

Caleb's Crossing Study Guide

Caleb's Crossing by Geraldine Brooks

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Plot Summary

This historical novel, set in pre-revolution America (the mid-to-late 1600s) is the story of a young Puritan girl and her long-term relationship with a native boy. Over a period of several years, as it chronicles the struggles of the two friends to determine and retain their individual identities, the narrative also explores thematic questions related to the nature of God and the interrelationship between sin, redemption and rebirth.

Each of the novel's three parts begins with a brief explanation of Bethia's situation at that particular time of her life, and is followed by detailed, chapter-by-chapter narration of how she arrived in that situation.

Part 1 begins with Bethia's description of lying awake and listening to her father (Pastor Mayfield) and brother (Makepeace) argue about whether it's wise to bring a boy named Caleb into their household, Makepeace arguing that Caleb is little better than a pagan and Mayfield arguing that there is no better way to teach such people the Christian way. Bethia describes how she and Caleb came to be good friends and how she is both excited and scared by the prospect of his moving into her home. Narrative action in this part of the book also explores the tensions between whites and natives on the island where Bethia and her family have made their home, and the tensions within her own family. By the end of Part 1, Caleb and his friend Joel have become thoroughly versed in Christian studies and professed themselves Christian, suppressing their native identity (which, however, resurfaces occasionally). Meanwhile, Bethia's family has suffered several serious losses and Bethia has come to see herself as a dangerous sinner.

Part 2 begins with Bethia's description of her new situation, as housekeeper for a school of teenaged boys in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She describes how the losses of Part 1, combined with new losses that she describes in Part 2, led her, Makepeace, Caleb, and Joel into the unhappy situation in which they now find themselves. Over the course of several months, Caleb and Joel become deeply involved in their new studies, the native aspects of their personality and identity surfacing only occasionally. Meanwhile, Bethia becomes involved with Samuel, the son of the school's headmaster, and a young native woman, Anne, comes to study. Bethia's quick thinking and determined action avoid a scandal when Anne suffers a miscarriage, having apparently been impregnated by a white man of considerable social and political status. At the same time, Bethia is becoming the object of romantic interest from Samuel, the son of the school's headmaster, and at one point gives in to her physical desire for him, afterwards once again believing herself to have given in to Satanic desires. Also, her friendship with Caleb deepens.

Part 3 begins with commentary by the now elderly Bethia on her happiness once she returned to the island several decades before and starting a family with Samuel. She describes how she and Samuel married, went to Europe to enable Samuel to study medicine, and had a son, the first of several descendants. Bethia also describes how Caleb and Joel's studies transcended the racially-defined judgments and negative



attitudes imposed upon them by their teachers and their fellow students, raising them to the top of the class. Shortly before their graduation, Joel is murdered by natives resentful of white incursions into their territory and spirituality, while Caleb falls ill with tuberculosis. A desperate visit made by Bethia to Caleb's uncle, a powerful pawaaw (medicine man) results in her being given the means to give Caleb a comfortable death. The book draws to a close describing Bethia's claim that the story she has told in these pages is not a story of triumph, but a lament.

A brief afterword by the author describes the historical sources she used as the basis for the book.



Section 1 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor

Section 1 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Summary

This historical novel, set in pre-revolution America (the mid-to-late 1600s) is the story of a young Puritan girl and her long-term relationship with a native boy. Over a period of several years, as it chronicles the struggles of the two friends to determine and retain their individual identities, the narrative also explores thematic questions related to the nature of God and the interrelationship between sin, redemption and rebirth.

Chapter 1 - Narrator Bethia lies awake in her attic bed and listens to her father and her brother Makepeace argue over whether she should be exposed to the near-pagan influence of the young man coming to live with them, a native given the Christian name of Caleb. Bethia describes the family's situation - isolated home and difficult life in a family with a recently dead mother whom, the teenaged Bethia adds, was killed as the result of her (Bethia's) Eve-like transgression into evil. Bethia describes her love for the island where she and her family live and reveals that she is writing down the events of the past few months in order to understand them better.

Chapter 2 - Bethia describes how her grandfather established a colony on their island, and her belief that the natives of the area (the Wampanoag) were taken advantage of. She describes how her father began the process of converting the natives to Christianity, how one of them, Iacoomis, taught him the basics of their language, and how she acquired the language more easily, adding that she has come to identify and connect with the Wampanoag.

Chapter 3 - Bethia says that the story of her fall from God's grace begins three years previously, when she was twelve. She describes the accidental death of her twin brother Zuriel, how she absorbed the lessons given to Makepeace better than he did, and how her father told her that too much learning was not good for a pretty girl destined for marriage. She describes her anger at his attitude, her mother's quiet contention that she should continue use her good mind but only in appropriate ways, and how she apprenticed herself to a nearby elderly neighbor in the ways of plants and of midwifery. Bethia also describes how she used to take her horse and explore the island, and how she one day she encountered Caleb. She describes his surprise at learning she knew some of his language, his distaste for how members of his people were becoming closer with those in her community, and how he taught her the names and ways of the land. As the chapter concludes, she describes the moment that he told her his true name, and how that moment changed their relationship.



Section 1 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Analysis

The narrative structure of the novel as a whole follows the pattern established with this first part - a statement of the narrator's present day situation, followed by an explanation of the circumstances that created and continue to define that situation. This technique effectively draws the reader into the story, raising a series of implied questions (i.e., why does Bethia she describe what happened as having fallen from grace? What did she do that was so evil?) the narrative then sets out to answer. This is a form of foreshadowing, as is the less direct reference to Bethia's apprenticing herself to a midwife, which foreshadows events in Part 2, chapter twelve, in which the skills she acquires here are both useful and troublemaking.

Meanwhile, the characters introduced in these chapters are quite vividly portrayed, as is the moral and religious context (setting) within which they play out their various conflicts and relationships. Those relationships, in turn, are each, in their own way, manifestations and/or contemplations of one or more of the work's three themes. The relationship between Caleb and Bethia, for example, is grounded in their individual struggles to define their identities, and also provides a medium through which the narrative can develop its explorations of the nature of God.

At the same time, the character of Bethia begins a trio of tormented searches, that seem to last all her life (at least, through to the end of Part 3, which portrays her at the end of her life). The first is a search for knowledge, the second a search through experiences of sin and questions of morality, the third a search for at least a degree of freedom from the strictures that faith and tradition impose on her and on women in general. The last is a manifestation of the former two, in that both education and freedom in general are denied her simply because she is female, an aspect of her identity that she persistently and obstinately, maintains can and should be no obstacle. All three aspects of her search lead her into some challenging circumstances, those circumstances in turn leading her to question whether the conservative, rigid identity of God that she has been taught (not to mention the equally conservative, equally rigid identity that she has been forced to assume) are, in fact, manifestations of essential truth.



Section 1 - Part 2, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor

Section 1 - Part 2, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Summary

Chapter 4 - When a whale strands itself on the beach, the white community gathers to slaughter it and take its fat for melting down into oil. Bethia describes how she sees this as an act of theft, as it was generally understood that such whales belonged, by tradition, to the Wampanoag. When she goes in search of firewood, she discovers a group of the Wampanoag engaged in a celebratory feast and dance, and becomes fascinated with the both the ceremony and the stately dancing of the Wampanoag women. She returns to the site of the slaughter, where she is berated by Makepeace for her absence, but later that night, returns to the site of the ceremony, where the power and intensity of the drumming and dancing has increased. She finds herself drawn into both the music and the energy, takes off some of her clothes, and dances alone. She makes her way back to the camp, watches as the carcass of the whale is thrown into the sea, and then returns with the others to the townsite, her mind still at the dancing circle.

Chapter 5 - Bethia reveals Caleb's Indian name (Cheeshahteumauck), which means "hateful one". Caleb doesn't really know why he got that name, but adds that names often change with his people. He is an outsider, independent and solitary, and hopes to be a pawaaw, or spiritual leader of his people like his powerful, feared uncle, Taquamack. At the same time, Caleb reveals his belief that Bethia's name (which means "servant") is unworthy of her, and starts calling her Storm Eyes. He also talks about the many gods of his people and of their stories, which Bethia at first considers outlandish, but then reconsiders her opinion, thinking how she encountered some of Caleb's gods and their power while she danced to his people's music.

Chapter 6 - Bethia describes how, one day, Caleb discovered her reading, how he treated her book with reverence, and how their conversation about God (during which, Bethia says, Caleb found her faith ridiculous) led Bethia to realize she needed to watch her father preach. She manipulates her way into accompanying him on one of his missionary visits to a native village. Pretending she doesn't speak the language, she watches him treat the villagers with respect, and listens as he preaches a sermon to the gathered community, some of whom express their disbelief in their own language which, unbeknownst to them, is understood by Bethia. As the sermon progresses, she notices that several of the listeners are becoming increasingly distracted by the presence of a tall man covered in vibrant body paint. The conversation of the audience reveals to Bethia that the man is Tequamuck. Several members of the audience join him, and they disappear into the woods.



Section 1 - Part 2, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Analysis

The novel deepens its exploration of one of its central themes in this section. The intense discussions between Caleb and Bethia about the differences and/or similarities between Caleb's multiple gods and Bethia's single god are a clear manifestation of the book's thematic interest in the question of just what God is believed to be, and whether either spiritual belief is fully right or fully wrong. Bethia, because she comes from a very conservative, puritan faith, argues in absolute terms for the supremacy of the Christian god, a supremacy which Caleb comes to accept but never entirely. At the same time, Bethia is introduced to experiences of the spirit, the world, and of the self that lead her to believe that her understanding of God may not be as infallible as she believes and as she is taught. She never comes to the kind of balanced, wise perspective that Caleb seems to come to, constantly (and even at the end of the book) defining herself and her experiences on purely Christian terms. But at least she asks the questions, thoughtfully and openly which, it could be argued, goes at least part of the way towards understanding, or at least being willing to hear, the answers.

Meanwhile, an important symbolic element in this section is the treatment of the whale, which can clearly be seen as a metaphor for the (exploitation? spiritual gutting?) of natives by whites that takes place throughout the novel. It might not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the treatment of the whale is a metaphorical foreshadowing of how Caleb, Joel, and perhaps even Bethia herself, are treated by the white, educated, Christian men whose attitudes and beliefs define their lives. Granted, there are white people (Pastor Mayfield, the soon to be introduced Merry family) who treat the natives they encounter with a degree of respect. But the book clearly portrays these people and their views/actions as in the minority, perhaps as an overall authorial commentary on how white imperialist and/or capitalist Christianity overwhelmed goodwill and humanism on a number of levels.



Section 3 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor

Section 3 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Summary

Chapter 7 - Bethia describes how, as the years passed, Caleb became better and better at reading and speaking English, so much so that he refused to speak anything else when they were together. She also describes how it became more and more difficult to separate the girl she was when she was with him and the girl she is at home.

One day he comes to her and says they can no longer be friends. He is about to endure the ritual transformation from boyhood to manhood and must afterwards follow the path chosen for him by his visions. Upset at the thought of no longer being able to spend time with him and convinced that as the result of the ritual he would be uniting his soul with the devil, Bethia begins to weep, and then hurries away. That night, the answers of her father and brother to her persistent questions about the ways of the native people upset her pregnant mother, leading Bethia to comment in narration that this was one way her sinful attitudes and actions contributed to her mother's death.

Chapter 8 - In this brief chapter, Bethia contemplates the nature of identity, commenting on her increasing frustration at having all her life's choices made for her, including the choice of potential marriage partner (one of which is a merchant's son named Noah Merry). She also wonders about Caleb, whether his ordeal was God's will, and why God brought him into her life.

Chapter 9 - Grandfather Mayfield asks Pastor Mayfield to meet with the Merry family to discuss a business interest, and Bethia is invited along. When they arrive at the Merry mill, Bethia and her father are greeted by the Merry family, including the animated Noah. Their meal is interrupted by the arrival of a pair of young Wampanoag, who have come to ask Mayfield's help in curing a visiting elder (sonquem), later revealed to be Caleb's father. Bethia, excited about the possibility of connecting even indirectly with Caleb, impulsively suggests that her father should go. He agrees, wondering how she understood what the Wampanoag were saying.

After a short journey, Bethia and her father arrive at the Wampanoag settlement, Takemmy. They briefly watch Tequamuck's ritual (including his drinking a foul-smelling liquid from a gourd) before being shown into a tent to wait. There they are offered a meal and Bethia addresses the woman there in her own language, explaining to her father that she learned it while he himself learned it from Iacoomis. When several men arrive to converse with Mayfield, Bethia is left outside on her own, where she sees Tequamuck lying in a trance next to his gourd. Bethia, commenting that she can only explain her actions by saying it was Satan's influence, sips the liquid in the gourd and experiences nausea, a series of powerful hallucinations, and unconsciousness. When



she wakes a few minutes later she is calmer, but has vomited and soiled herself. She cleans herself up and makes her way back to the village, commenting in narration that she expected punishment for her sins, but did not expect for him to punish her in this world.

Section 3 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Analysis

In hindsight (i.e., after reading the entire novel and coming to an understanding of Caleb's overall motivations) his actions in chapter seven can clearly be seen as an important component of his overall journey and intention - to be as fully native a man as he can within the context of being as fully Christian a man as he can. The former is his identity, the latter is the filter through which that identity can function to the benefit of his people. In other words, Caleb's choices and his reactions to those choices are clear manifestations of the work's thematic interest in the struggles faced by individuals to define individual identity; in particular, finding the balance between what internal drives dictate and what external circumstances demand.

Meanwhile, Bethia's struggles in chapter eight are similar in quality, if not in actual detail. She too is faced with struggling to find ways of integrating internal desire with external demand, although there is an important difference between her struggle and Caleb's. To a significant degree, the latter is much more willing to accept the confines of what society demands. He is also able to temper his outspokenness more than Bethia is, more able to restrain his impulses.

Bethia's drinking from the gourd is clearly the Eve-like sin that she referred to at the end of chapter one. According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, Eve was the first woman, created from one of the ribs of the first man, Adam. She was tempted by a serpent to eat food forbidden to her by God, and as a result, she and Adam, as well as all their descendants (i.e., all of humanity) were banished from paradise for all eternity. Bethia's tasting of the liquid in Tequamuck's gourd is clearly viewed by her as a parallel sin for which she expects to be justifiably punished. More contemporary, less Christian considerations might view her actions as simple curiosity which results in consequences, but nothing akin to the soul-defining transgression that Bethia views it to be here. In short, Bethia's actions and beliefs about those actions are a clear exploration of the novel's overall thematic interest in sin and redemption.



Section 4 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor

Section 4 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Summary

Chapter 10 - Back at the native settlement, after the sonquem responds to Mayfield's initial treatment, the still unsteady Bethia is sent her back to the Merrys', where her sleep is disrupted by the aftereffects of the potion. The following morning, Noah shows Bethia the farm. He is full of plans that Bethia is barely listening to, more concerned with her own sinful condition. Her attention turns fully to Noah when he makes a comment that suggests marriage arrangements have gone further than she knew, and she returns to the Merry home angry that again choices have been made for her.

Shortly after her return, Mayfield also returns, with news that not only has the sonquem fully recovered, he has asked for instruction in becoming a Christian. As he and Bethia return home, Bethia wonders whether the conversion process, in which her father plans to participate, means that she can once again see Caleb. Back at home, Bethia and her father, and his news, are happily welcomed, the happiness of Bethia's mother an unhappy foreshadowing, in Bethia's narration, of how the family's happiness was soon to end.

Chapter 11 - This chapter begins with Bethia's present tense commentary on how, in spite of her fatigue (the result of lying awake for several nights writing this confession), she will finish the story that brings her to this point in her life, explaining that the first attempt at conversion of the sonquem failed as the result of interference by Tequamuck. Shortly afterwards, the sonquem and his community are all stricken by an epidemic of smallpox. Tequamuck's failure to successfully treat the epidemic is followed by successful attempts by Mayfield and other white settlers, the gratitude of those who survive leading them to move the community (Manitouwatootan) closer to Bethia's community of Great Harbor and to start Christian studies. Caleb, returned from his quest, comes with them, agreeing to take instruction with Makepeace and Iacoomis' son Joel, Bethia commenting in narration that her father is planning to educate Caleb to the point where he can get into a university, and that he plans to have him live with the family. Meanwhile, Bethia says, her mother died, leaving her responsible for the well being of Solace, the baby whose birth was the cause of her mother's death. Bethia's narration then returns to the present, as she reveals her plans to conceal what she has written and to continue to be distant from the Wampanoag, but after Caleb comes later that day, she doesn't know what will happen to her.



Section 4 - Part 1, Anno 1660, Actatis Suae 15, Great Harbor Analysis

The most important element of this section is the death of Bethia's mother, an event which Bethia believes is the direct result of her (Bethia) having sinned, having given in to temptation and tasted Tequamuck's potion. This situation is the direct cause of several of Bethia's later choices, among them her decision to accept the unhappy circumstances of working for Master Corlett (chapter ten). The situation is also a narrative opportunity for the author to explore one of the work's key themes, the relationship between sin, redemption and rebirth. Bethia continually and repeatedly strives to redeem herself for what she sees as her sinful choices and feelings, but over the course of the narrative, seems less and less inclined to believe that what she actually has done is a sin (see, in particular, her choice to be intimate with Samuel Corlett in chapter twenty). This, in turn, can be seen as a manifestation of another of the work's themes, the struggle to discover and sustain individual identity. There is the very clear sense that, as she moves from feeling like a sinner to feeling like a human being, Bethia finds herself governed less by rules imposed by society and the church (which are, in this period, essentially the same thing, the external forces defining her) and more by internal forces - her experiences, her insights, and her instincts. All that said, her resentment here of people making choices for her can be seen as the springboard for her to take control of her own identity and make her own choices, even those made for misguided reasons and which ultimately prove to be damaging to her true sense of self (again, her choice in chapter ten).



Section 5 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 5 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 1 - Bethia begins this chapter by describing her current situation - as a housekeeper at Master Corlett's school in Cambridge - and commenting that although it's been a while since she told the story of her past, she will continue to do so, again to help her understand herself better. She begins with the day of Caleb's arrival in Great Harbor, describing his introduction to the community on the Sabbath at their religious meeting and how the Bible readings chosen by her father for that day reinforced his intention to have Caleb welcomed. Later, Bethia finds herself uneasily drawn to Caleb while she's serving him and the other men their midday meal. She also comments that the tension between her father and Makepeace over the propriety of having a young man in the house when Bethia was so young seemed strange to her, since she and Caleb had already spent so much time together.

Chapter 2 - The next morning, Bethia goes out to get water and encounters Caleb, who is on his way back from an early morning greeting to the sun god. When he sees Bethia's surprise, he tells her that he believes God created all things, and that there is nothing wrong with singing a hymn of praise to the sun, which he describes by its native name. Later, as Bethia goes about her busy day, viewing her chores as a way of atoning for her sins against her mother, she contemplates how things have changed between her and Caleb who, when they're alone, still calls her Storm Eyes.

That afternoon, Joel arrives for the first lessons he is to share with Makepeace and Caleb, lessons which seem to go smoothly. That night, Bethia discovers that the well has become contaminated. Her father says it's an easy thing to re-dig a well and then goes out with Makepeace to wash his hands before dinner. While they're gone, Caleb takes the opportunity to tell Bethia that he has missed their time together.

Chapter 3 - As time passes, Caleb and Joel develop a close friendship, and Bethia becomes even closer with Solace, determined that she will be educated as properly as possible, even in secret, and allowing her to play freely as the native children did. One night at lessons, conversation turns to techniques of farming. Much to Makepeace's displeasure, Mayfield encourages Caleb to help Bethia with the planting and the garden, their productive work meeting with the approval of Noah Merry, who seems to be around much more frequently. Bethia comments that whenever he was around, Caleb became very quiet - for no reason that she could see.



Section 5 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

There are several important elements to note in this section. First is the repetition of the author's structural technique of sketching up the narrator's situation with both questions and intriguing detail, designed to draw the reader into the narrative. In this case, the mystery of how Bethia got to such a different situation (one described in terms of location and misery that contrast vividly with what has gone before) is particularly stimulating. Second is the sexual and/or romantic tension that seems to be springing up between Bethia and Caleb, hinted at in the commentary about Bethia's unease while serving the men and about Caleb's unease about Noah Merry. This tension is never consummated or explored in particular detail, but is hinted at throughout the narrative and ultimately is resolved into a powerful, loving devotion, the depth of which manifests in the narrative's final chapters.

The third point to note here is the conversation between Bethia and Caleb following Caleb's prayer to the sun, their discussion once again manifesting the novel's central thematic interest in the nature of God. That interest seeming to be summed up, here and elsewhere, in the idea that God has many names. Then there is the suggestion of the growing friendship between Caleb and Joel, foreshadowing the deepening of that friendship through several challenging circumstances over the course of the narrative. Also, the partnership between Caleb and Bethia in planning and planting the garden can be seen as an example of what some of the characters (Mayfield, Merry) and perhaps the author seem to believe is the possible, ideal relationship between natives and whites, between colonizer and colonized. This sort of relationship, from a contemporary perspective (i.e., knowing how thoroughly native culture was exploited by whites over the years), can arguably be seen as either an opportunity missed or an idealization or some combination of both.



Section 6 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 6 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 4 - In this chapter, Bethia's narration focuses on her life in Cambridge - her drudgery as housekeeper to a small college of boys, her longing for the island, and her envy of Makepeace (able to return to the island). She describes how unhappy and unhealthy Cambridge is, how more and more like a white man Caleb is becoming, and how his reading of Hebrew reminded her of hearing him speak his own language. She concludes the chapter with a reference to how often, as in the moment of writing, she breaks down in tears of grief.

Chapter 5 - Bethia resolves to tell her story less emotionally, describing a perfect day that was not any kind of foreboding of the tragedy to come. She had gone out to harvest some beans, taking her time because it was such beautiful weather and because she was confident that Solace would be taken care of by Makepeace or her father. After preparing some of the beans, however, she discovers that Solace is missing. She and the rest of the family, including Caleb and Joel, search for her. Caleb discovers her drowned in what was to be the new well.

Chapter 6 - As Solace's body is prepared for burial, Bethia notices that Caleb places a small bundle in the casket - a doll, some beads, and a piece of scripture written on a scrap of paper. When she asks him quietly whether he's doing what his ancestors always did, leaving a medicine bag with the dead, he says he is doing something like that, and explains why. In the aftermath of Solace's death, Mayfield's determination to convert the natives increases, even in the face of increased activism from Tequamuck. Plans are made for him to travel to England to raise funds for his work.

Chapter 7 - On the day Mayfield is to leave, a crowd of both whites and natives gathers at the shore to see him off. Their celebrations are interrupted when they notice Tequamuck on a nearby hill, his arms raised, chanting. Many of the natives run away, but Pastor Mayfield cries out for him to stop and humble himself before God. Tequamuck continues, and Mayfield's boat sails away. That night the island is hit by a vicious storm that is revealed, the next morning, to have destroyed crops, scattered animals, damaged buildings and, as is eventually revealed, sinking Mayfield's ship, drowning all aboard. Bethia comments that her grief at her father's death was not nearly intense as the grief she felt, and continues to feel, at that of Solace.



Section 6 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

One of the more interesting elements of this section, and of the book as a whole, is a reference made almost in passing to religious historians having considered the possibility that native Indians are descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel as referred to in the Bible. The point is made here in relation to the skill and familiarity with which Caleb seems to read Hebrew but, it must be noted, has also been made by contemporary religious historians. The theory is arguably quite a liberal one, challenging traditional Christian philosophy about the races, but does raise an interesting question in relation to the book's thematic consideration of the nature of God. Given that Christianity is an outgrowth of the Hebrew religion (i.e., Judaism), and if native spirituality is a similar outgrowth (i.e., one practiced by a tribe of Hebrew faithful separated from the larger community), does it not follow that, at least to some degree, the two different faiths can be regarded as parallel descendants from a similar source?

Other important elements in this section include the portrayal of shifts in Caleb's identity - specifically, his actions and comments following Solace's death, and Bethia's portrayal of his native identity becoming subsumed, or overtaken, by his white identity, an overtaking manifest both spiritually and physically (i.e., in his increasingly unhealthy appearance). Here the narrative again manifests its central thematic concern - the struggle to define individual identity. Finally, there is the question of what happens to Mayfield's boat. Here it's important to note that the narrative never explicitly states that the wreck was caused by Tequamuck, only that some came to believe that it was. The structure of the narrative certainly seems to imply that there was at least some degree of cause and effect relationship between Tequamuck's actions and both the storm and the shipwreck. This implication emerges not only through the juxtaposition of circumstances but through the general implication, throughout the narrative, that all the natives are to varying degrees more connected to the power of nature and more able to harness it.



Section 7 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 7 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 8 - In the aftermath of Mayfield's death, the Wampanoag construct a stone cairn, or memorial, on the shore. Bethia and Makepeace visit the cairn every day. On one such visit, a discussion of whether Mayfield was killed by Tequamuck (Makepeace says yes, Bethia says no) leads to an argument over how changed Caleb truly is. During the argument, Makepeace reveals how jealous he is of both Bethia's and Caleb's success at learning, how he believes Caleb "witched" Solace into her death, and his belief that Bethia lusts after him. Bethia angrily denies any such feelings, revealing in narration that she feels for Caleb as she would a brother - a better brother than Makepeace. Later, Makepeace threatens to tell their grandfather of Bethia's behavior.

Chapter 9 - Makepeace and Bethia meet with their grandfather, who reads them their father's will and reveals, to everyone's surprise, that he left Bethia a pair of important books. He also reveals that the money to fund the trip to England came from the funds saved for Makepeace's education, and that he has made arrangements for Makepeace, Caleb and Joel to continue their studies in the school of Master Corlett in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He adds that Corlett has agreed to host them without tuition on condition that Bethia join the household as an indentured servant. Bethia's inner reaction is one of anger, but she restrains herself as her grandfather makes several good arguments in favor of this proposition. Bethia asks to consider it, and her grandfather gives his permission.

Chapter 10 - Bethia decides to accept the indenture, but keeps her decision secret in order to keep Makepeace being nice to her. One day she goes out on her own, visiting her father's cairn and taking a ride along the beach. When she stops to rest she is visited by Caleb who, during their conversation, calls her Storm Eyes. She tells him to stop, saying that she needs to do as he once said and change her name to something more fitting her changed life. She is now Bethia, a servant to God's will. She then asks what happened on Caleb's quest. He tells her he received guidance that he was to be a pawaaw, and Bethia asks how it's possible for him to be both a pawaaw and a Christian. He explains that he searches for knowledge and power, and will take it any way he can get it. This Bethia can identify with, and she tells him so, adding that she still intends to accept the new life she believes she is being called to by God. They ride back to the settlement together through on a secret route, thinking it wise that they not be seen together. On the way back, Caleb's closeness makes Bethia realize she thinks about him as more than a brother.



Section 7 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

There are several important points to note about this section. Among them is the cairn (which can be seen as a metaphoric representation of the potential for mutual positive regard between whites and natives), the revelation of Makepeace's jealousy (which, until this point in the narrative, he had barely been able to suppress), and more hints about the true nature of Bethia's feelings for Caleb. These recur both in Makepeace's comments and in Bethia's own suggestion that her feelings for Caleb are more than fraternal. This last is particularly noteworthy, in that it suggests a sensual aspect to Bethia's personality that resurfaces later during her relationship with Samuel Corlett (chapter twenty), an aspect which, in turn, can be seen as another manifestation of Bethia's thematically central struggle to come to grips with her individual identity.

Also in this section, the question of names comes into play, as it does several times throughout the narrative in terms of both the natives and the non-natives.

An "indenture" is essentially a contract for service over a limited term. In signing an indentured agreement involving Corlett and Bethia, Grandfather Mayfield is essentially signing Bethia into slavery, her work serving as payment of Makepeace's tuition. While some contemporary readers may question Bethia's decision and see her as selling short her self and her identity, it's important to remember two things - that, at the time, women were in many ways viewed and treated as property, and that Bethia was also striving to atone for what she believed to be the sin that killed her mother. Whether it did or not is ultimately irrelevant - she believed it did, and in the religious context of the period, such a belief was not only a prime motivator, but sanctioned. In short, it is not for the reasons outlined by her grandfather that Bethia takes the position. It has much more to do with her sense of sin and her desire to redeem herself - in other words, it is an evocation of one of the book's primary themes sin and redemption.



Section 8 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 8 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 11 - As their boat sets out for Cambridge, Bethia watches for Tequamuck, relieved he does not appear to disrupt their journey. After a brief but difficult journey, Bethia and the others (Makepeace, Caleb and Joel) arrive at Corlett's where, after Bethia is left to unwillingly listen to the long-winded Corlett, she is shown to where she is to sleep - on a rough bed in the kitchen near the fire.

Chapter 12 - In her first days at the school, Bethia confronts arrogant students, discovers that one of them is related to her favorite poet (Anne Bradstreet), and assists in the welcome of another new arrival, a young native woman named Anne who, when she first arrives, is nervous and frightened. Bethia calms her, learning that Anne's parents died when she was a child, that she was raised in the woods by a trader, learned English and Latin by accident listening to the trader, and came to be where she is as the result of writing to the governor and asking for help, later being taken into his household. Corlett suggests the two young women room together, and both agree. Their first night together, Anne keeps Bethia awake as she tosses and turns through troubled dreams.

Chapter 13 - Makepeace tells Bethia in a rare private conversation that he has realized he cannot do what is required of him and that he wants to return home. As Bethia responds with anger that he is planning to leave her behind, he also reveals her that he and their grandfather have arranged for the Merry family to buy out the remainder of Bethia's indenture and she is to go home and marry Noah. When she reacts with shock, he accuses her of wanting to be with Caleb, and that he is determined that she should do as he wills. She calls on God to damn him and returns to Corlett's.

Chapter 14 - As a consequence of her cursing Makepeace, Bethia is rebuked by Corlett, formally beaten by her brother, and forced to confess her "sins" at meeting. She continues in her duties, but remains upset and angry. After a while she is called into Corlett's office where she eventually admits, in response to Corlett's sensitive questioning, that she doesn't want to marry Noah Merry and that she resents her brother for trying to sell her as he would a pig. Corlett reminds her of her duty to her male family, but then asks whether she might be interested in marrying his son, Samuel. Bethia remembers meeting him and thinking relatively well of him, and agrees to meet him.



Section 8 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

Throughout this section, Bethia is repeatedly placed into situations she despises, speaks more bluntly than she should, and is punished for it. In other words, she is continuing to struggle to find the right balance between acting according to what her conscience, will and intelligence dictate and what society permits. Here it's interesting to note that for the most part, Caleb virtually disappears from the narrative, occasionally making comments and interjections but, for the most part, absent from both the circumstances of Bethia's life and her reflections on them. This, it seems, is the result of his being absorbed almost fully into the male-dominated, Christianity-dominated world that Bethia seems so determined to resist, to avoid being overwhelmed by. She is, however, slowly but surely, discovering how to be part of that world on her terms, a discovery and perspective enhanced by her deepening relationship with Samuel Corlett that begins in earnest in the following section.

Another interesting element in this section is the introduction of Anne, whose experience is, in many ways, parallel to that of Bethia, with one major exception - her learning is being encouraged, where Bethia's is being actively discouraged. Granted, the narrative makes it clear that the encouragement of Anne is financially and politically motivated - the school will receive money from a philanthropic organization back in England if they can prove that natives can be educated like whites and assimilated into the world. No one has anything to gain by educating a white woman. Still, as the narrative continues to unfold, it's worth considering the parallels between the physical abuse apparently endured by Anne and the intellectual/spiritual abuse endured by Bethia.



Section 9 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 9 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 15 - Samuel Corlett proves to be friendly, intellectually stimulating and, in a visit following their first meeting (to which he brings flowers and a valued book) romantically stimulating as well. Later, Caleb and Bethia have an opportunity to talk about the situation (i.e., Bethia having two suitors, Samuel and Noah). Caleb helps Bethia sort out the positives and negatives of both options, asking her some unusual questions - what does she want and which stirs her blood.

Chapter 16 - The next day, Samuel arrives and takes Bethia on a tour of the library endowed by John Harvard in the school where he Samuel is to work as a tutor. When they are alone, Samuel asks for Bethia's hand in marriage, professing his regard but confessing that he has little money and will need her to wait until he finishes his studies. Before the anxious Bethia can answer, they are interrupted by Caleb, who rushes in and hurries them back to Corlett's house where they find Anne, hysterical and bleeding. Bethia realizes the girl is having a miscarriage, and issues orders based on her memories of her mother's miscarriage and her conversations with the older women of Great Harbor.

Chapter 17 - The local midwife arrives after Anne's baby had been expelled from her body, takes one look at that baby and tells Bethia to burn it, which she does. When confronted by Corlett and his son, who accuse one of the natives of being the father, Bethia insists them the baby was too old, and must have been fathered when Anne was in service at the governor's house. Later, Anne refuses to name the father, leading Caleb and Joel (who, Bethia notes with some surprise, seems to care deeply for Anne) to realize that the only way Anne can escape a torturous inquisition is to escape to the island.

Chapter 18 - Bethia is disconcerted the next day by the arrival of Noah Merry, convinced that he means to pursue her in marriage. She is relieved and happy to learn that he has not only become engaged to another woman, but that he has bought out her indenture with Corlett. When she returns to Corlett's, she learns that the midwife's evidence about the baby does not agree with her own, realizes it would do no good to confront her, and goes to visit Noah, whom now she considers to be a good friend. When she explains the situation, he reacts angrily to the injustice of it and agrees to be part of the plan to spirit Anne back to the island. Back at Corlett's, Bethia tells Makepeace about Noah's plans to marry another. Makepeace apologizes for his behavior, and announces his plans to return to the island on Noah's ship. Bethia worries that this will make Anne's escape impossible and, after again consulting with Noah, tells Makepeace the truth. Once again she is surprised, as Makepeace sees that Anne has been done wrong, will



be done wrong again if she is challenged in court, and that Bethia could well be caught up in the ordeal. Within two days, and after a quick farewell to Caleb and Joel, Anne departs for the island, hidden in the back of a cart driven by Noah with Makepeace as another passenger.

Section 9 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

Just as Bethia is beginning a relationship (with Samuel Corlett) that eventually proves to be intellectually, physically, and emotionally both challenging and fulfilling, she comes face to face with a situation that reminds her of just how little she and essentially all women are valued within the society of the time. In other words, just as she is beginning to be treated like the exception she has always felt herself to be, wanted to be, and striven to be, she encounters the rules, attitudes and behaviors that make her realization of all those goals so challenging. Anne's experience, in fact, can be seen as a metaphorical representation of what Bethia has been going through. Where Anne was physically raped and miscarried a stillborn child, Bethia has repeatedly been raped intellectually and has miscarried of what had the potential to be a fine intelligence, clearly superior to that of her brother and many of the other men around her. It's also interesting to note that as the narrative unfolds, both women eventually achieve a degree of happiness and fulfillment, albeit having to endure even more suffering along the way.

One last interesting point about this section is the way the four young male characters (Caleb, Samuel, Makepeace, Noah) are all portrayed as having remarkably open minds, interested in and committed to the well being of both Bethia and Anne. In the case of both Makepeace and Noah, this comes as something of a surprise, particularly for Makepeace who has up to now been insufferably arrogant. It's important to note, though, that in the case of these last two characters, they have been released from what has been expected of them - in other words, they have been allowed, as the result of a shift in circumstances, to become more themselves. As a result, it seems they have also become more willing and/or able to help others become THEM-selves. In the case of Caleb, who is constantly struggling with questions of identity and who seems to have an innate wisdom on the subject, his perspective is less of a surprise. Samuel, as the narrative reveals in the following section, is perhaps the most surprising ... not to mention the most welcome, to both Bethia and the reader. He of all the male characters in the book, is perhaps the least concerned with propriety and image and the most concerned with living his life according to the dictates of his soul, his passions and his identity, as opposed to the dictates of society, rules and religion. As such, he is a positive embodiment and/or manifestation of the work's thematic interest in the struggle to define and maintain individual identity.



Section 10 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge

Section 10 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Summary

Chapter 19 - In the aftermath of Anne's disappearance, Samuel confesses to Bethia that he has long wanted a wife with whom he could talk on an intellectual level, that he found the idea of her (as presented by his father) attractive, and that once he saw her, he found her person attractive as well. He then urges her to reconsider her determination to defend the natives, apparently still believing that one of them was the father of Anne's baby. This triggers her temper and they argue, Bethia eventually walking away. Samuel runs after her, grabs her, says he loves her, and kisses her.

Chapter 20 - There are no legal repercussions to Anne's miscarriage - when she disappeared, so did the problem. Caleb, however, is still troubled by the lack of justice. Bethia urges him to pray his anger away, and late one night, when he sneaks out with his face blackened, she realizes that's what he's doing - only he's not praying to the Christian god. A few weeks later, the married son of the governor dies unexpectedly, and Caleb has a look of satisfaction on his face. Meanwhile, Bethia considers the two options available to her - return to the island and life that she loves without books, or marry Samuel, have access to learning, but be kept from the island. During another conversation with Samuel at the library, she asks for a few more months so they can both be sure, adding that the only reason she's staying, now that she's been freed, is because she's thinking of him. When she sees the gratitude and love in his eyes, she feels a surge of passion and, realizing she's already broken several commandments, gives in to it and runs to him.

Chapter 21 - As the day for the examinations nears, Corlett calls Bethia to his study to discuss her plans. She admits that she wants to stay, and Corlett perceives that she wants to be near Samuel. She also admits that she has applied for another housekeeping position in another school, confessing that she wishes to overhear the lectures. Corlett becomes angry, suggesting that it is both dangerous and inappropriate for her to become too educated. She eventually apologizes, and he agrees to not block her application, urging her to not listen to the lectures.

Chapter 22 - In her early days in her new job, Bethia unobtrusively listens as Caleb takes his entrance examinations with President Chauncy, who is patronizing and self-important but respectful of the learning Caleb has accomplished. Caleb passes the exam thoroughly and is welcomed to the college. As he and Bethia leave, they pass Joel, about to take his exams. Caleb offers encouragement in their native tongue, and Bethia comments in narration that Joel did even better than Caleb did.



Chapter 23 - On the first morning of classes, Bethia hands out the breakfasts to be taken by the younger boys to their seniors - only Caleb doesn't have a senior to report to, and Bethia worries that he will face repercussions, but he seems sure that he won't. Later, as she works to prepare meals, Bethia listens to the lectures going on only a few feet from her, and happily considers all the possibilities she has for learning. At the end of the day, when she hands out the evening meal, she is upset to see how drawn Joel and Caleb look. That night, her narration of this section concludes, with her comment that now that her future seems settled, at least for a while, she doesn't feel the need to write quite so much.

Section 10 - Part 2, Anno 1661, Actatis Suae 17, Cambridge Analysis

Here it's interesting to note the juxtaposition between two circumstances evoking the novel's thematic interest in the power and need for individual identity. Specifically, just as Bethia is acknowledging and accepting her sexual identity, Caleb is reaffirming his identity as a native - in other words, both central characters encounter and/or reconnect with important parts of their innate, inner being. Also at this point, it's equally interesting to note how the narrative never comes out and suggests that the death of the governor's son has anything to do with Caleb's actions or with Anne's pregnancy - the relationship is merely implied, as it was in the juxtaposition between Tequamuck's appearance on the cliff and the destruction of Mayfield's ship (Section 6). Here, as in that instance, the author implies a relationship between natives and nature that doesn't exist between nature and whites. One other manifestation of the novel's interest in identity - Caleb's murmured comments to Joel, a suggestion that not only was it possible for Caleb and Joel to retain their original, true identities, but also that, on a larger level, it's possible to retain individual, internal identity even in the face of harsh impositions of external identity. This is echoed in Bethia's situation as described at the end of this section - doing her job, but able to absorb, at least to some degree, the education she has longed for all her life.



Section 11 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor

Section 11 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor Summary

Chapter 1 - The narration of the now elderly Bethia reveals that her physical health is failing, but she still has her memories, many of which are triggered by the contents of an inlaid box she purchased in Italy the year she married Samuel. She reads the papers it contains, the writings of her younger self, commenting on how foolish it seems, on how she feels the need to write one last time, and on how the physical pain of actually handling the pen is probably nothing compared to the pain she thinks waits for her in hell. "Still," she says, "I do not choose to fear what I cannot know."

Chapter 2 - In the early part of Bethia's one year at Harvard College, she watches as Caleb and Joel are first shunned by their peers and then eventually welcomed into their circle, in part as the result of Caleb's insistent refusal to obey the tradition of younger boys serving older ones. Their first tutor is a drunken native hater who is discovered for what he is and dismissed. Chauncy takes over the tutelage of Caleb and Joel and they respond well, doing better than many of the white students.

Chapter 3 - Also in that first year, Bethia writes, she and Samuel were careful not to give in to their desires for each other, and eventually got married. A calmer Makepeace was at the wedding, engaged himself to a widow whose inheritance from her dead husband helped pay for Samuel and Bethia to travel to Italy so that Samuel could continue his medical studies. Bethia describes her happiness and wonder at all she experienced in Italy, particularly the range of spiritual beliefs she encountered, and how, on their return, she realized she was pregnant. The birth, she says, was difficult, and resulted in her not being able to have any more children. Her son, she adds, and his family now take good care of her and Samuel in their old age. Her thoughts return to the past, to Caleb (who, as the result of his intense studies, had become thin and developed a cough) and to Joel (who had worked so hard and done so well that he was to be valedictorian). He reveals to her his plans to return to the island to marry the happily resettled Anne, the two of them having corresponded in secret for years. Samuel, Bethia and the baby are to go along for the ceremony.

Chapter 4 - Bethia describes how the island remained safe from wars, plagues, famines and other violence on the mainland, how Samuel and the rest of her family settled happily there, and how her son married a daughter of Noah Merry and became a locally renowned boat builder.



Section 11 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor Analysis

Here again, the narrative follows the structural format of the previous two parts, introducing the present-day circumstances of the narrator and explaining how those circumstances came into being. It's interesting to note how, in Part 3, Bethia's narrative style is reflective of her apparent age. Where the other two sections were clearly written in a more linear, coherent fashion, the stories in this section are told with a rambling, winding sensibility appropriate for such an elderly character.

Other important points to note in this section include the portrayal of Samuel, who throughout the narrative has expressed his determination to follow his own desires and here, with his trip to Italy, actually does so. The sense here is that he has been clear and firm in his own self-perception of identity, and has acted on it in ways that Bethia and, to a lesser extent Caleb, were not able to. While this is clearly a manifestation of the novel's thematic interest in the value of living according to the demands of one's self, it's essential to remember that for Samuel, it was entirely possible - he was a white, educated male in a system (political, social, moral, financial) that supported, advocated, and sought the success of such individuals. A related point is the birth of Bethia and Samuel's son, a metaphorical representation of the new life (intellectually, sexually and emotionally fulfilled) into which the long-suffering Bethia is herself being born. Here it's interesting to note how the child is conceived in a land (Italy) that exposes Bethia and her husband to a broader range of religious perspectives and/or experiences than they ever thought possible. It's doubtful, keeping in mind the previously discussed metaphoric value of the baby, that this is a coincidence. In any case, the events of this section (particularly chapter three) and the commentary on those events are all clearly perceivable as an exploration of the novel's thematic interest in the nature of God.

All that said, the section concludes with an expression of foreboding - the portrayal of the coughing Caleb, which foreshadows the further death and suffering brought into the characters' lives in the following, concluding section.



Section 12 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor

Section 12 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor Summary

Chapter 5 - Bethia narrates her happiness at returning home to the island with Joel and her family, her sadness that Caleb had remained behind, the happiness of Joel and Anne's wedding. She then describes how arrangements were made for Joel to return to Cambridge before the rest of them, as it was likely he was to be valedictorian and would need time to prepare. Her narration comments that "later, when [she] tried to peer through [her] grief for any hint of a thing awry" she thought that maybe his boat sat low in the water ...

Chapter 6 - Narration reveals that heavy seas swamped Joel's boat onto a nearby smaller island, where it was overrun by natives bitter and angry at what they believe whites had done to their tribe. Joel, it is reported, attempted to calm them in their own language, but they attacked him even more savagely. Bethia prepares the body for burial, gives the distraught Anne the news, and does the same to Caleb after she and Samuel have returned to Cambridge for the commencement ceremonies. Caleb, for his part, wants to hear no details.

Chapter 7 - Bethia narrates the commencement ceremony in considerable detail, commenting on Caleb's particular dignity (see "Quotes", p. 284) and on the fact that Joel's name, success and death were never mentioned (a fact, she comments, bothers her even in her old age). She describes the speeches given by the top graduates, outlining what became of them afterwards, many meeting bad ends. Finally, after the ceremony concludes, she describes seeing Caleb get his degree from an emotional Chauncy, and later finding him alone, coughing into a handkerchief speckled with blood.

Chapter 8 - Caleb deteriorates quickly, and little of Samuel's treatments do him good. Bethia devises a plan to help him, returns to the island, and with the reluctant help of both Makepeace and Noah, finds her way to Tequamuck. At first he berates her for being a bad influence on Caleb, telling her of Caleb's spiritual struggles, that Caleb is lost without Joel, that Joel's own soul is lost, and that he will not help her. She begs him, and he takes her into a private ceremony, the details of which she, in narration, refuses to reveal. She does say, however, that she has come to believe that she is not sure Tequamuck was the servant of the devil she had always been taught he was (see "Quotes", p. 295). He also tells her of the unhappy future he has seen for his people, a future the aged Bethia comments in narration had come to pass. After the ceremony, she returns with Noah to her home, unsure of the kind of help Tequamuck had offered but which, she comments in narration, was some comfort to Caleb.



Chapter 9 - At Caleb's bedside, Bethia performs the ritual that Tequamuck had given her. Caleb gathers enough strength to sit up, assist in the ritual, and sing the death song she taught him. Bethia comments in narration that he died well (see "Quotes", p. 298), singing the song loud enough that she was sure Joel's spirit was able to follow him into whichever afterlife, Christian or native, welcomed them.

Chapter 10 - Bethia describes how many Indian students who studied at Harvard met bad ends. She also comments on how Caleb and Joel both visit her in her dreams, Caleb showing her the lives he could have lived. She confesses her hopes for a more peaceful relationship between whites and natives, adding that Samuel regards them as foolishness, even as he sits with her in loving silence at the end of the day, at the end of both their days. Finally, she says she will put her writings aside, saying it has eased her heart and affirming that she will not be "silent about what [she] did, and what it cost" (see "Quotes", p. 300).

Section 12 - Part 3, Anno 1715, Actatis Suae 70, Great Harbor Analysis

Of the many important elements in this section, the first and MOST important is that found in the work's final moments. Throughout the narrative, the reader is likely to wonder what, exactly, the author is leading up to - the thematic considerations (of the nature of God, of the nature of sin, and of the struggle for identity) are quite clear, but there are few if any indications how the author is going to tie them together. For long sections, in fact, it almost looks as though the author is advocating the Christian-ization of the natives, the subsuming of identity in favor of rules, status quo, and conservatism. As the novel concludes, however, Bethia's actions make clear that she has realized the value of reconnecting with, and staying true to, innate individual identity. She is too late to help Caleb live, but she is not too late to help him die, in a way that seems true to both his soul and hers. Here all three themes come together. God, and by extension the human spirit, is revealed to have power and peace transcendent of any name. Bethia redeems what she has believed to be her greatest sin (triggering the death of her mother) with her greatest act of compassion (enabling Caleb to have a peaceful death). And both she and Caleb act from a deep, instinctive, understanding of what they know to be true. This, then, is what the author was driving at - faith and trust in one's own sense of identity and personal truth enables both good life (as witnessed by the peaceful life described by the elderly Bethia) and good death. The book's final line, in this context, can ultimately be seen as Bethia's expression of regret that neither she nor Caleb (and perhaps not even humanity as a whole) realized that truth sooner.

One last point to note in relation to Caleb's death relates to the meaning of the title. Several times throughout the narrative, the term "crossing" is used in a variety of ways. Among them are its usage to evoke the crossing from the island to the mainland and back (a journey undertaken by many characters), and its evocation evoke Samuel's and Bethia's crossing of the ocean to Italy (a metaphoric journey into broader spiritual perspective. Bethia also uses it to describe Caleb's "crossing" from the world and ways

of his native ancestry into the world and ways of whites. But the most poignant, evocative and ultimately relevant use of the term is implied in the novel's final moments - in Caleb's "Crossing" from the world of the living to the world of the dead, from the world of the physical to the world of the purely spiritual.

Other important elements in this climactic section include the racism displayed by the silent whites at Cambridge and the murderous natives on the island towards the white-infused Joel, both of which are equally destructive of a soul that had simply striven to be the best in two very different worlds, and Bethia's glimpse of further, future tensions between those worlds. Those tensions are further foreshadowed in the reference to the blood coughed up by Caleb and to the disease which caused his death, tuberculosis being, like smallpox, a whites-born ravage of vulnerable native populations. Finally, there is Bethia's self-portrayal, full of a disquieting mixture of peace and regret, of fulfillment and lost dreams, of fading hope and rising determination to see that hope reawakened, somehow, in future generations.



Characters

Bethia

Bethia is the book's protagonist, its central character and narrator. Her name comes from her Christian faith, and means servant. Over the course of the narrative, Bethia ages from fifteen in Part 1 to seventeen in Part 2 to seventy in Part 3. In all three parts, and apparently throughout all the ages of her life, Bethia is strong willed and opinionated. She struggles constantly to find the balance between what she believes to be right (i.e., equal treatment to that received by her brother and other males in her community) and what she knows to be reality (i.e., that women are generally held to be both inferior and submissive to men). Only when she is with the one person in her life who is as much of an outsider as he is, the native boy Caleb, does she feel as though she can be truly everything she is. In short, Bethia's story is the primary narrative manifestation of the book's central thematic consideration - the struggle to achieve and maintain individual identity.

Bethia's struggles and situation also explore and/or manifest another of the book's themes - its exploration of the nature of God. Bethia learns from Caleb, as he learns from her, that there are in the world many names and many faces to the one god of all. She is, at first, reluctant to believe him, and even when, as a more mature married woman, she has difficulty letting go of her Christianity-defined preconceptions of what God is. But by the time of her impending death in the narrative's last pages, she has at least begun to acknowledge the possibility that there's more to spirituality than her Christian faith and its practices have led her to believe. Finally, her story also embodies and manifests the work's third primary theme, that exploring the relationship between sin, redemption, and rebirth. Bethia considers herself having sinned greatly, to the point that those sins were punished by God, and makes many of her life choices with an eye towards earning redemption and forgiveness, and at the end of her life being reborn into heaven.

Caleb (Cheeshahteumauk)

Caleb is the English name given to a young native boy, Cheeshahteumauk, who befriends Bethia one day while she is out riding with her horse along the beach. In his own way, Caleb is as much of an outsider in his community as Bethia is in hers - while she is interested in native values and in education in general, Caleb is interested in white values and in the white man in general, determined to know as much as he can. A prime difference between him and Bethia, even while they have so many similarities (i.e., intelligence, a questioning mind, a strong spirit) is that Caleb is, relatively, much freer to be independent and act upon his own will. He is, after all, a man, and men in the society of the time had much more liberty, on so many levels. Granted, Caleb faces challenges to that liberty and to his choices about how to live. But because he is a man, he is free to fight back against those challenges. Bethia has no choice but to submit.



Caleb's story, like Bethia's, is a manifestation and/or embodiment of the book's three central thematic considerations - exploring the nature of God, the struggle to establish and maintain individual identity, and the relationship between sin, redemption, and rebirth. This last is, in Caleb's case, particularly interesting, in that he is perceived by the Christians in the community to be even more innately sinful than they are, simply because he is native, a heathen and a pagan. This means that on some level, and for some of the more conservative characters, every step Caleb takes towards becoming Christian is an act of repentance, undertaken with an eye to achieving redemption. His rebirth at the end, however, is not the rebirth that Bethia longs for (i.e., into the eternal life of heaven), but a rebirth into his true identity as a native. In other words, in Caleb the first and third themes (i.e., identity, sin/redemption/rebirth) entwine even more tightly than they do in Bethia - Caleb, in singing his death in the manner of his ancestors, redeems his choices to reject those ancestors and their ways in favor of Christianity. In his redemption and rebirth, Cheeshahteumauk is reclaiming his one true identity.

Pastor Mayfield, Goody Mayfield

Pastor Mayfield is Bethia's father, Goody Mayfield is his wife (Goody being short for "goodwoman", a common form of address among Puritans of the period in which the narrative is set). At first Mayfield is a good father, compassionate and sensitive to the needs of his children, even his daughter, and a good minister, equally passionate and sensitive to the traditions of the natives who live nearby. But he is at heart a profoundly conservative Christian, with strong views about the place of children and family in the home and about the sinful paganism of natives. As Mayfield suffers increasingly traumatic losses and setbacks he becomes narrower and narrower in his ways and views, ultimately becoming rigid, merciless, and arrogantly hungry to eradicate sin in all its forms. His wife is portrayed as being a typical Christian woman of the time, entirely submissive and supportive. Bethia wants to be like her and also to be completely different from her, free and independent.

Grandfather Mayfield

Pastor Mayfield's father is a businessman first and foremost, his eye always on the money in any given situation. Patriarchal, demanding and autocratic, he makes decisions primarily with an eye to how they can eventually benefit him, or at the very least cause him the least amount of embarrassment and/or difficulty.

Makepeace

Makepeace is Bethia's older brother. Slower witted and less intelligent than she is, he is at the same time more conservative, more negative, and more judgmental, attempting to exert power over Bethia that he hasn't necessarily earned. As the narrative progresses, he becomes more and more compassionate, even to the point of helping Bethia through some difficult times.



Solace, Zuriel

Solace and Zuriel are two Mayfield children who die very young. Zuriel is Bethia's twin brother, killed in an accident, while Solace is her much younger sister, also killed by accident but whose birth was also the cause of Goody Mayfield's death. While Bethia is alive, she is determined to give Solace a better life than she ever had, but Solace dies too young for that ever to come to pass.

The Wampanoag

"Wampanoag" is the name given to the community of natives living near the white community where Bethia and her family make their home (Great Harbor). The community has a fairly good relationship with the white people of the area, in spite of the attitudes and actions of Tequamuck and because of the determined efforts of Pastor Mayfield.

Iacoomis, Joel

Iacoomis is a member of the Wampanoag, one of the tribe's earliest converts to Christianity, and endures taunting and a degree of rejection from some of its other members, many of whom eventually follow his lead. Joel is Iacoomis' son, and one of the first young members of the Wampanoag community to take schooling in Christian teaching. He and Caleb become both classmates and close friends, with Joel eventually surpassing Caleb in both quality and quantity of learning. Joel is tragically killed in the narrative's final chapters, attacked by natives resentful of his having given so much of himself over to the white man and his faith.

Tequamuck

Tequaamuck is a powerful pawaaw, what contemporary language would describe as a medicine man, a member of a native community with a strong spiritual connection to the gods and to nature. He is both feared and revered by those with whom he lives and works and deeply resented by whites. At the narrative's conclusion, and in spite of his hatred for whites, Tequamuck helps Bethia to help Caleb into a good death.

Noah Merry

The son of a prosperous merchant on another part of the island where Bethia makes her home, Noah initially appears as a possible suitor for Bethia's hand in marriage. Later, however, once he has fallen in love with and become engaged to another woman, he becomes one of Bethia's closest friends, helping her through some difficult situations and eventually becoming related through the marriage of his daughter to Bethia's son.



Master Corlett, Samuel Corlett

Master Corlett is the elderly, absent-minded headmaster and owner of the school that Bethia works for as an indentured servant. Compassionate and sensitive, he is also close minded and prejudiced - like most of the men in the colony, he has a very clear idea of a woman's place, and while he admires Bethia's mind, is not convinced that her using it the way she wants to is entirely appropriate. Samuel is his son, more open minded to a point, enough so that he approves of Bethia improving her mind (at least to some degree) and respects her friendships with Caleb, Joel and Noah. He and Bethia eventually marry, aging into a generally happy, loving couple whose closeness remains even in Bethia's dying days.

Anne

Anne is a young native woman educated in the ways of Christianity and white people. She comes to stay and study at Master Corlett's, but when she miscarries a baby, apparently fathered by a white man of considerable status, the potential scandal threatens to end her life. She escapes with the help of Bethia, Makepeace and Noah, eventually marries Joel, and is widowed in the aftermath of his murder.

President Chauncy

Chauncy is the headmaster of the college attended by Caleb and Joel. Initially resistant to the idea of having natives like them in his school, he is won over by their intelligence and their commitment, eventually becoming one of their biggest supporters.

Ammi Ruhama

Ammi Ruhama never actually appears in the narrative, but is referred to several times by his mother, elderly Bethia, in her narration of Part 3. His name is a combination of Biblical names that mean "my people" and "beloved". Unlike his mother and father (Bethia and Samuel), Ammi is portrayed as being neither particularly interested nor particularly good at intellectual pursuits, but becomes an exceptional boat builder.



Objects/Places

The Island (Martha's Vineyard)

Much of the narrative's action is set on an island off the east coast of America. The island is known today as Martha's Vineyard, but given no identifying name in Bethia's narration.

Great Harbor

On the eastern coast of the island, on the western side of a wide bay, is the Puritan community of Great Harbor. It is the home community of Bethia and her family, their farm being maintained nearby.

The Mayfield Farm

Pastor Mayfield, his wife and his children live on this small but prosperous corner of farmland a short distance from Great Harbor.

Manitouwatootan

This is the name of a village of Wampanoag on the northern side of the island. Caleb and Tequamuck are from this community, the citizens of which are generally more accepting of Mayfield and his teachings than many other native communities.

Takemmy

Takemmy is another Wampanoag village, this one further south and west of Manitouwatootan. This is where Bethia, accompanying her father on a mission of mercy, drinks illicitly from Taquemuck's trance-inducing potion.

The Cairn

Within weeks of Mayfield's apparent death in an accident at sea, the natives and whites of Great Harbor and the surrounding area, at least those who loved and respected him, construct a cairn, or marker, of white stones in his memory. Bethia and Makepeace visit there often, the cairn providing a focus and/or welcome trigger for their mourning and grief.



Cambridge, Massachusetts

Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a city in Massachusetts where the university Harvard is located.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

This is the school, headed by Latin teacher Elijah Corlett, that Caleb, Makepeace and Joel attend as they prepare for their college entrance exams. Bethia, much to her unhappiness, is forced into a position of indentured servitude at this same school.

The Harvard Library

This is the expansive new library being built as part of a new college endowed and supported by wealthy businessman John Harvard. Samuel and Bethia find much-longed for privacy here, and it is here that they consummate their relationship.

Books

Throughout the narrative, books are important symbols, for both the characters and the reader, of the education, and its associated status, longed for by many of the characters (most notably Bethia, Caleb, Joel, and Makepeace). One example of their symbolic value - the fact that her father leaves Bethia books in his will, a symbolic suggestion that he has at least some degree of respect for both her desire for such education and her capacity to acquire it.



Themes

The Struggle to Define Individual Identity

This is the book's primary theme, with its two central characters (Bethia and Caleb) each struggling to define an independent sense of who they are, what they believe, what they want to accomplish, and how they want to accomplish it, all in the face of substantial personal and societal obstacles. For Bethia, those obstacles primarily have to do with the fact that she is female, and females of the time, place and spiritual circumstance in which the narrative is set did not, with very few exceptions, receive the same exposure to an intellectual education that males did. She struggles against this constriction all her life, the intensity of her desire to learn occasionally leading her to impulsive actions for which she was punished, but eventually leading her to marital harmony with a man who shared, at least to some degree, her beliefs and her passion.

Caleb's situation is somewhat different, in that where Bethia wants to release her natural identity, he determines that it's necessary to suppress his - that is, his native spiritual systems and philosophy. For various reasons, he decides it's necessary for him to become as accepted as possible in the world of white, male, Christian power, and works intensely hard to become accepted in/by a world that, from the bottom of its being, seems determined to reject him. This suppression of self leads to illness and eventually death, but here it's important to note that Caleb's death only becomes peaceful after he returns to and expresses his true, original, spiritual self. Thus in the circumstances and endings of both Bethia and Caleb, the narrative offers the thematically central suggestion that success and/or peace are only truly possible by living according to the genuine, honest dictates of conscience and instinct.

The Nature of God

Throughout the narrative, characters debate their differing notions of God and/or spirituality. The primary definition of God throughout the narrative in conservative, traditional Christian terms is a function of its setting in time and place, and that definition is faithfully argued and supported by virtually all the characters, even Bethia, whose experience with God and the church is decidedly limiting. The only major character who actively challenges that definition, the pawaaw (medicine man) Tequamuck, is regarded by virtually all the characters as someone who has dealings with Satan, and who is himself evil. Even the native characters (Caleb, Iacoomis, Joel) regard him as extreme and violent in his views. But Tequamuck and the native community to which he belongs has an equally powerful spirituality, and the book goes to considerable, interesting lengths to suggest that that spirituality is in many ways as powerful and affirming as Christianity, the narrative of Caleb's death being a particularly vivid example.

At the same time, the narrative also goes to interesting lengths to suggest that Bible stories such as Moses parting the Red Sea and Jesus fasting in the wilderness for



seven days are, in their own way, as fantastical as the strange-seeming stories and practices associated with native spirituality. It's important to note that the narrative never actually comes out and says that Christianity is wrong or destructive. It does seem to be very clear, however, in its suggestion that there are at least other approaches to spirituality worth considering and exploring.

Sin, Redemption, and Rebirth

A thematic concern related to the novel's contemplation of the nature of God is its parallel contemplation of sin, death and redemption, as defined by Christian teaching. Put simply, conservative Christian faith at the time in which the narrative is set had, as one of its fundamental principles, the idea that every human being was born a sinner as a result of the actions of Eve and Adam, the ancestors of every human. The purpose of life was to live as good a life as possible, following the teachings of the Bible as thoroughly as possible, in order to obtain redemption for that sin and be reborn into a new life with God in Heaven after death. If anyone sinned in any way while alive on earth, that sin could be redeemed by prayer, repentance, punishment, good works, sacrifice, or any combination thereof, again with the hope of rebirth into eternal life after death. All the white Christian characters in the book are, to varying degrees, intensely aware of where they are, where they believe themselves to be, or where they're told they are, on the continuum of sin, redemption and rebirth. Bethia is convinced that she is such a sinner that she is going straight to hell, believing that incidents such as the death of her mother and baby sister are God's retribution for her sins and that they are signs of his determination that she repent. Her entire life, in fact, is spent searching for redemption for her actions and, simultaneously, believing that she is truly going to hell. She, like virtually all the white Christian characters, is entirely motivated by her own sense of sin and her need for redemption.

It's interesting to note, however, that Caleb follows a similar spiritual path, but takes a different turn at the very last minute. Even though the narrative never makes the point explicitly, there is the very clear sense that by suppressing his individual identity, he is committing a sin on the order of Bethia's sampling of Tequamuck's potion (chapter ten), the event that, she believes, triggers the retributive deaths of her mother and sister. But where Bethia's suffering for that sin is circumstantial (i.e., essentially being sold into slavery), there is the clear sense that Caleb's is physical (i.e., becoming thin and ultimately physically, fatally ill). His redemption and rebirth come on his deathbed, as he accepts the spiritual offerings associated with his identity, casts aside the "sinful" Christian identity he has adopted, and is reborn into what appears to be a peaceful new life in a way that Bethia does not (at least, not in the pages of the narrative). Here, the book's thematic contemplation of the nature of sin entwines with its contemplation on the question of identity. Because Caleb dies peacefully after embracing his identity while Bethia waits for death tormented by questions of whether she was faithful to her identity or not, the narrative seems to be suggesting that among the greatest sins is an abrogation, or denial, of identity, while the greatest act of redemption is an acceptance and/or return to that identity.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the first person, past tense point of view of narrator and protagonist Bethia Mayfield. What's particularly interesting about the way Bethia tells her story is that in each of the book's three parts she starts that part's story clearly stating its outcome, or at least a degree of it, then goes back and explains how she arrived at that outcome. In other words, she starts at the ending and goes back to the beginning, dropping enough hints in the first few paragraphs about that ending, or the situation in which she has found herself, to make the reader irresistibly interested in reading on.

Another aspect about point of view to consider is the work's thematic, or moral point of view. As suggested elsewhere in this analysis (primarily in the analysis on Section 12, Part 3). For most of the novel, the author seems to be taking the thematic point of view, expressed through Bethia's mostly Christian-centric narration, that the transformation of Caleb's identity from native (i.e., what whites hate) to Christian (i.e., what whites value) is ultimately a good thing. Bethia advocates it, Caleb rationalizes it, and the apparently evil Tequamuck vilifies it. But it's only in the work's last moments, in which Caleb dies a good and peaceful death only after reconnecting with his native identity, that the book's authorial point of view becomes clear. It is exactly the opposite of the first impression triggered by the story and the way it's told - original, innate identity is the only true identity.

Setting

The book's setting in both time and place is essential to both its plot and its thematic considerations. The time is the mid-late 1600s to the early 1700s, a period in which the humanist reforms of the Reformation were still percolating their mind-and-soul opening way through Europe, but which had been escaped by a considerable number of Puritans. Puritans were extremely conservative Christians who believed in the Bible as the one, true, absolute word of God, its every word to be obeyed. Among other things, they valued extreme hard work, submission of women to men and, elimination of any/all pleasure (i.e., singing, dancing, drinking alcohol, perceiving eating and/or sex as anything other than purely utilitarian or functional).

The characters in Caleb's Crossing are Puritans, having escaped Europe (specifically Britain) and settling in a free land in which they could practice and/or act upon their religious beliefs. They were physically isolated from anything and everything they had ever really known, forced to discover and develop new ways of farming, building construction and maintenance, animal husbandry, and above all interpersonal relationships, the latter with a community of human beings (natives) whose ways were entirely alien.



In short, Bethia and the other characters are strangers in a strange land that is, bit by bit, becoming more familiar and less frightening, but is still nonetheless overwhelmingly difficult to tame and ultimately, dependent on the will and cooperation of the community to survive (the same, by the way, could also be said of Caleb's native community). This setting, then, in which community and the good and/or ways of all are of paramount importance, is a powerful and challenging setting for a story, such as this one is, of individuals struggling for identity and independence.

Language and Meaning

There are several interesting elements at play when it comes to the book's use of language. First, there is the very strong sense that Bethia is writing in the character and style of the period, a time in which vocabularies were larger, sentence structures more complex, and ideas as much the subject of written contemplation as feeling or event. A related point is the work's use of vocabulary, which at first glance might seem somewhat extensive for the narrating character, a girl/young woman in her mid-teens with no formal education to speak of. It must be remembered, however, that Bethia (the girl in question) longs for and seeks out an education, and that education at the time was very different from today - languages like Latin and Ancient Greek, with their own complex sentence structures and expansive vocabularies, were thoroughly integrated into the educational system, as was the study of rhetoric (formal argument).

Bethia, in overhearing her father give lessons in all these subjects to Makepeace, Caleb and Joel, as well as having studied stolen textbooks at every opportunity and as being naturally intelligent, would in all likelihood have absorbed a substantial amount of language and ideas. While it is arguable whether the breadth of vocabulary and intellectual insight, particularly in Part One are genuinely reflective of how even an intelligent, semi-learned girl of the period would think and write, it must also be remembered that in the educational environment of the time, being able to express oneself clearly and well was of paramount importance. This means that when a writer is, as Bethia is, determined to speak her mind clearly and well (not to mention analyze, for herself, the workings of her mind), s/he has the linguistic means to do so.

All that said, there are also moments when Bethia's language becomes significantly less formal and intellectual, almost lyrically poetic as she examines/comments on the emotional/sensual experiences she goes through. These include her reaction to the native dancing of chapter four and her physical longings for Samuel at the end of chapter twenty. These diversions in language can be seen as manifestations of her inner identity, and of her explorations of that identity, which struggles to come through the ways imposed upon her by her family and her society. In other words, language is related to, and/or a manifestation of the theme of the struggle for individual identity.

Structure

As noted throughout this analysis, the narrative is broken down into three parts, each of which encompasses a particular phase in Bethia's life and each of which is defined by a series of events that define and shape the transformation that takes place during that phase. Also as previously discussed, each part begins with what might best be described as a prologue, an introduction of the narrator's state of being at that point in her life, which leads her a more detailed description and/or contemplation of how she arrived at that situation. Each part ends with Bethia poised to move into a new phase of life, but not necessarily the one that immediately follows it in the narrative. The value here is that the author triggers and retriggers the reader's interest by presenting beginnings that are endings, endings that are in effect beginnings, and middles that define both ending and beginning. This technique fully, thoroughly and effectively engages the readers in the unfolding of the narrative.

Another interesting aspect of the book's structure is the amount of time that passes for Bethia between the stories told in Part 2 and those told in Part 3. Sixty years of life are summed up in far fewer pages than the three years of life summed up in Part 2. One possible reasons for this discrepancy/shift include the possibility that for the author, and for Bethia, that middle phase of her life was the one that defined her the most (Part 2 is easily the longest of the book). Ultimately, though, the question of why the book is structured in the way it is must be considered in the light of its themes. Bethia's struggle for her identity is at its most complicated and most painful in the middle section. Therefore, it only makes sense that it be the longest section, while the final section, throughout which her identity is reasonably secure, is of less narrative length.



Quotes

"Listening, not speaking, has been my way. I have become most proficient in it. My mother taught me the use of silence."

Part 1, Section 1, p. 4

"So it is, out here on this island, where we dwell with our faces to the sea and our backs to the wilderness. Like Adam's family after the fall, we have all things to do. We must be fletcher, baker, apothecary, grave digger. Whatever the task, we must do it, or else do without."

Ibid, p. 5

"When I look at my hands and wrists, marred by the marks of small burns from cook pots and flying embers, every red weal or white pucker brings to my mind's eye that eternal fire, and the writing masses of the damned, among whom I must expect to spend eternity."

Ibid, p. 7

"We named the things of this place in reference to things that were not of this place - cat briar for the thickets of vine whose thorns were narrow and claw-like; lambskill for the low-growing laurel that had proved poisonous to some of our hard-got tegs. But there had no cats or lambs here until we brought them. So when he named a plant or a creature, I felt that I heard the true name of the thing for the first time."

Ibid, p. 23

"I heard him thank the fish for its life as he dispatched it with a quick blow. I had never thought of such a thing, and that day, I recall that it seemed to me outlandish."

Ibid, p. 25

"It was many weeks before he would even give me his name, that being considered a grave intimacy among his people. And when he finally did confide it to me, I understood why it is that they feel so. For with his name came an idea of who he truly was. And with that knowledge came the venom of temptation that would inflame my blood."

Ibid, p. 26

"...I thought it all outlandish. But as I rode home that afternoon, it came to me that our story of a burning bush and a parted sea might also seem fabulous, to one not raised up knowing it was true."

Part 1, Section 2, p. 35

"As time passed it became harder for me to keep a bright line between my English self and that girl in the woods, whose mouth could utter the true name of every island creature, whose feet could walk trackless through leavebed, whose hands could pull a fish from a weir in a swift blur of motion and whose soul could glimpse a world animated by another kind of godliness."

Part 1, Section 3, p. 51



"Who are we, really? Are our souls shaped, our fates written in full by God, before we draw our first breath? Do we make ourselves, by the choices we our selves make? Or are we clay merely, that is molded and pushed into the shape that our betters propose for us?"

Ibid, p. 57

"The taste in my mouth was metallic ... warm and viscous, like clotted blood. The blood of Christ. No, not that. No sacred wine from Satan's chalice. This was the blood of some demonic sacrifice; some gentle innocent impaled upon the devil's trident, bled to desiccation."

Ibid, p. 68

"Perhaps the joy she found in those last months was a mote of God's mercy, gifted to her, even as he shaped within her the instrument of his retribution unto me."

Ibid, p. 74

"He seemed older, certainly, but somehow winnowed, whether by the magical and diabolic rites demanded of him during his ordeal, or by the simple human matters of loss and death. He had exchanged the restless, flaring energy of his boyhood for a mannerly restraint. But the sense was of fires banked, not extinguished. One thing hadn't changed: even in the unfamiliar English garb, he glowed."

Part 2, Section 1, p. 91

"I strove to see each simple task ... as she had. She believed that each humble thing, if done worthily, might be touched by grace. I hoped it might be so, for it would require an abundance of grace to clean me of my sin."

Ibid, p. 95

"It was a strange thing, that we, who had spoken easily and for so long on this and every other matter would not now be able to converse beyond the most hasty exchange in a rare unobserved moment, or mere commonplaces when in company. Even though we shared a single roof, the distance between us was become as great as if the years of our friendship had never been."

Ibid, p. 97

"His voice, in the ancient tongue, took on a different pitch and tone. It went through me that he chanted the words in the voice of a pawaaw - and with that thought, I was under the gaily colored headland again, the wild, fierce prayers rising into a flame-lapped sky."

Ibid, p. 109

"If, as [your father] fashions it, Kiehtan our creator god is Jehovah by another name, then why shun the customs we have that come from him, to give the departing a small gift of comfort from this world as they pass into the next? A piece of gospel scripture, a few beads, and her doll. What harm is in it?"

Ibid, pp. 115-16

"God is pleased to dispense himself variously. But while I fill up my mouth with prayers, they bring no comfort. My words rattle against each other like the last beech leaves on a



winter branch, and though a hard wind scours the forest, it cannot free them from the bough; it will not lift them upward into the wide white sky."
Ibid, p. 126

"I am a man, Bethia. A man must take power where he finds it. If I find it in your books, I will take it. If I find it in visions brought to me by my familiar, then I will take that, too. It is what the times demand of me."
Part 2, Section 3, p. 147 - Caleb

"Now, of all times in my life, did I wish Caleb truly was my brother, rather than that selfish, imperious, weak-willed soul to whom fate had shackled me. If it were so, I could turn to him now, and he would surely help me change the fate being thrust upon me."
Part 2, Section 4, p. 175

"No one had ever asked me that before. What did I want? I wanted my old life, before all of its losses. I wanted mother, to guide me through this time as only a loving mother can guide a daughter in such things. I wanted to be Storm Eyes again, leaving dutiful Bethia carelessly behind me, shrugging her off, like a cloak left crumpled on the sand."
Ibid, p. 191-2

"There are some questions that can be answered, and some that cannot. And some questions that should never be asked, even of one's self."
Ibid, p. 193

"I had told him to pray, and he was doing so. But not necessarily to a just and loving God."
Part 2, Section 6, p. 222

"Why was it so wrong, in their eyes, that I should love what they loved? Would Samuel prove the same, in the end? Would he, too, strive to put a bridle on my mind and a branks upon my tongue? ... I seemed too dense witted to learn the simple lesson: silence was a woman's sole safe harbor."
Ibid, p. 233

"I need, I suppose, to account for my life, and for my part in Caleb's crossing from his world into mine, and what flowed on from it. Time is short, but I pray that he in whose hand my life rests will grant me days enough to make this accounting."
Ibid, p. 256

"Sometimes, four generations gather here at board. At such times, I look about me, amazed that such a restless girl should have grown old as matriarch to such a settled brood."
Ibid, p. 273

"Fair winds and foul. Barks and sloops. Schooners and gigs. Waters, wild and wide, shallow and still. How these things have marked out the chapters of my life. I suppose an island dweller should expect it to be so."
Ibid, p. 274



"In this fallen world, such is our condition. Every happiness is a bright ray between shadows, every gaiety bracketed by grief. There is no birth that does not recall a death, no victory but brings to mind a defeat. So was that commencement a celebration. I believe Joel wanted it so. His spirit, insofar as I felt its light touch that day, was no unquiet ghost but a warm and benign companion."
Ibid, p. 283

"He did not look all about him, as some of the others did, but kept his eyes ahead, his gaze intense and focused, as if he truly could see the future towards which he walked ... I had begun this journey following him into the hidden corners of his world and here it ended with him crossed over into the brightest heights of mine."
Ibid, p. 284

"I tried to fill my mind with prayers - rote words and psalms that were as natural as breath to me. But the fear this man engendered was like a black curtain and I could not summon a single verse."
Ibid, p. 293

"...since that day I have come to believe that it is not for us to know the subtle mind of God. It may be, as Caleb thought, that Satan is God's angel still, and works in ways that are obscure to us, to do his will. Blasphemy? Heresy? Perhaps. And perhaps I am damned for it. I will know, soon enough."
Ibid, p. 295

"Caleb was a hero ... he ventured forth from one world to another with an explorer's courage, armored by the hope that he could serve his people. He stood shoulder to shoulder with the most learned of his day, ready to take his place with them as a man of affairs. He won the respect of those who had been swiftest to dismiss him."
Ibid, p. 298

"So, let these last pages be MY death song - even if at the end it is no paean, but as it must be: a dissonant and tragical lament."
Ibid, p. 300



Topics for Discussion

How much do you think of your life, its events and circumstances, have been predetermined by God's will? How much is the result of your own choices?

Consider and discuss the importance of names in the narrative - Caleb's philosophy about names (chapter five), the names of the various characters, particularly the Puritan ones (i.e., Makepeace, Solace), and Bethia's reaction to having two different names. In what ways are the names given to the various characters appropriate? In what ways are they ironic? How does the use of names reflect and/or manifest the narrative's thematic interest in questions of identity?

Discuss the concepts of sin and redemption. Do you think it's possible for the after effects of "sin" (i.e., spiritual suffering and/or punishment) to be felt long after the actual, so-called transgression? Or do you think of sin as simply a mistake - you do it, you suffer the immediate consequences, and you move on?

Consider and discuss the book's portrayal of Christian faith. Do you agree or disagree with that portrayal (i.e., that it doesn't serve individual identity, and in fact may suppress it to the ultimate detriment of the human life). Why or why not?

What do you think are the aspects of yourself that define your identity? Consider both internal and external circumstances. What conflicts have you experienced when you try to declare that identity? What support have you had for such declarations? Have you ever made such a declaration in defiance of societal norms, as Bethia does? What was the outcome? Did it strengthen or shake your resolve?

How does what you believe about yourself, what you know about your own identity, define your actions and your choices?

What do you think is the nature of God? How does God manifest in your life? How do you respond to the attitudes and practices of other religions and spiritual practices? Is there only one path to spiritual fulfillment?

Do you think Caleb was right to infiltrate, as it were, the white community in order to gain understanding of it that might, someday, protect his people? Why or why not?