

Eloise: the prosperous woman

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In several Caribbean nations, European countries attempted to colonize and exploit the indigenous people. Through her various works, Myriam Warner-Vieyra is gaining increased recognition for her sensitive portrayals of Caribbean women who are placed in roles which doom them for failure.

Myriam Warner-Vieyra's short story "Passport to Paradise" is a quintessential example of her writing. The story is in a collection of nine short stories titled, *Femmes echouees*, which translates to failed women.

However, Eloise, the main character of the story, is far from a failed woman. Although she is put in a situation with a preordained fate of failure, she changes her destiny and succeeds in her goals and triumphs over the white patriarchy. Myriam Warner-Vieyra was born in Guadeloupe. She spent most of her childhood with her grandmother, who told her many stories of her past and inspired her to write. Later in her life, she went to France to study secondary education.

Soon after, she married a film-maker Paulin Vieyra and she has lived in Senegal for thirty years. She published the collection of short stories in 1988, during a time in which Guadeloupe saw the rise and fall of a movement for greater independence from France. Although most of the riots were violent, Warner-Vieyra depicts the peaceful overthrow of the church in a small town in Guadeloupe, led by a resilient woman Eloise fighting for her husband to have a passport to paradise. Eloise does not allow herself to be controlled by the white patriarchy.

She is a "strong countrywoman, tireless and carefree as a carnival night" (Warner-Vieyra 243). To her, happiness doesn't mean a large paycheck, big

house, or any type of luxuries. She just needs to have the “ strength and courage to work” (244), alongside her loving husband and children to make her life complete. Although her husband Eugenio is not the perfect man, she never questions his love for her. Nevertheless, each man has his flaws and Eugenio’s fault is his “ fervent” admiration for “ the god Tafia” (244), a cheap rum made from sugarcane juice.

One day, as Eugenio is at the bar, a fight breaks out and unfortunately he is caught in the crossfire. Suddenly, “ a bottle split open [Eugenio’s] skull” (244). Although Eugenio is an alcoholic, he dies without a drop of Tafia in his body, trying to stop a fight. Warner-Vieyra depicts the tension between the natives and the white patriarchy through the death and funeral of Eugenio. Eloise is deeply depressed about the loss of the love of her life, but knows that she will see him in the afterlife.

She knows that she cannot give her husband a first class funeral, but still wants his body to be blessed. After the priest denies salvation for her husband, Eloise changes from a docile, hardworking wife into an outspoken woman. It is despicable that the priest denies the prayer not because Eugenio was an alcoholic or a man of sin, “ but because he was poor and black” (245). Conversely, the rich who commit even bigger sins than her husband receive “ the grandest of funerals” (245). Consequently, Eloise will do anything to get her husband the salvation he deserves.

However, she fights for his salvation not only for her husband, but also to battle against the white man and represent the poor indigenous people of Guadeloupe. Religion helps people cope with the everyday occurrences and

helps to explain the supernatural. For Eloise, religion will allow her to be with her husband in heaven. On the contrary, for the white man, religion has been a way to purify the indigenous people of the lands they have colonized. They use religion to regulate societal interaction, to make the society work better. It is “white man’s burden,” according to Rudyard Kipling.

Realistically, it is a way for the white patriarchy to rule the colonized, and a way for the white man to obtain more money. People would pay for their sins to be washed away, and for a prayer to get their loved ones into heaven. This structure began the hierarchy in which only rich, white men and women were able to achieve salvation. Eloise does not want to believe in the religion of the white man, but it is forced onto her as well as all the other villagers during colonization. When she has a chance to “save her man’s soul” (245), she takes it.

Eloise gives up her most prized possession, “a ring that Eugenio had gave her” (245) but she is willing to give up anything because her husband is the most important part of her life and wants to be with him in paradise.

Although Eloise thinks that she has only helped herself and her husband, she has actually saved the entire community. Almost immediately, the entire town is giving the stranger their prized possessions.

“The only dissatisfied people in the village were the members of the clergy, because, needless to say, now not a single soul came to ask them to say masses for the dead. (246) Without Eloise’s perseverance to get her husband into heaven, the Church would have still been a dominant power in the village, and the people of Guadeloupe would still be “prisoners” of the white

man. "Passport to Paradise" is not solely about Eloise overcoming the patriarchal church. In fact it is about the unity of the Guadeloupians defeating the white man's supremacy, which in this story is portrayed by the church. Eloise may be a failed woman in the eyes of the church and the white man, but in any other eyes, she is a woman who fights against the white man and ends up winning.

Her goal is to get her husband a passport to paradise, and nothing stops her from achieving her goal. Once she knows Eugenio's soul will be in heaven, "she experienced the relief of having done her duty and she felt almost happy" (245-246). She can now continue her life and take care of her loving children, continuing to work hard on the fields. Eloise knows that one day she will be united with Eugenio, and that is the only inspiration she needs to work hard and live a happy and healthy life.