The final section of the story is told by the same narrator, but she speaks directly to Carlé, using the second person point of view. Again, the point of view is unusual. The narrator is telling Carlé things about himself that he surely already knows, recounting for him his recent actions and inactions, and there is no indication that he responds. Like the first-person point of view in the rest of the story, the point of view here creates an atmosphere that is at once intimate and distant. The narrator is physically close to Carlé now, but more distant emotionally than when she was watching him on television.

For Allende herself, point of view is one of the most important elements of "And of Clay We Are Created." In an interview with Farhat Iftekharuddin, she explains that when she first tried to write the story she told it from "an intellectual point of view" and focused on the girl Azucena. She eventually came to feel that this point of view was not presenting the proper story, and that her focus should be not on the girl but on Carlé. She wrote another draft of the story from the reporter's point of view, but found this unsatisfactory as well. Finally, she discovered that her focus should be on "the story of the woman who is watching through a screen the man who holds the girl," and she rewrote the story yet again, this time using the point of view of the unnamed female narrator.

Epilogue

An epilogue is a concluding section to a literary work, one that adds to the main composition and rounds it off. It would be possible to think of "And of Clay Are We Created" as complete as soon as Azucena sinks "slowly, a flower in the mud." If the story were concerned mainly with the girl or with the reporter, this would be a satisfying ending. But because Allende is concerned primarily with the development of the narrator throughout the story, she offers the final section, or epilogue, to bring the narrator back to center stage. The epilogue is set apart and dramatically different from the rest of the story: the time, the place, and even the point of view shift abruptly between the main story and the epilogue.

Dramatic Irony

As it is usually understood, dramatic irony is the contrast between what the characters in a story understand and the deeper understanding of the story's readers. Several instances of dramatic irony shape "And of Clay Are We Created." For example, it is ironic that a group of people who can assemble a tremendous collection of technical gear to show a trapped Azucena to the world cannot find a pump and get her out. With the exception of Rolf Carlé, the media people themselves do not see the irony; there is no hint that they find the situation remarkable or frustrating. The reader, guided by the narrator who repeatedly mentions the pump and describes the maze of cables and machines, sees the absurdity that the characters themselves do not see. Another example of dramatic irony, which may or may not be seen by the narrator, is the fact that the narrator is closer emotionally to Carlé while she is watching him on television than she is when they are reunited. The effect of dramatic irony in this story is that the reader finds lessons in the story that the characters themselves do not see.

Historical Context

Latin America in the 1980s

Although the volcanic eruption on which "And of Clay Are We Created" is based occurred in Colombia in 1985, Allende does not specify the date and location in which the story is set. Like the rest of the collection *The Stories of Eva Luna,* the story is understood to take place somewhere in Latin America, sometime during the 1980s. The 1980s were a turbulent time for Latin America, the region encompassing approximately twenty nations in South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean where Romance languages are spoken.

Politically, Latin America was a region of great instability during this period. Many countries, including Argentina, Haiti, Panama, El Salvador, Grenada, and Guatemala, were under the control of repressive military dictators. In Colombia, armed guerillas challenged the government, which they accused of corruption, and were killed by the hundreds. Chile, Allende's native country, was ruled from 1973 until 1989 by General Augusto Pinochet, chief executive of the country and head of the armed forces. Pinochet held onto his power by torturing, killing, or banishing thousands of Chileans who opposed him. Books and magazines that were considered unfavorable to the government were banned or burned, and their authors were punished.

The effects of this political turmoil have been significant for writers and for Latin-American literature. Allende learned about the Colombian disaster the same way Eva Luna learned about Azucena— by watching the television news. Allende was living in California at the time, having been forced into exile shortly after Pinochet took control of the country by murdering Allende's uncle, Chilean President Salvador Allende. Her greatest novel, *The House of the Spirits,* is in part about the political situation in Chile, yet she wrote it while living in Venezuela. Similarly, other great Latin-American writers have produced important work while in exile. Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez wrote about Colombia while living in Mexico. Mario Vargas Llósa wrote about Peru from exile in Paris. Other writers have shared their fate, writing about homelands in struggle and homelands they could not return to.

The Boom and After

The period roughly covering the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s is often referred to as "The Boom" in Latin-American literature. Previously, Latin-American writing, particularly novels, resembled the European works on which they were patterned. During the Boom, writers including Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortazar, and Mario Vargas Llósa experimented with new dramatic forms specifically intended to reflect a Latin-American consciousness. García Márquez in particular became known for "magical realism," a combination of realism and fantasy through which fantastical events are narrated in calm, expressionless prose, as though the

narrator had no idea that anything unexpected was occurring. Boom writers were overtly political, reflecting the shifting perceptions and instability of Latin American political and social life, and they were predominantly male.

Allende's early fiction is sometimes compared with the magical realism of García Márquez, but *The Stories of Eva Luna* reflects the writing of the post-Boom generation. The writers of this period include many women, and their writing is less political. The new works also tend to be less dense than works from the Boom, intentionally more accessible to the general reader rather than only the intellectual elite. They feature characters from a wide spectrum of social classes, and frequently focus on themes of love and relationships, and on issues facing women.

Critical Overview

Criticism about Allende's works has focused on the novels, especially on *The House of the Spirits,* her first novel, usually considered to be her best. Although most critics admired the magical realism and the passion of *The House of the Spirits* and found a new authentic voice in Allende's writing, some complained that the novel was an inferior imitation of the work of Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for literature. The debate over García Márquez's influence and Allende's talent continued through the discussion of her next two novels, *Of Love and Shadows* and *Eva Luna.*

Another issue for critics has been Allende's feminism. She has been heralded for her strong feminine voice, but criticized for turning her male characters into stereotypes of traditional machismo and for creating women characters who desire dangerous or otherwise inappropriate men. The third major issue for Allende critics has been her status as a Latin-American writer, the label she prefers for herself. Although there is no formal criticism of "And of Clay Are We Created" other than mentions in reviews of *The Stories of Eva Luna,* these critical issues all surface repeatedly.

The foremost American critic of Allende's work is Patricia Hart, author of *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende* (1989). In a review of the short stories, which she deems less successful than the novels, Hart finds three key elements: "lush, hyperbolic reality, a female sensibility and some none-too-subtle parodying of male stars of the Boom." Hart insists that Allende does not imitate Boom writers, but mocks them, turning their style to her own purposes. On the other hand, Suzanne Ruta's review reveals genuine irritation with Allende's echoes of the Boom, stating, "It's Allende's glib, sentimental treatment . . . and her cutesy allusions to other writers' inventions, that I dislike."

Critics have also divided over how well Allende handles the short story form. Louise Bernikow praises Allende's unique voice, drawing special attention to the stories' sense of place and visual imagery. In Bernikow's judgment, Allende "has only gotten better from one book to the next." Eleanor Bader finds the collection "touching, provocative, and entertaining," and the character of Carlé "memorable and captivating." Other reviewers were disappointed by *The Stories of Eva Luna,* feeling the short stories were too often melodramatic. Some observe that the short form did not give Allende room to create the rich characters and complex plots for which she had drawn praise. Dan Cryer describes the stories in the collection as "entertaining as long as you don't think much about them," and finds the plotting "energetic but given to soap opera."

Allende herself has admitted that she finds writing short stories much more difficult than writing novels, and less conducive to the "embroidery" she uses to steer and embellish her writing. Interviewed by Farhat Iftekharuddin she commented, "I would much rather write a thousand pages of a long novel than a short story. The shorter, the more difficult it is."

Although he judges the short stories as "some of [Allende's] finest work," Daniel Harris questions the author's political stance and her authenticity as a Latin-American writer. He describes her as "a gifted opportunist" who "shamelessly sentimentalizes the droll aborigines of primitive society," and "ransacks South America as if it were an insipid cache of folksiness." The risk in this stance, he explains, is that the horrors and atrocities described in the stories become mere clichés.

Although critics have not always been kind to Allende, the reading public has embraced her work enthusiastically. *The House of the Spirits,* originally written in Spanish as is all of Allende's work, has been translated into dozens of languages. It has sold over six million copies around the world, and been made into a film starring Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons. Her subsequent books have also sold well, making her the most well-known and widely read female Latin-American writer in history.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Bily teaches writing and literature at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan, and writes for a variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she looks at the development of the narrator in "And of Clay Are We Created."

Isabel Allende's "And of Clay Are We Created" is the last story in her only collection of short stories, *The Stories of Eva Luna.* All of the twenty-three stories in the collection are narrated by Eva Luna, who was also the title character of Allende's third novel. Luna tells the stories while in bed with her lover, Rolf Carlé, drawing her inspiration from Scheherazade, who in the *Arabian Nights* saves her sister's life and her own by telling stories for a thousand and one nights. Readers who come to "And of Clay Are We Created" having already read *Eva Luna* and the rest of the short stories will understand all of this before they begin. They will be familiar with the characters Luna and Carlé and the relationship between them, and they will know the value Luna places on stories and storytelling.

For readers who encounter the story away from the context of the collection, however, the reading experience is a very different one. These readers do not know the name of the narrator, or that she is a writer of television dramas, or that she is a person to whom Carlé said, "You think in words; for you, language is an inexhaustible thread you weave as if life were created as you tell it." For these readers, it would be easy to ignore the narrator and to focus instead on the dramatic story of Azucena, the girl trapped in the mud, and the television reporter Rolf Carlé who tries to rescue her. The narrator's narration, certainly, focuses on Carlé and the changes he undergoes through his experience with the girl. Any mentions by the narrator of her own reactions and emotions are intended to help her audience understand her lover's ordeal.

Allende, however, has spoken frequently about her intentions for the story. For her, the story is about "the woman who is watching through a screen the man who holds the girl. This filter of the screen creates an artificial filter and terrible distance but also a terrible proximity because you see details that you would not see if you were actually there. And so, the story is about the change in the woman who watches the man holding the girl who is dying." If this is true (and we must give Allende credit for insight into her own work), what is the change in the narrator throughout "And of Clay Are We Created," as it can be observed by a reader of this story alone? If the story is meant to demonstrate what happens to a woman watching her lover from afar, what does it ultimately reveal?

When Carlé leaves to cover the story, neither he nor the narrator understands what is to come. The narrator reports that she "had no presentiments." Carlé has often been the first on the scene, and has covered dramatic and dangerous stories before "with awesome tenacity." The narrator has watched him on television many times, and admired the way nothing seems to touch him or frighten him. She has learned over the years that his reporter's objectivity is really a protective mechanism that shields him from his own emotions. Knowing how unemotional he tries to hold himself, the narrator

reacts strongly to the sound of his resolve slipping when he promises Azucena he will get her out: "I could hear his voice break, and I loved him more than ever."

Until Carlé's objectivity starts to give way, the narrator feels herself to be a part of the large audience watching him. Twice she refers to herself as part of the "we" who see Carlé and the girl on the screen. But after he begins to change his stance, her own changes as well. Now she moves from her home to the television studio, to be "near his world," and she refers to herself as his partner instead of as his audience. She has overheard his plea for a pump, and goes on radio and television "to see if there wasn't *someone* who could help us." Now the "us" she belongs to is Carlé and herself.

Ironically, the television screen both emphasizes the distance between the two and brings them closer together—at least, it brings the narrator close to Carlé, who is not thinking of her. It is a one-way closeness. Though the reporter surely knows that his lover will be watching on television for any sign he might send her, he has "completely forgotten the camera." Yet she feels the child's pain, and Carlé's frustration, and believes that she is "there with him." She tries the "frenzied and futile" gesture of sending him encouragement through mental telepathy. By the end of the first morning, she is reduced to tears and emotionally drained. On the second day the sensation is stronger: "I had the horrible sensation that Azucena and Rolf were by my side, separated from me by impenetrable glass." She can see them, but they cannot see her. She feels what they feel, but they are unaware of her.

On the morning of the third day, the narrator can see that "something fundamental" has changed in Carlé. "The girl has touched a part of him that he himself had no access to, a part he had never shared with me." The generous and loving part of the narrator is glad to see this change, but one wonders whether there is some jealousy when Carlé assures the girl that he loves her "more than all the women who had slept in his arms, more than he loved me, his life companion." There is more than compassion in the narrator's heart when she says that she "would have given anything to be trapped in that well in her place."

Although there is hardly enough evidence in this brief story to lead to an informed opinion about two human hearts, the relationship between the narrator and Rolf Carlé (she nearly always refers to him by his first and last name) seems unbalanced, as though the woman has no other purpose in her life other than to make things easier for the man—as though she is always watching him through a screen while he is unaware of her. When he is called away before dawn to cover the story of the mudslide, the narrator gets up to fix coffee while he packs, and they say goodbye as they always do. Once he is gone, she seems to be lost, a woman with nothing else to do even for one day: "I sat in the kitchen, sipping my coffee and planning the long hours without him, sure that he would be back the next day."

Of course, he is not back the next day, nor the day after that. The narrator, with no children to attend to, or friends to worry with, spends the time at the National Television studio because she cannot "bear the wait at home." She has "often spent entire nights" with her lover there, helping him with his work. At the end of the story, when Carlé has

returned to her, she seems to have no responsibilities or desires other than to accompany him to the station to watch the videos again and again, and to stay beside him waiting as he sits "long hours before the window, staring at the mountains."

Carlé has passed through hell and back and is, the narrator believes, in the process of becoming more open and mature emotionally. The narrator sees this, telling him, "You are back with me, but you are not the same man." Are there ways in which the narrator is not the same woman as she was before? The changes are, at best, subtle, hard to see. Although clearly she has experienced a range of strong emotions throughout the ordeal, she does not seem to have taken much away from her experience of seeing her relationship reflected in the glass of the television screen. If Carlé has expanded his own vision of how he might live his life, the narrator seems to be satisfied with the status quo. Her wish in the final line is the rather bleak hope that "we shall again walk hand in hand, *as before"*(italics mine).

Critic Suzanne Ruta, commenting on the full collection of *The Stories of Eva Luna,* explains that through the telling of her stories to Carlé, Luna is "trying to help him break free of the cool, distant persona he's made for himself." The framework of "a troubled man and his helpful lover" gives structure to the collection, and leads naturally to "And of Clay Are We Created," in which "Scheherazade falls silent, acknowledging the limits of her power." For readers of this one story alone, there is no hint that the narrator's stories are intended to help Carlé, or that she feels herself to have a strength he does not have. Rather than presenting a woman who under extraordinary circumstances reaches the limits of her power, the story seems to present a woman with no power of her own.

Source: Cynthia Bily, in an essay for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses narration, pointof- view, and the theme of intimacy and distance, in Allende's story.

The short story "And of Clay Are We Created" by Isabel Allende is written from the perspective of a woman whose "life companion," Rolf Carlé, a TV news journalist, has been sent on an assignment to a South American country to cover a catastrophic avalanche which has just taken place. The story is told from *the first-person point of view* of the narrator, as she learns only from television news coverage of Rolf Carlé's experiences at the site of the catastrophe. While there, he comes to the aid of a thirteen-year-old girl, Azucena, whose body is trapped up to her neck in mud. Rolf Carlé quickly drops his journalistic duties to attempt to rescue and to console the girl over a period of three days, until she dies, still trapped in the mud. In the process, the tragic situation of Azucena, and the compassion of the reporter who stays by her side, becomes an international media event. The narrator is thus able to learn of her lover's experience only through television broadcasts of the event. In the following essay, I discuss the relationship between the narrator and her far-away companion, Rolf Carlé, as experienced from her limited perspective on his life-changing experience, which occurs thousands of miles away from her.

"And of Clay Are We Created" is published in Allende's collection entitled *The Stories of Eva Luna.* Although it is a book of short stories, each one is based on the fictional character of Eva Luna, who appeared in Allende's novel *Eva Luna*. Thus, although the narrator of this short story is not named, the collection as a whole indicates that she is Eva Luna. A "Prologue" to the collection is written by the fictional character Rolf Carlé, Eva Luna's lover and "life companion." This "Prologue" is written from the *second-person point of view,* meaning that the narrator, Rolf Carlé, addresses his narrative to "you"—in this case, Eva Luna. Rolf Carlé describes a scene of passionate lovemaking between himself and Eva Luna. He represents the experience as one of intense emotional closeness that also allows for the experience of temporary emotional distance. He says that "We were too close to see one another, each absorbed in our urgent rite, enveloped in our shared warmth and scent." The idea that the lovers are "too close to see one another," implies that such intense intimacy involves a loss of perspective. He goes on to describe the experience of their lovemaking as one in which the lovers are so close that they experience solitude and distance from one another, which leads them back into a state of physical and emotional intimacy: "In the final instant we glimpsed absolute solitude, each lost in a blazing chasm, but soon we returned from the far side of that fire to find ourselves embraced amid a riot of pillows beneath white mosquito netting." This description portrays a relationship in which moments of emotional distance—"each lost in a blazing chasm"—are an integral element of the experience of emotional intimacy—"too close to see one another." He goes on to compare his experience of their relationship to that of a spectator looking at a photograph or painting of two lovers. He says that, "From an indefinite distance I am

looking at the picture, which includes me." This continues the theme that their relationship is one characterized by both intimacy and distance, the distance reinforcing the experience of intimacy, and the intimacy allowing each the freedom to embark on their own solitary emotional "voyage." He continues that "I am spectator and protagonist"; As "protagonist" he experiences the painting, or the relationship, intimately, while as "spectator," he experiences the painting or relationship with a certain degree of distance. He goes on to describe the experience as one in which he simultaneously feels bonded with his lover, and alone, both close and distant: "I am there with you but also here, alone, in a different frame of consciousness."

The theme of a relationship built on the simultaneous experience of intimacy and distance, union and solitude, at the emotional, psychological, and physical level, as put forth in the "Prologue," sheds light on a parallel theme in the final short story of the collection, "And of Clay Are We Created." Throughout the story, the narrator, Eva Luna, bridges the temporary physical distance between herself and Rolf Carlé through drawing on the ongoing emotional and psychological bond between the two of them.

The narrator describes her experience of Rolf Carlé's preparations for leaving on the assignment in terms which indicate that the two routinely experience brief geographical separations throughout a relationship, which is otherwise characterized by togetherness. She explains that "When the station called before dawn, Rolf Carlé and I were together." Once he has prepared to leave, "we said goodbye, as we had so many times before." She is both used to these routine and brief separations, and used to his subsequent returns; after he leaves for the assignment, she "sat in the kitchen, sipping my coffee and planning the long hours without him, sure that he would be back the next day."

*A third-person,*objective, journalistic, sometimes scientific, point-of-view is utilized by the narrator in reporting the factual events surrounding the avalanche. This creates a feeling of great distance between the narrator and the faraway catastrophe, as if reading of it in the newspaper: "Geologists had set up their seismographs weeks before and knew that the mountain had awakened again. For some time they had predicted that the heat of the eruption could detach the eternal ice from the slopes of the volcano, but no one heeded their warnings. . . . The towns in the valley went about their daily life, deaf to the moaning of the earth, until that fateful Wednesday night in November when a prolonged roar announced the end of the world, and walls of snow broke loose, rolling in an avalanche of clay, stones, and water that descended on the villages and buried them beneath unfathomable meters of telluric vomit." She goes on to report that the assessment of the "magnitude of the cataclysm" included the calculation that "beneath the mud lay more than twenty thousand human beings and an indefinite number of animals," dead and decaying. Furthermore, "Forests and rivers had also been swept away, and there was nothing to be seen but an immense desert of mire."

Because all of the information the narrator receives about her lover's experience is gained through watching national television broadcasts of the disaster, she describes much of her experience of this reportage in the first person plural. Thus, although she is observing the experience of someone with whom she is personally intimate, she aligns

her own perspective with that of the mass audience of TV news spectators, describing the experience as that of a collective "we." She explains that "We watched on our screens the footage captured by his assistant's camera, in which he was up to his knees in muck, a microphone in his hand, in the midst of a bedlam of lost children, wounded survivors, corpses, and devastation. The story came to us in his calm voice." However, even while watching him on TV, the narrator experiences the national broadcasts from the perspective of her intimate knowledge of Rolf Carlé: "He smiled at [the girl trapped in the mud] with that smile that crinkles his eyes and makes him look like a little boy." Even via poor television transmission, broadcast from thousands of miles away, the narrator notices intimate details of Rolf Carlé's emotional state, and experiences increased love and intimacy with him: "'Don't worry, we'll get you out of here,' Rolf promised. Despite the quality of the transmission, I could hear his voice break, and I loved him more than ever."

Eva Luna also describes Rolf Carlé's thoughts during his three days spent by the side of the little girl. The narrator could only have obtained this information from Rolf Carlé himself, having told her about his own experience of the event, once he had returned home: "Rolf Carlé, buoyed by a premature optimism, was convinced that everything would end well . . . Azucena would be transported by helicopter to a hospital where she would recover rapidly and where he could visit her and bring her gifts. He thought, She's already too old for dolls, and I don't know what would please her; maybe a dress. I don't know much about women, he concluded, amused, reflecting that although he had known many women in his lifetime, none had taught him these details."

Eva Luna experiences her relationship with Rolf Carlé as both geographically distant, and emotionally intimate. Her only contact with her lover is via the impersonal and public avenue of the television broadcast: "Many miles away, I watched Rolf Carlé and the girl on a television screen." However, even at this level of remove, she gets as close to him as possible by watching him on the TV screen from the station where he works: "I could not bear to wait at home, so I went to National Television, where I often spent entire nights with Rolf editing programs." This allows her to more intimately experience his feelings, although she has no direct contact with him: "There, I was near his world, and I could at least get a feeling of what he lived through during those three decisive days." Although her only contact with him is via the TV screen, she is able to bridge the geographical distance between them through their ongoing emotional intimacy with one another, and live through his experience at this emotional level: "The screen reduced the disaster to a single plane and accentuated the tremendous distance that separated me from Rolf Carlé; nonetheless, I was there with him. The child's every suffering hurt me as it did him; I felt his frustration, his impotence." She attempts to further bridge the distance between herself and her lover via some form of mental telepathy: "Faced with the impossibility of communicating with him, the fantastic idea came to me that if I tried, I could reach him by force of mind and in that way give him encouragement. I concentrated until I was dizzy—a frenzied and futile activity." She is able to maintain her emotional empathy for Rolf Carlé's experience, to the degree that she "would be overcome with compassion and burst out crying." Yet she cannot completely overcome the tremendous distance which remains between what Rolf Carlé is experiencing at the site of the disaster and what she experiences from watching it on TV thousands of miles

away: "at other times, I was so drained I felt as if I were staring through a telescope at the light of a star dead for a million years." At this point, she experiences the distance at an exaggerated level: he seems to her to be not just on another continent, but on another star far out in the universe. This exaggeration causes her to feel removed from him by time, as well as by distance, looking at "the light of a star dead for a million years." These exaggerated feelings include the image of her lover, like the star, as long dead, and therefore much less accessible to her. Nonetheless, "even from that enormous distance," she can "sense" his private emotional state based on what she sees via national TV broadcast: "Rolf Carlé had a growth of beard, and dark circles beneath his eyes; he looked near exhaustion. Even from that enormous distance I could sense the quality of his weariness, so different from the fatigue of other adventures."

When equipment is brought in to produce "sharper pictures and clearer sound" on the television broadcasts, Eva Luna is brought into that much more intimate contact with her lover's experience: "the distance seemed suddenly compressed." Yet, while brought that much closer to the event via TV broadcast, she maintains the feeling of "impenetrable" separation from Rolf Carlé: "I had the horrible sensation that Azucena and Rolf were by my side, separated from me by impenetrable glass." With this increased quality in the broadcasting, she is at least able to experience more fully Rolf Carlé's actions throughout the incident: "I was able to follow events hour by hour; I knew everything my love did to wrest the girl from her prison and help her endure her suffering." Hearing only "fragments" of his conversation with the girl, Eva Luna knows him well enough to "guess the rest" of what he has said to her.

Try as he might, Rolf Carlé is unable to rescue the girl from the mud, and in the end can only console her. Eva Luna's emotional connection to him is so strong that, just based on what she sees him doing via TV broadcast, she intuits an almost magical knowledge of the consequences of this experience for Rolf Carlé's emotional life: "I, glued to the screen like a fortune-teller to her crystal ball, could tell that something fundamental had changed in him. I knew somehow that during the night his defenses had crumbled and he had given in to grief; finally he was vulnerable. The girl had touched a part of him that he himself had no access to, a part he had never shared with me. Rolf had wanted to console her, but it was Azucena who had given him consolation." From this great geographical distance, Eva Luna "recognized the precise moment at which Rolf gave up the fight and surrendered to the torture of watching the girl die." In spite of the distance, Eva Luna experiences herself as having bridged the gap between herself and her lover, feeling herself to be fully experiencing what he and the girl are experiencing together. She says "I was with them, three days and two nights, spying on them from the other side of life."

However, when Rolf Carlé returns home from this life-changing experience, the geographical distance between the two lovers is finally bridged, but an emotional distance has developed. Eva Luna, addressing Rolf Carlé directly through second-person narrative address, tells him, "You are back with me, but you are not the same man." The experience has caused him to emotionally withdraw from his lover, embarking on a "voyage" deep within himself. Eva Luna remains physically close to him, "beside you," waiting for his emotional "return" to their former intimacy, "walking

hand in hand." In the final words of the story, she tells him, "Beside you, I wait for you to complete the voyage into yourself, for the old wounds to heal. I know that when you return from your nightmares, we shall again walk hand in hand, as before." As in the "Prologue," the second-person narrative address to "you" reaffirms the long-term intimacy between the two lovers, despite this temporary emotional distance.

"And of Clay Are We Created" is characterized by a shifting narrative point-of-view and address, which captures the experience of simultaneous intimacy and distance experienced throughout the relationship of the two lovers. The "Prologue" to the story collection describes a pair of lovers who are so physically and emotionally intimate that their lovemaking allows them the freedom to "glimpse absolute solitude, each lost in a blazing chasm," and yet "soon return to the far side of that fire," and find themselves in an intimate lovers' embrace. The use of second-person address in the prologue—Rolf Carlé addressing his lover directly as "you"— increases the feeling of intimacy between them, as if inviting the reader into the fold of their relationship. The narration of the story "And of Clay Are We Created" describes the experience of emotional intimacy between the two lovers, despite great geographical distance and contact limited to that of a national television broadcast. The final paragraph describes the lover, returned home from this lifechanging experience, to find himself emotionally distant from his "life companion," despite their physical proximity. The relationship, however, is one that thrives on such fluctuations between intimacy and distance, be it geographical or emotional, and always maintains the promise of renewed closeness, the assurance that, whatever the current distance between them, "we shall again walk hand in hand, as before."

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Behar examines Allende's inspiration for writing "And of Clay Are We Created."

"And of Clay Are We Created" was inspired by the 1985 avalanche in Colombia that buried a village in mud. Among those trapped was Omaira Sánchez, a thirteen-year-old girl who became the focus of attention of news-hungry photographers, journalists and television cameras that fixed their curious and helpless eyes on the girl who kept her faith in life as she bravely met her death. In that horrid audience of onlookers, there was one man, a reporter, who made the decision to stop observing Omaira from the lens of his camera and lay down in the mud to offer her what comfort he could as her heart and lungs collapsed. Allende, who was obsessed by "the torment of that poor child buried alive," wrote her story from the perspective of a woman—and she was that woman —"who watches the televised struggle of the man holding the girl."

Allende assumed that once the story was published (in *The Stories of Eva Luna),* Omaira would disappear from her life. But Omaira she discovers, is

a dogged angel who will not let me forget her. When Paula fell into a coma and became a prisoner in her bed, inert, dying slowly before the helpless gaze of all around her, I remembered the face of Omaira Sánchez. My daughter was trapped in her body, as the girl had been trapped in mud. Only then did I understand why I had thought about her all those years, and finally could decipher the message in those intense black eyes: patience, courage, resignation, dignity in the face of death.

She reaches a paradoxical conclusion: "If I write something, I fear it will happen, and if I love too much, I fear I will lose that person; nevertheless, I cannot stop writing or loving. . . . "

Like the reporter who joins the girl in the mud, Allende, too, relinquishes the detached observer position. For her, this means exiling herself from the territory of fiction, which in the past has allowed her to invent the destinies of her characters and so removed reality to a safe and controllable distance.

Source: Ruth Behar, "In the House of the Spirits," in *The Women's Review of Books,* Vol. XIII, No. 2, November, 1995, p. 8.

Adaptations

The Stories of Eva Luna, the collection from which "And of Clay Are We Created" is taken, was recorded in 1991 by Elizabeth Peña. The two-cassette set was produced by Dove Audio Books and is distributed by NewStar Media.

Topics for Further Study

Find newspaper stories about the 1985 volcanic eruption of Colombia's Nevado Ruiz Mountain, the September 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, or another large-scale natural disaster. Look especially for stories about individual children trapped and rescued. Do you think the reporters writing these stories respect their subjects or exploit them? How emotionally involved do these reporters allow themselves to become?

What can cause mudslides of the magnitude described in this story? Research the geography and the geology to find an explanation. What parts of the United States and Canada are subject to this danger?

Most students know about the concentration camps run by the Germans during World War II, but fewer know much about Russian camps. Investigate these Russian camps. Who was held in them? What were conditions like? What happened to Russia during and after the war?

Investigate the Roman Catholic Church and its teachings about humans being made from clay and returning to the clay after death□teachings that Azucena would have been exposed to. Find out about other cultures—there are many—that also have stories about the first human being created from clay.

Compare and Contrast

1985: The eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in central Colombia kills more than 22,000 people and destroys more than 5,000 buildings. A large area is covered in mud and ash, making rescue of survivors nearly impossible.

1990s: Colombia continues to be subject to volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, but none causes devastation equal to the Nevado del Ruiz eruption.

1980s: There is a large gap between the poorest citizens of many Latin-American countries and the wealthiest citizens. Many of the wealthiest citizens are educated Europeans like Rolf Carlé, while the poorest tend to be of native or African descent.

1990s: As in the United States, the gap between rich and poor continues to widen in Latin America. Colombia and other countries experience significant economic growth, but the pattern of income distribution means that poverty actually increases.

1980s: The average per capita income in Colombia is nearly $1000, among the highest of the Latin-American countries.

1990s: The average per capita income in Colombia is $1,650. The per capita income in the United States is over $22,000.

1980s: In Colombia, over ninety percent of the citizens are Roman Catholic, a religion established there by European conquerors in the 1500s. Nearly ninety percent of Chileans are Roman Catholic. The numbers are similar for other Latin-American countries.

1990s: Approximately ninety-five percent of Colombians are Roman Catholic, and ninety percent of all Latin Americans are Roman Catholic. Latin Americans who practice indigenous religions increasingly organize and work for official recognition.

1980s: Many South American nations have autocratic governments led by military regimes and military dictators.

1990s: The South American countries are led by democratically elected presidents. Chile's General Augusto Pinochet, forced out in 1989, is the last of the South American military dictators.

What Do I Read Next?

The Stories of Eva Luna (1991) is Allende's first collection of short fiction. Like Scheherazade, Eva Luna presents twenty-three interwoven stories to her lover Rolf Carlé, the male protagonist of "And of Clay Are We Created."

The House of the Spirits (1985) is Allende's first novel. Three generations of a Latin-American family find strength through political and emotional struggle.

Leaf Storm and Other Stories(1972) is by Gabriel García Márquez. In seven interwoven stories, wonderful and impossible things happen to the citizens of the Latin-American village of Macondo. García Márquez, a master of "magical realism," is the author with whom Allende is most frequently compared.

A Hammock Beneath the Mangoes: Stories from Latin America (1992), edited by Thomas Colchie, is a collection of stories by twenty-six Latin- American authors, organized by country. Includes work by Allende, García Márquez, and Jorge Luis Borges, and also by newer and less well-known writers.

Further Study

Allende, Isabel, "Writing As an Act of Hope," in *Paths of Resistance: The Art and Craft of the Political Novel,* edited by William Zinsser, Houghton Mifflin, 1989, pp. 39-63.

Allende describes the violence, poverty, and beauty of Latin America, and explains that storytelling is the best medium for communicating its truths. "I write," she reveals, "so that people will love each other more."

de Carvalho, Susan, *"Escrituras y Escritoras:* The Artist- Protagonist of Isabel Allende," in *Discurso Literario,* Vol. 10, No. 1, 1992, pp. 59-67.

An essay examining the character of Eva Luna, and how she uses storytelling as a means of self-examination. Although this essay refers to the novel *Eva Luna,* its insights may be profitably applied to the narrator of "And of Clay Are We Created."

Leonard, Kathy S., ed., *Index to Translated Short Fiction by Latin-American Women in English Language Anthologies,* Greenwood, 1997.

An excellent guide through the dozens of anthologies that include, as the title indicates, English translations of short stories by Latin-American women. Useful for locating works by Allende, and also for finding available works by her peers.

Rodden, John, ed., *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* University of Texas Press, 1999.

An extensive collection of interviews from various literary journals, originally published in English or translated from Spanish, German, and Dutch. The volume includes an index and annotated bibliography.

Rojas, Sonia Riquelme, and Edna Aguirre Rehbien, eds., *Critical Approaches to Isabel Allende's Novels,* Peter Lang, 1991.

Although it deals only with Allende's first three novels, this collection reveals and explores the central critical issues in her fiction. The essays are in English and in untranslated Spanish. The Introduction, in English, is an excellent overview of the biographical and political sources of Allende's major themes.

Shaw, Donald Leslie, *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction,* State University of New York Press, 1998.

An analysis of Latin-American literature produced since the mid-1970s following the "Boom," a period that saw an explosion of internationally important works by Latin-American writers. Works written after the Boom tend to be more concerned with contemporary Latin-American society, especially with working- class and middle-class characters.

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Allende, Isabel, Prologue to *The Stories of Eva Luna,* translated by Margaret Sayers Peden, Bantam, 1991, p. 4.

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Hart, Patricia, "Boom Times-II," in *Nation,* Vol. 252, No. 9, March 11, 1991, p. 315.

Iftekharuddin, Farhat, "Writing to Exorcise the Demons" [Interview with Allende], in *Speaking of the Short Story,* edited by Farhat Iftekharuddin, Mary Rohrberger, and Maurice Lee, University Press of Mississippi, 1997, pp. 1-26; reprinted in *Conversations with Isabel Allende,* edited by John Rodden, University of Texas Press, 1999, pp. 353-54.

Ruta, Suzanne, "Lovers and Storytellers," in *Women's Review of Books,* Vol. 8, No. 9, June, 1991, p. 10.

Snell, Marilyn Berlin, "The Shaman and the Infidel" [Interview with Allende], *New Perspectives Quarterly,* Vol. 8, Winter, 1991, p. 57.

BOOKRAGS

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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.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

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.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

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.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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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