The Eye Study Guide

The Eye by Paul Bowles

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Contents

Introduction

Paul Bowles's short story "The Eye," written in 1976, initially appeared in the *Missouri Review* in 1978 and was reprinted in the *Best American Stories of 1979* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (1981). It is included in Bowles's story collection *Midnight Mass* (1981) and in the *Stories of Paul Bowles* (2001). Like many of Bowles's stories, "The Eye" concerns encounters between foreigners, in this case a Canadian man and the narrator, and Moroccan culture. Bowles uses the encounter to underscore the gap between the belief systems of the West and the Arab world, and to highlight the inscrutability of human existence. As an expatriate who spent most of his life in Tangier, Bowles is intimately familiar with his subject matter.

The story itself, only two thousand words, is accessible and rewarding, giving Western readers a glimpse into a culture with which most are unfamiliar. An unnamed narrator's curiosity is aroused when he hears about the death of a man he has never met, and he sets out to investigate the circumstances behind the man's death. Bowles's spare style and straightforward prose mask a more complicated structure, as the narrator, also an expatriate, tells a story about his attempt to understand another story. The title derives from the spell that the Canadian's Moroccan cook believes he cast on her daughter. Critics have commented on ideas of morality, intention, and crime in "The Eye."

Author Biography

One of the twentieth century's most enigmatic writers, Paul Frederick Bowles was born December 30, 1910, in New York, New York, the only child of dentist Claude Dietz Bowles and poet Rena (Winnewisser) Bowles. Bowles learned to read early and showed a passion for music as a child, studying piano and music theory before composing an opera when he was just nine years old. Apart from his reading and music, however, Bowles described his childhood as a lonely time spent in the company of eccentric adults. His father, a disciplinarian, took his parenting strategy from people like nutritionist Horace Fletcher, who claimed that chewing food until it lost its flavor would cure one of everything from acne to indigestion. Bowles's father forced the boy to chew each mouthful at least forty times before swallowing. Inappropriate swallowing resulted in a slap across the face. When she was not teaching her son to meditate, Rena Bowles would read her son Edgar Allan Poe's stories. Bowles's great-aunt, Mary Robbins Mead, was the most eccentric adult in the family, holding weekly seances from her hilltop home, where she purportedly summoned the spirits of local children.

At nineteen, Bowles dropped out of the University of Virginia and moved to Paris, where he met famous expatriates such as Gertrude Stein, Jean Cocteau, and André Gide. After studying with composer Aaron Copland in Berlin, Bowles toured North Africa and moved with Copland to Tangier, Morocco, in 1931. During the 1930s and 1940s, Bowles traveled widely and wrote scores for numerous plays including Orson Welles's *Horse Eats Hat* (1936) and *Love's Old Sweet Song* (1940), and Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie* (1944). Tired again of New York City, Bowles again moved to Tangier in 1947, then a quasi-anarchic city of intrigue and mystery, and began writing stories. On the strength of these stories, he was commissioned to write a novel, which turned out to be the work for which Bowles is best known, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). During the 1950s and 1960s, a number of American writers associated with the Beat movement visited Bowles, some of them staying in Tangier for extended periods. These writers included Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Brion Gysin, among others. Many of them came for inspiration, spiritual renewal, and to experiment with readily available drugs such as *kif* and *majoun*, made from cannabis, which Bowles himself used frequently while writing.

In addition to his other novels, *Let It Come Down* (1952), *The Spider's House* (1955), and *Up Above the World* (1966), Bowles wrote numerous short stories, collected under titles such as *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* (1962), *Three Tales* (1975), and *Midnight Mass* (1981), which includes the haunting story "The Eye." Bowles also wrote operas, poetry collections, and an autobiography, *Without Stopping* (1972), in addition to translating numerous Moroccan stories. *The Stories of Paul Bowles* was published in 2001, two years after Bowles died of a heart attack, November 18, 1999, in Tangier.

Plot Summary

In the first section of "The Eye," the narrator introduces the main character, Duncan Whitelaw Marsh, an expatriate from Vancouver, Canada, whose story he will seek to unravel. Like Marsh, who died ten or twelve years ago, the narrator lives in Tangier, Morocco. During the 1950s and 1960s, Tangier was an exotic and lawless place that many Westerners visited to indulge appetites that would be frowned upon in their own countries. Living there was inexpensive, and drugs were readily available. Before it gained independence in 1956, Morocco was divided among a French protectorate, a Spanish protectorate, and the international Zone of Tangier. The overwhelming majority of Moroccans are Arab or Berber and the dominant religion is Islam.

The narrator admits that he never saw Marsh and only knows of him through cocktail party gossip and expatriate "myth-making." He heard that Marsh moved into a furnished house and hired a teenage Moroccan as night watchman. A few months after dismissing the cook and gardener, who had come with the house, and hiring his own, Marsh became ill with a stomach disorder. He flew to London for treatment, returned, and eventually succumbed to the illness. The narrator notes that many people assumed his death was a case of slow poisoning by the employees. But the narrator is also intrigued by the marks found on the soles of Marsh's feet and by the rumor he heard that Marsh had given the watchman a paper providing him with a monthly allowance for as long as Marsh lived.

The narrator recounts how five years ago he learned that the watchman's name was Larbi and that he was a waiter in a local restaurant. The narrator visits Larbi and convinces him to show the narrator the paper Marsh gave him. Larbi shows him a simple note signed by Marsh that promised Larbi a hundred pounds a month. His curiosity piqued, the narrator sets up a meeting with Larbi at Marsh's former residence, now empty save for a guardian.

Larbi and the narrator meet at the house, now guarded by a man in a "brown *djellaba*." A *djellaba* is a hooded cloak traditionally worn by Moroccan men. Larbi recounts the story of what happened to Marsh to the narrator, who sits expressionless. Larbi says that Marsh, who hated noise, complained that his cook's daughter was too noisy. Trying to scare her, Marsh snuck up and "frowned so fiercely that she began to scream." That night the child fell ill and could no longer walk. Thinking that Marsh had put a spell on her daughter (i.e., "the eye") and that the only way that her child would be able to walk again would be to remove it, Meriam enlisted the help of a *fqih*, a kind of holy man and sorcerer. The *fqih* held a ceremony in front of the little girl during which he drew signs on a sheet of paper. Soon after the ceremony, men from Meriam's family dragged Marsh from his sickbed, holding him over a well while they carved these signs into the soles of his feet so the blood would fall into the water. Larbi's response is inscrutable when the narrator asks him if he sees a connection between the signs and Marsh's death. Larbi says, "He died because his hour had come." The narrator ends the story by meditating on the relationship between a crime and intention.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

A man once came to live in Tangiers and met with an early death. This was a relatively common occurrence, and local society sat back to watch the man suffer, convinced that he had brought it upon himself.

The man's name was Duncan Marsh, and he was from Vancouver, British Columbia. The man telling the story (whom we will refer to as "the narratornarrator") never met Marsh, but heard about him and his fatal circumstances at cocktail parties.

Marsh rented an inexpensive, furnished house just outside of town and hired a teenage boy to act as a night watchman. The house came with a cook and a gardener, but Marsh replaced these two with a new cook who had been suggested by the night watchman.

Soon after the new cook came to work for him, Marsh became ill. The doctors sent him to a hospital in London, where he spent two months recovering a small amount of his health. They still had no idea what had made him sick, however, and he returned to Tangiers, becoming bedridden soon after. He was eventually forced to go home to Canada, where he died shortly after arriving.

Through all of this, people assumed that he had made the typical mistake of becoming too familiar with the natives and trusting them, so he was yet another victim of slow poisoning by the natives. There is never any proof in these instances, so no one ever attempts an investigation.

There were, however, extra details to this story. While Marsh was ill, he told an acquaintance about his plan to provide for the night watchman financially, should he himself be forced to leave Morocco. He had given the boy a notarized letter for this purpose, but the boy had never tried to claim any money. Another piece of the puzzle was that the doctor, Dr. Halsey, who had arranged for Marsh's journey from the house to the airport, had reported that the soles of Marsh's feet had been cut with crude patterns. The cuts were deep, and some were slightly infected. Dr. Halsey called in the cook and night watchman to ask them about the cuts, but they were shocked and had no explanation. Within a few days of Marsh's departure, the cook and gardener who originally came with the house returned to the house to live once again.

In discussing the mystery, everyone believed that the night watchman was guilty, but they were puzzled by his behavior toward the money that had been provided for him, and the patterned incisions on Marsh's feet made no sense. It did not fit with the slow carefulness of a poisoner.

As time passed, the circumstances of Duncan Marsh's illness and subsequent death fell off the list of hot topics. Several years later, an American resident came to the narrator

with the information that he had discovered Marsh's night watchman. His name was Larbi, and he was now working as a waiter at a small restaurant in town. Apparently, he could understand English well but spoke it poorly. The American was simply sharing the information in case the narrator felt inclined to investigate.

He thought about it for a while and decided to go see Larbi in person. The restaurant was somewhat dark inside and frequented by Europeans. The three waiters all looked the same, so when one of them brought a menu, the narrator asked for Larbi.

Larbi came to take his order, and the narrator ordered in Spanish. When Larbi brought his soup, the narrator told him quietly that he was surprised he was working here and not running a bazaar or shop. This caught the young man's attention.

When he brought the next course, the narrator apologized and explained what he had heard about Larbi's legacy from the foreign gentleman. When Larbi said that the letter was not any good, the narrator expressed interest in seeing it. Larbi agreed to show it to him on the following evening, since the letter was at home.

The narrator thanked him and promised to return in two or three days, noting to himself that the young man obviously did not feel that he had had a part in Marsh's death. When he return a few nights later and was given the document to read, he learned that it was only good for a monthly sum of money while Marsh still lived. Larbi simply told him that it was fate. The narrator took his leave of Larbi, wanting time to consider this information instead of pressing the young man for details around Marsh's death.

He realized that the letter, written on the type of paper sold in a tobacco shop, was an agreement between master and servant. Marsh had asked for Larbi's help, and Larbi had consented. The narrator decided to try to speak to Larbi in Arabic in the house where it had all happened, to see if he could understand more clearly. When he went to ask Larbi, the young man replied that he knew the guardian of the house. He was surprised and then satisfied at being addressed in Arabic. Then the narrator asked if they could go there so he could hear the whole story and offered to pay him for his time.

They traveled to the house, and the guardian let them in and followed them everywhere. As Larbi showed the narrator through the house, the narrator began to feel as though everything would soon be made clear. When Larbi explained that the entrance from the kitchen to the patio outside is where everything began, the two men sat out on the patio, and the house guardian left them alone, locking the door after him.

Larbi explained that the original cook with the house was not a very good cook. Marsh was dissatisfied and asked Larbi to find him another cook. He found a woman named Meriam, who had a young daughter that she would have to bring with her on some days. Marsh said that this was not a problem as long as the girl kept quiet.

On the days Meriam brought her daughter, the girl would play on the patio where her mother could keep an eye on her as she worked. Marsh continually complained about her noise from the beginning. One day, he went quietly around the house to the patio, where he got on all fours, put his face close to the girl's and frowned so fiercely that the

girl screamed in terror and ran into the kitchen. She continued to wail and cry until Meriam took her home. That night, she came down with a fever and remained on the brink of death for several weeks. When the fever subsided, the girl could no longer walk.

Meriam consulted one fqih (a local Moroccan doctor) after another. Each told her that Marsh had put "the eye" on her daughter. However, even if Marsh agreed to remove the spell, he would not be able to do so himself. Instead, they would have to perform a special ceremony, and Meriam needed to give him certain substances so that he could not counteract the spell. The substance was merely a relaxing agent, not anything meant to harm him, so that when the time for the ceremony came, he could not object.

Marsh eventually told Larbi that he thought Meriam might be drugging him and asked him to watch for it. This was when the letter was written and witnessed. Since Larbi still believed what Meriam was giving Marsh was harmless, he told Marsh that everything would be fine.

When Marsh was sent to the hospital in London, Larbi told Meriam that she had made him sick and now she would never be able to break the spell. However, she simply replied, "It's in the hands of Allah." Larbi encouraged Meriam to finish things quickly when Marsh returned. He felt it would be better for the gentleman's health if the drugging did not continue for very much longer.

Soon Marsh was worse than ever, suffering terrible pain. He could not even get out of bed to use the bathroom. Meriam finally thought that it was time to hold the ceremony. The fqih held it that night in the presence of her child, and four men from her family came to get Marsh. Larbi saw them coming and left for the city, not wanting to have anything to do with the ceremony.

Larbi then took the narrator to see where the men had to take Marsh – climbing steps around the back of the house to a lawn and a wall of trees, then along a path thought the undergrowth to an old well. The men had to hold him steady over the well so the blood would drip in the water as they made the incisions in his feet based on drawings the fqih had given them on paper. Marsh was very sick for two days afterward, begging Larbi to call the English doctor. However, the mud and grime had to be cleaned up before the doctor could even come in the house.

The narrator carefully asked if Larbi felt there was any connection between these events and Marsh's death. Larbi simply answered, "He died because his hour had come." When questioned about whether the spell had been broken, Larbi told him that Meriam had taken her daughter and gone to live with her sister in another town, so he never heard whether the girl could walk again.

The narrator paid Larbi for his time, dropped him off in town and went on his way, mulling over what he had learned.

Analysis

"The Eye" is about the uncompromising magic of fate. A little girl was not meant to walk. A young man was not meant to be wealthy. A Canadian was meant to have an early end.

The story is a first-person narrative told by a man of unknown nationality, moving in the upper class circles of Moroccan society. News is distributed at cocktail parties. Servants are often casually referred to as "boy." They live in a glass bubble where they cannot be affected by the deaths of visitors to Morocco. It must have been fate for those people to die. After all, they "encouraged familiarity" with the native servants, so it is only natural for the natives to feel comfortable enough to turn on their masters and poison them.

Even the Moroccan officials seem to accept this fate. No public effort is ever made to find and convict the murderers.

However, one man breaks away from the haze for a brief time to take an interest in one set of events that had a puzzling turn, and he discovers the effects that fate can have. When they had first occurred, the mystery was nothing but a conversation piece. The poisoning was a normal way of dying by a servant's hand, and everyone assumed that the night watchman had done it, especially after it became known that the Canadian, Marsh, had taken steps to provide for him financially. What this man discovered, however, is that it was not the night watchman's fate to become a wealthy man.

We also discover, through Larbi's telling of the events, that Marsh was not the kind gentle Western gentleman we assume he was. We are allowed to think of him as the poor man who did not know any better, and so he was murdered. It is a shame no one took him under his wing to show him the ropes, so to speak. No, Marsh was upset about a child making noise, and he punished her by terrifying her to the point of sickness.

Granted, this was his only crime, but when the girl nearly died from the fever and then could no longer walk, the mother had no alternative but to try to have her daughter healed. Being a lowly servant, steeped in the old ways, no matter how well she may have been paid as Marsh's cook, she would not have had access to extensive Western medicine. Because of the high wages, however, she was able to consult with several of the local medical people, called "fqihs." They prescribed a treatment – one that we would think of as a technique from the Dark Ages – to relieve the "evil eye" he had put on the girl. She meant no harm to Marsh, and, in fact, she thought that the substance she was supposed to give him was intended to make the process easier for him. We have no idea if the voodoo-like ceremony actually helped. Larbi lost contact with the cook and her daughter shortly after Marsh left Morocco and died, so he cannot say whether the girl was able to walk again. With Paul Bowles' style of storytelling, it is highly unlikely that the girl was healed.

Ironically, Larbi is telling the story of what happened, not the events of Marsh's death. He makes no connection between his illness and his death. When asked, his answer is

the ultimate simplicity, stunning the narrator's character. There is no guilt, no blame – only fate. "He died because his hour had come."

Characters

The fqihs

A group of wise men who advise on the child's condition.

Dr. Halsey

Dr. Halsey arranged for Duncan Marsh's body to be taken to the airport from his house. Halsey is the first person to notice the crude incisions on Marsh's feet, which deepen the narrator's curiosity.

Larbi Lairini

Larbi Lairini is Marsh's Moroccan night watchman and the person who relates the story of his former employer's death to the narrator. Larbi works as a waiter at Le Fin Bec, a small restaurant. He understands English well but speaks it poorly. Marsh hired a relative of his, Meriam, as his cook shortly after moving into his house on the slopes of Djamma el Mokra. Larbi shows the narrator the piece of paper on which Marsh promised him a hundred dollars a month but says that it is useless now because he is dead. He represents himself as an innocent in the affair, professing that he had nothing to do with Marsh's death and that he did not know that Marsh was being poisoned. When Larbi recalls seeing men from Meriam's family coming to perform the ritual that would lift the spell, he says, "I got onto my motorcycle and went into the city. I didn't want to be here when they did it. It had nothing to do with me." Larbi's refusal to answer the narrator when he asks if he called the doctor as Marsh asked suggests that Larbi contributed to Marsh's death through his inaction.

Duncan Marsh

Duncan Whitelaw Marsh is an expatriate from Vancouver, Canada, who moved to Tangier about a dozen years before the story opens. He rents a house on a mountain outside the city, dismisses the gardener and cook, and hires a night watchman and a new cook, Meriam. Marsh, an intensely private man who values quiet, makes a face at Meriam's young daughter because she is making too much noise, and soon after the daughter falls ill and loses the ability to walk. Meriam slowly poisons Marsh, believing that her employer has cast a spell on her daughter. He flies to London seeking a cure for his stomach and kidney ailments and then returns to Tangier. Marsh suspects that he is being poisoned by Meriam and enlists Larbi's help, promising the watchman a hundred dollars a month for as long as Marsh lives. However, Marsh's condition only worsens, and he dies when men from Meriam's family drag him to a well, make incisions in his feet, and hold him over the water, attempting to break the spell.

Meriam

Meriam is Marsh's cook and a relative of Larbi, the night watchman. After her daughter comes down with a fever, almost dies, and then becomes paralyzed, she consults *fqihs*, who tell her that Marsh has put "the eye" on her daughter. They recommend she administer "substances" to Marsh to break the spell, which she does, slowly poisoning him. When men from her family bring Marsh back to the house after taking him to the well, Meriam refuses to clean him or touch his body. When he dies, Meriam moves to another town with her daughter.

Narrator

The unnamed narrator has lived in Tangier for five decades. He speaks Arabic, French, Spanish, and English, the languages of the city, and considers himself well versed in native culture. Though he pretends to be objective about the story he relates, in fact, he has already made a judgment, saying at the start, "What happened [to Duncan Marsh] was in no way his fault, notwithstanding the whispered innuendos of the English-speaking residents." He acts as a conduit for Marsh's story, relaying information that has come to him from various sources such as Dr. Halsey and Larbi Lairini, whom he seeks out after being told by an American that Larbi works in a restaurant in town. After Larbi shows the narrator the piece of paper on which Marsh agreed to pay him a set amount of money, the narrator remarks, "I no longer understood anything." More than the details surrounding Marsh's poisoning or the moral ambivalence of Larbi, it is the narrator who remains the story's central mystery.

Themes

Human Condition

In "The Eye," Bowles presents human beings as the victims of circumstances over which they have little control. He spells out this idea in the plot of the story, as Marsh is unaware of the source of his poisoning and, once he suspects its source, is incapable of stopping it. Larbi represents the idea that Marsh was unable to stop his death because it was his time to die. He sums up this notion in the word, *suerte*. In Spanish, this means "luck." However, in Tangier's Arabic culture, the narrator says, it takes on the additional meaning of "fate."

Colonialism

Colonialism entails not only the physical occupation of one country by the people of another but also a psychological occupation. Morocco has a history of being occupied by others, and Bowles alludes to both French and Spanish influences on Moroccans. However, Europeans of all stripes moved to Morocco during the middle part of the twentieth century for the inexpensive housing and "exotic" local color. The narrator and Marsh, both expatriates from the West, display the colonial attitude in their condescension towards Moroccans. Marsh has to pay for anything he wants, including his own life. By offering to pay Larbi to keep an eye on the cook, whom he suspects is poisoning him, Marsh illustrates the imbalance of power between the colonizers and the colonized. Although the former appear to have the upper hand because of their formal education and wealth, in reality the latter control events because colonizers depend on them for their very survival. The narrator illustrates his own colonial mindset in the way he characterizes Moroccans as superstitious and ignorant.

Crime

"The Eye"can be read as a detective story, with the narrator acting as investigator seeking to unearth the details and the motives for Marsh's murder. And indeed, the story was published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, a publication known for its detective stories. In the first section of the story, the narrator outlines what he has heard of the "crime," and then he proceeds to learn as much as he can from the person he considers to be the culprit, Larbi Lairini. The narrator cagily tries to extract information from Larbi and then resorts to paying him for details of Marsh's death. However, the more he learns, the less satisfied he is and the less able he is to assign guilt to any one person. He ends the story asking, "What is a crime? There was no criminal intent—only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance."

Style

Point of View

Point of view refers to the perspective from which a story is told. Bowles uses a first-person point of view in "The Eye," meaning that readers see events through the narrator's eyes. This narrator, the "I" in the story, is never named, but through information he provides the readers know that he is also an expatriate and a long-time resident of Tangier. First-person narrators can be either central to the action or peripheral to it. Bowles's narrator is somewhere in between. He acts as a detective, seeking out information about Duncan Marsh's death, initiates contact with Larbi, and comments on the story that Larbi tells about Marsh. However, he is not a participant in Marsh's story itself and never even met the man.

Setting

Setting refers to the time, place, and culture in which the action of a story takes place. "The Eye" is set in Tangier, a city in Morocco that Westerners flocked to during the middle of the twentieth century for its liberal atmosphere and exoticism. Bowles's descriptions of places in individual scenes, such as Le Fin Bec restaurant and Marsh's house, underscore the mystery inherent in Tangier *and* in the events surrounding Marsh's death. The narrator's inability to comprehend Moroccan culture also adds to the sense that things are never as they seem in Tangier.

Plot

Plot refers to how a story's events are arranged and how they relate. It emphasizes causality and offers a framework for fictional elements such as characterization, conflict, and theme. The way in which Bowles's narrator releases information— slowly and through the words of other people such as Larbi—creates suspense and emphasizes the gap between the story's details and the narrator's inability to comprehend the broader picture or the motivations of those involved.

Historical Context

Turmoil in Morocco

In the mid-1970s, when Bowles wrote "The Eye" while living in Tangier, Morocco was in turmoil. After Morocco became an independent monarchy under Muhammad V in 1956, the country struggled against republican opposition, and King Hassan, who succeeded his father in 1961, fought off attempted military coups and assassinations. Accused of corruption and incompetence, Hassan tried to deflect attention from his administration and consolidate support for the monarchy by pressuring Spain to withdraw from the Moroccan Sahara, a phosphate-rich area. In 1976, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania signed a treaty dividing the land among the countries. The Polisario Front, a rebel group aligned with the indigenous Saharawis, embarked on a guerrilla war to oust the three countries. They succeeded in forcing Mauritania and Spain out and proclaimed the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. However, Moroccan troops remain, having built a series of desert walls to demarcate their territory. King Hassan signed a cease-fire in 1991, with the fate of the region to be decided by a United Nations-sponsored referendum. The conflict remains unresolved.

Civil Rights for Native Americans

As the Polisario Front fought for independence in Morocco, Native Americans fought for it at home. In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. This Act encourages Native Americans to take control of their own education and promote their tribal customs, and requires the Secretary of the Interior to enter into self-determination contracts with tribal organizations to plan and administer programs. The law concretizes the federal government's responsibility to individual Indians and tribes. The Act came on the heels of the public's deepening suspicion of the United States government.

American Political Disillusionment

In 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned under threat of impeachment after being charged with corruption and income tax evasion, and in 1974, President Richard Nixon, who had been battling allegations that he knew more about the Watergate affair than he admitted, resigned. The Watergate affair centered around a burglary of the Democratic Party's National Committee offices at the Watergate Hotel in 1972.

Many Americans became disillusioned with politics as a result of the Watergate affair and lost faith in the government's ability to run the country. Hurt by double-digit inflation and a rising unemployment rate, the American economy fell into its deepest recession in forty years. Not surprisingly, crime also increased during the 1970s, with the violent crime rate alone skyrocketing 30 percent between 1970 and 1977. A soaring crime rate, however, did not dampen the desire of people to make the United States their home.

The Hart-Cellar Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 amended previous policies that favored Western Europeans, abolished immigration quotas by country, and encouraged family reunification. As a result, Asian and Latino peoples poured into America, dramatically altering the makeup of the workforce in a number of industries.

Critical Overview

Midnight Mass has not received the critical attention of Bowles's other writing because it was published by Black Sparrow, a small but well-respected press. Writing for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Allen Hibbard notes that many of the stories in the collection "taken together, represent certain stylistic and thematic shifts." These shifts, Hibbard claims, "depend more on the movement of memory than actual physical movement." Writing for *Harper's*, Francine Prose zeroes in on Bowles's darkness, the darkness that befalls most characters in his stories. Prose argues, "Paul Bowles's obsessive subject is the tragic, even fatal mistakes that Westerners so commonly make in their misguided and often presumptuous encounters with the mysteries of a foreign culture." Noting how the opening sentence of "The Eye" could have been written by "other writers who have focused on the confrontation between East and West," Prose observes, "But as the opening paragraph progresses, we can watch Bowles part company with his colleagues and enter territory that he has claimed as uniquely his own." In her essay for *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, "Paul Bowles and the Characterization of Women," Linda Wagner focuses on Bowles's representation of women in his later stories, arguing that stories from *Midnight Mass* display "the tendency to set character against character, to create a dialectic that somehow informs the reader." In "The Eye," Wagner writes, Bowles emphasizes the "darker side of woman's power." Gena Dagel Caponi agrees with Wagner that Bowles is attempting to teach the reader something. In her study, *Paul Bowles*, however, Caponi contends that morality, not women's power, is the central issue in the story, writing, "Bowles seems to ask the reader, are we all not moving in the darkness of ignorance of one sort or another?"

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition who writes about literature and culture for various publications. In this essay, Semansky considers the narrator's self-delusion in Bowles's story.

In his study of the West's representation of Arab culture, Edward Said writes that Orientalism "is an ideology born of the colonizers' desire to know their subjects to better control them." Although Said is referring to the way in which historians have represented the Orient, his characterization also applies to the ways in which fiction writers represent it. Said argues that Westerners have depicted Arab cultures as dishonest and irrational and that their writing about the Orient is a form of political propaganda of which the writers themselves are not even aware. Said says, "This is the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioners." In "The Eye," the narrator attempts to present information about Arab characters in an objective manner, as if his representations of events are inseparable from the events themselves. However, his desire (like that of others in the Anglo community) to fathom the motivations of the Moroccans involved in Marsh's death illustrates how expatriates think like colonizers in their drive to know the people in whose country they live.

From the story's opening, the narrator positions himself as separate from, yet part of, the expatriate community in Tangier. He believes himself to be an outsider who can objectively view newcomers and natives alike. He begins his tale of Duncan Marsh, writing, "What happened to him was in no way his fault, notwithstanding the whispered innuendoes of the English-speaking residents." Such an attitude illustrates the narrator's own stance towards the event he is about to investigate. He further attempts to set himself apart from both communities when he writes:

These people [the English-speaking residents] often have reactions similar to those of certain primitive groups: when misfortune overtakes one of their number, the others by mutual consent refrain from offering him aid, and merely sit back to watch, certain that he has called his suffering down upon himself.

He does not mention who those primitive groups are, but his representation of Moroccans in the story certainly suggests that he has them in mind. What is interesting about the narrator's comparison is that he himself is a watcher, or, more accurately, a listener, who does not know Marsh but attempts to put together his story out of curiosity and what appears to be sympathy for the man. He freely admits that he knows no one who ever saw Marsh, and that the information he has heard is the result of "irresponsible residents . . . [who feel] at liberty to indulge their taste for mythmaking."

The narrator says that he has heard other similar stories, suggesting that the story about Marsh could well have been an urban legend. An urban legend is a kind of contemporary folklore that revolves around an issue or a person and circulates through word of mouth, in this case, the cocktail party gossip of expatriates. Often, urban

legends function as cautionary tales for a group or groups of people. The narrator's desire to investigate Marsh's story, then, is also a desire to confirm its veracity. Of the other stories he has heard, the narrator notes: "On each occasion it has been said that the European victim had only himself (or herself) to blame, having encouraged familiarity on the part of a servant." Though he positions himself as not sharing the general sentiments of the European community, the narrator takes pains to point out that Marsh confided in Larbi, his night watchman, promising him financial aid for his help keeping an eye on the cook.

The narrator maintains his pattern of self-delusion throughout the story, professing objectivity one moment and then in the next making presumptions. For example, after listing a number of details surrounding Marsh's death, the narrator presents the detail about the knife marks found on the dead man's feet, stating, "It was this last bit of information which, for me, at least, made the story take on life." However, rather than influencing his theory about who committed the act, the narrator writes, this new information only complicated the motive of the crime. He is still convinced, "The boy [Larbi] was guilty."

The narrator's care in representing himself as an impartial observer has fooled at least one critic. In discussing "The Eye," Wagner, for example, writes, "As in several other of these late stories, Bowles has used an objective narrator." Objective narrators, however, are narrators most often associated with an omniscient or a third-person point of view. That is, they have access to the thoughts and motivations of *all* characters, or they "simply" present action and dialogue without commenting on them. Many of Ernest Hemingway's short stories employ objective narrators, for instance. However, in "The Eye," Bowles's narrator has neither an omniscient or third-person point of view.

Rather, the narrator foregrounds his own bias in his interactions with Larbi. Trying to identify him at Le Fin Bec, the restaurant at which Larbi works, the narrator says, "I studied the three waiters. They were interchangeable, with wide black moustaches, blue jeans, and sports shirts." Lumping all the waiters together into a stereotype of Arab appearance highlights the narrator's deficiencies of perception, which is surprising considering that he claims to be a fifty-year resident of Tangier. The narrator displays his powers of manipulation in his discussions with Larbi, baiting him by saying, "I thought by now you'd have a bazaar or some sort of shop." He continues his detective-like routine, convincing Larbi to show him the notarized letter he received from Marsh and extracting a promise from the waiter to accompany him to his former employer's house. After exerting considerable effort to track down Larbi, the narrator then tells readers, "I had no intentions then. I might return soon or I might never go back." Deciphering the narrator's ambivalence becomes the reader's primary task.

Caponi links this kind of ambivalence in the narrator to a sense of surrender in Bowles's stories of the 1970s. In her study of Bowles's fiction, *Paul Bowles*, Caponi includes "The Eye" with Bowles's "late colonial fiction," writing that it "displays a more passive resignation to circumstances than do his earlier works." Caponi continues: "In his later fiction the European characters of postcolonial North Africa learn to acquire the fatalism of the Muslims and the Berbers, because they are living in a world beyond their control."

It is easy enough to see how Marsh displays this fatalism. Though still ill, he returns from a London hospital to Tangier, suspecting that his cook is poisoning him. However, instead of dismissing her, he enlists Larbi, a relative of Meriam, to watch her. Meriam displays her fatalism in believing that Marsh cast a spell on her daughter and by believing that the only way to remove it is by administering certain "substances" prescribed by the *fqih*. When Larbi warns her that she is killing Marsh, she responds, "I've done what I could. It's in the hands of Allah." Larbi's fatalism is also apparent in his reactions, both to the men who come to perform the ritual on Marsh and to the narrator's questioning. When the narrator asks Larbi if he called the doctor when Marsh begged him to from his bed, Larbi changes the subject. Later he says that Marsh died "because his hour had come." The narrator displays his own fatalism while reflecting on his chances of ever comprehending what happened. Inside Marsh's house, he writes, "The absurd conviction that I was about to understand everything had taken possession of me; I noticed that I was breathing more quickly." Though the narrator is quick to describe his own physical responses to what he is about to hear, hiding his disapproval by making his face "entirely expressionless," he is oblivious to the ways in which his responses betray his sense of superiority, the way his "objectivity" masks his judgment.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "The Eye," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson examines the narrator and his transformation.

"The Eye" is a story that includes elements of numerous genres. Its most immediate access is as a detective story, in which the narrator searches for the person responsible for the poisoning and ultimate death of Canadian expatriate Duncan Marsh. On another level, it can be read as an adventure tale or as a cautionary tale of Europeans venturing into exotic places better left unexplored. Bowles invokes this genre when he opens the story by describing Marsh as "a man who would have done better to stay away."

The story can also be seen as the narrator's anthropological examination of two cultures clashing: Western and North African. In his opening comments about the actions of the English-speaking expatriates living in Tangier, the narrator speaks as someone who studies the behavior of people and cultures, such as an anthropologist. He compares the English speakers to members of "certain primitive groups" who, "when misfortune overtakes one of their number, the others by mutual consent refrain from offering him aid." They simply watch from afar, convinced that the misfortune is due to something that person has done, and he becomes "taboo." The narrator makes clear that he does not subscribe to a common perception among the expatriates that Western culture is superior to non-Western cultures.

The narrator, though defined purely by his anonymity and his curiosity about the events of Marsh's death, is of central interest in Bowles's tale. The author gives him no name, no background or profession, and no definite gender—although, an argument can be made that the narrator is a man, given the ease with which he seems to move through the Moroccan streets and back alleys in his quest for Marsh's alleged murderer. The only thing that is certain about him is that he is not a native Moroccan but has lived in Tangier for about fifty years. Even his interest in the events surrounding Marsh's death is unexplained; he never met Marsh, nor does he "know anyone who claims to have seen him," and the death took place some "ten or twelve years ago."

There is a reason, however, for the narrator's interest in the case, and it is this reason, finally, that defines the type of story Bowles has written. More than an adventure tale or a mystery or a story of colliding cultures, Bowles has written a story of one man's philosophical and personal transformation— the account of a man moving from a set of beliefs that define the world as a place where order rules and guilt can be assigned to the belief that people live their lives and make decisions in a world that is without structure or constraints and that events often happen for no apparent reason. Duncan Marsh's death was the catalyst that set the narrator upon this philosophical journey, so that he eventually came to see the world as place with no predictable patterns or reliable rules.

The issue of who is guilty of Marsh's death is a constant one throughout the story. Early in his investigation, the narrator dismisses the city's English-speaking population's

assumption that Marsh brought this calamity upon himself, and he quickly points the finger at a young night watchman, Larbi. According to the narrator, Larbi was responsible for finding the cook who worked for Marsh, a woman named Meriam. In addition, Marsh had arranged for the young watchman to be supported financially. The narrator therefore hypothesizes that Meriam and Larbi planned Marsh's murder by slow poisoning, something the cook could accomplish without attracting attention, so that the two could be free of their employer and share the ongoing income that Marsh had provided for Larbi. "There could be little doubt that the boy was guilty," the narrator surmises early on in his investigation. Someone must be to blame, the narrator believes, if a man dies under mysterious circumstances.

Underlying the search for Marsh's killer is the narrator's assumption that the events surrounding the Canadian's death can be, and must be, understood. The narrator even refers to his contemplations about the case as his "feasible hypotheses" and acknowledges that he has thought about Marsh for many years after his death. There are, however, a number of things about the case that confound him and challenge the possibility that he will be able to assign blame entirely. The first is the fact that the doctor who tried to help Marsh when he was near death found deep incisions formed into "crude patterns" on the soles of his patient's feet. The narrator learns another bewildering piece of information when he reads the contract outlining the financial arrangement between the Larbi and Marsh, noting that the payments were to continue only as long as Marsh remained alive. In fact, when the narrator saw the document, he recalls, "I no longer understood anything." He had taken the pieces of information he had and arranged them in a certain way that seemed to solve the puzzle of Marsh's death. But these new pieces do not fit: Why would Larbi be interested in killing his employer if Larbi's income depended upon Marsh's being alive?

Even after this experience, the narrator insists that there must be order and reason surrounding Marsh's death. If money is no longer a likely motive, then there must be some other motive or logical reason why Marsh died when he did and an explanation for the strange marks on the soles of his feet. The narrator eventually begins to believe that "if only I could talk to the watchman, in Arabic, and inside the house itself, I might be in a position to see things more clearly." He behaves as if he is a police investigator, strong in his conviction that returning to the scene of the crime will somehow either force a confession from Larbi or reveal some small bit of physical evidence to show who is responsible for the crime. Every effect has an identifiable cause, he still believes, and if he works hard enough he will uncover it. Walking through Marsh's shuttered house, however, the narrator has a moment of icy self-realization: "The absurd conviction that I was about to understand everything had taken possession of me."

The information the narrator *does* eventually receive from Larbi is no less perplexing and inexplicable than the facts he already knows. In truth, even though the narrator learns about the unkind manner in which Marsh treated Meriam's young child, how the child became seriously ill after Marsh purposely frightened her, and how a group of local wise men, or *fqih*, agreed that the "eye" had been put on the child and instructed Meriam to give Marsh a certain concoction to loosen the spell's grip, the narrator still has no one to blame. Even if the concoction prescribed by the *fqih* played a role in

Marsh's death—and it may or may not have—the men were guilty of nothing; they sought only to help a child, not to harm Marsh. The narrator leaves the house "with a vague sense of disappointment," realizing that he "had not only expected, but actually hoped, to find someone on whom the guilt might be fixed."

The narrator receives little satisfaction in exchange for his hard work tracking down the events and people associated with Marsh' s death, primarily because Marsh is as responsible for his death as are Meriam, Larbi, and the *fqih*; no single person's actions weigh more heavily than another's, the narrator realizes. Everyone involved made benign or benignly intended choices, yet a man died. "There was no criminal intent," the narrator decides, "only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance," referring to Meriam's desire to see her sick child well again by consulting the *fqih.*

The narrator, at the story's end, is beginning to look at the world in a new way—this is what he gains for all of his trouble. He has moved from being a man convinced of Larbi and Meriam's guilt, and of the importance of understanding events and assigning guilt, to a man who is aware of the possibility that his understanding of life is limited and flawed.

The question remains at the story's end, however, as to whether the narrator is capable of fully embracing a philosophical outlook that challenges the traditional Western concepts of crime and guilt. Bowles's dislike of most European expatriates living in Tangier is barely disguised in the story, and it is obvious that he considers them no better than the "certain primitive groups" with which the story's narrator compares them. They have come to a place where most of them don't belong, and often they suffer for their insistence on living outside of their natural habitat. While Bowles does not overly praise or exalt the local population in his story—and so avoids the pitfalls many writers fall into when they present non-Europeans as noble savages—he does make it clear that they hold some knowledge and understanding of life to which most Europeans have little access. In seven simple words, for example, Larbi speaks a truth about Marsh's death that has eluded the narrator throughout the story: "He died because his hour had come."

Even as the narrator has come to a different understanding of the world than the one he held in the beginning, the fact that he asks Larbi "if he saw any connection between all this and Marsh's death" indicates that he is still grasping for a clear explanation for the expatriate's premature and violent demise. He still longs for neat categories of cause and effect, crime and punishment, that do not exist, at least in the place where Marsh chose to live and where the narrator himself has chosen to live for most of his life. Through his investigation into Marsh's death, the narrator has come to a new understanding of the culture in which he has lived for fifty years and of life in general. It seems that it will take even longer for the narrator to fully accept what he now understands.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on "The Eye," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Hibbard comments on the narrative aspects of "The Eye."

The stories brought together in *Midnight Mass* (1981) and *Unwelcome Words* (1988) have not yet enjoyed the popularity that those in Bowles's *Collected Stories* have, despite the inclusion of many of them in *A Distant Episode: The Selected Stories* (1988). These recent volumes, however, contain many splendid stories, demonstrating the author's versatility and mastery of the genre. Bowles does not simply serve up tried and popular dishes, though familiar flavors are recognizable. He rather offers novel treats, lending both expected and surprising pleasures.

These later stories, consistently sharper than those of *Things Gone and Things Still Here*, depict a more settled mode of life and experience. There are, to be sure, expatriates in many of these stories, yet they tend now, like Bowles himself during this period, to be rather sedentary, and the conflicts that arise generally pertain to managing local help or dealing with property, rather than those arising from more daring wanderings into hostile, foreign terrain. They describe a Tangier beset by the pains of growth and often inscribe the conflicts of values that accompany modernization. Though no more optimistic about the plight of the world, Bowles seems to have adopted more of the wry, ironic wit that sometimes accompanies the resignation to one's fate in old age.

Midnight Mass signals stylistic as well as thematic shifts. Bowles's characteristic sense of sureness and economy is as sharp as ever. Each sentence drives the story a step closer to its logical outcome. The storyteller gives his listeners what they need when they need it. We get not a word more than necessary. These stories, especially those in *Unwelcome Words*, have that pellucid, bonelike quality we associate with Beckett's later work. This the writer achieves in part by abandoning the use of quotation marks to indicate dialogue, so that speech, description, and the subtle intrusion of the narrator's ironic wit merge fluidly, creating the semblance of a seamless, integrated whole.

Many of these stories, like those in the preceding volume, have a discernible "oral" quality about them; they often give the reader the sense that the storyteller is right there, telling us the story. More frequently than before, Bowles chooses a firstperson narrator. Again the writer's involvement with translation projects during this period, particularly in collaboration with Mohamad Mrabet, is probably responsible in part for these stylistic developments.

If there be a central motif in this collection of stories, a figure in the carpet, so to speak, it might be the preoccupation with houses, the structures we inhabit. The pattern and theme of many of these stories supply yet further examples of what Richard F. Patteson identifies as one of Bowles's central concerns: "That which lies outside is presented as potentially hostile and threatening, yet the barriers, the shelters, erected to keep the danger out are insufficient." The titles of two of the stories, "In the Red Room" and "The Little House," point to this emphasis, as does the content of many other stories.

In some instances stories begin with the presentation of a house, which becomes a fragile haven for human life or a contested site of opposing values. In "Madame and Ahmed" Mrs. Pritchard's house, surrounded by impressive gardens, "was at the top of a cliff overlooking the sea; the winds sweeping through the Strait of Gibraltar struck the spot first, and blew harder there." Two worldviews compete with each other under one roof, literally, in "The Little House," which opens, "The little house had been built sixty or seventy years ago on the main street of what had been a village which seemed several miles outside of town; now the town had crept up on all sides." In either case, the ensuing dramas reveal a strain the structure ultimately withstands only after a reconfiguration of those patterns of life which they contain.

In the title story, "Midnight Mass," a Westerner actually loses possession of his childhood home in Tangier. Eight years after his mother's death, he comes back to Tangier to reclaim the house and finds it "in even worse condition than he had expected it to be. He had naively assumed that because he paid their wages promptly each month, the servants would make an attempt to keep it in order." He should have known better.

At a Christmas Eve party, the man agrees to let a Moroccan painter use a room in the house. This foothold is all the Moroccan needs. The Westerner is squeezed out: "He did not go to Tangier at Eastertime, nor yet during the summer. In September he got word that the painter's very rich and influential family had taken possession of the entire house." His lawyer is unable to evict them. The story symbolically shows the end of a certain kind of European postcolonial presence and the growing determination of Moroccans to conduct their own affairs. The Morocco of the 1980s was far different from that Bowles had first come to, in its colonial period, 50 years earlier.

Both "The Dismissal" and "Madame and Ahmed" are stories involving relationships between Western expatriate home owners in Tangier and their help. Built into the structure of these relationships are not only a difference in culture but a difference in class. Given the value of foreign currency and the very low wage levels in Morocco, most expatriates have easily been able to afford help. In some cases—such as that of the late Malcolm Forbes, one of Tangier's most notorious expatriates, best known for his collection of toy soldiers and the pair of Harleys he kept by the door of his Marshan mansion—the difference was vast indeed.

Naturally, stories about maids, drivers, and gardeners—their level of competence, their mishaps, their cleverness, problems in communication and trust—circulate in the expatriate community. "Madame and Ahmed" tells of one episode in the relationship between a wealthy Western woman and her Moroccan gardener, Ahmed: "She felt that they knew and understood one another in a basic and important fashion, even though Ahmed never had learned to pronounce her name. For him she was Madame."

When the garden is doing poorly, her friends urge her to get rid of Ahmed, her gardener of 11 years. Ahmed, in order to keep his position, employs his wit when occasion presents itself. One day a man comes and persuades Madame to buy some plants Ahmed recognizes as being from the municipal garden. The man makes no attempt to

hide his intention to take Ahmed's position. That night, after the plants have been put in, Ahmed sneaks out and snips the roots off them. The next day Madame notices the plants wilting in the sun, discovers the cause, and blames the thieves, just as Ahmed had hoped she would. To get rid of the thieves when they returned, Ahmed lies, saying Madame knew where they got the plants from and would report them to the police if they ever showed their faces again. "Ahmed, what would I do without you?" Madame exclaims in gratitude. When she asks what Ahmed said to get rid of the men, he lies again: "I told him no true Moslem would play tricks on a woman with no husband."

The story is rife with deceit. Everyone is guilty of something—Madame for thinking of dismissing her longtime gardener, the peddlers for stealing the plants, and Ahmed for tricking and lying to his employer. Not much harm comes to anyone, however, and we feel that in the end each got what he deserved.

The expatriate in "The Eye," which appeared in the collection of *Best American Stories of 1979*, meets a worse fate than Madame at the hands of his help. We might imagine this story of an eccentric expatriate, Duncan Marsh, to be a popular one with those in the community. Bowles's telling, in the first person, seems to be but one more telling of a well-known tale, heard second-or third-hand, transformed and embellished in so many retellings. Calling the story "laconic, chilly, passionless," Joyce Carol Oates has noted that it "reads as if it had no narrator at all, and aspires to a condition of sheer narrative bereft of character—a tale told by no one in particular (its 'hero,' never directly glimpsed, is dead before the story opens), which nevertheless possesses an uncanny suspenseful power."

"Ten or twelve years ago," the story begins, "there came to live in Tangier a man who would have done better to stay away." Members of the English-speaking community, we are told, said he got what he deserved. With a very sharp understanding of how expatriate communities function, Bowles writes, "These people often have reactions similar to those of certain primitive groups: when misfortune overtakes one of their number, the others by mutual consent refrain from offering him aid, and merely sit back to watch, certain that he has called his suffering down upon himself. He has become taboo, and is incapable of receiving help." This sacrificial abandonment no doubt occurs partly because expatriates, especially in places such as Morocco, where manners and customs are so different from their own, live shipwrecked existences and feel they can ill afford to cast a rope to a drowning compatriot without the risk of being pulled along with him into the hostile sea.

Marsh, whom the narrator says he never himself knew, evidently came to Tangier, rented a home in the Djamaa el Mokra area, became ill, and eventually went back on a stretcher to his home in Vancouver, Canada, where he soon died. The scuttlebutt was that Marsh was but "one more victim of a slow poisoning by native employees." Two interesting facts turn the case into a mystery for the narrator. First, Marsh left the nightwatchman with a certificate guaranteeing his livelihood should his employer leave Morocco. Second, the doctor examining Marsh reported curious patterns of incisions on the bottoms of the patient's feet.

The narrator himself becomes a kind of sleuth when he meets, seven or so years after the affair, the nightwatchman, Larbi, now a waiter in a Tangier restaurant. When Larbi lets the narrator see the written document Marsh left with him, he finds it is worded in such a way that the waiter could not collect a cent. Driven by his desire to solve the mystery, the narrator makes it well worth Larbi's while to accompany him to Marsh's vacant villa, where, on the porch, the Moroccan unfolds the story.

All would have been fine, apparently, if Marsh had not decided to replace his cook, Yasmina, who came with the place. Larbi is called in to find a replacement. The replacement brings her baby, whose crying drives Marsh to distraction. One day, in order to try to stop the baby from crying, Marsh gets down on all fours and makes a fierce face at the baby, causing it to burst into hysterics. When the baby becomes ill, of course, everyone concludes it is because this Westerner has put the evil eye on the girl. The incisions cut on Marsh's feet, Larbi says, were part of what was necessary to undo the spell.

Even with a number of the questions answered, the narrator admits "a vague sense of disappointment" because he had "not only expected, but actually hoped, to find someone on whom the guilt might be fixed. What constitutes a crime? There was no criminal intent—only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance."

Both the narrative technique and the thematic content of "The Eye" call to mind "Reminders of Bouselham" in *Things Gone and Things Still Here*. The story, which turns on the belief in the evil eye, reveals sharp differences in worldviews. Beyond this, the story presents the language issue in a way no other story in this volume does. English is the native tongue for the narrator, as well as for Bowles himself, yet in order to draw the story from Larbi, he uses Spanish, establishing a kind of neutral ground, much in the same way Bowles uses Spanish on a daily basis with his own driver, Abdelouahaïd, and with Mohamed Mrabet, who comes in every day to cook Bowles his dinner. When the narrator wants to gain even more trust, he speaks Arabic with Larbi. Bowles, like the narrator, understands and speaks the local Maghrebi dialect, though he does not read or write Arabic.

Source: Allen Hibbard, "*Midnight Mass*," in *Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Twayne Publishers, 1993, pp. 102-18.

Adaptations

Jennifer Baichwal directed the documentary *Let It Come Down: The Life of Paul Bowles* (1999), featuring Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg, among others. Bowles discusses his relationships with some of the twentieth century's most celebrated and notorious writers including Gertrude Stein, Jack Kerouac, and Truman Capote.

Bowles's novel *The Sheltering Sky* was adapted into a film in 1990. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, the film stars Debra Winger and John Malkovich.

Bowles reads "Allal" and other stories from his home in Morocco in *The Voices of Paul Bowles* (1989), an audiocassette published by the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio. The cassette also includes early music compositions and field recordings of traditional Moroccan music by Bowles.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of Tangier and present it to your class. Pay particular attention to how the French, Spanish, and Arab populations have contributed to the city's culture.

Starting with Italy, research the tradition of magic and sorcery in at least two other cultures. Look for spells that involve "casting the eye" on someone. What similarities and differences do you see between the other cultures'understanding of the spell and Morocco's? Discuss as a class.

Write an epilogue to the story, explaining what happens to Meriam and her daughter after they move away from Tangier. Read it to your class.

Compare the expatriate writers and artists in Paris in the 1920s with those in Tangier in the 1950s and 1960s. A good place to read about the former is in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Does one group or another appeal to you more? Support your answer with detailed reasons.

Many of the American expatriates who moved to Morocco in the 1950s did so to escape what they perceived as the stifling conformity of American life. Does such an atmosphere exist in the United States today? Research where people who are disillusioned with American life move to today.

Bowles presents Larbi as a passive character who does nothing to stop Marsh's death. Argue for or against the idea that Larbi's inaction constitutes a crime.

Compare and Contrast

1970s: Average annual gross domestic product growth reaches 5.4 percent in Morocco.

Today: Average annual gross domestic product growth hovers between 3.5 and 4 percent in Morocco.

1970s: Numerous demonstrators protesting the policies of King Hassan are jailed in secret detention centers. Many of them disappear or are killed.

Today: In 2000, hundreds of former political prisoners and activists in Morocco protest outside a former secret prison to condemn past human rights abuses and to demand trials for those responsible for the detentions, deaths, and disappearances of ex-prisoners.

1970s: Morocco is involved in an inconclusive desert war in the former Spanish Sahara with Mauritania and the Polisario Front. By the end of the decade, Mauritania withdraws, leaving only Morocco and the Polisario Front, which in 1976 proclaims the region the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.

Today: Although the United Nations has agreed to sponsor a referendum on the disputed territory, the issue remains unresolved.

What Do I Read Next?

Critics consider Bowles's 1949 novel *The Sheltering Sky* to be a classic of existential literature and one of the finest novels of the twentieth century.

William Burroughs, who also lived in Tangier for a while, was a friend of Paul Bowles and a leading voice of the Beat movement. Burroughs's novel *The Naked Lunch* (1959) is a classic of Beat literature.

Michelle Green's *The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades in Tangier* (1991), is a gossipy chronicle of the expatriate community in Tangier in the 1950s.

Palestinian-American Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is one of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies. Said critiques Western representations of the East, arguing that Western scholars since the nineteenth century have depicted "Arab" cultures as irrational, anti-Western, primitive, and dishonest.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933), actually written by Gertrude Stein, is the story of Stein's life in Paris among expatriate writers and artists. When Bowles lived in Paris, he attended many of Stein's salons and mingled with the literati.

Further Study

Bertens, Jonathan, *The Fiction of Paul Bowles, Costerus*, 1979.

Bertens analyzes Bowles's fiction, focusing on themes of existentialism and postcolonialism.

Bowles, Paul, *Without Stopping*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.

Bowles's autobiography is a useful resource. However, some critics have faulted it for being a less-thancandid account of the writer's life.

Caponi, Gena Dagel, *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1994.

Caponi's interpretive biography of Bowles provides an exhaustive yet fascinating exploration of Bowles's contributions to music, ethnography, and literature.

Dillon, Millicent, *A Little Original Sin: The Life and Work of Jane Bowles*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.

Dillon makes extensive use of interviews with Paul Bowles for this biography of Bowles's wife. Jane Bowles was an influential part of her husband's writing life.

Pounds, Wayne, *Paul Bowles: The Inner Geography*, Peter Lang, 1985.

Using the psychoanalytical theories of R. D. Laing, Pounds analyzes Bowles's fiction.

Stewart, Lawrence O., *The Illumination of North Africa*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1974.

Stewart's useful study examines the connections between Bowles's travels in North Africa and his fiction.

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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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