The Sun, the Moon, the Stars Study Guide

The Sun, the Moon, the Stars by Junot Díaz

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Introduction

The story came about after Díaz spent a summer working as an interpreter for a U.S.-sponsored dentistry mission in Santo Domingo. The job gave Díaz an opportunity to visit his native Dominican Republic and experience it again from the perspective of someone who has lived for years in the United States. According to Díaz in the "Contributors' Notes" in *The Best American Short Stories: 1999*, that summer they "pulled . . . five thousand teeth on the trip and . . . rubbed shoulders with many of the country's elite," a contrast Díaz sought to capture in a story. After a year of revising the story, Díaz realized that he should delete all references to dentistry and focus more on the dissolution of the relationship between his two main characters. "Once I got that insight," says Díaz, "I finished the story in a single day, the culmination of sixteen months of work." This achievement represented something else for the author, however. "I still remember that day. The first piece I'd finished since my book [*Drown*] was published. My hands were shaking." The story first appeared in *The New Yorker* and was later included in the anthology *The Best American Short Stories 1999*.

"The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" recounts the ways in which Yunior, a proud Dominican male, manages to sabotage his relationship with Magdalena, a woman who seems very much like every man's ideal. The story progresses from one miscue to another as Yunior attempts to remedy the damage he has caused by having an affair. The couple travels from metropolitan New York to Santo Domingo to celebrate an anniversary, but the vacation, instead of reviving their love for each other, only brings an end to their relationship. Yunior does not think of himself as a bad guy, yet his actions contradict him at every turn. Charming and engaging, he is, nevertheless, his own worst enemy.

Author Biography

The Sun, the Moon, the Stars: Junot Díaz [graphic graphicname="TIF00020853" orient="portrait" size="A"]

In 1968, Junot Díaz was born into a *barrio* family and raised in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. In 1975, he moved with his family to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and later became a naturalized citizen of the United States. Díaz has held a variety of jobs, including copy shop assistant, dishwasher, steelworker, pool table delivery man, editorial assistant, and freelance writer. Díaz completed a bachelor of arts degree in literature and history at Rutgers University and a master of fine arts degree in creative writing at Cornell.

Díaz burst onto the literary scene with the publication of his short story collection *Drown* (Riverhead Books, 1996). The young author earned himself a six-figure advance that was unprecedented for someone who had only published five stories and who had nothing more than a one-page synopsis of a novel to show publishers bidding at auction. Success has not come without its price, however, for Díaz has published little in the years since his debut. In an interview for the *Latino News Network* online, quoted in *Contemporary Authors Online*, Díaz describes his meteoric success as "completely overwhelming." "I was not really mentally prepared for it. So instead of making mistakes□which meant . . . going nuts with the money or just going bananas and like changing who I was . . . what I did was shut down. . . . And I found it hard to write."

Díaz's stories have appeared in such prestigious publications as *Story*, *The Paris Review*, and *The New Yorker*, with two stories, "Ysrael" and "Fiesta, 1980," selected for inclusion in the *Best American Short Stories* anthology series. Subsequently, "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" was included in *Best American Short Stories 1999*. Díaz was named one of *Newsweek* magazine's ten "New Faces of 1996." In 1999, *The New Yorker* magazine named Díaz one of the "twenty best fiction writers in America." In addition to being honored with a Lila Acheson Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund award and a Guggenheim fellowship, Díaz was the 2002 recipient of the PEN/Malamud award for short fiction.

In early 2004, Díaz was teaching creative writing at Syracuse University and was at work on a novel tentatively entitled *The Cheater's Guide to Love*.

Plot Summary

Part 1

"The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" begins with the narrator claiming to be a good person even though he admits to cheating on his girlfriend. "I'm not a bad guy," he says. He rejects the stereotype of the philandering Dominican male as it applies to him. The narrator continues to rationalize his poor judgment, saying that everyone makes mistakes. He maintains his good character even after he reveals the presence of a letter that confirms his former girlfriend's opinion of him.

Looking back on his relationship with Magda, the narrator believes that their relationship had begun to improve once he began to express greater interest in her activities. "A nice rhythm we had going," he says. By then the affair with Cassandra has been over for months, yet the narrator cannot ignore the devastating impact her letter has had on his relationship with Magda and her family. He is now treated as an outcast, whereas he was once regarded as a son. He compares the damage to a "five-train collision."

The narrator continues to debate whether he should have admitted to the affair with Cassandra. His friends advise him to deny everything, but at the time he is too filled with remorse and too overwhelmed by the sight of Magda's pain to ignore the truth. "You have to listen to me, Magda. Or you won't understand," he begs.

The narrator describes Magda's physical appearance and personality. "She's a forgiving soul," one who attends Mass and asks nuns to pray for distant relatives. He is not the only one who has a high opinion of her, for "[s]he's the nerd every librarian in town knows, a teacher whose students fall in love with her." She is thoughtful and generous. "You couldn't think of anybody worse to screw than Magda," the narrator concludes.

The narrator then summarizes his attempts to win Magda back. Without shame, he recalls "[t]he begging, the crawling over glass, the crying" he did to convince her not to abandon their relationship. They discuss Cassandra, and the narrator placates Magda's curiosity by saying that he would have told her about the affair eventually. In the end, the narrator's love for Magda wins out over his sense of pride, yet that pride is not eliminated completely.

Nevertheless, the narrator senses that a profound change has occurred within Magda. "My Magda was turning into another Magda," he says. The narrator discovers that his girlfriend is no longer as accommodating as she once was. Rather than view her change in attitude as a result of his infidelity, he blames this change on the influence of her girlfriends, whom he believes are "feeding her a bad line." Even though he tries to ignore the fallout from the affair, every attempt he makes at reconciliation seems to confirm "something negative" about him. Magda's changes in attitude become more visible as time passes, bringing about improvements in her physical appearance and

wardrobe, improvements that, as the narrator says, "would have alarmed a paranoid nigger."

Part 2

The scene changes to summer, and the narrator describes plans for a vacation to Santo Domingo. The vacation is put into doubt because Magda feels pressured to make a commitment which she is unprepared to do. The narrator, on the other hand, believes that a vacation will end the ambiguity and uncertainty that has plagued their relationship since Magda learned of the affair the previous winter. "Me and her on the Island. What couldn't this cure?" Once again, the narrator blames Magda's reluctance on her friends' influence.

The narrator momentarily forgets his worries as he reflects upon his hometown of Santo Domingo and the many things he has missed since he left the Dominican Republic for New York. With tenderness and affection, he recalls the hospitality of his fellow countrymen and the sense of camaraderie that binds them together. He remembers the affection they openly display toward one another.

However, the narrator cannot dwell for long on such memories because he must confront the harsh realities that forced him to leave Santo Domingo for a better life in the United States. "If this was another kind of story, I'd tell you about the sea," he says. He would like to wax poetic about the beautiful Dominican landscape, but he cannot because that landscape is populated by "[m]ore albinos, more cross-eyed niggers, more *tígueres* [street children who often resort to stealing and prostitution in order to survive] than you'll ever see." The narrator is quickly distracted by thoughts of lovely young Dominican women before he resumes telling the reader about Santo Domingo and the dilapidated vehicles that roam the city's streets. He describes the shanties where a majority of Santo Domingo's citizens live, including his grandfather who still does not have running water or a flush toilet. The narrator recalls the place of his birth□Calle XXI (21st Street)□and wonders whether it will remain forever backward or make the strides toward modernity that are long overdue. In the end, the narrator, as confounded as ever by the lack of development in his homeland, says, "Santo Domingo is Santo Domingo. Let's pretend we all know what goes on there."

The narrator, whose name is Yunior, continues to believe that his relationship with Magda will be restored to its former level of intimacy if they observe the practices, such as visiting his relatives, that once established them as a couple. This time, however, Magda is bored, and, in what Yunior perceives to be a complete change in character, she tells him so. Yunior makes every attempt to be a good host, pointing out improvements, such as restaurant franchises, that have occurred since his last trip and telling her about some of his nation's history. Reluctantly, he admits that things are not going well, for Magda, who is normally very talkative, remains quiet throughout their bus trip from Santo Domingo to the country's interior.

Magda and Yunior continue to express differing opinions about how they should spend their vacation. Magda wants to go to the beach, whereas Yunior would prefer to spend more time in the countryside. Once again, he blames Magda's girlfriends for his difficulties, yet he manages to control his temper. Finally, he acquiesces and arranges for a bus to take them to the resort town of La Romana ahead of schedule.

Part 3

Once they arrive in La Romana, the tables turn, as it is now Yunior who becomes bored. His thoughts turn to sex rather than watching HBO. Yunior complains about how infrequently he and Magda have sex and how much more trouble he has seducing her than he did before. Sexual relations between them have become perfunctory, with no spark of passion or romance.

Yunior complains about their accommodations. It is not that the hotel accommodations are inadequate; it is that they are ostentatious and secluded from everything that might detract from the illusion of beauty and splendor. Yunior feels "walled away from everybody else," particularly the average citizens he has missed. He compares the resort to being in another country where "the only Island Dominicans you're guaranteed to see are either caked up or changing your sheets." They are served breakfast "by cheerful women in Aunt Jemima costumes."

The couple continues to argue over how much time they should spend apart from each other while on vacation. Magda says that she needs some time for herself "maybe once a day," but Yunior insists that they remain together. They compromise by taking a golf cart to the beach.

Yunior once again remarks upon the disparities between the resort and the rest of the country. "Casa de Campo has got beaches the way the rest of the island has got problems," he says. Having cataloged the many joys of Dominican life that are absent from the resort, Yunior next focuses on the scores of white Europeans, the "budget Foucaults," who have flocked to the beach to contemplate beauty, especially that of the local girls. Yunior describes each one of the tourists as looking "like some scary pale monster that the sea's vomited up."

When he sees Magda dressed in a new bikini that her girlfriends helped to pick out, Yunior immediately believes that they have planned to "torture" him. Magda's beauty arouses Yunior's insecurities rather than restores his confidence. He admits to feeling "vulnerable and uneasy." The swagger and bravado associated with his sexual prowess now desert him, and Yunior finds himself begging Magda for a declaration of love. She refuses to be cajoled by him, ending the matter by calling him a "pestilence."

Yunior's insecurities worsen when he and Magda arrive at the beach. He fears that they do not look like a couple, and he becomes painfully aware that Magda, wearing her new bikini, has become the center of attention. Yunior, on the other hand, feels as though everyone regards him suspiciously.

An Assistant D.A. who, like Yunior, is a Dominican living in Quisqueya Heights, takes an interest in Magda and strikes up a conversation with her. Yunior becomes jealous and possessive, threatening the Assistant D.A. with physical violence. The Assistant D.A. espouses a profound empathy with his accused countrymen who come before him in a court of law. However, Yunior regards the Assistant D.A. as a traitor: "I'm thinking he sounds like the sort of nigger who in the old days used to lead bwana to the rest of us." Yunior's combative attitude toward the Assistant D.A. forces Magda to walk away in disgust. Yunior does not bother putting up an argument, for he already knows what Magda will say: "Time for you to do your thing and me to do mine."

That night Yunior decides to hang out around the pool and the local bar, Club Cacique, where he meets Lucy, a "Dominicana from West New York" who resembles Magda physically except that she, Lucy, is *Trigueña*, a woman with wheat-colored skin. Yunior is tempted by Lucy's beauty, but he resists temptation when he sees a "spiderweb of scars" covering her stomach. He then meets "two rich older dudes drinking cognac at the bar."

These two men are the Vice-President and Bárbaro, his bodyguard. According to Yunior, the Vice-President is "a young brother, in his late thirties, and pretty cool for a *chupabarrio*," though there is some doubt as to whether this streetwise man acquired his wealth legally. "I must have the footprint of fresh disaster on my face," thinks Yunior, for the Vice-President quickly orders shots of rum all around. Before long, the Vice-President and Bárbaro are giving Yunior advice about women, advice that is no different from that offered by Yunior's friends in Quisqueya Heights.

Yunior wonders whether his inability to remain faithful is truly a part of his nature. Did he cheat on Magda because he is Dominican? According to Magda's friends, "all us Dominican men are dogs." Yunior refutes the notion that his infidelity can be attributed to something like genetics, citing other reasons, namely what he refers to as "[c]ausalities." He attempts to assuage his wounded ego by saying that all relationships at one point or another experience "turbulence."

Yunior then recalls the beginnings of his relationship with Magda. He recalls with the accuracy of an accountant conducting an audit the ways in which they truly resembled a couple after a year of dating. Even though Yunior is willing to make the compromises that establish a harmonious, if somewhat monotonous, relationship, his restless nature reveals itself when he puts that first year with Magda in perspective: "Our relationship wasn't the sun, the moon, and the stars, but it wasn't [b□□sh□□t], either."

Yunior's thoughts turn to sex, and he rationalizes his eventual betrayal of Magda by citing the many opportunities for an affair which he has ignored previously. In other words, he is a victim of circumstance. He then reflects upon the origins of the affair with Cassandra. "First week of knowing her, I made the mistake of telling her that sex with Magda had never been topnotch," he confides. Though he does not completely accept responsibility for his role in the affair, as if to imply, once again, that he is but a hapless bystander and that Cassandra's strong sex drive is yet another "causality" that has led

to the demise of his relationship with Magda, Yunior recalls how, even while in the throes of passion, he felt guilty for betraying the woman he loved.

Another day of vacation begins, and Magda and Yunior hardly speak to each other. The resort is throwing a party that night, and all guests are invited. As the couple dresses in front of the mirror, Yunior admires Magda's appearance as he fondly recalls the first time he kissed her curls "shiny and as dark as night." Yunior's hope for a reconciliation returns, but it is dashed just as quickly when Magda informs him that tonight, of all nights, she wishes to be alone. A bitter argument ensues, with names called in anger. Finally, Yunior leaves, feeling sorry for himself, thinking, "I'm not a bad guy."

Yunior returns to Club Cacique, looking for Lucy but finding the Vice-President and his bodyguard instead. They sit at the quiet end of the bar, drinking cognac and discussing how many Dominican ballplayers are in the major leagues. "This place is killing me," says Yunior, and the Vice-President suggests that they take a drive. He wishes to show Yunior "the birthplace of our nation." Having nothing better to do, Yunior decides to go along for the ride. Before leaving, however, he casts one last glance around the room, only to find Lucy slightly disheveled but still very much a temptation. Reluctantly, Yunior accompanies the men out of the club.

The three men drive in a black BMW sedan on dark roads, the air sweet with the smell of sugar cane as insects "swarm like a Biblical plague" in front of the car's headlights. The Vice-President and Bárbaro talk at the same time as a bottle of cognac is passed around. Yunior wonders where they are going, but he dismisses any fears because, after all, he is with the Vice-President□and the Vice-President knows what he is doing or else he would not have become the Vice-President. Yunior has doubts about Bárbaro, however. The bodyguard's hand shakes as he tells Yunior about his former dreams of becoming an engineer, and this makes Yunior think that Bárbaro is anything but a bodyguard. Yunior really does not pay too much attention to either man, for his thoughts have once again returned to Magda and how he'll probably never have sex with her again.

Mosquitoes devour the men as they get out of the car and stumble up a slope covered with vegetation. Bárbaro carries a huge flashlight as the Vice-President tries to remember the way. Yunior reconsiders his opinion of the bodyguard when he sees him carrying a machine gun with authority, his hand as steady as ever.

Finally, the Vice-President locates the site, a hole in the red earth that Yunior identifies as bauxite. The hole is deep and "blacker than any of us," says Yunior, staring down into the hole. The Vice-President announces that the hole is the Cave of the Jagua, "the birthplace of the Tainos." He ignores Yunior's attempts to correct his geography, saying that he is "speaking mythically," for the Vice-President regards the site with reverence. Bárbaro's flashlight barely penetrates the darkness as the three men continue to examine the hole.

When the Vice-President asks Yunior if he wants to see inside, Yunior cannot recall for sure what his answer was, though he realizes that he must have said yes, for he

remembers Bárbaro handing him the flashlight before the men grabbed him by the ankles and lowered him into the hole. As he is lowered down, coins fly out of his pockets, *"bendiciones,"* or offerings, made to the spirits of his ancestors. Yunior cannot see much, "just some odd colors on the eroded walls" of the "cave" as he hears the Vice-President ask, "Isn't it beautiful?"

"This is the perfect place for insight, for a person to become somebody better," Yunior thinks as he hangs upside down. He imagines that this is the place where the Vice-President first caught a glimpse of "his future self," the person who would overcome poverty to become a successful businessman. Yunior also imagines Bárbaro, his dream of becoming a benefactor of the people not quite extinguished, buying a concrete home for his mother and showing her how to operate the air conditioner. Instead of looking at his future self, as he imagines the others must have done, Yunior looks toward the past, to the time he first met Magda during their college days at Rutgers. "And that's when I know it's over," he realizes. "As soon as you start thinking about the beginning, it's the end." Yunior starts to cry, forcing the men to pull him up. The Vice-President, seeing that Yunior has failed to make the most of this opportunity, chides Yunior for being less than a man.

Part 4

Looking back on the events that took place on the night he visited the Cave of the Jagua, Yunior realizes that "some serious Island voodoo" must have been at work, for the ending he saw came true. He and Magda returned to the United States the very next day, cutting their vacation short.

Five months later, Yunior receives a letter from Magda saying that she is dating someone new, a "very nice guy." "Dominican, like me," observes Yunior. Even though Yunior has a new girlfriend, seeing Magda's handwriting has a devastating effect on him. He realizes now that their relationship is finally over.

Yunior berates himself for being such a fool. He then narrates the sad demise of his relationship with Magda on a night that once promised joyous celebration. In a flashback, he describes how he returned to the bungalow, where he found Magda with her bags packed, her eyes red and swollen from crying. "I'm going home tomorrow," she tells him. He sits down next to her and takes her hand, hopeful that she'll give him one more chance. "This can work," he says. "All we have to do is try."

Characters

The Assistant D.A.

Like Yunior, the Assistant D.A. is a native of Quisqueya Heights who has returned to his native country for a brief vacation. The Assistant D.A. strikes up a conversation with Magdalena after meeting her on the beach at Casa de Campo, arousing Yunior's jealousy. Ironically, Yunior observes that the Assistant D.A. "loves his people" even though he is responsible for putting many of them behind bars. "'Better I'm their prosecutor,'" says the attorney. "'At least I understand them.'" Yunior views the Assistant D.A. as a traitor, comparing him to "the sort of nigger who in the old days used to lead bwana to the rest of us."

Bárbaro

Bárbaro is the Vice-President's bodyguard. Even though the weather is hot and humid, he wears an ascot to conceal a knife wound he received from a soldier. His expensive suit is often rumpled, and his hand shakes while he smokes, which makes Yunior believe that he is not a very good bodyguard□that is, until he sees him carrying a huge machine gun. A self-described modest man, Bárbaro is also regarded as something of a philosopher since he takes a slightly romantic view toward his job and freely dispenses advice about women. He once had hopes of becoming an engineer and building schools and hospitals for his village, but these hopes, like so many held during the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes, were ruined by the government's poor economic policies. In Spanish, his name means "barbarous," which contrasts his actions with the more sophisticated ways of his employer.

Cassandra

Cassandra works with Yunior and has an affair with him. With an ample bust and "tons of eighties freestyle hair," she is a femme fatale who initiates an affair with Yunior, who is much too weak to resist. Cassandra is a woman who knows what she wants and knows how to get it. Her aggressive personality contrasts with that of Magdalena, who is much more studious and reserved sexually. Though their affair is over, Yunior thinks of Cassandra frequently while on vacation in Santo Domingo, especially when the Vice President advises him to find another woman, one who is "bella [beautiful] and negra [black]." Cassandra's name evokes that of the ancient Greek prophetess who was granted the ability to foretell the future by the god Apollo. However, everyone who heard her prophecies believed them to be lies instead of truths, and thus a blessing became a curse. Ironically, Cassandra's letter to Magdalena is taken as the truth.

Claribel

A loyal and true friend, Claribel provides Magdalena with support during her break-up with Yunior. Yunior describes Claribel, a native of Ecuador, as "chinita," a woman having almond-shaped eyes like an Asian. Like Magda and Yunior, she is college-educated, graduating with a biology degree. Because Magda still lives at home, Claribel provides an alibi for her whenever she stays over at Yunior's apartment. Claribel is the only one of Magda's friends who is mentioned by name.

Her Girls

These women provide Magdalena with moral support and counsel throughout her relationship with Yunior, especially once she learns of his infidelity. Magda phones her girls throughout her vacation in the Dominican Republic. Yunior describes them as "the sorest losers on the planet" and often projects his resentment toward Magda onto them, believing that they conspire against him. For example, he believes that they helped Magda pick out a bikini just so she could "torture" him.

His Boys

These unnamed characters give Yunior advice on his love life and appear off-stage, as it were. They act like a Greek chorus, commenting upon Yunior's actions. They espouse many of the behaviors that earn Dominican men a reputation as liars and womanizers.

Lucy

Lucy meets Yunior at the resort in La Romana while Magda enjoys a night alone. Lucy lives in West New York but has returned to her native Dominican Republic for a vacation. Physically, she resembles Magda with her dark curly hair and light complexion. Yunior describes her as a *Trigueña*, a woman with a wheat-colored complexion. Lucy bears a "spiderweb of scars across her stomach," which may account for why she prefers to spend time with her teenaged cousins on the town rather than remain at home. Lucy's socioeconomic status compares dramatically with other natives of Santo Domingo, such as Yunior and the Assistant D.A., who have immigrated to Quisqueya Heights. Lucy is beautiful, but her beauty is often flawed. In this respect, she represents the Dominican Republic symbolically. Yunior finds Lucy's beauty tempting, but he resists.

Magda

Magda is Yunior's nickname for Magdalena. A native of Cuba, Magda is Yunior's long-suffering girlfriend. She learns of Yunior's affair when she receives a letter from Cassandra. Yunior describes Magda as a "forgiving soul," a devout Catholic who

regularly attends Mass and who implores a group of nuns in Pennsylvania to pray for her family. Magda is a popular teacher with her students, and she continues to pursue an education even though she has earned a degree. "She's the nerd every librarian in town knows," says Yunior. Magda is very striking physically, with "big eyes and big hips and dark curly hair you could lose a hand in." With her red lips and voluptuous figure, she is the physical embodiment of what it is to be Latina. Magda is normally a very talkative person, but she can be sullen when she feels she has been wronged. As the story progresses, Magda becomes more assertive, taking time for herself and her interests despite pressure from Yunior to have sex. She asserts her independence on the night the resort sponsors a party, leaving Yunior to entertain himself. Five months after the end of their relationship, Yunior receives a letter from Magda that testifies, one would assume, to her forgiving nature.

Magdalena

See Magda

The Vice-President

A "young brother, in his late thirties," the Vice-President has all the hallmarks of a successful businessman, particularly one who comes from the slums of Santo Domingo. Not only is he well educated but he drives a BMW automobile, drinks cognac, and dresses fashionably□the essence of worldly accomplishment and sophistication. His business dealings may not all be legitimate, however. Yunior turns to the Vice-President for advice on women, and he dispenses it freely, with an air of worldly charm. The Vice-President respects his island ancestors, for he takes Yunior to the Cave of the Jagua, the mythical birthplace of the Tainos, with the hope that Yunior will be able to complete this rite of passage with manly pride and dignity.

Yunior

Yunior is the story's narrator and protagonist. He is a native of Santo Domingo who now resides in Quisqueya Heights, a district of Washington Heights in upper Manhattan that is home to many Dominican expatriates. Although Yunior is a well-educated professional who refers to characters from literature like Bartleby the scrivener, the hero of Melville's eponymous tale, and to Michel Foucault, a renowned French philosopher, he espouses the attitudes of the street. He refuses to believe that he is a "bad guy" even though he freely admits to having an affair with Cassandra. Throughout the story, he struggles against the stereotype of the Dominican male who is constantly on the prowl for sexual adventure. Yunior's *macho* attitudes are often at odds with his personality, which is rather sentimental.

Themes

Relationships

Díaz's main theme is personal responsibility and the ways in which it sustains an intimate relationship. From the very beginning of the story, Yunior tells the reader—and himself—that he is not such a bad guy even though he cheated on his girlfriend. He makes these comments retrospectively, once the relationship with Magda has ended and there is no longer any hope of reconciliation. Even so, Yunior still fails to accept responsibility for his actions, attributing his infidelity to "causalities" rather than to his selfish behavior. When he and Magda were together, he viewed their relations as an extension of "a nice rhythm [they] had going" or "the momentum of the past" rather than a deliberate effort to establish harmony. Furthermore, he fails to see Magda's change in behavior—she becomes more aloof—as a result of his thoughtlessness. On the contrary, Yunior blames Magda's girlfriends for influencing her change in attitude toward him.

In addition to the loyalty one partner should demonstrate toward the other, Díaz addresses the loyalty demonstrated among friends. Magda and Yunior know that they can rely on their friends to support them unwaveringly. His boys and her girls staunchly defend their respective friend's position without making judgments. Though this type of blind loyalty can occasionally yield disastrous results, the two main characters act knowing that they will not have to face their problems alone.

Relationships between family members remain important throughout the story. When Magda's family learns of Yunior's infidelity, they immediately cut him off, as though he has been ostracized from the family. He is no longer treated like a son but like the *"sucio"* Magda accuses him of being. Indeed, Magda's father is so filled with rage upon hearing of Yunior's betrayal that he can hardly speak. "You no deserve I speak to you in Spanish," he tells Yunior. Magda's family makes every effort to protect her from further injury. Likewise, Yunior's family is important to him. Yunior honors tradition by visiting his *"abuelo"* immediately upon arriving in Santo Domingo, and he respects the hard work his grandfather did as a laborer in the cane fields.

National Pride

Yunior takes great pride in being from the Dominican Republic. "Let me confess: I love Santo Domingo," he says. He loves the people and their superstitious ways; he loves the "shredded silver" color of the sea after it has been "forced into the sky through a blowhole"; he loves the taste of Island rum. It is Yunior's love for his country and its beauty that causes him to feel outrage when he witnesses the abject poverty so many of his countrymen endure. Because he feels so much pride for his country, Yunior is willing to champion the underdog, as witnessed in his exchange with the Assistant D.A., whom he believes does more harm than good to the community of Dominicans living in Quisqueya Heights.

The Vice-President is another character who exhibits national pride. He takes Yunior to the Cave of the Jagua, "the birthplace of the Tainos," the first island residents. The Vice-President speaks solemnly and respectfully of this place even though its historical and anthropological value remains uncertain. He carries with him a sense of pride that bestows more importance on the cave than is perhaps justified, for its ability to transform Yunior lies in its mythical and symbolic power.

Economic and Social Divisions

When Yunior arrives in Santo Domingo, he faces the stark reality that is life in the Dominican Republic. He would like to tell the reader more about the beauty of this island nation, but the impoverished conditions of its people confront him at every turn. "More albinos, more cross-eyed niggers, more *tígueres* than you'll ever see." Children make their living in the street, selling candy or else resorting to stealing and prostitution. Yunior describes Santo Domingo as "a cosmology of battered cars, battered motorcycles, battered trucks, and battered buses, and an equal number of repair shops, run by any fool with a wrench." The entire city has fallen into disrepair. People live in shanty towns, their dilapidated houses lacking running water and toilets. Yunior recalls the street where he was born and cannot decide whether it qualifies as a slum. Despairing of his hometown's poverty, Yunior closes by saying, "Santo Domingo is Santo Domingo. Let's pretend we all know what goes on there."

Contrasted with the abject poverty of Santo Domingo is the opulence of La Romana's Casa de Campo, "The Resort That Shame Forgot." Casa de Campo is the wealthiest resort on the island, and it resembles in many ways an entire country unto itself. The resort has its own airport, beaches, and golf course. Security guards, or *"guachimanes,"* patrol the resort while peacocks strut among the "ambitious topiaries" that dot the landscape. Everywhere there is an air of sanitized purity, of separation from all that is unsightly. This is where the rich come to play and make deals that will increase their wealth. A majority of the hotel's clientele are white Europeans. Ironically, the only Island Dominicans seen at the resort are the ones who clean the rooms and serve food. Yunior sums up the disparities between the resort and the Dominican Republic as a whole when he says, "Casa de Campo has got beaches the way the rest of the island has got problems."

Race

Díaz is less concerned about addressing differences between whites and blacks than he is with exploring differences between people of African American descent. (Here the adjective *American* refers to people whose origins are in Central and South America as well as North America or the United States.) These latter differences mainly concern skin color and the ideal of feminine beauty. For example, Magda becomes the focus of men's attention the moment she arrives in the Dominican Republic, much to Yunior's chagrin. Men walk right up to her and compliment her on her appearance, hoping to win her favor. "You know how it is when you're on the Island and your girl's an octoroon,"

explains Yunior. "Brothers go apesh□t." (By "Brothers," he refers to men with dark skin.) Lucy, on the other hand, is referred to as a *Trigueña*, a woman with light, wheat-colored skin. She is regarded as beautiful, though perhaps not as beautiful as Magda, whose skin color is slightly darker.

Style

Point of View

The story is narrated in the first person by Yunior, the story's main protagonist. Yunior's energetic, colloquial tone invites the reader to listen attentively to his story. Yunior is also an unreliable narrator. He often contradicts himself, as when he tells the reader that Cassandra was not advertising falsely about her prowess in bed; previously, he tells Magda that sex with Cassandra was "lousy." The advantage Díaz gains in using this type of narrator is that the reader only hears one side of the story, thus underscoring the ironies that continue to confound Yunior long after his relationship with Magda has ended. Furthermore, the theme of responsibility is highlighted by the selective manner in which Yunior reveals his actions and by the way he interrupts his narrative to make passing remarks about women. Inadvertently, he proves that Magda's opinion of him is indeed correct.

Language

Borrowing the slang of New York's streets, Yunior refers to himself obliquely when he describes Magda's sudden physical transformation: "About a month later, she started making the sort of changes that would have alarmed a paranoid nigger." The word *nigger*, often used in the United States as a derogatory term, is used by Yunior in the story to establish a more objective view of himself and to denote the affection and camaraderie he shares with his boys. They, in turn, address Yunior as "Nigger" when they desire his full attention and wish to impart advice about his relationship with Magda.

Díaz combines English with Spanish words and phrases that indicate Yunior's bi-cultural perspective of the world. He moves fluently between languages, using the language that best expresses his state of mind, even when he seems most confused. For example, when Yunior walks out of the hotel room in La Romana, effectively severing his relationship with Magda forever, he struggles to understand what has just happened while at the same time he maintains a facade of self-respect.

This is the endgame, and instead of pulling out all the stops, instead of *pongándome más chivo que un chivo*, I'm feeling sorry for myself, *como un parigüayo sin suerte*. I'm thinking, I'm not a bad guy.

Moreover, Díaz challenges his reader's familiarity with other cultures and languages by using Spanish to express thoughts that would otherwise be considered vulgar if rendered in English. Thus, he maintains the story's narrative tone without compromising his artistic vision or the integrity of the characters he has created. Díaz is not in the least reluctant to use profanity, but he does use it for a purpose; namely, profanity illuminates the cultural perspective of the character at the moment the word is uttered. For

example, when Yunior wishes to express a common sentiment, one that is often dismissive but not damaging, he will use English because that language, for him, lacks the power and authority he associates with his native tongue. On the other hand, when Yunior wishes to express a passionate state of mind, whether one aroused by erotic thoughts or extreme displeasure, he usually chooses Spanish. There is one occasion, however, when he uses English to make an emphatic point. He dismisses Magda's would-be suitors at the beach by saying, "Why don't you beat it, *pancho*?" Yunior expresses his disdain by using a word white North Americans use derogatorily to refer to someone of Latin heritage, a word that, in this case, compounds the slight because it does not even refer to the proper noun (i.e., *Pancho*).

Stereotypes

Díaz employs the stereotype of the femme fatale to underscore Yunior's sense of irresponsibility and to elucidate his *macho* tendencies. A femme fatale is a woman who is dangerously seductive and whose charms lead an unsuspecting man to ruin. Physically, Cassandra fits the stereotype, for Yunior describes her as "*bella* and *negra*," a beautiful black woman with "a big chest and a smart mouth," a "chick" with "tons of eighties freestyle hair" who wears denim skirts. She comes on to Yunior almost immediately after starting her new job, touching his pectoral muscles and complaining about her boyfriend, a *"moreno,"* or brown-skinned man. Though Cassandra is quite feminine, she also knows how to hang out with the guys, organizing a football pool at work. She is competitive in a way that appeals to the male sensibility. Yunior quickly falls into the habit of having lunch with her, especially once he learns the intimate details of her sex life. Here Díaz employs yet another stereotype to initiate Yunior's undoing. When Cassandra, referring to her boyfriend, tells Yunior, "Black guys don't understand Spanish girls," he, a dark-skinned Dominican, cannot resist the challenge of proving her wrong. Although Yunior never reveals why Cassandra wrote the letter, his affair with her becomes one of the "causalities" which, he says, contribute to his break-up with Magda.

Díaz also uses stereotypes as a device to propel the action of his story. At the outset, Yunior tells the reader that he is not like other Dominican men; he is not a *"sucio"* who runs around chasing women. "I'm not a bad guy," he says. "I'm like everybody else: weak, full of mistakes, but basically good." He admits, however, to having cheated on Magda, and from this point forward Yunior attempts to persuade the reader that, regardless of what Magda or her friends might say, he does not conform to stereotype. The story is filled with anecdotes about what a thoughtful and considerate boyfriend he is, but then, as though enthralled by a self-fulfilling prophecy, Yunior will reveal his thoughts about another woman, thus proving Magda and her friends correct.

Historical Context

Pre-Columbian Culture and Peoples

When Christopher Columbus first arrived on Hispaniola, the former name for what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic, there were an estimated 400,000 indigenous Taino Indians inhabiting the island. The word *Taino* means "men of the good," for the Taino were a gentle race of people whose lives where inextricably linked with their natural surroundings. The Tainos were a seafaring people who lived on the verge of dense jungle, but they also developed sophisticated agricultural practices that produced cassava, corn, squash, and peanuts. They wandered about naked, their bodies decorated with colorful dyes made from earth, and they bathed in the rivers near their homes, which were constructed of thatch and Royal Palm. They greeted Columbus and his men with the kindness and generosity that were honored Taino values. However, the Taino population decreased rapidly as a result of exposure to disease brought by the Europeans and by forced labor. The *encomienda* system, which allotted the Tainos to colonizers operating mines and farms and instructed the laborers in the tenets of the Catholic faith, forced many Tainos to commit suicide or abort pregnancies rather than endure a life of slavery. Eighteen years after Columbus' arrival on Hispaniola, the Taino population had dwindled to a mere 22,000.

Dictatorship in the Dominican Republic

For most of the twentieth century, the Dominican Republic, a Spanish-speaking country, experienced non-representative rule. The Dominican Republic has a history of changing ownership, with countries such as Spain, France, Haiti, and the United States governing the island nation. The United States, in particular, has intervened in the political affairs of the Dominican Republic, most notably in the years from 1916 to 1924, when United States military forces occupied the island, and between 1930 and 1961, when Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, backed by the U.S. government, ruled as dictator.

Trujillo won favor with the U.S. government in the wake of World War II largely because of his anti-communist stance. He encouraged foreign investment in the Dominican Republic by initiating a number of public works projects that were designed to create the illusion of prosperity. However, Trujillo's administration was rife with corruption, and, by the late 1950s, the social and economic gulf between the rich and poor in the Dominican Republic had widened. Trujillo's domestic problems were compounded by his intervention in the political affairs of other nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Kidnappings and assassinations were linked to Trujillo and his government, forcing the Organization of American States to enforce harsh sanctions against the Dominican Republic before that organization severed all diplomatic ties. On May 30, 1961, Trujillo was assassinated by members of the military.

The government's brutality did not end there, however. The dictator's son, Ramfis Trujillo, assumed power briefly before being overthrown and exiled. Joaquín Balaguer, a former associate of Rafael Trujillo, attempted to stabilize the government, but opposition to his administration, an opposition that had been oppressed by more than thirty years of dictatorship, forced Balaguer, through demonstrations and strikes, to permit greater freedom of expression. Political parties formed, and national elections were promised. However, a military coup ensued, forcing Balaguer into exile. His efforts at democratization put him in good stead when he returned in 1966 after the United States military forces intervened in a Dominican civil war between constitutionalists, led by former Dominican president Juan Bosch, and a civilian *junta*, or council, led by businessman Donald Reid Cabral, whose antidemocratic stance was perceived by a majority of Dominicans as a front for the military.

Like his predecessor Trujillo, Balaguer instituted public works projects in an attempt to mollify the citizens of his country and to improve the reputation of the Dominican Republic internationally. Schools, clinics, dams, bridges, and many other projects designed to improve daily life were devised, but, unfortunately, distribution of income remained unequal in the country and Balaguer's projects, viewed by many as public relations stunts, were never realized.

Critical Overview

Unfortunately, there is no criticism available for "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" because Díaz has yet to publish the story in a collection. Although the story is included in the anthology *Best American Short Stories 1999*, reviews of that book generally refer to the composition of the volume as a whole, offering plot summaries of a few selected stories rather than focusing on the individual achievements of their authors.

The Sun, the Moon, the Stars: City slums of Santo Domingo as described in "The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars" [graphic graphicname="TIF00003310" orient="landscape" size="B"]

According to *Contemporary Authors Online*, the critic reviewing Díaz's short story collection *Drown* for *Publishers Weekly* noted that Díaz's intensity gives the collection "a lasting resonance," and the critic writing for *Kirkus Reviews* observes that "Díaz's spare style and narrative poise make for some disturbing fiction." In an interview with Marina Lewis, Díaz himself elaborates upon his strengths as a writer:

What I write really well is silence, the things that the characters don't say, the gaps between people's sentences, the ellipses between what we feel, what we see, and what we recognize. I think that's where it all comes in."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Remy is a freelance writer in Warrington, Florida. In this essay, Remy considers Díaz's methods of characterization.

In "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," Junot Díaz creates a narrator who is at once charming, naïve, and disingenuous. Nevertheless, Yunior is an engaging character, one who practically leaps off the page in an effort to convince readers□and himself□that, despite appearances to the contrary, he really is not such a "bad guy." Because Yunior seems genuinely perplexed by past events, the reader is at first sympathetic and eager to learn more about his romantic troubles. As the reader soon discovers, however, Yunior is his own worst enemy, and his word remains suspect. Thus, through Yunior's use of language and the disparity between his thought and action, Díaz brings Yunior's character to light in a display of first-person narration fraught with unintended revelations.

One way in which Díaz portrays Yunior's character is through his use of language. A resident of Quisqueya Heights, a Dominican enclave in New York City, Yunior blends the rhythms of the street with a university education as he narrates his tale in both English and Spanish. For example, Yunior often refers to his "boys," his male friends, as though they comprised a gang. They affectionately address one another with epithets like "nigger," a term Yunior uses on occasion when referring to himself in the third person. He makes a show of using slang and strong language, as though trying to maintain a façade of impregnability against impending disaster. Using slang and profanity conceals Yunior's sensitive nature as it affords him a measure of identity, a sense of belonging he urgently needs once his relationship with Magda encounters difficulty.

Díaz makes language an inseparable aspect of character as he brings his narrator to life, for it is through Yunior's choice of language, both the manner in which he speaks as well as the language itself, that he reveals, however unintentionally, those aspects of his personality that permit the reader a more comprehensive understanding of the story's events. Yunior's sense of identity is enforced by his use of Spanish, a language that conveys his sentiments directly. Yunior uses his native tongue to express feelings that demand immediate expression, such as those that convey his sexual desire for Magda or his intense displeasure when he is confounded by the alleged schemes of her girlfriends ("*cabronas*"). Yunior's use of both English and Spanish demonstrates his bicultural perspective on life, a perspective that occasionally creates conflict for him as he struggles to determine which cultural code applies in his relationship with Magda. He wants to be faithful to Magda, as a contemporary American male is expected to be, but at the same time he is eager to indulge his sexual appetite, something which Magda has never been able to satisfy. In other words, by demonstrating the way in which Yunior vacillates between roles as a compliant "boyfriend" and a macho male on the prowl, Díaz reveals the ambiguity that resides at the core of his protagonist, an ambiguity that molds Yunior's character as it propels the story forward.

Díaz also uses language to provide readers with a glimpse of Yunior's educational background and the social mobility that contributes to the composition of his complex character. Psychologically, Yunior's use of street language contrasts sharply with the cultural references he uses to underscore his opinions. He is obviously well versed in the humanities, for he refers to American literature and psychology on a couple of occasions to make what are, compared with the vulgar pronouncements of the *barrio*, subtle distinctions. When Yunior complains about Magda's reluctance to accept his invitations, he appropriates one of Herman Melville's most memorable characters and transforms the proper noun into a verb: "A lot of the time she Bartlebys me, says, 'No, I'd rather not.'" Furthermore, Yunior's description of white European tourists as looking like "philosophy professors, like budget Foucaults" on the beaches of Casa de Campo highlights the cultural, as well as the socioeconomic, disparities between tourists and Dominicans at the resort. These references to literature and psychology demonstrate a more calculated and less impulsive side of Yunior's character, one that is at odds with his tough, streetwise image.

As Yunior's language divulges his true character, so, too, does the disparity between his thought and action. By introducing a letter from Magda as a plot device (a letter which, true to his nature, Yunior does not reveal until the end of the story), Díaz provides a spark that ignites a welter of memories, filling Yunior with nostalgia and doubt. The letter serves as a catalyst for Yunior's recollections, which, in turn, lead him to reveal more about himself, albeit unconsciously. As Yunior reflects upon the letter (the contents of which are known only to him) as well as the one Cassandra sent Magda nearly a year earlier, Yunior divulges key aspects of his personality though he takes pains to disguise them by making oblique references to "causalities," the destructive chain of events his actions set in motion. Because the story is told in the first person, the reader hears only one side of the story, and Yunior, the narrator, takes full advantage of this, moving from Quisqueya Heights to Santo Domingo and back again as he tells his tale of failed romance. "I'm not a bad guy," he begins, and thus Yunior narrates his tale of romantic woe as a means of justifying his actions to Magda, himself, and the reader, yet, in the end, he proves to be an unreliable narrator. From this point forward, Yunior attempts to explain, rationalize, and excuse the reasons why he had an affair with Cassandra and subsequently failed to salvage his relationship with Magda once the affair was discovered. Even though Yunior refers to the affair as "that particular bit of stupidity," he never reforms his ways completely. He continues to look at other women while vacationing with Magda at a Santo Domingo resort, casting his eyes on the lovely Dominican girls he would not mind "kickin' it" with. In particular, he is attracted to Lucy, a Dominican girl from New York, whom he entertains thoughts of seducing; then, at the last minute, he reconsiders. Yunior may believe himself to be a dutiful boyfriend, but his actions clearly demonstrate otherwise.

Yunior wants to be a faithful and devoted lover, yet he cannot bear the thought of limiting himself to one partner, as Díaz makes clear through his protagonist's alternating bouts of resentment and self-recrimination. Díaz enhances characterization further by introducing the stereotype of the philandering Latin male as a negative ideal which Yunior, fully aware of the cultural influences at work upon him, must struggle against. If, according to Magda and her friends, all Dominican men are "dogs" (that is,

"womanizers"), then Yunior must avoid completing a self-fulfilling prophecy. This struggle causes Yunior to commit actions that, although they may seem naïve and harmless, are disingenuous and harmful to his relationship with Magda. He tells "white lies" in the interest of preserving a delicate balance, one that could easily tip against him. For example, when Magda asks Yunior if he enjoyed sex with Cassandra, he responds matter-of-factly, "To be honest, baby, it was lousy." The reader later discovers Yunior's lie when he claims that Cassandra was not advertising falsely when she boasted of her sexual prowess. Thus the disparity between Yunior's statements and the actions he recounts reveal his true personality, that of a hopelessly ambivalent young man who wants nothing more than to have his way regardless of others' feelings.

For all of his attempts to pacify Magda, Yunior does not really change. Throughout his narrative, Yunior alternately plays the role of the heartsick lover and the wannabe player; he cannot bear the thought of losing Magda, yet at the same time he cannot help but wonder if a more exciting woman is not waiting for him around the next corner. As the final line of the story indicates, he is forever hopeful that his romantic life will change for the better. From the beginning of the story to the very end, however, Yunior's words and actions contradict him at every turn, revealing a character who remains as confused as ever by desire, never once humbled by experience.

Source: David Remy, Critical Essay on "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Dupler is a writer, teacher, and independent scholar. In the following essay, Dupler discusses the contradictions that appear in "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars."

In "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," a short story by Junot Diaz, the title alludes to subtle contradictions that appear in the story, as well as to the pairings of opposites that show up in certain facets of the narrative. Upon first glance at the title, the reader is apt to think that the story has a romantic or idyllic quality to it; for what is more charming than an image of the guiding lights of nature, the sun, moon, and stars? However, in the middle of the story, the narrator describes a failing relationship by declaring that the "relationship wasn't the sun, the moon, and the stars" after all. Furthermore, within the title is a pair of opposites, the sun and the moon, or, figuratively, the day and the night, the light and the shadow. This pairing of opposites of perception can further be observed in the way the narrator presents himself, his girlfriend, the relationship between them, and the country that gives the narrator his identity, Santo Domingo, also known as the Dominican Republic. By presenting the story with elements of the light and dark, or the positive and negative sides of things, the narrator ultimately provides the reader with a more comprehensive view of a fictional world, despite the fact that the narrator at times seemingly contradicts himself.

The first glaring contradiction occurs with the opening line of the story, when the narrator suspiciously declares that he is not a "bad guy," but "basically good." However, he then presents a reflection of himself that he observes from his girlfriend Magdalena (or Magda), who describes him unfavorably, even in profane terms. The first paragraph continues as a confession to a dark deed, an act of betrayal lying under the surface of things, described as a "bone . . . buried in the backyard of your life." The narrator further incriminates himself by the admission that he would have kept this betrayal a secret, if not for a letter that was sent to his unsuspecting girlfriend. The narrator, however, does not seem to lose the reader's trust by admitting these negative aspects of himself. By providing a portrait of himself that shows both sides of his character, the bright and dark sides, the narrator builds empathy in the reader.

Another contradiction in the story is the narrator's description of his girlfriend. He describes her early on as a "forgiving soul," but then reverses this assessment when he notes that the relationship is getting "worse and worse," because of her inability to forgive his betrayal. The reader also sees two sides of this woman throughout the narrative. The narrator recounts the positive and warm qualities of Magdalena while reminiscing about their love affair, while at the same time she is becoming colder and more distant in the present time of the story.

The narrator also has a complex perception of his native country, Santo Domingo. He says, "Let me confess: I love Santo Domingo," and he describes the country as a mixture of beauty and ugliness, of noble people and impoverished surroundings. His hometown has been in a "state of indecision for years," perhaps echoing the narrator's own state. Admitting to his complex outlook of his country, the narrator says that he

would "pretend" to "know what goes on there." Finally, despite his return to his beloved country, it is there that the relationship with Magda completely unravels and there that the narrator feels a painful alienation from the world.

The narrator also shows two sides of his identity as a Dominican man. He loves his country and has such faith in it that he believes a trip there with his girlfriend will restore their relationship. At the same time, he tends to believe that others view his ethnicity negatively. For instance, he writes that his girlfriend considers him a "typical Dominican man," which he thinks is a negative opinion. He also believes that Magda's friends attribute his betrayal to his nationality, because "Dominican men are dogs." The narrator's perception of his own nationality shows varied sides. He takes pride in the impoverished and hectic side of the country, but his girlfriend wants to go to an upscale resort that he jokes could get his "ghetto pass revoked." At this resort, the sight of Europeans offends him, and he stereotypes them as "philosophy professors." The narrator struggles with the fact that being from America enables him to afford time at the upscale resort, the same place that corrupt politicians go "to relax after a long month of oppressing the masses." Finally, the narrator's identity issues cause him to insult a Dominican man from America who is talking to Magda. This man is a successful attorney who "loves his people," but the narrator reveals anger and envy toward him.

The presence of Magda in Santo Domingo increases the narrator's confusions. When Magda becomes emotionally distant and requests space, the narrator says to her, "I feel like you rejected my whole country." His insecurity about being Dominican shows up when he compares himself to Magda. When she looks attractive on the beach, he feels "vulnerable and uneasy." He writes that when Magda smiles, men "ask for her hand in marriage," while when he smiles, "folks check their wallets." The narrator sees a reflection of himself in other people that is unfavorable or vulnerable and contains elements of prejudice and self-loathing over his own background.

In the field of psychology known as Jungian studies, the concept of the *shadow* is an important idea in understanding how people perceive the world. In Jungian theory, the shadow is part of the unconscious mind, the part of the personality that we cannot be completely aware of, because it exists under the surface of everyday activities. Jungian theorists believe that this part of the unconscious mind will eventually reveal itself by projecting outwards onto other people and things, which the conscious mind can then observe. If the conscious mind is the light, that which people are in touch with, then the unconscious mind contains the shadow that goes along with that light. This theory might provide insight into the narrator in "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars." When the narrator sees an unfavorable reflection of himself in other people, this might indicate turmoil in the unconscious part of himself that desires to be understood. Furthermore, the negative image of himself that the narrator constantly sees reflected back from Magda may indicate internal and unresolved feelings of guilt.

The narrator's perception of his home country, Santo Domingo, may also contain elements of the shadow, as evidenced by the way the narrator describes this place. After telling the reader how much he loves this country and giving a positive and detailed portrait of its energetic life, the narrator suddenly interjects negative elements.

For instance, after pointing out American chain restaurants such as "Pizza Huts and Dunkin' Donuts," the narrator notes that "this is where Trujillo and his Marine pals slaughtered the *gavilleros*," and where another leader "sold his soul to the devil." Amidst this, "Magda seemed to be enjoying herself." This is very revealing. In these quick and subtle descriptions, we can almost feel the conflict the narrator has about living in America, as it is implied that American presence in the country is connected to injustice and violence. Furthermore, the narrator projects this guilt onto his girlfriend and thus reveals it in himself. In another description, that of the resort where the narrator and Magda go to relax, the narrator is offended by a Dominican American man who is an attorney in New York, connecting the idea of America with the idea of political power as well as with envy and anger.

Two other characters enter the story who are described in shady terms and have connections with political intrigue, the Vice President and his bodyguard, Barbaro, whom a soldier once "tried to saw open" at the neck. The narrator believes these men observe his face as a "footprint of fresh disaster," again revealing inner feelings of insecurity in the reflections of others. The Vice President, who studied in America, has the mysterious presence of an underworld character; only the narrator's mother back in America will know what his political connections really are. In the final scene of the story, the narrator goes in a black car with these two characters, and the bodyguard is lamenting his failure to become a civil engineer and to "build schools and hospitals," another failure of civil life in the country connected to men who once lived in "upstate New York." Then, in a strange move, the two men lower the narrator into a dark hole, where the coins drop from his pockets and he symbolically loses everything. Going into this shadow world may be "the perfect place for insight, for a person to become somebody better," claims the narrator; the only way to heal the shadow is to observe it. This dark hole is the place where the Vice President recognized the dark side of politics and corruption. This place is also where the narrator realizes his relationship with Magda is finally over. Ultimately, this dark mysterious cave, containing "serious Island voodoo," is a concluding symbol of the pain, guilt, and negativity that the narrator has been carrying deep within the shadow of his own mind.

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #3

Hart, a former writing teacher, is a freelance writer and author of several books. In this essay, Hart examines how Diaz infuses his story with the concept of conflicting realities.

Right from the very first line of Junot Díaz's short story "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," readers are warned that this is a tale of conflict. And from that point onward, whether it is a disagreement between the two main characters, the inconsistency of dire poverty superimposed onto commercial tourism, or one man's personal struggle of contradictory desires, Díaz floods his story with the sounds and sights of seemingly unavoidable collisions. These impacts occur when one reality clashes with another; when two separate visions, whether personal or environmental, conflict. This is a story in which people have trouble hearing what another person is saying, in which people do not understand what another person is feeling, and, worse yet, in which some of the characters appear to be living within a divided personal world in which they do not seem able to truly comprehend even themselves. Díaz's characters are just plain out of sync, and the consequences are that experiences becomes distorted. Even the title, which purposely suggests a fairy-tale romance, conflicts with the body of this story, which hopes to be a romance but ends up being quite the opposite.

Díaz wastes no time setting up the conflicts that permeate this short story. In the first paragraph of "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," the narrator points out that Magdalena, his girlfriend, does not agree with him. And if the truth be known, even the narrator has trouble agreeing with himself. Although he will not admit that he is bad, he is hard pressed to convince the reader (or himself) that he is good. The narrator immediately qualifies his goodness: he is only basically good, he states. And it is upon this basic goodness that he sets the foundation of his argument□he does not deserve to lose his girlfriend, no matter what her friends advise and no matter what the narrator has done to destroy his relationship with her. The narrator admits that he has cheated on Magdalena, but he justifies his deception. It was just a fling, something he could not control. The woman, Cassandra, was all over him. How could he resist? And why, oh why is Magdalena making such a fuss over the affair? It is done with, having happened a long time ago, buried like an old bone in the backyard. It was performed at a time when his and Magdalena's relationship was not going as smoothly as it was right before Cassandra's letter arrived, unveiling the truth of the short-lived affair. So, in the narrator's mind, Magdalena should forgive him, although during most of the remaining story, he doubts she ever will.

That is the narrator's world. But Magdalena lives in another reality, one that is built on truths very different from the narrator's. Magdalena does not understand how her boyfriend could have done such a thing. How could he have had an affair? She takes his action as a personal attack against herself. She had trusted him to be monogamous. Her love for him was based on his fidelity. And like a parent who is scolding a child, Magdalena does her best, through her actions as well as her words, to let the narrator know that once trust is broken, there is no way of fixing it.

It takes the narrator a long time to comprehend Magdalena's message that something is seriously wrong with the relationship. And even when he catches hints of what Magdalena is trying to tell him, the narrator closes his eyes and wishes it away. He tries to convince Magdalena to forgive him, to persuade her to recreate their relationship, to show her there is another world that they can enter if she will just forget about Cassandra (even though the narrator has trouble doing this).

But Magdelena's world has been shattered, and the narrator is the cause of this disaster. Her dreams have changed. But even though she knows this, Magdalena does not fully comprehend how the change is affecting her. Therefore, she has to live somewhere in between the world she once shared with the narrator and a new world she has yet to completely shape. For instance, she feels she has to go along with plans they made earlier. The reason for this is that Magdalena cannot fully determine her new emotions because she is neither here nor there. And until she watches her feelings play out, until her new world is formed, she will not know what she thinks, not just about her boyfriend but about herself as well. Does she still love him? Can she forgive him? Can she continue to be who she was? And if not, who will she become?

The narrator and Magdalena travel to Santo Domingo where the narrator was born and raised. Although it is unclear in the narrator's mind whether he truly loves Magdalena (or does he just not want to take the time to find a new girlfriend), the narrator knows one thing for sure. He loves Santo Domingo. And he is hoping that in taking Magdalena to his tropical birthplace, she will learn to love him. Santo Domingo is one thing that is for real, he says. And it is here that the narrator believes he has his clearest vision. He does not romanticize the island and its culture, its poverty, and its natural beauty. He sees it all for what it is, much more so than he sees anything else in his life, including himself and Magdalena. It might be this clarity that pulls him back to Santo Domingo. Something tells him that if in no other place on earth, here he will find the truth. Here, he hopes, he and Magdalena will discover a coming together of their hearts, their spirits, and their hitherto diverse worlds.

The narrator points out that although Santo Domingo provides a tropical setting of beautiful beaches and palm trees, his homeland is in no way a world of fantasy. It has a warm ocean, which offers gentle sea breezes, but it also has mosquitoes, extreme poverty, and filth. It is uncomfortably hot and humid, and, in Magdalena's mind, it is also boring. In other words, Santo Domingo itself represents a world of conflict. The heat of the tropical setting makes it the perfect place for an abundance of fruited plants and lush vegetation. The warmth of the ocean attracts visitors from all over the world. But not all of Santo Domingo's year-round inhabitants enjoy the benefits that their tropical homeland provides. Many women, for instance, are reduced to working as slave-costumed servants. Others work as prostitutes, serving the rich businessmen who come to Santo Domingo and staying in the walled-up sanctuaries of air-conditioned rooms. Most people who live in the shanties that abound throughout the country have never seen past these hotel walls, the narrator informs his readers. And those who stay inside these luxurious inns have little regard for what exists outside them. These two worlds are so far apart, one would think there was no chance of collision. But the narrator hints

that there is trouble brewing. However, those circumstances need to be told in another story.

But it is inside these walls, in this artificially contrived paradise, that the narrator and his girlfriend finally end up. Magdalena insists they go there. Whereas the narrator had envisioned returning to Santo Domingo to share his history with Magdalena, her head is full of only the beautiful images taken from travel magazines. She is not interested in the narrator's relatives, their stories, and their way of life. She has not come to Santo Domingo to gain a more fully detailed account of her boyfriend's beginnings. To the contrary, she suggests that this trip is her reward for having endured the pain he has caused her. She goes with him to Santo Domingo to enjoy herself as much as she can, and then she suggests she will cut him loose upon their return to the States. She will tolerate the visit to his family, but her world, her dream, does not include them in any great proportion. After a couple of days during which she shares their company, she is ready for satin sheets on clean, cool beds and dress-up parties in a hotel ballroom. And even this is not enough for Magdalena, who finally admits that she also needs time alone, time to enjoy this luxury without having to share it with the one who is quickly becoming her ex-boyfriend.

The narrator in the meantime is having trouble accepting all of these changes in Magdalena. He cannot imagine how she is coming up with these ideas. Her concepts have nothing to do with his world, so he cannot relate to them. He thought that bringing her to Santo Domingo would make her fall in love with him all over again. He thought that in her agreeing to come, she was stating she was ready to commit to their relationship. The narrator never accepts what he sees or hears from Magdalena. He tells his readers that this is because he is such an optimist. The readers, on the other hand, are probably all saying it is rather because he is so blind and deaf. But Díaz might well be making the point that it is because these two people, the narrator and Magdalena, live in such disparate worlds. Their worlds are so different it is as if they speak different languages, use different expressions, and think in different terms. There are no more bridges linking their worlds. They have all been destroyed by conflict.

In the end, the only thing the narrator can conclude is that he must have been on drugs to imagine a world in which he and Magdalena could co-exist. He finally starts listening to what she is saying, and, when he finally hears her, he realizes that he does not know her. It is at this point that Magdalena begins to grasp the definitions of her new world. She realizes that she has left the world in which she saw herself and the narrator as one. Like the proverbial caterpillar, she has cracked the cocoon and has emerged as a butterfly. No wonder the narrator does not recognize her. But even after the narrator's trip to the Cave of the Jagua, the deep black hole of creation, where he sees the future and that future does not include Magdalena, he still clings to a world that no longer exists. Unlike Magdalena, the narrator has not yet experienced a metamorphosis. He continues to hang in suspension. It is as if he is living in a vacuum and keeps asking Magdalena to join him. However, Magdalena, in essence, tells him that their worlds have separated forever. There will be no more collisions because they have at last drifted too far apart.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

Audio Editions (http://www.audioeditions.com) offers *The Best American Short Stories 1999* on cassette, each story read by its author. The set contains four abridged cassettes and features, in addition to Junot Díaz, such noted authors as Pam Houston, Jhumpa Lahiri, Aleksandar Hemon, and Tim Gautreaux.

Topics for Further Study

Research the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic. Who were some of the major players? Was the U.S. government welcome? How did the occupation affect the Dominican Republic's economy? How did the occupation affect the Dominican Republic's relations with other countries throughout Latin America?

Who were the *parigüayos*? Where does their name come from?

Explore the ways in which Díaz uses words that share a common origin in the English and Spanish languages. Cite examples. How does Díaz's use of language reflect his characters' environment?

Who were the Tainos? What geographical region did they occupy? Did they really come from South America, as Yunior suggests? Are the Tainos an extinct race of people, or are their descendents alive today? Examine the cultural history they left behind.

Research the Cave of the Jagua. Is it an actual place, or, as the Vice-President suggests, does it possess a more mythical importance? What symbolic connotations does it have in the story?

How important a role does tourism play in the Dominican Republic? What other industries form the basis of this nation's economy? Research the rise and fall of the sugar cane industry in the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

In the story, the Vice-President and Bárbaro debate the actual number of Dominican ballplayers in the major leagues. Name some of the more famous Dominican ballplayers and compare their careers. Do Dominican ballplayers tend to play one position more than others? What accounts for the relatively high number of players from the Dominican Republic as opposed to, say, other countries in Latin America?

When Columbus sailed to what is modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic, he named the island Santa Esmeralda. Why? Research the expeditions of other European countries to the New World. Why did the French exert such a strong cultural influence on Haiti and not the Spanish?

Haiti, the Dominican Republic's western neighbor, was known as a country where voodoo was practiced as of the early 2000s. Trace the origins of voodoo to West Africa. To what extent was the slave trade responsible for spreading voodoo's influence in the New World? How does voodoo compare with other religious practices in the region? For example, do the practices of Santeria and voodoo share any beliefs?

What Do I Read Next?

A native of the Dominican Republic, Julia Alvarez moved with her family to New York to escape Trujillo's regime when she was ten years old. Based in part on her early experiences as an immigrant, her novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* follows the exploits of four sisters who move to the United States from the Dominican Republic. One of the sisters, Yolanda, is the protagonist of Alvarez's novel *¡Yo!* Alvarez addresses Trujillo's brutal dictatorship in her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*, which is based on the true story of the Mirabal sisters who were murdered at the hands of Trujillo's secret police. The novel was later adapted into a film of the same name starring Salma Hayek, Edward James Olmos, and Marc Anthony.

In 1984, Sandra Cisneros, a Mexican American writer, published *The House on Mango Street*, a book constructed of vignettes that may be read as short stories or prose poems. Narrated by Esperanza, a poor Latina girl who longs to have a room of her own and to become a writer, *The House on Mango Street* addresses the isolation from mainstream American culture many immigrants experience as it focuses on issues of poverty, identity, and cultural repression. Junot Díaz has cited Sandra Cisneros as one of his early influences.

Edwidge Danticat evokes the rich cultural history of her native Haiti in novels and story collections such as *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *Krik? Krak!* (1995), both of which have won her popularity with readers. However, it is Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) that is perhaps the more mature and enriching work of fiction. Narrated by Amabelle Desir, a young Haitian woman who was raised in the Dominican Republic after being orphaned, the novel's action occurs in 1937, with the massacre of Haitian workers by Dominican soldiers serving as a backdrop. Some 12,000 to 15,000 Haitians were slaughtered in what would be called an act of "ethnic cleansing." Amabelle survives the massacre, but she suffers deep psychological wounds in its aftermath as she contemplates the suffering of her fellow Haitians and the guilt of their Dominican oppressors. *The Farming of Bones* exposes one of the most horrific incidents in Latin American history as it honors the resilience of the human spirit.

Junot Diaz's collection of stories *Drown* won the young author critical acclaim and a reputation as one of America's most talented writers. The stories, which feature characters that reappear throughout the book, are often set against the backdrop of drug culture and immigrant life, particularly that of young Dominicans who find their environment overwhelming. In these stories that create memorable portraits of characters from the *barrio*, Díaz explores familial relationships, sexual coming of age, and racial attitudes. His story "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" addresses some of the themes in "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," though it serves as a satirical how-to guide for poor Latino men on the make. *Negocios*, a Spanish-language edition of *Drown*, is available as a Vintage paperback.

Mario Vargas Llosa combines historical fact with fiction in his novel *The Feast of the Goat* (2002). Moving backward and forward in time, Vargas Llosa juxtaposes the stories

of Urania Cabral, a successful New York lawyer who has returned to Santo Domingo to see her father, with that of the seven men who conspire to murder the Dominican leader Rafael Trujillo. In a third narrative strand, Vargas Llosa portrays Trujillo as a man frustrated by an elusive yet encroaching enemy: advancing age. Determined to preserve what little vitality he has left, Trujillo, nicknamed "The Goat" for his frequent sexual escapades, becomes obsessed with his grooming and personal hygiene, only to be confronted with incontinence and a recurring case of impotence that serves as a metaphor for his diminishing power as a ruler. Vargas Llosa describes the end of a brutal dictatorship as he offers an eloquent meditation on the moral and physical corruption of power.

Further Study

Bretón, Marcos, and José Luis Villegas, *Away Games: The Life and Times of a Latin Baseball Player*, University of New Mexico, 2000.

Journalists Marcos and Villegas follow the career of Miguel Tejada as he rises from promising rookie to become one of the stars of the American League. (In 2002, Tejada was named league MVP [Most Valuable Player].) Tejada, who as of 2004 played shortstop for the Oakland Athletics, is just one of many Dominican players who left the *barrio* for the major leagues. The book addresses the impoverished backgrounds many ballplayers come from as well as the language and cultural barriers that await them in the United States.

Howard, David, *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*, Signal Books, 2001.

Howard examines how ideas of skin color define Dominicans' idea of themselves as well as their Haitian neighbors. For decades, the Dominican Republic has defined itself as white, thereby disassociating itself from its black, or African, roots and making it superior, in the eyes of many, to Haiti. According to the author, perceptions of race and the unwillingness to accept "blackness" in Dominican cultural and political life have created divisions of race, color, and ethnicity that mold relations within Dominican society.

Sagás, Ernesto, *Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic*, University Press of Florida, 2000.

Sagás examines the use of *antihaitianismo* by Dominican leaders, particularly Trujillo, to portray Dominicans as a predominantly white, Catholic people, as compared to their neighbors in Haiti, who have been depicted as spirit-worshipping Africans. Although these racist and xenophobic attitudes first developed in the colonial era, they continue to be manipulated by conservative politicians in contemporary Dominican politics.

Yewell, John, Chris Dodge, and Jan DeSirey, eds., *Confronting Columbus: An Anthology*, McFarland, 1992.

This anthology addresses a wide variety of subjects relating to the Spanish conquest of the New World, including the influence of the Catholic Church on indigenous peoples, the importance of sugar as a major export crop, and slavery. Most important, the book raises the specter of genocide, an issue that has gone largely ignored until the late twentieth century.

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David Galens

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Product Design
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Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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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:

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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.

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

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Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535