

## **Essence of Paule Marshall's Novels**

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Paule Marshall (1929-2019)

Courtesy: <http://www.projecthbw.ku.edu/uncategorized/remembering-paule-marshall/>

Paule Marshall was born in 1929 at Valenza Pauline Burke in Brooklyn, New York. She visited her parents' birthplace, Barbados, for the first time at the age of nine. Marshall graduated from Brooklyn College in 1953 and graduate school at Hunter College in 1955. Early in her life, Marshall wrote a series of poems reflecting impressions of Barbados. Later, she turned to fiction. She has published short stories and articles in various magazines. She is best known for her novels and collections of short stories: *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961), *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), *Reena and Other Short Stories* (1983), and *Daughters* (1991). Marshall has lectured on black literature at universities and colleges such as Oxford University, Columbia University, Michigan State University, and Cornell University. She holds a distinguished chair in creative writing at New York University. Her fiction is characterized by narration in related to

African diasporic identity.” She showcases in her fiction the success and failures of the West Indian immigrants living in America.

Paule Marshall grew up in a bicultural environment rich with the folklore and language of Barbados. Marshall did not visit Barbados until she was nine years old. The island culture was made real to her by the lively conversation of her mother’s friends around the kitchen table. Their metaphoric, often ironic language inspired her attempts to find a narrative voice in her literary career. Richard Sandomir says, “Through five novels and several collections of short stories and novellas, Ms. Marshall created strong female characters, evoked the linguistic rhythms of Barbadian speech, and forged an early link between the African-American and Caribbean literary canons.

Paule Marshall’s novels emerged through the background of historical evolution, political power and aesthetic beauty of Caribbean Islands. The prominent purpose of her novels is to portray the Black women and their identity. She is concerned over the Black women and their society which is influenced by the white culture. The suffering of Black is an outburst legitimacy in her novels. She is envisioned by Marian A Davis, “Throughout *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Silla is continually referred to as a hard-working woman. Her religious views seem to indicate a heavy emphasis on works. She initially appears to possess an unbreakable will, always bearing a constant look of determination.”

Paule Marshall occupies a prominent position not only for creating complex characters but also for effective reflection of feminine aesthetic deliberations. Aruna Shantha Kumari says, “Considered a champion of the search for individual identity Paule Marshall is praised by critics for exploring the psychological trials and concerns of African-American women. She began her career as a writer when African-American women's literature was at a major crossroad.”

Though she has been neglected for long time she proved herself as an emerging writer. She advocates greatest amount of Black experience in her novels. She has given importance to the female characters and she portrayed female characters as heroes of her novels. Techniques help the readers to discover and travel among other identities, other varieties of the human adventures. The readers are exposed to the psychological process of the ordinary person. They can compare their private experience to their own. They can even identify and symbolises more. Paule Marshall uses techniques between life and art which helps the novels to interpret and transform reality. She uses the movement of characters and experience of Black people in their living ground, survival, and new perception of Black life as major techniques in her novels.

The further techniques employed by Paule Marshall in her novels included plots, narrative, imagery, landscape setting, characterization, narrative persona, style and use of

language. The Plots of her novels inculcate incidents and events which are considered to be the structure of structures. They contain conflict and suspense and keep the readers engrossed till the end. She expressed Quest for identity and conflicts in her novels.

In her first novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), the female protagonist Selina Boyce is partly her own. In her second novel *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1961), she reveals Pan African experiences by four different locals (Brazil, Barbados, Brooklyn, British Guyana). In her next novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), she exposes the theme of places, Afro-Caribbean identity, home and responsibilities. In the novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), she traces the protagonist path towards healing and self discovery. Through her work *Reena and Other Stories* (1983), she reveals the creative power of mother and other women in the unconditional love community. She explores female responsibilities in her novel *Daughters* (1991), and the unconditional love in *The Fisher King* (2001). The collection of her own work *Triangular Road: A Memoir* (2009), deals her sharing with Hughes and about rivers, seas and oceans and it also focuses on the impact on Black history and culture.

According to Paule Marshall, the narrative techniques in the novels should create a strong illusion of reality. She uses her plot to engage and hold the readers by her expertise in handling of setting, characters and use of language. She uses themes abundantly in her novels through the characters and the characters expose their own reality and human problems.

Some of the themes used in her novels are individuality and exposing Black experience. Other major themes of her novels include identity crisis, need for searching the importance of tradition blends with the innovations of recent years. Individuality, quest for identity, racism, migration, dream and reality, reintegration, gender identity, sense of belonging, ethnic identity, inter racial love, White guilt and structure and formal considerations are some other important themes exposed in her novels.

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