

World lit reflective statement

Family



"Paradise of the Blind" is characterized by its cultural significance. Duong Thu Huong chooses her characters very deliberately. Every character that appears in, the protagonist, Hang's life represents cultural pressures and cultural symbols. Since "Paradise of the Blind" is a bildungsroman, the characters that come and go within the novel itself all influence Hang. They change and alter the life of Hang based on the social pressures that are commonly seen in Vietnamese culture. Ultimately, by watching the lives of those around her and the role of traditions and cultures that playing their lives, Hang finds her individuality and her destiny at the end of the book when she has grown enough to differentiate and develop an opinion of her own. One of the most prominent and emphasized character is Aunt Tam. Along with Que, Aunt Tam embodies the traditional Vietnamese women. With her dedication to her family, loyalty to her duties and her respectability, Aunt Tame gives the readers insight into the life of a woman in Vietnam. The cultural significance of her life is portrayed through the minor details that are used to represent her in the book. Aunt Tam is someone who sacrificed everything, and willingly, for the sake of her family name and her ancestors. By laboring intensely in the rice patties and slaving with work during her free time, Aunt Tame gained much respect for her family and herself. As a result, she was able to provide much luxury to her offerings to the ancestors. The people of the village recognize Aunt Tam to be the epitome of Vietnamese women. The attitudes towards Aunt Tame show how it was culturally expected and demanded that women remain loyal to their families. Although she sacrificed everything, including love, children and families to conduct and upheld her duties, nobody saw her struggles; instead, for all her work, she merely enjoyed the praises of people for not fouling the family name.

Another key figure within the novel that contributes to the description of cultural values in Vietnam is Que. The mother of the protagonist stood for everything Hang would grow up not to be. Que is at the other end of the spectrum from Tam, but they share the same cultural burdens and values that they both abide by. While Tam is innately strong and independent; thus, later on successful, Que is weak and stupidly loyal. By complying with just about everything her brother forced her to be or do and even sacrificing her own health to ensure the health and well-being of her brother and his family, Que characterized the ingrained cultural values of Vietnam that made males much more important and dominative in comparison to women. Que showed her family loyalty by placing the heirs of her family first, even ignoring her own child in the process. Duong Thu Huong uses these two major characters within the book to emphasize just how cultural values and traditions impacted the lives of every-day people. The descriptions that depicted the appearance and actions of both Que and Tam showed the audience the burdens of culture. There are definite cultural reasons for the characters of Que and Tam. How else is Huong able to directly and clearly show the influence of the Vietnamese culture during her time except to reflect them through characters within the story? The novel does not include scenes packed with action or a dramatic climax, but by indirectly using the actions of Que and Tam and their effects on Hang, Huong is able to create a microcosm for the influence and impact of cultural values on the lives of most women in Vietnam. The commitment to their ancestors, respect towards the men and the sacrifices that these two characters go through not only allows and gives the readers insight into the values that are present within Vietnam, but also depicts their impacts in the long run as Tam and

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Que approach their death and old age as they have always been, crippled, worn, miserable and confined. They had labored away their youth, devoted their freedom to the ties of culture, contributed and given all they could, only to be met with a humble and lonely end. A cruel conclusion to lives that were lived for others rather than just themselves.