Barkskins Study Guide

Barkskins by Annie Proulx

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this guide: Proulx, Anne. Barkskins. New York: Scriber, 2009.

The novel, told from the third-person omniscient point of view, begins in 1693, when René Sel and Charles Duquet arrive in New France, where they are indentured servants for the eccentric Monsieur Claude Trépagny. They work cutting trees so that Monsieur Trépagny may sell the timber. Sel and Duquet live in a hut with Mari, a Mi'kmaq woman, and her sons Elphège and Theotiste, who Monsieur Trépagny has laid claim to. Monsieur Trépagny lives in a luxurious house downstream.

A young girl named Renardette comes to live with the woodsmen. Duquet disappears into the forest one day, and everyone believes he is dead. They later learn he has become a fur trader in the city. Monsieur Trépagny goes hunting for him to seek revenge, and dies. René moves into Trépagny's house and takes Mari as his wife. They have a happy marriage and have several children, Achille and twins Noë and Zoë, in addition to Elphège. After many years, Mari suddenly becomes very sick and dies. Later, René dies while cutting timber in the forest.

Meanwhile, Duquet has become a successful fur trader in Odaawa. Eventually, he turns his business to timber. He becomes an obsessive businessman who is constantly seeking to expand his empire. He takes a ship to Europe and then to China where he trades furs and woods. In Amsterdam, Duquet marries Cornelia Roos, the daughter of a wealthy family. They have many children, including two daughters, a son named Outger, and three adopted sons named Jan, Nicolaus, and Bernard. Duquet returns to New France, where he changes his name to "Duke," and continues to expand his timber business. His sons eventually join him and they form the company Duke & Sons. At the age of 51, Duke is murdered by Dud McBogle, a man who was attempting to steal his property.

Mari and René's children struggle without their parents and find it difficult to navigate the new world as Native Americans. They live in a wikuom in the forest in Mi'kmaq territory. Eventually, the sons leave home to try and find work in the lumber industry. Later, they return to their parents' large house, but it is eventually taken from them by Renardette, whose claim as a white woman overpowers their own. They return to Mi'kmaq territory and abandon the whiteman ways for good. One day, Achille returns home from hunting to find that his wikuom has been burned with his wife and children inside. Achille leaves his family.

Duke & Sons continues to prosper. The adopted sons marry and become popular in American society. Outger, too, marries, but leaves the family for the life of a botany professor in Europe. Bernard dies of an infection after a nail comes loose on the sole of his boot. Later, his wife dies and it is discovered she was biologically male.

Kuntaw Sel leaves the family and is taken by Outger's daughter, Beatrix Duquet, to a home in Penobscot Bay. Kuntaw's estranged son, Tonny, finds him there and rejoins the family in addition to Kuntaw's children with Beatrix: Amboise, Jinot, Elise, Francis-Outger, and Josime. Their lives are a blend of whiteman ways and Kuntaw's Mi'kmaq ways. Beatrix grows ill with cancer and she and Kuntaw grow apart as Beatrix falls in love with her doctor. Following Beatrix's death, Kuntaw pledges his life to Mi'kmaq ways. Jinot, Josime, and Amboise, who have been away at lumber camps, reunite and begin working together. Josime leaves the group for a woman.

James Duke meets Posey Brandon, a married woman, and begins visiting her almost every day. Her husband is a mentally-ill recluse, who James attempts to get rid of so he can wed Posey. He attempts to frame Mr. Brandon for murder and fails. Still, eventually Mr. Brandon dies of natural causes and James and Posey wed. They give birth to a daughter, Lavinia.

One day, when Jinot and Amboise are working in the forest, a massive wildfire breaks out. The fire kills many, including Amboise. Jinot lives, but his leg is badly wounded and leaves him with a permanent limp. Jinot is nursed back to health by a Native American family. Eventually, a man named Resolve Smith tells him about work at a new ax factory in Massachusetts. They head there, looking for work, and are hired by the factory owner, Albert Bone. Bone takes an interest in Jinot and brings him on a trip to Boston. Jinot marries a woman named Minnie and they have twin sons, Amboise and Aaron. Amboise dies in a sledding accident, sending the parents into depression. Cholera breaks out and the entire family, save for Jinot and Aaron, is swiftly killed by the disease. Aaron goes to Nova Scotia to find his Mi'kmaq family, for he desires to learn their ways. Jinot goes with Mr. Bone on a voyage to New Zealand. Mr. Bone is killed by a Maori man, and Jinot is held captive as a suspect. Eventually, he is released, but is forced to work in order to pay for his voyage back to America. While working, his bad legs becomes wounded and infected, and Jinot dies. Etienne Sel, an uncle of Jinot's, comes to claim him and ends up befriending Joseph Dogg, Mr. Bone's foreman. Eventually, they return to Boston together.

James Duke and his associate Lennart Vogel goes on a surveying trip with Armenius Breitsprecher. They find a massive forest in Michigan and agree to bring Duke & Sons to the area. Lavinia Duke begs her father to let her join the Duke & Sons business. Though he thinks it will not work, she is so persistent that he eventually allows her the role of a clerk. She succeeds all expectations for the position. She discovers that Armenius and his brother Dieter have their own timber company and are planning to steal the land from the Duke's. Lavinia and her father relocate to Detroit, where they can better oversee their new land. James Duke dies in a shipwreck, and Lavinia is left to manage Duke & Sons.

Lavinia shifts the company to Chicago and renames it Duke Logging and Lumber. She understands the need for an heir, and hires a detective to investigate her lineage. The detective produces information of a family of Native Americans living in Canada, and Lavinia is infuriated by this information. Eventually, after a rivalry with the Brietsprecher family, Lavinia realizes her affections for Dieter and they marry. Shortly after they marry,

Dieter is in a railroad accident that leaves him bedridden. Lavinia throws herself into the business more than ever in order to avoid caring for him. After he recovers, the couple takes a honeymoon to New Zealand, where they see the famed kauri tree. A Maori woman pleads with Lavinia to not cut the trees, but Lavinia is unmoved. When the couple returns to America, Lavinia gives birth to a son, Charles Duke. Shortly after, it is discovered that Lavinia's office assistant Annag and the company lawyer Mr. Flense have run away together, taking with them a considerable amount of the company money.

Aaron Sel, the only surviving son of Jinot, returns to find his Mi'kmaq family living in Nova Scotia. He remains there for two years before attempting to find his father. This leads him to Boston, where he takes work on a ship. Eventually, he returns to Canada in an attempt to find Mi'kmaq people. Instead, he finds ruined villages. After further searching, though, he finds a group of Mi'kmaw people, and Peter, Etienne, Kuntaw and Alik Sel among them. Slowly, the group tries to rebuild the Mi'kmaw way of life. They search major cities for people of Mi'kmaq heritage in an attempt to rebuild a proper village and culture. Their ways become a blend of traditional and whiteman ways. Reservations are created as the homeland becomes the property of timber companies and is destroyed in the process.

Lavinia dies suddenly one day, and Dieter quickly remarries. He has another son, James Bardawulf Brietsprecher. The first son, Charley, goes on to study forestry at Yale. He and his father come to disagreements about the lumber business, as Charley has a preservationist mindset and does not want to be involved with deforestation practices. Charley attempts to rape James Bardawulf's wife, Caroline, and when James Bardawulf discovers Charley in the act, he beats him and Charley falls into a coma. When Charley wakes, Dieter sends him to live in tropical South America, where he spends his days cataloging the hundreds of varieties of trees. He sends his reports to James Bardawulf's son, Conrad.

In the 1960's, Sophia Hannah, Dieter's youngest child, fights for a place within the family business. The men of the company agree to give her the title of company historian, and she becomes responsible for chronicling the Duke family history. In the process, she discovers the genealogy report Lavinia received years ago, stating that the Sel family may have a legitimate claim to the company. The company members panic and agree to sell the company.

Bren and Edgar-Jim Sel have a daughter named Sapatisia. She is an intense, headstrong woman who wishes to learn as much as she can about plants and the forest. She leaves home early and begins travelling, checking in only with the occasional postcard. Years later, two cousins, Jeanne Sel and Felix Mius are living on a reservation. They wish to leave the reservation and work incredibly hard in school and eventually in community college. They attend a lecture by Dr. Alfred Onehube, Sapatisia's ex-husband and a vocal supporter of the natural world. Jeanne and Felix are so inspired by his lecture, they become dedicated environmentalists. Jeanne discovers an article about Sapatisia in a magazine, and she and Felix resolve to find her. They hitch a ride to where she lives and talk with her briefly. She is brusque and does not

initially want them there. Eventually, she asks for their addresses and says she will be in touch.

Later, Jeanne and Felix receive mail saying they have received scholarships to go and do fieldwork with Sapatisia and her team. They return to her home, where she has assembled a diverse team from around the world. Together, they will study the local environment and try to learn as much as they can so they can help it. The novel closes with Sapatisia's anxieties about the future, and Jeanne and Felix's hope.

I . forêt, hache, famille (1693-1716), Chapter 1 - 7

Summary

In Chapter 1, René Sel is following his new master, Monsieur Claude Trépagny through New France. The novel observes the thoughts and actions of all of the characters, indicating a third-person omniscient narrator. René, along with another man, Charles Duquet, are indentured to Trépagny for three years. During that period, Trépagny is having the men cut trees so he can sell the timber. The forests are wild, thick, and unlike anything René has ever seen. René is fascinated by the constant barrage of new sights. Trépagny, on the other hand, seems familiar with the land.

At the base camp, they see Trépagny's house, which is French in style. Next to it, is a wikuom, where a native woman named Mari lives with her three children. René and Duquet and told to sleep in the dark and dank storehouse. Duquet confesses that he is going to run away as soon as he gets the chance. Mari and her children bring the two men food and beaver robes. The next day, René and Duquet begin working. They find the act of chopping trees to be very difficult. Mari cooks the men lunch and dinner. She senses Duquet's exhaustion and makes him a medicine of willow bark.

One afternoon, René and Duquet discuss Trépagny. Duquet senses evil in him and says he does not trust him. Shortly after, Duquet says he must go into the forest to relieve himself, but does not return. Trépagny laughs and says that one of the Mi'kmaw spirits of the forest must have taken him.

In Chapter 2, Trépagny becomes talkative and flamboyant. He shares his ideas about family and the "evil wilderness" they must subdue (17) and replace with civilization.

Trépagny adds fishing to René's list of duties, and Mari helps him make traps to catch many eels. One afternoon while fishing, René walks upstream and discovers that Trépagny has a very large, "almost a chateau," stone home that he has kept a secret from everybody else (21).

In Chapter 3, René's first year in the New World draws to a close. He experiences the harsh winter for the first time. Mari's youngest child, Jean-Baptiste, dies from a cough. Mari's other children, Theotiste and Elphège teach René how to hunt, and he is surprised at the boys' wealth of knowledge. Soon after, a man named Captain Bouchard arrives at the camp. He speaks with Trépagny and asks if he is willing to take care of a ten-year-old girl, who is an orphan and cannot find a home because of a devil-shaped birthmark on her neck. Captain Bouchard says she will be an asset because she can make beer. Mari agrees, saying she does not like to make beer. When Bouchard leaves to fetch the girl, Trépagny strikes Mari to the ground. The girl is brought to Trépagny and he says the birthmark is in the shape of a fox, not the devil.

In Chapter 4, René has been working for Monsieur Trépagny for three years. Trépagny is starting to behave strangely, and often disappears for weeks at a time. René and Mari spend time together, and René is startled to learn that Mari can read and write (he cannot). René meets Trépagny's brothers, who inform him that they have met Duquet, very much alive, in the town of Wobik.

Trépagny announces his plans to wed a noble French woman. This means he can no longer have Mari and her children around, and so he sends them away. As the wedding draws near, though, he realizes he has no one to cook the food, and Mari reluctantly returns to act as a chef for the wedding. When the bride arrives, she is outraged and feels she has been tricked into marrying Trépagny instead of a noble gentleman. At the wedding, Monsieur Trépagny is distracted when he learns that Duquet is alive. He vows to seek him out and make him suffer, though his brothers advise against it.

After the wedding, Trépagny spends most of his time with Mari at the storehouse, and not with his wife at their larger house. Captain Bouchard and Père Perrault come to Trépagny and let him know this is unlawful. To work around this arrangement, Trépagny has René marry Mari. René is hesitant at first, but they grow to genuinely care for each other, and have three children together: Achille, Noë and Zoë.

At the end of Chapter 6, Trépagny leaves to hunt Duquet and forces Elphège to come with him. In Chapter 7, Elphège returns, saying Trépagny is dead. He later reveals it was a tribe of Iroquois responsible for his death. René and Mari take over Trépagny's large house and have a calm, prosperous life together with their children. One spring, Mari becomes ill and very thin and eventually dies. Later, René is attacked and scalped, and dies while out chopping trees in the forest.

Analysis

The forests described in this section are dense, dark, and gloomy. The way the author describes the forests of New France makes the land seem almost pre-historic. Phrases like "evergreens taller than cathedrals," and "overhead leaf-choked branches merged into a false sky" (4) show that, at this point in time, nature has yet to be tamed by man and still carries a powerful meaning to the average person.

In Chapter I, Duquet asks how large the forest is. Trépagny replies, "It is the forest of the world. It is infinite. No one has ever seen its farthest dimension" (5). This immediately foreshadows the remainder of the book, which will deal largely with the limits of the forest.

When Duquet disappears, Monsieur Trépagny enumerates on the many Mi'kmaw spirits of the forest who may have kidnapped him. Though Monsieur Trépagny clearly does not respect Mi'kmaw people such as Mari, his knowledge of Mi'kmaw lore shows that these original settlers were connected to the ways of the native peoples. This compares to later in the novel, where even people of Mi'kmaw descent do not know these legends.

In this section, several important symbols are introduced. While out clearing the forest, René experiences the overwhelming mosquito population. The mosquitos reappear later in the novel as well and symbolize the parasitic nature of the settlers to the land of the New World. Another symbol that is introduced in this Duquet's teeth. In this section, he is constantly experiencing painful abscesses and forced to remove his teeth. Eventually, Duquet leaves René and Trépagny and his teeth come to symbolize the transition from naive settler to shrewd businessman. A third symbol introduced in this chapter is the birthmark on Renardette's neck. Many are wary of the birthmark, as they say it appears satanic. Trépagny, though, sees it instead as a fox. This shows how Trépagny, and the settlers of the New World by extension, choose to see the world how they want, as opposed to how things actually are. The larger impact of this thought process means consciously ignoring the suffering of both the surrounding nature, and the Native peoples who inhabit that land.

In Chapter 3, Mari's sons teach René much about hunting, and René is very surprised at how knowledgeable they are. This signals a transition within René that slowly happens over time: his recognition of Mi'kmaw ways as superior to the ways of the old world. After discovering Monsieur Trépagny's secret "chateau" in Chapter 2, René begins to recognize just how foolish and strange it is to have that essence of the Old World in this New World. René begins to go on walks by himself and appreciate nature the way it is. By Chapter 4, René and Monsieur Trépagny have reversed their roles in terms of understanding Mi'kmaw culture. Monsieur Trépagny is outraged when Mari cooks eels and screams that they are "savages' food" (30). At the same time, René understands Mari's distaste for gardening. "In the garden she felt snared," he observes (29). These examples establish the philosophical differences between the New World settlers and the Native people.

In Chapter 6, René and Mari are forced to marry by Trépagny. René feels he has been "caught in the sweeping current of events" and is "powerless to escape," (49). This thought foreshadows what is to come for René's lineage, who will find it difficult to fight against the infiltration of settlers.

At the end of the section, René dies while out cutting trees in the forest. His son, Achille, finds him still clutching the ax. The chapter ends with the line, "He was, until the end, a skillful woodsman, his life and body shaped to the pleasure of the ax. And so his sons and grandsons after him" (58). This line foreshadows the entirety of René's lineage and sets the stage for the Sel family to be forever destroying the forest. As the book divides, this last line becomes increasingly significant, as it also plays directly into the ways René and Duquet's lives diverge. René's family will forever be laborers, working for businessmen and scrambling to put together a living. Duquet, on the other hand, flourishes as a businessman and comes to represent the ax around which the Sel family must bend themselves.

Discussion Question 1

How are René and Duquet's characters similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 2

Is Monsieur Trépagny inherently evil?

Discussion Question 3

How do you predict the children of the Sel family will carry on without their parents?

Vocabulary

cudgel, hugeous, gobbet, tuque, beguilingly, eaves, pantomimed, maize, patois, victuals, malignant, mortising, beseeching, battened, sluiced, boreal, pharmacognosy, presaged, interstices, mnemic, pemmican,

II. "...helplessly they stare at his tracks" (1693-1727) Chapter 8 - 22

Summary

Chapter 8 begins when Charles Duquet flees from Trépagny. He hikes through the woods for weeks, facing hunger and thirst. After being attacked by an animal over a scrap of meat, Duquet is severely wounded and left for dead until a group of French fur traders stumble upon him and take him to an Ojibwa village.

In the village, Duquet regains his strength and befriends a Dutch-French man named Forgeron. Forgeron teaches Duquet about the fur trade, which he says is in decline. He and Duquet begin to work together, bartering for furs and re-selling them. Forgeron says he believes the logging industry is filled with untapped wealth. Forgeron finds work as a land surveyor, and Duquet continues his travels with the Trépagny brothers.

In Chapter 9, Duquet turns his business to lumber. He aims, more than anything, to make money and grow his business. He believes the forest is an “everlasting commodity” (69). Before starting his business, Duquet says he must become literate, and so he kidnaps a Jesuit preacher, Père Naufragé, and forces him to teach. Duquet learns quickly and eventually releases the preacher.

In Chapter 10, Duquet returns to Europe in hope of finding a ship bound for China. He aims to learn the ways of the forest and trade rare and expensive goods for his furs. He meets Captain Outger Verdwijnen, a Dutch man who will soon be traveling to China on his ship, the Golden Eagle. They become friends and spend the two weeks before voyage visiting coffee houses and chatting. The ship departs, and stops in Paris, where Duquet treats himself to a fine blue suit and an extravagant wig.

During Duquet’s stay in China, he meets with a trader named Wuqua, who buys Duquet’s furs for a healthy sum of money. He tells Duquet that different types of wood also fetch a healthy price. Duquet and Wuqua talk about the nature of the forest and different philosophical approaches to nature.

Duquet returns to Europe a rich man and buys himself an extravagant wig. He attends a dinner at Verdwijnen’s house, where he meets Cornelia Roos, the daughter of a wealthy family. Duquet almost immediately decides that Cornelia will be his wife.

Duquet meets a wealthy man named Benton Dred-Peacock, who helps Duquet organize his plans to purchase timber tracts in the United States. Duquet then returns to New France, and seeks out the Trépagny brothers. After exploring with them for some time, he steals their finest furs with the intent to sell them in China. On his way back to Europe, Duquet stops in the town of Wobik and is startled at how much the landscape has developed in just a few years.

When Duquet returns to Europe, he and Cornelia marry. They have a daughter, and then adopt three sons: Jan, Nicolaus, and Bernard. In addition, Cornelia bears a son, whom she names Outger. Following the birth of his sons, Duquet returns to New France to formally establish his lumber business. Duquet keeps tabs on his sons in Europe, and assures they are getting the necessary education so that they may someday join the family business. One day, he discovers several men attempting to cut trees on his property. Duquet captures one of them, a boy, and interrogates him. The boy reveals he is employed by a man named McBogle. The boy then dies of a pre-existing infected leg wound.

Duquet's sons come of age and they arrive in Boston to join the company. Duquet changes his name to Duke and establishes his company as Duke & Sons. Soon after, Dred-Peacock comes to Duquet and tells him that McBogle has been asking about him. This drives Duquet to seek out McBogle alone. Almost immediately after Duquet arrives at McBogle's camp, he is killed at the age of 53.

Analysis

When Duquet is rescued by the French fur traders, there is a Native woman with them who helps heal Duquet's many ailments, including a mouth infection that has been plaguing him since he was in the service of Trépagny. This unnamed woman is a parallel to Mari, and both women are responsible for providing life-saving treatments with their natural remedies. Yet, in both cases, the author chooses not to linger on their healing methods and describes them in short, terse sentences. This represents the offhand way with which the settlers regard these women and their Native medicine, but the reader can easily see just how powerful and skilled these women are.

As Duquet becomes more interested in expanding his business, his attentions shift from furs to lumber. He believes that the forest is infinite and that it could never be fully tapped. The supposed infinite nature of the forest is an idea that appears frequently throughout the novel, and those of Duke's lineage continue to make this claim. Here, this thought represents a settler's mentality: that the land is simply awaiting his claim, and pre-existing Native claims are irrelevant. Later in the novel, this mentality represents the false belief that the forest will regenerate itself even after mass deforestation.

During Duquet's trip to China, he and Wuqua discuss the nature of the forest. Duquet wishes to know if the rumors are true: that China's forests have been stripped. Wuqua reveals that they have indeed diminished and Duquet is shocked at the idea that forests are not everlasting. Duquet's genuine surprise reveals his innocence in the matter, but also acts as a turning point: now that he is aware of the effects of logging in other countries, he is complicit in the act. Wuqua also teaches Duquet about an important Chinese philosophy. He says, "You do not understand the saying, 'tian ren he yi.' It refers to a state of harmony between people and nature. You do not feel this. No European does. I cannot explain it to you. It is a kind of personal philosophy for each person, yet it is everything" (98). This philosophy sums up the ideological differences

between the European settlers and the native inhabitants of the New World; the settlers seek to dominate, while the native peoples intend on co-habitating with their surroundings.

The symbol of Duquet's teeth evolves in this section, when Duquet buys himself a set of ivory dentures. The dentures are not functional and are purely for show; they represent how Duquet is hiding the truth not only about himself, but about the damage he is doing to the land.

When Duquet returns to the town of Wobik, he is shocked to see how much it has developed since he first left New France years ago. For a moment, Duquet is frightened at the bare land, but eventually decides, "These forests could not disappear. In New France they were vast and eternal," (118). This momentary fear is highly significant--though Duquet was warned about deforestation by Wuqua, he is seeing it happen before his own eyes in a land he was certain was indestructible. This shows how Duquet and his like-minded settlers will so easily turn a blind eye to the destruction they see happening before them.

In this section, Duquet's primary concern is the development of his empire. He marries and has many children, all for the sake of establishing his legacy. His highly structured, pieced-together family acts as a mirror for the family of René Sel who, unlike Duquet, fell into his family situation without much planning. The Duquet family will continue to place business above family, and the Sel family will struggle to keep the family together as the currents of the New World force their decisions.

Discussion Question 1

How does Charles Duquet transform himself in this section (Chapter 8-22)?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Duquet changing his last name to Duke?

Discussion Question 3

How do you predict the Duquet family will continue without Charles Duquet?

Vocabulary

suppurating, blandishment, blancmange, exigencies, canard, eschewing

III. all these woods once ours (1724-1767), Chapter 23 - 31

Summary

Part III, Chapter 23 begins with a missionary named Louis-Joseph Crème. He is living and working among Mi'kmaq people and is fascinated with their language and culture. He observes the tight-knit relationship between these people and the nature around them. He is reprimanded by his superiors for viewing the native people as "persons."

Chapter 24 returns to the Sel family, who is now struggling to find their place in the world. Some years later, the brothers leave home to try and find work in a lumber mill. Noë is raped and bears a son, Auguste, from one of the assaults. The family lives in René's old house, which is frequently visited by drunken men from the woods who are looking for Renardette. She, too, visits them sometimes. Eventually, Renardette makes a legal claim that the house belongs to her.

The family goes to Captain Bouchard and says they wish to sell the house. They can use the money to support themselves and return to a native village. Bouchard agrees, but it is soon found out he has lied to them, and has supported Renardette's claim to the house. Men show up to the house and force the Sel family to leave. They pack up and leave to Odanak. It is the first time they have ever stayed in a Mi'kmaq village and they are uncertain of their place. They continue their travels and head for Mi'kma'ki. They arrive at the land to find it is bountiful and enjoy the temporary happiness.

Achille hunts with Sosep and becomes highly skilled. He regrets that he ever lived as a whiteman. Acadian settlers bring livestock to the land, which disrupts the natural balance of food sources. As the years pass, the Sels marry and the Acadian settlers continue to transform the land. The Mi'kmaw people try to keep themselves apart from the settlers, but more and more are forced to seek work at their lumber camps.

One day, Achille is out on a fishing voyage. Achille comes close to spearing a large creature, but it gets away. It speaks to him in Sosep's voice and says "You are not," before disappearing (185). Soon after, Sosep dies. Achille takes his son Kuntaw and his nephew Achille on a hunting trip. When they return, Achille finds that his wikuom has been burned by nearby loggers, and that his wife and other children are dead. Achille is infuriated and aims to seek revenge. He says, "I will despoil their land" (195). Achille leaves his family and finds work in a lumber camp.

In Chapter 31, the Sel family continues to disintegrate. Theotiste and Noë both die, and Auguste becomes a headstrong, wandering thief. Achille does not return as he planned to. Kuntaw heads out to find his father. One day, Kuntaw is stopped by an English-speaking woman on a horse. It is Beatrix Duquet, and she commands Kuntaw to follow her.

Analysis

Père Crème observes the very close relationship of the Mi'kmaq people to the land around them. He notes, "they were so tightly knitted into the natural world that their language could only reflect the union and that neither could be separated from the other. They seemed to believe they had grown from this place as trees grow from the soil, as new stones emerge above ground in spring" (149). This observation, in addition to elaborating on the Mi'kmaq relationship to nature, acts as foreshadowing for the fate of the people. The novel continues to deal with the destruction and clearing of the forest, and one can assume that, if these people are tied so closely to that forest, they will feel the pain the same as the trees.

Yet, though Père Crème has sympathy for the Mi'kmaw ways, he is displeased when the Sel family comes to Mi'kma'ki. He does not like that they speak French and thinks this means they will stir up trouble. This shows the dual-sided nature of men like Père Crème, who view themselves as among the few who understand Mi'kmaw culture, when in reality, they are only interested in the parts of the culture that further serve their own interests and ideas. At the same time, Père Crème's observations further emphasize how the Sel family has a difficult time figuring out their place between the Mi'kmaw world and the whiteman world. Their struggle is not an exclusive one, though, as Achille notes how the Mi'kmaw language is becoming increasingly interspersed with French, Portuguese, and English. The culture as a whole is no longer pure and exclusive as it was for hundreds of years before.

When Achille has a vision of Sosep speaking to him through the fish, the phrase "You are not," represents Achille's own internal conflict between his former life living like a whiteman, and his new life as a highly skilled Mi'kmaw hunter. Though Achille is certainly an extraordinary hunter, he has a chip on his shoulder similar to the whitemen, who are driven to be the best and strongest as opposed to understanding their own strengths and weaknesses. This trait is further exemplified when Achille returns to find his wikuom has been burned and his wife and children killed. Achille abandons his living son and vows to seek revenge on whitemen by despoiling their land. His family can see the ineffectiveness in this, but Achille remains intent. Thus, the Sels are broken up yet again.

At the end of the section, Beatrix Duquet finds Kuntaw Sel and says, "I need you, Indian man. Follow" (203). With nowhere else to go, he obeys. The section ends with the quote, "Were not René Sel's children and grandchildren as he had been, like leaves that fall on moving water, to be carried where the stream takes them?" This quote simultaneously reinforces the family's strong connection with nature, as it reinforces the ever-changing state of their lives due to external forces beyond their control.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think it is possible that any of the settlers could genuinely understand Mi'kmaw ways?

Discussion Question 2

What other interpretations might there be for Achille's vision of Sosep saying "You are not"?

Discussion Question 3

At the end of the section (Chapters 23-31), the Sel and Duquet families come together once more through Kuntaw and Beatrix. How do you predict their union will fare?

Vocabulary

potash

IV. the severed snake (1756-1766), Chapter 32 - 27

Summary

The section begins with Forgeron's funeral. All of the Duke sons are in attendance, except for Outger, who is staying at the house in Penobscot Bay so no one will be able to come and claim the great pine table the family so covets. The family returns to Nicolaus's home after, where his wife Mercy and Bernard's wife Birgit, along with many Pawnee slave girls, receive the men.

The group sits and discusses the state of the Duke & Sons business, which now stretches as far North as Quebec, and as far South as the Carolinas. The men pass around the Pennsylvania Gazette newspaper, which shows an image of a cut up snake and the words "Join Or Die" below it. The men discuss the growing discontent with English powers ruling over the colonies. From a business perspective, Duke & Sons agrees they must not get too involved with either side.

Cousins George Pickering Duke and Piet Duke meet at The Wolf's Den Tavern, where they continue the discussion about the colonies. The conversation turns to Outger, their uncle, and his strange ways. The men share a memory of when they once explored Outger's attic, where they found a horrifying, hairy creature that turned out to be Charles Duquet's old wig. Piet then informs George that Outger has planned a family voyage to Amsterdam in the coming year.

Chapter 35 opens with Bernard Duke's concern over finding a successor for his role as surveyor for Duke & Sons. In 1758 he, along with Nicolaus, Jan, Outger, Piet, and George Pickering start their voyage from Boston to Amsterdam. On the day of the voyage, Outger arrives on the dock at the very last moment. During the entirety of the trip Outger dominates the conversation with "bizarre tales" (235). He talks so much that the captain of the ship orders him to eat meals alone, in his room.

The family arrives in Amsterdam and they all notice how much Amsterdam has changed and industrialized. At Cornelia's house, Outger continues to dominate the conversation and the affection of their mother. Bernard sets out to leave Amsterdam after only a month. He purchases a new pair of boots before he leaves, but returns them when he discovers a loose nail poking into his foot.

That evening, Cornelia receives a letter from Outger, stating that he will not be returning to the colonies as he has accepted a position at a university in Leiden. All of his possessions are to be given to his daughter, Beatrix Duquet, who is the child of his relations with a Passamaquoddy Indian. The family is shocked at this revelation and Nicolaus and Bernard resolve to find Beatrix. They take the next ship back to Boston. During the voyage, Bernard's leg becomes infected from the loose nail in his boot.

Eventually, the infection spreads and Bernard dies. Nicolaus returns to Boston to find the company in disarray, as Hank Steen, the bookkeeper, has fled.

In Chapter 37, Piet Duke is now older and in charge of the company. Jan thinks back to several years before, when the remaining brothers went to the Penobscot Bay house in search of the pine table. They meet Beatrix, and she agrees to give them the table if they provide her with a smaller one. They agree, but when they return with the smaller table, Beatrix says she does not know them and wants nothing to do with them.

Birgit, Bernard's wife, rapidly grows ill and dies. When her body is being prepared, it is discovered that she has male genitalia. The section ends with Duke & Sons deciding to keep a quiet social presence, lest Birgit's identity be revealed.

Analysis

In this section, the symbol of the Penobscot Bay table is introduced. The table is made "from the largest single pine Charles Duquet ever cut" (207) and is a hotly coveted item among the Duke family members following Duquet's passing. This reflects upon how the Duke family is more preoccupied with material objects than their relationships with each other. It also furthers their stance that nature should be tamed. While those more connected to and respectful of nature may mourn the thought of the "largest single pine" being turned into a table, the Duke family instead squabbles over who will come into possession of the table. The men of the Duke family even go so far as to try and negotiate it away from Beatrix, one of their very own family members.

The notion of being more concerned for appearances than family is repeated near the end of the section, when it is revealed that Birgit was biologically male. The men of the Duke family band together and agree to scale back on the family's public presence, lest the truth about Birgit be revealed to the masses.

The Duke family's command over nature is a running theme in this section. During the conversation following Forgeron's funeral, Joab Hitchbone quotes Genesis, the first chapter of the Bible. He says, "And God said replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and every living thing that moveth, and every green tree and herb" (212). This quote touches on a larger theme that weaves throughout the novel: using Christianity as a justification for domination over the natural world. In Chapter 35, Bernard sees a raging fire on the horizon and thinks, "Forests burned according to God's will" (229). However, he does not realize that he was the direct cause of the fire, as he emptied his pipe along the road before he and Sedley rode back into town. Once again, the Duke family shows their penchant for blissful ignorance to the natural disasters they repeatedly bring to the land.

The title of the section, "the severed snake," refers to a political cartoon drawn by Benjamin Franklin that encouraged people to join with the colonies in declaring independence from England. In this section there are many impassioned conversations about the brewing tensions between England and America that will eventually lead to

the Revolutionary War. These conversations hint at a growing sense of independence and an emerging sense of national pride. During one of these conversations, Judge Bluzzard ends the tale of an early 1700's court case by saying, "It was a triumph for the independent American spirit" (220). This represents a dramatic shift from the scattered, loosely bound together villages and towns of earlier sections.

This section focuses heavily on Bernard: his thoughts, his goals, and his day-to-day doings. Yet, during the Duke family trip to Amsterdam, a stray boot nail gives him a fatal infection. His death is brief in comparison to the length of time the reader has just spent with his character. This is a literary technique used heavily by the author throughout the rest of the book: focusing heavily on a character, only to have them quickly killed off. This illustrates both the fragility of life during this time period as well as the insignificance of the individual against the forces of history.

In Chapter 37, Piet Duke looks out the window and reflects on how much the landscape has changed. He thinks, "Once illimitable forest filled the horizon. Now there were dozens of streets and the forest was a distant smudge" (254). The paragraph ends here and it is not revealed how Piet feels about this observation, but it is one of the first times that the Duke family is forced to confront how much they are responsible for changing the landscape, and also forced to acknowledge that the forest is not truly "illimitable," but can, in the span of just a few years, be significantly reduced to a mere blip.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think the Duke family's ignorance of what they are doing to the land is willful or genuine?

Discussion Question 2

Slaves are mentioned several times in this section (Chapter 32 - 27), and a handful of times in the text as a whole. What role do they or do they not play in the larger narrative of this time period?

Discussion Question 3

Were there any hints about Birgit's true identity in the text? Why do you think the author chose to incorporate this twist?

Vocabulary

syllabub, apogee, halyards, palsied, excoriating, conveyances, lissome, enmity

V. in the lumber camps (1754-1804), Chapter 38 - 41

Summary

Tonny Sel is Kuntaw's son from his first wife, Malaan. When Kuntaw leaves to search for Achille, Malaan grows lazy and depressed. Tonny grows up largely on his own, with occasional help from others in his village. At 14, Tonny and a girl named Hanah start a family. They have three children: Elise, Amboise, and Jinot. Their relationship falls apart as Hanah starts to drink whiskey and sleep with whitemen. Tonny decides to leave and search for Kuntaw. He takes his children with him, and they find Kuntaw and Beatrix in the Penebscot Bay house. Kuntaw is nervous to see his son and grandchildren, but Beatrix is kind and welcoming to them all. Beatrix says she will teach the children to read and write. That night, Tonny and Kuntaw go for a walk and Kuntaw apologizes for leaving Tonny and Malan. Kuntaw promises to tell Tonny "the old stories of our people and the great ones in our lineage" (275). Tonny feels cold towards his father and tells him of the dilapidation in Mi'kma'ki. Kuntaw thinks Tonny thinks and acts like a whiteman.

Tonny joins Kuntaw working in the lumber camps. Over time, Kuntaw becomes increasingly disappointed in his failure to make Tonny into a Mi'kmaw man. This causes him to withdraw from his children and Beatrix. The years pass and the area around the house becomes increasingly stripped. The children grow and start to marry. The male children head off to work in the lumber camps. Jinot, who has grown handsome and very popular, is the last to leave. Kuntaw asks him to go with Amboise to visit Mi'kma'ki and check on his relatives, Elise and Auguste. When they visit the village, they find it is a depressing place. Auguste is a drunk, who decides to remain in the village. Elise agrees to return to Boston.

Kuntaw finds a new job acting as a guide for whitemen surveying the land. Meanwhile, Beatrix grows ill with a mysterious illness. Kuntaw is scared and withdraws from her. Her illness grows worse, and the various doctors they call to the house cannot help her. Finally, a man named Dr. Mukhtar comes and diagnoses Beatrix with stomach cancer. Dr. Mukhtar begins to visit Beatrix regularly to provide her with treatments, and they develop deep feelings for each other. Eventually, though, Beatrix dies at the age of 52.

Jinot, meanwhile, is working hard in the lumber camps and faces frequent discrimination from the whitemen. Jinot witnesses a terrible accident in which his friend Franceway is brutally killed. When Beatrix dies, he returns home and Amboise asks him to come work at the same camp as him. Kuntaw, feeling as though he has failed everyone in his life, decides to go North with the intent of reclaiming his Mi'kmaw identity.

Jinot and Amboise work at a lumber camp in New Brunswick. Josime finds them and takes them to another camp. On the way, Josime finds a wife and remains with her.

Jinot and Amboise travel and work at many different camps, depending on who will hire them.

Analysis

This section revolves heavily around Kuntaw's internal conflict. Though he has shaped a happy life for Beatrix, their children, and himself--Tonny's arrival unearths a deep-seated regret over not being present in his first son's life, as well as a failure to raise his children in the Mi'kmaw way. He suddenly becomes engrossed with the idea of shifting his family's ways to be more traditional, but he is crushed upon realizing, "that world he wanted them to know had vanished as smoke deserts the dying embers that made it" (279). This only deepens Kuntaw's conflict, as he is committed to living as a Mi'kmaw man with a Mi'kmaw family, but the world is now simply too different for such a goal to succeed.

Beatrix Duquet is a quietly powerful character with hidden knowledge. Though she is not a direct descendent of Mari Sel, she embodies many of the same qualities: her calmness, her interest in learning, and her desire to teach her children. Though she is part Passamaquoddy, she is not consumed in the same way as the others in regards to navigating who she is. A similar trend follows many of the Sel women up to this point in the novel, and there are several reasons why identity may not be a priority for them; as their work is so often in the home, they are not as frequently in contact with whitemen or forced to do whitemen's work. There is also the thought that, as Mi'kmaw men become more unknowingly assimilated to whitemen's ways, they are subjugating women more and more so that they do not have as loud of a voice in the future of the culture. For example, when Kuntaw is experiencing guilt over a failure to raise his children as Mi'kmaw people, he retreats from Beatrix and sees himself apart from her, as opposed to her equal in developing their childrens' understanding of Native ways.

When Kuntaw visits Mi'kma'ki in search of his relatives, he meets Amboise and attempts to convince him to leave the dilapidated village. Auguste, who is now consumed by alcoholism, says he plans to stay in Mi'kma'ki forever. He encourages Amboise to venture out, but says he must be the "One Who Remains" (284). This illustrates the ongoing conflict for the Sel family and Mi'kmaw people in general: their limited options are either to abandon their homeland and traditional ways in search of work and survival--or to remain in the homeland for the sake of tradition, but find themselves living in ruin and wasting away.

This section also establishes the concept of the United States of America. The land that was once New France has now been molded into North America and has a distinct identity now completely separated from Europe. It is noted that, "the war for independence had linked the idea of freedom to a country of wild forests. Americans saw themselves as homines sylvestris--men of the forest" (p. 286). There is a deep level of irony in this establishment of a national identity and its ties to the idea of the forest. Readers have witnessed how the last 200 years has seen the land ravaged by the same men eager to clear the forest and just as eager to condemn the Native people

who are so deeply connected to it. Now, these men are adopting the same stance they so actively damned for the sake of forming a new identity. It is also worth noting how easily the European settlers move through identities, while the Sel family's eternal struggle is determining an identity for themselves.

Discussion Question 1

How do Beatrix and Kuntaw differ in their views of raising children?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think it is better to adopt whiteman ways or be the "One Who Remains"?

Discussion Question 3

How has the identity of the settlers changed from the start of the book up to this point (Chapter 38 - 41)?

Vocabulary

taciturn, febrile, environs, pedagogy

VI. "fortune's a right whore" (1808-1826), Chapter 42 - 48

Summary

Captain James Duke is now in his early 50's. He looks back on his life as an unsuccessful sailer and pities himself. A letter arrives informing him that Sedley Duke, his father, has died and James should replace him on the Board of Duke & Sons. Just as he is about to refuse the offer, another letter arrives inviting him to Boston immediately. During the voyage to Boston, he meets Mistress Posey Brandon, who he finds very beautiful. When the passengers are exiting the ship, James struggles with his trunk and falls into the icy harbor. He is saved by Posey and promises to call on her.

Once in Boston, James visits the lawyers Trumbull & Tendrill, who inform him that Sedley has left James his estate out of regret for their estrangement. The estate includes a home in Boston, millions of acres of land and trees, and various other extravagant possessions.

One day, James goes to visit Posey Brandon at her home. Before he enters, he hears distressed sounds coming from the house and James thinks Posey is being beaten. Upon speaking with Posey, however, he finds out that Mr. Brandon, once a minister, is now mentally ill and very reclusive. They have a long and pleasant conversation, and James learns that Posey is the daughter of a lumber man. He begins to return to her home regularly, where they talk about life and business. Mr. Brandon never appears. James learns she is in financially dire straits and begins supporting her. James aims to get rid of Mr. Brandon so he can make Posey his wife, and calls on a doctor who has Mr. Brandon sent to live with a farm family in the country. When Mr. Brandon seems to be getting well again, James frames Mr. Brandon for the murder of the farmer. Though Mr. Brandon escapes execution, he eventually dies of natural causes and James and Posey become engaged.

Posey's father, Phineas Breeley, arrives the morning of the wedding. He is a large, crass man who frequently makes off-color jokes, including ones about having relations with his own daughter. James and Posey marry in a small, private ceremony and set off for their honeymoon in New York. James grows nervous as Phineas seems to have the idea he is now a part of Duke & Sons. On the wedding night, Posey is incredibly aggressive and violent in bed. The next day, when James refuses sex, Posey attacks him. James insists they talk through the issue, as well as the issue of Phineas. They agree to give Phineas his own home away from theirs, and Posey proposes to have a dinner party so she may meet the Duke family.

The party is a success, though James is paranoid the entire time. Edward and Posey meet and spend the evening flirting with each other. Over the course of the following weeks, they spend much time together. In the years that follow, Posey becomes a star

of high-society and her parties are known far and wide. When Posey is 51, she and James bear their only child: Lavinia.

Analysis

James Duke has worked on English ships for the majority of his life. When he returns to Boston upon hearing of his father's death, he believes he will find the country to be crass and deplorable. In his imagination, he sees the Duke & Sons board meetings as "squalid" (328). James represents the distinction between England and the United States now that some time has passed after the Revolutionary War. England is now a place of distinction and the United States is a place of wildness.

Despite this supposed "wildness," those of European heritage living in the United States still consider the Native peoples to be far lesser. During a Duke & Sons meeting, Edward brings up "Nonintercourse Act," which consisted of six pieces of legislation passed by the U.S. government between 1790 and 1834. The laws established the boundaries of Native American Reservations and regulated trade between U.S. citizens and native peoples. For Duke & Sons, this means protected lands that they cannot claim for logging. Freegrace Duke, annoyed, asks, "In what other country must businessmen trouble with murderous barbarians coddled by the government?" (359). This complaint emphasizes how correct the settlers feel in their ways, as readers clearly see that native peoples, such as the Sel family, are certainly not living a "coddled" lifestyle.

Though changes, such as the implementation of reservations, are happening across the country, Duke & Sons remains committed to their idea of never-ending land. Edward says that the company would do best to, "take what we can get as soon as we can get it is what I say. I am not interested in fifty years hence as there is no need for concern. The forests are infinite and permanent" (364). This quote not only reflects on the Duke's consistent perspective that the forests cannot truly be destroyed, but it also establishes the fact that they are not concerned with the future, but only the "now."

Posey desires to throw a grand party and enter society. Before settling down to take care of Lavinia, she becomes known for her lavish gatherings. The growth of high society reflects on the increasing disparity between the lifestyles of the wealthy and the poor. In the first section, Monsieur Trépagny was living in conditions not much better than the men under him, and could hardly convince a European woman to be his wife. Yet now, the wealthy men and women of large United States cities are living just as fancifully as any European. This transition of the U.S. into a place with extravagant high society foreshadows the way in which the disparity between Europeans and native peoples will only continue to grow.

Discussion Question 1

How is James different than the other men of the Duke family? How is he similar?

Discussion Question 2

What is your characterization of Phineas Breeley? What do his behaviors and speech patterns say about him?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Brandon was actually like before James came to Boston?

Vocabulary

ribaldries, parsimonious, pedimented, linsey-woolsey, foolscap, apropros, fulminating, gaol, comestibles, victualing, vittles

VII. broken sticks (1825-1840), Chapter 49 - 53

Summary

Jinot and Amboise Sel continue to work in any lumber camp that will hire them. New inventions, such as advanced saws and gaslights, are constantly popping up, and the steam engine is being used for travel. One year Jinot travels to Penobscot Bay, but the house has been sold and belongs to distant relatives. He turns back to the lumber caps.

One afternoon, when the brothers are working in the forest, a long ridge catches fire and spreads too quickly. Jinot lives by jumping into the river, but he realizes his legs have been badly burned. When he wakes up, he is in a wikuom in a place called Indiantown, being taken care of by a man named Jim Sillyboy, a “renowned burn healer” (389). Jim explains the fire and gives Jinot strong medicine. Jinot spends the winter in Indiantown, slowly recovering. One day, a man from the lumber camp visits him and explains the fire. Jinot realizes that Amboise and their friend Joe Martel are both dead.

Jinot learns to walk again, but suffers from pain and hobbles. He cannot be a logger as he once was. He meets a man named Resolve Smith, who tells him of an opportunity working for an ax manufacturer in Boston. They join together and find the factory, where Albert Bone hires them. Jinot meets the foreman Joe Dogg, who is also a Native American. Mr. Bone takes a special interest in Jinot, and invites him to come on trips with him, such as to Boston and Bangor. Mr. Bone uses these trips to talk a lot about himself. Back at the factory, Jinot becomes friends with a man named High Boss. He marries Minnie, Boss’s oldest child. They have two children together, Amboise and Aaron. One day, Amboise dies in a sledding accident. This makes Minnie incredibly anxious and Jinot very grave.

After the accident, Jinot is inspired to reconnect with his family, and writes to Francis-Outger Sel. He receives a reply, and begins searching for Elise, who he finds living in Boston. After Jinot returns, Minnie becomes ill. Shortly after this, an outbreak of cholera kills Minnie and their twin children, Lewie and Lancey. Aaron survives. Jinot retreats into his work with Mr. Bone, who plans a trip to New Zealand. Jinot wishes to go, but Aaron does not and heads North to Nova Scotia.

In New Zealand, Jinot is frightened by the native Maori people. Nevertheless, he is bewitched by the beauty of the nature: “It was a fresh world pulsing with life and color” (426). Mr. Bone acts arrogant during the trip, and one day goes into the woods with a man in a grass cloak, despite Jinot’s warning. Mr. Bone does not return, and is presumed dead. Jinot is suspected as the culprit for the disappearance and is held captive by Mr. Rainburrow. Only after much time has passed is Jinot’s story of the man in the grass cloak corroborated, and Jinot is released. Still, he is given no money and is forced to work as a logger in order to pay for his return passage to Boston. His bad leg

cannot take the strain, and when it becomes infected, Jinot dies. Only after his death is Mr. Rainburrow informed by Joseph Dogg of Jinot's status as Mr. Bone's associate, not his servant.

Analysis

Jinot and Amboise Sel drift between lumber camps, finding work wherever they can get it. They are, "pressed between the white world and their own half-known and disappearing culture," and so they must "[settle] back into the woodsman's life" (382). With the growth of the whiteman's presence and culture, their options for making a living become increasingly limited. Yet, even though Jinot and Amboise are othered as Mi'kmaw men and face constant discrimination and limited opportunities, their own lives have not even been fully imbued in Mi'kmaw ways. After the fire that kills Amboise and Joe Martel, Jinot is healed by men in Indiantown. When he wakes, he realizes, "for the first time in his life he was in a wikuom" (387). Though his entire life he has been stereotyped and discriminated against as Mi'kmaw, he has not even had the opportunity to live as a Mi'kmaw man.

Jinot is uncertain of Mr. Albert Bone. Though he gives Jinot work and takes a liking to him, he has views of native peoples that leave Jinot unsettled. He is a similar archetype to Père Crème: he says he appreciates and understands native cultures--but only on the pretext that they are docile and obedient. Though Albert Bone may give men like Jinot or Joseph Dogg jobs within his company, he still views them as "other," and gives in to many of the stereotypes that haunt natives. Though Mr. Bone claims an interest in native peoples, his "enthusiasm," does not "extend to the forests and shorelines they inhabited" (401).

The motif of quick and stark deaths appears again in this section with the outbreak of cholera, which kills Jinot's wife and two of his children. After surviving the tragic death of another child, the family tries everything to protect themselves from pain, but the author once again shows how tragedy will strike at any time.

Mr. Bone gives Jinot a test where he asks him to chop down a tree with one of the axes from his factory. Jinot does so, but he notes the tree he chops is "young," and does "not deserve to be cut" (396). Though Jinot has not truly lived as a Mi'kmaw man and has worked chopping trees for much of his life, he still has an appreciation for and understanding of nature that is intrinsic to who he is. This sentiment reappears when Jinot voyages to New Zealand. The country has not yet been highly colonized, and much of the lush, original nature remains. Jinot is overcome by the sheer volume and variety of plants, trees, and flowers. Yet, he is also deeply suspicious of the native Maori people, which is ironic considering his Mi'kmaw heritage. This emphasizes how Jinot's identity has been corrupted to be unkind towards those different from him, though he has suffered this very injustice his whole life.

During his exploration of the New Zealand forest, Jinot ventures off the trail and into a ravine. Suddenly, "there were mosquitos. A wave of anxiety suddenly washed over him

and he felt he had to get out of the ravine quickly" (427). This scene harkens directly back to the first section, in which René Sel is constantly overcome by mosquitos while logging in New France. Just as René was once a parasite to the land, Jinot has inadvertently become a part of that same parasitic machinery himself.

Discussion Question 1

What is your impression of Mr. Albert Bone? Does he seem to genuinely care for Jinot?

Discussion Question 2

How is native medicine used in this section (Chapter 49 - 53)? When was the last time it was used in the text?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Jinot is suspicious of Maori people? How has his identity shifted away from being Mi'kmaw? How has it remained?

Vocabulary

helve, quixoteries, spasmodic

VIII. glory days (1836-1870), Chapter 54 - 59

Summary

James and Posey have become frugal and focus primarily on raising Lavinia. Lennart Vogel and James, who have become friends, discuss the future of the company. Settlers are now arriving en masse and clearing acreage that belongs to Duke & Sons in order to make room.They agree they need to go deeper into unknown lands in the Michigan territory and claim trees there. To do so, they hire on a man named Armenius Breitsprecher to help them survey the land.

James, Lennart, and Breitsprecher embark on their journey. Many times Breitsprecher goes ahead and leaves the other men nervously awaiting his return. Eventually, they reach the Michigan territory and there are more than double the amount of trees they imagined. Immediately, they plot to buy up the land. The men return to Boston, where Breitsprecher and his brother, Dieter, begin assisting Duke & Sons in their purchase of the land.

One morning, Lavinia confesses to her father that she wishes to join Duke & Sons. The request shocks James, who does not believe there is a place for a woman in the timber business. Still, he says he will think about it and eventually lands her a position as a clerk. She quickly proves to be more competent than many of her male peers. At the end of Chapter 55, she is the first to discover that the Breitsprecher brothers are plotting to take the Michigan territory before Duke & Sons. Thus, the two companies become rivals.

In Chapter 56, Edward hosts a large dinner party, which is attended by many Duke & Sons associates. A massive fire breaks out and kills almost everyone at the party, including Edward, his wife, Lennart Vogel, and Posey. Though Lavinia is distressed, she is highly pragmatic in figuring out what to do with Posey’s possessions and James admires her “unusually canny eye for business” (491). James and Lavinia relocate to Detroit, where they can better oversee their new land holdings. When they move, they build an exact replica of their Boston home. Once in Detroit, Lavinia becomes obsessed with learning all she can about logging and lumber mills, and pays regular visits to the sites. Lavinia even goes on a surveying expedition with Andre Roque, a simple country man. Lavinia is so intent on learning everything about the business that she writes to Dieter Breitsprecher, asking him to teach her about scaling.

In Chapter 57, James returns to Boston to oversee the shipment of his wine cellar. He finds the majority of it has been taken, likely by the housekeeper. On his return voyage, the ship crashes into rocks and James dies. When Lavinia hears the news, she goes to his body immediately. After confirming his death, she throws herself into work. She hires Annag Duncan, a simple country woman, to be her secretary. Lavinia is upset by her

lack of a personal life, and writes a letter to Andre Roque, asking him to marry her. He writes back and declines, which causes Lavinia immense grief. This pushes her to work even harder. Lavinia renames Duke & Sons “Duke Logging & Lumber” and shifts the center of operations to Chicago with plans to incorporate.

In Chapter 58, Lavinia is concerned about finding an heir to the company. She hires a detective to investigate her ancestry, hoping he might find more family elsewhere. The detective brings her results showing that the only other branch of the Duke family is tied to Native Americans, the Sel family, living in Canada. Lavinia is shocked and orders the information to be destroyed. Annag Duncan hides the information instead.

One evening, Dieter Breitsprecher and Lavinia have dinner. Lavinia wishes to offer the Breitsprecher’s a partnership with Duke Logging & Lumber. Yet, Lavinia becomes incredibly nervous, as she realizes she has romantic feelings for Dieter. She makes the offer and then immediately asks him to leave. The next time they see each other, Dieter agrees to the partnership and Lavinia is thrilled. They dine together once more and during a post-meal stroll in the garden, agree to marry. Their engagement is passionate and thrilling, though the board of Duke Logging & Lumber is nervous about the implications of the union.

During a ride on a train, Dieter is in a bad accident but survives. He becomes an invalid and forced to remain at home for most of the day. Lavinia finds that she is not attracted to his weakness and her affection for him weakens while his affection for her strengthens. While Dieter is bedridden, he begins engaging with those who aim to protect the forest. Once Dieter has recovered, he and Lavinia travel to New Zealand together where they see the great kauri trees. A native woman pleads with Lavinia not to cut the trees, but she cannot agree. Dieter does not wish to cut the trees, either. Lavinia purchases a large amount of land, but agrees to set up a kauri nursery.

When Dieter and Lavinia return to the United States, Lavinia becomes pregnant and gives birth to their only child: Charles Duke, called Charley. Lavinia returns to work only 10 days after giving birth.

At the end of the section, it is discovered that Lawyer Flense and Annag Duncan have run away with a portion of the Duke Logging & Lumber money.

Analysis

It is now the mid-1800’s, and the United States has been established for a long enough period of time that the concept of “immigrants,” now exists to “native” American people. During a business discussion, Lennart Vogel asks James to “consider settlers as human birds of prey” (455). Ironically, these men and their extreme wealth are the product of settlers only a few generations old. This proves that not only does the Duke family fail to consider the future (in terms of their consistent, mass deforestation), but they also do not consider the past. While the members of the Sel family are constantly looking to their ancestors for guidance and information about their place in the world, the Duke

family is focused solely on the present, with no regard for where and who they came from.

At the start of Chapter 56, it is noted that Edward has become “a great gourmand” (487). Up until this point in the novel, food has been consumed almost entirely for survival, with little regard for how it contributed to one’s societal standing. Yet, with the growth of European-influenced society comes the concept of fine dining. It is a way for the Duke family and other elites to set themselves apart in the newly-forming aristocracy. The differences between upper and lower-class Americans is also becoming increasingly evident, whereas once all American settlers were landowners of equal standing and potential. Upon hearing of her father’s decision to relocate the company headquarters, Lavinia asks her father if their is any good society in Detroit, indicating that it is a place known for its lack of finery. In the context of the novel, the emergence of high society is yet another way that the Duke and Sel families are becoming irreconcilably different.

Lavinia is a dynamic and complex character. She is perhaps the most shrewd businessperson who has ever commanded Duke & Sons. Yet, she is the subject of perpetual sexism due to being one of the few women in the business sphere. Even Lavinia herself is subject to internalized misogyny as she brags about her mind being one of her finer points - because it is masculine.

The large fire that consumes Edward’s house, and many Duke & Sons associates, is another instance of the author using quick and stark death scenes to make a point about fleeting individual lives in the grand scheme of time. It is also worth noting that, though the Duke and Sel families could not be more different, death is a great equalizer. In the last section, Amboise and Joe Martel die in a massive fire, and so do many die in a fire in this section. Whether they are working in the woods or in a fine home, no one is free of death. James’s death, too, is quick and painless, as it quite literally frees him from a longstanding headache. His is yet another briefly-noted passing in the grand scheme of time.

Dieter is one of the first characters associated with Duke & Sons who has genuine sympathy for what is being done to the forest. Both he and his brother Armenius do not initially agree with Duke & Sons' motives and methods, particularly their failure to replenish the forests they deplete. When Dieter is bedridden following the train accident, he becomes even more in touch with this sympathetic streak: “Dieter began to write letters to those men who seemed concerned with the disappearance of the North American forests, a concern that appeared more and more linked to a vague recognizance of national identity though he was not sure of this. Few now saw the forest as a great oppressive enemy; some even honored individual trees, especially those that were massive or stood as landmarks” (569). This touches upon the earliest waves of American environmentalism and the public thought that forests should be protected.

Yet, the failure of this philosophy is touched upon when Dieter is discussing native peoples working for Duke & Sons: “[T]he Indians have a deeper understanding of nature and time, and we employ them when we can” (553). This quote demonstrates Dieter

and other environmentalist's failure to join together with native peoples in their cause. Though they are advocating for similar ideas, Dieter and those like him still view the native peoples as lesser and not worthy of their cause.

During Lavinia and Dieter's trip to New Zealand, they encounter the massive and majestic kauri trees. Though a native woman pleads with Lavinia to keep the trees free from harm, Lavinia cannot heed her request. Still, it is noted that "[Lavinia], too, had been a little moved by the great silent trees, so immense, so helpless" (582). If even Lavinia is so touched by the trees, they must be truly significant.

The kauri being referred to as both "immense" and "helpless" in the same sentence simultaneously signifies the power of nature and the corrupted power of man over nature. Though the trees literally hold the Earth together and have the capacity to stand for thousands of years, they are ultimately helpless to the destructive forces of mankind--though they are powerful, they are incapable of fighting back.

Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Lavinia's character? What are her strengths and weaknesses?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the kauri trees? Why do they keep reappearing in the text?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Lavinia destroys the information about the Duke family's relations to the Sel family? What might be different if she connected with them?

Vocabulary

fustian, simpering, lascivious, spicule, inculcating, aplomb, untrammeled, deleterious, transcendental, absconders

IX. the shadow in the cup (1844-1960s), Chapter 60 - 62

Summary

Aaron Sel is Jinot's only surviving son. When Jinot goes to New Zealand, Aaron heads to Mi'kma'ki, where he is not given the ceremonial welcome he had hoped for. Instead, he feels out of place among his own people. After two years, he returns to Boston. He accidentally becomes a sailor for a demanding captain. He continues the work, despite how hard it is, because it gives him some sense of purpose. Eventually, though, he returns to Mi'kma'ki, but finds only a ruined village with one starving family living in a wikoum. He gets some food for them from a nearby farmer and continues on to try and find his family. He finds some Mi'kmaw people and they inform him that Jinot has died. Aaron is shocked and saddened, but welcomed by Kuntaw, Etienne, and the other Mi'kmaw.

The family agrees to try and rebuild a place for themselves. They pass the talking stick and discuss the challenges facing them: "food, lost territory, the cruelty of whitemen's laws, the loss of good canoe makers" (602). They plan to rebuild and welcome women into their new village. The men are no longer loggers, but coopers who have set up a barrel-making factory.

At the end of Chapter 61, Kuntaw dies "on the most beautiful day in a thousand years" (605). The next generation continues to grow the clan. Édouard-Outger Sel, the oldest son of Francis-Outger, joins the clan. The clan continues to drift, as they are forced out of both work and land by whitemen. The Mi'kmaw people meet and are forced to the realization that they must accept the whitemen in their land, and must become more like them if they wish to survive. The men say they will return to the lumber camps. At the end of the meeting, they burn the talking stick.

For the next three generations, the men of the Sel family work in the lumber camps of Nova Scotia. The Mi'kmaw men are often given the most difficult and dangerous jobs and many of them die. Aaron's son, John, dies fighting in World War I. Lobert Sel agrees to send his son Egga to the new Native American residential schools that are being set up by the government. The schools abuse the children both physically and mentally. Egga escapes from the school and becomes a homeless wanderer. Slowly, the Sel family starts to disintegrate the the Mi'kmaw culture breaks apart.

Analysis

In this section, readers see the Sel family try to rebuild Mi'kmaw ways. Kuntaw is now older and calmer, no longer frustrated and guilty as he was as a young man. He imparts his wisdom to many of the younger Mi'kmaw people, and advises them as they try to

rebuild the culture. In one lesson, he shows Aaron a bowl of water mixed with oil. “Water is whiteman. Oil is Mi’kmaw. In the bowl is mix-up métis,” he says, demonstrating the difficulty in navigating two identities. Surely enough, the oil in the mixture rises to the top of the bowl. “That’s how it was with me, long ago. I tried to be whiteman, but Mi’kmaw oil in me come to top” (601). This metaphor emphasizes the difficulty that has haunted all of the Sel family: navigating attempts to assimilate when one cannot forsake who they really are.

Kuntaw also emphasizes how women’s roles have changed for the worse, and how that has been of great detriment to the Mi’kmaw people: “In the old days, women were important, they were the great deciders. They did everything, some even hunted like men. But over the years the Mi’kmaw men began to act like whitemen, who do not regard women as worthy. It is the old Mi’kmaw way to know women are of equal value as men” (602). Not only does this account for Kuntaw’s relationship with Beatrix, but also the disappearance of many of the Sel women altogether. Throughout the novel, many of the Sel men have sought to reconnect with their Mi’kmaw heritage. Though logging is difficult and demeaning work, for many it served as an opportunity to seek out new ways of life and pay for travel. The women of the Sel family merely had the option to marry, after which they would have children and be forced to remain in the home.

Kuntaw’s death is one of the first deaths that occurs without great illness or hardship. He passes slowly, with a paragraph of beautiful, delicate language describing the scene. This pleasant death occurs after Kuntaw has helped rebuild the Mi’kmaw land to some notable extent. He is filled with wisdom as opposed to anger and is at peace.

Following Kuntaw’s death, though, the Mi’kmaw people inevitably disperse. A meeting is held, where the state of the culture is discussed. In regards to the whitemen, one man says, “they will never leave our country. They are with us for all time. And if we want to live we must be like them” (612). Many reluctantly agree, and a decision is made to forgo some of the old ways in favor of survival. In commemoration of this, they burn the talking stick as, “talking sticks were the old way” (613).

The Mi’kmaw people continue to be involuntarily broken up with the establishment of “residential schools.” These schools were established in the late 1800’s by the government with the goal of assimilating native peoples into white society. Many injustices and human rights atrocities have been documented as taking place inside these schools. In regards to the novel, it says, “the children were never again wholly Mi’kmaw,” after attending these schools (623), referring to both the attempts at assimilation and the abuses of the “genocidal nuns and priests,” who ran the schools.

Discussion Question 1

How has Kuntaw changed since his last appearance in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the Mi'kmaw people agree to live with the whitemen? What might have happened if they did not make this decision?

Discussion Question 3

How has the role of women in the Sel family changed since the start of the novel?

Vocabulary

mutinous

X. sliding into darkness (1886-2013), Chapter 63 - 70

Summary

Duke Logging & Lumber is now facing financial difficulties because of Lawyer Flense and Annag Duncan's theft. Lavinia is devastated and, in her frustration, orders all of the kauri trees on her New Zealand property to be cut. Nevertheless, the logging industry is not what it used to be and the forests are dilapidated. One morning, Lavinia randomly has a heart attack and dies. Very quickly after her death, Dieter re-marries a young woman and has a second son, James Bardawulf and a daughter, Sophia. His second wife dies of breast cancer shortly after the birth.

Charley studies forestry at Yale and develops a deep compassion for the forest. He does not wish to join the family business, as he feels too passionately about the trees. Meanwhile, James Bardawulf marries a beautiful young woman named Caroline, who Charley takes an interest in. One night, Charley attempts to rape her and James Bardawulf catches him in the act. He beats Charley over the head, sending him into a coma. When he wakes, Dieter agrees to send Charley to South America, where he can study trees as he pleases. Every day he fills notebooks with sketches and information about the local foliage. Soon after he leaves, Dieter dies of pneumonia. James Bardawulf, saddened by the death, tries to reconnect with Charley. Instead of responding, Charley begins sending his notebooks to Conrad, James Bardawulf's son. After Charley's death, these notebooks are used by the Breitsprecher-Duke company to destroy the forest.

After World War II, the company remains afloat by producing plywood. In the 1960's, Sophia Hannah Breitsprecher, Dieter's youngest, aims to break into the company, but faces resistance from her brother and husband. They agree to give her the position of "company historian," and she begins compiling all of the documents and information from the past 300 years. In her research, she stumbles across the ancestry report Lavinia had ordered, which details the Sel family claim to the company. The company holds a meeting to discuss these findings, and everyone is paranoid. The Breitsprecher family agrees to sell the company before anyone finds out about the Sel family claim.

Bren Sel and Egga Sel have two daughters, one of whom is named Sapatisia. She is a headstrong lover of nature. In college, she has an affair with a married professor and is expelled. She begins travelling and exploring, only sending home the occasional postcard.

Jeanne Sel and Felix Mius are cousins who aim to break out of life on the reservation. They work hard in high school and community college. One afternoon, while waiting at the laundromat, Jeanne Sel finds an article in a magazine about Sapatisia Sel, who "collects medicine plants and trees" (689).

One evening, Jeanne and Felix attend a lecture given by Dr. Alfred Onehube, a “militant environmentalist” (689). He encourages the audience to protect the “great boreal forest,” and Jeanne and Felix are inspired. They decide to seek out Sapatisia so they can learn more about environmental activism. They hitch a ride to where she lives, out near the ocean by a lighthouse. They catch sight of her, but she does not want to talk. They try again the next day, and she speaks with them but is rough and terse. Finally, after experiencing the earnestness of Jeanne and Felix, Sapatisia speaks more openly with them, She says she will be in touch.

In Chapter 70, Jeanne and Felix both receive letters detailing their receipt of a $5,000 fellowship from the Breitsprecher Tree Project. The letters are from Sapatisia and invite them to work with her on environmental research. Jeanne and Felix drive down to her home on the designated date, and find three other researchers from around the world along with Sapatisia. Once everyone is assembled, Sapatisia explains the goals of the project: to study the local environment and replant trees. The group dines together and has a lively conversation about the local ecosystems.

That night, there is a brilliant white moon. Jeanne and Felix are both too excited to sleep. Sapatisia cannot fall asleep either, as she is riddled with anxiety. She lies away and thinks of her past failed relationships, her hopes for her current group of researchers, and all of the work that still has yet to be done.

Analysis

Upon hearing that Lawyer Flense and Annag Duncan have robbed Duke Logging & Lumber, Lavinia is distressed. She cries, “No such rich woodlands exist these days. Flense took my ancestral heritage” (631). This exclamation is powerful in two ways: first, it is an acknowledgement that the landscape has changed so drastically, that the forests are clearly not “infinite,” and there is a limit to what a company like Duke Logging & Lumber can do to the environment. Second, it is highly ironic that Lavinia accuses Flense of taking her “ancestral heritage.” While she did legally inherit the land from her father, and his father before him, that lineage is only several generations old, while the Mi’kmaw claim to that land runs back hundreds and hundreds of years.

Lavinia is so angered by this betrayal that she sends an order to her land in New Zealand saying, “cut all the kauri, sparing none” (632). This act only furthers the irony of the situation, as she is destroying precious land out of anger that she has been robbed of “rich woodlands.” Unfortunately, Lavinia’s fleeting frustrations have much larger consequences.

Following Lavinia’s death, Dieter remarries, has two more children, and becomes a much more business-savvy man. Where he once provided a sensitive balance to Lavinia’s headstrong attitude, he becomes a shrewd and uncaring businessman. He says to his son Charley, “I learned that the entrepreneurial spirit of this country could not be dampened. We can’t be wild animals. We are humans. We live in a world that is a certain way and forests must adapt to the overwhelming tide of men with axes, not the

reverse” (645). There is a similar reluctance in this statement to the reluctance of the Mi’kmaw people in the last section. Though there is no spirit or drive to continue logging, both sides of the industry feel they are now trapped in a cycle that will not end, and so they must unwillingly perpetuate it.

Even Charley is caught up in this unstoppable current, though he tries his best to resist it. Charley is the first in the Duke lineage to leave the family business since Outger Duke many generations ago. Instead of logging, he aims to protect the trees and document them.

In his last notebook, Charley writes, “Nothing in the natural world, no forest, no river, no insect nor leaf has any intrinsic value to men. All is worthless, utterly dispensable unless we discover some benefit to ourselves in it--even the most ardent forest lover thinks this way. Men behave as overlords. They decide what will flourish and what will die. I believe humankind is evolving into a terrible new species and I am sorry that I am one of them” (657-8). Charley recognizes the fundamental flaw in the relationship of man to nature and perceives that mankind is heading in a direction where it will never be able to reconcile its abuse of the natural world. This warning is even lost as, upon Charley’s death, the detailed notebooks he creates are used as guides for loggers who come to that area so that they may be more efficient in their work.

Years later, the Breitsprecher-Duke company is sold when the board members discover the Sel family claim to the company that Lavinia had investigated years before. They exhibit the same paranoia that Lavinia experienced upon first reading the ancestral report, and make drastic maneuvers as a result. Though the reader, who has knowledge of the Sel family, knows it is incredibly unlikely that the family has any information regarding their association with the Duke family, and the threat they pose to the company is almost nonexistent.

Sapatisia Sel shares many characteristics with Mari Sel. Both are willful, intelligent, and gifted in the art and knowledge of medicinal plants. These similarities reflect on the cyclical nature of the family line and how, though the Mi’kmaw culture has been highly assimilated and dampened into mainstream white society, there will always be a spark that ignites someone to learn more about their heritage. Even when Sapatisia is older and slightly more hardened to the world, Jeanne and Felix demonstrate yet another generation of people eager to connect with their ancestry.

The novel ends with Sapatisia considering the future of her own life as well as the larger life of the planet. The future is not often considered in this novel, outside of the context of finding an heir to the Duke company. Consideration for the future indicates both nervousness and fear, but also hope--as Sapatisia and her work have the capacity to make an impact on that future.

Discussion Question 1

How does the role of women on the Duke/Breitsprecher side of the family change over time? How does it stay the same?

Discussion Question 2

Sapatisia has many qualities similar to Mari. What other characters does she share similarities to?

Discussion Question 3

How do you interpret the last lines of the book, "The sea lifted itself toward the light. And kept on lifting"?

Vocabulary

catarrh, excoriation, pate, knobkerrie, champterous, boreal, mestizo

Characters

René Sel

As a young man, René Sel comes from France to New France, where he works as a logger for Monsieur Trépagny. René must work for three years, and then he is promised financial independence and a house of his own. René is a cautious and sad man, who is mourning the death of his late brother Achille. After Monsieur Trépagny's death, René marries Mari, a Mi'kmaq woman, and they have a pleasant marriage. René remains a logger for the rest of his life, and eventually dies while chopping a tree.

Mari

Mari is a Mi'kmaw woman who lives with Monsieur Trépagny. She has three sons from a man named Lolan: Elphège, Theotiste, and Jean-Baptiste. With René, she has a son and two daughters: Achille, Noë and Zoë. Mari is a strong, quiet woman who is highly skilled at using wild plants and herbs to create medicine. She frequently heals her family using her natural remedies. Mari eventually dies after suffering a prolonged illness.

Claude Trépagny

Claude Trépagny is a lumber man from France. His is very wealth and his personality is highly flamboyant. He often tells wild tales to anyone who will listen. Monsieur Trépagny has a short temper, and frequently takes out his rage on Mari or anyone else nearby. He is enraged when he learns that Charles Duquet has escaped his servitude and dies when seeking the man.

Charles Duquet/Duke

Charles Duquet is born in France, and come to New France to work alongside René Sel as an indentured servant for Monsieur Trépagny. Charles does not like the work or Monsieur Trépagny's outbursts, and escapes into the woods one night. He becomes a prosperous fur trader, and eventually turns his business to the timber industry. He marries the wealthy Cornelia Roos, and together they adopt three boys: Jan, Nicolaus, and Bernard. In addition, they have two daughters and a son, Outger. With his sons, Duquet changes his last name and forms the American timber company Duke & Sons, which grows to be incredibly prosperous.

Duquet is a quick-witted, business-minded man, who cares for little else than his profit and his legacy. He is obsessed with making Duke & Sons the front-runner in the industry, and he never makes decisions without his business strategy in mind.

Kuntaw Sel

Kuntaw Sel is the son of Achille Sel and Isobel, and the grandson of René Sel and Mari. He is a powerful man and a strong hunter, but he is conflicted about the ways in which his Mi'kmaw heritage fits in with the rapidly-changing world in which he lives. He has a son, Tonny, with a Mi'kmaw woman before he runs away with Beatrix Duquet.

Jinot Sel

Jinot Sel is the son of Tonny Sel and Hanah, and the grandson of Kuntaw Sel and Malaan. As a young man, Jinot is happy-go-lucky, skilled, and very attractive. He has a relatively carefree life, and works as a logger with his brother, Amboise. A horrible fire kills Amboise and leaves Jinot's leg badly wounded.

Eventually, Jinot finds work for Albert Horn, an ax manufacturer. Mr. Horn takes a liking to Jinot and brings him on many business trips, including a trip to New Zealand. When Mr. Horn is killed in New Zealand, Jinot is held captive as a suspect. When the crime is resolved, Jinot is free to go, but must pay his own passage back to Boston. He finds work as a logger, but suffers a wound and infection that eventually end his life.

Sapatisia Sel

Sapatisia Sel is the daughter Edgar-Jim Sel and Brenda Hingham. She is a fiery, headstrong woman who shows a keen interest in the natural world from a young age. In college, she begins to study ecology, but leaves the school after a muddled affair with a married professor.

Sapatisia marries the ecological activist Alfred Onehube, but they divorce. She lives alone in a rocky coastal area and continues doing fieldwork and research into the changes happening in the natural world.

Outger Duke

Outger Duke is the son of Charles Duquet and Cornelia Roos, and their only non-adopted son. Unlike his brothers, who are steadfast and business minded, Outger is highly eccentric. He shows little interest in the business and instead prefers to study plants. Eventually, he leaves the family business in favor of becoming a professor at a European university.

Before leaving America permanently, though, Outger has relations with a Passamaquoddy woman, and they have a daughter together, Beatrice, who will go on to marry Kuntaw Sel.

Lavinia Duke

Lavinia Duke is the daughter of James Duke and Posey Breeley Brandon. She is a blend of her father's business acumen and her mother's fiery personality. From a young age, Lavinia shows a keen interest in the Duke & Sons business affairs, and eventually confesses she wishes to join the company. Her father makes arrangements for her to take a position as a clerk, and she immediately proves her worth.

When her father dies, Lavinia assumes the principal role at the company. She marries Dieter Breitsprecher, a former rival, and they have a content marriage that produces one son, Charles.

James Duke

James Duke is the son of Sedley Duke and Eugenia, and the great-grandson of Charles Duquet. James is a romantic, passionate man who falls for Posey Breeley Brandon, a married woman. When he finds out that Posey's husband is a mentally-ill recluse, he attempts to frame the man for murder but fails. Eventually, Mr. Brandon dies and James and Posey are free to marry. They only have one child, Lavinia, a headstrong daughter who James comes to dote on, as he recognizes much of her mother in her.

Later in life, James suffers from terrible near-constant headaches. He eventually dies while on a ship returning from Europe.

Charles Duke

Charles, "Charley," Duke is the son of Lavinia Duke and Dieter Breitsprecher. Charley attends Yale, where he studies forestry. Yet, instead of going into the family business, he rebels against the idea of logging and wants to be a botanist instead.

He attempts to rape his brother James Bardawulf's wife, Caroline, and is beaten by James Bardawulf in the process. After Carley wakes up from the coma his brother put him in, his father sends him to South America, where he lives in a small hut and spends his days studying the vast number of trees and plants that surround him.

Symbols and Symbolism

Mosquitos

The mosquito is a parasite and represents the way that the European settlers are taking advantage of the land, and literally leeching off of what is not rightfully theirs. In Part I . forêt, hache, famille (1693-1716), Chapter 1 - 7, René Sel, who is in the forests of the New World for the first time, makes a note of the density of mosquitos.

Later in the text, in Part VII. broken sticks (1825-1840), Chapter 49 - 53, Jinot, René's descendent also makes a note of the mosquitos that surround him. Though Jinot is a Native American who considers the forest a part of his heritage, the fact that the mosquitos attack him represents how Native ways have been corrupted and confused to such an extent that even Jinot does not have the same balanced relationship with nature as his Native ancestors.

Charley's Notebooks

Charley's notebooks represent the difficulty one faces in breaking the cycle of destruction, for both the Duke and Sel families.

In Part X. sliding into darkness (1886-2013), Chapter 63 - 70, Charley Duke relocates to South America and begins creating notebooks filled with detailed information about every tree in the area. He sends these notebooks to his nephew, Conrad, who takes a keen interest in them. However, they are then used by James Bardawulf, Conrad's father and Charley's brother, in order to go into that same forest and tear down those same trees for use as lumber.

Just as Charley's notebooks were ultimately used to continue the practices of deforestation he loathes, the members of the Sel family who wish to return to Mi'kmaw ways are ultimately forced to return to jobs as loggers if they are to survive.

Penebscot Bay Table

The table, on a basic level, symbolizes the growth and power of the Duquet family based solely on trees, such as the one used to make the table. The table also symbolizes the scheming and inter-family corruption that comes from that business, and how they will place material objects above all.

In Part IV. the severed snake (1756-1766), Chapter 32 - 27, Charles Duquet dies and his family covets a table made of the single largest pine Duquet ever cut. Duquet's sons attempt to wrestle it away from their estranged niece, Beatrix.

Charles Duquet's Teeth

Charles Duquet's rotting teeth symbolize how Duquet's morals slowly diminish over time as he becomes more and more consumed by his business and the prospect of wealth. His expensive ivory dentures not only symbolize his wealth, but his complete acceptance of superficiality over depth.

In Part I . forêt, hache, famille (1693-1716), Chapter 1 - 7, a young Charles Duquet is suffering from near-constant mouth infection causing painful abscesses and frequent tooth removal. Eventually, during his voyage to China in Part II. "...helplessly they stare at his tracks" (1693-1727) Chapter 8 - 22, Duquet has all of his teeth removed and purchases a set of dentures carved from ivory. These teeth are purely superficial and Duquet must remove them in order to eat anything.

Renardette's birthmark

How Trépagny interprets Renardette's birthmark demonstrates how he and the other are capable of warping the truth to fit their views. Trépagny uses his ability to see only what he wants to in order to convince himself he is not destroying the forest.

In Part I . forêt, hache, famille (1693-1716), Chapter 3, a young orphan girl is brought to Monsieur Trépagny. No one wants to adopt her because of a birthmark on her neck that looks like the devil. Trépagny looks at the birthmark and instead sees a fox. A fox is a symbol of trickery.

Kauri trees

The trees, which are described as "immense" and "helpless," in Part VIII. glory days (1836-1870), Chapter 54 - 59, symbolize both how ancient and powerful the natural world is, but also how susceptible and defenseless it is in the face of man's great capacity for destruction.

The Kauri is a type of tree indigenous to New Zealand. It has the potential to grow incredibly large and live for thousands of years, and these properties make it significant to the native Maori people of New Zealand.

The talking stick

The talking stick is a symbol of the Mi'kmaw culture's old ways.

The talking stick is an item used in the Mi'kmaw culture during group meetings. Whoever holds the stick has their turn to speak. The Mi'kmaw people use the talking stick in Part IX. the shadow in the cup (1844-1960s), Chapter 60 - 62, as the tribe attempts to determine what to do about the disappearance of their culture. After

agreeing they must make changes in order to live alongside the whitemen, the Mi'kmaw burn the talking stick and therefore it becomes a symbol of the "old way" of life that the Mi'kmaw have abandoned in order to survive.

The ax

The ax simultaneously represents life and death. For the men of the Sel family, the ability to work in lumber camps is what keeps them alive. Though the Mi'kmaw culture is fading, the individuals are able to support themselves through work as loggers. Yet, the ax also represents death as it is the catalyst men use for the destruction of the forest.

The wikuom

The wikoum, a Mi’kmaw shelter that appears throughout the novel, represents how wholly connected Mi’kmaw culture is to nature, as the shelter is fashioned out of natural materials, and its use invokes the connection of the resident to nature, as they eat and sleep on the floor of the dwelling.

The lighthouse

In Part X, Sapatisia is living near a lighthouse on the coast. Jeanne and Felix use this lighthouse to identify her home in their quest to contact her. This lighthouse represents how the Mi’kmaw people will always seek out their culture. This can be both literally, as Jinot or Kuntaw, who sought their motherland, or figuratively, as Sapatisia left home to study the traditional medicinal plants of her ancestors.

Settings

New France

At the start of the novel, the area being claimed by Monsieur Trépagny is referred to as New France. The land is still relatively untouched. With its dense thickets, gloomy forests, and ancient trees, the land feels almost prehistoric. Within only a few years, though, massive clearings have been formed and villages are springing up.

China

In Part II. "...helplessly they stare at his tracks" (1693-1727) Chapter 8 - 22, Charles Duquet voyages to China in order to trade furs. The country is highly advanced in comparison to the newness of New France. China does not have much large natural forests in the same way as New France, but they do have highly curated gardens that intend to demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between man and nature. Though Charles Duquet is mesmerized by the gardens, Wuqua makes the point that no European man understands or values this symbiotic relationship.

New Zealand

New Zealand is visited many times throughout the novel because, for European settlers, it is similar to America in that it is "unpopulated and uncivilized," in addition to boasting a wealth of natural resources. The country is home to the native Maori people as well as the majestic Kauri trees. When Jinot visits, he is nervous about the native peoples, but absolutely taken with the scope and lushness of the nature. When Lavinia visits, even she cannot help but me moved by the intensity of the land. Towards the end of the novel, New Zealand is undergoing European colonization and seems on the precipice of meeting the same fate as the United States in terms of native displacement and deforestation.

Mi'kma'ki

Mi'kma'ki is a Mi'kmaq land located in what is present-day Quebec, New Brunswick, and Maine. In the novel, it is the ancestral home of the Sel family. Many members of the Sel family return to Mi'kma'ki throughout the novel, hoping to learn more about their family and culture. Yet, every time someone returns to the land, it is guaranteed to be found more dilapidated and depressed than the last time. Eventually, in Part IX. the shadow in the cup (1844-1960s), Chapter 60 - 62, there is a concentrated effort to rebuild Mi'kma'ki, but this eventually gives way to a dissipation of Mi'kmaq culture altogether.

Boston

Boston becomes a hub for the European settlers, and the first headquarters of Charles Duquet's lumber company. The city is a hotbed of the "independent American spirit," and a key city in the Revolutionary War that separates the United States from England's rule. Eventually, the Duke company moves further west and larger cities develop with their own identities, but Boston remains as a symbol of the formation of the United States.

Themes and Motifs

Food as a means of defining "other"

The author uses food throughout the novel to demonstrate how the idea of who is the "other" in a culture changes over time with circumstantial and environmental changes.

At the start of the novel, food is merely a means of survival. There are no established notions of cuisine or culture. Mari, as a Mi’kmaw woman, knows more about the land and the proper acquisition of food than any of the male settlers. She teaches René how to properly fish, and though Trépagny calls the eels they catch “savage food,” it is clearly the best food available. Arguably, Mari has a more refined understanding of food than any of the European men. Though Trépagny sends her away, he calls her back almost immediately when he realizes he needs someone to prepare his wedding feast, which she does with skill.

Yet, as American society becomes more established, and more firmly rooted in European finery, food and the culture around it becomes a crucial way in which the once-rugged settlers distinguish themselves from the native people, and contribute to the idea of the native people as “others.”

In Part VIII, Edward hosts a grand feast, and is referred to as a “great gourmand” by the narrator. This is one of the first times in the novel that food is regarded as a status symbol as opposed to a means of survival. This signals the establishment of yet another insurmountable barrier between the European-Americans and the native people. For, while Mari and Trépagny were clearly different in many ways, they ate and lived and worked in the same conditions. Trépagny did not respect Mari, but he was receptive to her larger understanding of the natural world. Establishing a certain style of food as “high culture” and other foods as “barbaric” is merely another technique used to set the Mi’kmaw people apart as “other.”

This othering is furthered by the fact that Mi’kmaw people can’t even cook and eat in the same way as Mari did. The settlers’ penchant for excess causes many once-abundant food sources to disappear, and their use of livestock destroys many plant resources that Mari would have relied on. Not only are the Mi’kmaw people kept from the fine dining of American society, but they are prevented from living even in their traditional mode. In Part IX, two starving Mi’kmaw people eat a housecat that wanders near their wikuom, which demonstrates just how much the Mi’kmaw people have struggled to survive.

Cultural identity viewed and received differently among white and non-white characters

The author shows multiple time throughout the book how cultural identity could be fluid for white characters, while it became a source of angst, confusion, and discrimination for the non-white characters who were forever doomed to be considered "others."

The concept of one's "identity" is a question the characters of the novel are constantly pondering. For the Sel family, this means navigating an identity that is partially French, and partially Mi'kmaw. White society regards the family as though they were wholly Mi'kmaw, in terms of their discrimination and limiting of opportunities towards them. No matter what they do, they will always be grouped together with all other native peoples. Though, the Sel family does not necessarily see this as a bad thing, and many of the male family members, such as Jinot and Kuntaw, aim to explore the Mi'kmaw aspect of their family history. However, Mi'kmaw society is not wholly receptive to the family. Despite their efforts to assimilate into Mi'kma'ki society, the Sel family has all-too-clearly failed to be raised in a wholly Mi'kmaw environment, leaving them with little to no knowledge of the customs, traditions, and skills (such as hunting or basket weaving) that are critical to the Mi'kmaw way of life. In this sense, the Sel family is forever outsiders, even among their own people.

This mixed identity only grows more complicated and difficult to navigate throughout the course of the novel, as all native people become grouped together in the eyes of the U.S. government. Projects such as reservations and residential schools not only view native people as homogenous across the board, but they also attempt to subdue that aspect of one's identity more than they conserve it.

Meanwhile, the Duke family transitions between identities with ease. Charles Duquet is born in France, comes to New France, travels to China, marries a Dutch woman, and has a mixture of children. Yet concern for what this means for his "identity" is never a focal point. As a white man, he and his family have the privilege of sliding between cultures, languages, and countries with ease. Eventually, this identity of his lineage is simply "American." The American identity develops rapidly, with a characteristic spirit of independence, defiance, and boldness. Within mere years of establishing the United States, there is already a concern over "immigrants" infiltrating the new nation, though just mere years ago, men like Charles Duquet were bringing cultural influences from all over the world to the land that would become America. Yet, this sense of entitlement is merely another facet of the white American identity.

Christianity used as justification for destructive behavior

The author has multiple characters in the novel use Christianity as an excuse for destructive behavior, such as deforestation, claiming the Bible actually instructs people to use the land to serve their purposes. An introductory page of the novel contains a

quote from scholar Lynn White Jr. that says, in part, “By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.” This attitude sets the precedent for how the Europeans will come to view and treat the land in the novel, and how Christianity will be used as a justification for this treatment.

Christianity is never extensively discussed or practiced in the novel, and no character is even remotely pious. Nevertheless, the European and American Christian identity acts as a backdrop to the rise of Duke & Sons. When God, or some other heavenly power, is mentioned--it is often in regards to a Manifest Destiny-like belief in the power of Duke & Sons. In Part IV, embers from Bernard’s pipe cause a forest fire. The true origin of the fire remains unbeknownst to him, and Bernard ends up regarding the blazing forest as “God’s will.”

On the contrary, religion is not mentioned by the Sel family in any form. Still, among Mi’kmaw people there is a clear spiritual connection and association with nature, which could be loosely defined as Animism. These values run contrary to the Christian belief system, and contrary to the wanton destruction of the forest that is perpetuated by that belief system. The European’s desire to eliminate Mi’kmaw and other native cultures is, in part, a desire to eliminate their guilt over the presence of any value system that is potentially in conflict with their own.

The abuse of Christianity becomes even more prominent when the government establishes residential schools, which are run by nuns and priests. The torture-like horrors of these schools attempt to flush-out the native mentality and belief system and convert natives to Christianity. Yet, the physical and mental abuse that was so prevalent in these schools reveals, once again, that the mask of Christianity was merely used as a justification for the destruction of both nature and culture.

Fire as a symbol of death or dying

In the novel, fire is used as a symbol of death or dying. It is a symbol directly connected to the forests, as many forests burn from man-made causes, while others require fires for the good of the soil and the spreading of seeds. Both man-made and natural fires occur throughout the novel, and many characters have their lives taken in a blaze--such as Edward Duke, Lennart Vogel and Posey Brandon from the Duke side of the family, and Amboise Sel and Joe Martel from the Sel side of the family. These respective fires that kill the two groups above occur under very different circumstances--one is during a dinner party, and the other is out in a lumber camp--yet the condition of fire represents how all are equal in death. No matter the circumstances, all are susceptible to being taken at any time.

Fire is also frequently used as a metaphor or literary device in the text. Comparisons are made between the burning of the trees and the dying flames of Mi’kmaw culture. Similarly, ashes are used to describe the Mi’kmaw culture, as well. This analogy, while figurative, is also literal. Not only has the Mi’kmaw culture been reduced, its reduction is

directly tied to the literal burning of the forest, and all of the invasion and destruction that comes with it.

Cycles

Both the Sel and the Duke families are subject to the cyclical nature of time. The Sel family, as foreshadowed at René's death, is fated to repeat the same type of life over and over again: struggling, working in lumber camps, feeling uncertain of one's place in the world. And indeed, these are the tasks that many of the Sel men are subject to. In Part IX, the family attempts to break this cycle and is semi-successful in reestablishing Mi'kmaw culture. Yet, ultimately, they once again fall prey to the prejudices of the outside world that make sustaining an isolated culture impossible.

The Duke family is subject to cycles of their own, albeit with less strife. The men attempt to expand the company, fail in personal relationships, and die in strange and untimely ways. They are stubborn and revenge-seeking to a fault. Most importantly, they perpetuate the cycle of the destruction of the forest, with no concern or recognition for their actions. Dieter Breitsprecher attempts to break this cycle, as he holds real compassion for the forest. Yet, as he ages he realizes he is helpless to stop this destruction in its tracks. Even his son Charley, who leaves the business to study South American trees, inadvertently becomes a cog in the cycle when his notes are used to level the forest.

The last lines of the novel are perhaps an allusion to the breaking down of this cycle for these two families, and for the planet: "The sea lifted itself toward the light. And kept on lifting." The sea, instead of rocking back and forth in a typical, cyclical tidal pattern, continues to rise. This may indicate a sense of hope and change; that even the most consistent cycles can be broken."

Styles

Point of View

The novel is told through a third-person omniscient narrator, meaning the narrator has access to the actions and emotions of each character in the story. Not only does the narrator spend time focusing on the thoughts and actions of the major characters, but will often go aside to minor characters who are never mentioned again for the sake of providing historical and contextual information that enriches the larger narrative. The many and ever-changing perspectives allow the narrator to simultaneously share many different perspectives of a morally complicated story.

Language and Meaning

There is a distinct shift in the use of language between the sections dealing with the Duke family and the sections dealing with the Sel family. In the sections pertaining to the Duke family, extravagant language is used and many uncommon vocabulary words appear. The contrary is true for the sections pertaining to the Sels, as their chapters are told in a much more straightforward, storytelling style with little embellishment.

Many words from other languages appear in the novel, such as wikuom, and bits of French and Dutch. Both the Mi'kmaw people as well as the European settlers adapt to many shifts in the common language. Yet, while the European's languages remain spoken in their native Europe, the Mi'kmaw language starts to die out and is kept alive out of tradition as opposed to use. By the end of the novel, English is established as the uniform language for all.

Structure

The novel is broken into ten sections, with each section dealing with a chunk of time in either the life of the Duke family or the Sel family. Only in the first and last sections are the families discussed side by side: in Part I, the reader sees how René Sel and Charles Duquet first come together and then how their paths diverge. In Part X, 300 years later, the reader sees how the Duke family business fizzles out as the Sel family continues on.

These alternating sections allow enough time for the author to paint an extended portrait of significant moments or people within each family before moving on to the next generation. The alternating pattern also allows the reader to see how each family deals with larger events and shifts in time, such as war, changes in technology, or changes in the economy. Often times, these alternating sections contain passages or lines that mirror related information from previous sections, such as Jinot and Lavinia's respective trips to New Zealand in Parts VII and VIII.

Quotes

The air was in constant smoke, the smell of New France.
-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this scene, René and Duquet are working for Monsieur Trépagny, chopping trees and burning the piles of unused wood. This quote shows how New France is built on destruction. The pre-existing landscape is not respected, but is constantly altered and wasted so that land may be cleared for settlers.

To be a man is to clear the forest. I don't see the trees. I see the cabbages. I see the vineyards.
-- Monsieur Claude Trépagny (chapter 2 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote shows Monsieur Trépagny's vision for the future of New France. It is his belief that "real" men clear the forest, and that it is a man's responsibility to envision civilization in place of nature.

We will not burn trees into dirty ashes.
-- Achille (chapter 25 paragraph 3)

Importance: Achille says this to his family after the Sel family has been robbed for their house by Renardette. He aims to inspire his family to look beyond the whiteman ways and see out the Mi'kmaw ways. They will never give in to the kind of civilization that destroys the land.

You are not.
-- Sosep (chapter 28 paragraph 1)

Importance: Achille hears Sosep's voice speaking out of a giant fish, just before it escapes. This quote symbolizes Achille's own fears and uncertainties as he attempts to find his place in the fast-moving world.

That world he wanted them to know had vanished as smoke deserts the dying embers that made it.
-- Narrator (chapter 38 paragraph 1)

Importance: This statement summarizes, both figuratively and literally, how the Mi'kmaw world has disappeared. The culture itself has dissipated and has no strong central root. Physically, as well, the culture has been destroyed by the settlers who cut and burn trees into "dying embers."

Forests burned, according to God’s will.
-- Narrator (chapter 35 paragraph 7)

Importance: After a fire consumes some of the Duke & Sons forest, Bernard feels that

the occasional fire cannot be helped and that it is the will of God. This is ironic because the fire was caused directly from Bernard's pipe, and would never have happened were it not for settlers like Bernard. Yet, Christianity allows the men to blame the violent acts of destruction on something as abstract as the will of God.

It was the richest and strangest part of his life, for he felt he was no longer Jinot Sel, bot someone else, a hybrid creature in a contrived space.
-- Narrator (chapter 50 paragraph 5)

Importance: Jinot works for Mr. Bone for many years, and Mr. Bone takes a special liking to Jinot. Jinot is referred to as "Mr." and goes on regular trips with Mr. Bone. He is living a very different life than he is used to, and it is difficult for him to accept this. No matter what, he will always feel partially out of place.

Nothing in the natural world, no forest, no river, no insect nor leaf has any intrinsic value to men. All is worthless, utterly dispensable unless we discover some benefit to ourselves in it--even the most ardent forest lover thinks this way. Men behave as overlords. They decide what will flourish and what will die. I believe humankind is evolving into a terrible new species and I am sorry that I am one of them.
-- Charley Breitsprecher (chapter 65 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote comes at the end of Charley's last notebook. After he has spent years of his life dedicated to the study of plants, his conclusion is that no man could ever truly appreciate nature unless it benefits him in some way. This quote illuminates the failure of the industry-focused, European man to live in harmony with nature as the native peoples have done for hundreds of years.

In the old days, women were important, they were the great deciders. They did everything, some even hunted like men. But over the years the Mi’kmaw men began to act like whitemen, who do not regard women as worthy. It is the old Mi’kmaw way to know women are of equal value as men.
-- Kuntaw Sel (chapter 60 paragraph 2)

Importance: Kuntaw makes this point to emphasize one of the most devastating ways in which Mi'kmaw men have unknowingly become like whitemen: their treatment of women. This quote is reflected in the novel, as the women of the Sel family, since Mari, have been relegated to housewives, incapable of making a living of their own in a world run by whitemen.

I learned that the entrepreneurial spirit of this country could not be dampened. We can’t be wild animals. We are humans. We live in a world that is a certain way and forests must adapt to the overwhelming tide of men with axes, not the reverse.
-- Dieter Breitsprecher (chapter 64 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is significant because it shows how Dieter has become helpless to the now self-sustaining current of destruction. Though, as a young man, he

believed in preservation and reforestation, he has become hardened and embittered to these things in favor of resigning himself to being swept up in the Duke family business.

The children were never again wholly Mi'kmaw.
-- Narrator (chapter 62 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote refers to the residential schools that were set up by the government. The goals of these church-run schools were to educate children in the ways of whitemen, and remove their native culture through intensive assimilation. These schools quickly became hotbeds for child abuse and this quote indicates the fact that the children lost both their culture and their dignity because of this abuse.

She, too, had been a little moved by the great silent trees, so immense, so helpless.
-- Narrator (chapter 59 paragraph 8)

Importance: During her trip to New Zealand, even shrewd, calculating Lavinia cannot help but be overwhelmed by the intensity of the kauri trees. The immense yet helpless nature of the trees is indicative of both their power and presence, but their ultimate inability to protect themselves from the destructive forces of mankind.