

Silent Sites of Memory in Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*

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Abstract

As the title of the book suggests, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) is place-focused; it is indeed a narrative of place and its people. The main fictional setting is a fictive Caribbean island, which acts as an essential locale in the protagonists' act of (re)memory and (com)memoration. An emotionally charged place, this apparently insignificant island acquires a majestic stature in the book; it is space and place, home and exile, paradise and purgatory, past and present, remembrance and forgetfulness. This paper focuses on specific sites which are emblematic of the island community, given the complex role they play in the restoration of memory and identity. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* will be used here with an understanding that, in a Caribbean setting, places record the monumentality of loss caused by colonialism and its aftermath. The cane field and Sugar's bar are places where the past lives, bearing constant proof of terrifying colonial abuse. Other locales, however, mainly dwellings and gardens, will be identified and examined as a solution to the protagonists' exile. The paper aims to demonstrate that all these locales are the essence of the island or, to paraphrase Derek Walcott, they are the genuine fresco, map-less, history-less yet quintessential for the 'persistence of memory.'

Keywords: Paule Marshall, island, lieux de mémoire, memory, identity

The lieu de mémoire is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations.

—Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History*

Here is where a real fresco should be painted, one without importance, but one with real faith, mapless, Historyless.

—Derek Walcott, *The Antilles*

In this highly acclaimed novel, Marshall depicts the troubled consciousness of the West Indian condition in a post-colonial environment suffused by the memory of the Middle Passage and slavery. The book covers a plethora of important topics, including the divisions existing in post-colonial culture, the American melting pot, the Black diaspora and the Jewish diaspora, hybridity and cultural schizophrenia, community and resistance, as well as the struggle to remember or forget. More importantly, as its title suggests, the book is a narrative of place and its people. This paper will analyze several sites—realms of memory—which, despite being shrouded in silence, play a fundamental role in the restoration of individual and collective memory and identity.

The novel is a third-person narrative that takes place on the fictive Bourne Island, located in the Caribbean. The story unfolds over four chapters or books, each bearing a suggestive title for the development of the plot. Book I “Heirs and Descendants” serves as the novel’s exposition in which the *place* and its *people* receive meticulous and lengthy descriptions. Two of the most important protagonists, Merle Kimbona and her native island, more precisely the region Bournehills, are concomitantly introduced from the onset of the novel. Four other main characters arrive on the island by plane: Vere, the native who comes back home after three years spent in the US on the farm labor scheme, and two American anthropologists—Allen Fuso, who is returning to the island accompanied by a reputed Stanford professor, Saul Amron, and Saul’s wife, Harriet. Along with a succinct biography of the characters, the exposition also presents the political, social, and economic climate on the island.

In Book II, entitled “Bournehills,” the action occurs exclusively in the poor region of the island and deals with the efforts made by the two anthropologists to understand the place and its community. Book III “Carnival” serves as the climactic point of the story in which the carnival and its aftermath upturn situations and unleash all tensions and energies of the plot. To briefly sketch a very intricate intrigue, the anthropologists’ research project almost fails, a love affair begins between Saul and Merle, while Harriet eventually grasps the meaning of her artificial by-the-book existence, and later commits suicide. Allen realizes his misfit status with regard to his sexual orientation and Vere settles the conflicts of his life but dies shortly after in a car accident. In Book IV “Withsun,” numerous decisions are made toward the novel’s elusive ending, which resounds of reconciliatory overtones projected on the background of the monumental setting of the island.

To begin with, memory and its perception as time-bound should probably be re-defined when it comes to such strong places as the island. “Topical History: Places Remember Events” is one of James Joyce’s notes for *Ulysses* which Edward Casey (1993) uses

to underline the localism of memory, that is to say, the link between places and memory: “the active agent is the place and not historical events, the former actively remembering the latter” (p. 277). As Casey notes, a place is not only a stage on which a role is played; each place has a story and a history, and this is what Marshall’s novel engages in depicting. In *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison poignantly evokes the same pivotal role of certain places as sites where memory thrives:

I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. *Places*, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the *place* where it happened. (p. 46)

Morrison underlines here the crucial importance that places play in the act of remembering and anchoring memories. Most places do live in people’s memories or dare we say that people’s memories live in places? By safeguarding memories, certain places become consecrated; they become maps of the past, as a matter of fact, sites of memory.

In this context, the present paper relies on the interpretation which Pierre Nora (1989) gives to the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, understood as sites “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (p. 7). Any entity, material or not, claims Nora, can become a *lieu de mémoire* with the passing of time and as a result of repeated symbolic practices. Due to their functions, such places appear as pure sign, as *templum*, and therefore are endowed with sacred qualities: “the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” (p. 19). These *loci memoriae* are in his opinion quint-essential repositories of collective memory and ultimate embodiments of a commemorative consciousness, this definition being large enough to comprise places, objects, or concepts, all products of the interaction between memory and history. However, in this study, Nora’s concept is narrowed down to address geographical places that pertain to individual but mostly to collective memory.

Moreover, memory belongs to a tripartite relationship with people and place and is its constitutive element. Dwelling, orientation, and movement are several essential actions that people perform in place and, of course, in time. Consequently, memories associated with these acts actualize the places themselves, according to Paul Ricœur (2004):

“the ‘things’ remembered are intrinsically associated with places. And it is not by chance that we say of what has occurred that it took place” (p. 41). Ricœur’s reading of Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* is meaningful for the present analysis since it emphasizes the unavoidable association of place and time in the act of documenting the past:

These memory places function for the most part after the manner of reminders, offering in turn a support for failing memory, a struggle in the war against forgetting, even the silent plea of dead memory. These places ‘remain’ as inscriptions, monuments, potentially as documents, whereas memories transmitted only along the oral path fly away as do the words themselves. (2004, p. 41)

There are numerous sites of memory in Marshall’s novel, especially since the act of remembering is fundamental in the structure of the narrative. Silent for the most part, such places only exist in Bournehills, all other *lieux de mémoire* of slavery have been eradicated or converted (for example, Sugar’s bar, or the elite beaches). The need to remember implies a struggle against forgetting, and these landmarks of compressed personal or collective history serve as material support in the act of tacit remembering. They locate and document the unspeakable memory of slavery and colonialism, therefore preventing forgetting for the Bournehills community and acting against cultural amnesia displayed by the rest of the island.¹

Challenging the image of the Caribbean setting as paradise *per se*, the depiction of the postcolonial island in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* carries upsetting derogatory connotations at all times. With categorizations such as “green wen” (Marshall, 1969, p. 19), “tiny green blemish” (p. 95), and “green speck” (p. 205), suspicion is cast upon what could have been the picturesque scenery of the full green ripened crop blending in with the mild green of the newly planted canes on a remote island in the Caribbean. Bourne Island, however, presents numerous places that help to historically locate the community: former or present exploitative sites become significant *lieux de mémoire*. DeLamotte (1998) argues that Marshall’s novel employs a series of such embedded places linked to oppression and silence, a category in which she includes the cane field, the sugar mill, Merle’s house, and Sugar’s nightclub. They appear as “a double-exposed picture of a psychological compulsion to silence as well as a violent imperialistic assault that creates silence” (DeLamotte, 1998, p. 233) and will be analyzed in detail here as silent sites of memory, yet with a strong message to convey.

¹ The western part of the island is reminded of communal history once a year, during the carnival.

An emotionally charged place, Bournehills—the insignificant eastern part of the island—appears as a *dramatis persona*, a fusion of geography, community, and history. It acquires a majestic stature in the novel and becomes a point of contact, the “epicenter of every journey” (Casey, 1993, p. 284). It also provides permanence and plays an active role in the act of commemoration. The region, however, does not lend itself to easy discovery. Under the “good strong Bournehills sun” (Marshall, 1969, p. 65), the entire landscape “waver[s] and lose[s] shape before the eye” (p. 99). It flickers and changes appearance like a *fata morgana* mirage. “It looked strangely familiar to Saul” (p. 99), for whom the region becomes *everyplace* or a heterotopia since it assumes valences of other places that are connected to other moments in time.

Bournehills, stubborn and resistant to changes, can be read as a cleidoic place. Cut away not only from the rest of the island but also from the rest of the world, it is a self-contained and womb-like environment. It is the place where memory is re-actualized, where the past lives, bearing constant proof of terrifying colonial abuse. It resembles a postcolonial apocalyptic landscape, ravaged by overuse and then discarded: a perfect image of a dystopia. The arid hills and the ridge seal Bournehills off and leave no possibility of reconnection with the western(ized) part of the island. “We’re still there everybody” (Marshall, 1969, p. 68), proudly declares Merle, reminding the rich clique that the Bournehills people will not change and that they will not be moved either. What could be at first misunderstood as stasis or even cultural paralysis is in fact resilience, “life persisting amid [...] nameless and irrevocable loss” (p. 5), as Merle asserts. It is an act of survival, resistance, and struggle against forgetting. People’s timelessness is a very active state here “because [they] never forget” (p. 102). The Bournehills community may appear “ensnarled in the trap of memory” (p. 212) but it forms a “world of the past” (p. 217) that has the power of summoning other times past for visitors and locals alike. The condition of timelessness must and does validate history and remembrance.

Two essential sites of memory emerge from the onset of the novel: the cane field and the sugar factory. A perennial and rhizomatic plant, sugar cane was the sole purpose and commodity of colonialism on the island and significantly regulates its existence even in the post-colonial era. New Bristol, the village one could see before the plane’s descent is “buried like a bird’s nest” (Marshall, 1969, p. 22) in the omnipresent cane fields. The entire island, except for Bournehills, seems swallowed up by canes. The small Bournehills community alone displays a profound attachment to the land despite the scarce crop it yields. The canes, the only sustenance for this part of the island, become privileged members of the community. They participate in people’s everyday life “running their long fingers over the wall whenever there was a breeze” (p. 26), playing an important role in

a tripartite bond that is created among the people, the land, and their past. The past is revealed in the despoiled land and is reflected on the faces “eaten by time” of those who are toiling the land, under the burning sun, aging in the space of a day, cutting canes.

Saul, the anthropologist, is the one to record people’s daily work on the steep slopes, in the overwhelming heat. Ordeal, claims the omniscient voice, “this was the only word for him that came close to describing what he witnessed in those fields” (Marshall, 1969, p. 160). The cane field becomes a battleground where the daily fight for survival takes place. The powerful tropical sun, a temporal indicator, permeates the entire harvesting scene and endows it with a primeval characteristic. A day of laboring in the fields becomes the concentrated image of man’s journey through life; people grow inexplicably old and silent in the space of several hours. The Bournehills local, Stinger, with whom Saul developed a strong friendship, is presented as fighting with an army of canes in which “the entire world might have been planted” (p. 95):

Stinger’s essentially slight, small-built body, which was further reduced by the canes towering above him, appeared to be gradually shrinking, becoming smaller and painfully bent, old. By early afternoon all that was left to him it appeared were the shriveled bones and muscles within the drawn sac of skin and the one arm failing away with a mind and will of its own. (Marshall, 1969, p. 162)

Stinger’s pregnant wife Gwen hauls the big bales of cane down the steep slope and this ruthless workplace will metamorphose her too. People’s stubbornness and resilience are reiterated as every slope of the fields appears to be “the same slope” (Marshall, 1969, p. 216), a never-ending Sisyphean trial. Their daily encounter with this oppressive place reduces them to the almost spectral condition of the ‘ancestor group’: “They had had the same slightly turned up, fixed, flat stare that you find upon drawing back the lids of someone asleep or dead [...] aged beyond recognition” (p. 163).

Another exploitative and ambiguous place, an extension of the cane fields is the sugar factory. A dramatic image of colonialism, this locale echoes a slave ship and a potentially manageable place by Sir John, the now-absentee lord. The place is shaped by historical silence and by the imagery of the “dark hold of a ship set on some interminable voyage” (Marshall, 1969, p. 221). An overt and poignant allusion to the Middle Passage, this coercive place entraps in its entrails the workers who resemble ghosts, devoid of any human presence. As in all other *lieux de mémoire* in Bournehills, silence prevails here as well and is illustrative of the unspeakable effects of exploitative labor. The workers contribute almost voluntarily to the memory of places, their entire attitude denoting a dutiful rehearsal of times past.

The same narrativized distance is employed in relation to the workers in the old factory as well as those who work the land or the 'ancestor group'; they are "silent, impassive [...] caught in that stillness which at times, made them resemble statues" (Marshall, 1969, p. 385). Even the talkative Ferguson, his "eyes filled with memory" stands in front of Sir John like "a thing of stone, a dumb effigy" (p. 385), unable to utter the slightest complaint about the decaying state of the factory. When the factory eventually breaks down, an entire mute and helpless community stands in front of the mill, now silent and empty. Overpowering the place is this strange silence "so absolute it seemed no amount of noise could ever fill it again" (p. 388). The silence of the people might mean helplessness in front of the brutal exploitation, yet it does not denote in any way surrendering. On the contrary, it is their century-deep resilience.

Before the narration moves entirely to the "chosen place," the first book of the novel scrutinizes the western part of the island with its pervasive falseness. Suggestively, the exposition of the novel closes climactically, with the presentation of what could be called the pinnacle of irony: Sugar's place in the town of New Bristol. Bearing the name of what the entire island stood and still stands for—cane sugar—, Sugar's is a very popular nightclub and a site of passage, as Merle puts it: "You people aren't officially on the island until you've met Sugar and he's passed on you" (Marshall, 1969, p. 78). The bar is a perpetual feast where, in the space of one evening, many details about the island are unveiled or, surprisingly, obscured. The place stores the traces of previous customers and tourists from all parts of the world. Items left behind, scribblings on the tables, letters, and photographs, as well as many other trinkets, testify that this nightclub is a place of passing, endowed with a temporal quality.

A curious mixture of the public and the private, Sugar's is a place of encounter² that allows people of different social classes to intersect, cross boundaries, and even exchange places in a supposedly neutral environment, without breaking the social barriers that continue to exist outside. However, Sugar's place is thoroughly misunderstood. Everybody, including inhabitants like Merle or the barrister Lyle, considers it as a genuinely egalitarian institution³ on the island. Beyond the sarcastic hint of this claim, to call a nightclub an institution seems like an exaggeration, even if the place is thought to have a social role in regulating tensions and actions. Rather, the bar seems to be part of the larger mystification that pervades the microcosm of the island, especially its western part.

² The upcoming carnival is the extended form of this socially ambiguous way station that is Sugar's nightclub.

³ Paradoxically, it is the only place on the island where anybody can go irrespective of color, class, and gender.

At a closer look, it appears as a place of silence which, by its deceptive reconciliatory atmosphere, obscures the oppressive past. Sugar's place is probably the last relic of slavery brought to life or a re-enactment of slavery.

The bar was actually the place where slaves were held in confinement, one of the most famous barracoons in the West Indies. Its stonewalls are all impregnated by the smell of crude sugars, muscovado, and the history of slavery, carrying a "fainter exhalation of dark flesh, its essence distilled over the centuries" (Marshall, 1969, p. 316). Symbolically, the place is situated at the end of Whitehall Lane, the point of confluence for all the roads of the small town. Cheap rum shops, sailors' clubs, and whore houses, as well as other ambiguous and transitory places, are to be found in this street. The ignorance with regards to a new form of colonialism in which all customers dwell, intentionally or not, is suggested only once, "the patrons' unsuspecting heads" (p. 82).

Sugar himself is the image of the neo-master,⁴ this time the one who "can arrange anything" (Marshall, 1969, p. 84) provided the right price is paid. Strangely enough, Merle, whose judgment readers have come to trust, is very fond of him. He is very silent, almost unnoticeable if it were not for a sporadic white cone of light that is cast in the room. Barricaded behind "a large, old-fashioned cash register" (p. 83), Sugar is presented as a gnome, "pitifully small" (p. 83) with abbreviated limbs. Nobody knows anything about this American who arrived one day on the island with a poster of Sugar Ray Robinson, the famous black boxer of the 50s. People nicknamed him Sugar, not just because of the poster or because "he himself is so *sweet* and *understanding*" (p. 85) but also because sugar symbolizes the essence of the island "that runs in our veins" (p. 85), according to Merle. In her endless verbal tirade, most certainly accidentally, the main character pinpoints: "I'm a damn diabetic and so is everybody else in the place. A 'nation of diabetics'" (p. 85). What Sugar's provides for the island is indeed its essence—the rum made of sugar cane juice—but in excessive quantities. More than an 'overdose of sugar,' diabetes here signifies forced and blind dependence, or "the developed world's abuse on Bourne Island" (DeLamotte, 1998, p. 231), maintained with the help of the indigenous sugar-based alcoholic beverage—the rum.

In the web of *might have beens* and *as ifs* that Marshall weaves, Sugar's appears to be a great dupery. Gluttonously silent, all he requires is money "like a croupier's stick, rake[ing] the dollar bills and coins" (Marshall, 1969, p. 84). "With his ageless featureless face of

⁴ Sugar appears as the new master, a representative of the North American neocolonial influence in the Caribbean. Less concerned with the exploitation in the cane fields, this new master trades the staple product of that labor—the rum— and, like a croupier, amasses the new currency—the dollar.

indeterminate beige color, in which all colors have been canceled" (p. 83), Sugar remains passive and unperturbed, towering over the debauchery and the apocalyptic atmosphere from the height of his high stool. All this madness is dominated by the shadow of the stuffed bald eagle—the American symbol—cast over the entire room and "its *great* hooked beak gleaming blood-red" (p. 82). Dark underage girls and boys dance almost naked among the tables, offering themselves "for the trade," entertaining the customers, that is, "the wealthy expatriates from England, Canada, and the United States" (p. 76).

Sugar's bar may be regarded as a heterotopia. Recreated in a scrap of space, it brings together slices of time, contained by all the items or traces the customers left behind in what resembles a junk store or the "dumping ground of the world" (Marshall, 1969, p. 82). It is meant to be a more or less egalitarian melting pot. Too small for the large number of patrons, the place forces them to merge "into a single undifferentiated mass [...] one body, the inseparable parts of a whole" (p. 81). Nevertheless, the place is bound to remain heterogeneous. As the end of the show-carnival confirms, harmony cannot be acquired. Conversely, the hysterical dance-union finishes off as a "violent combat" with the room, that by now has expanded to the size of the world, evocatively divided "between great areas of shadow and light" (p. 92). This locale is indeed a paradigm for the entire Caribbean space, contested by different imperial powers during its tumultuous history.

On the other hand, the dwelling places in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* are an outgrowth of the island and faithfully mirror the traits of character of the people inhabiting them. For example, the barrister Lyle's imposing white house stands on its private rise and oversees the rest of the small town. It indicates to what extent the barrister has adopted the mask of the white conqueror. The house is also Lyle's anthropomorphic portrait. Lavish and unattractive, it has neither taste nor style and, in trying to blend elements from the past and present, ends up as an architectural failure.

Lyle's character appears as a Caliban figure, presiding over the island's legal, political, and economic systems with a conservative restrained British pose and exaggerated mannerisms. Consciously or not, he imitates the language and the actions of the master. Furthermore, he is the paradigm of Caliban who will consummate a reversed version of the native's rape of the white woman that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* portrays. There is only one place on the island where Lyle is refused access because of his color and this is the all-white elite Crown Beach Colony. An indicator of his racial exclusion is also the location of his luxurious beach house at the lower end of this select beach and separated from it by a rocky ledge.

On the other side of the island, however, the Bournehills dwellings are collections of personal family histories and memorabilia, that is, spatial encapsulations of times past. For instance, the house inherited by Merle from her master father suggests the trap of isolation in a womb-like environment that frustrates positive growth and discourages fecundity. The figure of the compartmentalized house is a microcosm that represents the divided island: a fragmented space once managed by the colonizer(s). Built by the planter Duncan Vaughan, “some riffraff out of the gutters of Bristol or Liverpool [...] [who] tried to populate the entire island his one” (Marshall, 1969, p. 107), Merle’s place appears to be “several houses [...] haphazardly thrown together” (p. 107). Time has materialized in the house with each of the following Vaughan generations (including Merle’s father, Ashton Vaughan) who all put their mark, adding to the initial construction. This is a palimpsest house that, by its presence alone, elicits the memory of the ancestors—generations of white masters; it is a landmark that retraces slavery and colonialism.

In some of its parts, however, it is more a replica of a monastery playing the function of a temple or a sacred place. The wing of the house assigned to Saul and Harriet is described in detail. In contrast with the rest of the building, there is a note of simplicity and peace here, of “contemplation and repose” (Marshall, 1969, p. 110). The omniscient voice speculates that the rooms “might have been cells in a monastery, places for meditation and penance” (p. 111) precisely what the characters need. Labyrinthine, dim echoing stone passageways lead ever inward where even the light and air seem “left from another time” (p. 110). Not at all surprisingly, there is, at the end of the corridor, a “maternal figure” (the housekeeper Carrington), who might have been one of the many “massed shadows” from her cavernous kitchen.

The rest of the house, the “old place” where Merle lives is inhabited by “duppies [...] ghosts” (Marshall, 1969, p. 111), the omnipresent Bournehills companions, the “deep shadows” (p. 401). It is in this part of the house that Merle’s catatonia unfolds, her way of helplessly reacting to the societal situation on the island. A condition related often to schizophrenia, her catatonic states are characterized by stasis and seclusion. At the antipode of her usual incessant talking, she becomes the composite image of all the other silences of her community. In the “numb center” (p. 399) that her room becomes, she lies inert, “more dead than alive” (p. 398). Her face, presented as the container “in ever-shifting and elusive forms [of] all the faces in Bournehills” (p. 388) is once more silenced.

Merle’s room is the place in which “the psychological and the political are one” (DeLamotte, 1998, p. 234). It is as much communal as it is personal and private, traits that are two inseparable parts of a whole. The room is in its main attributes a miniature Bournehills,

a museum of times past. As Saul senses it, an accurate understanding of the region goes through Merle, who is “somehow Bournehills” (Marshall, 1969, p. 118), or “in the old Biblical sense, the way” (p. 260). Moreover, her portrait is sharpened by the image of her room, thus understanding Bournehills is conferred through adjacent places, in particular her habitat.

As a private place, Merle’s room is also a mirror of her inner world. It is a confused clutter to which she half-heartedly tried to instill a vague order. Unarranged and unsorted furniture, scattered West Indian history books, heaps of cloth, and other effects bespeak the indecision and chaos she is confronting. Large half-unpacked steamer trunks invoke expectancy, instability, and an unsettling image of arrival or departure. As the omniscient voice explains, the room “expressed her: the struggle for coherence, the hope and desire for reconciliation of her conflicting parts... the chambers of her mind” (Marshall, 1969, p. 402).

Merle’s place is also a site of collective memory; it is covered with prints and drawings, faded chronotopes, portraying the planters’ leisure time activities “in places like Bournehills” (Marshall, 1969, p. 400). The silencing of history emerges as all these pastimes were made possible by the slaves’ work. Other prints portraying happy slaves working in “deceptively pleasant” (p. 400) fields contribute to the larger falsification of colonial history. However, a number of prints render justice to the harsh slave-work, by presenting the slaves carrying canes on their backs, “bending them double” (p. 400) or “bound to the millwheel along with the oxen” (p. 401). The direct portrayal of slave labor culminates with the poignant evocation of the Middle Passage presented by the detailed drawing of a “three-masted Bristol slave ship” (p. 401) towering over all the other prints. The entire history of colonialism is encapsulated and stored in the room of Merle—“the historian” (p. 206)—as much as it is contained by the entire Bournehills region.

Significantly, there is only one other dwelling that acquires visibility in the narration as a silent repository of an oppressive past. Its owner, Leesy, one of the oldest inhabitants of Bournehills, is the most vivid live relic, a reminder of times past. The small board house where she lives alone after her husband’s death is now inhabited by shadows. A windowless front wall blocks all connection with the exterior suggesting clausturation and solitude. The personified canes and the shadows are the old woman’s life companions; members of the family, they are the only living entities in and around her house, among “all that still-life clutter” (Marshall, 1969, p. 26). Everything else conveys immobility and temporal paralysis. These mausoleum-like features are reinforced inside by the presence of a neatly polished collection of “silver plated plaques inscribed with the names and dates of the family dead” (p. 28). “Frail and insubstantial” (p. 135), Leesy has become part of them. In her nightgown that resembles more a burial garment, she is presented preparing for the night,

as a “figure carved upon a catafalque [...] an effigy of someone already dead” (p. 142). As is visible throughout the entire Bournehills, “time was brought to a standstill” (p. 34) in this dwelling place as well, yet the place continues to tell of the region’s tormented history.

The last category of *lieux de mémoire* examined in this paper are particular sites that may either appear as a solution to the protagonists’ exile or may play a redemptive role when the risk of dispersion in too many locales acquires menacing proportions. Bournehills influences and changes the visitors from the very beginning of their stay. Two scientists, inclined to approach their research project with the help of graphs and statistics are instantly drawn into the close-knit microcosm of the Bournehills community. The usual containers of space and time, Allen’s charts and figures are not sufficient to encompass “the whole formless bewildering sprawl of life” (Marshall, 1969, p. 380) they encounter in the region. Allen’s overriding concern for the exact measurement of time is symbolized here by his desperate need for a watch and his obsession with mental representations. The sophisticated watch, an integral part of his life, is useless in a place where the most accurate temporal indicator is the sun’s passage in the sky. Conversely, Saul, the least organized and disciplined of the two, involuntarily gives up “wearing his watch and began telling time by the sun like everyone else” (p. 153).

For Allen, the return to Bournehills symbolizes in some way an acquittal: “[h]e has been granted a reprieve” (Marshall, 1969, p. 113). His deep attachment to the region and its people is connoted by the kitchen garden that he started from scratch during his first visit, as a favor to Merle. The garden on a small patch of stony land is a statement of endurance and faith, which justifies and rewards his return. During his absence, Merle carefully tended the garden proving that she faithfully awaited his return. More than a catalyst of Allen’s friendship with Merle, the garden is a temporal suppressant, abolishing the time he spent away: “the last year might not have happened” (p. 112), as he contends.

The garden is a heterotopia as it juxtaposes several past times linked to other places. These are not just the memories of the place but also the memories of other places and experiences for Allen. A fleeting memory, mere detail even, may trigger other memories and events from one’s past may reveal themselves in a domino-like fashion, not unlike a Proustian madeleine. Such is Allen’s memory of his room in his parents’ house, where he still keeps a photo of his best friend, Jerry. The memory of the photograph on the dresser brings forth another memory about Jerry’s death when Allen was in college. In its turn, this image leads him further back in time, to a high school memory, this time regarding his unsuccessful relationships with girls. Numerous other memories related to his family members erupt in the context of this heterotopic garden.

Allen's days inevitably start with a visit to the garden, where he witnesses the break of day. These daily revelations (brought forth by the genesis of a new day) connect him with "the best in himself" (Marshall, 1969, p. 149). The race to seize the present comes to an end, the instants miraculously dilate and Allen, bent over his tiny growing plants, experiences a liberation that becomes visible on all levels of his being. Despite the intruding spatial and temporal distance(s), the garden reconnects Allen with his past and with his self. Presented as atrophied at the moment of his arrival on Bourne Island, he slowly recovers, "his hazel eyes [...] came warmly alive" (p. 149). The small plants coming out of the barren soil are indicative of his psychological growth and self-actualization. As a childhood memory elicited by the garden, the imagery of a warm ripe tomato pulsing like a heart in his hand is emblematic of his inner rebirth.

Displaced, in a secular post-modern age, both Saul and Allen lack a sense of spatial stability and community. The place of departure (or home) is viewed more as a place of exile, thus a return is very much undesirable. "I'm beginning to feel so at home here in Bournehills" (Marshall, 1969, p. 183), declares Saul, while Allen "absolutely refuses to go home for some reason" (p. 67). Allen actually manages to address his dysphoria by choosing to remain on the island. It is doubtful that Saul, a professional wanderer, will ever resolve such restlessness and "delusory topomania" (Casey, 1993, p. 309) ethnically inscribed in him. The ambiguous denouement of the novel is far from elucidating this point. He was used to placing and re-placing himself in different places; to his *vagabondage*, the peace he finds on the island is punctual, salutary, yet ultimately, redemptive.

The region of Bournehills, itself a mausoleum of times past, abounds in *lieux de mémoire* which are places where time and geography meet. It would probably be more appropriate to assert that these are places where history and geography *once met*. On the one hand, the canefield, the sugar factory, and Sugar's bar, all related to the object of oppression—sugar—are nodes between place and collective history. On the other hand, the dwellings and the restorative places discussed above are representative of their close association with personal memory. It is not surprising that a text like *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* presents such a panoply of sites that exist as *lieux de mémoire* simply because the memory of places is fundamental for the existence of the island community as a whole. In this context, remembrance may be voice-less or silent, as long as the past is materialized in the place itself, its persistence thus ensured.

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