Ti-Jean and His Brothers

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DEREK WALCOTT

Derek Walcott was a Saint Lucian poet, playwright, and professor. He comes from a multiracial family, which is a theme he explores in much of his work. Walcott's father, a painter, died when he was one year old, and Walcott, his twin brother Roderick, and his sister Pamela were raised by a single mother. His mother was headmistress of a school, which meant reading and writing were priorities in the family's household. Walcott published his first poem at age fourteen, and graduated from the University College of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. After graduation, Walcott moved to Trinidad, where he founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959. He published several plays in Trinidad before moving to the United States to teach at Boston University. In 1981, Walcott was granted a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. He published *Omeros*, his most famous work, which is a loosely rendered Caribbean interpretation of the *Odyssey*. In 1992, Walcott received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Just a year before his death, Walcott was knighted, becoming one of the first knights of the Order of Saint Lucia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Published in 1970, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* corresponds with the rise of the postcolonial literary movement. The themes of colonial rule and local resistance were popular among many writers from the formerly colonized world, notably India, Nigeria, the Caribbean islands, and South Africa. The historical events associated with the setting of the play itself are slave rebellions and the end of slavery in the Caribbean. Ti-Jean's act of resistance at the end of the play corresponds with both successful and failed slave rebellions across the Caribbean Islands, many of which took as their central action either the reclamation or the destruction of sugar plantation land.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Like *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, *The Book of Night Women* by Marlon James also addresses the theme of colonialism in the Caribbean. The novel's protagonist, Lilith, is born into slavery and orphaned in early childhood. Like Walcott does in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, James analyzes the variety of responses that colonized peoples have to their colonizers. In the novel, Lilith both hates the slaveowner and also aspire to obtain a position of privilege by pleasing the overseer and owner of the plantation. Gros Jean embodies the latter sentiment in the play with his desire to impress the Planter by working hard, while Ti-Jean represents the rebellious side of Lilith. In both works, the authors explore the complex relationships of the colonized to their colonizers. *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff also shares thematic similarities with *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. Just as Ti-Jean eventually destroys the Devil's plantation in an act of uprising against his slave masters, the protagonist of Cliff's novel, Christopher, is a groundskeeper who murders his white Caribbean boss's entire family. Cliff explores the themes of racism and colonialism in the modern age, when colonial forces from other countries are no longer present but legacies of colonialism such as colorism and classism live on and continue to subject poor, black Caribbean people to poor treatment. Like Walcott, Cliff champions the uprising of her characters against the racist and postcolonial forces that oppress them.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*
- **When Written:** 1957
- **Where Written:** Trinidad
- **When Published:** 1970
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism, Postcolonialism
- **Genre:** Postcolonial literature, Caribbean literature, fable, play
- **Setting:** An unnamed island in the Caribbean
- **Climax:** Ti-Jean burns down the Devil's plantation.
- **Antagonist:** The Devil
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Homegrown Literature. Walcott said that *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* was his "most Caribbean" piece of writing, due to its incorporation of folkloric elements. Papa Bois, for instance, is a character commonly referenced in Caribbean narratives.

Lifelong Themes. The religious overtones in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* are echoed in many of Walcott's earliest writings. The first poem he published was inspired by his devout Methodism, and even drew criticism from local Catholic priest.

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Ti-Jean, Mi-Jean and Gros Jean are three impoverished Caribbean young men who live on a cold mountain with their deeply religious mother. Often, the boys don't have enough to eat. Gros Jean is strong but not very smart, and Mi-Jean is smart but always has his head in the

clouds. As a result, neither boy has what it takes to provide for the family. Meanwhile, Ti-Jean, the youngest, doesn't make much of an effort; he sits around all day doing nothing. While their mother laments the family's poverty and lack of food, she believes that God will eventually provide for them.

One evening, the family hears a strange noise outside the hut. It is the Bolom, the ghost of an aborted fetus and a messenger of the Devil. He tells the family that the Devil wishes to pose a challenge to the three brothers. Longing to feel human emotion, the Devil wants one of the brothers to make him angry. The Devil promises to grant the boy that is able to do so wealth and property. But, if the Devil succeeds in making one of the three boys angry, the Devil will eat him.

Gros Jean, being the oldest, is the first to leave home to take on the Devil's challenge. Before he leaves, his mother reminds him to trust in God, who has created all things. Gros Jean insists that he already knows this. As he walks through the forest on his way to meet the Devil, Gros Jean comes across Frog and exclaims at how God could make such ugly creatures. Soon after, Gros Jean meets the Old Man, and asks him what the quickest path to success is. The Old Man tells Gros Jean that the only things that matters is money, and that the fastest way to acquire that is to go and work for the Devil. So the Old Man gives Gros Jean directions to a **plantation** that the Devil owns. After two days working on the plantation, Gros Jean has received neither a minute of rest nor a cent of pay. Frustrated, he stops counting sugar cane for a moment to take a smoke break. The Devil, disguised as the Planter, comes up to him and asks why he is taking a break when lunch hour is over. Gros Jean explains that he is tired, and the Planter encourages him to rest, while passive aggressively implying that Gros Jean should be working—after all, the more Gros Jean works, the more the Planter earns. The Planter continually addresses Gros Jean by the wrong name, and eventually this upsets Gros Jean so much that he blows up at the planter. In losing his temper, he loses the challenge to the Devil.

Being the second-oldest, Mi-Jean is the brother who has to go and face the Devil next. Leaving home, Mi-Jean also comes across Frog in the forest and, like his older brother, insults the animal. Mi-Jean also meets the Old Man, who recognizes him. The Old Man tells Mi-Jean that everyone knows about him because of his intellectual prowess. As Mi-Jean soaks up the praise, the Devil goes behind a bush and removes his Old Man's mask and replaces it with the Planter's.

The Planter asks Mi-Jean if he has caught the goat the Planter asked him to catch, and Mi-Jean responds that he has. But the goat is loose again, and Mi-Jean must recapture it. As he does so, the Planter begins to explain to Mi-Jean the best way to tie down a captured goat. Mi-Jean becomes frustrated at the Planter for this explanation. Sensing a way to provoke Mi-Jean, the Planter starts a discussion about how animals and humans have equal intellectual capacity. Mi-Jean, who prides himself on his intellect, soon loses his temper, and in doing so, loses the challenge with the Devil.

Finally, it is Ti-Jean's turn to go and meet the Devil. His mother worries for her youngest son, who has neither the strength of the oldest nor the intelligence of the middle son. But Ti-Jean assures her that he has faith, the most powerful tool of all. As he walks through the forest to meet the Devil, Ti-Jean also encounters Frog, and stops to talk with him. Frog warns him that the Old Man is, in fact, the Devil in disguise. So when Ti-Jean encounters the Old Man just moments later, he is prepared, and doesn't fall for any of the Old Man's attempted tricks. In fact, he tells the Old Man that he knows he is the Devil, causing the Devil to take off his Old Man's mask. Ti-Jean is afraid to look at the real face of the Devil, and so the Devil disguises himself as the Planter. He tasks Ti-Jean with capturing the same goat that his brothers were tasked with capturing. Ti-Jean not only captures, but also castrates the goat so it won't escape again. Slightly frustrated, the Planter tries to keep his cool and asks Ti-Jean to count all of the sugar cane on the plantation. Instead of doing this, Ti-Jean orders the plantation workers to burn everything down. Later that night, Ti-Jean meets up with the Devil again, who is drunk. Ti-Jean also pretends to be drunk, and the Devil confesses to him that he misses being an angel. When Ti-Jean tells the Devil that he burned down the plantation, the Devil loses his temper, and Ti-Jean wins the challenge. At first, the Devil doesn't want to honor his side of the bargain, but the Bolom helps Ti-Jean convince the Devil to play fair. The Devil grants the Bolom life, and God honors Ti-Jean by giving him a place on the moon.

CHARACTERS

Ti-Jean – The youngest of three brothers and the protagonist of the play, Ti-Jean grows up in poverty raised by a single mother on a cold mountain somewhere in the Caribbean. While his oldest brother, Gros Jean, is known for his strength, and his middle brother, Mi-Jean, is known for his intellect, Ti-Jean is still really a child, and hasn't developed any particular skill set when the play begins. When the Bolom—the horrifying ghost of an aborted fetus who is a servant of the Devil—appears outside of his family's home to announce that the Devil has a challenge for the three boys, Ti-Jean is the only member of the family with enough courage to go outside and meet the Bolom. Ti-Jean demonstrates great courage again when he goes to meet the Devil for the challenge, which his two older brothers have failed at. The conditions of the challenge are that whoever makes the Devil angry will win property and riches, but if the Devil is able to provoke anger in one of the boys, he will eat that boy alive. As Ti-Jean is leaving for the challenge, his mother worries that, having neither strength nor great intelligence, Ti-Jean has no weapon to defeat the Devil. But Ti-Jean has something that his brothers don't: faith in God. Because he

respects God and all of his creatures, Ti-Jean takes time to speak with Frog on his way to meet the Devil. (Both of his brothers came across Frog, as well, but either insulted or ignored him.) Rewarding Ti-Jean for his kindness, Frog warns him that the Old Man, Papa Bois, is the Devil in disguise. Ti-Jean cleverly defeats the Devil by burning down his **plantation**, and refusing to complete the menial tasks the Devil has assigned him. Through his defeat of the Devil, Ti-Jean demonstrates resistance, faith, and courage.

Mi-Jean – Gros Jean's younger brother and Ti-Jean's older brother. Mi-Jean is an intellectual. He always has his head buried in a book, and because of this isn't very good at fishing, or doing any other practical task. After Gros Jean loses the challenge to the Devil, it is Mi-Jean's turn to go forth and see if he can make the Devil angry before the Devil makes him angry. Like Gros Jean, Mi-Jean insults Frog, whom he meets on his way to find the Devil. When Mi-Jean finds the Devil, disguised as the Planter, the Planter tasks him with chasing after and tying up and old goat, which Mi-Jean does successfully. Knowing that the Planter is the Devil in disguise, Mi-Jean resolves not to speak with him—this way, the Planter will never know if Mi-Jean is angry. But when the Planter implies that man is no more intelligent than animals—meaning that Mi-Jean's intellect may be no greater than the goat he is trying to capture—Mi-Jean loses his cool. He enters into a heated debate with the Planter about man's superiority over animals, and, losing his temper, he also loses the challenge. Like Gros Jean, Mi-Jean's ego is ultimately his downfall.

Gros Jean – Mi-Jean and Ti-Jean's older brother. Gros Jean is very strong, proud of his so-called "iron arm." He is the first to leave home in order to accept the Devil's challenge—Gros Jean is to make the Devil angry before the Devil can make him angry. As he leaves his family home to find the Devil, he comes across Frog in the forest, and wonders at how God could make such ugly creatures. Soon after that, Gros Jean comes across the Old Man, and asks him what the quickest path to success is. The Old Man tells him that money is what's most important, and that working for the white Planter is the fastest way to riches. Gros Jean follows the Old Man's directions to the **plantation**, where the Devil, disguised as the Planter, is his boss. After two days straight of work with no rest, Gros Jean wants to take a smoke break, but the Planter passive aggressively tries to encourage Gros Jean to keep working—after all, the harder Gros Jean works, the more the Planter will profit. Frustrated that the Planter doesn't acknowledge how hard Gros Jean has already worked—and how much faster he is able to work than others, due to his strong arm—Gros Jean loses his temper with the Planter, and in doing so loses the challenge to the Devil. Like Mi-Jean, Gros Jean's downfall is his ego.

Devil / Planter/ Old Man – The play's antagonist, the Devil has two disguises: the Planter and the Old Man, also called Papa Bois. According to the Bolom, one of the Devil's assistants, the Devil longs to feel a human emotion but is unable to. This is why he challenges Gros Jean, Mi-Jean, and Ti-Jean to a challenge—he wants to see if anyone can provoke anger in him. The Devil easily beats Gros Jean and Mi-Jean at the challenge, by taking advantage their big egos to make them angry. But humble, faithful, and rebellious Ti-Jean proves impossible for the Devil to beat, as Ti-Jean refuses to play by the Devil's unfair rules. When disguised as the Planter, the Devil is a white man who owns a sugar cane and cotton **plantation**, where he employs many black Caribbean workers for low wages and subjects them to difficult working conditions. When Gros Jean goes to work for the Planter, he complains about having received no rest or pay for two days straight, which speaks to the brutal conditions colonized peoples worked under during colonial rule. Walcott's choice to make the Planter one of the Devil's disguises suggests that he believes the systems that the Planter represents—colonialism and capitalism—are evil. Papa Bois, on the other hand, in Caribbean folklore is usually depicted as a benevolent spirit of the forest, but in this play Walcott chooses to link him with the Devil. Perhaps because of the positive qualities generally attributed to Papa Bois in Caribbean cultures, both Gros Jean and Mi-Jean blindly trust the Old Man, while Ti-Jean, thanks to a tip from Frog, recognizes him as the Devil. Ultimately, the Devil, disguised as the Planter, loses the challenge to Ti-Jean when Ti-Jean tells him that he has destroyed all of his property. Through his characterization of the Devil, Walcott highlights the evils of materialism and, by contrast, the importance of humility and faith.

Mother – Gros Jean, Mi-Jean, and Ti-Jean's impoverished single mother. The boys' mother is deeply faithful, believing that God will provide her starving family with food and stressing the importance to each of her boys to respect all of God's creatures before they go off to meet the Devil. The mother's piousness suggests her resilient spirit: she has lost her husband and lives in abject poverty, but she still has steadfast faith in God. Ti-Jean is the only one of her sons to have absorbed this lesson, and it is through his own faith in God, as well as his humility, that he eventually defeats the Devil.

Bolom – The ghost of an aborted fetus, the Bolom is one of the Devil's assistants. When the Devil wants to pose a challenge to Mi-Jean, Ti-Jean, and Gros Jean, it is the Bolom who shows up at their house to deliver the message. The boys' mother longs to give the Bolom the love and care that his own mother, who aborted him, wasn't able to, but the Bolom is so hurt and traumatized by his experience with his own mother that he rejects this. But when Ti-Jean beats the Devil, the Bolom begs Ti-Jean to ask the Devil to grant him life, and he does. At the end of the story, the Bolom is finally born, and it is implied that he goes to live with Ti-Jean and his mother.

Frog – Frog is a creature who lives in the forest. The story is framed by Frog's narration—he opens the play by describing

the shadow of Ti-Jean in the moon, once he has beaten the Devil and been placed in the skies by God. All three brothers cross paths with Frog on their way to meet the Devil for the challenge. The three brothers' different approaches to interacting with Frog demonstrate their different understandings of God—while all three boys have been taught to respect all of God's creatures, only Ti-Jean treats Frog with respect, while Gros Jean and Mi-Jean insult the animal. This suggests that only Ti-Jean truly has respect for all of God's creatures, and indeed, he is rewarded for his faith: Frog gives Ti-Jean the advice he needs to recognize the Old Man as the Devil in disguise

THEMES

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PRIDE VS. HUMILITY

Ti-Jean and His Brothers is a fable set in the Caribbean in which the Devil poses a challenge to three brothers. The Devil promises to grant wealth and property to whichever of the brothers is able to make him angry. But the other side of the deal is that the Devil will eat the brothers whom he is able to make angry. Ti-Jean, the youngest of the three brothers, is the only one who successfully defeats the Devil in this challenge. His older brothers, Mi-Jean and Gros Jean, only lose to the Devil because of their pride—they want to prove that they can succeed at the impossible tasks the Devil assigns them, whereas Ti-Jean doesn't care about proving to himself or others that he is capable of completing such tasks. By highlighting the difference between Ti-Jean's humble nature and his brothers' pride, Walcott emphasizes the importance of humility.

In disguise, the Devil sends Gros Jean to work on a sugar **plantation**, where the Devil himself is the owner. Proud of his legendary strength, Gros-Jean wants to prove that he can endure the plantation's strenuous working conditions. When Gros Jean takes a smoke break from his hard work, the Devil, disguised as the Planter, comes up to Gros Jean and criticizes him for taking a break. Gros Jean, who doesn't know that the Planter is the Devil in disguise, wants to earn the praise of his boss and wants him to acknowledge how much he has already accomplished, saying, "I do more work than most, right?" Here, Gros Jean makes it evident that he wishes to be recognized for his hard work and superiority to others. Prior to this moment, he has continuously bragged about his "arm of iron," thinking that his strength will promise him success. But the Planter continues to hint that Gros Jean isn't working hard enough, manipulatively telling Gros Jean to go ahead and have his smoke but then reminding him, "the harder you work the more" the Planter himself makes—implying that the Planter will value him more if he works even harder. Ultimately, Gros Jean becomes angry because the Planter won't acknowledge how much work he has already done. In this way, Gros Jean's pride—his identification with being strong, and with being able to get his work done—causes him to stay in a frustrating work environment simply because he wants to prove his superior strength. If Gros Jean weren't attached to proving how strong and hardworking he was, he wouldn't be upset at the Planter's implication that he should work more. Therefore, Gros Jean's pride leads to his undoing. He gets angry with the Planter—the Devil in disguise—and so loses the bet, because the Planter's implication that he should work even harder wounds his pride.

Mi-Jean is harder for the Devil to beat, but ultimately the Devil is able to take advantage of Mi-Jean's pride surrounding his intellect. Mi-Jean resolves not to speak to the Devil at all in order to protect himself from getting angry. However, when the Devil begins to talk about his belief that "A man is no better than an animal," Mi-Jean gets defensive. Always reading, Mi-Jean thinks of himself as an intellectual, and it is clear that he is attached to his identity as an intelligent person. At the Devil's insistence that man is no more intelligent than animal, Mi-Jean eventually loses his temper, arguing with the Devil that man is, in fact, divine. His pride causes him to defend the idea that is the basis of his sense of self-worth, which ultimately leads him to lose the Devil's challenge.

Ti-Jean, the youngest of the brothers, is unattached to any particular identity—he has neither particular strength nor particular intellect, and so he is not burdened by the desire to prove them. This humility is what allows him to defeat the Devil. When Ti-Jean leaves home to try and beat the Devil, his mother worries for him. "Never proven your self / In battle or in wisdom / I have kept you to my breast," she tells her youngest son. Here, Ti-Jean's mother worries that because he has no specific talents, he will be unable to face the Devil. However, his two older brothers lost to the Devil precisely because they had "proven" themselves in battle and wisdom, respectively, and were attached to the idea of beating the Devil with those skills. The fact that Gros Jean and Mi-Jean had proven themselves led them to be prideful, which made them vulnerable to the Devil's manipulation. The Devil tries to make Ti-Jean angry by assigning him impossible menial tasks, such as counting all of the sugar leaves on his plantation. Gros Jean's inability to perform a similar task makes him angry, as he prides himself on his strength and wishes to prove his ability to the Devil. However, Ti-Jean has no such attachment, and instead orders the workers on the plantation to burn it down. Because Ti-Jean is not preoccupied with proving himself to the Devil or measuring up to the standards the Devil creates for him, he does not get angry like his brothers. His lack of response, in

turn, angers the Devil—and so Ti-Jean wins the bet.

Walcott demonstrates the dangers of pride in the play by showing it as what causes the two older brothers to succumb to the Devil's manipulation. Gros Jean and Mi-Jean's pride leads them to want to prove that they measure up to the standards and expectations set by the Devil. Their egos are so inflated that they don't stop to wonder whether it's really worth it to try and prove themselves to the Devil. However, Ti-Jean's lack of pride allows him to discern that he doesn't actually need to prove himself to the Devil, and to see that the whole system the Devil set up is unfair and needs to be destroyed.

COLONIALISM AND RACISM

In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Derek Walcott tells a fable about three young men challenged to defeat the Devil. The Devil makes a bet with the three brothers: they are to try to make him angry. If they succeed, the Devil will grant them wealth and property. If they fail, the Devil will eat them. The play is set in an unspecified place in the Caribbean, and Ti-Jean and his brothers seem to be of black, Caribbean descent. Throughout the play, Walcott characterizes the Devil as a racist (presumably white) colonizer, and the brothers as the victims of his racist oppression. In this way, he emphasizes the evils of colonialism and highlights the danger that living under and accepting these systems poses to colonized and formerly colonized peoples.

One of the Devil's disguises is as the Planter, the owner of a large cotton and sugar cane **plantation** in the Caribbean, where colonial slave owners were notorious for their violence and brutality. When Ti-Jean's brother Gros Jean goes to work for the Planter, the Planter mistreats him in ways that have both racist and colonial undertones. Gros Jean describes the plantation where he works, saying that it is "estate-like […] sugar, tobacco, and a hell of a big white house where they say the Devil lives." Here, Walcott paints the stereotypical image of a slavery plantation. Sugar and tobacco were the most common goods to be farmed at slave plantations, and the allusion to the "big white house" or master's house implies that the Devil is a slave master—and that Gros Jean is a slave rather than an employee. Gros Jean decides to take a smoke break, and the Devil, unhappy that Gros Jean is not being productive, manipulatively tries to get him to continue working. During this conversation, the Devil confuses Gros Jean's name several times, calling him Charley, Hubert, and, most notably "Gros Chien." Consistently mistaking someone's name is, at best, a clear sign of disrespect. In this context, the Devil's inability to distinguish Gros Jean from the other works is likely also racist, as all of the workers on the plantation are black. Finally, *chien* is the French word for "dog," and so in calling Gros Jean by this name, the Devil implies that he does not fully recognize Gros Jean's humanity. By drawing readers' attention to the Devil's racism, Walcott highlights the evils of the colonial system that allows white plantation owners to disregard the humanity of their black slaves.

Similarly, when Mi-Jean speaks with the Devil—who at that point is disguised as the Old Man—the Old Man frustrates Mi-Jean by comparing him to an animal. Mi-Jean gets into a debate with the Old Man about whether animals and humans are equal in intellect or not. Mi-Jean passionately defends the superiority of human beings, while the Old Man suggests that humans and animals are equally lacking in intellectual capacity. When he notices Mi-Jean is getting upset, the Old Man says, "Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! How assured in logic! How marvelous in invention! And yet, poor shaving monkey, the animal in you is still in evidence…" Here, Walcott's choice to have the Old Man refer to Mi-Jean as a monkey is an intentional reference to racist ideologies that compare black people to apes and suggest that black people have not reached the same stage of evolution as white people. Like the Planter's interactions with Gros Jean, the way that the Old Man treats Mi-Jean has clear echoes of racist stereotypes. By painting the Devil in his various disguises as a quintessential racist—and making it clear that, under colonialism, the brothers have no way to escape his degrading treatment—Walcott indicates that racism and colonialism are every bit as evil as the Devil himself.

For both Mi-Jean and Gros Jean, the Devil's racism is what leads to their deaths: Mi-Jean becomes upset that the Old Man implies that he is equal to an ape, and, in getting angry, loses the bet with the Devil. Similarly, Gros Jean becomes upset with the Planter for various reasons, one of which is the fact that the Planter's racism prevents him from remembering Gros Jean's name. Through the brothers' fates, Walcott casts racism and colonialism as systems that literally endanger the lives of black Caribbean peoples. By drawing readers' attention to the Devil's racism, and by positioning the Devil as a colonizer in the Caribbean, Walcott emphasizes the evils of racism and colonialism.

CAPITALISM AND DEHUMANIZATION

In the play *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*, Derek Walcott tells the story of three brothers with whom the Devil makes a bet: if the Devil is able to anger any of the brothers, he will kill him, while any brother that can provoke a response of anger in the Devil will be granted wealth and property. One of the Devil's disguises in the play is the Planter, a wealthy white **plantation** owner in the Caribbean who overworks his employees. The Planter embodies a capitalist value system in that he prioritizes accumulating profit over the wellbeing of his workers. Through his descriptions of the ways in which Gros Jean and Ti-Jean engage with the Planter, Walcott highlights how capitalism dehumanizes the working class, and how, consequentially, the working class can

only liberate itself by rejecting capitalist values. When disguised as the Planter, the Devil reveals many beliefs that speak to his capitalist value system. By linking capitalism with the Devil, Walcott suggests that capitalism itself is evil.

When Gros Jean is taking his smoke break, he remembers how the Old Man had advised him to go and work for the Devil, saying, "Working for the Devil [is] the shortest way to success." Here, the Old Man's advice assumes that Gros Jean has a very capitalistic view of success: clearly, if success were defined as achieving wisdom or morality, working for the Devil would not be the quickest way to achieve it. However, as the Old Man assumes correctly that Gros Jean is seeking worldly status and possessions—markers of success under capitalism—it is true that working for the Devil is the quickest way to achieve these things. In his conversation with Gros Jean, the Devil (disguised as the Planter) apologizes for trying to get him to continue working when he is tired, saying, "Sometimes we people in charge of industry forget that you people aren't machines." Here, Walcott references the undervaluing of human workers under capitalism. The Devil forgets that his workers are not machines because fundamentally, he wishes they were, and he would rather not account for the limitations that the workers' humanity places on their productivity. This is a dehumanizing view of his workers, and in highlighting it, Walcott speaks to the violence that underlies capitalism.

While Gros Jean willingly subjects himself to the Planter's abusive treatment, Ti-Jean refuses to fulfill the Planter's cruel requests that he overwork himself. In working on the plantation, Gros Jean loses the bet to the Devil, who is disguised as the Planter. Gros Jean becomes frustrated with the Planter's implication that he could be working harder and shouldn't have taken a break. Because Gros Jean prides himself on his strength, he wants to prove his worth according to capitalism's value system: he wishes to be the most productive worker on the plantation. As a result of this desire—which is inextricably linked to capitalism—Gros Jean gets angry when the Planter points out that he doesn't meet capitalism's standards of being a successful worker. Therefore, Gros Jean's willingness to let the capitalist value system define him leads to his downfall.

Ti-Jean demonstrates opposite behavior. The Planter tasks him with capturing a goat that continuously runs away, and Ti-Jean gives up, saying, "I got a bit tired chasing the goat / I'm human you know." Here, Ti-Jean, unlike his older brother, is not ashamed of the limitations that being human places on his productivity. This suggests that Ti-Jean has not bought into the capitalist value system; unlike Gros Jean, he doesn't think that his worth is directly correlated with his productivity. While Gros Jean attempts to succeed under this system, Ti-Jean defies it. His refusal to endlessly chase after the goat is only the beginning of his resistance: when the Planter asks Ti-Jean to count all of the sugar cane leaves on the plantation, Ti-Jean orders the plantation workers to burn down all of the crops, as well as the Planter's house. In destroying the plantation, Ti-Jean destroys the Planter's ability to subjugate his workers to cruel treatment. This, in turn, angers the Devil, and Ti-Jean wins the bet.

Ti-Jean is able to defeat the Devil essentially because he refuses to play by the Devil's rules. He recognizes that the system the Devil has set up—that is, capitalism—is inherently unfair, and therefore rather than subjugating himself to it, he destroys it. In the process, he liberates not only himself, but all of the other works who were subject to the Planter's abuse.

THE POWER OF FAITH

The antagonist of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* is the Devil himself, who challenges three young men to a dangerous bet. Ti-Jean and his two older brothers live in poverty, and the Devil promises them that whoever among them can cause him to lose his temper will receive wealth and property. However, if the Devil succeeds in making one of the brothers angry, he gets to eat him. As the three brothers navigate this challenging situation, they demonstrate varying understandings of religion and faith. While Ti-Jean has an understanding of faith that gives him courage and strength to face the Devil, his two brothers have more negative understandings of religion that end up limiting them. Through demonstrating the ways in which Ti-Jean's faith helps him to beat the Devil, Walcott stresses the power of steadfast religious belief even in the face of bleak circumstances.

Gros Jean and Mi-Jean's faith seems to depend upon external evidence of God acting in their lives, and therefore their belief in God wavers when this evidence is missing. However, Ti-Jean has a faith that is deeper than either of his brothers', one that doesn't depend on external evidence of God's care or love. At the beginning of the play, Ti-Jean's family is lamenting their poverty. Ti-Jean's faithful mother tells her boys to "Wait, and God will send [them] something." But neither Gros Jean nor Mi-Jean is convinced. Gros Jean responds, "God forget where he put us," and Mi-Jean says, "God too irresponsible." In both cases, the brothers feel that God is not present in their lives—either because he simply forgot to care for them, or because he is aware but incapable of caring for all of his creations. What's important about the both brothers' insistence that God is not engaged with their lives is that they assume God's presence manifests as something material. In other words, in order to have faith, both Gros Jean and Mi-Jean need to see external evidence that God is real, present, and benevolent.

Ti-Jean, on the other hand, has a faith stronger than that of his brothers. His belief in God doesn't depend on any external circumstances. Rather, he says, "Whatever God made, we must consider blessed." This suggests that Ti-Jean is able to accept the world as it is, without assuming that bleak circumstances are reason to give up belief in God, or evidence that God does

not exist. Ti-Jean's faith is something that he learned from his mother, who tries to impart lessons of faith to each of her sons before they leave. Ti-Jean is the only one who listens. When Gros Jean leaves home to go and fight the Devil, his mother tells him, "Praise God who make all things," and Gros Jean insists that he already knows this. However, immediately after he leaves, he comes across Frog, one of the talking animals who dwell in the forest nearby. Frog offers each of the brothers advice as they depart. Gros Jean says to Frog, "Get out of my way, you slimy bastard! How God could make such things?" This reflects the fact that, contrary to what he told his mother, he does not "already know" to praise God and all of the things that he has made. What's more, he demonstrates that he thinks himself superior—for being human, for being a strong man—to other creations that God has made. This demonstrates again that Gros Jean's relationship with God is material—he judges animals for their appearance and is preoccupied with his place in a superficial hierarchy.

By contrast, Ti-Jean demonstrates that he does appreciate all of God's creatures. Because he genuinely values God's work and maintains his faith, he stops to talk to Frog and the other creatures instead of insulting or ignoring them, as Mi-Jean and Gros Jean have done. The creatures tell Ti-Jean to beware of the Old Man who tricked both of his brothers—and who turns out to be the Devil himself. Because Ti-Jean knows that the Old Man is really the Devil in disguise, he sees through his manipulations and is eventually able to defeat the Devil. In this way, Ti-Jean's willingness to believe in God and to put the spiritual teachings he has learned into practice helps to save his life.

Gros Jean and Mi-Jean are concerned with external manifestations of God's love, and don't have faith if they don't see such evidence. While they are looking for this evidence, however, they forget to put into practice the spiritual teachings their mother has passed on to them, which causes them to lose their lives—had they truly appreciated all of God's creatures, like Ti-Jean does, it's likely that the animals would have warned them, too, about the Devil. However, Ti-Jean is willing to trust so deeply in God that he doesn't need material evidence of God's work, and therefore is able to put into practice important spiritual teachings. This, ultimately, enables him to defeat the Devil, demonstrating the power of faith.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PLANTATION

The sugar cane and cotton plantation that the Planter owns symbolizes colonial rule in the Caribbean. Sugar cane and cotton were commonly grown on Caribbean plantations, and the cruelty with which plantation owners treated the people who worked producing these products was notorious. When Gros Jean goes to work for the Planter, his choice to work on the plantation represents more broadly Caribbean and black men's choice to participate in the colonial system. Ti-Jean, instead of counting all of the sugar cane on the plantation as the Planter has asked him to do, demands that the plantation workers burn down all of the crops and the master's house. This represents not just the destruction of the singular plantation, but rather is a cry to dismantle the system of colonialism that imprisons and mistreats the Caribbean population.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hodder Education edition of *Plays for Today* published in 2017.

Prologue Quotes

MOTHER: Wait, and God will send us something.
GROS JEAN: God forget where he put us.
MI JEAN: God too irresponsible.

Related Characters: Mi-Jean, Gros Jean, Mother (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This quote establishes the ways in which the mother's faith is different from that of her oldest son. Although she has lived in poverty for many years, the mother does not believe that God has abandoned her or her family. In other words, she needs no material evidence of God's love to continue believing in him. On the other hand, both Mi-Jean and Gros Jean assume that, because their family is poor and starving, God has abandoned them—that he created them and then "[forgot] where he putu [them]." Their insistence upon seeing material evidence of God's presence prevents them from having much faith in God—they feel abandoned by him. Notably, Ti-Jean does not comment in this moment, which suggests that he does not share his older brothers' lack of faith in God.

Act 1 Quotes

"Get out of my way, you slimy bastard! How God could make such things?"

Related Characters: Gros Jean (speaker), Frog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Gros Jean has just left home to meet the Devil, who has challenged him and his two younger brothers to a bet. Before he left home, Gros Jean's mother reminded him to appreciate God and all of the creatures that he has made—with Gros Jean insisting to his mother that he already knew that. However, his behavior when he comes across Frog suggests everything to the contrary. Frog, obviously, is one of God's creations, and if Gros Jean had truly internalized the lesson that he should treat all God's creatures with reverence, he would not have insulted Frog. It is clear from this behavior that Gros Jean feels that he, as a human being, is superior to Frog. This demonstrates, again, his lack of faith in God and his lack of respect for God's work, and it also foreshadows the way that Gros Jean's ego will be his undoing.

"What counts in this world is money and power."

Related Characters: Devil / Planter/ Old Man (speaker), Gros Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Gros Jean has just come across the Old Man in the forest. Not suspecting that the Old Man is, in fact, the Devil in disguise, Gros Jean asks him for advice on the fastest way to "what matters in the world." The Old Man quickly assures Gros Jean that those things are money and power. Here, the Old Man is essentially encouraging Gros Jean to adopt a capitalist value system; under capitalism, money and power are indeed the only things that matter. By associating the Old Man (who is the Devil) with capitalist values, Walcott suggests that capitalism itself is evil. By characterizing Gros Jean as vulnerable to this ideology—Gros Jean himself, after all, has no personal idea of what matters in the world—Walcott highlights the ways in which poor, black and/or colonized peoples are vulnerable to believing and participating in the capitalist system that oppresses them.

"Remember what the old son of a leaf-gathering beggar said? He said that working for the Devil was the shortest way to success. Well, I walked up through the bush then I come onto a large field. Estate-like, you know. Sugar, tobacco, and a hell of a big white house where they say the Devil lives. Ay-ay. So two next black fellers bring me up to him. Big white man, his hand cold as an axe blade and his mind twice as sharp."

Related Characters: Gros Jean (speaker), Devil / Planter/ Old Man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Walcott furthers his association of the Devil with capitalism, and also introduces whiteness into his characterization of the Devil. Walcott draws attention to the issue of race inequality by making the two people who work for the Devil black, and characterizing the Devil himself as white. What's more, the image he creates of the plantation harkens back to the age of slavery. Sugar and cotton were two of the crops most commonly grown by slaves in the Caribbean, and these plantations were notorious for subjecting their workers to inhumane working conditions. Gros Jean's statement that "working for the Devil [is] the shortest way to success" reminds readers of the way workers navigate modern-day capitalism; people often use this phrase in reference to working for major corporations, for instance. Walcott likely includes this language to highlight the similarities between modern-day capitalism and the capitalism common during colonialism.

"Other people want what I have, Charley, and other people have more. Can't help myself, Joe, it's some sort of disease, and it spreads right down to the common man."

Related Characters: Devil / Planter/ Old Man (speaker), Gros Jean

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Walcott furthers his critique of capitalism. The Planter is explaining to Gros Jean why he prefers that his workers not take many breaks. By having the Planter himself—who functions as the embodiment of capitalist values in the play, with his poor treatment of his workers and obsession with accumulating wealth—admit that capitalism is a disease, Walcott establishes his position as a heavy critic of this economic system. He shows that capitalism causes suffering even to those whom it most benefits, while, of course, acknowledging that the suffering of the working class is greater and more extreme than the suffering of the owning class. Walcott's characterization of the Planter here paints him as a victim of the capitalist system.

"Sorry, sorry, Gros Jean, sometimes we people in charge of industry forget that you people aren't machines. I mean people like you, Hubert..."

Related Characters: Gros Jean (speaker), Frog

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Planter is trying to passive aggressively convince Gros Jean to continue working instead of taking a smoke break. Gros Jean has just been working for two days straight with no pay and no rest. The Planter in this moment apologizes for encouraging Gros Jean to keep working when his body needs to rest. By saying he sometimes forgets that his workers aren't machines, the Planter demonstrates the extent to which the black, poor people he employs on the plantation are dehumanized in his mind—which is also evidenced by the way he callously calls them "you people." In this passage, the Planter implies that he wishes they *were* machines so that they could be more productive, and that he doesn't have any respect for the limitations that being human places on their productivity. The Planter's dehumanization of the workers is rooted in racism, as they are predominantly black. His inability to remember Gros Jean's name reflects the fact that for him, all black workers are the same—they are not worthy of being remembered as individuals.

Act 2 Quotes

"A man is no better than an animal. The one with two legs makes more noise and that make him believe he can think."

Related Characters: Devil / Planter/ Old Man (speaker), Mi-Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, the Planter has tasked Mi-Jean with catching his goat, which keeps escaping. Mi-Jean has just expressed his belief that men have souls, and, with this statement, the Planter contradicts Mi-Jean. The Planter is trying to provoke anger in Mi-Jean, who prides himself on his intellect. Mi-Jean's ego is tied up in the idea that he is intellectually superior to others, especially animals. This firmly held belief reflects not only his pride, but also the fact that he, like his brother Gros Jean, hasn't truly absorbed his mother's religious teachings. If he truly had respect for all of God's creatures, he wouldn't be so offended that the Planter thinks men and animals are equal. However, due to his ego and his assumption that humans are the most important creatures on Earth, Mi-Jean becomes offended by this simple statement—and that is precisely the Planter's intention.

"Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! How assured in logic! How marvelous in invention! And yet, poor shaving monkey, the animal in you is still in evidence..."

Related Characters: Devil / Planter/ Old Man (speaker), Mi-Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the Planter rubs in the fact that he has been able to make Mi-Jean upset. The two have just gotten into an argument over whether humans are intellectually superior to animals, with Mi-Jean passionately arguing that they are and the Planter arguing against him. At this point, the Planter has finally made Mi-Jean angry—therefore winning the challenge that Mi-Jean made with him. Just before he devours Mi-Jean, the Planter makes fun of him with this quote. He is patronizingly and ironically praising Mi-Jean's

intellect. Referring to Mi-Jean as a monkey not only is deeply insulting to Mi-Jean, who believes humans to be far superior to monkeys, but it also has deeply racist undertones. For years, pseudoscience has compared black people to monkeys to suggest, falsely, they are less developed than white people.

Act 3 Quotes

"You are hardly a man, a stalk, bending in the wind with no will of its own, never proven your self, in battle or wisdom [...]"

Related Characters: Mother (speaker), Devil / Planter/ Old Man , Ti-Jean

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, both Mi-Jean and Gros Jean have been defeated by the Devil, and Ti-Jean, the mother's only remaining son, is about to leave home to try to beat the Devil. As Ti-Jean is leaving, his mother worries whether he will be able to defeat the Devil. In this quote, she laments the fact that unlike his two older brothers, Ti-Jean has no specific skill or identity that will help him defeat the Devil. However, what his mother thinks is a weakness for Ti-Jean actually turns out to be a strength. Both Gros Jean and Mi-Jean were defeated by the Devil precisely because they took pride in the traits with which they had "proved themselves" to their mother—Gros Jean got frustrated because the Devil did not recognize his strength, and Mi-Jean got frustrated because the Devil did not recognize his intellect. In this passage, the mother laments the fact that Ti-Jean hasn't formed a fixed ego or identity, but this ends up being to his benefit—he doesn't have anything to be prideful about, and therefore isn't as easy to upset as his brothers were.

"You have told me yourself our lives are not ours, that no one's life is theirs husband or wife, father or son, that our life is God's own."

Related Characters: Ti-Jean (speaker), Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Ti-Jean responds to his mother's worries that he is not ready to try to defeat the Devil. He reminds her that he has faith in God, and that he wishes to let God control his destiny. Here, Ti-Jean's attitude contrasts starkly with his brothers' attitudes. Before leaving, neither of them stopped to talk to their mother, and insisted that they had already mastered the lessons of faith that she wished to instill in them—only to prove during their encounters with the Devil that they in fact lacked faith in God. Ti-Jean, on the other hand, speaks to both his powerful faith and his humility in this moment. These are the traits that allow him to successfully defeat the Devil, while his brothers could not.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

On the night of the new moon, Frog begins to tell a story: When the moon is full, he says, it's possible to see on its surface not a man, but a boy, burdened by a bundle of sticks on his back and accompanied by a small dog. This is Ti-Jean, "the hunter," whom God rewarded with a place on the moon because Ti-Jean beat the Devil. In life, Ti-Jean had a mother and two older brothers: Gros Jean, whose arm "was hard as iron," but who wasn't the smartest knife in the drawer; and Mi-Jean, not as strong as Gros Jean but much smarter, whose head was buried in his books.

Walcott's choice to narrate the play from the point of view of a frog is a nod to traditional fables, many of which incorporate the points of view of animals. Additionally, the three brothers also embody traditional fabular archetypes—Gros Jean is the strong but dumb warrior, while Mi-Jean is the smart but impractical dreamer. These characterizations set readers up to understand how these traits will work both for and against the brothers throughout the play.

Ti-Jean's mother, whose husband passed away, was very poor, too old and weak to protect her home and provide for her family. Still, she has great faith in God. The four of them lived in a wood and thatch little house on the top of a mountain where it was always raining and very cold. What's worse, the Devil himself used to live on that very mountaintop. As Frog speaks, the Devil appears before him, saying, in French, "Give me a child for dinner! [...] One, two, three little children!" Ti-Jean and his family were terrified of the Devil—he had skin "powdery as leprosy" and a dead expression.

Walcott's description of the Devil's face as "powdery" may be a subtle reference to whiteness—indeed, over the course of the play, Walcott associates the Devil with whiteness in several ways. Additionally, Ti-Jean's mother's faith in God, in spite of her difficult circumstances, is Walcott's first mention of faith in the play, setting the precedent for belief in God to become an important theme.

With his nose in his books, Mi-Jean is useless for fishing, and Gros Jean simply doesn't have the brains. Unable to find any food for themselves, Ti-Jean's family starves while, in Mother's words, "the planter is eating from plates painted golden, forks with silver tongues, the brown flesh of birds, and the white flesh of fish." While Gros Jean and Mi-Jean have made sincere, if futile, efforts at finding food, Ti-Jean admits in French that he hasn't done anything that day.

The mother in this passage references the economic inequality that black people experienced under colonialism. The contrast between the Planter's abundant meal and the family's starvation highlights this inequality. What's more, here, Walcott characterizes Ti-Jean as a young boy, without much to offer, while Mi-Jean and Gros Jean are only slightly more useful in that they make an effort.

The boys' mother doesn't seem all too worried that they don't have anything to eat. "Wait, and God will send us something," she counsels her sons. But Gros Jean responds, "God forget where he put us." Mi-Jean, equally cynical, says, "God too irresponsible."

By highlighting the fact that Mi-Jean and Gros Jean do not have faith in God, Walcott emphasizes the difference between them and Ti-Jean (who says nothing in response to this) and the boys' mother.

Suddenly, Bolom appears outside the family's door. They hear the sound of a child's cry, and Mother fears it is one of the Devil's "angels." Distraught, she tells her son that she prayed all day for God to help them, and instead she is sent devil spawn. To protect their home, Gros Jean and Mi-Jean say, "Let two of our fingers form one crucifix!" Ti-Jean, on the other hand, silently steps outside. Their mother demands of Bolom: "Spirit that is outside, with the voice of a child, crying out in the rain, what do you want from the poor?"

Here, Gros Jean and Mi-Jean's action—joining their fingers to form a crucifix to protect their home—contrasts with their previous statements that indicate a lack of belief in God. Ti-Jean demonstrates more courage than his brothers by leaving the house to confront the Bolom. This suggests that he may have deeper faith than his brothers—he has the confidence to go outside perhaps because he believes in God's protection.

Bolom asks the boys' mother to send her oldest son outside, for the boys "must die in that order." And he asks that Ti-Jean go back into the house. Ti-Jean does, but inside, a strange light shines through and the family sees Bolom within their home. They try to catch him, but can't. The mother tells Bolom that she has done him no harm, but Bolom replies, "A woman did me harm, called herself mother, the fear of her hatred, a cord round my throat!" To this, the mother responds that perhaps it is better never have been born into such poverty and misery. Still, she wishes to comfort Bolom, and offers to hug him. Bolom recoils, saying he will never live until her sons die. Bolom hears the Devil's voice from outside. He says in French, "Do what I commanded you!"

Here, the Bolom reveals that he has been aborted, and, because of this, works with the Devil in order to one day be born into the world. By demonstrating the pain of an aborted fetus, Walcott may be making a comment about the morality of abortion, which could tie into the Christian moral beliefs he strongly incorporates throughout the play. Walcott suggests that the mother who aborted her baby denied the Bolom the right to life, and, in doing so, created a monster.

So the Bolom enters the house and delivers his message: "The Devil my master, who owns half the world, [...] has done all that is evil," he says, listing the many evils, such as war, disease, and corruption, that the Devil has invented. Still, the Bolom says, the Devil isn't satisfied—he can't enjoy the vices he has created, and he longs to be human. So he has sent a challenge to Ti-Jean and his brothers: any human who can make the Devil angry will "never more know hunger, but fulfillment, wealth, [and] peace." But, any human who accepts the challenge but whom the Devil is able to provoke to anger will be eaten alive. Outside, the family hears the Devil singing in French: "Give the Devil a child for dinner, one, two, three little children!"

By saying that the Devil "owns half the world," the Bolom subtly links the Devil to capitalism by implying that the world is the Devil's property. The fact that the Devil is unhappy even with so much wealth and power implies that ownership and material wealth aren't the secrets to happiness; rather, the ability to feel and create human bonds are what guarantee joy and success in the world of the play.

ACT 1

Early morning the next day, Gros Jean rises early and packs up a bundle. His mother is sorry to see him go, but he feels it is time for him to go out and find work. Gros Jean thinks his arm is too strong just to be splitting trees; he has an arm of iron. His mother is quick to correct him, saying, "The arm which digs a grave is the strongest arm of all." She has parting advice for her eldest son: it is important that when he leaves, he "praise God who make all things" and "ask direction" of the birds and insects. She warns Gros Jean that the Devil can disguise himself as anyone or anything. Gros Jean says he already knows that.

In this passage, Walcott furthers his characterization of Gros Jean as prideful. Because he is strong, he thinks he is too good for the work he currently does, which is splitting logs. It is clear that his ego is responsible for at least part of his motivation for leaving home—he wants to prove that he is capable of greater things. His pride also shines through when he dismisses his mother's advice. This suggests that he thinks he is above listening to his mother, and that he doesn't value having faith in God.

When Gros Jean leaves the house, he soon comes across Frog and some other creatures. In fact, Frog is in his way, so Gros Jean kicks him, saying "Get out of my way, you slimy bastard! How God could make such things?"

Here, Gros Jean's dismissal of Frog clearly demonstrates that, contrary to what he told his mother, he does not already understand the importance of appreciating all God's creatures, nor does he understand the value in asking for their assistance. This shows his lack of faith.

An Old Man limps onto the forest path, lifting his robe to scratch his hairy hoof. Gros Jean asks the older man what's wrong with his foot. But the Old Man responds, "The flesh of the earth is rotting. Worms." Gros Jean asks him what the "quickest way" is to "what counts in this world." The Old Man promptly responds that the only things that count in the world are money and power. Gros Jean tells the Old Man that he has an arm of iron but is missing money—and the Old Man says he can't advise someone without money. This angers Gros Jean, who picks up his axe and threatens to kill the Old Man. "With your arm of iron, the first thing you kill is wisdom?" He says.

In this passage, Gros Jean shows his blind ambition. He himself doesn't have a clear idea of what "counts" in the world, an inner compass that points him in the direction of what success means to him. Rather, he is concerned with worldly success that will be recognized by others, which again speaks to Gros Jean's inflated ego. The Old Man easily exploits Gros Jean's lack of inner values by convincing him to adopt a capitalist value system. What's more, Gros Jean's threat to kill the Old Man again reflects his lack of respect for God's creations.

Finally, the Old Man resolves to help Gros Jean. He tells him that coming through the forest, he passed "some poor souls going to work for the white planter," who will "work you like the devil"—but that, it seems, is exactly what Gros Jean wants with his iron arm and his impatience. As parting advice, the Old Man tells Gros Jean, "Remember an iron army may rust, flesh is deciduous." Gros Jean heads toward the **plantation**, warning the Old Man, "Next time don't be so selfish." As he walks away, the Old Man sings, "Who is the man who can speak to the strong? Where is the fool who can talk to the wise? Men who are dead now have learnt this long, Bitter is wisdom that fails when it tries."

Here, the Old Man takes advantage of Gros Jean's impatience and desire to prove himself by sending him to work on the plantation. This moment in the play speaks to the way in which people's willingness to accept a capitalist value system—in which money and hard work are the most valuable things—leads them to willingly participate in situations that are exploitative. A boss that will "work you like the devil" does not sound appealing at all, and yet, because Gros Jean is obsessed with proving his strength, he is attracted to this type of environment.

Meanwhile, Gros Jean, now in another part of the forest, reflects on the two days he's spent working "for this damn white man." After leaving the Old Man, he "walked up through the bush" until he arrived at a large, "estate-like" field, complete with "a big white house where they say the Devil lives." Disguised as the Planter, the Devil reminded Gros Jean of the deal they have: "the one who show the first sign of anger will be eaten." Since he arrived, Gros Jean hasn't rested nearly at all. The first day, the Planter tasked him with counting all the leaves of cane in the field, standing up. This took until four in the morning. Then, the Planter asked him to catch 70 fireflies, but Gros Jean could only see stars. Finally, he's decided to give his arm a break because he has a cramp.

In this moment, Walcott details the poor working conditions that exist on the plantation. Gros Jean's lack of rest and of pay during his time as a plantation worker speak to the unfair working conditions that black Caribbean people faced when they were either enslaved on plantations or had no choice but to work there for low wages. By comparing the Devil to a white plantation owner, Walcott emphasizes the evil that whiteness and capitalism represent in a Caribbean context. What's more, the tasks that the Planter asks Gros Jean to carry out—like counting fireflies—are totally meaningless. This suggests that he isn't asking Gros Jean to work to be productive; rather, the Planter seeks to manipulate and exploit him out of cruelty.

As Gros Jean is taking a break, the Devil, disguised as the Planter, comes up to him and says, "Well, how's it progressing, Joe, tired?" Gros Jean reminds the Planter that his name is not Joe. Clearly, the Planter is upset that Gros Jean has taken a break, and reminds him that the lunch hour is over. "Black people have to rest, too," Gros Jean reminds his supervisor in response. The Planter responds, "That's right, Mac." Again, Gros Jean corrects him, to which the Planter responds by telling Gros Jean that he seems annoyed. Gros Jean's face freezes.

The Planter's inability to get Gros Jean's name right reflects his racism. Because all of the plantation workers are presumably black, the Planter is unable to distinguish them from one another; to him, they are all interchangeable, low-wage workers. Gros Jean picks up on this racism when he reminds the Planter that black people need rest, too. He clearly feels dehumanized by his new boss, which is starting to annoy him.

As the two men continue talking, the Planter mistakes Gros Jean's name again calling him "Gros Chien." He excuses himself, saying "Can't tell one face from the next out here." When Gros Jean asks the Planter why he himself doesn't take a break, the Planter replies, "Other people want what I have, Charley, and other people have more. Can't help myself, Joe, it's some sort of disease, and it spreads right down to the common man."

Chien *in French means "dog," and this mistake takes the Planter's racism to the next level: in his mind, black people are so dehumanized that he compares them with dogs. Additionally, by having the Planter describe the influence of capitalism as a disease, Walcott highlights the extent to which capitalist values create unhappiness, even in those who seem to be in charge.*

Gros Jean is quick to correct the Planter, telling him that he himself is "no common man"—according to Gros Jean, just because he comes from the mountain forest, or just because he's black, doesn't mean he can't become like the Planter. "One day all this could be mine!" he tells his boss. The Planter ignores this comment, and reminds Gros Jean that he still has to stack, count, and classify the sugar cane leaves. Grinning tightly, Gros Jean says to the Planter, "Look, I haven't let you down yet boss, have I?" The Planter responds, "Sit down, Joe, relax [...]only time is money." Gros Jean protests, reminding the Planter of everything he's done successfully on the **plantation** with his "iron arm." The Planter responds, "Sorry, sorry, Gros Jean, sometimes we people in charge of industry forget that you people aren't machines. I mean people like you, Hubert..."

Gros Jean's behavior in this passage suggests that he has bought into the classic "rags to riches" archetypes. He believes, mistakenly, that he will be able to work his way to the top of the capitalist system and join the owning class. Clearly, he does not recognize the extent to which the system is rigged against him—through its racism and colonialism—as he is a poor, Caribbean black man. Indeed, the people at the top of the system, like the Planter, don't even recognize Gros Jean's humanity, as the Planter clearly reveals when he openly states that he forgets people like Gros Jean "aren't machines."

Frustrated that the Planter has mistaken his name again, Gros Jean stands up to correct him. The Planter tells Gros Jean to have his smoke, adding, "You don't know what it means to work hard, to have to employ hundreds of people [...] You're worth more to me, Benton, than fifty men. So you should smoke, after all[...] And such a pleasant disposition, always smiling [...] Just like a skull [...] But remember, Mervin, I'd like you to try to finish this..." At this, Gros Jean smashes his pipe furiously, demanding what a man has to do to have a "goddamned smoke." There is an explosion, and, when the smoke clears, the Devil stands with his Planter's mask removed, saying in French, "Give the Devil a child for dinner. One!"

The Planter's speech in this passage is full of contradictions. If Gros Jean is indeed worth more than fifty men to him, he should be able to remember his name, for instance. By both telling Gros Jean that he is not working hard enough and that he deserves to rest, the Planter manipulates him. The real reason Gros Jean gets frustrated is that he longs for the Planter's approval, his recognition that Gros Jean is a hard worker. In other words, Gros Jean's ego wants the Planter's praise—which of course he will never get. His ego, then, loses him the bet.

ACT 2

The sun rises the next day on a cross marked "Gros Jean." Mi-Jean is walking quickly past the grave when Frog approaches, asking if Mi-Jean is going to join his brother. After all, according to Frog, Mi-Jean is "a man's size now." The Old Man comes up to Mi-Jean in the forest and greets him by name. Upon seeing him, Mi-Jean recalls his mother's parting advice to him that morning when he left the house: "no one can know what the Devil wears." When Mi-Jean asks the Old Man (addressing him as Papa Bois) how he knows his name, he praises Mi-Jean extensively: "Who in the heights […] has not heard of Mi-Jean the jurist, and the gift of his tongue, his prowess in argument, Mi-Jean, the *avocat*, the fisherman, the litigant?"

Here, Mi-Jean demonstrates himself to be a little bit less prideful than Gros Jean. While he doesn't engage Frog in conversation, he doesn't immediately dismiss him. In addition, rather than completely ignoring his mother's advice, Mi-Jean remembers part of it, which leads him to be rightly suspicious of the Old Man. However, the Old Man knows that Mi-Jean's weakness is his pride in his intellect, and so quickly tries to take advantage of that weakness by praising the middle brother. In Caribbean folklore, Papa Bois is a benevolent spirit of the forest, which may be why Mi-Jean seems to trust him.

The Old Man asks Mi-Jean about the book he has in his hands. Mi-Jean, who has noticed that the Old Man has a hoof, tells him he will look up "man with cow-foot," as the book has "every knowledge." Meanwhile, the Old Man invites Mi-Jean to have some tobacco, but Mi-Jean refuses, saying, "Apart from wisdom, I have no vices."

By identifying wisdom as one of his "vices," Mi-Jean demonstrates a lot of ego. He clearly identifies strongly with being intelligent, and prides himself on this ability. The irony is that Mi-Jean's pride in his intellect makes it a vice, for it is through playing to Mi-Jean's ego that the Old Man is getting to him.

Hearing this, the Old Man asks Mi-Jean if he believes in the Devil. Mi-Jean says he does—if he didn't, he wouldn't be able to believe in God. But Mi-Jean feels he knows the Devil is not the Old Man, because the Devil "would never expose his identity so early." When he does meet the Devil, though, Mi-Jean has a plan: to beat him "with silence and a smile." Mi-Jean proceeds to sing a song about why the wisest thing a man can do is keep silent. While he does this, at a leisurely pace, the Old Man goes behind a bush, removes his robe and Old Man mask and reveals the Devil's face. He then changes into the clothes and mask of the Planter.

In this moment, Mi-Jean's declaration that the Old Man can't be the Devil demonstrates his arrogance. He assumes, wrongly, that the Devil wouldn't reveal himself so early, and because he makes this assumption, he isn't as on guard with the Old Man as perhaps he should be—unwittingly, he has revealed his plan to defeat the Devil to the Devil himself. Like his brother, Mi-Jean's pride puts him on the path to losing the challenge with the Devil.

Stepping out from behind the bushes, the Planter asks Mi-Jean if he has finished the work he gave him: to catch a wild goat. Mi-Jean nods yes, and the Planter asks, "And the menial work didn't bore you, a thinker?" Mi-Jean only nods in response. The Planter continues to try to get Mi-Jean to talk to him, but Mi-Jean resists.

Here, readers realize that Mi-Jean has recognized the Planter as the Devil—he is employing his strategy of keeping his mouth shut. It's possible that Mi-Jean easily recognized the Devil in the Planter's disguise due to the Planter's whiteness, while Papa Bois (the Old Man), whom Mi-Jean does not suspect, is a fellow black Caribbean man.

Suddenly, the goat the Planter has asked Mi-Jean to catch breaks loose again, and the Planter tells Mi-Jean to hurry up and catch it before it gets dark. Annoyed, Mi-Jean sets off. While Mi-Jean is scurrying around trying to capture the goat, the Planter gives him a detailed, flowery explanation of the best kind of knot to use to tie the goat down. Hearing this, Mi-Jean feels angry inside, and he finally breaks his silence to tell the Planter that he knows what he's doing.

Again, Mi-Jean's pride becomes evident in this passage. He cannot stand having something explained to him—even something he is, apparently, doing badly—because he prides himself on being intelligent. His desire to defend his intelligence leads him to abandon his strategy of silence, and, consequently, his ego begins to get in the way of his defeating the Devil.

The Planter acknowledges Mi-Jean, explaining himself by saying, "I've seen dumber men, not you, fail at this knot you know, it's just a matter of know-how, not really knowledge but plain skill." Once Mi-Jean has run off after the goat again, the Planter, frustrated, rants about how he has no way to get Mi-Jean angry. Then Mi-Jean comes back, saying, "That goat certainly making a plethora of cacophony." The Planter replies that the goat is only an animal, to which Mi-Jean replies, "Men are […] animals too, but at least they have souls" But the Planter believes "a man is no better than an animal," and says so. For him, "the one with two legs makes more noise and that makes him believe he can think."

Although the Planter fears he will never get through to Mi-Jean, in fact, he already has an in. Mi-Jean continues to ignore his previous commitment to stay silent. The fancy words he uses to describe the goat suggest that he may still be trying to prove to the Planter that he is intelligent. The Planter may have picked up on this insecurity when he insists that men are equal to animals—his comment about men only believing they can think seems particularly targeted at Mi-Jean, whose entire identity is based around being a thinker.

Mi-Jean thinks this is ridiculous, and almost catches himself, saying, "You can't get me into no argument!" But quickly after, he adds, "All I say is that man is divine!" In response, the Planter asks Mi-Jean if he thinks he is more intelligent than a goat. Again, Mi-Jean insists that he won't get into an argument, but the Planter says he'd like to hear what Mi-Jean has to say. So Mi-Jean stands and prepares to "lecture" on why men are superior to animals. As he speaks, though, the goat continues bleating, which comes to annoy Mi-Jean. The Planter declares that since the goat is his, if Mi-Jean gets upset at the goat, "who represents [his] view, then [he] is vexed with [the Planter], and the contract must be fulfilled."

Here, Mi-Jean struggles to control himself, aware that he can't get into an argument with the Planter, whom he knows is the Devil. Unfortunately, Mi-Jean's need to prove mankind's—and therefore, his own—intellectual merit proves more urgent to him than protecting his own life. He becomes upset at the goat, presumably for interrupting his lecture, which is a sign of Mi-Jean's ego. He feels entitled to speak uninterruptedly, based on the merit of his ideas.

As he prepares to eat Mi-Jean, the Planter says, "Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! How assured in logic! How marvelous in invention! And yet, poor shaking monkey, the animal in you is still in evidence[…]" The Planter removes his mask, and the Devil devours Mi-Jean. He says, in French, as always, "Give the Devil a child for dinner. One! Two!"

In this moment, the Planter's choice to compare Mi-Jean to an ape is deeply racist. Historically, many pseudoscientific comparisons have been made between black people and monkeys, to demean the humanity of black people.

ACT 3

The next day, Ti-Jean is comforting his mother, who tries to ask her youngest son not to leave. She tells him he is "hardly a man" and has "never proven [himself] in battle or wisdom." She wants to protect her youngest son, but Ti-Jean comforts her, reminding her that she herself told him "[their] lives are not [theirs] […] that [their] life is God's own." As Ti-Jean prepares to leave, his mother says, "The first of my children never asked for my strength, the second of my children thought little of my knowledge, the last of my sons, now, kneels down at my feet, instinct be your shield, it is wiser than reason, conscience be your cause and plain sense your sword." As he leaves, Ti-Jean says, "Yes, I small. *maman*, I small, And I never learn from book, but like the small boy, David, I go bring down, bring down Goliath."

Here, Ti-Jean demonstrates his humility through the way he relates to his mother. While both of his older brothers simply left home without taking time to converse with their mother, Ti-Jean recognizes the value of her wisdom and pauses to hear what she has to say. The wisdom she passes on to her youngest son largely has to do with developing and relying upon a strong faith in God. Ti-Jean's choice to compare himself to David from the Bible suggests that he does have this strong faith in God, and relies upon religion to navigate and understand the world, just as his mother advises.

As he heads into the forest, Ti-Jean encounters Frog and greets the animal. Frog assumes Ti-Jean is making fun of him, as Gros Jean and Mi-Jean did, but the youngest brother protests, saying, "Why should I laugh at the frog and his fine bass voice?" Ti-Jean tells Frog that he has his own kind of beauty. He then asks Frog what the fastest way is to the Devil's estate, and the Frog tells him to beware of the Old Man, who then appears on the forest path.

In this passage, Ti-Jean's behavior starkly contrasts with that of his brothers—he demonstrates that he truly does have respect for all of God's creatures by treating Frog with respect. Perhaps as a reward for this respect, Frog gives Ti-Jean the critical information that the Old Man is the Devil. If Gros Jean and Mi-Jean had known this—if they had been respectful to Frog—they might have won the bet.

The Old Man asks Ti-Jean whether his parents are alive, and Ti-Jean responds that he thinks nothing dies. "My brothers are dead but they live in the memory of my mother," he shares. The Old Man says, "So you lost two brothers?" To this, Ti-Jean points out that he never said how many brothers he had, and asks to see the Old Man's foot. But when he sweeps up the Old Man's skirt, Ti-Jean only sees a regular, human, old foot. But then, a bird swoops down from the sky to untie the bundle of sticks on the Old Man's back, and the Old Man becomes frustrated. Ti-Jean offers to help him retie the sticks, and takes advantage of the situation to lift the Old Man's skirt from behind. He sees the Old Man's forked tail.

In this moment, Ti-Jean believes the Old Man is the Devil and is looking for evidence that this is true. Perhaps because he has sensed that Ti-Jean suspects him, the Old Man doesn't show him his foot. But the bird, in knocking the sticks off of the Old Man's back, helps Ti-Jean to see his tail, revealing him to be the Devil. Readers can interpret the bird's act as divine intervention—because Ti-Jean respects all of God's creatures, they assist him in winning the challenge.

Ti-Jean asks the Old Man what the fastest way to the Devil's estate is, and the Old Man tells him to proceed through the forest until he finds "springs of sulphur, where the damned souls are cooking." But Ti-Jean accuses him of lying, saying, "If evil exists, let it come forward." So the Old Man removes his mask, revealing himself to be the Devil. But Ti-Jean says that he can't bear to look at the Devil this way, because it is like looking "at the blinding gaze of God." To keep the challenge fair, the Devil replaces his mask as the Old Man.

In this passage, Ti-Jean demonstrates his courage. The Old Man clearly knows that Ti-Jean is onto him, and so he lies about how to find the Devil. Ti-Jean's insistence that the Devil replace his mask is evidence of his humility. Ti-Jean feels that the Devil, like God, is a figure too great for him, a human being, to look upon. This suggests that he has respect for divine beings' power.

The Devil assigns Ti-Jean the same task as his brothers: he is to catch and tie up a goat. Ti-Jean catches the goat once, and it escapes. Thinking the young boy will get angry, the Devil laughs to himself. But the next time Ti-Jean catches the goat, he returns with something in his hands, which he tells the Devil is goat-seed—he has castrated the goat.

By castrating the Devil's goat, Ti-Jean makes the crucial choice to ignore the Devil's rules. Even though he certainly respects the Devil's power as a divine being, Ti-Jean demonstrates that he does not respect the Devil's authority to determine the conditions of the challenge. He also demonstrates that he does not respect the Devil's property—the goat belongs to the Devil, and by castrating it, Ti-Jean defiles the Devil's property.

The Devil, a bit vexed that Ti-Jean has "fixed" his goat, struggles to control his temper. Sensing this, Ti-Jean says, "It looks like you vex." But the Devil contains himself, and gives Ti-Jean the next task: to count each leaf on each sugar cane stalk on the **plantation** before sunrise. When he has finished telling Ti-Jean what he must do, the Devil says, "Well, what are you waiting for?" To this, Ti-Jean replies, "I got a bit tired chasing the goat. I'm human you know."

This scene mirrors the scene in which Gros Jean gets into a fight with the Planter over taking a break. Whereas Gros Jean insists upon being recognized for his hard work, Ti-Jean doesn't care whether the Devil acknowledges that he has worked hard. He is comfortable admitting the limitations that being human places on his productivity—something that also suggests that he does not buy into a capitalist value system.

As soon as the Devil has gone, Ti-Jean says to himself, "Count all of the canes, what a waste of time!" Immediately, he calls out to all of the people working on the **plantation**, saying, "Hey, all you niggers sweating there in the canes! Hey, all you people working hard in the fields! [...] I'm the new foreman! Listen to this: The Devil says you must burn everything, now! Burn the cane, burn the cotton!" Ti-Jean repeats himself, saying, "Burn, burn, burn de cane!" The plantation workers repeat after him as a chorus. Frog enters, and shares how the plantation burned all night, until the very last sugar cane existed no longer.

Here, Ti-Jean again demonstrates a complete disregard for the Devil's authority and property. He doesn't give the Devil the power to determine what he, Ti-Jean, should do in the challenge. In calling on the plantation workers to destroy the plantation, Ti-Jean is essentially initiating a slave rebellion, one that will upset the systems of racism, capitalism, and colonialism that keep the poor, black Caribbean people working in poor conditions for the Devil.

Later that night, the Devil appears, drunk and singing. He laments, "I drink, and I drink, and I feel nothing. Oh, I lack the heart to enjoy the brevity of the world!" Frog appears on the path, and the Devil says, "O God, O God, a monster! Jesus, help!" He begins singing again, "When I was the Son of the Morning, When I was the Prince of Light." But, picking up the mask, he censures himself, saying, "Oh, to hell with that! You lose a job, you lose a job. Ambition."

In this passage, the Devil reveals his vulnerable side. His disgust at Frog mirrors Gros Jean and Mi-Jean's reactions to the animal. This suggests that the Devil, too, lacks respect for God's creatures, and in his lamentation, the Devil implies that he regrets having fallen from God's graces. This highlights Walcott's emphasis on the importance of faith.

As the Devil wallows in his misery, he sees Ti-Jean coming and puts on his Planter's mask. Ti-Jean is also carrying a bottle. The Devil asks whether he has done everything he had to do, and Ti-Jean says that he cleaned the entire **plantation**, drank some wine, and had curried goat for dinner. The Devil commends Ti-Jean for completing the tasks his brothers couldn't, and Ti-Jeans says, "The only way to annoy you is to rank disobedience."

Here, Ti-Jean's impertinence towards the Devil underscores the importance of resistance to colonial and capitalist forces, which the Devil's plantation represents. Ti-Jean's statement that the only way to annoy the Devil is to disobey also speaks to disobedience as the only way to disrupt colonial and capitalist forces in the Caribbean.

Exhausted, the Devil wants to go home, and as he is leaving, Ti-Jean throws his arms around him, saying he is drunk and wants to know the way home. The Devil doesn't believe Ti-Jean has really been drinking, as he doesn't smell like alcohol. But Ti-Jean insists that drinking is his vice, and the Devil offers him liquid brimstone to drink. Accepting, Ti-Jean says, "I have pity for all power. That's why I love the old man with the windy beard. He never wastes it." Reminded of his past, the Devil reflects on God, saying the fact that he could have everything as the son of God is what ruined him.

In this passage, Walcott again emphasizes the power of faith. Ti-Jean admires God because God does not abuse his power. On the other hand, the Devil, over the course of the play, has demonstrated time and time again that he does abuse power through his exploitation of plantation workers and even his choice to challenge the three brothers. The fact that the Devil is nostalgic for his days in God's favor further highlights the importance and value of a faithful religious life.

As he reminisces, the Devil sees the **plantation** burning in the distance, and asks Ti-Jean what the fire is. Ti-Jean tells him that it's the plantation, and he has set it on fire. The Devil responds and tells Ti-Jean that it's the only home he has. In response, Ti-Jean tells him that his mother had three sons, and didn't get vexed. Taking off the Planter's mask, the Devil says, "What the hell do you think I care about your mother? The poor withered fool who thinks it's holy to be poor, who scraped her knees to the knuckle praying to an old beard that's been deaf since noise began?"

In this moment, the Devil tries to undermine Ti-Jean's mother's faith in God by implying that because the family lived in poverty, they were not loved by God. This emphasis on the material evidence of God's love reflects Gros Jean and Mi-Jean's approach to religion: they, too, believed that God had ignored their family simply because the family was poor.

The Devil commands miniature devils to surround Ti-Jean, and tells them to seize him when Ti-Jean comments that the Devil isn't smiling. But Bolom intervenes, begging the Devil to be fair. The Devil shows no signs of listening, and raises his fork to kill Ti-Jean. Then, Ti-Jean's mother appears, asking the devil to have mercy on his son. Ti-Jean admits he's "scared as Christ." As the Bolom tries unsuccessfully to convince the Devil to play fair, the Devil reveals an image of Ti-Jean's mother dying in their hut. He asks Ti-Jean if he can sing, knowing that his mother is dying. Frog encourages Ti-Jean to sing, and the Devil feels his face wet with tears. The Bolom begs Ti-Jean to ask the Devil for life, and the Devil grants this wish, allowing the Bolom to be born.

The Bolom's birth at the end of the play is a representation of hope. Ti-Jean has just defeated the Devil—symbolically, he has just defeated capitalist, colonial influences in the Caribbean—and, as a reward, he gives the Bolom a chance to live. This suggests Walcott's hope that the destruction of these harmful systems will give rise to a hopeful future in the Caribbean, What's more, Ti-Jean's generous choice to advocate for the Bolom's right to live demonstrates Ti-Jean's own compassion, humility, and faith in the idea that all of God's creations have the right to live.

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