

Brazzaville Beach Study Guide

Brazzaville Beach by William Boyd (writer)

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Plot Summary

To read *Brazzaville Beach*, one must first accept and become comfortable with a complete fluidity of time, as Hope Clearwater tells her story. In fact, the tale involves three large parts of Hope's life: her educational training and marriage to a brilliant mathematician, John Clearwater; her life after his death as a research scientist and part of an ongoing study of chimpanzees in the Congo; and her current state of inertia, living in a beach house and completing rather mundane tasks to support herself as she attempts to sort out the purpose of her life and the possible path of its next phase. Hope moves the reader back and forth among these three existences, and the work at first seems to lack essential continuity. As one becomes accustomed to these "time travels," however, the novel becomes a piece of art, into which all of Hope's experiences merge into central themes.

As a young graduate student, Hope becomes infatuated with a newly-arrived mathematician, John Clearwater. She pursues him ardently and they marry quite quickly. Hope finishes her doctorate and takes a part-time position chronicling the plant life on an old estate near London. John immerses himself in his work, gradually becoming less and less rational, as is often the tragic case with genius. Eventually, Hope must extricate herself from the marriage and does so without great sadness. John descends deeper into insanity, ultimately committing suicide. The next phase of her life entails the work at Grosso Arvore, as a team member of a group of researchers, observing chimpanzee behavior and contributing to the final book of Eugene Mallabar, the pre-eminent scholar on chimpanzees.

During the Grosso Arvore period, Hope discovers that chimp behavior is not always as Mallabar has portrayed it. While he has long ago concluded that chimps in the wild are non-aggressive, Hope witnesses violence, attacks, murders, infanticide and cannibalism among two groups of chimps that have divided themselves, living apart from one another. Hope's efforts to convince Mallabar are met with resistance and anger, and she is forced to remain mute, so that his research and conclusions remain intact. Secretly, she keeps her own journals of the events, however, and writes an article for publication, negating the conclusion that chimpanzees are peaceful creatures. After a frightful and violent confrontation with Mallabar, Hope leaves the research project and takes up residence in a small beach house close to town.

The final phase of Hope's life is the present, living in a beach house purchased by a lover who has now disappeared but, who, as well, was not honest with her about his own past. She suspects he may still be alive and may one day reappear. Her daily routine is now filled with leisure, as she engages in translation work for another male friend and performs some perfunctory tasks for the Grosso Arvore project. She is "sorting out" her life, as she says, in order to determine what constitutes a purpose and true tranquility. The reader gains no sense that Hope has drawn any firm conclusions at the novel's end.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Hope Clearwater lives on Brazzaville Beach, a beach only recently named as such, in a small remodeled home. She is taking a break from her life in order to sort out some meaning for it. Her story is really of two major events in her life: a failed marriage in England, which sent her to Africa; and a lengthy period of time observing chimpanzees as a part of a scientific study. Hope wonders how to begin her story and determines it must begin with Clovis.

Clovis is one of several chimps being observed by Hope. In her opinion, he is more stupid than the others but endearing anyway. He has come to accept Hope's presence as have the other chimps in his group. Clovis is sitting under a mulemba tree, inert and occasionally sniffing his finger, enjoying the odor from whatever he has stuck it into earlier in the day. Eventually, he climbs up into the tree and, swinging from branches, is soon lost from sight. Hope decides to return to camp, finding Joao, her full-time assistant, who states that he has seen Lena, a pregnant female chimp. Joao's son, Alda, is also present at times, training to become an assistant.

The camp is known as Grosso Arvore and is a semi-permanent series of structures, housing huts for the scientists, a kitchen, utility buildings, and an Artificial Feeding area, designed to draw chimps in for observation. Not far from the camp is a small river which Eugene Mallabar, the project's director, has named the Danube. The remainder of the scenery is typical of Africa, the Congo specifically. Many of the original members of the project are now gone, funds having become scarce, but a small band of scientists remain. Hope returns to her hut for a scotch and then wends her way over to the canteen for dinner. There, she has short and inconsequential conversations with Mallabar, Ian Vail, another scientist who is present with his wife, Roberta, and Hauser, the man generally responsible for the artificial feeding area and for laboratory testings of feces and such.

Prologue Analysis

Hope clearly has a story to tell, and is careful to explain to her reader that the telling will be a bit disorganized, moving back and forth from England to Africa, from past to present, and in both the first and third person narratives. From this introduction, it becomes clear that both major events in her life—the marriage in England and the position as a scientist in the Congo—have wrecked havoc on her. She has been so effected that she now finds it necessary to simply exist with a simple job of translation, so that she can sort through the quagmire and emerge somehow healthy and ready to move forward. She begins with a simple afternoon of observing a chimp and returning to camp afterward, and yet one senses that she is not particularly fond of the people with

whom she works. It appears that Hope sees herself as a loner and misfit for this crowd, but will continue in her position for the present.



What I Like to Do and The Mockman

What I Like to Do and The Mockman Summary

A flashback to Hope's life as a single graduate student in England opens this chapter. It was during this time that John Clearwater arrived to begin his professorship in mathematics. Hope determined to meet this new bachelor and a romance was quickly begun.

Looking back upon her former life as she observes her chimps, Hope reflects upon the fact that these Pan Troglodytes are differentiated from man by perhaps a one-and-a-half to a two percent difference in DNA. For this reason, the chimp is often called the "mockman," exhibiting gestures and behaviors closely resembling homosapiens. She had come to Africa to join a research project begun by Eugene Mallabar, in 1953, in an attempt to complete his dissertation. Fascinated by chimps, he stayed on, bringing his wife, Ginga, over as well. Gradually, a compound had evolved, Mallabar became world-known for his studies, two books were written, and lecture invitations poured in. Grosso Arvore, the geographical area of chimp study, eventually became a national park and game preserve, and the scientists and workers employed by Mallabar live a rather pleasant existence.

The process by which one begins the study of chimps is to insert oneself into their environment every day until the chimps accept the presence. At this point, they will then engage in normal activity, and such activity can be recorded and logged. Each chimp is given a name, and a complete biography maintained. Because Mallabar's work has entailed twenty years, he is considered the premier expert on chimps in Africa.

The project is not without its difficulties. Funding has been lacking, there is a civil war in which four distinct factions are involved, and supplies are difficult to obtain. The researchers persist, however, as Mallabar is finishing his final book. One of the distinct issues of recent observations is that a group of Mallabar's chimps have broken away and moved south from the original group. Why this has occurred, no one knows, and the phenomenon is a bit of a kink in Mallabar's research. Hope has been assigned the task of studying these southern chimps in an attempt to discover the reason for their exodus from the north, and she is assisted by Joao and Alda. The six chimps include Clovis, the alpha male, Rita-Mae, a strong, mature female, Rita-Lu, daughter of Rita-Mae, Muffin, an adolescent male, and Lester, the new baby of Rita-Mae. Conrad and Lena, two other adults in the southern group are not present on this day, but they often go off on their own. Lena is pregnant and close to delivery.

Rita-Lu climbs down from a tree and tosses around a bundle. It is a baby chimpanzee, apparently half-eaten. While chimps are known to hunt and eat meat, they have not been known to kill and eat their own species. Hope realizes that this is critical information and must take the information, the baby chimp's body, and fecal matter back to Mallabar. The fecal matter will be analyzed to determine if, in fact, the adults have



eaten the dead baby. There are many questions to answer: How did the baby die? Whose baby was it? Who had eaten it?

Hope delivers everything to Hauser in the lab, for analysis, and he agrees to test the fecal matter for remains of chimpanzee. Because Hope is still looking for the possible mother, she agrees to go out with Ian Vail, the researcher observing the northern chimps, to check on all pregnant females. That evening, Mallabar comes to Hope's tent, informing her that the carcass was that of a baboon, not a chimp. Even though Hauser collaborates Mallabar's conclusion, Hope remain unconvinced.

What I Like to Do and The Mockman Analysis

The reader now has at least a cursory view of the main characters and will need to watch as their personalities unfold. Eugene Mallabar obviously enjoys his preeminence in his field of research and is working hard to complete his final and most definitive work. Hauser is clearly Mallabar's "man" and will agree with Mallabar's conclusions out of loyalty to the man, not to pure science. Hope wants to "get it right" and is dogged in her persistence of the truth, even though it may throw a wrench into Mallabar's primary theses about chimps and their behaviors. The foreshadowing of conflict between Hope and at least two other members of the team is evident, and Hope does not appear to be one who will "back off." Mallabar has obvious motivation to bury any aggressive behavior of chimps toward one another, because his life's work, as well as his previous publications, has defined the chimp as non-aggressive to his own species.



The Wave Albatross and The Night Heron; Noise or Signal; The Margin of Error; the Inverse Cascade

The Wave Albatross and The Night Heron; Noise or Signal; The Margin of Error; the Inverse Cascade Summary

In the ensuing four chapters, Hope fluctuates from the past to the present, and one gains some insight into the personality of John Clearwater. Clearwater is a mathematician, high strung and restless and absorbed in his work. The married quickly after meeting, and Hope believes that her life has gained purpose and fulfillment. As newlyweds, there is great intimacy, and Hope attempts to understand John's work, specifically related to turbulence. He is attempting to discover if turbulence as a phenomenon is characterized by determined mathematical patterns or just unpredictable sounds. If turbulence were found to be unpredictable, what would that tell man about his universe? During this research, he is spending more time away from home, but Hope is involved in completing her doctoral thesis, "Dominance and Territory: Relationships and Social Structure." In retrospect, Hope realizes that John was subtly changing, although at the time she blamed it on his immersion in work. While John attempts to give Hope a cursory conceptual understanding of his work, she feels woefully inept.

Moving into the chimp project phase of life, the tale of Hope's observations continues. She accompanies Ian Vail to search for the chimps that Ian knows are pregnant among the northern population. Ian is concerned about Hope's insistence that the carcass was a chimp, and he appears not to want to confront Mallabar or upset the current smooth operation of the camp and the completion of Mallabar's book. As they seek the chimps, Vail explains his theory that a chimp group is really held together by a dominant female, not an alpha male. Rita-Mae had been the dominant female until she took a group south. When Rita-Mae left the northern group, its society became disrupted and brought in other nomadic females in an attempt to find a new dominant female. It stabilized when Crispina emerged as the leading female. Mallabar does not agree with him, but his is unwilling to press his position. Vail believes, however, that additional difficulties will soon come to the northern group. All adult females are pregnant, and Crispina will soon be. At this point, there will be no female left with a functioning sex cycle and the males will have to resolve the issue somehow.

Hope and Vail return to camp, with moderate success in finding the pregnant females. Hope discovers that someone has gone through her tent and is certainly disturbed by this event. She decides not to report the intrusion to anyone, though she has some thoughts regarding who and why. In any event, the big news of the day supersedes all



else; Mallabar announces that a new grant has come through, guaranteeing more than enough funds for completion of the research and then some. He also announces that Hope will be going to make the supply run, even though not her turn to do so. Hope does not mind, however. Though the roads are bad, she looks forward to getting to the provincial capitol, staying in a real hotel for a few days, eating restaurant food, and seeing her male friend - Usman Shoukry.

The Wave Albatross and The Night Heron; Noise or Signal; The Margin of Error; the Inverse Cascade Analysis

Hope appears to be a bit jealous of John's understanding of mathematics. She phrases this as his "secret," something that only a few in the world will ever know. Somehow, she believes this might make his world more ordered and synchronous, as opposed to those who do not see patterns and formulae in their personal worlds, which guide their decisions and choices. The changes in John are subtle, yet identifiable in behaviors. He is immersing himself far more in his work and seems to only wish to go to movies for evening entertainment. His selection of movies, as well, is a bit strange - horror and thriller plots - and he insists upon sitting in the very front where the sound is horribly loud.

As the plot moves back to the Grosso Arvore project, Hope's suspicions are increased when she discovers that an intruder has been in her tent. While nothing is missing, it is clear that someone has been into her drawer and perhaps read her observation notes. This foreshadows a possibility by Mallabar to suppress her conviction that the baby carcass was that of a chimp, an event that would destroy much of Mallabar's current theories about their social structure and behaviors. Also, the reader begins to gain glimpses into Ian Vail's character. He is not willing to confront Mallabar's dismissal of his theory, a sign of weakness, and attempts a sexual overture toward Hope.



Usman Shoukry's Lemma; Ikarios and Erigone; Cabbages and Spheres

Usman Shoukry's Lemma; Ikarios and Erigone; Cabbages and Spheres Summary

In life, according to Hope Clearwater, we tend to try to solve our problems the same way that algorithms are used to solve mathematical problems. There are also lemmas, "...propositions so simple they are not even called theorems" (p. 79). Life is also full of lemmae, she posits, and remembers Usman Shoukry's favorite - "Never be too happy." Usman is her Egyptian male friend whom she met on her first provision run. He is a mercenary air force pilot for the federal government. He and several others fly Russian-made MIG-15's and bomb suspected revolutionary strongholds and villages. Shoukry has no rules and answers to no government. He is simply paid to complete missions, and life is not complicated. Hope thoroughly enjoys the company and the sex and always returns to Grosso Arvore renewed and ready for work. On this trip, Usman takes her to the airport to show her his plane. Nestled in the cockpit is a small pistol which he claims is his good luck charm. After three days together, Hope returns to the project site.

Today, no more Migs fly out of this airport, as the air force operation has moved south. While Hope lives quite close to the town, she does not frequent the hotel where she and Usman stayed. It is now owned by a Greek, and is relatively quiet and empty. Occasionally, Hope eats there with Gunter, the German who has hired her to complete translations. She is reminded that life is not precise and structured, as she recalls a former time with John.

The story abruptly returns to Hope's past in England. She has secured a job, chronicling the plant life around an old estate not far from London, having turned down perhaps her first choice of studying chimpanzees in Africa. At this point, she does not want to leave John. Prior to reporting for work, she and John take a short holiday in Scotland, staying at a small cottage on the beach. John has a mathematical epiphany while digging a hole to bury the garbage and, in hopes of additional insights, begins to dig holes frequently during both day and night. Hope becomes a bit concerned that he may be losing emotional balance but she says nothing.

The reader must now return to Hope's Africa of the chimp project. She is returning with the provisions and is ruminating on a favorite saying of a former professor: "You can't enjoy anything without a contrast to it." Upon arrival, she is met by Mallabar who informs her that, during her absence, her tent has burned down, purportedly by a careless housekeeping boy smoking. The boy has been fired, and Hope's remaining possessions have been moved into a part of the census building until the tent can be repaired. Of course, Hope's observation notes have been destroyed, and she immediately realizes that Mallabar and Hauser are the true culprits.



The following day, Hope ventures out to observe the southern group, accompanied by Joao, who informs her that he and his son Alda have kept all of their notes. Using these, Hope will be able to reconstruct what has been lost. They find Lena, who has had her baby, and it is promptly named Bobo. Lena appears very protective, allowing only a few strokes of her baby by the other chimps. Some of the chimps have been gone and return noisily, prompting Lena to become even more protective. At the end of the day, Hope goes to Joao's home to pick up the notes. As she is consolidating them that night, she is intrigued by a sighting of six unidentified males by Alda during her time away. She has decided to make copies of these notes when next in town, leaving a set with Usman for safe-keeping.

Hope ventures out alone the following day and finds the southern group. The male chimps are now all posturing around Rita-Lu, who is in estrus. There appears to be some tension, and Hope is horrified when Rita-Mae and Rita-Lu attack Lena, grab Bobo, killing and eating him. She immediately returns to camp to inform Mallabar, who refuses to accept that Hope has truly seen what she says. Also, he informs her that if she should repeat this story to anyone, she will be fired. Hope agrees to be silent. That night, however, she stays up quite late, writing an article, titled, "Infanticide and Cannibalism Amongst the Wild Chimpanzee of the Grosso Arvore Project." Her plan is to send it off for publication without Mallabar's knowledge.

Usman Shoukry's Lemma; Ikarios and Erigone; Cabbages and Spheres Analysis

Hope is beginning to comprehend the strangeness of the world. First, there is the strange behavior of her husband, John, about which she has concern but as yet unwilling to confront openly. Then, there is the realization that the bauxite mined in Africa is sold to Russia; Russia makes Mig's and sells them back to the government in Africa, which then uses the planes to bomb and kill some of the people who mine the bauxite. This spherical cycle of human activity appears purposeless and only adds to her increasing bewilderment about how one should find purpose in his or her own individual existence.

It is also clear that Hope is onto something among the chimps. Given Vail's theory and her observations, something has happened among the chimp populations, causing cannibalism and infanticide. While she does not propose a cause, she is, nevertheless, emotionally affected and angered by Mallabar's dismissals and threats. Her only option is to defy him by writing the article and continue to observe, in an attempt to make sense of what is occurring. She is, after all, a scientist, and must continue to behave like one, despite the perceived growing threat to herself. Hope emerges as a strong protagonist, willing to defy her boss in order to maintain her standards.



Fermat's Last theorem; The Happiness of the Chimpanzee; Pulul

Fermat's Last theorem; The Happiness of the Chimpanzee; Pulul Summary

Hope opens with a short discourse on the final theorem of a mathematician by the name of Fermat. Some theorems, such as Fermat's final one, can neither be proved nor disproved. They are simply accepted as true, because logical thought says so. This applies to the world in general as well. Some things we accept as undoubtedly true, though we cannot actually prove them.

During her life of marriage, Hope is content with her job at the estate. She enjoys being outside most of each day and engaging in true scientific inquiry. It is a bit unsettling to her, however, that she enjoys being at the estate by herself more than she enjoys being with John in London or having him come to stay with her there. On the occasions of her father's seventieth birthday, Hope travels to their home for a large party. While there, Hope realizes that her parents are not really happy anymore, and it saddens her. Just as the celebratory speeches are to begin, Hope receives a call from the caretaker at the estate. John has evidently gone quite mad, digging a trench around the lake on the property, then promptly leaving for London. While concerned, the incident nevertheless gives Hope a reason to leave a strained situation, amidst complaints from her father that he is bored. She travels to London to find John, but, as her emotions change from concern to anger to injustice, she chooses to go to her friend Meredith, rather than to her home.

Fast forwarding again to the chimp project at Grosso Arvore, Hope is unable to find the remains of Lena's baby. Lena herself had gone off for several days, eventually returning but keeping her distance from the others. In the camp, as well, relationships have returned to normal, as Hope has kept her promise to say nothing to others, working on her article at night. Top "sweeten the pot," Mallabar hints that, with the new grant money he has received, he may open another camp about ten miles north and put Hope in charge. Hope, however, is intent upon solving the mystery of the murders and determining the identity of the unknown male chimps spotted by Alda. Something strange is clearly occurring. One day they see the seven chimps again, on all fours, very quiet and completely concentrating. They are led by Darius, a northern chimp Hope knows well, and one female accompanies them. Hope and Joao follow them deeper into southern territory, where they appear to be "scouting," and then observe them return north, becoming more noisy as they put greater distance between themselves and the southern chimp area. Confused and attempting to draw conclusions about this behavior, Hope accompanies Ian Vail on an observation of the northern chimps, where she finds all of the males she had seen with Darius. There are only three adult females in the northern grouping, and Crispina, the only one available for mating is probably now



pregnant. The imbalance of the sexes, Hope believes, may indeed be the cause of the odd behaviors. When Rita-Mae, Rita-Lu and Lena left the northern group, they threw off the balance. In the southern group, moreover, the population is too heavily female.

Hope, Joao, and Alda watch three more incursions of northern chimps into southern territory, each one taking them farther in. To her horror, during the third incursion, Hope witnesses the northern chimps attack Mr. Jeb, an elderly southern chimp. Conrad, another southern chimp runs up a tree and swings away. The northern chimps surround Mr. Jeb, brutally attacking him and then leave him for dead. Mr. Jeb drags himself into a thicket to die, As Conrad watches from a branch above. Hope reports this latest attack to no one, merely saying that she believes she may have "lost" one of her southern chimps. Mallabar theorizes that a leopard may have killed him. One of Hope's concerns is the viciousness with which Pulul, an adult northern male, had attacked Mr. Jeb. She wonders if this cruelty is the result of a definitive cognitive act, the deliberate unnecessary torture of an old chimp who was clearly beaten and dying.

Rewinding to the past in England, Hope confronts John about his behavior at the lake. He becomes agitated and angry but admits that he is doing whatever he can to force his brain to move forward. Digging the ditch around the lake was an attempt at this. After having a bit of a breakdown over dinner, Hope gets John into bed and goes to his briefcase to find his sleeping pills. There, she discovers a note from a lover.

Fermat's Last theorem; The Happiness of the Chimpanzee; Pulul Analysis

These three chapters give the reader good insight into Hope's methods of dealing with crises and unforeseen events which clearly impact her life and her emotional well-being. Obviously, she is not one to become overwrought in the face of calamity; however, one senses that she is almost too scientific in her approach to human emotions. It appears, moreover, that she is more overwrought with the death of her elderly chimp than she is over John's apparent descent into insanity and his infidelity so early in their marriage. Obviously, her emotional attachment to John is waning, and he is becoming somewhat of an albatross. He has dug a trench on the estate property, an event for which she must now make amends. She is not unhappy that he does not join the celebration of her father's birthday, and her only goal when John breaks down in the restaurant is to get him out, relieving herself of further embarrassment. Discovering that he has a lover brings neither an emotional outburst nor an inner disconsolation. Rather, it is treated as information that seals her next steps more clearly. It is almost as if she now has additional justification to end their marriage.

The continued violence and aggression of the chimps can also be seen symbolically. How like humans, perhaps, these creatures behave. They are willing to attack and kill to gain what they want or need, much like the opposing forces of the civil war in the Congo or in any war for that matter. The northern chimps, lacking in females, must obviously attack and kill southern males, who have a plethora of females from which to choose. At

the same time, southern females are turning on one another, perhaps because they must compete for males.



The One Big Axiom; The Cosmic Dawn

The One Big Axiom; The Cosmic Dawn Summary

These two chapters continue to move the reader back and forth in time. Opening in the present, Hope muses about time. Civil time, that of clocks and civilization, is not important when one operates on internal time, and, as one ages, internal time becomes more and more predominant. It will end when the nervous system does - "the one big axiom" (p. 155). She turns her reflection to the continuation of the Grosso Arvore events.

The research team goes on a holiday together to an unfinished luxury hotel about fifty miles away. Completion of the resort had been abandoned when the civil war had erupted, but a small staff has been maintained by the tourism Ministry in hopes that one day it will be completed. Here, they stay for an entire day, enjoying the beach and barbecue. Hope decides to return to camp early, with the cooking staff, in order to go through Vail's cottage, to look for the proofs of Mallabar's book which Roberta (Vail's wife) is editing. She is unable to locate the proofs before the rest return. A further concern is that Mallabar wants Joao's notes, which she has, and she plans to secret them out of the camp by volunteering to take Ian Vail's turn for the provision run. During a conversation with Ian, Hope reveals to him the incident of the Mr. Jeb's killing, and both realize that this new fact will discredit Mallabar. Ian agrees to remain quiet, as Hope explains her theory. The northern chimps are angry because Rita-Mae left with Clovis. They will kill the southern male chimps in order to get her back.

Hope makes the provision run, stays with Usman in his hotel cottage, writes a postscript to her article, and places copies of Joao's notes with Usman for safekeeping. During this stay with Usman, she learns more of his personal life. Never married, he has been free to pursue many things, including going to Russia to train as an astronaut. When he was not ultimately chosen for a mission, he decided not to return to Egypt, answered an advertisement for mercenary pilots, and has ended up here. He also shows Hope a nearby beach cottage, in bad condition, which he plans to purchase from a Syrian friend.

The reader is taken again back to England, as Hope decides to spend a weekend spying on John. Discovering that John's lover is Jenny Lewkovitch, the wife one of John's colleagues, she confronts him and learns that she is not truly hurt or angry about his behavior. She is disappointed only that he has chosen someone so ordinary. By evening, John is withdrawn and states only that they should end the farce of their marriage. Before returning to her work on the estate, Hope meets with the lover's husband, primarily to discuss John's mental state. Bogden Lewkovitch reveals that John's work has not gone well and, in fact is random and episodic. Unfortunately, John's early work was promising, and now there are many others working on the same concepts. If John's stall does not dissipate, someone else will receive the credit. Bogden



also reveals that he and Jenny are divorcing. He has a lover, and he suspects she does as well. Hope reveals nothing.

The One Big Axiom; The Cosmic Dawn Analysis

With age and maturity, Hope appears to become far more reflective and certainly less inclined to venture again into the world of her scientific career. While she justifies her inertia as a temporary condition, one wonders if she has not rather permanently opted for the "safety" of isolationism. This current attitude is so very different from the assertive Hope of the past who was determined to ferret out the truth about chimp behavior and to develop her own theories regarding the witnessed events. Her determination to write the article, to add the postscript and to secret away copies of Joao's notes, reveal an individual who is ready to confront the status quo regardless of consequences. The end of her marriage has perhaps taken a toll she is unwilling to admit, even though she is not consciously pained by the event. Failures in both her professional and personal lives have brought her to an emotional place of stagnation, perhaps, as she accepts, indeed welcomes, a current existence free from entanglements and challenges.



The Calculus; Fame

The Calculus; Fame Summary

These two chapters begin with Hope reflecting on calculus and its relationship to life. Both involve change and the study of change, growth and decay. The defect in calculus, as as in life, is that it cannot cope with abrupt change. "Not everything moves by degree, not everything ascends or descends like lines on a graph. Calculus requires continuity.." as does life (p. 185).

After the death of Mr. Jeb, Hope discovers that Clovis has taken the southern chimps further south. They have remained in a tighter group, and, except for Lena, individuals are not venturing out much. Eventually, Hope, Joao and Alda set up watch of the southern chimps, and Lena does not return from an excursion. Rita-Lu is now in estrus and is mating with both Clovis and Conrad. Joao informs Hope that a villager has heard a chimpanzee fight in the night, and, upon finding the location, they discover Muffin, an adolescent male southern chimp, dead, torn, and decomposing. This time, Hope takes pictures, assuming now that Lena, too, has probably been killed. Only five southern chimps remain - Clovis, Conrad, Rita-Mae, Rita-Lu and one baby, Lester. The northern chimps have seven mature males and a number of adolescents, and are certainly capable of wiping out the small southern group.

Hope meets with Mallabar and expresses concern for the southern chimps, asking to transplant one of the southern females into the norther group. Mallabar insists that she is merely speculating, that the chimps could have been killed by a larger animal. When he refuses to allow the transplantation, Hope leaves with more resolve. Two days later, Mallabar beckons Hope to a village, in which she finds a killed leopard, the cause, states Mallabar, of the southern chimp killings. Armed with her own observations and now pictures, Hope realizes that she, alone, is witnessing and recording extraordinary and never-before reported findings. Her name may "be forever associated with this new knowledge and understanding" (p. 197). She understands, now, John Clearwater's apparent obsession with making his own "mark" within his own field.

Returning to the past events in England, Hope continues to work on dating plant life, returning to London only once, to clean the flat now vacated by John. The meet and discuss the possibility of a reconciliation at a future time, but John appears happy and busy, believing that a breakthrough is nigh. All is not well, however, and soon Hope receives a call from Bogdan stating that John is ill.

The Calculus; Fame Analysis

Another side of Hope's personality is revealed in these two short chapters. She is beginning to understand the difficulty everyone has with rapid and abrupt change. Gradual, evolutionary change can be tolerated, because it flows like the lines on a



graph, with small steps to the ultimate alteration. When change is too abrupt, humans recoil, much as Mallabar is recoiling from her insistence that chimps are actually aggressive and cruel to one another. Hope, on the other hand, is rather ignited by the thought of fame, of being the first individual to observe, record and report on a formerly unknown phenomenon - chimp aggression. She now understands the motives of both Mallabar and John Clearwater, as they endeavor to gain their legacies, and she is somewhat caught up in the thrill of it all. Her anger with Mallabar over the refusal to allow a female transplantation is probably two-sided. First, she is horrified by the bloodshed and torturous deaths, but, as well, she would have been able to test her theory that the aggression is truly about disproportionate imbalances of sexes in chimpanzee groups.



The Clearwater Set; Death of a Prophet

The Clearwater Set; Death of a Prophet Summary

Another northern chimp attack begins. As quickly as it begins, however, it stops, with only Rita-Lu surrounded. The northern male chimps each begin to sniff her rump, and soon all run off with Rita-Lu following. She returns two days later and is welcomed. Clovis has a severe wound on his thigh, but is nursing it well. Hope notes that Rita-Mae is developing a sexual swelling and this would mean that both southern females are now in estrus. This will clearly cause more attacks, if Hope's theory is correct. Finally, she invites Mallabar to go with her, hoping to convince him of the necessity of a transplantation. He agrees. As they observe each day, Mallabar speaks of all the years he has spent with the chimps. He knows them all, and like Hope, he is a bit stumped by the initial splitting off of the chimps into two groups.

As Hope and Mallabar observe, another attack occurs. Rita-Mae's baby Lester is killed, and Rita-Mae badly injured. Rita-Lu has run off with the attackers; Conrad and Clovis have escaped. Shocked and shaken, Mallabar suddenly turns on Hope, accusing her of having done something to make these chimps aggressive. They argue and Mallabar punches Hope, then pummels her with a stick. Hope runs back to the camp, packs a few of her belongings, leaves a note for Mallabar which reveals that she has already sent off an article, and climbs into the truck with Ian Vail, who is leaving on the provisions run. Vail is shaken by Hope's narrative of the events. Soon, however, they have bigger concerns. They are stopped by a blockade, taken as hostages in their own truck, by a Dr. Amilcar and his band of young guerrilla soldiers. They discover that Amilcar and his group are members of UNAMO, one of the warring factions in the complex civil war.

Flashback to England. Hope has received a letter from John, who is now in a psychiatric hospital. Evidently, he had been found dehydrated and starving in his flat, having been keeping himself on amphetamines in order to work. At the hospital, Hope discovers that John is receiving electro-shock therapy, at his own request. John is diagnosed as manic-depressive, but Hope has serious concerns about the treatment being given. John believes it will straighten out his brain so that he can resume work. He has been dreaming of the development of a mathematical set, to which his name will be permanently attached, a formula that demonstrates a solution for plotting an "endless series of points on a complex plane" (p. 204).

The Clearwater Set; Death of a Prophet Analysis

One climax in the novel has been reached, perhaps the most significant one. The building conflict between Hope and Mallabar has finally erupted, Mallabar facing the invalidation of years of work, Hope facing the truth that she cannot continue to work at Grosso Arvore. Again, the theme of human response to abrupt change is featured. John



Clearwater's life has reached a crisis point, as well. Unable to fulfill his vision, he descends into the realm of insanity and insists upon a treatment that is certainly questionable in psychiatric circles. In both of these situations, Hope finds herself caught up in events and crises which she has neither created nor induced, and which, nevertheless, have far-reaching impact upon both her professional and personal life. In England, she can only leave John to his illness and escape back to her work at the estate. In Africa, she chooses to escape, in hopes that Usman will be at least a temporary refuge while she contemplates her next moves. Each of these three characters respond to change differently. Mallabar chooses denial and confrontation; John Clearwater chooses self-destruction; Hope chooses escape.



ECT; Minonette; The Neural Clock; The Weight of the Sense World

ECT; Minonette; The Neural Clock; The Weight of the Sense World Summary

Ian and Hope are taken on a long drive in their truck, only to be allowed out, guarded by the young soldiers, while Almicar drives off to find gasoline. Hope seems to remember that the UNAMO forces had basically been defeated and wonders why this group appears to still be fighting. While Ian cowers in fear, Hope engages the young men in conversation and learns that they are actually a part of a volleyball team, once coached by Almicar at a UNAMO base. Almicar returns with cans of gasoline, the group continues its ride, and finally camps for the night. At this point, Almicar explains that he is actually a physician with the UNAMO forces and is attempting to return to their base in the north. He will release Hope and Ian, once they arrive. After three days of heat, humidity, and little food, the group arrives at an abandoned mission school, hiding the land rover inside. The landscape has changed to lush forest, and here they will hide to avoid the federal troops while Almicar travels on foot to the base, to discuss the plan for Ian and Hope's release.

Ian attempts to apologize to Hope for his apparent cowardice upon their capture, praising her for strength and courage he failed to show. For the second time since she has known him, Hope is sexually accosted, rebuffing him severely. Awakened by gunfire, and in the midst of the chaos that ensues, Hope and Ian escape through the forest. Hailed by gunfire and attempting to escape the lamplight of their pursuers, Hope falls, injuring her ankle. Ian takes off, leaving Hope to fend for herself. Burying herself under the thick blanket of dead leaves on the ground, Hope is able to escape capture.

When dawn breaks, Hope realizes that she is in the midst of a teak tree plantation. She walks to the edge of the tree rows and turns east toward the rising sun, following a path to much lusher growth. Eventually, she comes upon a destroyed village in which Almicar and three surviving volleyball players are hiding. Hope sees no choice but to join them as they travel on to UNAMO headquarters. The headquarters, actually a village, is deserted, and Hope is beginning to realize that Almicar and his few boys may be all that is left of UNAMO forces. She and Almicar spend the evening in conversation, Hope revealing her biography. Almicar interrupts her tales of plant and animal study with one question - "What is it all for?" Hope is not able to answer, and Almicar tells her that no living plant or animal is as important as a human being. He prods her to think of what benefit her life has been to other human beings.

By morning, the three remaining volleyball players have gone. Almicar asks Hope to help him lay land mines on the roadway, as he intends to blow up a huge section, preventing federal troop advance. As they are working, Hope hears, then spots, a convoy. Almicar begins shooting at them and they turn around as he has predicted. In



their retreat, however, they continue to shoot back, and a stray bullet strikes Almicar, killing him. Contemplating her options, Hope constructs two white flags of truce and waits. Five armed men arrive, two of them Belgian.

ECT; Minonette; The Neural Clock; The Weight of the Sense World Analysis

Ian Vail has revealed himself to be the quintessential coward, unable to confront or "cross" Mallabar at Grosso Arvore and now unable to engender any courage or strength in the face of personal danger. His vile attempt at a sexual encounter with Hope is further comment on his basic selfishness. Leaving a wounded Hope to face their pursuers, however, is the final testimony to a man consumed with self above all else. Hope, on the other hand, continues to reveal a strength of character that serves to both gain necessary information and to calm Vail. Her creative problem-solving, that is, hiding herself under a bed of leaves, further attests to her strength in crisis situations. Almicar can almost be seen as a modern Don Quixote, living in an unrealistic world of a battle that has already been lost but refusing to accept that reality. During their evening discussion, however, he is able to cause Hope to confront a basic issue: What value is her life of study? Has she contributed to improvement of humanity in any way? She has no answer that is acceptable to Almicar or, more important, to herself. This is perhaps another climax of the rising conflict within Hope herself.



Three Questions; Fermat's Last Theorem II

Three Questions; Fermat's Last Theorem II Summary

There are only three questions in life, according to Hope. 1) What can I know? 2) What ought I to do? 3) What may I hope for? All religions, philosophies, and ideologies attempt to answer these questions. For John Clearwater, however, the answers are easily given. One can know nothing for sure; one should try not to hurt anyone; and one may only hope for the best. These are not satisfactory answers for Hope, however. John is released from the hospital and comes to the estate at East Knap to stay with Hope for a few days. She is not relishing his presence, but John is convinced that he is cured and will now be able to begin work on something completely new. It seems that, while he was in his "stall," someone else completed his work and has received the credit. The fact that he has accepted this, he believes, demonstrates his mental stability. Hope is not convinced and finds some of his behaviors odd. She reflects upon these days of John's return as she lives in the present, at the beach, coming again to the conclusion that in life, just as in mathematics, some things are true, though they cannot be proved. One must use his intuition and instinct in these instances.

The tale of Hope's kidnapping and rescue in Africa is also concluded in this two chapter section. Upon rescue, she collapses and is then greeted by a Mr. Doblin, from the Norwegian Consulate. His team had been looking for both Ian and Hope. She learns that Ian is safe after having returned to the mission school the day following their escape. It had been taken over by federal troops, and he was taken back to Grosso Arvore by them. Hope is flown to the town near Grosso Arvore and given funds and a room at the airport hotel, where she will remain until her new passport arrives. She also learns that Usman is dead, having not returned from a mission. Presumably, it was a navaid failure, the eighth or ninth for the year. Usman had complained constantly about the bad navigational tools on his plane, and Hope finds this explanation believable. All of the other pilots have since quit.

Three Questions; Fermat's Last Theorem II Analysis

Hope is grappling with her three questions, and she has not yet given the reader much insight to her responses, other than to say that she knows certain things in life are true. It is also obvious that Hope truly has removed herself emotionally from John. She wants his visit to be short and states so emphatically. The death of Usman brings some grief but not as much as the reader might think it should. Her revelation of this event is almost without emotion, and leads one to wonder if the compilation of catastrophes in Hope's life has hardened her responses.



Two Kinds of Catastrophe; Invariants and Homeomorphs; Finesse; The Languid Fire

Two Kinds of Catastrophe; Invariants and Homeomorphs; Finesse; The Languid Fire Summary

These four chapters form the resolution and denouement of all conflicts within the novel. The section begins with Hope explaining catastrophe theory, a study of abrupt change, stating that there are actually seven types of such events. One type is the "fold catastrophe," caused by one event and unable to be undone or reversed. The popping of a balloon, for example, is a fold catastrophe. Life, she states is filled with fold catastrophes, controlled by the single event, time. "Cusp catastrophes," on the other hand, are reversible. Illnesses, nervous breakdowns and injuries, for example, are cusp catastrophes. John Clearwater has had his share of both. He is at East Knap and is now working on topology, or the study of things that remain fixed despite force placed upon them. These unchanging features are called "topological invariants." Hope is tense and tired, as they discuss the futility of attempting to save their marriage. She spends the third day of John's stay cataloging, returning home just before dusk. John has left a note stating that he is out strolling. Convinced that he is up to digging again, she grabs her lamp and goes to find him. John has committed suicide by drowning himself in one of the smaller pools on the property.

In Africa, Hauser has come to town to retrieve Hope and return to Grosso Arvore. It seems that Mallabar wishes to discuss the terms of her contract. While waiting, Hope assists in the cleaning out of Usman's bungalow at the airport hotel. She takes a small Italian pistol and some of his drawings as mementos. On the drive back to Grosso Arvore, Hauser tells Hope that Mallabar is not doing well, that the book had been postponed, and that Ian appears to have been traumatized by the incident. Mallabar is re-writing sections of the book because of the chimp wars he has discovered. Hope, of course, insists that she discovered the wars, not Mallabar.

Mallabar's wife Ginga informs Hope that she is fired, paying her through her contract period. Upon Ginga's request, however, Hope refuses to turn over the rights to her article to Mallabar, nor will she surrender her research notes. She leaves the next day, stopping at Joao's house to bid farewell. He too has been fired and relates to her that all southern chimps are gone except Conrad. Northern chimps have taken over the southern territory, Rita-Mae is missing, and Rita-Lu has joined the northern chimps. Hope decides to look for Conrad before leaving for town. She finds Conrad, looking wasted and thin, being attacked by the northern chimps, and, in an attempt to stave off the attack, runs screaming at them, firing Usman's pistol into the air. When two of the northern chimps charge her, she shoots, killing them. The others turn and run, as Hope



puts Conrad out of his misery. The chimp wars are over, and Hope is convinced she has done the right thing.

Two Kinds of Catastrophe; Invariants and Homeomorphs; Finesse; The Languid Fire Analysis

Hope herself has experienced "fold catastrophes," events that cannot be reversed. Her husband has committed suicide; her position at Grosso Arvore is terminated; she has murdered chimps to stop their brutality; Usman is dead. She is at a bit of a crossroads and yet provides no clue as to her inclination toward her future. Her thoughts as she confronts each catastrophe are almost intellectual and removed, as if these events are all occurring to someone else, and certainly there is not the emotional response one would expect. Hope is obviously able to accept abrupt change more easily than others. Mallabar is obviously distraught; Ian Vail has been traumatized by an event from which Hope has emerged unfazed; she has killed chimps out of a duty to prevent more warring. Yet, the reader is not allowed to know what emotions may be playing within her. Hope Clearwater presents herself perhaps as she truly is: an individual who "welcomes what cannot be avoided."



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

The beach house in which hope now resides as the one Usman bought from his Syrian friend. She has renovated it, and his drawings hang on the walls. Recently, she has read a book on space exploration. Unlike He had told her, there was never an Egyptian in the Russian astronaut program. She has also read a strange story about Mig-15 planes in Latin America, taken there, perhaps, by African mercenary pilots, stolen actually, from the African government that had purchased them, repainted and then sold. Hope imagines that she may in fact see Usman again and rather constantly looks for him. In addition to her translation for a German businessman, Hope is also still working for Grosso Arvore. The project has grown extensively, and Mallabar needs a contact in the town to meet planes and manage the supply needs. There is plenty of money, not that Eugene's book has been published, and Hope is actually cited in one spot. No one has mentioned finding the murdered chimps.

Hope follows a new doctrine now. It "advises one not to seek tranquility in certainty, but in permanently suspended judgment" (p. 315).

Epilogue Analysis

A final insight into Hope's character here: Her ability to remain at peace perhaps is found in her refusal to pass judgment on people and events.



Characters

Hope Clearwater

Hope Clearwater is a complex individual. Having achieved a doctoral degree and marriage to a man she clearly sought, she begins her adult life full of a sense of happiness, contentment, and stability. She launches into a plant project on an old estate while husband John immerses himself in his mathematical research. In the early months, they enjoy a typical newlywed life, and the future is clear and foreseeable. This "world" crumbles when her genius husband has a breakdown, and, experiencing remorse, anger, embarrassment, and relief, Hope divorces him without much sadness. She then moves on to Africa, to become part of a research project studying chimpanzee behavior. She is a valued member of the team until she observes and reports behavior which the project leader insists cannot be true. A clear conflict between Hope and Mallabar reaches its climax with Hope leaving the camp. In town she discovers that her lover, an Egyptian mercenary pilot, is missing, probably killed by inept radar specialists. She moves into his old beach house, renovates it with her severance pay, and takes on mundane jobs in order to support herself. Hope's life has stalled at this point, as she appears unable to put all that has happened to her into some meaningful, logical pattern. Once aggressive and enthusiastically purposeful, Hope has retreated to an existence which, in its comfort, allows her to avoid decisions and choices about the remainder of her life.

John Clearwater

A brilliant mathematician, Clearwater is given a research fellowship by the same English university at which Hope Dunbar is studying. He is pursued by Hope, and they quickly marry. John is working on complex mathematical concepts, hoping to formulate answers to the mathematical aspects of turbulence. At first, he is immersed in his work and appears to be making good progress. Eventually, however, he stalls, and his behavior becomes odd and erratic. He takes to engaging in strange behaviors, in an attempt to pull himself out of his "stall," to include digging holes and frequenting films of terror and violence. Unable to pull himself out of his inert state, John experiences a nervous breakdown and voluntarily hospitalizes himself, requesting electric shock therapy as a means of "re-starting" his brain. In the meantime, other mathematicians have finished his work on turbulence and now have the credit for it. John begins a new mathematical quest, once he is released from the hospital and arranges to stay with Hope for a few days. During this time, Hope avoids him as much as possible. John, in depression and perhaps realizing that he is unable to adequately perform in his field or in his personal life, commits suicide by drowning himself in a small pool on the estate at East Knap.



Eugene Mallabar

Mallabar has made the study of chimpanzees in the Congo his life's work. Indeed, as he explains to Hope, he began twenty-five years ago with just a tent and his wife. Over the years, he has written several books and journal articles, is now considered the foremost expert on chimpanzee life and behavior, and is currently completing research for his final and most definitive work. This last book will ensure his place in history. Mallabar's work is being completed by a small group of researchers who continue to observe and log chimpanzee behavior. He is currently concerned with the unexplainable split of a group of chimps into two groupings. When Hope Clearwater discovers that the chimps are engaging in infanticide, murder, and cannibalism, Mallabar is unwilling to accept this new behavior and, in fact, attempts to quiet Hope by burning up her notes and threatening her employment. In the end, Mallabar witnesses the violence himself, and is seriously affected by this development. His book must be postponed and revised, and, while Hope is no longer a part of the research, new researchers are brought on board to finish the project.

Ian Vail

A vain, shallow, self-absorbed researcher, Ian is responsible for observing and logging behaviors of the northern chimps. He has developed a theory that the gender imbalance of the two groups of chimps has been responsible for their strange behaviors, although his expansion on this theory is not yet fully developed. He is married to Roberta, a woman quite unlike himself, and, while the marriage appears to be stable, Ian rather consistently makes overtures to Hope, which she spurns. When he and Hope are kidnapped by a UNAMO revolutionary group, Ian demonstrates his cowardice and lack of character.

Usman Shoukry

An Egyptian mercenary pilot for the Congolese federal government, Usman is Hope's lover in town, living in a small bungalow at the Airport Hotel. According to his self-told biography, he was once in the Egyptian air force, left that to become an astronaut-in-training in Russia, and landed in the Congo when he was not one of the final astronauts selected. He flies MIG-15 fighter planes and bombs targets designated by the federals. Ultimate, he goes missing, purportedly a result of bad ground navigation, and is presumed dead. Much later, Hope discovers that much of what he has told of his life is indeed false, and she suspects that he has stolen the plane, taken it to Latin America for sale, and may, indeed someday return.

Dr. Almicar

a leader in the UNAMO faction, one of four warring groups in the current civil war, Almicar is a physician by profession, who has been supporting and treating the troops.



As well, he has coached a group of young guerrilla soldiers in the game of volleyball. Almicar is woefully unrealistic, refusing to admit that his faction is too small and too far defeated to be of any important force in the current strife. Eventually, he is killed by a stray bullet fired from federal troops, a martyr to his hopeless cause.

Hauser

Hauser is the laboratory specialist at Grosso Arvore. He is an unattractive, sometimes sarcastic individual who is responsible for all laboratory testing of animal remains, feces and such. He collaborates with Mallabar in determining that the first infant carcass found by Hope is not that of a chimp, but, rather, a baboon.

Ginga Mallabar

Completely devoted to her husband, Ginga Mallabar manages many of the operations at Grosso Arvore. When Hope is obviously no longer welcome at Grosso Arvore, it is Ginga who terminates her employment and threatens the possibility of a lawsuit if Hope does not retract her article and turn all of her research notes over to Mallabar. Later, Ginga employs Hope as an outside assistant, working from her bungalow at Brazzaville Beach.

Joao

A native African from a nearby village, Joao has been employed as an assistant to Hope. He accompanies Hope on many of the observation sojourns and keeps his own notes of that which he observes himself. When Hope is fired, he is as well.

Roberta Vail

Roberta Vail is an American, married to Ian, who is loyal to her husband but, clearly, fiercely loyal to Eugene Mallabar. She is editing Mallabar's latest book and is particularly unkind to Hope when she senses that there is conflict between Mallabar and Hope.

Alda

The son of Joao, Alda is being trained to become an assistant observer as well. He works hard and keeps solid notes on what he observes.



Objects/Places

Grosso Arvore

The compound in Africa, a wildlife preserve and national park, in which the Mallabar study of chimpanzees has occurred for twenty-five years. While fictional, it is located in the Congo.

East Knap

The estate outside of London at which Hope works to chronicle plant life.

Danube River

A river in the Congo which has been named the Danube by Mallabar. It separates the northern and southern groups of chimps.

Airport Hotel

The hotel in the closest town to Grosso Arvore where Hope stays when she makes the provisions runs and at which her Egyptian lover Usman lives.

Northern Territory

The northern part of Grosso Arvore where one group of chimps lives.

Southern Territory

The southern part of Grosso Arvore where a smaller and female dominated group of chimps lives.

lemma

A "truism" is mathematics, that is, a statement so simple that it need not be proved. Lemmae exist in life as well.

MIG-15 Fagot

The type of plane flown by mercenary pilots, under the employ of the Congolese federal government.

UNAMO

A small revolutionary group, one of four forces involved in the civil war in the Congo.

Brazzaville Beach

The beach on the Congolese coast at which Hope resides in Usman's renovated bungalow.



Themes

Finding One's Life Purpose

An age-old theme of a significant body of literature, *Brazzaville Beach* offers its own discussion of man's rather universal search for meaning and purpose in one's life. Hope seems to have moved through a number of life-altering events, each of which appear to have shown her what her purpose is not. As a young intelligent woman, trained to be a scientist and married to a mathematical researcher, she forms the rather naive notion that her purpose is defined by her plant research and support of her husband in his quest to resolve issues of mathematics. The death of John Clearwater and the end of her plant project send her off in a new direction. Perhaps original research on an animal so close to the human will give her a sense of purpose. Again, she is disillusioned, not only with her fellow scientists but, as well, the futility of attempting to find some sort of logic in behavior of both animals and men. She finds little to cling to within her family either. Her father is clearly unhappy; her sister, Faye, living a life of prudence and moderation, does not provide an answer. Meeting Dr. Almicar is perhaps a turning point in Hope's quest. He asks her to explain the benefit of her work to other humans, and she is unable to do so. Her response is to retreat from a lifestyle of significant activity, with the question of her purpose still unanswered. The reader is left with the impression that Hope may never seek "purposeful" activity again. For now, she is content to seek tranquility, and, perhaps, that is the purpose of individual humans.

Response to Change

Much of this work addresses the types of changes which one may often experience in a lifetime. As Hope clearly describes, these changes can be seen as catastrophes of two types - those that cannot be reversed and those that can be. Life is filled with both types, and one must recognize which changes are of each type. Life itself is change, that is, the living thing is born, grows and decays. Many other changes are permanent as well. Hope faces a series of permanent changes (she calls these "fold" catastrophes) as her life progresses. Her husband, from which she is essentially separated, commits suicide in his insanity. Her work at Grosso Arvore is dismissed, then threatened, and her professional career of studying chimps with a renown researcher is terminated. Her occasional lover has disappeared, presumed dead. How one responds to significant change speaks to levels of inner fortitude and seems to emanate from basic character development. Hope responds to the changes with fortitude, certainly, because she does not crumble into a mass of emotional wreckage. Rather, she adopts the attitude of a former professor that, "what cannot be avoided must be welcomed." She accepts all that has occurred, that she cannot reverse these changes, and that she will now take time to reflect and seek her own peace. The future is not in her current thought processes, and perhaps, in the end, this is the best response to change.



Seeking Inner Peace

Every religion and philosophy posits a path to inner peace, that coveted condition in which an individual appears to be able to withstand whatever comes his way and to move forward without negative emotional responses. It appears that these individuals are able to remove themselves from the world around them, to go within, and to know that all things of this world are passing. Hope Clearwater seems to have found at least temporary inner peace by the end of her story. She has endured a tragic marriage; the suicide of her husband; the recriminations of Eugene Mallabar; a kidnapping and danger that could have resulted in her death; the termination of her employment because she has refused to suppress scientific evidence; and the loss of a lover, who, in the end, has probably been dishonest with her from the start. Through these events, Hope experiences a variety of emotions, to include disappointment, sorrow, anger, bitterness, and revenge. In the end, however, as she lives in a beach bungalow, completing menial tasks for basic living needs, she feels none of these earlier emotions. She has developed an approach that is characterized by acceptance - of the follies of others, of the succession of events which cannot be controlled, and the far more comfortable existence of surrendering to all that has occurred.



Style

Point of View

One of the most interesting facets of *Brazzaville Beach* is the point of view. As the story begins, it is told by Hope Clearwater in the first person. Thus, the reader is able to glean not only the unfolding events but, as well, Hope's personal responses to these events. At numerous points during the plot development, however, the author switches to the third person narrative, throwing the reader into a confusing depiction of events as if these are told by an impartial observer. Once comfortable with this continual switch, however, the reader is able to understand why the author has chosen this means of presentation. The third person narrations are used when it is important that Hope's inner thoughts and emotions not be known intimately. The effect of this fluctuation is to create additional suspense, to provide more effective foreshadowing, and to force the reader to wait for the significant outcomes of the protagonist's reflections and responses. As well, the third person narrative allows an important distance between Hope and the storyteller when it becomes necessary to provide a far more objective recounting of events that have import to the story but not necessarily to Hope's inner being.

Setting

Three predominant settings provide the threads by which *Brazzaville Beach* is held together, by a fluid movement among all three. The first setting is London and the surrounding area, in which Hope has grown up and completed graduate study in biological science. It is within this setting that she meets and marries John Clearwater and begins to form her life activities based upon this relationship. Thus, she takes a low-paying position near London in order to remain with John, to support him and his important work, and to enjoy the bliss of newly married couples. In London, indeed, they enjoy the many entertainment opportunities and the excitement of both an academic and urban environment. London becomes less and less attractive to Hope, as her marriage deteriorates, as her husband descends into an abyss of intellectual stagnation and insanity, and as she spends more time on an old estate, dating plant life, in order to avoid facing the marriage difficulties. From life in London, Hope moves to the Congo, taking up residence in a remote preserve and site of a twenty-five year old study on the behavior of chimpanzees, in a land rife with civil war. Far removed from an urban lifestyle, Hope enjoys this more primitive life, with occasional respites in the provincial capital with an Egyptian lover. In this setting, Hope functions as a research scientist, observing and logging the behaviors of a small group of chimps that have broken from a larger group. When this work is terminated, Hope moves to a small beach bungalow, where she plans to spend an undetermined amount of time reflecting on life itself, in almost virtual isolation, and from which she has told her story.



Language and Meaning

The extensive use of mathematical and scientific language can at first be overwhelming to a reader who is not particularly knowledgeable in these areas. Much of the mathematical explanations are beyond the average reader and must, therefore, be read within the context of their relationship the author attempts to draw between both the stability and instability of the world of mathematical theorems, axioms, lemmae, and the as yet undefined and unexplained. Parallels between both the unknown in mathematics and the unknown in life are consistently drawn, and the reader may often have difficulty absorbing these comparisons. It is best, in some instances, to accept what one does not fully comprehend and simply move on through the reading. Much becomes clearer as the novel progresses. Scientific language is more easily understood, first, because it is often then defined in more lay terminology, and second, because the researchers engage in observation and recording as opposed to more complex laboratory testing and biological investigations. Scientific names for plants Hope catalogs and dates lend credibility to her professional status but are not critical to reader comprehension and can be virtually ignored. Overall, the novel may be understood despite the difficult references to higher mathematics; however, the ultimate richness and the complete comprehension of the themes is not possible without closer analysis of that which is being described and posited.

Structure

The structure of *Brazzaville Beach* is perhaps the most initially frustrating aspect of the work. While the book is divided into specific chapters, each with a significant title, continuity is at first indiscernible. Within each chapter, the author volleys among the three settings and the three phases of Hope Clearwater's life, so that the reader is left wondering how the decision was made to adopt this particular method of plot structure. The reader is lead from England (phase one of Hope's life), to the beach life (phase three of Hope's life), then to Grosso Arvore (phase two of Hope's life), with this jumbled mix of events and settings, completely out of time sequence, proceeding throughout the work. It can be frustrating to reach a crisis point in one setting only to be thrown to a completely different setting in which that part of Hope's story is picked up and moved forward, thereby being forced to wait until the author decides to move back to finish the previous crisis. Once the reader becomes accustomed to this lack of chronological sequence, however, the story proceeds nicely, and the reader even comes to look forward to the abrupt changes in progression. Perhaps, the structure itself was chosen to orient the reader to the predominant theme of change itself.



Quotes

I lay down on my camp bed, closed my eyes and, as always when I returned home at the end of the day, tried not to let my feelings overwhelm me. I arranged my day and my routine in such a manner as not to leave myself with much time alone and little to do, but his moment of the early evening, the light milky and orange, with the first bats jinking and swooping between the trees, and the tentative creek-creek of the crickets announcing the onset of dusk, always brought in its train a familiar melancholy and cafard and, in my particular case, an awful self-pity. I forced myself to sit up, took some deep breaths, inveighed powerfully against the name of John Clearwater, and went to sit at the little trestle desk where I worked. (p. 21)

Genetically, chimpanzees are the closest relatives to human beings. When genetic matches were made of chimp and human DNA it was found that they differed only by a factor of 1.5 to 2 per cent. In the world of taxonomy, this means that chimpanzees and human beings are species siblings and, strictly speaking, the classification should really be changed. We belong to the same genus - Homo. Not Pan Troglodytes, then, but Homo Troglodytes and Homo Sapiens. The Mockmen. (p. 28)

Apart from his new alcohol-free life, there were no other significant changes in John's life that Hope could easily discern. But, subtly, indubitably, things were different. For a long time she blamed herself for experiencing this feeling, on the grounds that if you persistently go around thinking something is different, this in itself will be sufficient to establish that fact. Covertly, she observed and analyzed him, and she had to admit there was very little to go on. Perhaps she was imagining things? They went out together, they talked to each other just as often, they shared enthusiasms and exasperations as before, they made love with the same frequency...But despite all that, in the end she knew that, in some as yet undefined way, he was not the same man she had met and married. (p. 60)

John called it the for-want-of-a-nail syndrome. For want of a nail the battle was lost. Something small suddenly becomes hugely enlarged. Something calm suddenly becomes enraged. Somethings flowing smoothly in one instant becomes turbulent. How or why does this happen? What if, John said, there are small perturbations that we miss or ignore; tiny irritations that we regard as fundamentally inconsequential. These small perturbations may have large consequences. In science, so in life. (p. 61)

That was it: John had secrets and she envied him. This was what had fascinated her about him almost immediately, but she had never really understood it. John and his mathematics, John and his game theory, John and his turbulence...she would never, could never know about them. She envied him his secret knowledge, but it was, she saw, an envy that was strangely pure, almost indistinct from a kind of worship. He was at home in a world that was banned to all but a handful of initiates. You gained entrance if you possessed the necessary knowledge, but she knew it was knowledge that was impossible for her to acquire. (p. 65)



And so it went on. And so John only saw those films that did not, as he saw it, demean or betray cinema's true purpose. Hope came to realize fairly swiftly that going to see these films was in a real sense therapeutic for him. They functioned as a kind of drug, and she began to see how his close-up, all-enveloping, dream-fulfilling cinema buoyed him up and kept him floating. Those few weeks of ease she had experienced after his return from the conference began to be eroded once again by the slow drip, drip of worry. (p.76)

I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to do with all this data, to tell the truth, but it seemed to me clear that if Mallabar and Hauser wanted my records destroyed, then it would be prudent for me to try and reproduce some copy of my own research, however patchy. Something Roberta had said also nagged at me: if Ginga had delayed publication of the book for a year, did that imply that its publication was now imminent? And could that explain the panic and unseemly coverup of the dead baby chimp? Also, all this talk about money was intriguing. Mallabar had been made wealthy by his work at Grosso Arvore; I wondered how much he would receive around the world for the successor to the Peaceful Primate and Primate's Progress? (p. 107)

A simpler definition tells me that the calculus is the study of continuous change, that it deals with growth and decay, and I begin to understand why it is such a crucial tool. Growth, change and decay...that applies to all of us. But its key defect, it seems to me, is that it cannot cope with abrupt change, that other common feature of our lives and the world. Not everything moves by degree, not everything ascends and descends like lines on a graph. The calculus requires continuity. The mathematical term for abrupt change is "discontinuity." And here the calculus is no use at all. We need something to help us deal with that. (p. 184-85)

In mechanics, systems that lose energy to friction are known as dissipative. In most systems that loss is gradual, measurable and predictable. But there are other dissipative systems that are ragged and untidy. The friction grips, and then suddenly eases, only to grip again. If you consider life as a dissipative system, you will understand what is meant. The most dissipative system anyone will ever encounter is war. It is violently uneven and completely unpredictable. (p. 220)

I looked at him, smart in his new uniform, as he talked with tranquil confidence about this chain of events as if they were inevitable and preordained. I glanced back at his "troops," the remains of his personal UNAMO column, three frightened and confused teenage members of a volleyball team, and wondered if all zealots saw the world in this simple way, devoid of any connection to the evidence on hand. Or perhaps he had gone mad. (p. 261)

The weight of the sense world overpowers me some days, today clearly being one of them. I seem unable to escape the phenomenal, the randomly human. It's at times like these that the appeal of mathematics, and its cool abstractions, is at its most potent and beguiling. Suddenly I can understand the satisfaction of that escape, savor something of the acute pleasure it gave to someone like John. All the itch and clutter of the world, its bother and fuss, its nagging pettiness, can wear you down so easily. (p. 266)



I used to wonder - occasionally - if I could justifiably describe myself as either an optimist or a pessimist. Whatever response I came up with always depended on my mood. If I was feeling clever, I would consider myself a pessimist, and a proud one at that, no matter how fortunate I had recently been. It was only in my stupid moods that I felt optimistic. The more stupid I was, the more I assumed that events would unfold favorably for me. I now see that there was an error in these neat categorizations: from time to time my cleverness disguised just how stupid I was being. (p. 282)

I sat on my bed and allowed my swiftly alternating moods to dominate me, unchecked. I felt by turns apathetic, sullen, hard done-by, bitter, frustrated, baffled, hurt and, finally, contemptuous and independent. Mallabar, "nervous exhaustion" or no, was evidently trying to initiate some sort of damage limitation program, to incorporate my discoveries about the chimpanzees into his magnum opus before it was too late. I began to regret my hasty note informing him of my own publishing plans. (p. 296-97)

I go about my business. I live in my little house on the beach. I think about what has happened to me and what I have done and wonder if I have reacted and behaved correctly. I don't know. Yet. Perhaps this is an area where I should employ Blaise Pascal's "finesse." I like the idea of finessing my way to a correct answer, rather than relying on the power of logical argument. Perhaps I shall finesse my way through the rest of my life? (p. 305)



Topics for Discussion

Throughout the novel, Hope attempts to compare the world of mathematics to real life. In what ways does this appear to work? In what ways does it not?

John's descent into insanity came in phases. List the telltale signs as the novel progresses.

Ian Vail can be described as shallow and selfish. Point out events that support this characterization.

In what ways do you believe Hope is responsible for the negative events in her life? In what ways is she a "victim" of events beyond her control?

Eugene Mallabar can be viewed as both a successful and renown scientist but also as a tragic figure. Which events support each of these views?

Why do you believe the narration switches between first and third person? How does this impact the novel?

One of Hope's favorite expressions from a former professor is, "What cannot be avoided must be welcomed." Discuss the meaning of this statement relative to Hope's response to all that happens to her.