

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Vol. 1: The Pox Party Study Guide

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Vol. 1: The Pox Party by Matthew Tobin Anderson

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Plot Summary

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume One: The Pox Party by M.T. Anderson, is an award-winning book about one extraordinary boy's early life and subsequent attempts to escape slavery in pre-revolutionary America. Octavian is the son of an African princess and through his early life, enjoys a great education and many luxuries at his master's College of Lucidity in Boston.

While he is cared for and even given expensive things during his young childhood, he learns from a manservant by the name of Bono that he is still a slave, and that he still must learn how to deal with his white masters. While the revelation that he is a slave changes Octavian's outlook somewhat, real changes come to him and the College upon the death of a Lord Cheldethorpe, who once funded Lucidity College and its scientific research that Octavian participated in.

Octavian is being treated so well and educated as part of an experiment to see if blacks can be as intelligent as whites. His master, Mr. Gitney, quickly invites Cheldethorpe's heir to the college in hopes of securing the same amount of funding. Cheldethorpe develops feelings for Octavian's mother and affection for Octavian. For a brief period, it seems as though things will work out in everyone's favor. However, before the new Lord leaves, he approaches Octavian's mother and takes them with him to London as his slaves. When Cassiopeia demands her freedom, Cheldethorpe belittles her and through the wall, Octavian hears a fight begin.

Octavian's attempts at intervention wind up getting both himself and his mother severely lashed. Cheldethorpe refuses to fund the college any further. As colonial tensions rise, Gitney seeks funding and finds it in the form of a Mr. Sharpe, who represents the interests of plantation owners across the colonies, and seeks to destroy Octavian's success as an experiment. Tensions between the colonies and Britain grow worse, and the college is removed to a house in the town of Canaan, where Gitney plans to throw a pox party. This is a party intended to protect people from the smallpox virus by giving them safer versions of it. However, Octavian also learns that they have moved to the house in Canaan in order to guard against a rumored slave revolt. Many of the people at the house grow sick, and Octavian's mother dies from the disease. At this, Octavian makes his own escape, serving briefly in the rebel army and learning what it is like to be free. He is captured once again by his former masters, however, and confronts them over their hypocritical desire to free themselves from Britain yet retain their slaves in so doing. As Sharpe berates him, both he and Gitney fall victim to a poison given to them by a former tutor of Octavian's who cares about the boy greatly. The two flee to Boston together, in an attempt to find a way that Octavian might remain free.



Part One, Pages 3-36

Part One, Pages 3-36 Summary

Octavian begins to recall his life as a young slave. He and his mother, Cassiopeia, live with a number of scientists and academics that refer to themselves as the Novanglian College of Lucidity. They operate out of Boston in the pre-revolutionary days of America. Octavian does not know his father. The house and college are run and owned by a man named Mr. Gitney, who refers to others in the household, with the exception of Octavian and his mother, as a series of numbers. Gitney himself is 03-01, according to this system. Octavian is well educated and does not even realize that he is technically the property of someone else and not free. He is given many fine things and taken excellent care of, but forbidden to enter one room in particular, that even bears his picture with a crossbones beneath it. He is warned that if he ever tries to escape he will be captured by cruel people and forced to work. According to some, Octavian's mother is a princess in a faraway African empire, which makes Octavian himself royalty and treated far better than the other slaves, but he is, in some ways, treated as the subject of an experiment. During one of his master's experiments involving him, Octavian is forced to watch as a young girl is badly beaten. Octavian stares at the wall, and when Gitney asks him what he is watching, he answers that he is watching a daddy long-legs crawl along the wall. When Octavian incorrectly identifies the creature as a spider, he is forced to go without dinner.

Octavian's education includes ethics, and as he relates the tale, he insists that he is thankful for the education afforded to him by his masters. He recalls a time as a young boy, going into a workshed and finding his dog dead. He later discovers that the dog died from a mercury compound that Gitney had been putting in the animal's food. At the time, Gitney takes Octavian aside and asks him if he thinks that the dog has gone to heaven. He records Octavian's answer that he believes the dog has gone to heaven. At the top of the stairs in the college is a picture depicting a world as Gitney imagines it, as it is dedicated to reason, and everyone within it works to uncover the workings of a perfect world. Once in Octavian's childhood, Gitney arranges a trip to the countryside with many of the other scholars, and takes both Octavian and Cassiopeia along with him. They ride alongside Gitney in his carriage with a Dr. Trefusius, an old man who studies classics among other things. They reach an oak and begin preparations for dinner. A 07-03 challenges Octavian to a race on all fours towards a cow. Several other scholars join them on all fours, also carefully studying Cassiopeia as they play with Octavian. That night, Gitney declares to the others that he believes America is a new Eden. On the way home, Octavian asks the valet, another slave named Bono and designated 24-06, a question about the moon. The valet threatens him suddenly, and tells him that he must learn to fear the white men.

A man named Dugget delivers all sorts of specimens to Lucidity College from the frontier. Octavian finds him somewhat frightening. One day, Dugget brings in what he claims to be a dragon skull. Octavian places his head in the skull and cries until Gitney



allows him to sleep that way. Throughout this time, servants in the house weigh Octavian's waste every day, until he is taught to do it himself. A golden scale is used for the measurements, and he realizes no one else in the house measures their waste in this fashion. His mother tells him stories of the kingdom they come from in western Africa. She tells him that another prince became jealous when she married Octavian's father, and that this jealous prince declared war on them. Octavian's father was killed, but Cassiopeia refused to marry the other prince. As a result, he eventually exiles her to the coast, and finally to a French fortress, which is eventually captured by the British. At this point, she is taken over to America, eventually winding up in Boston at the age of thirteen. She is pregnant with Octavian, and Gitney hears word of her story. According to Cassiopeia, Gitney invites her to live at Lucidity College, if she allows the scholars to raise her son according to the principles of rationalism.

Part One, Pages 3-36 Analysis

Octavian's early life is introduced to the reader through stories of his young childhood, which are presented in rough chronological order. At the very beginning of his life, he does not differentiate himself from the other slaves, or indeed, anyone at the college, but Octavian is slowly made to understand that he is important, and this is partly due to the fact that he is royalty. Mr. Gitney does not seem a particularly cruel slave master in any case, though his experiments with the beaten girl and the poisoned dog do strike the reader as somewhat monstrous. Gitney is nevertheless kind to Octavian and Cassiopeia. 03-01, as Gitney calls himself, desires to understand and organize the world according to the principles of rationalism, and has elected to use Octavian for an experiment, or rather a series of experiments, though what exactly he wishes to learn with Octavian is unknown. Part of the experiment likely involves Octavian's education, but the reader does quickly learn, in any case, that the principles of rationalism in this era are not always kind, as Octavian is deprived of food for an incorrect assumption about the daddy long-legs, and also forced to witness acts of torture against other children. The rationalism of this time period was still apparently in its developing stages, and in many cases was still closely tied to acts and beliefs of racism and other forms of cruelty, as well as superstitions like astrology, which Octavian appears to make vague references to in his introduction to Lucidity College.



Part One, Pages 37-74

Part One, Pages 37-74 Summary

Several days after the race on all fours in the countryside with the scholars, Octavian is with Bono. He asks the servant why he wishes to change his name, and Bono explains that his name was a joke. Since his mother was pregnant with Bono when she was purchased, Bono was given the name Pro Bono, since he was free. He also tries to convince Octavian that he is in a similar situation, and that he and his mother are slaves just as Bono is. Octavian rejects this claim at first, but slowly begins to realize that Bono is right. As he begins to consider the implications that he is a slave, he notices he is surrounded by servants everywhere, and becomes increasingly conscious of his status as property, even though he continues to be well taken care of. He also begins to wonder what is behind the forbidden door with his picture on it. He gets his chance to enter it one night when Gitney holds a dinner party for wealthy people. Inside, he finds a chart explaining the different species of humans, then other similar charts for kinds of mammals. He suddenly hears his name being called, and realizes that Gitney wishes him to perform music for his guests. He comes across a picture of his mother, and is caught by Gitney. His master makes him sit on a chair and explains what they have been doing with him. He is part of an experiment that is designed to see if an African prince can ever become as well educated as a white man. Octavian's punishment is to hold a number of books filled with observations on him. Meanwhile, Gitney is planning to buy land from the Indians and sell it to Americans who wish to move westward, despite the fact that Parliament forbids further settlement at this point.

Octavian learns a great deal of Latin and Greek in his youth, including their histories, by Dr. Trefusis, who instructs him in the classical element of his education. Trefusis is designated 09-01 by Gitney, and the old man is very kind to Octavian. He has trouble believing that things still exist if they are not being observed by someone, and often steals away to his room during his teachings to ensure that things are still in order there. His music teacher, designated 13-04, is also very generous and kind both to Octavian and his mother. He is responsible for teaching Octavian the violin and for teaching Cassiopeia the harpischord. He also records many songs from Cassiopeia from her homeland, but she grows increasingly reluctant to sing them. 13-04 asks Octavian to convince his mother to sing them, but she discovers it eventually and stops singing them at all. While both of these teachers strive to educate Octavian as much as possible, tensions rise between the colonies and Britain. Soldiers become a common sight in Boston, though their presence is not welcome. Riots in the city begin to break out. Taxation and importation of British goods is creating a great deal of civil unrest, and Octavian witnesses acts of violence in the streets of the city, mostly aimed against the British. Octavian is too young to understand the conflict, but Mr. Gitney's very own household is gravely effected, as customs agents continue to seize more and more property intended for trade in the colonies.



Part One, Pages 37-74 Analysis

Octavian's sudden understanding that he is a slave has a profound effect on his outlook on life, even at his young age. He suddenly realizes that he is surrounded by servants, and that each of these servants has much more in common with him than he once realized. However, Octavian makes clear in his narration that he does not pity his upbringing, and does not want the reader to pity him, either. He insists that Mr. Gitney is not evil or cruel, and wants to please his master by becoming as well educated as he can be. His experiences with Trefusis and 13-04 are similarly enlightening, as both of these individuals care a great deal for the child, and go out of their ways to ensure his comfort, happiness, and understanding. As Octavian longs for his own freedom, the New World desires its freedom from the British Empire. This relationship between Octavian seeking his freedom as the people of America seek theirs is bound to become a recurring theme in the novel, and has been established here as a driving force of Octavian's understanding of the world.



Part I, Pages 74-116

Part I, Pages 74-116 Summary

One night, while Octavian and Dr. Trefusis are walking along Long Warf in Boston, they come across a customs agent in one of the carts, badly beaten. Several boys begin to beat the agent even more. When Octavian is eleven, Lord Cheldethorpe, designated 02-09 by Gitney, passes away suddenly. The great lord has donated much to the college, and the title passes on to his nephew, who Gitney does not know, but invites to Boston in hopes of securing the same funding as he once did from the man's uncle. When the new Lord Cheldethorpe arrives, he asks Gitney if there is a way to capture a one-legged seagull that kept him company on the voyage across the Atlantic. The new Lord Cheldethorpe is introduced to Cassiopeia, and the two begin flirting almost immediately. Cheldethorpe is also impressed with Octavian's intelligence, and decides to extend his stay in Boston at Lucidity College. He agrees to fund a trip into the forests of New York in order to take advantage of a one-time opportunity to gauge the distance between Earth and Venus. Octavian goes with the group, along with his mother. Cheldethorpe and several of the others hunt along the way, and the lord promises to kill a moose for the party. Not long after, Gitney begins unloading astronomical equipment, while Octavian rests inside a tent with his mother and Dr. Trefusis. Cassiopeia continues to become closer friends with Cheldethorpe, and Gitney asks that she uses that friendship to the benefit of Lucidity College. Eventually, Cheldethorpe approaches Octavian and asks him if he would like to learn how to swim. Bono watches the two together in the water, and later warns Octavian about the Lord, even as Octavian and Cheldethorpe become closer.

The group of academics studies Venus of the afternoon of June 3rd, 1769. Cheldethorpe is present, but quickly grows bored of the astronomy. He goes off a ways from the group with Cassiopeia to have her sketch him. The trip ends after they have collected the information on Venus, however, and Cheldethorpe still has not agreed to continue to fund the college. Two nights before his departure from Boston, the Governor throws a party for Cheldethorpe. Octavian and Cassiopeia are both told to be expected to play music for him during the party. Gitney asks numerous financial investments of Cheldethorpe, but the man still does not agree to anything specific. Finally, at the party, Octavian and Cassiopeia are called to play. Octavian performs marvelously, and later that night, after the part is over, Cheldethorpe comes to Cassiopeia's room, as Octavian listens through the door. Cheldethorpe offers to buy both Cassiopeia and Octavian, and take them back with him to London. She demands her own freedom out of the deal, and insults him when he makes a poorly timed joke. They begin to fight, and Octavian rushes into the room and attacks Cheldethorpe. Moments later, Bono comes in with footmen. Octavian and his mother are bound and taken to a stable where there are lashed severely by Cheldethorpe's servants. After this, Gitney takes them both to the ice-house and leaves them inside through the rest of the early morning. The Novanglian College of Lucidity loses Cheldethorpe as a patron.



Part I, Pages 74-116 Analysis

Before now, Octavian has witnessed acts of cruelty against slaves, but his awareness that he is in actuality a slave has awakened him to the reality that even though he is treated well, he is far from untouchable with respect to this sort of treatment. The friendship he and his mother have with Cheldethorpe is completely destroyed instantly, and their status as slaves determines the brutal outcome and their subsequent beating. The college's journey to the forest's of New York represents the closest thing to actual freedom that Octavian will ever know, but it is afforded to him only insofar as he is obedient and mindful of his place in the hierarchy of authority, at which he is on the very bottom as a slave, alongside his mother. As Cassiopeia and Octavian grow closer to Cheldethorpe, it does seem as though great things are in everyone's near future, but these hopes are dashed after the Governor's party, after the liberties Cheldethorpe takes with his position as a great lord of the British Empire. Octavian is even temporarily able to overcome his jealousy over his mother's attention to Cheldethorpe. However, Bono's warning to Octavian proves well-founded. Cheldethorpe's intrusion into Cassiopeia's room so late at night, and his subsequent mockeries of her desire for freedom, underscores the reality of their situation. Octavian once crawled inside the skull of a creature believed to have been a dragon, as though he were the dragon itself. It is this fury that awakens in him when he hears Cassiopeia begin to fight the Lord.



Part II, Pages 118-154

Part II, Pages 118-154 Summary

The day after the beating, Octavian is in great pain, and cannot wear a shirt because his wounds still bleed. His mother is in similar pain, and stays hidden away in her room for the most part. The entire college is in bad spirits. Octavian begins his studies again, after several days, with Dr. Trefusis, who begins teaching him stories of slave revolts from Rome. Eventually, Gitney introduces the college to a Mr. Sharpe, who congratulates everyone on its splendid work, and explains that the college must now work to produce benefits to mankind that it can readily sell as trade goods. Mr Sharpe also brings an end to the number system, and meets with each of the scholars to determine how best to make their studies profitable. He has an immediate dislike for Cassiopeia and her desire for luxuries, and brings an end to it. Sharpe also ends Trefusis' teachings, and undertakes to educate Octavian in Latin and Greek personally, but rejects the use of stories as a valid way of teaching the child Latin and Greek, instead forcing Octavian to translate dry paragraphs filled with facts. He also extends Octavian's responsibilities throughout the house, insisting that the boy learn to become a valet since a slave will never have need to know anything regarding the principles of science or higher learning. All of Octavian's academic pursuits except for Greek and Latin are stopped. He is taught by Bono how to become a better servant, and Octavian enjoys this because he looks up to the older slave very much.

Mr. Sharpe loses interest in Octavian's studies quickly, but does whip Octavian when the boy's translations are incorrect. Bono, on the other hand, continues to teach Octavian more about being a servant, and how to negotiate the fickle attitudes of his masters. At one point, Bono is able to convince Sharpe to give him a cravat with a bad stain on it, claiming that the stain will never come out. However, Bono quickly removes the stain and explains to Octavian that a slave has more power when he pretends to be foolish as opposed to being headstrong. During this time, Octavian grows bored of the lessons given to him by Sharpe, and Bono begins smuggling him books from the library, as long as Octavian agrees to translate the Greek and Latin for him. Sharpe also dislikes music for the most part, and Octavian is concerned that he will soon lose his opportunities to play, but instead is told that he will play publicly for the profit of the college, to make up for all of the money spent on his higher education. He is nervous about playing in front of a large group of people. The first night he is intended to do so, Sharpe informs him that the impresario has been told that Octavian came about his skill in music through a pact with the devil. Octavian is offended at the suggestion, but Sharpe tells him that those in attendance want a better story than years of hard work learning to play an instrument, and orders Octavian to go along with the story. Cassiopeia and Gitney also protest, but to no avail. In retribution, Octavian deliberately plays poorly. Many of the attendants praise his skill on the violin, but Sharpe is very displeased, and whips him when they return to the college.



Part II, Pages 118-154 Analysis

Before this time, Octavian has only witnessed the brutality of slavery, but now the reality of his situation has been laid bare, and he resists in every way that he can. Despite the fact that his mother was once royalty, she and Octavian are now both slaves, to be used for the profits of Lucidity College. It is from this realization, as much as from the wounds he received from the whip, that he remains in hiding so long after Cheldethorpe's departure. Gitney, however, may surprise the reader in his reaction, for even though Octavian's assault on Cheldethorpe could be viewed from him as having placed the college in jeopardy, Gitney never so much as scolds or even discusses the matter with Octavian or his mother. While this can be seen as gracious in the context of the relationship of a master and his slaves, the reader should not be too quick to judge Gitney in a positive light, either, for while he claims to adhere to the principles of rationalism, his main concern is for the continued existence of Lucidity College, and his decision to invite Mr. Sharpe as the new master of the school is undertaken for this reason and only this reason. Sharpe, while disposing of Gitney's eccentric system of enumeration under the reasoning that it promotes hierarchy and servitude, nonetheless proceeds to treat Octavian and Cassiopeia both as though they are merely property. The reader would do well to take note of this hypocrisy, for while Sharpe has taken control of the college, tensions between the colonies and Britain have grown worse, and it is not difficult to imagine that a similar hypocrisy is soon to be revealed in the colonies' struggle for freedom.



Part II, Pages 155-191

Part II, Pages 155-191 Summary

Sharpe uses Octavian as a fiddler for simpler gatherings after the deliberately botched gathering, and many of those that he plays are with other black musicians. During this time, the desire for revolution grows much stronger in Boston and the colonies overall. Five colonists are killed during a riot by British soldiers in an event that comes to be known as the Boston Massacre. Over the next few years, Lucidity College grows less and less important under the leadership of Sharpe, and its inhabitants grow less and less happy. Cassiopeia, in particular, has a difficult time adjusting to her new status. During this time, the King of England announces that all slaves on the British Isles are free, and she deeply regrets her decision to reject Lord Cheldethorpe. Bono steadily collects articles and advertisements regarding slavery as well during these years, and he is eventually discovered by Sharpe. Though Bono tries to play the fool, Sharpe orders him to be lashed as punishment. The next morning, Octavian confronts Gitney, and asks why they are treating him this way, and insists that Gitney wants his education to fail. Gitney denies this, and also denies that Sharpe wishes him to fail. Octavian learns during this confrontation that the college's funds now come from a group that does wish to prove Africans are less intelligent than whites, and that slavery is necessary for the betterment of everyone. The people funding the college are mainly plantation owners and dependent upon slaves. Octavian returns to his room and remembers the last lessons Trefusis taught him about the slave revolts, before Sharpe took over his education. Several months later, the Boston Tea Part occurs, and Octavian walks along the Wharf with Trefusis to watch the tea bags sink into the sea. Time passes, and tensions between colonists and royalists grow even worse. Finally, the British Governor is withdrawn, and General Gage arrives to take his place, signaling the beginning of military rule in the colonies. Lucidity College flees Boston to escape the royalists and takes refuge in the small town of Canaan on the countryside, to the house of one of Gitney's brothers. Bono is given away as a gift during this time, as most of the college's income is halted once the ports are closed. Before Bono is given up, he takes Octavian to a rock at their new house, and claims that the rock has wish-granting powers. Octavian says farewell to him and returns to Canaan, where eventually Gitney decides to throw what he calls a pox party on April 1st of that year, barely a month in the future. This is a party where people will supposedly be inoculated against the pox, and then people would be able to reside comfortable in the house while the more dangerous version of the disease ravages the rest of the population. Guests arrive for the party on the first of April, and they are mostly Gitney's family. Octavian suspects something is not right with respect to the intentions of the party. Gitney "inoculates" people against the disease by cutting open their arms and inserting a hair infected with smallpox inside of it.



Part II, Pages 155-191 Analysis

The college's retreat to the town of Canaan, the loss of Bono, especially from Octavian's perspective, and the commencement of the pox party all have the sense of bad tidings about them, and Octavian is right to suspect that Gitney has not been entirely straightforward in his reasons for throwing the party in the first place. The reader should take note that the advent of the Revolutionary War is on its way, historically speaking, and also that Gitney's solution to protecting everyone from smallpox is essentially ensuring that they get the virus, and almost certainly guaranteeing disaster. The Revolution, however, has been an expected development in the novel for some time. Gitney's pox party is suspicious, and should be treated as such. The threat of smallpox changes the course of the narrative through a heightened dramatic effect, where nearly all of the characters are placed directly in harm's way as a result of Gitney's "rationalism." Thus, Gitney and his associates may continue, at least briefly, to act as though they have defeated a serious illness, when in reality grave danger is not far off. The reader is also left in the dark at present as to the other suspected reasons behind the pox party, which Octavian mentions only briefly, but also explains that the end result yields drastic consequences.



Part II, Pages 192-234

Part II, Pages 192-234 Summary

The pox party begins pleasantly enough, and there is even the brief formation of a love triangle inside the residence, amongst the servants. Octavian plays a little music in the evenings while the non-slaves dance. However, Octavian does notice that three of Gitney's relatives watch over the servants in the yard at all times, and they are armed with many weapons. Gitney even call Octavian in to ask him if he has heard any news of a slave revolt, and Octavian denies it. Several days later, the fevers break out in the house. The fevers quickly give way to pock marks and more serious symptoms. Octavian feels himself catching a fever during one of the dances while he plays music. Trefusis speaks to him briefly about what will most likely happen next, and finally reveals to Octavian that the British are attempting to incite slave revolts by promising slaves their freedom after the war is over. Octavian realizes this is a large part of the reason that Bono was sent away. He also realizes this is another reason they have all been taken away to Canaan. The Gitney family seeks to protect their property, the slaves, in a location removed from the city of Boston, which the British have taken over. As Trefusis explains to Octavian that his masters are terrified of a slave revolt, Octavian's mother suddenly collapses mid-dance. He carries her out of the dance with Gitney, who scolds him for sitting in front of guests, and sends him back to play music. On his return, he is stopped by a group of young teenagers who ask him to get blindfolds for them. He is very sick, however, and goes to the stone that Bono told him had wish-granting powers. He digs the stone up and finds a set of keys, but realizes he can't currently use them to escape. He takes the keys nonetheless. Not long after, the pox grows worse. Octavian's case is not serious, and he is charged with helping the others as they become more seriously ill. Cassiopeia is one of the sickest of all of them. The first child who contracted the pox dies quickly, as Octavian's mother develops sores all over body. With the disease fully underway, the house is disturbed at night by the sound of muskets firing. Octavian goes outside where he learns that Britain's army has marched out of Boston, and are heading towards Canaan. The British force winds up at Lexington, and fighting erupts throughout the region. Octavian hears stories of violence through the day, as he tends to his sick mother. During this time, Octavian asks her to tell him the truth about their homeland. She refuses to give him any solid information, but does tell him that their original language was once all in song. Across the colonies, fears of a massive slave revolt mix with news of preparations for war. Octavian's mother dies from the pox, having been in great agony from the disease for days on end. The entire pox party is later written up as a scientific article, with Cassiopeia's dissection the main subject. Octavian loses himself to fury in his grief, and tries to attack Sharpe during the procedure, but is fought off by two of Sharpe's servants. He is removed from the room and tended to by Trefusis for several hours. Nevertheless, he takes advantage of the situation and escapes that very night from the house in Canaan. Trefusis sends a letter to a colleague of his explaining that Gitney held Cassiopeia's hand and told her that he loved her, even as she lay dead on the dissection table.



Part II, Pages 192-234 Analysis

Octavian effects his own escape mainly because he has been made to understand that his mother lost her very life in an experiment, and was ultimately treated like property, an object without a real mind or will. It is now well understood that the pox party was undertaken mainly to secure the slaves against a massive revolt that is feared by slave owners across the colonies. The monstrous decision to run the pox experiment caused his mother to die. That the experiment was run on the whites as well as the slaves only serves to reinforce that Gitney's belief in the rational still rises out of a worldview where the concept of rational is still not very well-formed, as he risked the lives of his family in the experiment. The death of his mother is made worse when Sharpe explains that Octavian's grief at seeing his mother's corpse is a kind of regression into an animal state, as opposed to a very natural and understandable reaction to seeing the only family he has ever known die in this fashion. Further, Sharpe's explanation that Octavian's subsequent rage is further proof that Octavian is a lesser animal than a white human takes his distorted argument far beyond the bounds of reason. Gitney is totally wrong in his former insistence that Sharpe is a disinterested scientific observer of Octavian's progress. Octavian was correct in his insistence that Sharpe wished him to fail, for no human could succeed if natural reactions were to be understood as animal instincts, thus as proof that one is somehow less of a human for having them. The mere fact that Sharpe includes this account in his article as solid evidence for the superiority of whites over blacks is complete evidence that Sharpe desired nothing but Octavian's total failure. It is interesting that Octavian's escape was mentioned in the article, which greatly provokes the reader's interest in the contents of the next section, for now Octavian has escaped, and will be free for a time, while he attempts to evade his captors



Part III, Pages 235-269

Part III, Pages 235-269 Summary

Gitney posts a five-pound reward for Octavian, who tries briefly to work for a farmer in Acton, but the farmer drives him off when he realizes that Octavian hasn't worked in fields at all. He tries to pass himself off as free to avoid capture, but is unable to do so without legal documentation. He's caught in a butcher's smokehouse at one point, but when he is threatened with a gun, he walks towards it without fear, and simply waits to be shot. When the man with the gun lowers it, Octavian raises back up to his face and asks to be shot. The man tries to knock him out with the gun instead, but Octavian fights and escapes. He is later taken on by a militia band of Patriots on their way to Boston because of his skills as a musician, after being discovered in an Inn playing the fiddle. His story is thereafter mainly relayed to the reader by Private Evidence Goring's letters to his sister and mother. The band of rebels marchers on towards Boston, which is closely guarded by the King's Army. The soldiers poke fun at how quiet Octavian is, but it is because they are curious about him and want to draw him into the conversation so that he will talk about himself. He tells Evidence, or Ev, that his name is Prince, and Ev refers to him by that name. Ev, at the very least, is a strong believer in freedom, and believes that Octavian was once owned by a very cruel master. Meanwhile, Sharpe has sent people out to look for Octavian. Ev Goring grows closer to Octavian, but he never reveals much about his past, and in reality only more familiar with the sadness Octavian possesses. As their company gathers more militiamen and makes preparations for the upcoming battles, Sharpe receives word from one of the school's trustees, who is very displeased over Octavian's escape, and learns that Bono has also escaped. The two escaped slaves are assumed to be working together in some fashion, and the trustee suspects it involves the massive slave revolt they all still fear. On May 28th, 1775, Octavian's band of militia engages with the Parliamentary Army. They originally plan to steal livestock and supplies from the enemy. They don't plan to fight, but they are spotted by the enemy army, which begins moving towards them. To complete their mission, they open fire on a number of horses. They are caught on their way back to the mainland and fired at by several enemy ships.

Part III, Pages 235-269 Analysis

The narrative of the story has been passed from Octavian to Evidence Goring, for the most part, and his correspondences to his mother and sister. This shift in narrative is somewhat jarring at first, but makes good sense considering two things. First, Octavian is too disturbed emotionally to continue his own personal account of events. Second, and no less important, is that this book has been a vantage point to the Revolutionary War, and, as Octavian has fled just in time for the fighting to really begin, the novel has actually made an appropriate shift, although the reasons that Octavian is fighting for the Patriots, or even the fighting in general, are far from clear. Note, most importantly, that Octavian is fighting with the rebels, who believe that slavery is a byproduct of a corrupt

Parliament, when many slave-owning Americans fear the British will emancipate their property and free the slaves. This is an important distortion that will play a role as the novel progresses, as it is similar to the Colonies' desire to hold onto their own slaves while they free themselves from the British.



Part III, Pages 270-306

Part III, Pages 270-306 Summary

Octavian's group stays hidden in a ditch as another group of militia fights off the Royal Army. While hidden in the trench for hours, the others ask him which Roman Emperor has his mother cut open in order to see where he came from. Octavian impresses the group greatly when he readily responds that it was Nero, and distances himself from them somewhat, despite their praises of his knowledge. One of their group suddenly panicks and charges the enemy as they approach, but is quickly shot down. Octavian walks towards the shot soldier armed with nothing but a sword, which he does not even raise, and in doing so also approaches the enemy. Evidence cannot stand the idea of Octavian being shot, and so leaps out of the trench to tackle him. Gunfire erupts as he does so. Another group of militia hiding farther back down the riverbank suddenly engages the redcoats. In the confusion, Octavian and Evidence manage to carry the wounded soldier away from the fight. Their militia group returns to Cambridge, and Octavian thanks Evidence for saving his life. On their way, they encounter children, who Octavian teaches about the various insides of fish and sheep, further impressing Evidence by his knowledge. Finally they reach Cambridge, where there is a large group of rebels. They are waiting for General Gage to come out of the city of Boston and engage them in battle. Octavian is moved to a work detail that builds trenches, and the waiting game continues for some time. Finally, their orders come in Evidence's group is led to a hill near Charlestown where they see a large assembly of ships from the royal navy. They spend an entire night quickly building fortifications on the hillside. Evidence is ordered back to Cambridge alongside the others who spent the night building. Their camp is soon full of wounded militia, as the British manage to take the hillside. Evidence grows disheartened and seeks out Octavian to play music for his group and so they can share dinner together. He brings Octavian back to his encampment. Everyone is afraid that they will be overrun by the enemy very shortly, and they all share this misery briefly. After this, Evidence recommends Octavian to a Mr. Turner, who seeks an able musician. Octavian is wary of the invitation at first, but realizes he is the perfect man for the job, and so travels to meet Mr. Turner. Unfortunately, Mr. Turner is really Sharpe in disguise, who heard of Octavian's presence nearby and set up a trap for the slave in order to recapture him and bring him back to Canaan. Octavian is once again in shackles.

Part III, Pages 270-306 Analysis

Though the reader has still been without Octavian's narrative, an important character development takes place through the second half of this third section of the novel, particularly near the end of the battle between rebels and the redcoats. It seems strange, at first, that Octavian is suddenly willing to live after having clearly been ready to die so often. However, this sudden willingness to live comes after Evidence saves him from the enemy, risking his own life in doing so. Octavian realizes that he is being treated as an equal amongst the soldiers, who really do fight for freedom, as Evidence

has insisted. While this does not completely allieviate his mournful nature, Octavian is still given a new reason to live, and this persists, up to the point of his capture. The rest of the novel is bound to explore his confrontation with his old masters, Mr. Gitney and Mr. Sharpe.



Part IV

Part IV Summary

Octavian is bound and put in darkness, with the iron mask on, and he is left for a long time in silence. He recalls a lesson that Gitney once taught him, throwing an egg at Octavian's face during breakfast time and informing him that the egg has the substance of a chicken, but not the form. Eventually, the mask is removed, and he is fed. He finds himself in one of the house's upper rooms. He refuses to eat at first, but finally breaks down and takes in oatmeal. He wonders how he managed to be caught again, and comes to realize that Sharpe must have had friends in the rebel army to help him do so. Though he did become good friends with Evidence, he knew that the private's beliefs regarding the eventual freedom of all slaves was misled. Octavian understands that the revolution is taking part to preserve slavery, and that many of the blacks in his regiment were slaves whose masters were paid for their services they performed as soldiers. Octavian is asked about Bono, and if he has heard any news from the other slave. He denies having heard anything, but they continue to question him and finally he remains silent on the matter. Eventually, he is told that he will discuss his role in the household, and is brought to the old experimental chamber before Gitney, Trefusis, and Sharpe. Gitney tells him the story of Phaeton, who once stole his father Apollo's chariot and rode it across the sky, but lost control of it and burned much of the earth. Octavian is not interested in the story, and asks them how they consider themselves liberators when they insist on slavery. Gitney insists that they would free all slaves if it weren't so expensive and dangerous to America's economy. Sharpe interrupts and tells Octavian that he personally helped prove that blacks are not fit to be free, since he escaped in the first place. Octavian refuses to submit to this logic, and Sharpe has the mask thrown on him once again. Sharpe insists that the entire world runs on commerce, and that slavery is a natural part of commerce. During this speech, Gitney suddenly falls to the floor, and Sharpe grows confused, then collapses as well. Trefusis reveals that he has poisoned the tea. He frees Octavian from the mask, and uses his shackles to chain Sharpe to a desk. He takes Octavian out of the house and orders a carriage prepared for them both. He tries to insist to members of Gitney's family that Gitney and Sharpe do not wish to be disturbed, but Gitney's family continues to ask about him. As they leave, Trefusis assures Octavian that if they are caught, they will both be hanged. Trefusis plans to arrive in Cambridge, then enter Boston at night, but Octavian insists they do so from Roxbury instead, as fewer soldiers will be watching. They make it into the city, and Octavian is allowed to continue his life as a free man.

Part IV Analysis

Octavian stands bravely against his former masters and denies that they have any claim to him as property, and here Gitney's complicity is made clear, as his refusal to set Octavian free is framed in terms of economic convenience. Gitney's argument is utterly weak, whereas as incorrect as Sharpe may be regarding human nature, he is at the

very least a man of conviction, having been convinced of the principal of profitability since his introduction into the novel. Trefusis may surprise the reader in his assistance of Octavian, but considering the man was of great importance to Octavian throughout the novel, and that he clearly yearned for the boy's freedom from the start, it follows logically that he risks his own life to help the boy in escaping Gitney and Sharpe.



Characters

Octavian

Octavian is the son of an African princess, and very close to his mother up until the time of her death. Though he is a slave, he is originally treated very well. He is part of an experiment run by his master, Mr. Gitney, who wishes to prove that Africans can be just as intelligent as whites. Though he does have a respect for the things that Gitney did for him during his youth, Octavian still wishes to be free, and this wish grows desperate when he sees his mother die as the result of an experiment Gitney runs while they are in Canaan. Octavian has grown to be at odds with his status as a slave by increments ever since it was brought to his attention that he was in fact a slave. This distaste for his status as a slave grew the most when he confronted Lord Cheldethorpe to protect his mother, and of course at the death of his mother. He felt as though he could not withstand slavery without her, and so escaped, briefly becoming a soldier in the rebel army against England, and experiencing true freedom for the first time. He is captured by Sharpe and Gitney, but former tutor Dr. Trefusis poisons them both, giving them time to escape the house at Canaan once again. Octavian is described as tall and incredibly thin. He is liked and respected by many, and despite Sharpe's claims that his education is not successful, is deeply intelligent.

Cassiopeia

Cassiopeia is an African Princess and Octavian's mother. She is beautiful, skilled in the arts of sketching and playing the harpischord, but somewhat demanding with respect to the finer things in life. She hides her and her son's status as slaves from him for quite some time, saying that she agreed to come to Lucidity College with Gitney when in fact she was more than likely purchased. She also very likely lies to her son about the nature of their homeland, but quickly refuses to talk about it as Octavian grows older. She is only thirteen when Octavian is born, and desires freedom very strongly. This desire leads her to reject Lord Cheldethorpe when he offers to purchase her out of his affection for her. She does not get along with Sharpe when he becomes a part of the college, and is increasingly treated as a slave while Sharpe runs the household. Cassiopeia gets infected with smallpox during the pox party, and this infection grows serious. She eventually dies from it, and her loss drives Octavian to seek his own freedom. Near the end of her life, Octavian realizes he, and thus, the reader, really knows very little about her, except that she was brought to the colonies at the age of thirteen with very little in the way of hope. Octavian is so affected by her passing that he crosses and blacks out parts of the book where he has tried to write about it.



Gitney

Mr. Gitney is in charge of the Novanglian College of Lucidity, and uses Octavian in an attempt to prove that Africans may be just as intelligent as Europeans. For the most part, Gitney is generous to both Octavian and Cassiopeia, and goes to great expenses in order to ensure that the two have many fine things. However, he is not without a streak of cruelty, as he is also noted for beating a girl in front of Octavian to measure his reaction, and for poisoning Octavian's dog at one point to learn about the child's reaction. When darker times fall on the college, he is forced to take funds and direction from a Mr. Sharpe, who has a different notion of the way that the college ought to be run. Gitney seems to be a man of soft principles, readily abandoning his own convictions so that the college might continue to exist in a meagre form. He is ultimately responsible for the death of Cassiopeia, though he is heard to proclaim his love for her upon her death, this fact is ignored in the article detailing her dissection. He defends the actions of Mr. Sharpe weakly, so that while he is seen as something of a benefactor at the beginning of the book, by the end he is essentially powerless, and simply trying to convince Octavian that slavery is not desirable, but is totally necessary. In this fashion, however, he does represent a powerful and real notion that many colonists ascribed to.

Bono

Bono is the name of Gitney's valet. He is the slave responsible for informing Octavian that the young boy is also a slave. Octavian looks up to the man as the closest thing he has to a father, and when the young man undertakes training to become a valet, the two grow even closer. Bono is highly intelligent, but insists on pretending otherwise so that his masters don't grow suspicious of him. Eventually, he is caught with a collection of slave-trade related articles and whipped for it. Shortly after, he is given away as a gift, and Octavian comes to realize it is because Gitney fears that his former Valet was becoming the center of a large slave revolt. Octavian also hears that the old man manages to escape his own slavery at roughly the same time he does.

Trefusis

Trefusis is Octavian's tutor in the classics. He is an old man, and very friendly to both Octavian and his mother. He displays genuine sympathy and care for the boy, as when Octavian is beaten and Trefusis begins to give him Roman stories about slave revolts. He later helps Octavian escape Gitney and Sharpe a second time by poisoning them with Opium and risking his own life.

Sharpe

Mr. Sharpe comes to control Lucidity College after it loses its funding from Lord Cheldethorpe. He is profit-driven, and determined to prove that Octavian can never be as intelligent as a white man. He dislikes Octavian's mother, and replaces the boy's



stories in Latin and Greek with boring paragraph translations. He is also the character that does most of the dissection on Cassiopeia.

Dugget

Dugget is a man who delivers specimens and other supplies to Lucidity College. Octavian does not like him, and is somewhat afraid of him.

13-04

13-04 is the music teacher of both Octavian and Cassiopeia. He tries to record Cassiopeia's songs, but she quickly grows relectant to recite them.

Mr. Goff

Mr. Goff is known as 07-03 throughout most of the book, and is the painting and sketching artist at Lucidity College.

Evidence Goring

Evidence Goring is a private in the rebel army who takes quickly to Octavian and admires the youth. The two become good friends late in the novel.



Objects/Places

Books

Books are everywhere in Lucidity College, and form the backbone of Octavian's education.

Chains/Shackles

These restraints are used to keep slaves in place, and Octavian personally finds himself in them a number of times.

Ships

As most of the novel takes place in or near Boston, ships are a common sight in the harbor.

Muskets

These primitive guns were used during the revolutionary war.

Fiddles/Violins

Octavian is highly skilled with the violin, and plays it often.

Redcoats

The name given to British soldiers by the colonists. These soldiers grow more common as the novel progresses.

Boston

The majority of the novel takes place in Boston, Massachusetts, just before the Revolutionary War

Canaan

A town near Boston



Cambridge

A town near Boston and closely connected to it.

Roxbury

Another town close to Boston

Lucidity College

This is the college operated by Mr. Gitney, which first is established in Boston and then moves to Canaan when people grow nervous about slave revolts.

England

Often mentioned throughout the novel, England owns the colonies and seeks to increase its own revenues by restricting trade in them.



Themes

Freedom versus Slavery

No phrase better sums up the novel as a whole than Freedom versus Slavery. Octavian desires freedom even when he is not poorly treated. This desire to be free is man's natural state, so taken for granted amongst slave-owners in the colonies that they cannot understand why slaves would even desire it. This constant striving for freedom is the driving force in the novel, and the reason that Octavian comes into conflict with the likes of Gitney and Sharper over his own freedom is that they refuse to equate his desire to be free from slavery with their own desire to be free from Britain's rule. The other slaves in the novel that Octavian familiarizes himself with all desire freedom as well, one even dies in the fighting and is freed after death for his work. Hence, the institution of slavery is simply grossly mistaken that slaves are better off as such, and it is the ownership and the wealth that the slaves represent which drives the desire to keep them as slaves, not any sort of desire to enforce the natural order of things. Sharpe's view on the matter most strongly supports this idea, since he is convinced that the world is run solely on commerce, he is predisposed to take any action Octavian commits as evidence of his inferiority to whites. Despite Sharpe's insistence that slavery is a decent practice, it is anything but decent.

War

Closely related to the theme of slavery, is that of war. At the beginning of the novel, there is little if any indication that conflict is on the way, and in fact the only thing that may clue the reader in to the fact that the Revolutionary War is on the way would be a careful attention to the dates listed in the novel. Several historical events occur and are discussed in the novel as well, including the Boston Massacre and Boston Tea Party. The war becomes the central focus during the third part of the novel, when Octavian actually joins the rebel forces against Britain, despite the fact that Britain has promised to free all slaves at the end of the war. The war serves to highlight the atrocities and unfairness of a slavery system, as slave-owners fear a massive revolt that never comes to pass, and begin treating their slaves more harshly as a result. It is also important to note that typical literature that originates in the United States tends to portray the English as enemies, and that this book takes a much more careful and honest look at the war and the causes of war, one of which was the possession of slaves, which England strongly felt should be outlawed, and did apply pressure on the colonies in order to bring emancipation about. Though the war has really just begun by the end of the novel, the violence is present throughout.

Intelligence

Sharpe and other slave-owners attempted to use the idea that slaves could not be as intelligent as Europeans in order to justify their captivity. While this idea has long since been disproven and discarded as pro-slavery nonsense, during the Enlightenment it was in fact a very common scientific idea that non-whites were naturally less intelligent than whites, and thus could not be trusted to coexist peacefully with whites in society. This argument is often used when an oppressor seeks a reason that it is oppressing, and was also used to keep women from having the right to vote for centuries. Octavian's intelligence is unquestionable to the reader. As the narrator he consistently demonstrates his higher faculties, and in instances where Evidence Goring makes note of him, it is often to remark on how extraordinary his intelligence is. However, it is not the fact of Octavian's intelligence that makes him deserving of freedom. In fact, nowhere in the novel does he imply that he believes he should be free simply because he was given an education equal to that of a wealthy European. Instead, Octavian understands implicitly that the arguments with respect to intelligence are no more important than they are true. Human beings are not deserving of freedom simply based on whether or not they know Greek or Latin, or any of the sciences.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is often the first-person perspective of Octavian as well as letters from the first-person point of view of characters such as Private Evidence Goring. The point of view is less than reliable at many points in the novel, especially during Octavian's early childhood, as he is reconstructing these memories at a later time, and even admits to not being sure if his earlier account is given in anything like chronological order, though he makes that attempt. However, the unreliability of the narrator does not stem from fears or perceptions that he is in any way dishonest, but instead simply not entirely clear how certain events transpired. The point of view does well to drive home the fact of Octavian's humanity, and sharp and critical contrasts are made against his point of view and the detached articles from newspapers or letters portraying slaves as property and only property. In the brief instances where the narrative is suspended for a news dispatch the reader catches a view of a very different reality from the one Octavian or indeed anyone at the College of Lucidity is accustomed to.

The story is revealed through exposition, but there is a great deal of significant dialogue, and action becomes critical to events at the beginning of the third part, which Octavian does not provide a direct narrative for. It is also recounted in very rough chronological order at the beginning, and becomes more or less completely chronological as Octavian relates closer events.

Setting

The novel is set almost entirely in the colony of Massachusetts just before the Revolutionary War. Ships and sea-trade dominate the economy, and tensions rise between the English and the colonists as the colonist's resentment of their masters grows steadily. Streets are made of cobblestone and houses are constructed out of brick and thatched rooftops for the most part. Science has had a profound impact on the citizens of the colonies, and alongside the deep exploration of science has come the age of rationalism. The College of Lucidity itself is a wealthy home at the beginning of the book that explores the principles of rationalism in an attempt to order a perfect world.

Outside the cities of the colonies lie vast expanses of towns and then beyond that, wilderness. The East Coast is sparsely populated at this time, and the woods are regarded as bewitched or filled with Indians for the most part, but they represent to the colonists a new frontier that they wish to settle and bring order to. Surrounding Boston itself is the sea, upon which the city is completely dependent for survival in the form of ships bearing trade goods and the like.



Language and Meaning

The novel is written in the form of modern English that prevailed at the time during which the events were to have transpired. In the case of Octavian's narrative, the language is easy to understand, if somewhat florid and complex in choice of words, however. Octavian uses, for the most part, readily accessible English, though a few words possess outdated spellings here and there, and some words are no longer used at all, these occasions are rare and do not disrupt the general flow of the novel at all.

The third section, however, can be somewhat of a challenge for the reader to follow, and it should be kept in mind that in many places the account turns into more of a list than a narrative. Several people record written accounts of sighting Octavian while he has escaped his masters, but they are barely literate, as farmers of that time would be barely literate, and so this is an accurate reflection, even though it is difficult to read. Evidence Goring uses the ampersand, the "&," a great deal in his account, and tends to break off into rambling lists, which is consistent with what the reader knows to be true of his character.

This is a good place to make note of a possible oversight on behalf of the author. In Octavian's account, many segments regarding his mother's death are blotted out, presumably by ink, as though Octavian becomes too disturbed to write about the occasion of her passing. This is understandable, but the novel then goes on to leave his own personal account out of the work while he fights against England, that being a time where he was still emotionally disturbed. It is worth wondering how difficult it would have been for Octavian to recount these events at whatever time in the future he set about recounting them, because his narrative has clearly been a reconstruction since the beginning.

Structure

The novel is divided into four parts, each further divided into chapter breaks which are not named or numbered. The chapters themselves tend to be very short, most no longer than five pages, and none much longer than ten. There is, as a result, a great deal of empty space on many of the pages, and in fact a significant amount of the narrative is blotted out in regards to his mother's death.

The novel's plot is very simple, Octavian desires his freedom. Alongside this desire is his eventual service in the rebel army which has been foreshadowed by the mounting conflict between the colonies and the states since near the beginning of the novel. Octavian receives an extraordinary education, yet nonetheless resents his status as a slave and seeks escape from his unsatisfactory life, eventually being aided by a former tutor of his.

The novel begins at a very slow pace, but quickly picks up speed as more concrete scenes are encountered and expanded upon. Octavian himself is the focus of nearly all of these scenes, and as he grows older, the violence and reality of slavery is steadily

brought to bear through his eyes, until the third part when, despite the fact that events begin to unfold very quickly, we lost his personal narrative in favor of a friend and fellow soldier of Octavian's.

Quotes

"I did not ask why we were not numbered, as the others were; I suspected that it was due to my mother's royal blood - for I was told from my earliest youth that she was a princess in her own kingdom, could she but get back to it from her exile" (Part I, p. 8).

"As with so many elements of my upbringing, it took me some time to appreciate what thought had gone into the regulations by which I was raised, and the extreme purity and inviolability of their conception" (Part I, p. 29).

"Latin and Greek were taught me by Dr. Trefusis, 09-01, the aged philosophe. In his youth, he had been welcomed at the courts of Versailles and Sansouci" (Part I, p. 58).

"I gave little thought to the debates regarding taxation by our Parliament. When the King's ministers demanded that the Colonies pay the costs of the Indian and French wars, wherein the armies of our nation had fought with such abandon in my extreme youth to secure our borders from, as they said, the incursions of savagery, I had no memory of the conflicts, and no property with which to pay, and so taxation or no seemed all the same to me" (Part I, p. 71).

"My mother and I were told, before the event, that we should rest well and be prepared, for we might be called upon to play our instruments, and astound the assembled with our facility in music-making" (Part I, p. 101).

"In the morning, we were taken inside, because it was known we would die of cold if exposed for any longer" (Part I, p. 115).

"I missed my studies with Dr. Trefusis inveterately; for reading, once begun, quickly becomes home and circle and court and family; and indeed, without narrative, I felt exiled from my own country" (Part II, p. 143).

"Far out in the harbor, tea clotted the brilliancy of sun upon the water. Men thin as insects rowed scows between the clumps, shepherding them with paddles, pressing down upon them, dousing them, drowning them, so that light might play unimpeded upon the winter sea" (Part II, p. 173).

"When I trod to the top of the stairs with their meals, I noted only the sentinels' air of watchfulness. They looked out the windows; one smoked. They watched the coming day; they watched the laborers turn in from the fields" (Part II, p. 195).

"We watched each other's eyes. We were as strangers, in that moment—as intimate as strangers—for strangers know more of us, and can judge of us more without reproach than even those we love" (Part II, p. 219).

"O Fruition, dear Sis, the Spirit of Liberty stirs the Countryside like Sap & everywhere I am sensible of the Blossoms" (Part III, p. 243).



"& then I saw that on my other Side, PRINCE was risen to his Feet & walked towards John; walking with an Air of Defiance; with no simple intent of Heroism; but we could see he WISHED TO DIE" (Part III, p. 274).

"Friend Prince has been requisitioned for a Work Detail of Negroes & Irishmen which is much relied upon to dig Ditches & hoise Abatis" (Part III, p. 285).

"When last I had been imprisoned, in my childhood, she had been at my side; we had been stashed in the ice-house. I was not, then, alone, for she loved me; she was with me then and spake comfortably to me" (Part IV, p. 313).

"I knew not what I ran toward; I knew not what freedom meant, though it seemed at the moment to mean the quickness with which we leaped over rivulets; I thought on the word freedom, and could picture nothing that it might be, beyond freedom to die; I knew not what the hours held, nor the years; nor whether I would one day sit beside my river; nor whether I would hang, nor fight, nor what man I would be, nor what woman I would take to wife; nor what would be the fate of this nation, birthing like a Caesar, tearing its mother midst blood and travail" (Part IV p. 350).



Topics for Discussion

How does Octavian feel about Gitney as a young child? Explain how this changes as he grows older.

Why is Octavian jealous of Cheldethorpe's attention toward his mother? Does this lead him to attack the Lord when his mother is threatened? Explain.

What is the most important change that Sharpe brings about at Lucidity College? What about in the life of Octavian when Sharpe first arrives? Why does he do this?

Is Bono a wise man? Why or why not?

What regarding Cassiopeia's past is likely true, given that she attempts not to discuss it so much? Why does she refuse to talk about it with Octavian as he grows older?

Why does Octavian join the rebel army if the English have promised to free the slaves?

What evidence, if any, is there that a large slave revolt will take place in the colonies? Are the slave-owners correct in their fears? Why or why not?