To Da-duh in Memoriam Study Guide

To Da-duh in Memoriam by Paule Marshall

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Introduction

Paule Marshall's "To Da-duh, in Memoriam," first published in 1967 and reissued in *Reena, and Other Stories* in 1983, is a story imbued with thematic resonance. The story focuses on a rivalry between grandmother and granddaughter; this conflict is based on several opposing forces, particularly the rural world versus the urban world, tradition versus modernity, and age versus youth. Marshall skillfully draws these disparate elements together, thus illustrating the cycles of time and the enduring nature of family. These multifaceted themes, along with Marshall's subtle evocation of Barbadian history and her rich symbolism and metaphor, have made "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" one of the author's most interesting and discussed works of short fiction.

The story also introduces Da-duh, who appears in different forms throughout Marshall's work. Marshall openly notes the autobiographical nature of the piece, which she wrote many years after a childhood visit to her grandmother in Barbados. Understanding Da-duh's influence on Marshall is an important tool for achieving critical understanding of the author's body of work and her continuing themes. As Marshall describes her grandmother in an introduction to the story published in her 1983, "She's an ancestor figure, symbolic for me of the long line of black women and men . . . who made my being possible, and whose spirit I believe continues to animate my life and work."

Author Biography

Marshall was born on April 9, 1929, in Brooklyn, New York, the child of Barbadian immigrants who were among the first wave of Caribbean islanders to relocate to the United States. Her early life was suffused with Caribbean culture; she spoke its language and followed many of its traditions. Marshall made her first visit to the Caribbean when she was nine years old, which inspired her to write poetry. After graduating from high school in 1949, she attended Brooklyn College (now part of the City University of New York). She graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English literature in 1953 and became a Phi Beta Kappa member.

From 1953 to 1956, Marshall worked as a researcher and journalist for the African-American magazine *Our World.* Her job required her to travel to Brazil and the Caribbean. While attending graduate school at Hunter College, which she entered in 1955, she started writing her first novel, the autobiographical *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), in her spare evening hours. She completed it on a visit to Barbados.

This novel introduced many of the themes that Marshall would further develop throughout her literary career, particularly the importance of her relationship to her family in the Caribbean. She dedicated the novel to her grandmother, who inspired her to write "To Da-duh, in Memoriam." In 1960, Marshall won a Guggenheim Fellowship, which she used to complete the book of novellas *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961). In this work, Marshall expands her Barbadian community to include other members of the African diaspora. In the years until her next publication, the novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), Marshall worked for a Caribbean magazine, *New World,* and as a librarian for the New York Public Library. She followed up the novel the following year with *Reena and Other Stories* , which included the previously published "To Da-duh, in Memoriam." Marshall also became involved in the civil rights movement during the 1960s, joining the American Youth for Democracy and Artists for Freedom; the latter groups included other important African-American writers such as James Baldwin. Throughout the 1970s, after marrying her second husband, a Haitian, Marshall divided her time between New York and the West Indies. She also taught creative writing and literature at several colleges and universities. Although she did not publish any fiction in the 1970s, her work began to draw greater critical attention and was even being taught in college classes.

She published the novel *Praisesong for the Widow* in 1983. It shares with *Brown Girl, Brownstones* the theme of the search for identity. The novel *Daughters* was published in 1991. In the 1990s, Marshall also became sought after as a keynote speaker and lecturer. She also won a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1992. Toward the end of the decade, she retired from a teaching position at Virginia Commonwealth University, a position that she had held for ten years, to devote herself full-time to writing.

Plot Summary

"To Da-duh, in Memoriam" is an autobiographical story told from the point of view of an adult looking back on a childhood memory. The story opens as the nine-year-old narrator, along with her mother and sister, disembarks from a boat that has brought them to Bridgetown, Barbados. It is 1937, and the family has come to visit from their home in Brooklyn, leaving behind the father, who believed it was a waste of money to take the trip. The narrator's mother first left Barbados fifteen years ago, and the narrator has never met her grandmother, Da-duh. Although an old woman, the narrator's grandmother is lively and sharp. When she meets her grandchildren, Da-duh examines them. She calls the narrator's older sister "lucky," but she silently looks at the narrator, calling the child "fierce." She takes the narrator by the hand and leads the family outside where the rest of the relatives are waiting. The family gets in the truck that takes them through Bridgetown and back to Da-duh's home in St. Thomas.

The next day, Da-duh takes the narrator out to show her the land covered with fruit orchards and sugar cane. Da-duh asks the narrator if there is anything as nice in Brooklyn, and the narrator says no. Da-duh says that she has heard that there are no trees in New York, but then asks the narrator to describe snow. The narrator takes advantage of this opportunity to impress Da-duh with all the things that New York does have, and she describes the snow as falling higher than Da-duh's house and cold enough to freeze a person. Then the narrator decides to show her grandmother popular dances from America and sing popular songs. When the performance ends, Da-duh stares at the narrator as if she came from another planet, but then smiles and gives her a penny to buy candy.

For the remainder of the visit, the narrator spends most of her time with her grandmother. They walk among the sugar cane, and the narrator tells Da-duh all about New York, describing the world of the city with its buildings, machines, and modern appliances. The narrator can sense her grandmother's fear at hearing about all of these signs of urbanity. The narrator even tells Da-duh that in New York she beats up white girls, a remark which leaves Da-duh speechless.

Toward the end of the visit, Da-duh takes her granddaughter to see a very tall palm tree. She asks the child if they have anything as tall in New York. The narrator almost wishes that she could say no, but she tells her about the Empire State building, the tallest building in the world and over one hundred stories high. Da-duh gets angry and accuses her granddaughter of lying. The narrator says that she will send a postcard of the Empire State building when she gets home. Da-duh realizes that she has been defeated. They return to the house, Da-duh looking uncertain and the narrator feeling triumphant but sad.

The next morning, Da-duh doesn't feel well. The narrator sings for her until breakfast. Then the two take their customary walk, but it is short and dispirited. At home again, Da-duh spends the rest of the afternoon napping. This pattern continues until the family

returns to Brooklyn. On the day of their departure, Da-duh reminds her granddaughter to send the postcard.

However, by the time the narrator mails the postcard, Da-duh has died. Shortly after the family left, riots in Bridgetown took place. To quell the protest, the British sent planes to fly over the island and scare the people. Everyone in the village fled into the cane fields for safety, with the exception of Da-duh; she stayed in the house and watched the plans swoop down. The narrator imagines that, to her grandmother, it must have seemed that the planes were going to come right at her, in her house. When the planes withdraw and the villagers return, they find Da-duh dead in her chair by the window. The narrator recalls how she always remembered her Da-duh. As an adult, she does penance for how she treated her grandmother, living in a downtown loft in New York and painting pictures of the sugar cane while the machines downstairs thunder noisily.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The story begins with a young girl waiting with her mother and sister in the darkness of a crowded disembarkation shed. Her eyes are still a little hazy from the brilliance of the sun on the water of the bay they had just crossed. They had come by boat from New York to Barbados to see her grandmother for the first time.

She is fascinated by all the sights and sounds of the island bombarding her, as they are all so different from her world in the city. She is taken with her new surroundings that she does not see her grandmother approaching at first. Her mother squeezing her hand brings her to attention and looks up to see the shadowy figure of a small, erect woman headed her way.

The girl can see her plainly now, even though her face is overshadowed by the shade of an old rolled-brim felt hat. She had an incredibly strong back, a testament of her 80 odd years after a life spent working on the island, while holding its owner upright and proud.

Her gait was so strong and intense that the girl didn't think she would be able to stop once she had reached them, but that she just might sweep past them out the doorway and into the sea and, just like Jesus, walk on the waters before her. She was dressed in a severe, long white dress and black high-top shoes and of course that brown hat.

Once the girl saw the woman's face up close, she almost wished that the hat's shadow could still hide it for the face was as gaunt and lifeless as a death mask. Only her eyes still looked alive "with a sharp light that flicked out of the dim clouded depths like a lizard's tongue to snap up all in her view."

How could this tiny, shrunken woman have produced 14 children when her slight body looked as small as a girl's body? The girl's mother is the first to speak, calls the woman Da-Duh and they embrace tentatively and briefly, completely erasing the fifteen years since they had last seen each other. The girl sees her formidable mother transposed into a young girl again in the presence of this intense, tiny woman.

Da-Duh inspects the girl and her sister, declaring the sister pretty and fortunate to have the looks of her father. Then Da-Duh leans into the other girl's face, comments on her fierce strength, and takes her by the hand and leads the four of them out of the shed and into the sunlight to the relatives waiting to meet them.

The relatives all comment on the New Yorkers and their apparent affluence. Da-Duh is obviously embarrassed by their provincialism and moves to get the visitors into a waiting lorry for the journey back to her home. They made their way through Bridgetown past the shops and offices, often sharing the road with women balancing huge baskets on their heads, as easily as if their burdens were no more than hats necessary on such a sunny day. Da-Duh took her place as monarch of the family by sitting on a trunk and

seemed visibly relieved once they had left the city and moved onto the tiny dirt road into the sugar canes.

The canes dwarfed them all. The girl felt that they were heading into a dangerous place for sure because they seemed high and as thick as a forest and seemed to overrun the island leaving room for nothing and no one. She longed for the familiar sights of her home in Brooklyn. Da-Duh must have sensed her discomfort and promised to show her the fields tomorrow, God willing.

Therefore, the next morning, they begin their sugar cane walks. They enter via a trail no wider than Da-Duh's tiny body, which was supplemented a little bit on this morning by petticoats under her work dress. On her head, she fashioned a clean white cloth high on her head, which added to her height and her almost arrogant bearing.

Along the way, Da-Duh pointed out the fruits that grew so plentifully on her little part of this island… breadfruit… papaw… guava… mango… sugar apples. She knew that these gifts surpassed any that the girl could claim from her New York home. Then out of the orchard came the sugar cane fields. Once again, the woman chides the girl that they do not have anything like those in her city and that her canes are the ones that go to the factory, have their life squeezed out of them so that people in New York and wherever can have their sugar.

Once Da-Duh has shared her world with the young girl, she asks her about snow. The girl tells her that all her fruit trees would be bare, no leaves, no fruit, nothing. They would be covered in snow. The canes would also be buried and the snow would be taller than her house and that her gulley would be snowed under. Da-Duh seems skeptical and is relieved when the girl launches into singing and dancing as she does on the sidewalks back home. Da-Duh is sure this child must be from another planet with all her strange ways but she is pleased with her, reaches under her petticoats to find her cloth purse and presents the child with a penny for a sweet from the shop up the road.

And so, as the girl's visit to the island stretched on, so did her walks with Da-Duh, who always reminded her that they didn't have anything as good or as sweet like her island in New York. However, the girl felt compelled to tell her grandmother of her life in spite of her skepticism. She told her of refrigerators, radios, gas stoves, elevators, trolley cars, wringer washing machines, movies, airplanes, Coney Island, subways, toasters and electric lights. Da-Duh was impressed and the girl could feel the old woman's reserve about city life start to melt.

Shortly before the end of the girl's visit, her grandmother took her into a part of the gulley that was darker and more overgrown than the rest, almost impenetrable. Suddenly she stopped before an extremely tall royal palm tree that soared above all the others near it. It appeared to touch the sky and Da-Duh challenged the girl that surely they do not have anything that tall in New York.

The girl wished she could have said no but had to tell the old woman that they have buildings many times taller than this magnificent palm. Da-Duh accused her of lying

about that and the girl promised to send her a picture postcard when she returned home so that the old woman could see with her own eyes that what she was saying was true.

Da-Duh lost her zeal at that point, tried to dismiss the girl and her world with a wave of her hand and turned to begin the walk out of the gulley. The girl followed behind, secure in her triumph but sad somehow.

The next day the girl found Da-Duh dressed for their morning walk yet she was stretched out on a chair in the drawing room where she napped during the hot island afternoons. To the girl she appeared thinner and so much older. She asked the girl to sing for her and she did all morning until shortly before noon when they went out again into the canes.

However, the walk was short and lacked the spirit of their usual morning adventures. Da-Duh did not even seem to notice that the mangoes were ripe and needed to be picked before the village boys got to them. It seemed that she was seeing something else when she looked out at the palms and sugar canes. Something had fogged her vision of the land. They returned to the house and the old woman slept the entire afternoon in the chair where the girl had found her earlier that morning.

Da-Duh stayed lifeless for the remainder of the girl's visit. She could only muster a labored morning talk, a brief stroll on the grounds not speaking for much of the time, and then afternoons of sleep that sometimes pushed into dusk.

On the day the girl and her sister and mother departed, the old woman again dressed in her long white dress, the black shoes and the same old brown hat, but she did not go into town to see them off. There were tears all around and Da-Duh reminded the girl about the postcard to the tall buildings.

By the time the girl got home and was able to mail the cards, the old woman had died in the air strikes of 1937. They heard that on the day of her death, England had sent planes flying so low that the downdraft from them shook the ripened mangoes from the trees in Da-Duh's orchard. Everyone else fled into the sugar canes, but not Da-Duh. She stayed in her house and watched the planes attacking like some giant birds come to eat up her life. When the rest of the villagers returned they found her dead in her favorite chair.

The girl lived on in New York and when she was old enough, lived in a loft above a noisy factory and painted extensively. The whole time the thunderous noise from the machines downstairs jarred the floor and the girl's easel as if to mock her efforts.

Analysis

This story is a study in contrasts: an old woman and a young girl; rural vs. industrial life; and tradition vs. change. The old woman is leery of encountering her granddaughter: when she looks in her face, she sees something fierce. Is it frightening or does she see herself in a younger version? They share lineage and the same skin color but that is

where the similarities end. The old woman has spent a lifetime in the sugar cane fields and orchards of Barbados. Every tree is familiar to her and she is proud of the cane that grows tall and strong year after year. These things of the earth are her road signs and how she measures time. She is immensely proud of her land and how fruitful it has become, and she is proud to show it to her granddaughter.

We sense that while she is sharing her world with the girl, she is in awe of the stories about life in New York, but continues to challenge her granddaughter that nothing in the city can compare with what she has on this island. However, she also knows that without the industrial parts of the world, her cane would not have the markets she needs and her life would still be very small. She hates the modern world but needs it at the same time.

She allows in a little bit more information about this foreign world by asking about snow and how it would look on the island. It is as if she can imagine a complete takeover by powerful, industrial companies and countries and is testing it out in her mind. As surely as snow kills green things, industrialism would kill her. Once she lets this possibility into her mind, she gives up hope. It is closer than she ever thought it would be, sleeps a lot and goes on lifeless walks with the girl through the canes. She knows her life is about to change and this girl represents all those things to her.

Therefore, when the bombers fly in from England, she does not flee with the others. She stays in her house and defiantly stares down the planes come to destroy her world. Then she dies in her favorite chair. She does not give in to the mechanized world even to the moment of her death.

The girl carries her grandmother in her soul and paints the beauty of the island in her loft over the noise of a factory… and we realize that she is keeping her Da-Duh alive in her art despite the obvious intrusion of the manufacturing just beneath her feet. The lush, beautiful world of Da-Duh must not fade and her granddaughter's fierceness continues, and in a way, so does her beloved Da-Duh.

Characters

Da-duh

Da-duh is the narrator's eighty-year-old grandmother. She has lived her whole life on Barbados and is confident and proud of her lifestyle, surroundings, and ways of looking at the world. She dislikes the trappings of the modern world, such as any form of machinery, and is uncomfortable in the city of Bridgetown. When Da-duh first meets the narrator, the narrator imagines that she saw "something in me which for some reason she found disturbing." However, Da-duh also feels connected to her granddaughter, as evidenced when she clasps her hand. Da-duh is completely at home in the countryside of St. Thomas where she lives. She takes her granddaughter on daily walks on the land surrounding her house. She shows off the glories of the natural world, and listens with an air of fear to her granddaughter's descriptions of life in New York. She is not accustomed to having her life challenged, as her granddaughter does, and she attempts to assert authority through the royal palm tree, which is the tallest thing she has ever seen. When her granddaughter tells her about the Empire State building, Da-duh is finally defeated.

The small instances of surrender that the narrator had seen throughout the visit now pervades Daduh's person. Instead of eagerly going on walks, she spends mornings staring out the window and spends her afternoons napping; grandmother and granddaughter take only brief, dispirited walks.

She dies shortly after her family leaves, and her death suggests both her stubbornness and her defeat. When Britain sends planes to fly low over the island in retaliations for riots and strikes, Da-duh, alone among her community, refuses to take cover in the cane fields. She stays in the house and watches the planes. The narrator imagines that it must have seemed to Da-duh that the planes were going to destroy her house and the whole island. When the rest of the village returns to their homes after the planes have departed, Da-duh is dead, still sitting in her chair at the window.

Narrator

The narrator is nine years old when she visits Barbados and meets her grandmother, Da-duh, for the first time. The narrator is a strong-willed, unique child. Her stubbornness matches Da-duh's, and both of them immediately recognize this similarity. Sensing this, the two lock gazes upon first meeting, and the narrator revels in her triumph when her grandmother looks away first.

Their likeness draws them together. On the day after their arrival, the pattern of their relationship emerges when Da-duh takes her granddaughter on a walk through the countryside. Da-duh shows off her world, and when prodded by her grandmother, the narrator agrees that they have no natural, healthy environments like this in Brooklyn.

Da-duh's comments make the girl realize what her world is missing. At the same time, however, the natural world discomfits the girl. She sees the sugar canes as "giant weeds" and thinks they have taken over the island. The narrator brings into her grandmother's world songs, dances, ideas, and descriptions of the city, which her grandmother listens to, with a sense of disbelief. Throughout the course of the visit, grandmother and granddaughter battle over whose world is more grand.

Toward the end of the trip, however, the narrator wins the battle with finality when she tells Daduh about the Empire State building, which would tower over the royal palm tree, the tallest thing that Da-duh has ever seen. However, the narrator is able to take little delight in her victory. For the rest of the trip, she tries to perk her grandmother up by performing songs.

After leaving the island, the narrator never sees her grandmother again because Da-duh dies soon thereafter. The memory of Da-duh, and the way she belittled her, remains with the narrator for the rest of her life. She also learns a valuable lesson from her grandmother: that in its unique way, the rural, natural world is as important as the urban, technological world and has something of value to offer her.

Themes

Rivalry

The story pits an aging Barbadian grandmother against her youthful American granddaughter. Upon their first meeting, the two sense a similarity in each other that far outweighs the differences presented by the seventy years between them. Most importantly, each has a stubborn strength of will and a confidence that her way of regarding the world is the right way.

The characters knowingly participate in this rivalry. Da-duh has the knowledge that comes with age and experience, but the narrator has the brash confidence of youth. Da-duh has her pride of place, showing off her land with its lush plants, trees, and cane fields. The narrator has the technological superiority of the modern world, which she uses to goad her grandmother into silent submission; Da-duh is not impressed by technology, but it is so foreign to her that she cannot even conceive of her granddaughter's descriptions of life in New York. The story ends with the narrator's victory in this rivalry, which makes her feel somewhat sad because she knows that her success only comes as a result of her grandmother's concession.

Time

As the oldest and youngest characters presented in the story, Da-duh and the narrator represent the span of time and its cyclical nature. Marshall writes in the last paragraph, "She died and I lived"; in a sense, the role that Da-duh occupied in the family has passed on to the narrator. She dies to make way for her granddaughter and the world, period, and change that she symbolizes. The grandmother and granddaughter also represent how the passing of time changes the world, forcing its older members to be left behind. The granddaughter's triumph at the end of her visit illustrates that in many ways the world truly belongs to the new generation. This theme is further reinforced by Da-duh's death soon thereafter. There is no place for Da-duh in the modern world, therefore she must leave.

Rural and Urban Worlds

Because of their stubbornness, grandmother and granddaughter participate in a rivalry in which each tries to prove that her world is superior. Daduh has the wonder and beauty of the natural world on her side, but her granddaughter has all the technological wonders of the urban world. Da-duh is frightened of the trappings of the modern world; in the truck, driving through Bridgetown, she clutches the narrator's hand tightly. Once back in the country, among the sugar cane fields, she feels safe and comfortable again. The granddaughter, a child of one of the most vibrant cities in the world, is unimpressed by these sights, however. To her, the sugar canes□which have sustained the Barbadian economy for hundreds of years□are only giant weeds. Da-duh and the narrator spend

most of their days together walking around the land. Da-duh points out all the amazing sites of the island□the fruit-bearing trees and plants, the tropical woods, the tall royal palm. Each of these objects that are so precious to Da-duh come from the natural, rural world and represent the agricultural tradition of Barbados. In response to Da-duh, the narrator shows off the dances she learns from the movies and the songs that play on the radio. She brags about all the machines and technology New York offers□kitchen appliances, trolleys and subways, electricity□technology of the urban, modern world. She finally wins the rivalry by telling Da-duh about the Empire State building, which was the tallest building in the world at that time and hailed as a great wonder of architecture.

Slavery and Colonization

Barbados was a British colony for hundreds of years. Historically, the lands of Barbados belonged to the privileged white minority, while enslaved Africans worked the land that made them wealthy. Emancipation came to Barbados in 1838, but the whites still held the power. Conditions for Africans on the island essentially remained the same. Many elements in "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" reflect this heritage. As Martin Japtok writes in *African American Review,* in this story "Marshall shows the inescapability of history by inscribing it into the very landscape." The plants that Da-duh so proudly shows off to her granddaughter, whose names Da-duh intones "as they were those of her gods," are not indigenous to the island, instead originating from other British colonies. Indeed, sugar cane, which brings Da-duh so much happiness, was the fundamental cause of long-lasting African exploitation. The planes that bring about Da-duh's death also represent colonial oppression; Britain ordered these flyovers in response to a 1937 strike and riot.

Style

Point of View

"To Da-duh, in Memoriam" is written from the first-person point of view. The majority of the story is viewed through the child narrator's eyes. She recalls when she first met Da-duh, her first impression of the sugar cane fields, and the rivalry that exists between the two family members. Hers is the only voice the reader hears, and hers are the only eyes through which the reader sees Barbados and Da-duh. Thus the rivalry□and both participants' reaction to it□is only explained as a nine-year-old child might have seen, or an adult looking back at the nine-year-old child that she was. At the end of the story, the narrator pulls back even further from the events that form the bulk of the story. Her narration of what happens after she and her family leave Barbados□the riots, the planes flying over the island, and her grandmother's death□are told from the point of view of an adult looking back at something that has happened a great distance and time away. The point of view is also less personal, more factual. The story's final paragraph, though still firmly within the narrator's point of view, shows the narrator's close ties to the past and the story she has related. She reveals the lasting guilt she has felt about showing up her grandmother and making her feel inferior. She also reveals the ties she feels to her past and to her ancestry, of which Daduh remains the most potent symbol.

Autobiography

In her introduction to "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" when it was collected in *Reena, and Other Stories* , Marshall writes, "This is the most autobiographical of the stories, a reminiscence largely of a visit I paid to my grandmother (whose nickname was Da-duh) on the island of Barbados." She goes on to explore the feelings that she and Da-duh experienced that year, as she recalls them from a distance. However, Marshall also acknowledges that later she tried to give a "wider meaning" to their rivalrous but affectionate relationship. "I wanted the basic theme of youth and old age to suggest rivalries, dichotomies of a cultural and political nature, having to do with the relationship of western civilization and the Third World," she writes. Marshall also states that her grandmother is "an ancestor figure" for her, thus it is clear that Marshall's remembrances of her grandmother can never be wholly objective or representative of the truth. Rather, "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" is Marshall's recollection of the truth as she perceives it from a distance and as she has chosen to shape it. Marshall's introduction reminds the reader that the story cannot be perceived as pure autobiography and that, as the author, she has striven to create a specific world and a specific message.

Symbolism and Metaphor

Marshall infuses "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" with rich symbolism and metaphor. Many elements take on great significance as seen through either Daduh's or the narrator's

eyes. The narrator believes the royal palm is as proud as Da-duh in its "flaunting its dark crown of fronds right in the blinding white face of the late morning sun." The planes that Britain sends over the island do not look or act like objects of the machine age, but like "swooping and screaming . . . monstrous birds" or "the hardback beetles which hurled themselves with suicidal force against the walls of the house at night"; this use of metaphor shows that despite hearing about New York and the modern world, Da-duh cannot even fathom its existence. The story's most important symbol is sugar cane. To Da-duh, this plant represents a source of beauty and pride, but the narrator sees the cane fields as threatening. She walks among them feeling that the canes are "clashing like swords above my cowering head"; the narrator's reaction to the canes reflects their history as an impetus for the slave trade and the ensuing exploitation of countless Africans. Through all this, the Empire State building, representative of one of the greatest countries of the world and the home of the narrator, symbolically towers over Barbados, a tiny colonial island.

Historical Context

Colonial Barbados

By the 1930s, Barbados had been under British colonial rule for over three hundred years. Always a poor country ruled by a white, propertied minority, Barbados suffered throughout the 1930s. The rapidly growing population, rising cost of living, and fixed wage scale was exacerbated by the worldwide Great Depression. Riots broke out throughout British holdings in the Caribbean in the late 1930s. Protests in Barbados in 1937 resulted in the deaths of fourteen people.

The British rulers created a commission to look into the cause of these riots, and Grantley Adams, a Barbadian educated in England, rose to prominence after testifying that they resulted from economic distress. He formed the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) in 1938. In 1940, he was elected to the House of Assembly. Over the next few years, he led a reform movement that protected union leaders, increased direct taxation, and created a worker's compensation program. Adams's also led the fight to broaden voting rights and, as a result, women were allowed to vote□and the cost of qualifying to vote was reduced, allowing more people to vote. Eventually, Adams became the leader of the government.

Striving toward Independence

British officials had been devising a plan for a federation of the Caribbean islands since 1953. Adams's became prime minister of the short-lived West Indies Federation, while a political rival, Errol Barrow, founder of the Democratic Labour Party, became Premier in 1961 and led the government for the next ten years. Barrow's party increased worker's benefits, supported higher wages for sugar cane workers, instituted a program of industrialization, and expanded free education. The government also pushed for completed independence from Britain, and on November 30, 1966, Barbados became an independent country within the British Commonwealth of Nations; Barrow became Barbados's first prime minister.

Sugar Cane Economy

In the 1930s, as it had done for the past three hundred years, Barbados's sugar cane industry continued to be the dominant economic force. The vast majority of the land was given over to the production of sugar cane. The few crops that were grown locally were too expensive for the average worker, and most Barbadians relied on the purchase of imported food. Not until the 1970s did the sugar cane industry relinquish its dominance over the Barbadian economy.

Barbadian Emigration

From the mid-1940s through the late 1960s, unemployed Barbadians left the country to find work elsewhere. In the 1950s, Britain was the primary destination of most Barbadian emigrants, but in the 1960s, as Britain placed restrictions on West Indian immigration, more Barbadians moved to the United States. Such emigration led to a substantial diminishment in population growth.

Critical Overview

"To Da-duh, in Memoriam" was originally published in 1967. Although it drew the attention of a few early literary scholars, at that time Marshall had a relatively small audience. Lloyd W. Brown wrote in a 1974 article for *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* that such neglect is "unfortunate, because Paule Marshall's major themes are both significant and timely" and help to define the contemporary African American identity. In 1983, "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" was reissued and published in Marshall's collection *Reena, and Other Stories* . The story was often singled out, drawing much favorable attention from readers and critics. Writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Carole Boyce Davies called it "one of the most skillful stories" in the collection. Over the years, critics have written about many different elements of this rich story. Brown has suggested that the musical and machine rhythms with which Marshall infuses "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" symbolize the strength of her characters and the life-death themes explored through the relationship created by grandmother and granddaughter. Similarly, in her essay included in *Black Women Writers,* Eugenia Collier suggests that Marshall "uses the ritual of dance to underscore the great contrast between the child's world and Daduh's." According to Collier, the story ends in the child's discovery of a "vital dimension of her self" as she realizes that the natural, traditional world of Barbados has value as well.

As Marshall has increasingly grown in stature as an important African-American writer, critics continue to explore the many themes of the story, which include the conflict between older and younger people, Western civilization and the Third World, the urban world and the rural world, and modernity and tradition. The story also reflects the history of Barbados, with its heritage of slavery, colonialism, and a reliance on sugar cane.

Other critics have also studied "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" with regard to its place within the Marshall cannon, a point which Marshall previously raised. Barbara T. Christian, writing in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* suggests that the story's narrator could be the younger sister of Selina Boyce, the heroine of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* , Marshall's first novel. Christian also points out that Da-duh "seems to be Marshall's sketch of a more fully developed character in *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* , which is Marshall's second novel. Read together, Marshall's works show the development of a writer. "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" further defines the themes that have been important to Marshall throughout her literary career, as well as the people who have shaped her life. As Marshall writes in her introductory comments to the story when it was reprinted in *Reena, and Other Stories* , "Da-duh turns up everywhere."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, Korb explores the contrasts that Marshall presents in the story.

Marshall's short story "To Da-duh, in Memoriam," revolving around a rivalry between a grandmother and a granddaughter, functions within a series of contrasts as each female tries to prove that her world is superior. "I tried giving the contests I had sensed between us a wider meaning," Marshall notes in her introduction to the story when it was included in *Reena, and Other Stories* . "I wanted the basic theme of youth and old age to suggest rivalries, dichotomies of a cultural and political nature, having to do with the relationship of western civiliza tion and the Third World." Marshall infuses "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" with small, careful details as well as large thematic concepts that explore those opposing forces, all of which contribute to the complex link between the vigorous American child and the aging island woman. Indeed, as Adam Gussow points out in *The Village Voice,* the love shared by grandmother and granddaughter is "fed by a mixture of love and fear."

In the opening paragraph of the story, the narrator introduces the contrasts that will form the basis of the relationship between herself and her grandmother. Inside the embarkation shed, the narrator stands on the threshold of entering a new world. She is not quite in Bridgetown proper, yet she is no longer connected to the boat that transported her from New York. This in-between point is characteristically indistinct; it is "dark . . . in spite of the daylight flooding in from outside." In failing to illuminate the interior, the sunlight is unable to carry out one of its primary functions, thus hinting at upcoming island inadequacies. The sunlight also blinds the narrator, thus illustrating its dual, opposing nature; it can provide clarity of sight, but it can also be so strong that it obscures vision. The sunlight thus represents both the granddaughter and the grandmother, who are so positive what they believe is right that they have difficulty seeing the other's point of view. Indeed, the light symbolism applies to the narrator's entire trip to the island; although Barbados is a land of sunshine, the narrator brings darkness to her grandmother's world.

Details throughout the story strengthen this idea of contrast, many of which come at the beginning of the story and rest within the family. For example, Da-duh prefers boys to girls and "white" grandchildren□fair-skinned grandchildren of mixed race□to those with dark coloring. Da-duh, who lives in St. Thomas, considers her relatives from St. Andrews to be unsophisticated and awkward. Comparing the reactions of the New York relatives to her own, she is "ashamed at their wonder" and "embarrassed for them." The words with which the Barbadians greet the American relatives also show the material and sociocultural differences between the two family groups: "And see the nice things they wearing, wrist watch and all!" they exclaim. Bridgetown offers Marshall another opportunity to explore the idea of opposites. Though Bridgetown is Barbados's largest city, its thirdworld atmosphere makes it hard to conceive of it in the same category as a modern city such as New York. The narrator notices the donkey carts on the streets and

the woman's feet that "slurred the dust" of the unpaved roads. The family's journey through Bridgetown should be celebratory reunion, but it is described as "part of a funereal procession" moving toward a "grave ceremony." The reactions of the family members to the ride in the lorry further reinforce the differences between New York and Barbados. Da-duh, so confident at the embarkation shed, now holds tight to her granddaughter's hand because she is afraid of machinery. However, as soon as the truck leaves Bridgetown, surrounded again by her beloved sugar canes, Da-duh is able to relax. The narrator, in contrast, now feels overwhelmed. Looking at the tall canes lining the road,

I suddenly feared that we were journeying . . . toward some dangerous place where the canes, grown as high and thick as a forest, would close in on us and run us through with their stiletto blades.

Nowhere, however, are the forces of opposition more apparent than in the granddaughter's and grandmother's evocations of their communities and backgrounds. To prove the superiority of her world, Da-duh introduces her granddaughter to the land. She points out the plants, the breadfruit, papaw, guava, and mango, and elicits that the only tree on the narrator's block is a chestnut tree that produces no fruit. She takes the narrator to a small topical forest that is at once a place of beauty, violence, and peace. She owns sugar cane fields, while the narrator only has processed sugar, an insubstantial, potentially harmful substance derived, as Da-duh tells her, by "squeez[ing] all the little life in them." Daduh's words serve as a reminder that she possesses the real item□the canes□while her granddaughter only has a cheap imitation. In response to Da-duh's boasting about the natural glory of Barbados, the narrator tells her all of the things that New York *does* have. If Barbados is a "perennial summer kingdom," New York offers dramatically cold winters. The narrator exaggerates in telling Da-duh how the snow in New York covers the treetops. The canes, too, would be "buried under tons of snow. The snow would be higher than your head, higher than your house." She highlights Da-duh's inadequacy by pointing out that if she dressed in New York as she did in Barbados, she would "freeze to death." The narrator adds insult to injury by telling her grandmother that she has a coat "with fur on the collar."

This pattern, set on the first day of the narrator's visit, continues to develop. Da-duh shows off the natural world, while the narrator responds by "recreating my towering world of steel and concrete and machines for her." Eventually, Da-duh turns to her crowning glory, her greatest source of island pride, "an incredibly tall royal palm which rose cleanly out of the ground . . . [and] soared high above the trees around it into the sky." Da-duh challenges her granddaughter, "All right now, tell me if you've got anything this tall in that place you're from." The narrator responds with news of the Empire State building, at the time the world's tallest building, which is located in New York. Thus, with finality, she wins the competition. Not surprisingly in a story so reliant on opposition, this victory leaves her feeling "triumphant yet strangely saddened."

While "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" rests on this series of contrasts, there are also many instances in which these opposites meet in one entity. For example, when the narrator's mother is reunited with Da-duh for the first time in fifteen years, the narrator is surprised

how her mother, "who was such a formidable figure in my eyes, had suddenly . . . been reduced to my status." At one time, the narrator's mother occupies the dual roles of child and mother.

This concept of merging disparate factors most aptly applies to Da-duh, however. This suggestion, raised at the narrator's first sight of her grandmother, grows increasingly stronger throughout the story. The narrator's initial impression of Da-duh is that of a woman who is both young and old, one whose vibrant force of will stubbornly fights against her weakening body. As Da-duh makes her way through the embarkation shed, her body strains not to give in to the physical debilities that wrack an eighty-year-old woman. Her posture is bent "ever so slightly" but the "rest of her . . . sought to deny those years and hold that back straight." Also significant is Da-duh's ability to transcend time periods, as evidenced by the "long severe oldfashioned white dress she wore which brought the sense of a past that was still alive into our bustling present." Indeed, when the narrator looks into her grandmother's face, she wonders if Da-duh might be "both child and woman, darkness and light, past and present, life and death," for "all the opposites [are] contained and reconciled in her."

Because Da-duh possesses youthful elements within her, she can form a close connection with her granddaughter. Similarly, the narrator is equally drawn to this relationship. In certain ways, the narrator is both child and adult, for example, in her "fierce look," her "small strength," her pride in taking after "no one but myself," and her ability to alert her grandmother to some "disturbing, even threatening" characteristic. These two females, one young and one old, can be perceived as two halves of one whole. However, they are unable to coexist as such; the old woman cannot sustain the pressure of the child's vitality, and the child, with the backing of the changing world, overpowers the old woman. Da-duh is eventually unwilling to accept the modernity that her granddaughter presents to her and instead accepts her defeat□and chooses death. In accordance with all that has come before it, the story's ending further raises the specter of opposites.

As Lloyd W. Brown observes in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction,* "The opening statement [of the last paragraph] ('She died and I lived') presents the life-death antithesis." Indeed, this idea is so important to Marshall, who wrote in her introduction that she felt that she and her grandmother, upon their first meeting

both knew, at a level beyond words, that I had come into the world not only to love her and to continue her line but to take her very life in order that I might live.

Despite□or perhaps *because of* □these conflicting feelings, the narrator continues to honor her grandmother, and in doing this creates her own environment of contrasts. For a period, she lives as an artist in a loft above a New York factory. Within this stark, urban, technologically advanced world, the narrator chooses to embrace those natural elements that her grandmother so dearly loved. The story closes on an image of the narrator's pictures of "seas of sugar-cane and huge swirling Van Gogh suns and palm trees [in] a tropical landscape . . . while the thunderous tread of the machines downstairs jarred the floor beneath my easel."

Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on "To Da-duh, in Memoriam," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Japtok explores "the intertwining of the forces of nature with the forces of human-shaped time" present in "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam."

There might not be a region of the world that reflects the history of colonialism in its various phases in a more direct way than does the Caribbean. Its very population is a direct result of the African slave trade, European migration, and later immigration from various parts of mostly the British empire, while little is left of the indigenous Arawaks or Caribs. The Caribbean ecology has been forever changed by the plants, animals, and agricultural methods imposed by Europe; in addition, the soil depletion characteristic of a number of West Indian islands directly results from the monocultural economy of the plantation system. The multi-lingualism of the West Indies mirrors the various participants in and stages of European colonialism□Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, French, British□while the fractured nature of West Indian politics grows out of European and North American rivalries over the fate of the Caribbean. In her 1967 short story "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam," Paule Marshall shows the inescapability of this history by inscribing it into the very landscape. In Marshall's story, in her later work, and in works by a number of Caribbean authors, even "nature" does not offer a retreat from the political realities of the West Indies. By focusing on the role of "nature" in Marshall's story, I wish not so much to offer an analysis concerned with representations or ideologies of "nature" in and of itself but rather an interpretation from the point of view of environmental history; that is, to quote Peter Coats, "looking at the impact of economic and political systems, ideologies and technologies on the non-human world." Much attention has been paid to the importance of landscape in Caribbean literature. One might think here of Wilfred Cartey's study *Whispers from the Caribbean,* of Eduard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse,* or of Moira Ferguson's work on Jamaica Kincaid, as well as of the importance of geography□both as metaphor and "site"□in postcolonial literary criticism. Michael Dash, in his preface to *Caribbean Discourse,* has commented that

the relationship with the land . . . becomes so fundamental in [Caribbean discourse] that landscape . . . stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process.

I wish to "literalize" that attention and focus on the actual flora as flora in Marshall's story□and, later in the essay, in the work of other Caribbean authors□in order to unlock the history found in Caribbean plant life, approaching its symbolic import in the wake of migrating plants.

Wilfred Cartey's wonderful term landscaped history may best describe what I am after here: the intertwining of the forces of nature with the forces of human-shaped time. How does this process play itself out in Marshall's short story, the story of a little girl's first visit to Barbados and her encounter with her grandmother and with island culture? As is

characteristic of her fiction in general, Paule Marshall works here with a set of oppositions which interplay with one another in complex ways. "In this case, the asphalt jungle of New York City is fixed against the dense vegetation of a Caribbean isle." The story juxtaposes a Barbados representing nature with a West representing technology in a sort of competition. After introducing the child protagonist to some of the Barbadian plant life, her grandmother Da-Duh triumphs, "'I know you don't have anything this nice where you come from,'" repeating the statement after not receiving an answer, to which the protagonist replies, "'No,'" and observes, "and my world did seem suddenly lacking." Barbados wins this contest through its rich, fertile, natural world. New York, as representative of the West, appears sterile and barren. When Da- Duh claims to have heard that New York is "'a place where you can walk till you near drop and never see a tree,'" all the protagonist has to offer in reply is "'a chestnut tree in front of our house.'"

But even here Da-Duh□and Barbados□remains victorious: "'Does it bear?' She waited. 'I ask you, does it bear?' 'Not anymore,' I muttered. 'It used to, but not anymore.'" The only natural thing the protagonist is finally able to connect with New York-snow□only heightens the impression of sterility and death clinging to the Western metropolis. The child describes with delight the effects snow would have on Barbadian plant life, unwittingly providing a metaphor of the relations between the Third World and the West that the story further develops later on:" '. . . you see all these trees you got here,' I s aid. 'Well, they'd be bare. No leaves, no fruit, nothing. They'd be covered in snow. You see your canes. They'd be buried under tons of snow.'" But since the West becomes associated with barrenness and death here, and the island appears lush and green, full of cane fields, trees, and tropical fruits, it may at first seem that "at the time of the narrator's visit . . ., the full effects of Western 'progress' and its accompanying materialistic values have not spoiled Da-Duh's Eden," as Dorothy Hamer Denniston claims. Upon closer examination of the plant life depicted in the story, however, and especially of the descriptions of sugarcane, it appears that the West has already left an indelible physical mark on Barbados, even before the arrival of concrete and steel. A closer examination of sugarcane in a Barbadian text is a legitimate undertaking since" 'Crop,' as sugar cane harvesting is still known, defined Barbadian life," and its "idea, its permeation of all aspects of island culture was as important a s its economic fact. Every plane of Barbadian life was touched by sugar."

What did Caribbean plant life consist of before Europeans arrived? One answer is that it is difficult to know. Even in the earliest decades after the arrival of the Spanish, the Caribbean flora underwent irreversible processes. Already "Bartolome de las Casas told of large herds of cattle and other European animals in the West Indies eating native plants down to the roots in the first half of the sixteenth century, followed by the spread of ferns, thistles, plantain, nettles, nightshade, sedge, and so forth, which he identified as Castilian." With the conquistadores came conquering plants. The most fateful of these imported plants was sugarcane. After sugar plantations had been economically successful in various Mediterranean islands, and, in the fifteenth century, phenomenally so in the Atlantic islands off the African coast, such as the Canary Islands and Madeira, "Columbus, who lived for over a decade in Madeira, had the foresight to take sugar plants from the Canary Islands on his voyages to the 'Indies.'"

Seen in this context, the child protagonist's perception of Barbados' cane fields proves to be more than apt:

They [the sugarcanes] were too much for me. I thought of them as giant weeds that had overrun the island, leaving scarcely any room for the small tottering houses of sun-bleached pine we passed or the people, dark streaks as our lorry hurtled by. I suddenly feared that we were journeying, unaware that we were, toward some dangerous place where the canes, grown as high and thick as a forest, would close in on us and run us through with their stiletto blades.

The oppressive presence of the canes, the mortal danger they metaphorically pose here, points, of course, to the way in which sugarcane was cultivated in Barbados, and in the Americas in general, during much of its agricultural history□with the brutal exploitation of African slave labor, an exploitation so relentless that it necessitated a constant influx of new slaves merely to outmatch death rates. As descendant of the surviving Africans, the protagonist appears to intuit the historical meaning of sugar production and seems incapable of perceiving canes merely as green fields swaying in the wind, the picture the tourist industry conveys of cane fields. A second description of canes is even more explicit: In her first walk through her grandmother's plot of land, the protagonist refers to "the canes [as] clashing like swords above my cowering head," thus making sugarcane directly reminiscent of the swords of conquistadores and the whips of overseers□aptly so, since "sugar and slavery traveled together for nearly four centuries in the New World."

That the story envisions sugarcane as the symbolic source of oppression is emphasized even more by a passage following the quotation above, as it implies that liberation from the practices of oppression associated with sugarcane only becomes imaginable outside the cane fields. After the child protagonist and Da-Duh leave the cane fields, they go to a small forest:

Following her apprehensively down the incline amid a stand of banana plants whose leaves flapped like elephant's ears in the wind, I found myself in the middle of a small tropical wood. . . . It was a violent place, the tangled foliage fighting each other for a chance at the sunlight, the branches of the trees locked in what seemed an immemorial struggle, one both necessary and inevitable. But despite the violence, it was pleasant, almost peaceful in the gully, and beneath the thick undergrowth the earth smelled like spring.

On leaving the cane, the protagonist encounters this place of violence, which is not a violence of whips and swords but of resistance, revolt, and struggle□all preconditions for peace, as Marshall implies. The spring-like smell of the earth suggests a new beginning, one apparently resulting from struggle. And this struggle takes place in an area not cultivated by plantation owners□and thus outside their immediate purview□but dominated by what might be indigenous woods and by plants pointing to either India or Africa. Elephants exist on both of these landmasses; the origin of bananas is uncertain□ some species may have been indigenous to the East Indies, others to Madagascar. However, the English name for the plant seems to have originated from Wolof or

Malinke (according to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*), both West African languages, or from the Congo (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*), from which it came to English through Portuguese or Spanish. Given the trajectory of the story as a whole, one may safely assume Africa as the intended symbolic echo in this passage invoking liberation, not least because of an early uprising in Barbados□to be followed by others□by Africans intending "to make themselves master of the island"; India and the East Indies, though, remain important points of reference in the (ecological) story.

When Da-Duh shows her grandchild the various trees growing on her plot of land, she names them with proprietary pride: "'This here is bread fruit,' she said. 'That yonder is papaw. Here's a guava. This is a mango. I know you don't have anything like these in New York. Here's a sugar apple. . . . This one bears limies. . . . ' She went on for some time, intoning the names of the trees as though they were those of her gods." Some of the gods she reveres are foreign gods, however, if one takes their origin into account. Papayas come from India, both breadfruit and mango from the East Indies, which leaves only sugar apple and guava as indigenous plants, with limes and citrus fruits most likely coming to the Caribbean from the Mediterranean. Da-Duh's dietary choices are indelibly marked by British colonialism and its links to Southeast Asia. India and the East Indies are connected to the Caribbean not only through their common fate as British colonies and sugar plantations but also through a British colonial policy encouraging the importation of East Indian laborers to the Caribbean from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. Southeast Asia and India are also the home of sugarcane; in India, "its cultivation was commonplace by the fourth century B.C.," and it was from there that it started its slow but fateful journey westward, a journey that speeded up once it reached the Caribbean. Thus, the protagonist's description of the cane as "giant weeds that had overrun the island" is historically appropriate in two respects: For one, plants introduced by Europeans tended to thrive on Caribbean soil and spread with incredible speed, even when disregarded by their importers; secondly, the British, though only settling Barbados in 1627, expanded sugar production so rapidly that, by the early 1650s, the island ran short of timber and of land available for food crops, so that food supplies had to be imported from either England or North America. These last two, significantly, also figure in the short story as external threats. The U.S. symbolically looms over the island through its towering buildings that, in Da-Duh's eyes, threaten to obliterate the natural splendor of Barbados. Great Britain figures as a direct physical menace through the jets it sends flying over the island at the end of the story in response to a 1937 strike that was an expression of solidarity with an oil strike in Trinidad. Both of these external powers are directly linked to Barbados through sugarcane production, and the representation of sugarcane in the story is resonant with these historical linkages. The threatening and foreboding quality cane fields assume in the text is not merely an echo of the past but also of the present of the short story, the 1930s.

In 1697, "Barbados was," as Eric Williams has noted in his masterly history of the Caribbean *From Columbus to Castro,* "the most important single colony in the British Empire, worth almost as much, in its total trade, as the two tobacco colonies of Virginia and Maryland combined, and nearly three times as valuable as Jamaica. The tiny sugar

island was more valuable to Britain than Carolina, New England, New York, and Pennsylvania together." Though Barbados' importance to Great Britain greatly declined in the eighteenth century, the sugar industry remained dominant in Barbados, as in the French and British Caribbean in general. In 1848, Sir Robert Schomburgk, when publishing his *History of Barbados,* remained well aware of the importance of sugarcane for the British empire, as evidenced by what he gives as one of his main justifications for writing that history: "It was here [in Barbados] that the first sugar-cane was planted upon the soil of British dominions." In 1928, 20 percent of the population was still employed in the sugar industry, and a British commission estimated that 67 percent of the population of Barbados would be adversely affected should sugar production be abandoned. In the 1930s, most land continued to be given over to sugar production, making the importation of food a continuing necessity. Hence the protagonist's view of the canes as "leaving scarcely any room for the small tottering houses of sunbleached pine we passed or the people." Locally grown food, due to a shrinking indigenous food production, was often simply too expensive for average workers, who thus often subsisted in part on imported goods□imported, to an overwhelming extent, from the United States.

This, among other things, explains a U.S. interest in the region that continues to this day, as does the necessity for Barbados to import food in signifi- cant quantities. As a military historian approvingly noted in *American History* in February 1995, U.S. troops have been deployed in the Caribbean thirty times to protect what the U.S. views as its strategic interests. "Eons ago," the historian writes, preparing to introduce an unsettling simile, "the accidental formation of land and sea masses shaped the North American continent into a colossus that□like a giant meat axe poised overhead□dominates its Central American and Caribbean neighbors." The threatening presence of Western powers, whether imagined as "canes clashing like swords" or as a "giant meat axe," hovers over the island and is, in both metaphors, directly linked to food production. Indeed, the use of food metaphors in conjunction with imperial interests goes back to an earlier period of U.S. interest in the Caribbean. Listen to the nforeign minister John Quincy Adams, commenting on Cuba's future in 1823: "There are laws of political as well as physical gravitation[,] and if an apple severed by the tempest from its native tree, cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its unnatural connection with Spain and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only toward the North American Union, which, by the same law of nature, cannot cast her off from its bosom." Such sentiments were expanded in the same year into the Monroe Doctrine, which declared the entire Western Hemisphere as the sphere of U.S. interest and influence.

In the short story, Da-Duh explains the connection between food production and imperialism in a symbolically resonant way when teaching her grandchild about sugarcane, indirectly commenting on the inordinate consumption of sugar□first by English settlers in the New World and then by American□that, after all, is the basis for Barbados' economic position: "'I bet you don't even know that these canes here and the sugar you eat is one and the same thing. That they does throw these canes into some damn machine at the factory and squeeze out all the little life in them to make sugar for you all so in New York to eat.'" The canes in Marshall's story, historically linked to

exploitation, death, and economic dependency, are plant representatives of historical forces, are "landscaped history."

Thus, the role they play toward the end of the story must be read in that context. Marshall's protagonist returns to New York and therefore only learns of the death of her grandmother shortly after her visit:

On the day of her death England sent planes flying low over the island in a show of force□so low, according to my aunt's letter, that the downdraft from them shook the ripened mangoes from the trees in Da- Duh's orchard. Frightened, everyone in the village fled into the canes. Except Da-Duh. She remained in the house at the window, so my aunt said, watching as the planes came swooping and screaming like monstrous birds down over the village, over her house, rattling the trees and flattening the young canes in the field.

What the story has suggested before becomes clear here as well in a metaphorically urgent manner: The impact of imperialism and its accompanying technology on the Third World, on nature, on human beings, is that it kills. For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to note how the inhabitants of the island attempt to escape this impact: They flee from the planes into the canes, fleeing from technology into nature. But that nature is a nature already compromised by history, not a pre-colonial haven or shelter, and as such, it proves unreliable. Having served imperialist interests for hundreds of years, the sugarcanes do not harbor Barbadians in this moment of conflict but, almost as if in collusion with the metropolis, leave them exposed to the British fighter planes overhead by being flattened. In what position does this leave the protagonist, the descendant of Da-Duh living in New York? A very ambiguous one, as she herself realizes in the last lines of the story:

She [Da-Duh] died and I lived, but always, to this day even, within the shadow of her death. For a brief period after I was grown I went to live alone, like one doing penance, in a loft above a noisy factory in downtown New York and there painted seas of sugarcane and huge swirling Van Gogh suns and palm trees striding like brightly plumed Tutsi warriors across a tropical landscape, while the thunderous tread of the machines downstairs jarred the floor beneath my easel, mocking my efforts.

She imagines the island, tries to "recollect it in tranquility," to use a Wordsworthian phrase, but even that memory is jarred by the impact of technology, the very thing the act of recollection attempts to escape. The machines "mock" the narrator's efforts so that even her attempt at artistic recreation is compromised. Indeed, one can see that: While one imaginary trajectory in her painting leads back to Africa, to "Tutsi warriors," another one leads to Europe again, making her see a tropical sun through a European painter's eyes. The Caribbean present connects to an African past but cannot escape the present-day impact of the West. The Caribbean cannot be simply the Caribbean□even its nature always evokes reminiscences of other places. Paradoxically, even the protagonist's paintings erase and reconstruct Barbados as much as the nonindigenous flora has. Rather than seeing the Caribbean landscape for itself, she sees a contest again, one between Europe and Africa. An earlier passage illuminates

her paintings: When Da-Duh leads her grandchild on one of her tours of the island, she shows her "an incredibly tall royal palm which rose cleanly out of the ground and, drawing the eye up with it, soared high above the trees around it into the sky. It appeared to be touching the blue dome of the sky, to be flaunting its dark crown of fronds right in the blinding white face of the late morning sun."

Da-Duh's tall royal palm appears to symbolize Afro-Caribbean resistance against a "white" sun apparently representing the colonial powers, and the story's final paragraph becomes resonant with this struggle, with palm (reminiscent of Tutsi warriors) and sun (connected to Europe through Van Gogh) as antagonists in an almost mythical, timeless conflict. As Beverly Horton has said in a discussion of Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,* "Buried under the surface of the island, and the sea surrounding it[,] are the intermingled histories of colonization and colonial resistance, the histories of contact between African and European peoples in the Caribbean." Marshall's vision here is more pessimistic than in her later fiction. Especially *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* envisions possibilities for overcoming colonialist domination, but even there, the place the protagonist has to start from is Africa, not the Caribbean itself.

Sugarcane's role as a mirror of a tortured history is not confined to "To Da-Duh." *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* represents cane fields in similar ways; canes appear "ranked like an opposing army . . . their long pointed leaves bristling like spears in the wind," the passage echoing, in its militaristic imagery, the history of conquest alluded to before. In Barbadian author Cecil Foster's novel *No Man in the House,* the grandmother of the protagonist also associates a sense of danger and threat with sugarcane plantations, and she uses this threat as a pedagogical tool to keep children at home at nighttime:

"That is why I keep telling you young children to stay close to the house at night. You can never tell when some man looking for a young person's heart might pass through this village and grab one of you off the streets. An the next thing we know, one of you will turn up dead in some cane field."

It is not surprising, then, when the protagonist internalizes this outlook on sugarcane fields, so different from the one offered in tourist brochures and commercials disseminated for Western consumption: "The houses in the villages along the highway had suddenly given way to endless fields of sugar cane. . . . I didn't want to be caught in such a desolate, frightening part of the island." In Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,* canes have a similarly threatening quality and are linked to exploitation and death. The novel's protagonist remembers walking through cane fields as a painful experience: "She did not get far; her bare legs soon stung and bled," or were" 'sliced fine,' "as her friend says, '"by the blades of the cane . . . sharp, sharp."' Moments later, when talking to the protagonist about a slave hospital, her friend explains,"Tek a lot of smaddy fe grow cane, missis. Cyaan have smaddy dying off□not when dem cost so'," thus connecting the objectification and enslavement of Africans with the cultivation of sugarcane. George Lamming, too, personifies canes and hints at ominous meanings when describing "fields of sugar cane [creeping] like an open secret across the land." Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* continues this

tradition of associating cane with danger. The protagonist's mother is raped in a cane field, and in a parallel to *No Man in the House,* the protagonist's grandmother tells children begging her for another story" 'to go home before the werewolf on the sugarcane cart came out, the one who could smell you from miles away and would come and kill you.'" Indeed, Barbadian folklore has also memorialized the threat symbolically inherent in sugarcane: The "outman," a spooky figure said to haunt and chase children, has sugarcane fields as his hiding place, thus imbuing them with a sense of danger.

Sugarcane and the Middle Passage that sugarcane brought in its wake haunt Marshall's Barbados and the Caribbean of other authors. It appears that landscape in "To Da-Duh" is never merely landscape but always the mirror of human history, bearing record through proliferating the seeds humans have planted.

Source: Martin Japtok, "Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-Duh, in Memoriam,'" in *African American Review,* Vol. 34, No. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 475-82.

Topics for Further Study

Find out more about Barbados in the 1930s, including the riots of 1937. Does the story seem an accurate reflection of Barbados and its culture during that time?

Marshall wrote "To Da-duh, in Memoriam" about thirty years after her own experience in Barbados. How do you think this lapse of time might have affected her perception of these past events and relationships?

Read one of Marshall's works that features a Daduh character. Compare and contrast the portrayal of the grandmother character in these works.

Find a work of art that represents the story's setting for you. Write a response to this piece of art.

Research Barbadian history. Describe how slavery and colonialism affected the island's development.

Examine Da-duh's role as an "ancestor figure."

Comment on Marshall's statement in the introduction: "I had come into the world not only to love her and to continue her line but to take her very life in order that I might live."

Write a short scene that might have taken place if Da-duh had visited her granddaughter in New York.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: Barbados is a colony of Britain.

1960s: Barbados gains independence from Britain in 1966, but remains a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The British monarch, represented by an appointed governor general, is the head of state and holds executive authority along with the prime minister and the cabinet. **Today:** In 1998, a constitutional commission recommends that Barbados become a republic and replace the British monarch with an elected head of state. However, Barbados remains a sovereign nation within the Commonwealth.

1940s: The mainstay of Barbados's economy is the sugar cane industry.

1960s: Toward the end of the 1960s, tourism becomes an important industry in Barbados, and in the following decade it surpasses the production of sugar cane as the nation's leading source of revenue.

Today: Tourism remains the top industry of Barbados, accounting for nearly 50 percent of the island's gross national product. Tourism employs more than 10 percent of the Barbadian workforce. Sugar cane, however, is still the island's main cash crop.

What Do I Read Next?

Marshall's *"Reena" and Other Stories* (1983) collects several of the author's short fiction from the 1950s and 1960s, as well her personal comments on each.

Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1996) explores the intermingled histories of Africans and Europeans in the Caribbean. This nonlinear novel focuses on the dual nature of culture, as a uniting and a destructive force.

George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin,* written in the 1950s, recounts growing up in the 1930s in a small Barbados community. G, from a poor, black family, provides an eyewitness account to the social, racial, and political struggles that beset the island.

Nobel Prize-winner Derek Walcott has represented the many faces of the Caribbean□its society, cultural identity, history, and development□ through his rich and imagistic poetry. *Collected Poems, 1948-1981* (1987) includes some of his best poems and provides a good introduction to this unique writer.

Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House* (1992) takes place in 1963, as Barbadians begin their bid for independence. Eight-year-old Howard is left with his brother in the care of their grandmother as his parents go to Britain to find work. Howard blossoms at school under the tutelage of a new headmaster and vows to make his way out of poverty.

Caribbean poet Kamau Braithwaite explores multiple aspects of the Barbadian experience in the poems collected in *Ancestors.* His poems also reflect the spoken aspects of the text, such as dialect and diction.

The semi-autobiographical *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) is James Baldwin's first novel. The classic of contemporary African-American literature is based on the author's experiences as a teenage preacher in a small revivalist church.

Further Study

Beckles, Hilary McDonald, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State,* Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Beckle's comprehensive history emphasizes the struggle for social equality, civil rights, and economic improvement that have marked the island's past.

Chamberlain, Mary, *Narratives of Exile and Return,* Palgrave, 1997.

Chamberlain bases her social history of emigration from Barbados on interviews across multiple generations of Barbadian families.

Coser, Stalamaris, *Bridging the Americas: The Literature of Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones,* Temple University Press, 1995.

Coser's work evaluates the similarities between these three important African-American writers.

Denniston, Dorothy Hamer, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender,* University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

Hamer's study examines Marshall's writings as they represent the author's background and experiences.

Labrucherie, Roger A., *Barbados, A World Apart,* Imagenes Press, 1995.

Photojournalist Labrucherie presents the world of Barbados, including its history, culture, people, and wildlife, through his photographs and essays.

Pettis, Joyce, "A MELUS Interview: Paule Marshall," in *MELUS,* Vol. 17, Issue 4, Winter 1991-1992, p. 117.

The interview focuses on the role of the Caribbean in Marshall's writing and examines characters who appear in her books.

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Collier, Eugenia, "The Closing of the Circle: Movement from Division to Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation,* edited by Mari Evans, Anchor Books, 1984, pp. 295-315.

Davies, Carole Boyce, "Paule Marshall," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Vol. 157: *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers,* edited by Bernth Lindfors, Gale Research, 1996, pp. 192-202.

Gussow, Adam, Review of *"Reena" and Other Stories,* in *Village Voice,* Vol. XXIX, No. 20, May 15, 1984, p. 47. Japtok, Martin, "Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's 'To Da-Duh, in Memoriam,'" in *African American Review,* Vol. 34, Issue 3, Fall 2000, p. 475.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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