The Harvest Study Guide

The Harvest by Tomás Rivera

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Introduction

"The Harvest" (Arte Público Press, 1989) is a short story by Mexican American writer Tomás Rivera. Rivera was the first writer to document the experience of Mexican American migrant farm workers who each year traveled north from Texas to the Midwest to find seasonal work. Rivera, who was the son of Mexican immigrants, had been a migrant worker in his youth, at various times living and working in Iowa, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio. He therefore knew firsthand the difficult lives such workers had to endure, and still do today. Migrant workers are among the lowest paid of U. S. workers and they often work long hours in difficult conditions. Housing provided for them is often inadequate, and they are frequently treated as aliens in the communities where they work, even though many are American citizens. Rivera wrote that, in spite of the hardships of their work, the Chicano migrant workers kept their spirits up by what he described as their love of the land. "The Harvest" is a story that illustrates this love. It shows how one old migrant worker regularly renews his feeling of kinship with the land. Through his example, one of the young workers discovers this connection for himself, leading him to a new appreciation of the earth and the cycle of the seasons.

Author Biography

Tomás Rivera was born on December 22, 1935, in Crystal City, Texas, the son of Mexican immigrants, Florencio M. and Josefa (Hernandez) Rivera, who were migrant workers. Rivera accompanied his family in the migrant labor stream that traveled from Texas to many parts of the Midwest. During that time, Rivera lived and worked in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and North Dakota, but his parents also ensured that he had sufficient time to attend school. He graduated from Southwest Texas State College (now Southwest Texas State University), with a bachelor of arts degree in English in 1958. After graduating, he became a teacher of English and Spanish in the public schools of San Antonio, Crystal City, and League City, Texas, from 1957 to 1965.

Continuing his education, Rivera was awarded a masters degree in education from Southwest Texas State College in 1964. This degree made him eligible for college teaching, and in 1965 he became an instructor in English, French, and Spanish at Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde, until 1966. In 1968, he became an instructor in Spanish at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, and the following year, he received a doctorate in romance languages and literature from the University of Oklahoma. He immediately became associate professor at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, a position he held until 1971, when he became professor of Spanish at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

In 1971, Rivera published the novel for which he is best known, ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra / ...And the Earth Did Not Part.* It had already been awarded the Premio Quinto Sol in 1970. Rivera was also a poet, and he published *Always and Other Poems* (1973), as well as nonfiction essays in scholarly journals on topics such as Chicano literature. Some of Rivera's works were published posthumously. These include the short story "The Harvest" (1989) and *The Searchers: Collected Poetry* (1990).

Rivera became associate dean of the college of multidisciplinary studies at the University of Texas, San Antonio, and later vice president for administration. He then became executive vice-president at the University of Texas at El Paso before accepting the position of Chancellor at the University of California, Riverside, in 1979.

Rivera's administrative abilities earned him recognition and honors. He was a member of the board of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1976 and the Board of Foreign Scholarships (which directs and administers the Fulbright program). He was also a member of the board of the National Chicano Council on Higher Education. In 1980, he served on the presidential commission that reported on the nation's educational problems.

Rivera married Concepción Garza, on November 27, 1958. The couple had three children: Ileana, Irasema, and Florencio Javier.

Rivera was working on a second novel, *The People's Mansion,* when he died of a heart attack in Fontana, California, on May 16, 1984.

Plot Summary

"The Harvest" is divided into seven short sections. It is set somewhere in the Midwest at the end of September and the beginning of October. The unnamed narrator, a migrant farm worker, thinks this is the best time of year because the work is nearly over and he and his fellow workers will soon be able to return to Texas. Then the main character, Don Trine, is introduced. He walks through the fields every afternoon, and he prefers to do this alone, becoming angry if anyone tries to accompany him.

The next section is a dialogue between a group of unnamed workers, who work alongside Don Trine. They discuss the possible reasons for Trine's walks, which puzzle them. One says that it is Trine's business what he does; another thinks it is strange that he walks alone.

Next, the narrator reports on how the rumors about Trine spread. Some of his fellow workers have tried to spy on him, but he would get wise to what was happening and turn around and go back to his chicken coop. Soon people began to say that he was hiding the money he earned or that he had found buried treasure and was bringing it back to the coop little by little. There were other rumors about Trine, too, all of them centered on the idea that he must have money.

The reasoning behind the idea that Trine was secretly wealthy was that he was an old bachelor, had been working for many years, and had nothing to spend his money on. He only bought food and an occasional beer.

The young workers closely follow Trine on his walks, noting the route he takes and where he would disappear and linger. He seems to spend time around a ditch that crossed the west field. The boys decide to investigate the ditch the following Saturday. But when they do so, they find nothing in the ditch. They do, however, discover a number of holes a foot deep in the field.

They speculate about what might have caused the holes. Trine must have dug them, they conclude, but what was he hiding? They find a coffee can and decide that this is what Trine uses to dig the holes.

Late the following Monday, the boys find out the truth. They manage to fool Don Trine and observe what he does. They are correct that Trine digs the holes with the coffee can. From time to time he measures the depth of the hole by thrusting his arm into it, up to the elbow. He remains in this position for some while, even trying, unsuccessfully, to light a cigarette with one hand. Then Trine digs another hole and thrusts his arm into it in exactly the same way as before. The boys are mystified. They return to their co-workers and report what they have seen. Everyone else is mystified, too. They had all assumed that the holes had something to do with money. Since this has been shown to be incorrect, they think that Trine must be crazy and forget about him. One boy, however, remains curious. The next day he goes to a field and does exactly what he had observed Trine do the previous day. He finds that feeling the earth around his arm

is a pleasurable sensation such as he has never felt before. He realizes that Trine is not crazy; he simply likes to feel the earth when it is sleeping. After this, the boy keeps going to the field every afternoon until a freeze comes and it is too hard to dig. Then he thinks with pleasant anticipation of the following October when he will once again be able to repeat the process.

Summary

"The Harvest" is Tomas Rivera's short story about a migrant worker named Don Trine whose love for the land he works is more powerful than any amount of backbreaking toil.

The story begins at the "end of September and the beginning of October," and the story's narrator describes the migrant workers talking about the end of work in this part of the country and their imminent return to Texas. The workers talk about the harvest and whether or not they will return to this area again next year.

Some of the workers begin to take long walks around the fields, particularly Don Trine, who walks every afternoon by himself and makes it very clear that he does not want anyone to join him. Some of the other workers discuss the mission of Don's walks and cannot understand why he wants to walk alone all the time and why he gets angry when anyone tries to follow him. The other workers are annoyed at Don's behavior because the land is not his, but he acts as if he has proprietary rights to it.

The other workers are fueled by active imaginations and speculate that Don is hiding money out in the fields and does not want anyone else to see his hiding places. Every time Don realizes that he is being followed, he changes his path and returns back to his own chicken coop. Some believe that Don has found a buried treasure and is carrying away small amounts at a time.

Whatever the point of view, the others feel sure that Don's secretive behavior revolves around money. The others think that Don must have accumulated a significant amount of money in his life in spite of any treasure because he never married and has no children for whom he is responsible. Even today, Don's spending habits are very frugal, spending just a little on food and a beer once in awhile.

One day, some of the young workers decide to follow Don once again, paying particular attention to his route. Don enters a grove and emerges in a west field. He seems to spend a significant amount of time at a ditch that crosses this particular field. The younger men decide to return on Saturday to investigate the ditch to see if they can find any clues.

On Saturday, the young men are filled with anticipation as they approach the ditch to begin their inspection and are perplexed to find many deep holes that are all empty. An empty coffee can lying nearby is obviously the tool used to dig the foot-deep, uniformly dug holes. The young men cannot come up with any explanation for the strange situation and decide to hide and wait until Don returns so that they can see his behavior.

The young men see Don Trine return to the hole-filled ditch area late on Monday. As Don begins his ritualistic digging, the young men note that they were correct in their assumption of the coffee can's use. Watching silently, the young men see Don

methodically dig a hole and test its depth by inserting his forearm and remaining in this position for a little while.

Don unsuccessfully attempts to light a cigarette with his free hand while he remains fixed with his other arm buried in the ground. Amazingly, once Don retrieves his arm, he repeats the activity and buries his arm in yet another hole. The young men do not understand this unusual behavior. They return to the other workers and report what they have seen. The fact that there is no money or treasure involved leads the others to believe simply that Don Trine is crazy, and they forget about the whole incident.

One of the young men, however, is intrigued by Don Trine's activity and goes to a field the next day to mimic Don's procedures. Almost immediately, the young man feels the earth move around his arm, caressing it warmly, and understands Don Trine's activities. The young man surmises that Don is not crazy; he merely likes to feel the sleeping earth. The young man repeats the ritual every day until a hard freeze arrives, and he vows to re-visit the practice again after the harvest next year.

Analysis

Rivera uses the limited third person narrative perspective to tell the story, which means that the reader can witness the activities of all the characters but has access only to the thoughts and feelings of the young man. Don Trine's thoughts and motivations are never revealed, lending the necessary air of mystery to the plot line of the story.

The young men and the other migrant workers are never identified, leaving Don Trine as the focal point and the significant character amidst the group. This symbolizes Don's distinctive characteristics and unique thinking among the others, who do not assert any individualism or independent activity. The plight of the migrant worker is one of tedious, controlled toil, so Don is unique in his ability to break away from the others and experience a fuller life while in the midst of the sameness of everyday life.

Rivera also uses metaphors to help describe the earth and portray it as if it were a person. When the inquisitive young man reaches his arm into the holes in the earth, he immediately experiences "feeling the earth move, feeling the earth grasp his fingers and even caressing them." The earth is given more human characteristics when the young man senses that "he simply liked to feel the earth while it was sleeping."

Finally, the young man understands the passion that Don Trine feels for the earth and even has personal feelings of regret that he has not appreciated the earth until now. He feels as if "it was like when someone died. You always blamed yourself for not loving him more before he died." Rivera provides these human characteristics to show that the earth has a huge part in the life of migrant workers, and with some there is a sense of reverence for this important persona.

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Characters

Curious Boy

The curious boy is one of the group of boys who follow Don Trine to see where he goes and what he does on his walks. Unlike the others, though, he is intrigued by what he sees Don Trine doing. He goes back on his own and imitates Don Trine's actions for himself.

Group of Boys

The boys in the group are young migrant farm workers who speculate on why Don Trine goes on so many solitary walks. They follow him to find out what he does but lose interest when they discover that he is not hiding a treasure trove of money.

Don Trine

Don Trine is one of the migrant farm workers and the only character in the story who is named. He is old, although this description is supplied by the youngsters, which means that Trine might perhaps be only middle-aged and simply appear old to their young eyes. Trine is a bachelor and appears to be a sober, cautious, taciturn man. He says little, but he has a temper: he angrily turns away anyone who tries to follow him in his walks. A loner, Trine is a man who likes his own company.

Trine has been working for many years, presumably doing the same kind of work, but he does not spend the money he earns in any ostentatious way. He has no family to take care of, and his only luxury is the occasional beer or cigarette. It is this frugal aspect of Trine's character that leads the youngsters to think that he may have money stashed away in the holes that he digs.

It turns out that Trine values his connection to the land more than money or human company. He appears to be completely satisfied when he immerses his arm up to the elbow in the holes he has dug and feels the earth nestling up against his skin.

Themes

Materialism

The young boys who speculate about Don Trine have a limited, materialistic vision of life. Although they work on the land, they have no real connection to it. This may be understandable since they are migrant workers often on the move, but it is clear that they can conceive value only in terms of money. A man like Trine who goes off in secret must be hiding money. Perhaps the attitude of the youngsters reflects the hard and impoverished life led by Mexican American migrant workers. As low-paid workers without many material resources, they see the accumulation of money as the principal goal of life. Although their ethnic heritage is Mexican, they live in the United States, the most abundant culture in the world from a materialistic point of view, and they have acquired its values. Acquiring these values has come at the expense of a true relationship with and understanding of nature and its cycles. At the end of the story, one of the boys finds out for himself that there are things of enormous value that have nothing to do with money.

Nature and Its Meaning

In contrast to the young boys who think of life only in terms of money, the older workers appear to have a different attitude. These are the people the narrator refers to in the first paragraph as "the folks ." They are more mature and reflective and can sense an "aura of peace and death" in the air as the harvest season comes to an end. Sensing that everything is coming to rest, they take more time to think. They are aware of the cycles of nature and how these affect human life. Their reflective thoughts are partly because they are about to pack up and move back to Texas, but they also possess a deeper awareness of how nature's moods color their own.

The only named character in the story, Don Trine, is the one who knows this better than anyone. He is deeply connected to the land, and he has developed his own ritual to remind him of this, and it has acquired an almost sacred quality for him. Although he does not deliberately pass on this ritual to the younger generation of workers, one boy discovers it for himself through observing Trine. This boy is motivated only by curiosity, but as he imitates what he has seen Trine do, he, in effect, initiates himself into a new way of experiencing the land. As he sinks his arm into the earth and feels its embrace, he becomes aware of the earth as a living being. This awareness gives him a new appreciation of nature's cycles and his relationship to them.

Style

Structure

In his introduction to "The Harvest," Julián Olivares quotes from an unpublished manuscript in which Rivera commented on the construction of a short story: "The conflict or problem of each story is what interests us as a story. The more intriguing the conflict, the more the story will interest the reader." This, says Rivera, is because every reader has a natural desire to find out how the conflict is resolved. In "The Harvest," the interest is generated by the problem, or mystery, of exactly what Don Trine does when he goes off on his walks. The development of the mystery dictates the structure of the story, which proceeds in alternating sections of narration and dialogue. With each section, as the youngsters continue to speculate about what Trine does, the reader's interest in the mystery grows. It is only in the last section, which is longer than all the others, that the mystery is revealed.

Point of View

The story is told by a limited third person narrator, who observes the activities and attitudes of the migrant workers. The narrator knows what is going on in the minds of the youngsters who speculate about Don Trine, but he has no insight into Trine himself, who is seen entirely through the eyes of the boys. This technique is necessary to create the sense of mystery about Trine's activities on which the story depends.

Of all the characters, only Trine is named. The other characters are anonymous, and there are no physical descriptions of them. The dialogue does not identify any differences between the speakers, other than their words, which stand alone like dialogue in a play. This is a technique Rivera used elsewhere. The anonymity places the emphasis on the experience of an entire group, rather than on individuals. The speakers are representatives of a collective voice, that of migrant workers as a group.

Figurative Language

After the narrator has mentioned that in the fall there was "an aura of peace and death" in the air that the workers created, he comments, "The earth shared that feeling." This figure of speech is known as the pathetic fallacy, in which human emotions are attributed to natural things. It conveys the idea that, for the narrator, the earth is a living being.

In the final section of the story, the boy discovers this also. As he thrusts his arm into the hole, he feels as if the earth is reaching out to grasp his fingers, "even caressing them," and he "sensed he was inside someone." Then the boy refers to the earth as "sleeping" and later, when the frost comes, as "asleep." This feeling that the earth is alive gives the

boy new affection for the land. He compares the earth to a person who has died and regrets that he has not loved it more before it went to sleep.

Historical Context

Chicano Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are those who are employed on a temporary, often seasonal basis and who come from a community, state, or nation other than where they are temporarily employed. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of migrant farm workers in the United States were recent immigrants from Asia or Europe, but with the growth of the sugar beet, fruit and vegetable, and cotton industries in the early twentieth century, the number of Mexican and Mexican American migrant workers rapidly increased. Each spring they would travel from Texas to the north central, mountain, and Pacific Coast states. At the end of the season, they would return to Mexico or towns on the Mexican border.

Rivera's parents were part of this migration of Mexican Americans north. He recalled that one of his earliest memories was of waking up in a farm in northern Minnesota where his parents and relatives worked in the beet fields. This memory probably dates from the late 1930s, when there were an estimated four million agricultural migrant laborers working each season.

These workers were often exploited. Wages were low and working hours were long. Child labor was widespread. Education levels were also low, and often local schools would not admit the children of migrant workers since they were not permanent local residents. Because the local community considered the workers as aliens, they were excluded from community life and often found it difficult to attain health care and government services such as food stamps and disability insurance. Levels of diseases such as tuberculosis, typhoid, and smallpox among migrant workers were far higher than that of the general population, as were maternal and infant mortality rates. Employment was also limited; most migrants worked less than a quarter of available working days. In addition to all these hardships, housing provided for migrant workers was grossly inadequate.

Rivera commented forcefully in his essay, "Remembering, Discovery and Volition in the Literary Imaginative Process," on the plight of migrant workers: "The political and economical structures which surrounded the lives of these families [was] brutal, outrageous and inhuman." Rivera believed that the migrant workers were possibly worse off than slaves. Slaves were considered an investment by their owners and therefore had some protection, but not so the migrant worker:

The migrant worker never had any protection because he was really not an investment for the exploiter and thus worked under the conditions of slavery without the most rudimentary benefits.

In the 1950s, when Rivera himself was a migrant worker, their numbers dropped to about 600,000 yearly. In the 1960s, the numbers fell once more, to about 400,000, and

there were some improvements in living and working conditions. Much of this was due to the efforts of Mexican American activist Cesar Chavez, who organized what is now the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) in California.

Chicano Literature

Rivera was one of the leading figures in what has been called the Chicano Renaissance, an explosion of literary activity among Mexican Americans during the 1960s. In part inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and the gains made by African Americans, Chicano writers emphasized the need for social and political action to end discrimination and provide equal opportunities for Chicanos. As Rivera writes in his essay, "On Chicano Literature," in the decade from 1966 to 1976, Chicano literature had a three-part mission: "conservation of a culture; the struggle or fight for better economic, social, educational and political equity; and invention."

Many of the most celebrated Chicano writers of this period were poets, who drew on the oral traditions of their culture to inspire their communities with a sense of identity and mission. Abelardo Delgado's collection, *Chicano: 25 Pieces of a Chicano Mind* (1969), was one of the most influential books in this respect.

Another landmark in Chicano literature was the establishment in 1968 of the publishing house Quinto Sol in Berkeley, California, by a group of young Mexican Americans. Its purpose was to provide a channel for the publication of Chicano literature. Quinto Sol instituted a national award for Chicano literature, Premio Quinto Sol (Fifth Sun Award), which offered a cash prize and publication of the winning entry. In the first year, the prize was awarded to Rivera's *...y no se lo tragó la tierra/ ...And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971), which is still one of the most highly regarded of all Chicano works. In the following year, the Premio Quinto Sol was awarded to Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), which has also become one of the best-known and most popular Chicano novels.

Critical Overview

The publication of *The Harvest: Short Stories* five years after Rivera's death cemented his reputation as the foremost chronicler of the Chicano migrant workers' experience. According to Patricia De La Fuente, who reviewed the book in *Western American Literature,* "Rivera possesses that rare ability in writers to convert everyday episodes in the lives of ordinary people into small masterpieces of sparse yet often lyrical prose."

In his introduction to the book, Julián Olivares noted that the title story was one of three, the others being "The Salamanders" and "Zoo Island," which "bring into focus the experience of the migratory cycle." In "The Harvest," "this cycle is enclosed within the greater cycle of life, death and regeneration." Discussing the story's culminating moment of revelation, Olivares commented, "The sense of deracination caused by migrant farmwork is countered by the youngster's awareness of belonging to a world of which external forces cannot deprive him."

Rivera had previously given literary expression to the migrant workers' lives in his novel.. *.y no se lo tragó la tierra/...And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971), and as Olivares notes, the story "The Harvest" supplies an aspect of the workers' experience that is excluded from the novel. The novel dwells on the struggle of the farm workers against nature; in contrast, the story emphasizes what Olivares, following Rivera himself, calls the "love of the land."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey analyzes Rivera's story as an example of an initiation story.

Rivera's "The Harvest" is a brief story, covering in some editions no more than three pages. However, springing up from this spare narrative are the archetypal themes of initiation and search, and one archetypal character, that of the Wise Old Man. These structural patterns are archetypal in the sense that they recur in many different myths and literatures of the world and seem to reflect universal human desires and life processes. Since the most prominent of these themes in "The Harvest" is that of initiation, the story can be classified as an initiation story.

The term "initiation" was originally employed by anthropologists to describe the rituals used in primitive societies to mark the passage from boyhood to manhood. Such rituals might include a period of seclusion, an ordeal involving the endurance of physical pain, or the killing of a wild animal. There may be ceremonies, feasts, and dances, all with the purpose of transforming a youth into an adult member of his tribe or community. There are also rituals involved in a girl's rite of passage, often involving fasting and isolation, ritual bathing and purification.

The term "initiation" has been adopted by literary critics to describe a certain type of short story. Some initiation stories portray rituals similar to those in primitive societies. William Faulkner's "The Bear" (1942), in which a young man kills a bear, is an example. But many stories contain no formal ritual element. The main feature of an initiation story is that a young person undergoes experiences that teach him or her vital truths about human life, often about the adult world that the young person is about to enter. The initiate may also learn a lesson about the world of nature. In all cases, there is a passage from ignorance to knowledge or self-discovery. The protagonist learns something that he or she did not know before. Although many initiation stories show a young person coming into contact for the first time with evil or experiencing disillusionment with the complexities and unpleasantness of the adult world, not all initiation stories fall into this category. Some, like "The Harvest," may be stories of awakening, in which, as a result of his experience, the protagonist perceives life as more rich and rewarding than before, rather than less so.

What is the nature of the initiation in "The Harvest?" The character who undergoes the initiation is a boy migrant worker. As such, he probably knows a lot about dislocation and alienation. Migrant workers move from place to place and are often isolated from the life of the community in which they work. When this unnamed boy follows his curiosity and reenacts Don Trine's ritual immersion of his arm into the earth, he finds to his surprise that this simple act opens up a huge treasure trove of previously unknown experience. It is a treasure quite unlike the buried bags of money, which up to then has been the only way in which he and his friends could conceive of the idea of wealth.

What the boy has experienced is a kind of rebirth (a concept that underlies much of primitive ritual and is itself an archetypal theme). He has been reborn into an awareness of something that is much larger than himself. He realizes that the earth too has consciousness; it is a living being, not merely an inanimate thing that happens to produce crops. As he realizes this, he also understands that he can actually have a relationship with this living being, a being that is at once new to him and indescribably ancient. It is an experience that changes him forever: "What he never forgot was feeling the earth move, feeling the earth grasp his fingers and even caressing them."

The boy has managed to achieve in a moment what English writer D. H. Lawrence, in his book, *Apocalypse* (1931), urged modern, materialistic man to do if he were to become fully human:

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family.

These living, organic connections that Lawrence advocated are precisely what the boy in "The Harvest" discovers. Rivera explains as much in his essay, "Remembering, Discovery and Volition in the Literary Imaginative Process," in which he comments on the type of character that appears in his work. At first he condemns the "cold, materialistic, inhumane system" that was responsible for the injustices suffered by Chicano migrant workers. But what saved them was their ability to cultivate a love of the land. Rivera comments:

[M]an has a love for the land as well as his love for his neighbor. He engenders it. He gives love and from it generates life.... [T]he Chicano, when he knelt upon the land...felt a symbiotic existence with the land....As long as this relationship with the land existed, the Chicano was not dehumanized.

This in part explains the significance of the story's moment of illumination. Rivera connects the Chicano's love of the land with his love of his own people, his sense of community. Although this is not explicitly stated in the story, it suggests that through his moving, sensual contact with the earth, the boy will develop an awareness of the spirit and continuity of his people through their shared embrace of the land. It is easy to imagine the boy in "The Harvest" saying, with Rivera in his long poem "The Searchers":

How can we be alone

How can we be alone

if we are so close to the earth?

"The Searchers," as its title suggests, repeatedly presents the experience of the Chicano people in search of continuity and community, for self-knowledge and self-discovery. Search is an archetypal theme often present in initiation stories, and it occurs in somewhat muted form in "The Harvest." The boys who follow Don Trine are not conscious of searching for anything other than the solution to the mystery of what Trine

does on his walks, but the boy who imitates Trine's ritual is at some unconscious level propelled by more than mere curiosity. Although the spare narrative does not elaborate on his motivation, the fact that the boy is unnamed suggests that he can be understood not simply as an individual but as a representative of his people and their search for meaning and connection to nature and the earth. This search is all the more urgent for the Chicano migrant worker because often, due to the harshness of his work and life, nature is seen as an antagonist, as a force to be overcome, rather than as the warm, benevolent, responsive being that the boy discovers.

The final archetype present in "The Harvest" is that of the Wise Old Man. Psychologist Carl Jung identified this archetype. Jung theorized that such images welled up from what he called the collective unconscious and were found in the dreams, myths, and literatures of many different cultures. According to Jung, the archetypes embody universal patterns of human consciousness.

The Wise Old Man is usually a benevolent character who acts as a guide to someone younger. He embodies wisdom, insight, and knowledge. In Arthurian legend, for example, Merlin, the magician and counselor, fulfills the role of Wise **Old** Man. In Dante's *Divine Comedy,* Virgil performs the same function as he guides Dante through hell, purgatory, and heaven. Initiation stories often contain a Wise Old Man who teaches some vital knowledge to a younger person. Examples include "Open Winter" (1953) by H. L. Davis; "The Promise" (1938) by John Steinbeck; and two stories by Faulkner, "The Old People" (1940) and "The Bear" (1942), in which an old man tutors a young boy in the art of hunting. There is a similar relationship between the characters Manolin, a young Cuban boy, and Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman, in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1962).

In "The Harvest," Don Trine is a variant of the Wise Old Man archetype. He is not a complete expression of it because usually the Wise Old Man possesses moral qualities such as goodwill and a willingness to help, which the grouchy, taciturn, private Trine does not embody at all. But he is a Wise Old Man nonetheless. Trine possesses knowledge that the younger workers do not have. He knows his connection to the earth, and he has devised a ritual of his own to maintain it. It is through Trine's example that the youngster learns something that is extremely valuable to him. He would not have discovered it without Trine. Trine is therefore the vehicle through which wisdom is passed from the older generation to the younger. In that transmission of wisdom, Rivera seems to be saying, lies the hope for the Chicano migrant workers, a people who have otherwise suffered too much for too long.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "The Harvest," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Sanderson holds a master of fine arts degree in fiction writing and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sanderson examines Tomás Rivera's use of various storytelling techniques in his short story and how these techniques help construct a ritual of community survival.

Tomás Rivera is best known for his poetry and one published novel,...*y no se lo tragó la tierra /...And the Earth Did Not Part.* Critics have praised Rivera's poems and novel for their inclusion of ritual and remembrance as major features while describing the Mexican migrant farm worker culture of the 1940s and 1950s. In addition, critics note that Rivera successfully explores in these works the relationship between the generations. Though "The Harvest" may not have received as much attention as these other writings, this brief story displays similar techniques. Rivera's use of these three narrative features—rituals, relationships between generations, and remembering—gives "The Harvest" a fullness in spite of its brevity, creating a story that mimics the atmosphere of a campfire tale-telling session. Ultimately, Rivera's story is a short but powerful love letter to the earth that also acknowledges the struggles of the migrant farm worker community.

In this story, Rivera provides a peek into the world of his origin—the world of the Mexican and Mexican-American migrant farm worker in the United States. They were (and still are) a community always on the move, making the creation and maintenance of rituals an important way to establish some stability and consistency in their lives. As Rivera notes in the very beginning of the story, uncertainty and variability were the hallmarks of their existence. At the end of the season, the workers would talk about "if it had gone well for them, if they would return or not to the same place next year." Their children's education was sporadic, as they were always on the move with the seasons, and their daily lives were only as predictable as the weather.

Out of this unpredictability grew a culture steeped in rituals and events that unfolded with regularity. For as they traveled across the United States with the seasons and slept and worked according to the rotation of the earth, the earth's movements were always a source of stability and constancy for the workers. Rivera integrates this feature of migrant worker culture into his story and alerts the reader to its guiding importance by making it very clear what time of the year the story takes place and what that means for the workers: "The end of September and the beginning of October.... It was a sign that the work was coming to an end and that the return to Texas would start," begins Rivera's story. As if to put an exclamation point on the value of the seasons' regularity and their relationship to the rituals of the farm workers, Rivera ends his story by noting that the young boy who discovers Don Trine's personal rite looks forward to "next year, in October at the harvest time, when once again he could repeat what Don Trine did."

The narrative core of the story, in fact, is one man's annual ritual. Don Trine, after the harvest, goes out nearly every evening to a ditch near the edge of the fields and digs a hole into which he places his arm, elbow deep, to feel the earth. Every community has

its own public and private rituals; Don Trine's ritual is purely private, so much so that he snarls at the children when they become curious and try to follow him out to the ditch. At the story's beginning, some of the community's rituals are noted: regular discussions about the past year's successes and failures, the expected trip back to Texas, and "long walks around the grove." Don Trine has a couple of personal yet public rituals, as well, including buying his food every Saturday.

Like many rituals, Don Trine's effort to feel the earth after the harvest is clothed in secrecy. Not only does he tell the children to stop following him when he begins his walk to the ditch, but he also changes his route in an effort to foil any plans they may have to uncover his actions. "When he would leave, and someone would spy on him, somehow or other he would catch on, then take a little walk, turn around and head right back to his chicken coop," the story's teller recounts. Eventually, the children figure out where he is going and visit the ditch when Don Trine is not around. There they find the accoutrements of his ritual: multiple holes dug into the soft earth and a coffee can. But even when they manage to follow him to the site and watch him perform the ritual, their view is incomplete and obstructed, and they leave, assuming that Don Trine is crazy. Only when a single young boy tries to reproduce the ritual is its meaning clear. It takes the reenactment of the ritual, complete with its physical movements, to make the ritual alive and meaningful to another person in the community.

Don Trine is described as a man who has never married and does not have a family. When the children talk of him, it is in terms of someone who has lived a long time. "He's an old bachelor," they say, someone who has worked "so many years" and must have saved a lot of money. Even though the reader does not see a face-to-face meeting between Don Trine and the boy who re-creates the older man's ceremony with the earth, they most certainly have a relationship, which brings the motif of cross-generational relationships into the story. After the boy understands Don Trine's ritual, he establishes a relationship with the older man, similar to the way in which a son would connect with his father. When the boy thinks of doing the ritual the following year, it is with a sense of both anticipation and bittersweet sorrow. "It was like when someone died. You always blamed yourself for not loving him more before he died," he notes. These last lines in the story are the most mournful in the whole piece and seem to refer, on the one hand, to no one in particular and, on the other hand, to Don Trine.

The third feature that appears in Rivera's story is the act of remembrance. Much like the incorporation of rituals, remembering events and retelling stories are important to a community searching for roots and stability. Remembering people and sharing stories can become rituals and create bonds between generations as well as help to hold communities together during periods of hardship. Not only are there incidences of storytelling and remembering in the story, but the story itself is structured to sound as if someone is telling it around a campfire or over dinner.

A very casual but realistic tone is struck from the beginning of "The Harvest," framing Don Trine's tale in a general place and time (in the fall, just before the migrant families return to Texas) and using language that indicates familiarity. Maybe the teller has even shared this story before and can assume a high level of familiarity with the listeners, as

few details are revealed about who the characters are, their backgrounds, or what they do for a living; nearly all of that information is understood and unspoken. The only person who has a proper name is Don Trine; everyone else is referred to as "the folks," "the youngsters," or even simply "one of the boys." Don Trine is also the only character with a specific past, divulged when the workers are suspicious about his walks out to the edge of the fields and "began to say that when he was young he had run around with a gang in Mexico."

Presenting the story as a tale shared between neighbors or friends, Rivera uses phrases such as "And that's why" and "And that's how" to start the paragraphs that attempt to explain Don Trine's and, eventually, the young boy's, behaviors. These phrases act as a break in the action of the story, a way to connect with the reader to explain what might seem like an inconsistency in the narrative. Finally, Rivera ends his story in a very personal tone of voice, with the second person "you," as if he wants to address and connect directly with his reader.

All of these features promote the idea that the tale of Don Trine is not just a story about a migrant worker who happens to like sticking his hand in warm dirt at the end of the harvest season. To begin with, Don Trine is passing a ritual on to another generation (although he does so against his will), something that is essential for the survival of his culture. For all the care the older man takes to keep the children away from his walks, his sudden slip-up that allows them to follow him does not come as a complete surprise. It seems as if he understands—or hopes—that one of the children will be, not disappointed, but curious when he discovers that Don Trine is not hiding money but is engaging in a ritual that connects him with the earth.

Rivera has given the earth, as well as the other characters in his story, very human qualities. When the story opens, the earth is said to have "shared that feeling" of "peace and death" with the farm workers. Rivera also has the narrator observe that in the final days of the harvest, "there was a wake over the earth," a tricky wording that gives the character of the earth a life and a death, much like a human. But nowhere does the earth become more human and more full of the possibility of life than at the very end of the story, when Don Trine's ritual is revealed. As the boy digs a hole in the soft dirt using the old man's coffee can, he experiences through his hand "the earth move, feeling the earth grasp his fingers and even caressing them." He knows then that Don Trine was not crazy when he "felt the warmth of the earth ... [and] sensed he was inside someone."

Rivera's language in these passages reads as if Don Trine and the boy are experiencing an almost sexual connection with the earth. In a moment of humor while the group of boys is watching Don Trine perform his ritual, the story's narrator observes that Don Trine "seemed very satisfied and even tried to light a cigarette with one hand" after his hand was deep inside one of the holes he had dug. It is very hard *not* to see this scene as a teasing nod to the classic postcoital moment replayed in innumerable modern movies and novels.

However, the full understanding of Don Trine's ritual is undoubtedly more closely related to the bond the migrant farm worker community has with the earth itself. Without the earth the workers do not have a livelihood and cannot support their families. The workers take from the earth their livelihood; Rivera's story, however, also highlights the fact that the relationship with the earth cannot be one-sided. The ditch where Don Trine performs his ritual is next to a field where potatoes have recently been harvested. In this light, the old man's rite seems to say that the workers must also give back to the earth. Don Trine's ritual of putting his hand reverently back into the earth after the harvest—not to take, this time, but to caress—replenishes the earth so that the crops will grow next year and the workers can nourish their families. By learning the ritual and practicing it, the boy has assured, across the generations, the future survival of his people and community.

Source: Susan Sanderson, Critical Essay on "The Harvest," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

Research the lives and working conditions of Chicano migrant workers today. Are they better or worse now than in the 1960s and 1970s? Describe the differences.

Investigate the lives and working conditions of migrant workers from other ethnic groups, such as African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans. In which parts of the country are each group found most frequently? How do their lives differ from those of Chicanos?

Think back over your own life and write a brief essay describing an incident that might form the basis of an initiation story. What did you learn from the incident that you did not know before?

What permanent effects has it had on you? Are the effects positive or negative?

Describe an incident in your own life that caused you to feel a new appreciation for nature or a new understanding of it.

Rivera wrote that one of the ways that Chicanos created a sense of continuity and identity was by remembering the past, and this is one of the functions of Chicano literature. What are some other ways in which groups of people create a sense of community amongst themselves?

Research the life of Cesar Chavez and briefly describe some of the ways in which he helped to improve the lives of migrant farm workers.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: There is almost no literature that documents the experience of Chicano farm workers.

Today: The works of Rivera, which chronicle the life of the Chicano migrant worker, are widely read and studied in many universities in the United States.

1950s: Although accurate estimates are difficult, there are about 600,000 migrant workers in the United States yearly.

Today: Estimates of the number of migrant workers of all ethnicities (mostly Mexican Americans, Mexicans, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans) who work in the United States range from 125,000 to over one million.

1950s: Under the Bracero program, the United States legally admits 400,000 Mexican farm workers each season. Levels of illegal immigration from Mexico are not high enough to cause concern.

Today: Many regard soaring levels of illegal immigration from Mexico as a major security problem for the United States. In 2001, a panel reporting to President George W. Bush calls for legalizing the status of some of the estimated three million Mexicans living illegally in the United States. It is estimated that fifty percent to eighty percent of the 1.6 million farm workers in the United States are illegal immigrants. Most of them are from Mexico.

What Do I Read Next?

Rivera's highly influential *..y no se lo tragó la tierra/.. And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971) is the story of the hardships endured by a Chicano migrant worker family and their community, as seen through the eyes of a young boy.

Pieces of the Heart: New Chicano Fiction (1993), edited by Gary Soto, is a collection of fifteen stories from some of the best-known Chicano writers. Writers represented include Sandra Cisneros, Alberto Alvaro Rios, Ana Castillo, Victor Martinez, and Helena Maria Viramontes.

Necessary Theater: Six Plays about the Chicano Experience (1989), edited by Jorge Huerta, is a collection of plays that examine the lives of Mexican Americans in diverse situations, from a World War II veteran returning to San Antonio ("Soldierboy") to Latina immigrants working as domestics in Beverly Hills ("Latina").

Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child (1999), by Elva Trevino Hart, is an autobiographical account of the life of a child growing up in a family of migrant farm workers. Like Rivera, Hart was born in south Texas to Mexican immigrants and spent her childhood moving back and forth between Texas and Minnesota.

With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today (1998), by Daniel Rothen-berg and Robert Coles, tells the story of the migrant farm workers. Based on 250 interviews by an anthropologist who worked for a legal aid service that represented migrant workers, the book documents the poverty and neglect that these workers endure, even today.

The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement (1998), by Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, is a biography of the renowned Mexican American activist who founded the United Farm Workers union in 1962 and led the fight to secure basic human rights for farm workers.

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) presents a vivid and bitter portrait of the hardship and oppression suffered by farm families from the southern Midwest states who migrated to California in the 1930s in search of work.

Further Study

Bruce-Novoa, Juan, *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview,* University of Texas Press, 1980.

This work includes an interview with Rivera in which he explains that part of his motivation as an author was to document the strength and the suffering of the Chicano migrant workers and to give their story a spiritual dimension.

Lattin, Vernon E., Rolando Hinojosa, and Gary D. Keller, *Tomás Rivera, 1935-1984, The Man and His Work,* Bilingual Review/Press, 1988.

This collection features works by Rivera as well as poems written in his memory, scholarly contributions, drawings, and photographs.

Olivares, Julián, ed., *International Studies in Honor of Tomás Rivera,* Arte Público Press, 1986.

Olivares's text is a collection of seventeen essays on all aspects of Rivera's work and on Chicano and Hispanic literature in the United States.

Sommers, Joseph, "Interpreting Tomás Rivera," *mModern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays,* edited by Joseph Sommers and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Prentice-Hall, 1979, pp. 94-107.

Sommers offers an assessment of Rivera's .. *y no se lo tragó la tierra/...And the Earth Did Not Part* that is critical of the author's treatment of female characters.

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Literary Imaginative Process," in *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works,* edited by Julián Olivares, Arte Público Press, 1991, pp. 365-77.

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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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