The Good Lord Bird Study Guide

The Good Lord Bird by James McBride

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Good Lord Bird is a historical novel published by journalist, noted memoirist, and author James McBride in 2013. It is his third historical novel, and it was honored with the National Book Award. It is 417 pages long, and follows the experiences of a young African-American boy named Henry Shackleford as he travels with abolitionist John Brown from his enslavement in Kansas to the raid on Harpers Ferry. The novel is fiction, but approaches verisimilitude by framing it as a true and transcribed account by the last living survivor of the raid on Harpers Ferry.

Henry was unwillingly freed from enslavement by John Brown after his father is accidentally killed. He was immediately assumed to be female by John Brown and given girls' clothing to wear. Through most of the novel, most characters assumed that Henry was female, and for his own safety and that of others he continued the charade. The humor of this and other events bring great comic relief to the action of the novel, relieving tragic events like massacres and battles and the realities of slavery. Henry traveled with John Brown's army from Bleeding Kansas and experienced battles between Free State forces and Pro-Slavery forces there.

The second part of the novel depicts Henry's experiences in Missouri, a slave state, where Henry was re-enslaved in a hotel. Here he experienced slavery in all its horror, from treachery, lies and the consequences of insurrection. He came to understand what it means to be a slave and desire freedom for himself.

The third part of the novel depicts Henry's experiences as he went east with John Brown and saw New England and cities for the first time. He met famous black leaders like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, and found himself a front-row witness to historical events throughout. Finally, he witnessed the famous and ill-fated raid on Harpers Ferry. Throughout the novel, Henry was the favored adopted daughter of the near-mythical John Brown, acting as his good luck charm in what appear to be impossible odds. As a boy pretending to be a girl, he found his true self and the bravery he didn't know he possessed.

Prologue - Part I: Chapter 1

Summary

"The Good Lord Bird," published in 2013, is a historical novel written by James McBride. It is a first-person fictional account of the experiences of Henry Shackleford, a slave boy from Kansas Territory, as he travels across pre-Civil War America with fanatically religious abolitionist John Brown and his supporters. Through his journey, Henry witnesses momentous historic events, encounters historic figures, and must come to terms with what it means to become a man.

The novel begins with a Prologue, consisting of a fictional newspaper article from Wilmington, Delaware, headlined, "Rare Negro Papers Found." The article is dated June 14, 1966, and tells of a fire in a black church that revealed hidden fireproof box containing the hidden papers of a now-dead church deacon. Found with these papers were a written, lengthy series of interviews relating the account of another congregation member, Henry "the Onion" Shackleford, who claimed to be the sole survivor of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. The article briefly recounts what happened at Harpers Ferry, and says that this find may be the only existing full account of what happened there. In the box were also 12 Confederate dollars, an ivory-billed woodpecker feather, and a note from the deacon's wife. The article then describes who the deacon and Shackleford were, noting that Shackleford was for several years presumed to be female by the community. Finally, it says that the deacon was the oldest member of the church when he died, and the interview was written in 1942, when Shackleford was at least 103 years old.

Part I of the three-part novel is titled "Free Deeds (Kansas)." Chapter 1, "Meet the Lord," begins with the statement that the narrator was born a "colored man," but lived as a woman for 17 years. The narrator begins his story as a ten-year-old motherless boy named Henry, living in Osawatomie, Kansas Territory with his father. They were both slaves owned by a big man named Dutch Henry. Henry's Pa ran Dutch Henry's tavern, worked as a barber, and made homemade liquor. Pa was well-known for loudly and drunkenly preaching the gospel to his patrons. He couldn't read, but quoted—and misquoted—the Bible often and was not well-liked by the townsfolk. It was the spring of 1856, and Henry had grown to understand that the townsfolk had come to hate his father so much they wanted to kill him. The narrator notes that a visitor would come to town and do the job for them.

Dutch Henry's tavern was located on the California Trail, right near the Missouri border. It served as a sort of community center, and because of its proximity to the border, many of its customers were Pro-Slavery rebels from Missouri. From them, Henry heard much talk about abolitionist and troublemaker Old John Brown, complete with rumors and tall tales about his murderousness. Henry thought that if he ever met Brown, he would have to kill him because of all the evil he'd done or would do to the "good white people" he knew.

Not long after Henry resolved to assassinate Brown, a non-descript, raggedy looking old man came in to get a haircut from Henry's Pa. The man and Pa talked excitedly about the Bible, and soon the man began to talk about the evils of slavery. Pa wasn't aware that this sort of talk was sensitive and dangerous. The man was, of course, John Brown himself, though he said his name was Shubel Morgan. Dutch Henry came in to collect his earnings from the tavern, and didn't like the looks of this man. Dutch was suspicious and questioned the stranger sharply. Finally, the old man insulted Dutch as a lazy slave owner and Dutch drew his gun. Henry, who stayed out of the way during this altercation, felt the old man was wrong in insulting his master, since he believed Dutch treated his slaves well and worked very hard himself.

Dutch demanded the old man swear on the Bible that he was who he said he was and supported slavery and the U.S. Constitution, warning him that if he was a liar, he would be pistol-whipped. The atmosphere was tense as Brown swore on the Bible to his name, Shubel Isaac, which was of course not the name he had just used minutes before. An old drunk woke from his stupor and blurted out that the old man looked like John Brown. This caused three of the patrons to draw their guns, and these men and Dutch surrounded Brown, demanding to know if this was true. Brown was evasive, saying he was "whoever the Lord wants him to be," which made Dutch so frustrated he threw the Bible on the floor and cursed. These two actions upset Brown, who told him to stop swearing under threat of God's retribution. This made Dutch curse more, and Brown pulled back his coat to show his rifle. Dutch pulled the trigger on his gun, but it misfired and wounded his hand. In the momentary confusion, Brown calmly pointed his rifle at Dutch, and made the rest of the men drop their guns on the floor. He yelled that he was indeed John Brown, Captain of the Pottawatomie Rifles, and that he was there to "free every colored man" in the territory.

Brown announced to the room that every black slave in the place was now free and shouldn't be afraid. When he said this, all the slaves in the place except for Pa and Henry ran away back to their masters. Brown grumbled that they were not yet "saved to the Lord." He turned to Pa, who in shock said, "Lawdy," which led Brown to believe he was agreeing to join him in the fight against slavery. He told Pa he'd made a good choice for himself and his "octoroon daughter." He said they were now free, and should walk out with him.

Henry was surprised to be mistaken for a girl, but the narrator comments that this was probably because of his small size and the fact that, like many slave boys of the time, he was wearing only a potato sack. Everyone else in the room knew Henry was a boy, but they didn't dare say anything at the point of a rifle. Henry tried to speak up for himself, but was so frightened he cried loudly instead. Pa also tried to interject, but Brown heard him say, "My Henry ain't a--" and thought he'd said the child's name was Henrietta. Brown said they must go immediately. He grabbed Henry's hand and pulled him toward the door. Pa charged at Brown to save his son, and at the same moment, Dutch grabbed one of the guns from the floor and shot.The bullet splintered the door jamb and made an eight inch piece of wood stick out right at Pa's chest height. Pa ran right into it and died almost instantly.

As Dutch protested that Brown was a thief, Brown tucked Henry under his arm and escaped out to the alley to join his supporters who had arrived on horseback. They rode off with the kidnapped Henry.

Analysis

The Prologue sets the tone for the novel, which is a realistic telling of historical events heavily peppered with humor. The reader becomes a modern-day historian reading an oral history as collaborated on by two rather rascally-sounding characters, long since dead. The tale is portrayed as a "lost history," and the most complete primary resource on John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry, an incident that will be known by name to most readers, if not in the details.

The reader will note a few details in the news clipping that are interesting. One is the other contents of the fireproof box: the amusing note from the deacon's wife, the Confederate dollar bills and the ivory-billed woodpecker feather, which becomes a recurring symbol throughout the novel from this point forth. The ivory-billed woodpecker feather is noted as a rare item, from a bird that is "nearly extinct." Some readers will know that this bird is nicknamed a variant of the novel's title, based on what people say when they see one. The most mysterious detail of the story, however, is the idea that Shackleford was kicked out of the church after being discovered to be both a scoundrel and male. This works to spark interest in the reader, which is furthered in the first two sentences of Chapter 1. How, after all, does a black man manage to masquerade as a woman in the early part of the 20th century for seventeen years? We must turn to Henry's story for answers.

Pa is a clownish and ignorant character, but he was also Henry's only caretaker. Henry was growing up in a frontier town's social center, full of scoundrels and gun slingers and drunks. As a slave, he had been expected to work almost as soon as he could walk, helping his father operate the tavern. His life was about survival at all costs, as it is for all slaves, and he was living in a very dangerous time and place. The reader sees Henry through his own eyes and those of his later self, the Narrator as an old man telling the tale. As such, Henry speaks alternately through two voices, both an ignorant child and an adult who can interject commentary from a backward-looking eye. In this way, the story is set up as if we are hearing an elder's tale of his experience.

As a child, Henry has only known the world for a short time and only with the people around him. His father, though illiterate and obsessively religious, was also a fairly privileged slave in their world. While he made no income for himself, he ran the tavern and was the center attraction of the place, though his mouthiness and antics put him at risk, something of which Henry at ten years old is only just becoming aware. It is only as the adult narrator that Henry fully understands how his Pa's patrons must have reacted to his overbearing preaching and pretended Biblical knowledge. They tolerated him, but only barely. Henry accepted his father's religiosity as a fact of life and a source of entertainment, until all was disrupted by someone even more religious. In John Brown, Pa met his religious match. They loved the Bible, though only one of them could read it.

These two men loved God with their every breath, a fact that can be seen variously as amusing, extreme, and admirable. They were true believers who did their best to bring Jesus to everyone they met. Henry therefore passed from the hand of his preacher father to the hand of zealot John Brown, and will spend the novel watching how Brown expressed his Christian faith in word and deed, a major theme. The irony is in the idea that John Brown was perceived by the majority as a "bad man," murderous and thieving, while slavery was both considered lawful and observed as normal by decent folk.

This irony reaches a peak in this chapter in the appearance of a Bible, over which Dutch Henry tried to get John Brown to swear to his true name and that he supported slavery and the United States Constitution. Being asked to swear to a lie in this way was like a Christian man's kryptonite; it exposed a superstitious weakness that brought the conflict to a head. He could only barely swear to a false name without making a mistake, and therefore avoided having to swear to support something he considered the worst of sins, slavery. When Dutch Henry desecrated the Bible by throwing it to the floor and cursed, he'd gone too far.

Dutch Henry Sherman was considered by everyone to be a hard-working slave owner and fine upstanding citizen, despite the fact that he owned everyone in Henry's family as well as several Native American women he used sexually. Henry feared and admired his master as such. Dutch Henry's social status rubbed off on his slaves. If you had to be a slave, it was best to be the slave of a powerful man who treated you relatively well. Henry had never experienced hunger and didn't know himself to be suffering. Therefore, when John Brown insulted his master, he instinctively took his master's side in the matter.

Old John Brown is a near-mythic character, both in the novel and in real world historical accounts. Most Americans know John Brown only as the crazed abolitionist who led a failed slave revolt at Harpers Ferry. The details of his deeds in Kansas Territory will be a revelation for most readers. In the novel, the encounter between Dutch Henry and John Brown are almost stereotypically and humorously Wild West, complete with slangy big talk, a guns-drawn standoff and escape with roughriders. It is the maybe-exaggerated tale told by an unreliable narrator from the perspective of a child. Old men tell tall tales sometimes, and this one is told with much humor and mythic flourishes.

Freedom as a theme is explored extensively in the novel through the various eyes of its characters. When John Brown declared that all the slaves in the tavern were now free, however, every single one of them (except Pa and Henry, who lived there and had nowhere else to go) fled for home and master. What did freedom mean in this case? It meant allying oneself with a man who appeared to be a violent criminal. There was no safety in freedom, and it could only be viewed by them as an alien and terrifying prospect. It is funny, but it is also sad. There is yet more confusing humor in Brown's mistaken assumption that Henry was a girl and Pa wished to join Brown. Brown was so certain of the virtues of his cause and behavior that he could not hear any words to contradict him. Henry saw this element of his personality as a demonstration of how Brown was a "real white man," a man who didn't hear the words or see the reality of the

black people he wished to save. Here amongst the ongoing humor in this encounter is the tragedy of Pa's accidental death as he tried to save his son from his "savior."

As they left, the "good master" Dutch Henry brought home the reality of how he saw his most privileged slave. He wasn't calling Brown a "nigger thief" for stealing Henry, but rather for having killed Pa, property worth $1,200.

Discussion Question 1

What did the white townsfolk of Osawatomie think of Gus Shackleford, Henry's Pa? How and why was he killed?

Discussion Question 2

What did the slaves in the tavern do when John Brown told them they were freed? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why did John Brown think that Henry was a girl?

Vocabulary

dropsy, commodity, ague, rotgut, outhouse, johnnycake, onerous, proclamations, coot, scourge, laggard, fib, gauge, octoroon, iniquity, heathens

Part I: Chapters 2 - 3

Summary

Chapter 2 is titled "The Good Lord Bird." John Brown and the two other roughriders took Henry out to the Kansas flatlands on the stolen horses. After a couple hours hard riding, they reached their camp. Henry could see that Brown felt guilty for his Pa's death and having kidnapped him. The Old Man dug into his pockets and found a lint-covered, old onion and gave it to Henry as a token of welcome and celebration. Henry quickly ate it, believing he was doing what he was expected to do, though it tasted terrible. Brown was surprised at Henry's action, saying that it had been his good luck charm for fourteen months. He told Henry that his having eaten his good luck charm was a sign from God that Brown shouldn't have placed such significance to a mere object. He then nicknamed "Henrietta" "Little Onion," because "she" was now his good luck charm. Henry didn't understand what Brown was talking about, but said nothing, mostly because he didn't dare talk back to a white man who was also his kidnapper.

Brown then gave Henry the rest of the good luck charms he had in his pockets. Included in these objects was a long black and white feather. He put the feather in Henry's hair, saying that the feather of the Good Lord Bird was his most precious object. When Brown asked Henry if he understood, Henry nodded his head and thought that Brown was a lunatic. Brown then talked directly to God and gave thanks.

Brown then turned away to look at a map with his two sons, Frederick and Owen. He ordered them to care for "Henrietta," told the story of how "she" came to be there and informed them that Henry's name was "Henrietta." He also told them about Pa's death, that "she" was now called "Little Onion," and was now a freed person. Henry began to cry again, so Brown gave him a dress and bonnet he was planning to give to his own daughter. Henry wanted to object and confess his true gender, but was too frightened. He kept crying and noticed that they expected him to cry because he was a girl.

Out of habit, Henry called Brown and the other men "master," which they repeatedly corrected, reminding him he was now free. Frederick was tasked with teaching Henry how to ride a horse in preparation for the coming war. Henry was frightened by this and secretly wanted to escape back to Dutch Henry's. Henry soon realized that Frederick was mentally disabled. He tricked Frederick into leaving him alone for a moment, and used the opportunity to try to escape. When he tried to jump on a horse to escape, he was thrown off and knocked unconscious. When he came to, he found that Frederick was standing over him. The dress was thrown up to reveal Henry's true gender. Fred was confused by this, and asked if Henry was a "sissy." Neither of them knew what that meant, and so Henry said he didn't know. Fred confessed that he wasn't very smart, and perhaps should ask his father about it, but Henry persuaded him not to. When Fred wondered what the Bible said about "sissies," Henry said he didn't know since he couldn't read. Fred was delighted to find a fellow illiterate, since he was the only one in his family.

Fred took Henry to show him the Good Lord Bird, a big black-and-white woodpecker. He told Henry that it got its name because it is so pretty that when a man sees it, he says, "Good Lord." He told Henry that a feather from this bird would bring life-long understanding, which was what Fred lacked. When Henry wondered why he didn't catch one, Fred told him the birds were very shy and that his father had taught him not to believe in good luck charms. In light of his earlier encounter with Brown and his many good luck charms, Henry was surprised. Seeking to confuse Fred further to his advantage, Henry offered the feather to Fred, who was astonished and wondered how he came to have such a thing. Henry told him he couldn't tell, but that it was now his, which made Fred very happy. Fred then taught Henry how to catch a pheasant without a gun. When they returned to camp with their pheasants, Henry worried that Fred would reveal his secret, but found that he had successfully distracted him with the feather, which Fred said had given him understanding.

Henry resolved to run away back to his master at the first opportunity. He thought about how black people had to think strategically in order to preserve their safety. Because white people didn't have to work so hard to protect themselves, he believed white people were foolish, including Brown and his son Fred. The narrator notes, however, that his presumptions would prove wrong, and that in fact he himself would prove to be the fool, and his assumptions would cost him later on.

In Chapter 3, "The Old Man's Army," the rest of Brown's army returned to the campsite bringing news. Henry saw that this feared army was nothing but a small group of skinny young men. He also found that Brown was in the habit of praying a very long time over meals. Henry had never heard anyone pray the way Brown did, in which his thoughts came out like "tornadoes." There was urgent news that a posse was riding out after them, but Brown was most agitated to hear that an abolitionist congressman had been physically beaten by a pro-slavery congressman in Washington D.C.

Brown wanted to strike back immediately in revenge for this act, but the men were reluctant, especially Reverend Martin, who didn't see why they should care about the fight in Congress when they had their own struggles to find enough to eat. When Martin heard that Henry had been taken from Dutch Henry, he objected to having made an unnecessary and powerful enemy. Brown and Martin argued, which caused a rift amongst the men. Some of them defended Dutch Henry as a decent person, and Brown reminded them that slavers were rapists, pillagers, and sinners. Martin persisted in his various objections. Brown declared they would strike back the next night, inviting anyone who disagreed to leave. He warned them, however, to ride the other direction and keep the army's secrets. Martin refused to agree to any of it, and the army split in half. When Martin insulted Henry, Fred reacted by drawing his guns on Martin. Brown stopped him from shooting. Martin and his supporters left. One of the remaining members warned Brown that Martin would surely warn Dutch Henry, but Brown declared he wanted everyone to know what he would be doing anyway. The narrator closes with a comment that this was a mistake that would cost Brown later.

Analysis

In these two chapters, Henry discovered through his fear and awe more about the character of his kidnapper, Old John Brown. The Old Man was kind to "Henrietta" but was also myopic in his viewpoints. He was stubborn in his resolve, but also didn't stop those who didn't agree with him from leaving, even to the point of risking his safety. His religious behavior was equal parts amusing, bewildering and a bit frightening to Henry, who through his father had come to assume that religion and insanity went hand in hand. The author is careful not to make Brown's intense religious fervor simply the butt of a joke, however. Brown may have seemed insane, but he was also passionate and akin to a prophet. He didn't just pray to God, but rather talked to him directly. He acted entirely as a man who believed he was doing God's will. His beliefs were like a force of nature rather than simply a set of ethics.

The Old Man's obsession with lucky charms is charming in its contradictions. Brown was doing his best to do what he believed God wanted him to do, but he also had held tight to an old onion for more than a year as if it would protect him. There is great and fairly obvious symbolism in Henry's act of eating the onion. As far as Henry was concerned, he had been kidnapped by a crazy murderer, and he would do his best to do as he was told, behaving in whatever way he must until he was able to escape. He treated his captors carefully for this reason, which only added to the caution he had been trained from birth to use with white people. For a young slave boy, contradicting a white person in word or deed was the first sin he would learn to avoid, and so he could not do anything but accept what he was given with gratitude. Henry ate the onion, and became Little Onion, the good luck charm. Because he did so, the Old Man could divest himself of all the other lucky charms he carried, which he clearly knew was not a Christian custom. The fact that he carried them at all shows that Brown was a human, fully capable of contradictions and "sin." The fact that he was so willing to give them up shows his sincere desire to live up to the religious goals he had set for himself.

When Brown gave Henry the Good Lord Bird feather, he was giving his most precious good luck charm to Henry, not only as an act of charity as he presumed, but also as a way to invest Henry fully as the living embodiment of luck. Henry wore the dress Brown intended to give to his daughter and became not only Brown's good luck charm, but also his daughter and an emblem of success in having freed at least one slave. These layers of meaning to Henry's existence in Brown's army make him very much like an onion indeed.

The Good Lord Bird feather was then passed on from Henry to Frederick, who believed deeply in the superstition that the feather brings wisdom—this despite the fact that his father had taught him that to believe such things is un-Christian. Henry only sought to protect the secret of his gender as a way to protect himself. Despite his discomfort, he instinctively knew that to contradict the roles given him would be a mistake. He also soon found that as a girl, he could hold himself separately in the expectations put upon him. He tried to use this to his advantage to escape back to Dutch Henry's but failed.

There is much humorous irony in the contrary views Brown and Henry had about freedom. Brown believed he had freed Henry from bondage, while Henry could only feel that he was being held against his will by a madman. At the first opportunity, he sought to escape from Brown back to his master. For Henry, slavery was home and relative comfort while freedom was full of uncertainty and hunger.

The portrayal of Brown's supposed army as really just a small group of hungry men who couldn't even agree on why they were there brings to the fore the complexity of the abolitionist fight in Kansas Territory before the Civil War. Again and again in the novel, the reader will be struck by the fact that abolitionists who are against slavery in the abstract have a difficult time being against a particular slave-holder like Dutch Henry. This despite the fact that he was in fact a rapist and pillager as Brown suggested. Brown, despite appearing to be insane, could see Dutch Henry most clearly for what he was. The author also shows that being an abolitionist didn't necessarily mean one was not a racist. The army became split over Henry and the reality of what freeing slaves meant—antagonizing powerful men who had been your friends. In the end, Martin was most insulted by being told what to do in front of Henry.

Both chapters end with foreshadowing commentary by the narrator. This reminds the reader that this isn't just a story being told by ten-year-old Henry, but rather a tale being told by a hundred-year-old Henry looking backwards, complete with that 20/20 hindsight everyone has when looking back on their lives. The child Henry believed he was less foolish than these white men, but when he was older, he would find that he was wrong to prejudge people in this way. The reader is told explicitly that these presumptions would cost the narrator down the road, but we don't know how. The last sentence of Chapter 3 also foreshadows that a mistake was made, but this time by Brown.

Discussion Question 1

How did Henry gain the nickname "Little Onion"? Why did Brown give Henry all his good luck charms? What did Frederick believe about the Good Lord Bird feather?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Henry want to escape back to Dutch Henry's? What happened when he tried to escape?

Discussion Question 3

What caused half the men in Brown's army to leave?

BOOKRAGS

Vocabulary

pintos, tarry, transpired, flagellate, sacrilegious, privy, baubles, charade, quandary, pheasant, ruination, scrawniest, gullets, victuals, sensibility, commingled, abolitionist

Part I: Chapters 4 - 5

Summary

Chapter 4 is titled "Massacre." Brown's plan to attack Osawatomie was delayed, and the army wandered the country stealing food from the Pro-Slavers. There were twelve men remaining in the army. Henry learned that Brown viewed the altercation in Congress as the last straw in a long line of crimes committed against Yankee settlers by pro-slavery criminal gangs riding the Kansas Territory. Henry had grown up surrounded by supporters of slavery and thus knew they viewed the Yankees as privileged newcomers unaware of local culture who were moving west to steal land from previous white settlers. He also saw the fight as one that was being fought between white men, who appeared to be oblivious to the opinions or needs of African-Americans or Native Americans. Henry's only thought was to escape and get back to Dutch Henry's, where he could be with his remaining family and not go hungry like he was out on the frontier. He was also put off by the fact that he was being treated as a servant by everyone in Brown's army except for Brown himself.

After a few days, Brown announced they would attack that night, but would not tell his men where. The narrator comments that this was a common arrogance on the part of Brown, who didn't seem to know himself what he was going to do until he received a message from God.

Fred had adopted "Onion" as his responsibility, which left Henry no chance for escape. He taught Henry how to clean weapons and other tasks and was impressed by Henry's boy-like adaptability. Henry was getting used to wearing a dress and was glad being a girl would keep him out of the battle.

When Brown announced it was time to go into battle, a number of the men quit. Brown was indifferent to their leaving. After they left, there were only eight hungry men, including five of Brown's sons. Before they departed, he gathered the men to pray, which lasted 45 minutes. His son Owen finally interrupted him and reminded him of the coming dawn, which displeased Brown.

The army followed a little used logging path, not knowing where they were headed. Brown fell asleep in the wagon, and they circled around aimlessly in the dark for an hour. When Brown woke, he decided they were going to attack the nearest cabin. None of the men dared to speak up against his decision, except Owen, who wondered if they were at the right place. Brown ignored him, except to say that he could "smell slavery" there. They were instructed to use only their broadswords and Henry was to remain behind in the wagon. Despite the order against guns, several of the men drew theirs as they approached the cabin.

Henry took the opportunity to run away but was immediately set upon by two dogs. Fred killed one of the dogs and the other ran off. Brown praised Henry for finding the watch

dogs. He told "Onion" it was obvious he would rather fight for freedom than remain behind so was welcome to join the attack. Henry reluctantly complied by following at a distance.

Owen and Fred tricked the occupants to open the door and kicked their way inside. The occupant turned out to be James Doyle and his family, one of Dutch Henry's friends and supporters. The family was held at rifle point while Brown read a declaration about who he was and what their purpose was. Brown questioned Doyle about his stance on slavery, eventually finding that he was a supporter. Doyle was taken outside with his two eldest sons and held at sword point while Brown continued to question him, finally gaining an admission to his presence at the sacking of Lawrence. Brown told him he would pray for his forgiveness and ordered Fred and Owen to kill him, which they did with their swords. Doyle's two sons were likewise killed. One of Brown's sons was severely disturbed by the horror of the killings and lost physical and emotional control of himself. In the confusion, Henry stole a horse and rode off toward Dutch Henry's.

Chapter 5 is titled "Nigger Bob." Henry reached the California Trail and ditched the horse, knowing that being caught riding her would attract attention. A mile from Dutch Henry's Tavern, he heard a wagon coming and hid in the bushes. As the wagon came into view, Henry saw the wagon was being driven by a black man and was about to hail him when a posse of "red shirts" from Missouri appeared. He stayed hidden and watched the scene. An elderly white man named Pardee was chained in the back of the wagon. All the men in the posse and the prisoner were drunk and all knew one another. Kelly, the leader, announced they were going to try the prisoner. He held out a paper he wanted Pardee to sign, who refused to do so without reading it. Pardee was given the paper and took much time reading, and Henry realized the prisoner was illiterate and pretending. There was much argument and delay over the legality of the paper and whether or not Pardee could sign something he didn't understand. Finally Pardee accused Kelly of wanting to steal his claim, which caused the rest of the posse to demand answers from Kelly. Kelly then took the judge's order and demanded that Nigger Bob, the man driving the wagon, read it. He too was illiterate and protested, but Kelly insisted. Bob pretended to read it, reciting nonsense. There was more laughter and anger, and there was more talk about tarring and feathering or hanging Pardee. Kelly called a vote, which was a tie. Kelly demanded Bob make the decision, which caused Pardee to object to his fate being decided by "a nigger." Finally Pardee admitted to being illiterate, which upset Kelly because it called into question a previous land claim. After some wrangling it turned out that none of the men present could read the order, including Kelly. The men got impatient and worried about their vulnerability to Brown's nearby army and left. Kelly also rode off, upset about the now questionable land deal.

After the posse was gone, Nigger Bob freed Pardee from his irons. Pardee ordered Bob to take him home, but Bob refused. Because Pardee was smaller than Bob, he couldn't make Bob agree to his demands, especially since Bob had other orders to follow from his master. In retaliation, Pardee removed a wheel pin and threw it into the bushes, causing one of the wagon's wheels to fall off. He left. When Bob was alone, Henry emerged from the bushes and offered to help repair the wagon in return for a ride. Bob

wondered what a "little girl" was doing out there, and Henry responded by trying to take off the dress. Bob misinterpreted this as an offer for sex, which upset him and lead him to flee. Henry tried to insist he wasn't a girl. Bob responded that Henry shouldn't take off his dress for a married man, unless he really wanted to. This offended Henry, who said he only needed a ride to Dutch Henry's and that he was Gus Shackleford's boy. Bob accused Henry of lying. Henry was doubly offended, but told Bob he would get a reward for returning him to Dutch Henry. Bob refused because going there was too risky. When Henry told him that the Pro-Slavers were only after Old John Brown, this caught Bob's attention. Henry told Bob the full story of his kidnapping, how he came by the dress and about the Doyle killings. Bob told Henry that he should feel grateful for having met John Brown and that he would dress as a girl for ten years if Brown would help him to freedom.

Bob advised Henry to return to Brown, despite Henry's protests that Brown was a murderer. Bob informed Henry that Dutch Henry was a murderer as well, and would only sell Henry south now that he'd had a taste of freedom. Henry told Bob he didn't want to continue as a girl, but Bob reminded him that being sold to New Orleans was a death sentence. Bob volunteered to help Henry return to Brown's army. They fixed the wagon and set off together.

Analysis

Henry's understanding of Brown's views continues to develop in Chapter 4, though he remained mostly unmoved by Brown's perspective on the fight over Kansas Territory. Henry knew (from a child's eye view) the perspective of the pro-slavery "ruffians" and "red-shirts," who essentially saw the Free State supporters as interlopers who were just out to steal their land and change their culture. He was most clear on the reality that neither of the fighting sides seemed to do any consultation with the true sufferers over land loss and loss of freedom: the people of color, both Indian and black. For many of those men doing the fighting, the issue of slavery was only a cover for a fight over land. So, while Brown and his sons may have been true believers in the abolition of slavery, some other members of his army were not true believers, and they shrank away when they were being pushed to fight.

The vague references to true historical events are accurate. The brutal caning of Congressman Charles Sumner on the Congress floor did instigate John Brown's retaliation, as was the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas. The killings of Doyle and his two adult sons were just one part of what is commonly called the Pottawatomie Massacre, in which five settlers were killed by Brown and company. It is clear that his aims, in historical reality and in the novel, were one part revenge and one part terrorism—to strike terror in the heart of pro-slavery forces.

While Henry saw the attack as fairly random and confused, he seemed to be looking at it from a child's eyes. Brown, on the other hand, appeared to know exactly who he was targeting and why. The horror of the attack—its night time confusions and the fact that one of Brown's own sons responded with temporary madness—was lessened only a

little by Henry's traumatic stress as a witness. He fled not only because he wanted to escape his kidnappers, but also because he naturally wanted to flee the carnage. Because he fled, the reader too is spared too close a look at the moral crime in fighting slavery with terroristic murder.

The oppressive horror of the previous night is lifted with comic relief in Chapter 5, beginning with the Shakespearian-level farce of Pardee and Kelly over illiteracy and a failed lynching. It is a dark humor, however. Pardee would rather die than have Bob the slave contribute his vote. Kelly and Pardee both attempted to use their power over Bob to force him to behave in ways they want, but fail, which showed Henry for the first time that white power could be resisted through both submission and refusal to break the rules the slave owners had set themselves.

The humor continues with Henry's encounter with Bob, who was both afraid and intrigued by Henry's apparent femaleness. While Bob may have been ignorant and illiterate, he was clearly an adult with more understanding of Henry's true situation after Henry came clean about his circumstances. It is through Bob that Henry realized Dutch Henry was not his friend and why he should continue to pose as a girl. It is through Bob that Henry learned just how the slave community saw John Brown—as a Biblical sort of hero, an avenging angel of death to the slave masters.

The language here is reminiscent of Mark Twain, who contemporaneously uses the racial epithets common to the time period. Here too, the author doesn't shrink from racist and uncomfortable language in the interest of historical accuracy. Nigger Bob is a parallel in some ways to Nigger Jim in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which puts Henry in the role of the wily boy Huck Finn. Bob was wise despite his ignorance. He was an adult conversant with the ins and outs of slave life and how to preserve safety at all costs, but he was willing to get one over on his oppressor where he was able. Freedom was worth dressing as a girl or any other shenanigans that got one closer to that goal.

Discussion Question 1

What were some of the underlying issues present in the fight between pro-slavery ruffians and abolitionists in Kansas Territory?

Discussion Question 2

What finally saved Pardee's life?

Discussion Question 3

What did Bob advise Henry to do? Why?

BOOKRAGS

Vocabulary

atrocities, plundered, squatters, carpetbaggers, grousing, adaptable, barbarity, conundrum, chastise, commingling, infernal, frivolities, tethered, soused, quandary, winch, cotter

Part I: Chapters 6 - 7

Summary

Chapter 6 is titled "Prisoner Again." Henry and Bob found that the region was overrun by armed patrols and the homesteaders were on high alert. They saw Yankees were fleeing back East, and everyone was afraid of John Brown and his men. Because Bob had papers to prove he was authorized to drive the wagon, they passed freely. They went to see Bob's Cousin Herbert to find out where Brown and his men were camped. Herbert was frightened at their request, and he told Bob to leave. When Herbert wondered what Bob was doing with a "young girl," Bob informed Herbert that Henry was John Brown's "property" and needed help to get back to him and to freedom. This information changed Herbert's attitude, but he was still reluctant to help. He asked many questions, and wondered why "she" looked so much like Gus Shackleford's son, who was responsible for the man's death. They argued quite a lot. It was only when Bob said that Herbert wouldn't want to anger Brown that Herbert gave in and told them how to find Brown's camp. Herbert warned them that Brown roasted the skulls of those he killed and ate their eyeballs and called Brown the devil. The narrator comments that everything Brown did was wildly exaggerated. When they got to the woods, Bob left Henry, saying he was afraid for his life and couldn't leave his family. He told Henry to continue posing as a girl for his own safety and that he would catch up with him later on.

Henry followed Herbert's directions to the camp, and when he found the location he discovered it was empty. He fell asleep. When he woke he was confronted by Fred and Owen and the other men, who were unhappy with him and wondering what he'd done with the horse.

Henry was taken to Brown, who greeted him as if his absence was inconsequential. He didn't mention the horse or ask any other questions. The narrator comments that this was common behavior with Brown—that men would leave the army for a year and come back and be treated by Brown as if nothing happened. Brown treated his "Pottawatomie Rifles" as a volunteer unit, where men could come and go as they pleased.

Brown told Henry that as someone who was probably half white, he had to fight not only outside himself but also within. Henry told Brown he got scared, ran, and lost the horse. Brown shrugged and told him that others ran away as well. This comment embarrassed several of the men. The army had grown bigger. They were also now much better equipped and armed. Henry also noticed that though the rest of the men looked exhausted, Brown looked fresh.

Brown told Henry that the killing they did was willed by God. They prayed together and ate dinner. Afterward, Henry talked with Fred, who was glad to see him but worried about the killings. He also informed Henry that two of Brown's sons had left the unit, and they must be found. A rider came into the camp with the news that Brown's two missing sons had been captured by Captain Pate and his Sharpshooters. Brown's army had 23

members including Henry; the company holding Brown's sons were 150-200 men. Nonetheless, they would ride against them. When Owen questioned how they would do that with such limited ammunition, Brown declared it didn't matter. Owen tried to get him to delay, but Brown responded that the enemy would attack Lawrence if they waited, and so they must cut them off at Black Jack. Brown preached and prayed for a long time, until Owen reminded him they must be going. As usual, Brown was irritated by the interruption, but ultimately they rode.

Chapter 7 is titled "Black Jack." Brown's army rode out in search of the enemy, but because of faulty intelligence, they rode for months without catching up to them. They were hungry, worn out, and cold. However, their number grew to thirty men. Henry was hardening due to life on horseback, and didn't feel like he was suffering too much. He was no longer being treated as a girl servant by the other men, on Brown's orders. As a result, Henry's life was better than it had ever been. He had also taken Bob's advice to heart, and no longer sought to escape back to slavery or reveal his true gender. As a girl, he found that he was treated better; he was not expected to carry a gun or do any heavy labor. He also got admired for being "tough as a boy."

Though life in Brown's army was difficult and included rising at four a.m. for prayer, Henry had learned many things from Owen and Fred, including how to read, fire a rifle, and make baskets. He also had come to enjoy Fred's company.

When springtime came, Brown came back to camp with six freed slaves including Nigger Bob. Henry had gained much confidence since they last saw one another. He wasn't happy at Bob's arrival since Bob knew the secret of his gender. Bob and the other freed men intended to continue north to freedom rather than join the fight with Brown. When Henry informed Bob they were riding against Pate's Sharpshooters, Bob was shocked because of the disparity in their numbers. He wondered why Henry hadn't escaped north and was unhappy to find that Brown's main aim was fighting rather than running an Underground Railroad. He recounted that Brown forcibly freed him from his master, without asking what he wanted.

The narrator comments that this was Brown's typical mode of operation. He just assumed freed men wanted to fight, and it didn't occur to him that they wanted to just run. Bob was upset, and felt that Henry misled him. He told Henry that when they were caught, the blacks found with Brown would suffer the worst. He told Henry he intended to steal a horse and run for Iowa, welcoming Henry to join him, but Henry didn't want to steal from Brown. Bob told Henry that Brown's ideas about black equality would get him killed, and Henry agreed that Brown's sanity was in question. However, he still admired Brown for his simultaneous toughness and gentleness. He wondered if they shouldn't warn Brown about the coming dangers. In the end, Henry refused to join Bob's plot to steal a horse, and they agreed to keep silent about each other's secrets.

In the morning, Henry changed his mind about keeping quiet, but before he could warn Brown about Bob, Brown announced they had found Pate's army at Black Jack and would ride against them. Before they left they prayed. While the prayer went on, Bob collected provisions for his own journey, which went unremarked upon until he

approached the rifles. Brown praised Bob for being ready to take up arms for freedom. Bob replied that he didn't know how to use a gun, so Brown gave him a sword. Bob reluctantly got into a wagon with Henry, Brown and some other men. His fear made him call Jesus' name, which Brown interpreted positively. Brown preached the whole way to Black Jack, and some of the men fell asleep.

As had happened before, many of Brown's men disappeared on the way to the fight. They got to a ravine and looked down over Black Jack to see there were 300 armed men ready to defend the town. They were unaware of Brown's approach from the high ground. There was some strategy discussion, and Henry grew very nervous.

They were soon joined by another Free State rifle company, and so numbered in total about seventy men. The other company's leader insisted on taking over command and attacking right away, straight down the ravine. Brown preferred a more cautious approach. The other company attacked, several were killed, and they retreated. Those who retreated fled. Brown put his plan into action, and they came under fire. Henry saw that following Brown was the safer option. He tried to hide, but ended up joining the attack to save himself from being shot. Brown saw Henry's joining them as a heavenly sign. Brown's controlled attack won the day. Only thirty of Pate's men survived, and they surrendered.

The prisoners included Captain Pate and Pardee, who was upset to see that Bob was among Brown's men. When Brown found that his sons were now at Fort Leavenworth, he planned to exchange Pate and Pardee for them. They left for Fort Leavenworth. There was much looted booty, and Henry acquired some men's clothing for later use. Pate heckled Brown, who was unmoved.

They were intercepted by the federal army, who tried to arrest Brown for violating the laws of Kansas Territory. Brown replied that the laws didn't apply to him. When the officer threatened to shoot him, Brown told him to go ahead, warning that it would lead to his own death, as his men would defend him. Brown declared that he aimed to free the slaves no matter what was done to him. When the officer demanded to know under whose authority he acted, Brown replied that he acted under God's authority. This unsettled the officer, who demanded Brown's men to lay down their guns. Brown responded that he would exchange the prisoners for his sons, and if that was done he would give himself up. If the officer refused, he would be shot and have to face God for his sins in supporting slavery. Brown told the officer that his sons were not involved in any killing, and were only settlers who lost everything when the rebels burned their homesteads. This was reluctantly confirmed by Pate, who insisted they deserved it for being lawbreakers and thieves. This changed the officer's demeanor. When Pate demanded to know if the officer was Pro-Slavery or Free State, the officer replied that he was U.S. State.

The officer and Brown agreed that the officer would take the prisoners to Fort Leavenworth and attempt to secure the release of Brown's sons. In return, Brown would surrender. Brown said he would do so, but if they were not back in three days, he would burn the territory. Brown swore to God to keep his promise, but Henry knew he was

lying, because Brown never said whom he would surrender to. Henry knew that Brown was fully willing to lie to help his own cause, because he believed God was on his side.

Analysis

The Meaning of Freedom is addressed once again in the exchange between Bob and Cousin Herbert. Underneath their banter, there was a serious fear of the consequences of sticking their necks out. It is only when Bob told Herbert that Henry was John Brown's "property" that Herbert saw the necessity of returning him to Brown's custody. Brown might have been a murdering devil, but he was a white murdering devil who must have his "property" returned to him, which rid Herbert of any responsibility or fear of consequence. As lifelong slaves, Herbert, Henry and Bob had to fight against their minds which only ever knew slavery and had some difficulty seeing a black person as anything other than some white man's property. Even the man who would be Henry's savior owned him.

When Henry returned to Brown, he was surprised to find there were no dire consequences for running off; in fact, he was no worse than several of the other men who ran off in fear as well. They were volunteers, and no one was treated poorly for being cowardly. In this way, Brown was reflecting a fatherly and Christian forgiveness of those who struggled to put, as Brown said, "God's philosophy into action." How killing Doyle and his sons fit into God's philosophy might have been questioned privately, but Brown didn't appear to question it in the slightest. Again, he felt as if anything he did was God's will. His confidence in this belief was reflected physically: while the other men looked tired and hungry, Brown looked younger and fresher than ever. Brown's attachment to long-winded prayer instead of riding to meet the enemy in a timely fashion is repeated with comic effect.

This comedy of errors continued when they rode out to immediately confront Pate's Sharpshooters only to spend months in search of them, raiding and praying as they went. For Henry, though, this time was a reprieve with lightened labor and opportunities for learning. Brown instituted a sort of equality for Henry, in that he was not treated as women generally were treated in this time period—he no longer was asked to do laundry and cooking for the men. On the other hand, as a girl he found he was treated preferentially. For the first time, therefore, Henry really tasted freedom. Two symbols of that freedom are his learning to read and how to fire a rifle—both forbidden to slaves.

It is only Bob's return that brought conflicted intentions back into Henry's life. Bob felt he'd been misled by Henry into thinking that Brown was an agent of freedom, only to find that he was expected to fight with the other men. Bob wasn't wrong to be angry, since it is clear that Brown never consulted Bob on his wishes, and by bringing him to his encampment, he put Bob and the other freed men into serious danger whether they liked it or not. Bob was also correct in his assertion to Henry that the consequences if they were caught were far more severe than those the white men would suffer. Historically, rebellious slaves knew they could expect horrific tortures, while the white men would be treated only as criminals.

Henry's allegiances became clear when Bob welcomed him to join him in stealing a horse and escaping. Henry was fully allied with Brown now, and would not steal from him. He would even risk exposure of his secret by telling Brown about Bob's plan, but was prevented from doing so by the fact that they finally would go into battle. His allegiance was tested in the battle. After all, they were drastically outnumbered, and it would make sense to run away. Henry found, however, that sticking with Brown was the only way to self-preservation. On Brown's end, Henry's effort to save himself was seen as a sign from God—Henry as "Onion" the good luck charm continued to be meaningful to Brown, especially in battle. Externally, it was Henry's femaleness that brought boldness to Brown's army. After all, if a girl could be brave then so could they.

The historical conflict between the Free State movement and the Pro-Slavery rebels with the United States Government caught in the middle is shown to good effect in the standoff between Brown and the federal officer. Again there is a return to the theme of God's will. Brown promised to surrender "to the will of Almighty God" if his sons were freed from custody. But Henry knew that Brown considered his will and God's will to be synonymous. As Henry noted, this was a common belief of those in a war. Everyone believed that God was on their side.

Discussion Question 1

How was Henry treated when he returned to the encampment? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why was Bob angry about being in Brown's encampment? What did he fear would happen? What did he plan to do? How was he thwarted in his plan?

Discussion Question 3

How did Brown's outnumbered army succeed in taking Pate's Sharpshooters?

Vocabulary

devilment, liable, grimaced, chortled, hither, contention, spry, ordained, furtively, commenced, grits, abolitionist, breechloader, sorghum, schooner, bevy, gruff, mangled, prattling, redemption, boggy, reconnoitering, spyglass, dotty, dragoons, sentinel, bogus, abide

Part I: Chapters 8 - 9

Summary

Chapter 8 is titled "A Bad Omen." John Brown intended to wait for three days for the release of his two sons, but a problem arose that made this difficult. The first morning, an ally came to inform Brown that the Missourians were heading to his homestead near Osawatomie to burn it down. Since he had promised his sons' wives not to leave until their husbands were returned, he decided to send Owen, Fred, Bob, Henry, and the rest of the men to investigate and report back. He instructed them to leave "Onion" in Osawatomie. Brown told Henry he was sorry for removing him from battle despite his bravery. Henry did not recall doing anything but cower from the bullets, but Brown had his own perspective. Henry was very happy to hear he would be out of the fight, but tried not to show it.

They traveled quickly on the California Trail, despite the dangers of being intercepted. Henry thought about his plans. He had boy's clothing in his possession, but didn't know what it would mean to go North.

Though Fred was unhappy to find that Henry could now read, he was pleased when Henry read him a Bible story from a book he'd been given by Brown.

When they arrived at the Marais des Cygnes River near Osawatomie, they came across a fight between Free State Indians and Missouri Pro-Slavers. They disagreed on whether to join the fight or report to Brown. Several of the men joined the fight, forcing Owen to do so as well. Bob took this opportunity to run off. The narrator notes that Bob would do this seven times but never got free until he ran to Missouri.

Fred and Henry were left behind. Fred wanted to join the fight as well, but Henry distracted him by asking for food. As they talked, Henry realized that Fred had not forgotten that Henry was a "sissy." When they separated to flush out a beaver, Henry was caught by a white man. Fred freed him by threatening to shoot the man, who ran away. They rode to another creek and continued hunting. Fred accidentally shot a Good Lord Bird, which he considered a terrible sin and bad omen. He prayed and begged for forgiveness loudly for an hour. This worried Henry, who was afraid they would be heard and caught again. Fred gave the dead bird to Henry, saying they would give it to Brown. They heard horses coming, and Henry hid in a thicket. It was a posse of redshirts led by Reverend Martin. Fred didn't recognize Martin right away, and so didn't draw his gun. Martin shot and killed Fred. Henry stayed hidden and watchful. The group argued over Rev. Martin having killed Fred in cold blood rather than taking him prisoner. Martin warned them Brown was on his way, so they all left.

Henry wondered if Fred's superstitious beliefs about the bird were correct. He was confused and grieved, and he fell asleep next to Fred's corpse, holding the bird carcass. This was how he was found by Brown the next day.

Chapter 9 is titled "A Sign from God." Henry woke to find Brown standing over him, wondering what happened. Henry explained how Fred died, as a battle went on nearby. Jason and John had returned to Brown's army. Henry asked if Brown would go after Martin for revenge, but Brown said they didn't have to. Brown told Henry to stay with Fred's body, and went to rejoin the battle for Osawatomie. Henry watched the battle from the top of a hill. He saw Brown's army charge and send the rebels scrambling. Rev. Martin's riders burned several houses and shot many people. The Free Staters were disorganized, losing the battle, and badly outnumbered. Brown ignored any danger to himself, but his men were forced to retreat. As Brown was the last to retreat, Henry saw him get hit in the back by a cannonball and fall into the creek. Henry assumed he was dead, but because the shot was spent before it reached Brown, he was only stunned. The enemy was shocked to find him still alive and fighting in the creek. Owen returned to fight with him. The rest of the men covered them with repressing fire until they could both get to safety. This was the first time Henry saw Brown retreat.

Martin's redshirts killed and burned Oswatomie. They claimed to have killed Brown and burned his homestead, but only the latter was true. The Free Staters watched their town burn from a distance.

Brown and his men returned to Fred's body, which lay with the Good Lord Bird on his chest. Henry regretted not having been able to defend Fred, but Brown told him there was no shame in being a girl who didn't know how to shoot a gun. He told Henry that he was grateful he and Fred were friends. Brown knelt over his son, took his cap and a feather from the God Lord Bird, and said some words about God's vision.

Brown's remaining sons and others came to tell Brown they didn't want to fight anymore, but would rather rebuild their homes and let the federal army go after Martin for his crimes. Brown told them to take "Little Onion" with them. He put Fred's cap into his saddlebag and held up the feather, saying it was an omen from God.

He put the feather in his cap and despite the pleas of his family for him to recognize that they were finished, he smiled. He looked very battered, but also crazy. He responded that he had only a short time to live, and would die fighting for his cause. He told them to stay behind if they wanted, and hopefully they would find a cause worth dying for. He told them he would go commune with God, to bury Fred and take care of "Little Onion." He rode East. The narrator comments that he wouldn't see the Old Man for two years.

Analysis

The two chapter titles, "A Bad Omen" and "A Sign from God," both refer to the same thing: the killing of the Good Lord Bird and its feathers. For Fred, killing the Good Lord Bird accidentally was a clearly bad omen, and it turned out to be true. Not only was Fred promptly killed thereafter by a man he previously humiliated, but the Free Staters and Browns experienced a devastating defeat at the hands of the Pro-Slavery renegades. For Brown, who saw everything that happened as a sign from God, this "bad omen"

became a sign from God. Fred was the killer of the Good Lord Bird, but they were soon together in death. No doubt Brown was devastated by the loss of his son and Osawatomie, but his response was one of Biblical import—he would go into the wilderness to "commune" with God. In this way he continued to act as a prophet of old.

Henry could not have saved his friend's life, but he still felt guilty because he didn't defend him. He continued to masquerade as a girl rather than taking up arms and fighting "like a man." Henry was torn between the child he was and the man he must soon become, but naturally blamed his inaction on his cowardice.

From the distance of the hill, Henry saw again that Brown was extraordinarily brave and incredibly lucky. He cut a mythic figure as always, fighting to the last as his men retreated. Even a cannonball shot to the back could not kill him, which of course added to the sense that he was immortal or god-like by those fighting against him. Nonetheless, the enemy felt certain they had killed him and for good reason.

The Battle of Osawatomie and the killing of Fred Brown is a natural ending for Part I of the novel. The abolitionist fighters were defeated and must regroup. Brown had regained two of his sons, but lost another, along with his home. Even the Pro-Slavery belief that the Old Man had been killed contributed to the idea of retreat. Henry didn't see Brown for two years. Like a mythic figure, Brown would travel to the world of the dead to talk to his God.

Discussion Question 1

Do you agree or disagree with Henry's decision to continue to masquerade as a girl? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How was the killing of the Good Lord Bird a bad omen? How was it a sign from God?

Discussion Question 3

Why did the Free Staters disband?

Vocabulary

contrary, hither, yon, wrangled, grim, grapeshot, artillery, knoll, douse, ludicrous, horizontal, plumb

Part II: Chapters 10 - 12

Summary

Part II is titled "Slave Deeds (Missouri)."

Chapter 10 is titled "A Real Gunslinger." The remaining Brown sons buried Fred and argued over what happened. They plucked some of the Good Lord Bird's feathers and distributed them amongst themselves. They decided to split up and Owen was reluctantly tasked with taking Henry with him. Owen was afraid that having "Onion" along would delay him on his way, so Bob offered to care for "her," and the three of them prepared to set off together. First though, Owen wanted to salvage what he could from his ruined homestead in Osawatomie. He instructed Bob and Henry to wait for him where they were. Owen and his brothers rode off.

Henry and Bob watched the riders depart from the top of the hill, but also saw them disappear before they reached the river. Bob decided to take a mule and wagon that had been left with them and tried to persuade Henry to go with him, saying they should get away while they could. Just then, they heard a firefight from the direction the brothers went and saw rebels approaching. The rebels confronted them, and Henry lied his way through an awkward conversation, pretending to be a light-skinned black slave owner. The rebels, Chase and Randy, claimed they had seen John Brown dead and his army on the run. Henry tried to persuade them he must be going with his "slave" Bob to Lawrence, but the white men insisted on accompanying them to ensure their safe passage.

When they asked what "Henrietta" did for a living, he said he "sells trim," meaning that he cut people's hair. The rebels thought this meant that "she" was a prostitute. Later, Bob quietly enlightened Henry about the misunderstanding. They were forced to leave the area with Chase and Randy, who were now interested in getting "some trim" from Henry.

Chapter 11 is titled "Pie." As Henry and Bob traveled with Chase and Randy, Chase talked incessantly, attempting to impress "Henrietta." Henry kept him from getting physical with him by singing songs to distract him.

They arrived in Pikesville, a rough pioneer town. Chase loudly claimed to the townsfolk that he himself shot and killed John Brown. In the hubbub, Randy slipped away, never to be seen again. The townsfolk helped Chase get very drunk.

Henry and Bob wanted to escape, but were unable to sneak away. The men all flirted with Henry and got rowdy. Eventually, Chase woke from his drunken stupor and took "Henrietta" to the Pikesville Hotel. There, Henry met Pie, a beautiful biracial prostitute. She was not happy to see Chase, who owed her money. Chase offered to give "Henrietta" to her as payment. Bob was sent to the slave pen because black men were

not permitted in the brothel area. The narrator notes that this separation changed Henry and Bob's relationship forever.

Pie sent Henry to Miss Abby for a bath. Henry fainted with all the stress and when he woke, Miss Abby commented on "Henrietta's" lack of breasts and hips. Henry ran from her, tearing Miss Abby's scarf. He ran into Pie's room and found Chase and Pie having sex. He hid under the bed with Miss Abby in pursuit. Pie promised to pay Miss Abby for the scarf. Miss Abby told her to get rid of Henry and threatened to get Darg. This frightened Pie. She kicked Chase out and persuaded Henry to come out from under the bed. Henry instantly fell in love with Pie.

Pie beat him and discovered he was a boy. This frightened her, because the deception broke serious racial taboos. She feared they both would be lynched. Henry defended himself by telling about the kidnapping, John Brown, and how he came to be with Chase and Randy. She worried because Henry now knew she hid her money under the bed.

Henry tried to persuade Pie to give him a job, telling her that John Brown would soon come for him and Bob. This frightened her even more. He told her he could forge papers for them, and it surprised Pie to learn that Henry could read. She decided Henry would secretly tutor her in reading in return for a job as a servant and a better female disguise.

Chapter 12 is titled "Sibonia." Henry settled into Pikesville as a girl with Pie's help. Henry proved he could be a good tavern worker. Henry respected Miss Abby and enjoyed relative comfort in being a house slave rather than being on the run with Brown's army. Henry lost contact with Bob in the slave pen, both because he was inconsiderate and because he was restricted in his movements. He asked Pie about Bob, but she warned him to stay away from the slaves in the slave pen, because they were "trouble." Finally, Henry was able to sneak out to look for Bob.

There were twenty slaves living in the smelly, scary pen. In the center of it all was an apparently insane woman sitting on a wooden box in the mud. Henry asked for Bob repeatedly, but no one answered him except for Sibonia, the crazy woman. She threw mud at Henry's face, repeating nonsense phrases.

Sibonia's sister, a thin woman named Libby, calmed Sibonia and asked what Henry wanted. Henry arrogantly threatened to tell Miss Abby that the insane woman should be beaten for her behavior, bragging stupidly about being a house slave. Libby informed him that there was no Bob living in the pen. Henry didn't believe her and spoke to her insolently. He told Libby that he had been told Bob hadn't been sold, and she wondered if this was the first time he'd been lied to by white people. Libby chastised him for pretending to be a girl, which surprised and upset him. He offered to pay her to tell him where Bob was, but she refused. He then offered to teach her to read, but she accused him of lying about his skills and told him to go away. Sibonia quietly spoke to Libby in a normal voice, sending her over with the rest of the slaves. The narrator comments that he never talked to Libby again the rest of her life, which wouldn't be long.

Sibonia looked at Henry and he realized that she wasn't crazy—that it was all an act. She made mud balls and talked to him in a low voice that no one else could hear, telling him he was going to get into serious trouble for lying about knowing how to read. Henry insisted on the truth, and she warned him about Darg. She extracted a promise from Henry to write a pass or bill of sale for her, warning him that failing to follow through would lead to serious consequences. She informed Henry that Bob had been loaned out to the sawmill.

Henry told Sibonia that he was worried Bob would be sold. Sibonia reminded him this could happen to any of them, including Henry. She warned him not to say anything about their agreement to Pie, on pain of death. She would send word to Henry about when he could come back to the slave pen to see Bob. She returned to her seat in the mud and continued her insane act.

Analysis

The Good Lord Bird feathers were distributed amongst Brown's men as a symbol of Fred's sacrifice, their cause, and a continued camaraderie in the midst of chaos. They were like talismans of hope in the future when all seemed at its most bleak. There was a promise to meet up, but all was disrupted and Henry and Bob were removed from the group by a couple of Border Ruffians, both of whom posed a very real danger to Henry and Bob. A humorous misunderstanding only somewhat salves the seriousness of Henry and Bob's predicament, and in fact the end result is a return to slavery for them both. In this scene, the reader will sense that Henry wasn't as clever as he thought: the Ruffians clearly either didn't believe Henry's story that he was a slave owner, or the misunderstanding that he was a prostitute trumped this and made both Henry and Bob obvious commodities to be used for whatever gain possible.

There is a big increase of sexual tension in these chapters. Not only were the men all around Henry bent on using him as the female prostitute they presumed him to be despite his age, he was also crossing racial taboos that if discovered endangered his life more seriously than ever before. As a black male he should never have been in casually intimate contact with white women, even prostitutes, because his presence was considered both sullying and dangerous. As a result, Pie put herself into serious risk by keeping him around. Also, Henry developed his first pre-pubescent crush on the beautiful Pie. This crush led him to lose track of everything he had previously intended to do.

The primary reason Pie was persuaded to take the risk in keeping Henry around was because the power Henry had gained by learning to read, no matter how minimally. By giving Henry the gift of literacy, John Brown had given him a gift that he could truly use, a gift that was both dangerous and useful. As shown in these chapters, it was a skill that slaves definitely saw as valuable, and Henry quickly learned that it had more weight than threatening people with the mythical wrath of John Brown. Just like Pie, Sibonia was moved to see potential value in Henry because he could read.

In Pikesville, the reader finds that Henry's disguise had only worked heretofore because the men he'd been around for months didn't truly see him. Finding himself in contact with black women for the first time in many months, he found they could see through to his true nature without a bit of trouble. The white women prostitutes and Miss Abby remained fooled, because they saw nothing but a black slave. Through this the reader can understand the invisibility of females, blacks, and slaves to those who didn't share that status. Sibonia, too, enhanced her invisibility by pretending to be crazy. In this way, like Henry, she could hide in plain sight from the eyes of her oppressors.

The horrors of the slave pen gave Henry his first real understanding of the true status of slaves in his society. They were penned like animals, right next to the pigs, treated as a threat to be feared and watched constantly. It is only through luck that Henry and Pie managed to avoid being in the pen like all the rest, and it was primarily an accident of being fair-skinned and therefore fitting within the paradigm of what the dominant culture found attractive. Both Pie and Henry cherished their charmed status, but Sibonia reminded Henry that his status was imaginary and temporary. They were property, and at any time they could be ripped from their privilege and sold.

Discussion Question 1

What misunderstanding led Chase to bring Henry to the Pikesville Hotel?

Discussion Question 2

How and why were Bob and Henry separated?

Discussion Question 3

What skill did Henry have that others sought? Why did it give him power?

Vocabulary

knack, tainted, groused, scrounge, notions, scat, pinto, mulatto, ague, sullied, grog, sullen, jackals, soused, cooter, lubricated, infernal, skinflint, gizzard, warbled, flogging, flummoxed

Part II: Chapters 13 -14

Summary

Chapter 13 is titled "Insurrection." Several days later, Henry was notified of the Bible meeting in the slave pen. He was reunited with Bob and found that he was being worked very hard at the sawmill. He told Henry that the slaves in the pen wouldn't talk to him, and worried that he was going to be killed. He was especially resentful of Henry's status in the hotel while he was suffering.

Henry saw Darg for the first time. All the slaves pretended to be working to avoid attracting his attention. He asked what Henry was doing there, and Henry lied that he had been given permission by Pie. Darg rejected his explanation. Henry told him he was there to visit Bob, so Darg wondered if they were romantically involved. Henry denied this. Darg informed Henry that the pen was his responsibility and that Henry wasn't to be there without Miss Abby's permission. The only exception would be if "Henrietta" was willing to have sex with Darg. Henry realized that Bob felt deeply betrayed by his actions.

Henry told Pie about having gone to the pen. She was furious with him and worried that it would bring trouble. It came out that she and Darg hated one another. Pie's fears and opinions made Henry stay away from the pen. Henry's growing affection for Pie made him want to stay on her good side, and he had become her trusted confidant and servant. Henry worried about his promises to Sibonia, who sometimes sent word wondering why he was avoiding the pen. He was afraid of being too easily observed from the hotel, and he was also worried about the increasing tension in the town over the slave question.

Talk around the saloon about slavery increased, and so did arguments about the issue. Miss Abby openly worried about the slaves acquiring guns. Many redshirts came into the saloon one day and Henry witnessed a heated argument about an insurrection plot that was exposed. Judge Fuggett arrested several of the slaves from the pen, and Miss Abby was angry because four of them were hers.

Henry ran to tell Pie about the trouble and was shocked when she lamented that only nine had been arrested and were to be hanged, adding that they should all hang. Pie instructed him to find out more and report back to her, but not to be seen talking to any other slaves. In particular, he was to find out who had been arrested. Pie reassured Henry that the two of them would be safe.

Sibonia was brought into the saloon in chains for questioning by the Judge. He accused her of being the leader of the rebellion, an accusation she readily admitted. She confessed her involvement and that of her sister Libby, but refused to implicate anyone else. Her calm demeanor impressed Henry deeply. Judge Fuggett threatened to torture her to get the other names, but she welcomed him to do so, insisting she would not

break. Her attitude angered the judge and the other redshirts, and they threatened her in many ways, but she was not moved. Finally, she was returned to the jail. The townsfolk argued for days, worried about what to do, and were very concerned that not all the insurrectionists had been arrested.

The slave owners argued for their own slaves' innocence, because their executions would mean a loss of investment. When one demanded to know who told of the plot, the judge said he was told in confidence by a trusted slave known by many of them. Henry realized this traitor must have been Pie, but tried to push it out of his mind.

Finally, the judge decided to have the minister talk to Sibonia. The minister agreed, declaring that the woman would not be able to lie to him. When he returned, he was deeply shaken. He told those in the saloon that Sibonia challenged him on religious doctrine. When he confronted her on the fact that the plot would have led to his and his wife's murder along with that of many innocent people, she told him she would have killed him first to prove to the other slaves she was willing to sacrifice those she loved. She told him that in her heart, she knew God supported her cause. The minister felt completely defeated by Sibonia's argument. He told the gathering that he prayed with her, and that he was redeemed. He declared that he would no longer support slavery and resigned from his position as the minister for Pikesville.

Chapter 14 is titled "A Terrible Discovery." The next day, the townspeople began to build the scaffold on which the arrested slaves would be executed. Miss Abby was still angry at the loss of four slaves, but the upcoming executions brought a lot of business to town. People were coming from everywhere in the region to watch. Many slave owners, however, took their "property" out of town to prevent them getting arrested.

Henry heard a rumor that Free Staters were planning to ride on the town to prevent the executions. Everyone was armed and excited. After a week of tension, execution day came. A big crowd gathered and the insurrectionists were brought out, escorted by rebels and militia. Several black slaves, including women and children, were forced to watch from the front row.

The line of nine were brought up onto the scaffold. When a young man in front of Sibonia collapsed in fear on the way up the steps, she pulled him up and told him to "be a man." Sibonia volunteered herself and her sister to go first. Everything was quiet and still, and the hangman was polite to them, allowing them to speak quietly to one another. When he went to cover Sibonia's head, she jumped up high and into the hole before he could do so. She took a long time to die, and the horrific spectacle caused many onlookers to question what was happening and why. The people of color in the front became openly upset, and the soldiers threatened them to keep under control. Because things appeared to be getting out of hand, the judge ordered the rest to be hung as quickly as possible, which they were.

Henry went to tell Pie about the executions, but she refused to speak to him. Her rejection upset him. Henry felt ambivalent about the hangings because he was a hotel slave who had made quite a bit of money in tips over the week of increased business in

the saloon. The narrator reflects that if he'd known better, he'd have been more worried about Miss Abby's financial losses and how this might affect his own duties as a slave. However, Henry was mostly oblivious to what was happening around him, only concerned about Pie.

There was continued concern in the community about the loss of valuable slaves and the fact that the confessions of those who died conflicted. People were afraid and confused because Sibonia and Libby's silence left many unanswered questions.

Pikesville slaves were now all considered to be potential troublemakers. As a result, their value as property was diminished, and they couldn't be sold. Henry saw this as Sibonia's gift to those who remained.

Henry suspected that Pie was the traitor who told on the insurrectionists, but Henry didn't blame her because slaves customarily had to look out for themselves. He understood that people, especially slaves, traded in secrets to gain favor. He saw that Pie miscalculated about how this would make her feel afterward, and her depression and irritability were the consequence. He also realized that Judge Fuggett's actions were in part to lessen Miss Abby's economic power, and that Pie didn't account for how that would affect her personally. Henry believed Pie was promised her freedom by the judge, and that her treachery was in effort to gain that freedom. She was willing to sell out the slaves in the pen because they hated her, and Henry didn't blame her because he too was posing as a girl to gain certain advantages. To regain Pie's affection, Henry considered quitting his deception and "being a man" like Sibonia told the man on the scaffold. He thought that Miss Abby would possibly accept him as a male slave to replace two of the men she lost. He felt that he could then openly show Pie his love for her.

Henry went to tell Pie about his decision and found her room empty. He looked for her and found her having sadomasochistic sex with Darg in his hut. He saw Darg whipping Pie and cursing her for her treachery, and that Pie was enjoying it.

Analysis

Henry learned more about the politics and tensions between the slaves in the pen and him and Pie up in the hotel. While he considered himself to have status, he found that this was an illusion. While Pie was a slave of high value to Miss Abby at the hotel, she was well and truly hated down in the pen, and the fact that Henry was allied with her brought him no power out there. To Darg, his only value was for sex. Henry also realized that his child-like obliviousness to Bob's predicament led to a deep rift between them. Henry had in essence forgotten any sense of loyalty because he was so dazzled by Pie's beauty and attention. This misguided affection for Pie and his fear even led him to avoid his promises to Sibonia.

Sibonia demonstrated true leadership after her arrest. It was perhaps a hopeless cause, but she felt strongly that God was on her side. Her bravery deeply affected Henry. For

the first time he saw someone in his subjugated position willing to suffer and die for a righteous cause. While John Brown was also heroic, he was not fighting for himself. Sibonia on the other hand was fighting for her own people. As such, she functions as a contrast to the cowardice demonstrated by the characters of Bob and Henry.

Sibonia's encounter with the minister is important. It brings home the religious conflict surrounding slavery. All these slave owners likely considered themselves to be Christians. They even sent their minister to persuade Sibonia of her sinfulness. However, her righteousness and saint-like sacrifice turned him around and converted him to the path of righteousness. He was in essence converted to abolition of slavery by being in close contact with a righteous avenger. As with John Brown, however, there was a very un-Christian thread of violence within their abolitionist fight. Both John Brown and Sibonia were willing not only to self-sacrifice and lose those they loved in the fight, but also to murder "innocents." There is purpose in this, because the line between innocence and collusion is being drawn. Sibonia justified murder because no one involved in slavery was innocent, and she needed her followers to believe in her willingness to sacrifice those she loved. John Brown too considered all participants in slavery to be sinners deserving of death in the name of victory.

The execution is a dramatic scene illustrating the truly horrific nature of slavery and frontier life. Executions were spectacles, even celebratory political theater. However, reality came up hard against the intended purpose. The black people being forced to watch didn't "learn the lesson" intended, but rather posed an increased threat and were likely inspired by Sibonia's sacrifice. Even the average Pro-Slavery townsfolk were taken aback by the reality of executions when Sibonia strategically refused to be hooded during her hanging. In this way, the watchers were forced to look their collective victim in the eyes, and forced to see what they had done.

Henry was deeply affected by the horrific spectacle as well as Sibonia's insistence on dignity on the part of one of her fellow prisoners. When she told the young man on the way to the rope that he should "be a man," Henry felt this as an indictment of his failures. Like many young people, he was too hard on himself in some ways. He could hardly be expected to be a man when after all he was still only a boy. However, his continued deception by posing as a girl, which enabled him to avoid difficult work and the kinds of risks Bob dealt with, was an added and obvious problem. His guilt therefore may have been justified.

There are several points during these chapters where the practical economics of slaves as property is seen. To Miss Abby, losing slaves whatever the reason was an economic hit, and it was clear that Judge Fuggett had an economic motivation for depriving her of property and therefore power in this way. When slaveowners left town with their slaves to avoid having them swept up in the arrests they were choosing to preserve their property even at the possible expense of their own safety, should their slaves have been part of the uprising. Just as Henry had mixed feelings of respect and loyalty to his slave owners, so too did the slave owners have mixed feelings about their slaves. In a patriarchal way, they couldn't imagine their slaves plotting against them, because believing in their loyalty was necessary so they could sleep at night. At the same time,

there was always that suspicion and fear that this all-too-personal oppression would be disrupted by rebellion. In this way, the author puts the complicated personal dynamics between master and slave into the story. When Sibonia put all the Pikesville slaves under suspicion by refusing to accuse anyone else in the insurrection, she gave them the next best thing to freedom: she made them unsellable. The primary fear of a slave was to be tortured and killed, but the secondary fear was to be sold South, where they would be worked to death amongst strangers. By making them all suspected troublemakers, she made them into marked goods and therefore safe from that fate.

In these chapters, Henry is brought face to face with his own treachery and selfishness and also Pie's. In some ways this sort of untrustworthiness was part and parcel of a slave's world as Henry saw it. In order to gain a modicum of power or security or even freedom, slaves often would betray one another. These were the actions of the utterly powerless. However, Henry was growing up, and as children do, he became more aware of his disloyalty to Bob and his lack of follow-through with Sibonia. He began to awaken from the complete selfishness of childhood and saw how his own actions might have affected others. While he had earned money in the week leading up to the executions, he had betrayed Bob and Sibonia. Then there was Pie's treachery in telling Judge Fuggett about the plot to revolt. Henry understood that she had her motivations, but when he found her performing a sexual exorcism with the hated Darg, he felt she betrayed both him and herself.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Pie betray the insurrectionists?

Discussion Question 2

How did the minister react to his meeting with Sibonia? How did she persuade him he was wrong-headed?

Discussion Question 3

What were some ways Henry failed to "be a man"?

Vocabulary

consort, cavorted, mulling, lingering, insurrection, gizzards, coerced, grievous, collateral, rendered, ministerial, rebuke, scaffold, spectacles, notions, bayonets, revolt, timid, instinctively, convulsed, malarkey, agitated, consolation, discombobulation, superstitious, pretext, craw, charade, partition

Part II: Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

Chapter 15 is titled "Squeezed." Henry didn't say anything to anyone about what he'd seen. A few days later, Pie came and apologized to him for her behavior and invited him to resume tutoring her in reading. Henry attempted to do so, but because he did not treat her as usual, she got frustrated and kicked him out.

Henry resolved to run away to freedom. He began to drink a lot, and became popular entertainment with the customers in the saloon. The customers began to pursue "Henrietta" more. Chase returned and he and Henry bonded drunkenly over their mutual love of Pie, who now refused to see anyone but customers. Chase made a pass at Henry, but Henry avoided him.

There continued to be resentment toward Judge Fuggett on the part of slave owners over the executions. As a result, the judge left town. Rumors of Free State victories reached the town, and business began to dry up. As a result, Chase also left town.

Henry went to see Bob in the slave pen and found that he'd been accused of being the snitch, and therefore didn't want to see Henry. Broadnax grabbed Henry and reminded him that he never kept his word with Sibonia. Henry tried to explain that he couldn't help because he was being watched too closely. They accused him of being too close to Pie, but Henry denied any knowledge of what Pie did. Broadnax informed Henry that the slaves were slowly being sold off. He promised he would find the snitch and make them suffer.

Henry insisted to Broadnax that he and Bob bore no guilt in the matter. He told Broadnax that they wouldn't have done so because they rode with Old John Brown. This declaration caught the slaves' attention. Broadnax repeated Chase's assertion that he killed Brown, but Henry disabused him of the idea. He told them all about his history with John Brown, with the exception of his uncertainty that Brown was still alive. Broadnax wondered why Henry hadn't escaped, but Henry didn't explain that he stayed because of his love for Pie, thinking it would make them think he was in on her treachery. Instead he told them he was waiting for Bob to forgive him so they could escape together. Finally, Broadnax released Henry, but warned him that he had one chance to redeem himself. Broadnax repeated the rumors that the Free Staters were riding for Pikesville. He charged Henry with telling them when he found out where they were. If he fulfilled this responsibility, then they would be even. Henry protested again that he was under too much scrutiny and worried about Darg. They told him they would handle Darg, and that if he didn't do as he was told, they would kill Bob.

Henry worried about his task and the wrath of Broadnax. He contemplated simply running away on his own. To forget his troubles, he drank and flirted with a redshirt with a wounded arm. The man ordered Henry to go fetch and clean his saddlebag and he

would pay him. Henry was very drunk, and dropped the saddlebag, only to find that there was a Good Lord Bird feather in the bag. The redshirt joined him in the dark, and it turned out to be Owen, who called him "Little Onion." He had been looking for Henry for two years. He wondered what "Onion" was doing there, and Henry confessed he had been in love with someone who didn't return that love. Owen said that he had had the same experience, but it hadn't turned him into a drunk. When Henry asked why Owen didn't return after the Battle of Osawatomie, Owen told him they ran into some rebels and found him as soon as he could. He told Henry to wait, and that the Free Staters would be invading the town soon. He also told Henry he must quit drinking. Henry tried to ask about the Old Man, but Owen rode off without answering him.

Chapter 16 is titled "Busting Out." Henry couldn't get out to warn the slaves in the pen until the next day. The town was very tense because of all the rumors. The saloon was full of rebels and militia and everyone was armed. There were plans to defend the town with cannons.

Henry went to tell Broadnax what was happening, but they were interrupted by Darg. Darg ordered Broadnax to line up with the other slaves for a count, but Broadnax defied him. Darg went to whip Broadnax, and Henry attempted to intercede by stroking Darg's ego. When this failed, Henry pretended to faint. When Darg went to get "Henrietta" a cup of water to revive "her," Henry briefly told Broadnax to ready himself for the raid. Just as Darg was attending to Henry, the attack on the town began. The Free Staters blasted their way into the hotel. Henry hid inside the saloon as the fighting went on. Many rebels were shot. The last Henry saw of Darg, he was headed upstairs to the prostitutes' rooms. The captain of the Free State Militia declared any remaining rebels to be prisoners, but most were dead or dying. Henry resentfully decided not to find Pie, thinking that Darg and her were together. The narrator comments that he would never see either of them again.

Henry escaped out to the slave pen, and unlocked the gate to release everyone. Bob was reluctant to go with Henry, but decided he must as the rebels rode down the alley after them. They were both caught by a rifle-wielding rebel. John Brown stepped out and killed the rebel with his broadsword. As Henry tried to run away, the Old Man tripped him and aimed his gun down at him, demanding to know if Owen's tales of drunkenness, swearing and smoking were true. Meanwhile, Brown's men swept the alley of rebels, and shots were fired all around them. The Old Man didn't lose his focus on Henry, however, so Henry confessed all.

Brown demanded to know if "Onion" was still a virgin, and Henry reassured him that he was. Henry noticed that Brown looked older, and that his beard was now white and very long. Brown continued to question Henry, and lectured him on the story of King Solomon, despite the fact that bullets were flying all around them. Meanwhile, Broadnax and the other slaves had taken over one of the rebel cannons and readied it to be fired. Brown took no notice of them, and continued to preach at Henry. Finally, Owen reminded Brown that they had to leave or be left behind. Brown announced in a big voice who he was and ordered the rebels to "git." The rebels ran away. The cannon fuse burned all the way down but the cannon didn't fire. Brown saw this as a divine sign. He

told Owen that he only came to Pikesville to retrieve Onion, their good luck charm. He declared that Kansas Territory didn't need them anymore, and they must go East. He took Henry on his horse, and they rode off.

Analysis

Henry's descent into alcohol abuse over his broken heart put him into some danger. After all, in an addled state, he might have accidentally revealed his true gender, which could lead to his death. The author doesn't dwell on this possibility, however, because we are seeing the world through Henry's eyes, and Henry was in denial about such a consequence. Like many youths, he couldn't always see how vulnerable he was to danger.

In addition, Henry's confrontation with Broadnax was a sort of comeuppance for his failure to help Sibonia. While he did not betray her directly, his selfishness had come back to haunt him. As a result, he was forced to take risks to make up for it by sharing news with Broadnax.

Henry's first encounter with the real possibility of freedom was through the discovery of the Good Lord Bird feather, a reminder of his promised loyalty to the cause of abolitionism. In this case, it was also a sign of rescue, since Owen had found him. Owen's disgust at Henry's fallen nature as a drunk in a brothel and saloon, is our first window to how dissipated Henry had become.

Henry finally followed through on his promises, just in time to redeem himself to the slaves in the pen and Bob. While Darg's possible presence dissuaded him from pursuing Pie, in effect he had made his choice in loyalty to the cause rather than to his failed love. However, like an avenging angel, he was rescued by John Brown in the nick of time, only to suffer the comical preaching and lecturing due him, even with bullets whizzing about them. In this position, he could only confess his sins to Brown. When Brown focused on Henry's "purity," there is some irony that the only real reason he still remained a virgin was because of his disguise. If he didn't have a compelling reason to hide his maleness, he might have crossed that line as well.

Henry's rescue is epic, and this is reflected in the language, in which he and Brown end Part II by riding off "into legend." John Brown had retrieved his good luck charm—"Little Onion—redeemed him from his sins, and off they went to finish the story of John Brown, bringing to readers to the tale most well-known about him: the raid on Harpers Ferry.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Henry's heart broken?

Discussion Question 2

What promise did Broadnax extract from Henry?

Discussion Question 3

Why did John Brown lecture Henry during the battle?

Vocabulary

rustling, redemption, tarry, fretted, fillet, pixilated, essence, prosperity, ornery, possum, gallant, putrid, ruse, frolic, cowering, pillaged, rangy, mute, sundry

Part III: Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

Chapter 17 is titled "Rolling into History." Brown's army was bigger now, and they traveled East through a blizzard. Henry and John Brown got sick with fever. Brown decided they should free some slaves in Missouri. Henry again noticed some of the ways Brown had changed over the years. He was more stern and firm in his resolve. He had spent one of those years alone in the woods studying theologians, and his language had become more arcane. He looked more like a Biblical prophet than ever.

They traveled through Missouri for days in the snow, failing to find any slaves to free. Finally Brown declared that slavery there had been defeated, and they would go on to Iowa, traveling overland instead of taking the ferry downriver. They were being pursued by the federal army. Finally, the feds sent a messenger to ask for Brown's surrender. Brown responded defiantly. A day later, the feds stopped following them, and Brown declared that this was because the army realized God was on Brown's side. Meanwhile, when out of earshot, Brown's sons talked of returning home. Two of them had already departed for New York, and four remained. There were new men in Brown's army, tougher and smarter than the crew from two years before. Instead of being locals fighting for their land, they were intellectuals and committed abolitionists. They didn't smoke or chew tobacco. They often discussed politics and religion, and Brown sometimes tried to convert them to his version of Christianity. Despite this and the fact that they had their own individual beliefs, they followed Brown without question.

The group traveled 250 miles to Tabor, Iowa, freeing slaves along the way. This journey took two months. Henry found and kept some boy's clothing in his gear. Though the men suffered from the cold and were hungry, the Captain seemed unaffected. Brown declared they would spend the winter in Tabor, but Tabor didn't welcome them, despite being in free territory. The townsfolk thought Brown was a murderer, while Brown thought they were weak Christians.

Brown took them to some friendly farmers in a nearby town, Pee Dee. They sold most of the horses and wagons and supplies to pay for refuge and had to work to earn their keep. Brown put Kagi, one of the natural leaders amongst the men, in charge of training in preparation for the coming fight.

Brown and "Onion" took a train to Boston to seek more funding for their endeavors. He brought "Onion" along because he was his good luck charm and because "she" was a symbol of the cause they were fighting for, which would help boost financial support. Bob tried to take "Onion's" place, but Brown refused him. Two weeks later, they heard Bob had run away from Brown's army.

In their train travels, Brown used assumed names, but he was recognized by their fellow passengers. The Pro-Slavery passengers left the cars to avoid him, but the Yankees gave them gifts of food and drink.

Henry learned more about Brown's life, including the fact that he was a poor man who had had two wives and 22 children. His second wife now lived in Elba, New York with twelve of them still at home. Along the way, Brown picked up random gifts for them, but bought nothing. Henry was wearing boy's clothing now, because the fancy dress he wore in Pikesville had fallen apart during their journey from Missouri to Iowa. Brown was proud of "Onion" being a tomboy and Henry found the Old Man had a kind heart. He missed his family, but thought that the fight against slavery was a worthy and god-ordained reason to be away from them. He spent the journey reading the Bible, studying maps and writing letters. Instead of taking the train all the way into Boston, they got off in Pittsburgh in order to avoid any federal agents who might be tailing them. They took another train to Philadelphia. This was Henry's first visit to a real city, and it impressed him very much.

They spent the last of their money to go to Rochester, New York to see an important black man. Brown informed Henry that he would be meeting a man who would go down in history as a great leader. They were met at the station by Frederick Douglass, who impressed Henry with his proud demeanor and stately style of dress. Brown introduced Henry as "Henrietta Shackleford, my consort, who goes by the name of 'Onion.'" Henry greeted Douglass by using his first name. Douglass was not happy with this lack of respect. He responded by asking Henry's age and chastising him on his nickname, masculine dress and bad manners. He insisted on being addressed as "Mr. Douglass."

Brown in turn told Douglass about "Onion's" bravery and luck in meeting such an important man. The narrator comments on what a lovely image it was to see the two great men together on the train platform, smiling. He also warns the reader that Brown would be wrong about trusting Douglass.

Chapter 18 is titled, "Meeting a Great Man." Brown and Henry spent three weeks at Douglass's house in Rochester. Brown spent most of that time in his room writing and studying, which surprised Henry. He found that Douglass lived with two women, a white German woman named Miss Ottilie and a Southern black woman named Miss Anna. Henry believed that they were Douglass's two wives. They hated each other and treated "Henrietta" like an uneducated and uncouth girl. The men spent all their time in their respective rooms "scribbling," while Henry was put under the care of the two women. Henry only avoided having his true gender exposed by playing them off one another.

Douglass often walked around the house practicing his speeches in a booming voice, and took his meals in his office alone, eating incredible amounts of delicious food. Henry's unladylike manners brought him negative attention. Secretly, he craved alcohol and contemplated running away, but he worried that his frontier experience in tavern work wouldn't get him a job here in the East where things were so different. He also saw that in this region females were not even allowed in taverns.

Henry tried to steal a drink from the pantry, but was caught by Miss Ottilie, who told him he'd been sent for by Mr. Douglass. Henry went to Douglass' office, and Douglass told him that he must be interviewed and educated about the "plight of the Negro." Henry thanked him, though he secretly wasn't interested in fighting for any cause. Douglass talked to him about skin color and the fact that "mulattoes" were different from other black people. He insisted that "Henrietta" should call him "Fred." He beckoned Henry to sit close to him and listen.

Douglass put his arm around Henry and talked about Europe and also Henry's ignorance. He asked when Henry's birthday was, but Henry didn't know. This set Douglass off on a speech about the rootlessness of "the Negro" and how black women were preyed upon by their slave owners. While talking about black women's vulnerability, he began to touch Henry inappropriately. Henry avoided Douglass' hands by asking for liquor. Douglass poured Henry a tall drink and a short one for himself, hoping that it would make Henry more susceptible to his advances. However, Henry had earned a high tolerance for liquor, and found this liquor to be far weaker than what he was used to. Douglass was surprised by how quickly Henry drank his portion down and called "her" a "harlot." They drank more, and Douglass was far more affected by it than Henry. This led Douglass to get competitive. They drank a lot, and this successfully distracted Douglass from his sexual intentions. It also led him to make drunken speeches on various subjects. As he got drunker, Douglass' lost his educated gift of language. As Douglass was on the floor with the remains of their third bottle, he advised Henry not to marry two women at once before he passed out. Henry made his escape from the room.

Analysis

Both chapter titles have an element of ironic humor to them. While Brown's fame cleared a path for them to Iowa, his effort to free slaves all along the way were somewhat lame. Basically, they only managed to roll into Iowa and find a place to stay for the winter, overall unproductive in the cause against slavery.

Also, while it is clear historically that Frederick Douglass was a great man, Henry's encounter with him brings him down to human level. The author brings mythic historical figures like John Brown down to size throughout the novel, which is one way the reader sees them through Henry's child eyes. John Brown was a figure that spent a year in the wilderness talking to God and could swoop out of nowhere to save Henry's life but who also had a tendency to overvalue lengthy prayer at inopportune times. He risked everything to free slaves, but he seemed to have a major blind spot in understanding their human fears and feelings. On their train journey, Henry learned a great deal more about Brown as a human being rather than as this giant of a man. He learned the man was poor and away from his family because of his ideals. He cared deeply for his children, but he felt an obligation to his godly pursuit. Thus he was more complicated than most people realized.

Frederick Douglass is also presented as imperfect. Douglass was incredibly dignified when Henry first met him on the train platform, but was eventually reduced to sitting on the floor completely drunk. Most readers won't know that there is truth in Henry's perspective that Douglass had "two wives," and that indeed he insisted they share a household together for periods of time. In the novel, Douglass is portrayed, similar to Brown, as having quite a bit of arrogance that blinded him to certain facts. He talked to Henry about "the plight of the Negro" as if Henry himself wasn't capable of holding an opinion or had any experience of his own. He talked about how black women were treated while treating "Henrietta" like a piece of meat.

Once again, Henry had found some boy's clothing and kept it for a possible escape later. However, when his dress disintegrated in the difficult winter, he wore these clothes openly on the train journey east with Brown. Henry held all this fear about being "found out," and yet no one really seemed to notice or care when Henry presented himself as a boy. Henry told us that Brown saw Henry as a tomboy and was proud of that fact, but it's interesting that Henry wasn't just as capable of finding himself a dress to wear. In any case, Henry could wear boy's clothing, but because of his size, he was still perceived as a girl. The clothing he wore became irrelevant.

Discussion Question 1

How was John Brown like an Old Testament prophet?

Discussion Question 2

What was ironic about what Frederick Douglass said versus what he did?

Discussion Question 3

How did Henry keep from being molested by Frederick Douglass?

Vocabulary

nary, ague, enjoined, vanquished, brandished, pickets, expunge, barbaric, proclamations, temperate, salvation, johnnycake, reminiscent, fore, countenance, liable, gruff, colicky, privies, incorrigible, diaspora, spritely, derringer, hearth, uncouth, pantaloons, orations, lye, bustle, plight, comely, congruities, chortled, waif, guile, fodder, carnal, chattel, libations, prattling, stupefied, germinated

Part III: Chapters 19 - 20

Summary

Chapter 19 is titled "Smelling Like Bear." Henry didn't tell Brown about his experience with Douglass, fearing to disappoint him. He did know, however, that Brown generally didn't change his opinion about people as long as they were anti-slavery. Henry and Brown left Rochester, and Brown told Henry that Douglass had made him an important promise. They evaded any following federal agents by taking a train toward Chicago, but disembarking in the Allegheny Mountains near Pittsburgh. Brown shared with Henry that he grew up in the area. He told Henry that God had led him here because this was a place an army of ex-slaves fighting for freedom could hide and survive, but Henry didn't understand what he was planning.

They hiked to a nearby town and caught a train to Boston. On the train, Brown informed Henry that they would have to raise money by making speeches, and after they acquired enough they would return to gather up the army and "raise the hive in our fight against the infernal institution." Brown told Henry that they would have to stay quiet about their intentions. He also told Henry that he would have to tell potential donors about how bad slave life was. Henry didn't confess to Brown that his personal experience as a slave never involved being whipped or starved, but rather he only experienced hunger when with Brown. Brown told him to keep an eye out for federal agents, but Henry had no idea what to look for.

They were met by two wealthy white men at the station in Boston, and they were taken to a series of churches to give speeches. Henry found that while Brown was hated out West, here in the East he was treated like a celebrity. He was also surprised by the simplistic way the Pro-Slavery and Free State supporters were portrayed. Brown wasn't a compelling speaker, but his personality brought applause. Henry noted that there were rarely black people at these events.

Brown and Henry traveled to several cities. Henry noticed that whenever Brown was asked directly about his plans for fighting slavery, he avoided lying but also avoided answering directly. Brown told Henry privately that these people were good only for talking.

Life during the tour was good, with excellent food and feather beds. Henry received many gifts from white women. He knew to stay quiet around them, because he knew that acting too intelligent around white people wasn't wise. He acquired another set of boy's clothing by telling a woman he wanted to free his brother from slavery. After making a circuit of several cities, they returned to Boston without enough money to return to Iowa. Word came that a federal agent was in Boston to arrest Brown. There was talk of how Brown would defend himself or be protected, but Henry didn't trust these supporters to defend Brown with the necessary force. Again, Brown told Henry to keep his eye out for the agent in the crowd. Henry asked what an agent looked like, and

Brown told him that the man would smell like a bear because of the grease on his hair, and he would look weak and like he spent all his time indoors. Henry thought this description fit much of the audience. If he saw the agent, Henry was to wave the Good Lord Bird feather hidden in his bonnet.

When Brown stepped to the dais, he challenged any agent present to a fight. This frightened the audience into silence for a moment, but then they shouted their intent to attack anyone who went after Brown. Henry was afraid their would be violence. Brown gave his speech, and Henry spotted a man in the back who was not cheering like the rest and fit the description Brown had given him. Henry tried to move closer to the man, waving his feather, but Brown didn't notice because he had his eyes closed in prayer. Henry kept following the man waving his feather as the man moved toward Brown. Just as the man reached the stage, Henry shouted out in warning that he smelled bear. There was a tense moment until Brown recognized the man and shook his hand.

The man was Hugh Forbes, a military expert Brown had been waiting for. He and Brown met in private for three hours while Henry collected donations. Brown gave all their money to Forbes, who left. Brown told Henry that Forbes would train the men back in Iowa. The narrator reveals that Brown would never see the man again.

Chapter 20 is titled "Rousing the Hive." They traveled to Chester, Pennsylvania for two weeks. When they received a letter from Iowa saying Forbes never arrived, Brown realized he'd been swindled, but he wasn't discouraged. He said that the men didn't need training, and that righteousness was all they need. He told Henry they were going to Canada to rally the black fighters against slavery. Henry was glad to go, in part because he was looking forward to better food and he knew Canada was a safe place to be if Brown was killed. They took a train to Detroit and met up with the other members of Brown's army.

They took a wagon to Chatham, Ontario. Brown was cheerful and told them they were headed to a convention of a newly formed organization of black people from all over the continent who intended to make a resolution against slavery. Brown said this was where the war would really begin, and they would now have a true army with many soldiers.

Unfortunately, the convention was poorly attended. Frederick Douglass did not appear as expected. Nevertheless, many speeches were made and resolutions passed. When Brown finally took the podium, he roused the crowd mightily, but no one initially volunteered to sign up for the fight. One man asked what Brown's specific plan was, but Brown declined to tell it, explaining that there might be spies. One man, O.P. Anderson, volunteered. Again there was more demand for Brown to share his plan, since people weren't willing to risk their lives without more information. Brown was too stubborn to do so. Several men wondered why they should trust him, and Brown got angry. One woman in the room spoke up for Brown, saying she trusted him and believed in him. This was Harriet Tubman. She demanded to know whether they were willing to stand up and be men.

This made Henry feel guilty and ashamed. He remembered Sibonia's bravery and thought about his own attachment to comfort. Without intending to, Henry shouted that he would follow the Captain to the ends of the Earth. Tubman praised God for this, saying a child would lead them. Henry's outburst inspired all the men to sign up, despite the fact that as educated men they had no experience as fighters.

After the room was empty, Tubman told Brown she hoped he did have a plan, because a lack of one would cause suffering for nothing. She gave him much advice, especially about not deviating from a clear plan, but also having a backup plan in case of failure. This was the only time Henry ever saw Brown accept advice. Brown called Tubman "General." She gave him maps of travel routes through Virginia and Maryland and told him to destroy them after memorizing them. She promised to send him more soldiers as well as come herself. She reminded him repeatedly to be organized and stick to a determined date, because many people would depend upon it. Brown promised he would follow her advice.

As she went to leave, she stopped to talk to Henry. Henry tried to avoid her because he knew she probably could see through his disguise. She praised Henry for speaking out and inspiring the men. She told him she understood he was doing what he felt he had to do by posing as a girl, but he would feel better if he came clean before he died. Before she left, she repeated her warning to Brown to stick to the date he set and gave Henry her shawl. The narrator comments that despite all these promises Brown made to Tubman, he didn't heed her advice and it cost him her support in the fight.

Analysis

The speaking tour exposes the deep division between Brown's true believer heroic actions and the typical Yankee abolitionists who favored talk and donations to the cause. Henry saw that black slaves were more of an idea or myth to these people than real, and that black supporters didn't attend these events or churches. Real black voices were neither sought nor heard. Also, while Brown may have been a celebrity, the donations weren't as large as they could have been. Henry was being taken on this tour as a symbol almost exclusively rather than as a companion: he was Brown's good luck charm and a representative of the horrible experience of slavery. Unfortunately, Henry was in reality neither of those things.

Again the symbol of the Good Lord Bird feather makes an appearance. Henry was to wave the feather if he spotted a federal agent, who he had been told would look a certain way. Turned out that this warning failed because Brown was so consumed with prayer he didn't see it. At any rate, the person Henry perceived as slimy-looking enough to be a federal agent turned out to be a swindler—a different kind of enemy altogether.

Brown's idealist expectations are repeatedly defeated in these chapters. He didn't expect anything from the white folks but money, but there wasn't very much donated to the cause. The money he did raise ended up being stolen by a swindler. While he didn't expect money from former slaves, he did expect them to put their bodies on the line. But

this too was not forthcoming. In this case, however, their reluctance seemed a matter of wisdom and justified lack of trust rather than simple cowardliness. In fact, to accuse any escaped slave of being a coward would be the height of ignorance. Brown's arrogance and lack of empathy got in his way. It is only Henry and Harriet Tubman who inspired the black men to sign up for the fight. In other words, they were essentially shamed into it by two women.

Again, Henry was seen for who he was by a heroic black woman, Tubman. She is a partner to Sibonia in this department, and in fact she said they very same words that Sibonia did: "Be a man!" She is a kinder figure than Sibonia, however, and only gently reminded Henry that he would be a happier person if he could be himself.

The fact that Harriet Tubman is nicknamed "the General," and John Brown is called "the Captain" is interesting. Brown had previously noted that God would only grant him the title "Captain," and if this was so, then General Tubman garnered more respect than anyone in the novel. Her wisdom foreshadowed grave consequences for not following her advice, and it was her shawl that would come in handy for Henry down the road, akin to a sacred object.

Discussion Question 1

Why did so few black people attend Brown's abolitionist rallies?

Discussion Question 2

Who did Brown mean when he referred to bees and hives?

Discussion Question 3

What advice did Harriet Tubman repeatedly give to John Brown?

Vocabulary

lollygagged, deprivation, scandalous, finagle, proclamations, gnashing, tactic, surged, afflicted, pertinent, hellion, gladiators, sop, flophouse, percolating, froth, rostrum, conniption, deviate, capitulate, compromise, emancipator

Part III: Chapters 21 - 22

Summary

Chapter 21 is titled, "The Plan." Brown was unreasonably excited when they got back to Iowa, despite the fact that all the new recruits except for O.P. Anderson went home. Their promises to step up when they were called to action were taken as a given by Brown. He also was proud to have Harriet Tubman's support. Henry believed that Brown was losing touch with reality, but he had a difficult time making any plans to leave. The men trained with wooden swords and pistols. Brown spent some weeks writing letters to potential supporters. The letters he received back begged for information about his plans, which only served to irritate and infuriate him, since he knew that sharing his plans would be unwise.

Henry believed that Brown hadn't shared his plans because he was still waiting for God to tell him what to do. This went on for months, and both Henry and Brown became sick with fever. Some men got frustrated and left, but others came to replace them. The core group was firm. Henry cared for Brown during his months-long illness and learned much about Brown's previous business failures, debts and the deaths of some of his children.

There was some talk of disbanding. Kagi, an intellectual abolitionist and natural leader, kept the peace amongst the impatient and idle men. Finally Brown recovered and gathered them together to pray and share his plan. Some of the men were non-believers and didn't participate in the prayer. Brown told them he'd had long talks with God and began to preach, but Owen stopped him and told him to get to the point. He said he had studied long and hard, and that they were going to attack and wouldn't be forgotten. Kagi objected to Brown's vagueness. It was only when Kagi offered his own plan that Brown told them they would leave in two days. When Owen demanded to know where they were going, Brown said they were going to attack the government itself. Kagi responded that they couldn't attack Washington D.C., but Brown replied that Washington was where men talk, and they instead would have to strike at the "heart of the enemy." When Owen again demanded clarity, Brown told them they were going to Harpers Ferry in Virginia to break into the federal armory, steal the weapons and arm the slaves so they could free themselves. The men were silent in response. Henry felt that he wasn't the only one who thought Brown had gone mad.

One member of the army noted that Harpers Ferry was 800 miles away and heavily guarded. Brown responded that the Lord would protect them and the fact that he knew the mountains very well. Kagi wondered why they were diverting from their original mission: to steal slaves and agitate so the country would see the error of slavery. Brown responded that they were no longer going to steal slaves but rather get them to fight. When Kagi asked why they didn't attack Fort Laramie instead, which was more convenient and where they had more allies, Brown said that their acts in Kansas had been to fool the enemy into thinking that was their goal. The men continued to object, and Brown continued to respond with references to lopsided victories in history and his

studies. One man left, and Brown welcomed all of them to do so. He spent hours responding to all their objections and concerns with steady answers about how they would do it. He showed them his map, which impressed the men. He told them what he'd learned about the armory and its guards. He believed that with the element of surprise, they could take thousands of guns and escape into the mountains from which they could fight a guerrilla war. When Kagi asked why the slaves would join them, Brown pointed to Henry as an example. He predicted that they would move south, arming slaves as they went, and slave owners would abandon slavery in fear for their lives.

This full explanation of the plan convinced the men, which worried Henry because he felt that Brown's plans never seemed to work out. When Kagi pointed out that it could fail a thousand ways, Brown said they had already failed before God by allowing slavery to exist. Henry saw that Owen was uncharacteristically nervous. Again, Brown welcomed any doubters to leave with no hard feelings. He comforted them by saying that he knew thousands of slaves would join the fight in Harpers Ferry. When Owen pointed out that slaves didn't know how to use guns, Brown said he'd ordered pikes. He also promised to defend all of them with his life, dispelling their doubts with more details. Brown went to bed, saying that if they were still there in two days, they would ride together. Those who left must promise to forget all they'd heard.

Henry and O.P. Anderson were the only two remaining African-Americans. Henry noticed that Anderson looked afraid, so he sat with him. Anderson told Henry he didn't know why he was there, but when Henry asked if he planned to leave, Anderson responded that he was as crazy as Brown.

Chapter 22 is titled "The Spy." There were delays, and Brown's army didn't leave until months later. Brown decided to send John Cook ahead to Harpers Ferry to act as a spy. Kagi objected because Cook was a loudmouth, but Brown said he wouldn't be believed. Kagi recommended sending Henry to keep an eye on Cook and gather support in the black community there. Henry was not against this, in part because hiding out in Iowa was difficult and he didn't want to be there when Brown was killed by the cavalry. Henry still had no intention to fight, and he thought it would be easy to slip away from Cook if need be.

The narrator comments that Brown's men were rough, loyal, and committed to the cause, but they were independently minded. Brown would lecture the non-believers a bit, but he believed in free will. As long as they didn't cuss, drink or chew tobacco and were anti-slavery, that was all that was required. However, Brown was not good at judging people's inner nature. The narrator notes that his choice of where to send Cook and Henry was a foolish one because they were both selfish and unwise.

Brown stole a wagon and loaded it up with mining tools and crates labeled as mining tools with unknown contents. He told Cook not to drive too fast or bump them too much because they would blow up. He also warned Cook to keep his mouth shut about the plan. Cook and Henry departed for Virginia. As they left, Brown told "Onion" that he would miss "her" because "she" was both dutiful and their Good Lord Bird.

Cook and Henry arrived in Harpers Ferry quickly. Henry realized that Cook was good with people and could get information from them easily. The two of them got along well, but they were also both very self-centered. They looked for a house they could use as a headquarters. Cook didn't heed Brown's advice to lay low. They rented a farm six miles from town. Cook chose it because of its proximity to a woman he was interested in. Henry knew that Brown wouldn't like it because it was too visible to the neighbors.

They spent a few days readying the farm. Cook told Henry he was going into town to get information, and while he was gone Henry should "roust the coloreds." When Henry asked where to go, Cook didn't know. Henry didn't see him for three days. He considered running away, but didn't feel comfortable enough in the area to risk it. When Cook returned, he brought the woman he was seeing, and he wondered out loud in front of her why Henry hadn't done what he was told to do. Again, Henry said he didn't know where to go. Henry was irritated that Cook wasn't keeping his tongue about their plan. When Cook asked the woman where the black people were, the woman responded that they were "everywhere." Cook reminded her that she had to keep silent about his secret mission. She told some more specifics about neighboring plantations and the local free blacks. Henry decided to try the plantations first, because he didn't think the free blacks would be interested. The narrator notes that in the future he would find he was wrong about this.

Henry went to a nearby plantation. He saw a slave woman, and when she looked at him questioningly, he thought she knew he was really a boy. He greeted her and she finally responded. When he talked to her, she was evasive. When he told her he wanted to teach black people to read, she responded with shock, stated that he was trouble, and walked away. Henry hid and waited until a horse-driven coach drove up driven by a well-dressed black man. The man stopped and called out to Henry. The man demanded to know if he was sent by "the Blacksmith." Henry responded that he didn't know who that was. The man asked him for a password, and he didn't know what to say. The man asked if he was on "the gospel train" or the railroad, and finally just bluntly asked if Henry was a runaway. He demanded to know what Henry wanted. Henry said he'd come to warn them that a fight was going down at Harpers Ferry. The man responded that this was old news. He asked if Henry was a sissy, but Henry ignored the question. They continued to confusedly talk past one another, and Henry explained his purpose. This angered the man, who told Henry he was putting everyone in danger. He told Henry to go away and called him a fool. As the man went to leave, Henry told him that Old John Brown was on the way. This caught the man's full attention, but he called Henry a liar. Henry swore he was telling the truth, so the man told him to hide in the coach and they rode off.

Ten minutes later, the Coachman stopped the coach and pointed Henry up the trail to Chambersburg, telling him to go see Henry Watson and say the Coachman sent him. He would have to stay off the road for safety. He told Henry that he was causing trouble, and that he knew John Brown was dead because he heard it at church. Henry insisted on his truth. The Coachman continued to disbelieve him. He told Henry to tell "the Blacksmith" not to send anymore "packages." It became clear that the Coachman believed Henry was a troublesome and stupid passenger on the Underground Railroad

and was trying to move him along out of a sense of duty. Henry tried again to explain where he was staying and why. He repeated his purpose in a speech to the Coachman but stated that he would quit asking since he was encountering so much trouble. Henry angrily walked back toward Harpers Ferry. The Coachman turned the coach around and challenged him again. Finally, on the Coachman's prompting, Henry proved he could read. The Coachman wondered why Brown would send "a sissy" to do a man's job, and Henry once again began to leave in anger. The Coachman finally began to believe Henry's story was true and resolved to send someone to the farm to inquire. He warned Henry to keep quiet about the names he's mentioned. Henry warned the Coachman that he would tell Brown he was hindered in his mission. The Coachman continued to wonder why Brown would have such a strange plan. Henry responded that the Coachman didn't know John Brown and the Coachman left.

Analysis

Henry became close to the human aspects of John Brown during his illness. In a way, Henry learned too much: that Brown was just a human man with a series of business failures and debts behind him. He had lost some of his children to death, and he remembered them with guilt, especially Frederick's murder. Even more than before, he came to think Brown was delusional. And perhaps he was right that he was unrealistic, however, when Brown finally was forced to share his plan, Henry and the others were surprised to find he had actually thought it out rather completely. The only nagging flaw was the dependence upon the slave uprising to boost their numbers.

Without the hindsight of history, a reader might be persuaded that the plan wasn't so crazy after all, since Brown had thought it out so completely. He had maps, experience, and knowledge. The intelligence about the relatively unguarded armory was key, as was Brown's knowledge of the area. The unlikely optimism that spread after the full plan was revealed was a bit contagious, so that even the reader who knows what is to come will see why the small band continued onward in the face of such overwhelming odds. After all, most readers will be aware of other times in history that small groups of guerrilla fighters have succeeded. Brown was masterful at defeating all their objections.

Brown was pointedly unwilling to act as an autocratic leader, despite his reluctance to share his plans. While the reader might have doubted with Henry that the Old Man even had a plan, it turned out he did. His unwillingness to share the plan with others was simply precautionary so that spies would not get ahead of them. Also, Brown didn't threaten any of his followers—he trusted them enough to stay quiet and they were free to leave at any time. Despite his strong religious beliefs, he didn't demand his followers follow the same faith, aside from following a few simple behavioral rules.

The tension increases when yet again, there are delays. Brown's trusting nature in the face of characters of loose loyalty continues to pull a noose around them all. Why did Brown send the loudmouth Cook and the child Henry to Harpers Ferry to do such important duties? Was it because Brown was crazy or that he expected the best in

people? The bumbling here would be comical if it weren't so tragic at the same time. His trust that those who left would stay silent also seems to be an obvious mistake.

When Henry left, Brown reminded Henry that he himself was their Good Lord Bird, the symbol of their fight and good luck. Whether this was a foolish idea or tender-hearted would be left up to the future to decide. The fact that Brown trusted Henry to "rouse the slaves" into action is one thing. but the fact that Cook seemed to have the same trust seems incredible. However, there was a slyness to this plan. Henry was a child, and so therefore would not be expected to be the enemy. On the other hand, he must struggle to be believed by those who have worked and risked all along the way in the interest of the cause. When Henry met the Coachman, a man who was obviously a long-standing figure on the Underground Railroad, naturally cautious and responsible, Henry almost didn't succeed in persuading the man of the veracity of his mission. This miscalculation put the black folks at great risk, something that Brown consistently seemed oblivious to. It was only Henry's literacy that made him believable. All of this tension is somewhat relieved by the comic farce in the miscommunications between Henry and the Coachman. The back and forth between them is tragic and comic at the same time, since it is rife with danger and fear.

Discussion Question 1

How did John Brown convince his men that his plan was valid?

Discussion Question 2

What were some ways John Cook risked their mission?

Discussion Question 3

What did the Coachman believe Henry was doing there? How did Henry finally persuade him he was telling the truth?

Vocabulary

liable, sensible, confounded, tannery, congregated, boll weevil, volition, cursory, disgruntled, armory, premise, folly, feint, simultaneously, consolidated, fortification, unjustifiable, barbarous, primed, pikes, hindrance, notion, dutiful, fatback, joust, snuff

Part III: Chapters 23 - 24

Summary

Chapter 23 is titled, "The Word." Two days after Henry's encounter with the Coachman, an elderly black woman named Becky came to the farm where Henry and Cook were staying. She said the Coachman sent her, and she was selling brooms. She offered them to Cook, who didn't know how to respond. Cook went to make coffee while Henry talked to the woman. She chided him for going around causing danger to himself and others with his loose talk, especially pointing out that the Coachman's wife wasn't trustworthy. Henry told her he'd already been told all this by the Coachman. He avowed no knowledge about the Underground Railroad, which she called "the gospel train," and wasn't a runaway. He again told her he'd been sent forward to "hive the bees" by John Brown. She wondered why the great John Brown would send him. Henry replied that there were only two black people in Brown's army, and Brown wasn't sure about the other one.

Cook returned to the room and confirmed Henry's statements and told her Brown's army would be there in three weeks. She said that Brown was coming to the wrong place, and that the armory made it too dangerous. Cook replied that the armory was their purpose in coming to Harpers Ferry and that they would need local slaves to join the fight. Becky responded that Cook sounded crazy. He proved he was telling the truth by prying open one of the boxes of "mining tools" and showing her a box of brand new rifles. He told her how many they had and that more were coming—that they would have enough weapons for 2,000 insurrectionists.

Becky told Cook and Henry that most of the black people nearby were free, but all were connected to slavery in one way or another. Cook thought this meant they would be willing to fight. Becky still suspected a trick. Cook informed her that the date of the insurrection would be October 23. Henry was worried that Cook had taken a terrible risk in telling the date and reminded him they shouldn't be so trusting. Becky was indignant and informed them she was the one who should be suspicious. She told them they were endangering the Underground Railroad and that if Henry was lying, the Blacksmith would kill him. Cook informed her that "Onion" was like Brown's child.

Becky was confused and wondered what she should report back to the Coachman. She said the main Underground Railroad effort was led by the Rail Man, who worked on the literal railroad. She decided she couldn't trust them and went to leave, but then noticed Harriet Tubman's shawl on the coat hook. She asked where they got it. Henry said it was a gift from one of Brown's friends. Becky took the shawl and spread it out, staring at the design. She demanded to know where Henry met this person. Henry refused to tell her even though Cook said he should. Becky then asked what the shawl owner said. Henry reported that she said not to change the time, because she was coming herself with her people. Becky asked if she could keep the shawl, and Henry agreed, if it would help the cause. She told him it would help a great deal, and that God had blessed her.

She put it on and gathered up her brooms. She told Cook to stay quiet and wait a few days, because she would send word soon. She warned them that if anyone came around asking and didn't mention the Blacksmith or Rail Man right away, they should kill him because they have been exposed. She left.

Chapter 24 is titled, "The Rail Man." Cook got a job at a tavern near the armory and railroad depot. He worked long hours while Henry readied the farm. A week later, Cook told Henry a black man at the railroad wanted to talk to him. He wouldn't come to the farm, and Henry was concerned because the man didn't mention the Blacksmith as a password. Cook took Henry to meet the man after the train came in in the middle of the night. The man was a railroad porter, and had an hour to talk. When Henry asked if he was the Rail Man, he didn't answer. The man wondered who and what gender Henry was. When Henry said it didn't matter, the Rail Man insisted on knowing who he was dealing with. He chastised Henry for talking to the Coachman's wife about insurrection, but Henry replied that he only told her he knew how to read. The Rail Man told him that this was the same thing. He warned Henry that Brown was coming to the wrong town if he wanted to get black supporters, because there were so few who would join the fight. He believed that they would be too outnumbered in Harpers Ferry and Brown's army would be easily defeated. Not only would they kill Brown, they would severely punish all the region's black people in revenge. He voiced doubts about the plan and whether Brown was still alive, saying the whole idea was foolish. Henry wondered where the man heard the plan, and he said he heard it from "the General"—Harriet Tubman. This was the only reason he was talking to Henry. When Henry asked if she was coming, the Rail Man said he hoped not because he feared she would be killed. The Rail Man was angry primarily because the plan would lead to widespread death for black people, even those who did not follow Brown. Those who weren't killed would be sold south, and the Rail Man's own enslaved family members would be at risk.

Henry tried to reassure the Rail Man by telling him about the meeting in Canada and the support of the men who signed up, but the Rail Man believed they were all big talkers who wouldn't follow through. The Rail Man had little respect or trust in the black abolitionist leaders, thinking they knew nothing about what the fight was like on the ground. He declared his love for Brown, but that the plan was suicidal. When asked, Henry told him the true size of Brown's army, which led to bitter laughter. The Rail Man said that at least he wasn't only crazy one, and asked for the full plan. He agreed with the idea about getting guns from the armory, but wondered again about where the black fighters would come from. Henry tried to defend Brown, saying Brown had studied the idea for years. The Rail Man replied that black people had been studying it for a hundred years. The plan would fail, because getting the numbers required was impossible in the time given. In the end, he agreed to spread the word in Baltimore if Henry would give him some money to persuade the numbers men to help. He said that if Henry got him more money, he would get wagons to transport fighters from Baltimore. When Henry sent the signal, he would signal the fighters to move in. Henry was to tell Brown to stop the train when it came in and that the Rail Man needed money.

When Henry told Cook about the money, Cook didn't think it would be possible. The narrator comments that Brown would pay more than expected, but it would be a mistake and costly for everyone involved.

Analysis

Henry's encounters with Becky and the Rail Man bring the reader down to earth and gives the reader a reality check. Through sheer luck, Henry had come into contact with the Underground Railroad, but this social structure existed in a world of deep dangers, and Henry's blundering put everyone at real risk of their lives. Brown's contagious optimism, which Henry had taken on almost in spite of himself, came up sharply in contact with people who constantly already put themselves in danger for the sake of runaway slaves. Brown's plan was shown to be foolhardy and apparently unconscious of the consequences it would put onto real and innocent people. This is Brown's privilege showing: he was risking his life for others, surely. But he didn't seem conscious of who else he would take with him—the entire region's African American population that would be punished for his deeds, regardless of whether individuals supported him or not. Brown believed his long study and faith in God had brought him enough wisdom to defeat slavery. But he was naive, and the Rail Man knew it. Brown didn't realize that his years-long study didn't put him even close to the collective study put to the issue by African-Americans of the time, both free and slave. Brown's neglect in consulting that collective wisdom and arrogance would defeat him.

When Becky told Cook and Henry that even free African-Americans were connected to slavery, Cook thought this would mean they would want to fight. Henry and Becky knew that this actually meant they had to be more careful, to protect their enslaved loved ones. The Rail Man himself would risk losing his own wife and children. Again, Brown and Cook and the other members of Brown's army risked themselves. Brown risked his grown children who knew the consequences of their actions, but he appeared unconscious of or unwilling to consider the risks to innocents.

It is the powerful symbol of Harriet Tubman's shawl that finally brought the trust of the local Underground Railroad workers. While Henry was ignorant of what the design on it meant, Becky knew, and it was only through this talisman that they were willing to work with the cross-dressing child Henry and the single white man Cook.

The Rail Man (a literal man on the railroad and the Underground Railroad) made clear to Henry the danger he had put them all in by talking too much, making him understand that to tell people he knew how to read and wanted to teach others was the same as fomenting insurrection. Henry's literacy was equal to abolitionism.

Henry learned that Brown's optimism was misplaced, but the character of the Rail Man is equivalent to Brown in many ways. Like Brown, he was a man of action, and deeply suspicious of men of his own race who talked a lot about abolitionism but did nothing about it in a concrete sense. The problem for Brown was that he was unable to see the same lack of probable action in black abolitionists that he saw so clearly in those of his

own race. This was due to his unconscious inability to truly see black people for who they were (like he couldn't see Henry). The Rail Man was clear of vision, but could not say no to a plan from the mythical John Brown and Harriet Tubman. In this way, he joined the insane optimism of the fight.

Discussion Question 1

How was Becky persuaded that Henry and Cook were telling the truth?

Discussion Question 2

What did the Rail Man do for a living? Why was this helpful in his role on the Underground Railroad?

Discussion Question 3

What did the Rail Man promise to do? What was Henry to do to make this happen?

Vocabulary

sullied, braggart, fret, porter, locomotive, trestle, practical, vain, bondage

Part III: Chapters 25 - 26

Summary

Chapter 25 is titled, "Annie." Cook wrote to Brown about the Rail Man's request for money. A week later, they received a box from a black man in a wagon from Chambersburg labeled "mining tools" that had tools, supplies, $500 and a letter saying Brown's army would be there within a week. The men would arrive in twos and threes so as not to attract attention. Henry took the money to the Rail Mn at the appointed time.

Two weeks later, Brown arrived at the farm. When he asked Cook if he'd been staying quiet about their plans, Cook told him he had been. The first of the army to arrive were two women: Brown's daughter Annie and daughter-in-law Martha. They were both sixteen years old. Henry was told to work with them to keep the farm in order, and was expected to share living quarters with them. Henry avoided them because he didn't want his natural attractions to give away his true gender.

The other army members began to arrive. Henry avoided kitchen work by helping Brown organize his maps and papers. Brown asked Henry to confirm that Cook had truly kept quiet, and Henry tried not to discourage him by telling the full truth. Brown told "Onion" his alias and that he should tell people he was a miner. When Brown wondered about Henry's efforts to "hive the bees," Henry told him about the Rail Man, but avoided his troubling encounter with the Coachman's wife. Brown told Henry he expected black support in the thousands. Henry didn't have the heart to break Brown's enthusiasm. In reality, local black folks avoided Henry and wouldn"t speak to him, thinking he was putting them all in danger.

Henry continued to try to avoid Annie, despite her interest in fixing his hair and possibly buying him a wig. She also wanted to talk to him about religion. He slept very little and when he did, it was next to the stove.

Kagi met with the Rail Man and they furthered the plans for bringing black supporters to Harpers Ferry to join the fight. Henry developed a crush on Annie and forgot his plan to run away to Philadelphia. More and more men arrived, including two African-American college men from Ohio who had heard the plan through the grapevine.

Brown was not eating much or sleeping. Henry responded to his queries about "hiving" with what encouragement he could muster. The arriving men stayed out of sight in the house. Activities were busy and confused for six weeks. Henry spent time reading and discussing the Bible with Annie. Through these talks, Henry began to believe that gender and color of one's skin truly were meaningless compared to one's internal self. Annie asked Henry about his plans for the future. He confessed a desire to buy a fiddle and sing songs. Annie was surprised by this and asked Henry to sing to her, which he did. She was impressed by his skill and told him that if he were a boy she would marry

him. She kissed him on the cheek. Henry again resolved to avoid her, because he knew no good could come of his feelings.

A nosy neighbor, Mrs. Huffmaster, became suspicious of the goings on at the farm. She stopped by frequently, and bullied Annie with many questions. Her demanding queries made it clear that rumors were beginning to spread about what the residents of the farm were up to. Annie finally broke and told the woman to mind her own business. After the woman left, Annie cried, worried that her father would be angry that she had not kept her cool. Henry wanted to comfort her with a hug, but was afraid doing so would reveal his true feelings.

Chapter 26 it titled, "The Things Heaven Sent." A week passed and the Captain finalized the date for the insurrection, October 23, which was two weeks away. The men chafed under their confinement in the house. Kagi told Brown that keeping them cooped up so long was a problem, but Brown stayed firm.

Brown became anxious about the possible lack of black support, which was essential to his plan. He decided to meet with Frederick Douglass in Chambersburg, bringing "Onion" along with him. Despite Henry's previous experience with Douglass, he was happy to come along and get away from Annie. Brown visited with black supporters including Henry Watson the barber, who gave him gifts of weapons, food, drink and money they'd raised. Watson voiced concerns that black insurrectionists would not come to the fight. Brown reassured him, saying he would pass along his concerns to Douglass. Watson responded that he didn't believe Douglass was firm in his support. Watson's wife informed Brown that they had gathered five men who were willing to fight, including one of their sons. Brown told her God would be with them. The narrator comments that this group of men never had a chance to join them because once things got going, the only thing they could do was run from white vengeance.

The narrator notes that much has been written in the historical record about the meeting between Douglass and Brown, but that the other witnesses who were there died before they could recount their version of events. Henry's view of the event differs from Douglass's future account.

Brown, disguised as a fisherman, went to meet with Douglass in a quarry. The meeting was supposed to be secret, but as Brown, Henry and Kagi traveled through the darkness, they were greeted by many hidden black supporters who offered them words of encouragement and supplies. This moved Brown even though none of them pledged to fight with him. The narrator notes that many black people were driven from Chambersburg after Brown's insurrection, no matter whether they supported him or not. Brown felt their support and love was a sign that God would support them too. They found Douglass accompanied by a black man he called "Emperor." Brown revealed the full plan to Douglass. Douglass expressed doubt, but Brown replied that they had spoken of it for years and the plan could work. Douglass responded that what should be done was different from what could be done. Brown pleaded with Douglass, knowing his support was crucial. Douglass declared the plan was suicidal and refused. Henry saw that Douglass was a man of words and speeches, not action.

The Emperor joined Brown and the others on the wagon. The narrator notes that Brown never spoke to or about Douglass ever again. Henry saw that Brown's disappointment in Douglass was the great heartbreak of his life. Brown knew his mission would ultimately fail because of the lack of large-scale black support, but would fight anyway because of his trust in God.

For the first time, Henry felt God in his heart, but he didn't share this with Brown, because he didn't want to tell Brown that God was telling him to run away. Henry felt he'd known all along that Douglass wasn't up to the task, just as he knew he himself wasn't up to the task of loving Annie as a real man.

Analysis

With the arrival of Annie and Martha, Henry again had to confront his precarious position as a male in disguise. He was approaching puberty now, and hiding his true gender was a growing struggle. Like the young teenager he now was, Henry had a more and more difficult time hiding his feelings, and what many readers will interpret as a crush on Annie felt like true love to Henry. It was through her that Henry began to have faith that race or gender truly were incidental to one's inner reality. He was torn between a new optimism and his need to hide who he was for his own safety.

Brown's push to "hive the bees" finally hit reality full in the face. Henry had managed to get only one active helper in getting black fighting support, the Rail Man, and though much money had been given toward that effort, it was only one avenue of support. Brown's trip to Chambersburg to meet with Douglass was obviously crucial, but because of foreshadowing the reader knows Douglass would fail to step forward and bring the full support of what was clearly the country's most powerful black man. The two men differed: action versus words; fighting to the death versus survival. Two views can be argued: Was Douglass being a truly wise representative of his people, unwilling to sacrifice his own or other's lives in a plan sure to fail? Or was he a coward? Historically speaking, this is an open question. It could be argued that with more rigorous planning and the full support of black people, both free and enslaved, the insurrection might have succeeded. In any case, Brown had to face the reality of Douglass' well-earned sense of responsibility. A slave who escaped as Douglass did must have had an extremely well-developed survival instinct. It was, as is seen in Henry throughout the novel, the only thing a slave could really do: survive at all costs. When Brown asked the slaves and the free blacks to revolt, he was asking them to deny this strong instinct in a plot that could surely be seen as suicidal. The question then became: would that sacrifice be worth it? Brown believed so, because he believed that he was on a mission from God. But directly after Douglass' refusal, Henry had a religious epiphany for the first time—he believed that God was speaking to him, saying he should run away. So who was right? Brown or Henry? The religious quandary of diametrically opposite and strong directives from God is the problem all religious people must struggle with.

So, if the plan was doomed to fail, why were so many black supporters still coming forth with gifts of weapons and food and money? It seems contradictory, but just because so

many of the free blacks weren't willing to risk themselves or their loved ones didn't mean they didn't see Brown as a sort of saint or prophet deserving of prayers and gifts. In this way, he truly was a religious figure, a figure of faith. He was acting in concordance with his beliefs despite the insurmountable realities of failure.

Henry again was surrounded by examples of manhood he may or may not have emulated. He believed a "real man" would love Annie openly and without fear. He could not find a way to do so, and the fact that he was disguised as a girl was just one reason why. The other was that he was not ready to be a man in general, because he was still a child. The tension there is palpable. He also saw the contrast between Douglass, who denied Brown his support, and the Emperor, who gave it despite knowing the suicidal nature of his mission. Self-sacrifice—risking one's life for honor and a good cause—is what a man does. While Douglass may have been taking a wise course, it was the Emperor who could be admired for taking a stand as a true man.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Henry avoid Annie whenever he could?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Douglass refuse to support Brown's plans? Do you agree or disagree with Douglass' refusal? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Brown continue his quest despite signs indicating that he does not have the support he needs to succeed?

Vocabulary

vittles, gruff, pious, obedient, dowdy, lest, ante, conglomeration, hominy, innards, lieu, majestic, brigadier, varmint, diligent, solace, minced, caboodle, dander, uncouth, fixated, rampage, ruination, suicide, surge, traces, silhouette, jibs

Part III: Chapters 27 - 28

Summary

Chapter 27 is titled, "Escape." When Brown and the others returned to the farm, they found that Mrs. Huffmaster had reported them to the sheriff, who had come by with accusations that they were abolitionists. The sheriff had declared his intent to return with deputies to search the house.

Henry felt that things were beginning to unravel. Brown looked tired and worried. Some of the men had written their goodbyes to their families, and their mothers had written to Brown demanding he send their boys home to safety. Martha was pregnant and upset. Some white supporters had written letters demanding their money back. Rumors had reached the federal government, and many of their new weapons had proved to be poorly made. The men were restless. Brown decided they would attack the armory in four days, a full week before the planned date. Kagi objected, saying that this would mean the loss of any supporters who knew the later date. Brown responded to Kagi's anxiety by telling him to trust in God. Kagi reminded Brown he was an atheist, but Brown replied that God believed in him. Kagi wondered about Harriet Tubman, but Brown revealed that he had received a letter saying she was too ill to come. Brown instructed Henry to go to the Rail Man with the news about the new date. Kagi wanted to go instead, but Brown told him it was too risky, and the authorities wouldn't bother with a "colored girl." He told the men to ready the weapons. He also shared a plan for "Onion," Annie and Martha, escorted by one of his sons, to leave for Philadelphia before the insurrection began. They would then go on to upstate New York to the Brown home. Henry was happy to hear this information.

Henry went to the rail yard, found the Rail Man, and shared the news. The new date upset the Rail Man, but he said he would do his part if they stopped the train before it got to the bridge. He told Henry to use the password, "Jesus is walking." If they did so, the Rail Man would call on those he brought to come out and pull up the tracks so the train couldn't escape. This was the full extent the Rail Man would participate, but nothing would happen without the password. He told Henry he shouldn't die in a woman's dress and that he hoped they never met again.

When Henry returned to the farm, everything was in an uproar of preparation. Henry tried to say goodbye to Brown, who ignored him. Henry noticed that Annie was depressed. When he asked her about it, she said she had a terrible sense of foreboding. She was glad, however, that Henry would join them when they left. Henry tried not to show his joy. His secret plan was to leave the group at Philadelphia, believing he should stay away from Annie, knowing his love for her was doomed. He was worried, however, they would be stopped before they got there, and so planned to hide under the hay in the wagon. Brown said goodbye to "Onion," saying they would see each other again when "her people" were free.

Henry hid in the wagon and they left. Annie spoke to him about future plans, which made Henry want to reveal his true feelings and gender. He wanted to be a man, but felt he was too cowardly to do so. He thought about the fact that his lie was similar to the front black people had to put forward all the time, hiding their true selves and needs. He remembered Sibonia and Libby's bravery when they were executed. He also remembered that when Sibonia told the faltering prisoner to "be a man!" he stood up and faced his death bravely. He thought about how Brown might have been insane, but he was true to his nature as a good, godly man. Henry felt regret that he was too cowardly to be true to his own nature, and that Brown was standing up for Henry's people while Henry fled. Annie cried in regret because she forgot to share a good omen with her father. When Henry attempted to comfort her, she explained that omens were important in times of trouble, unlike feathers or passwords. Henry realized he'd forgotten to tell Brown the password given him by the Rail Man. He was afraid to run back to Harpers Ferry, however, because they had already traveled for hours and he might be caught by slave catchers. He felt terrible that he was no better than any of the other black men who were too afraid to join the fight. He realized he couldn't go on pretending, and let Brown be killed because of his failure. He couldn't bear the guilt, thinking it would be far worse than never being loved by Annie.

Henry burst out from his hiding spot and demanded the wagon stop. Annie tried to tell him he couldn't go back because he would be caught, but he refused and ripped off the bonnet and the dress down to his waist. This shocked Annie. He told her he loved her and would never see her again. He jumped off the wagon and ran toward Harpers Ferry.

Chapter 28 is titled "Attack." Henry caught a ride back to Harpers Ferry with an old black man. It was very late at night when Henry got to the farm, and he found that most of the men had already left. Only a few men including Owen remained to guard the guns for the black fighters. Henry told them they were making a mistake, but Owen stayed firm. Henry found that he only had fifteen minutes until the train arrived. He ran at top speed to catch it. As he ran, he saw the train stop. He heard the Rail Man ask Oliver for the password, and Henry screamed it from a distance, but no one heard him. The Rail Man blew out the lantern and went toward the office. Oliver called for the Rail Man to stop, but he didn't. Oliver shot him in the back, which made the Rail Man the first to be killed at Harpers Ferry. The narrator notes that the Rail Man would live longer than Oliver, since he would hang on for 24 hours, and though he spoke to many people before he died, he never told of his role in the event.

Henry blamed himself, but the narrator notes that years later he would feel regret but also partly blame the Rail Man for his impatience. Oliver told Henry there was no time for self-blame. Over Oliver's shoulder, Henry saw sixty or seventy black people get off the train and run back toward Baltimore, believing they were escaping a trap. Henry felt a sense of impending doom.

Analysis

After all the warnings from Harriet Tubman, Brown did decide to move up the date. This was another nail in the coffin, surely. However, Brown didn't have much of a choice in the matter. Their secret was out, and unless they moved up the date, they were sure to be arrested and no attack would come whatsoever. The fact that Tubman herself was too ill to join them seems mysterious: there isn't enough information to know if it was because of Douglass or if she truly was ill. Certainly, the fact that the original date had spread meant that doing the attack a week early would catch any spies unawares. The Rail Man alone followed through on his promises, but was too nervous or impatient to give the plan a chance. As a result, the dozens of black supporters they might have had disappear into the darkness.

Henry came up fully into a confrontation with what it means to "be a man." The Rail Man warned him that he shouldn't die in a dress. Brown sent him away with the women to safety, which he was originally glad for, not because he got to be with Annie, but because he valued his safety above everything. At least, he thought he did, but because of his failure to share the password with Brown, he couldn't stand the guilt and had to return for the battle. This failure was an accident that led to the Rail Man's early death and the loss of supporters, but whether that would have changed the ultimate outcome of the battle is an open question. Certainly people would have died no matter what Henry did. Before he remembered this fact and returned to Harpers Ferry, however, Henry was already consumed with the internal conflict about his deception. He wanted to reveal his true self to the girl he loved, even if their love was doomed. He wanted to honor the memory of Sibonia and "be a man" and die honorably. However, he also knew he wasn't alone in this battle to be himself, because he was conscious of the fact that in his world black people in general were not allowed to "be men" and be themselves, but had to always reflect what their white oppressors demanded them to be. They had to hide their true feelings or suffer terrible consequences. In the end, Henry broke and revealed himself to Annie, told her his true heart and nature, and ran off. However, he didn't abandon his disguise overall, and whether Annie really understood what had happened is not answerable, because he did not wait to find out.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Brown move the date up a week?

Discussion Question 2

What did Henry plan to do as he escaped with the girls? What caused him to abandon this plan?

Discussion Question 3

Who was the first to die at Harpers Ferry? What caused his death?

Vocabulary

arsenic, ferret, varmint, snit, pep, glum, transactions, azaleas, vise, mirage, satchel, shrivel, timber

Part III: Chapters 29 - 30

Summary

Chapter 29 is titled, "A Bowl of Confusion." Henry followed Oliver and Taylor with their two prisoners to the armory. The armory had already been taken and communications with the outside world had been cut. Brown was glad to see "Onion," seeing his appearance as a good omen. They had taken several prisoners. Brown issued orders and looked satisfied because they had succeeded in taking Harpers Ferry.

Brown asked if they had seen the Rail Man, and Henry answered without telling him that the man was shot. Brown asked if the Rail Man "hived the bees." Henry told him he saw "a bunch." O.P. and the Emperor were especially interested in his answer, wondering whether they ran away. Henry responded that there was a misunderstanding and confusion. Just as he said this, two white men knocked on the outside door. Brown announced his name and his purpose, "to free the Negro people." They laughed in response, disbelieving him, asking if he shot the black man in the railroad yard and wondering where the guard was. They told Brown through the door that there were reports that a black girl was the shooter. Brown turned to "Onion" and asked about the shooting. He told the men he would free the guard when they "let the Negro people go." He showed his rifle out the window and ordered them to tell their superiors who he was and that he had hostages. They continued to think he was joking until one of the hostages told them it wasn't a joke, and that there were a hundred armed black men in the building and he was a prisoner.

Within ten minutes, there were fifteen men outside, most of them drunks from the nearby tavern, a few of them armed. They argued about what to do. They tried the various buildings in the armory and found that all the buildings were occupied and locked. They insisted that Brown free the guard or they would get the deputy. Brown told them to do so.

Stevens, who was tired of all the talking, fired his gun out the window. He shouted their mission, and demanded food or they would kill the prisoners. Brown asked why he said this, and Stevens responded that he was hungry. The men outside ran off, yelling. The town began to wake up, and the townspeople were confused about what was happening. As the workers arrived at the armory, they too were taken prisoner, until there were nearly fifty of them.

Brown delayed, hoping for the arrival of the black insurrectionists. The narrator notes that this was a mistake that cost him. Brown decided to let the train employees go, and then lost another 200 potential hostages when the train left. Steven noted that these people would spread the word about what was happening. Brown didn't mind, saying he wanted the world to know. By noon, the crowd began to get annoyed, and wild rumors began to spread. The truth, that a bunch of mostly white men had taken over the country's largest armory to help free black people, was too strange to be believed.

A finely dressed emissary arrived to talk, but was driven away by gunshots. An old man came and knocked on the door. He asked if Brown was who he said he was and asked for the release of his younger brother. After some question about which of the hostages was the correct man, he was released. The crowd continued to grow, and some militia men showed up. Everyone inside the armory were hungry, so Brown proposed to trade one prisoner for food. When the crowd heard who he wanted to release, they jokingly refused, but then agreed. The man went out, brought back food and whiskey, and stayed.

The news that the Rail Man was dying hit the crowd, and they finally began to believe the armory had been taken by a "Negro insurrection." This changed the mood of the crowd to anger. Several armed townspeople charged one of the unguarded buildings. A firefight began.

Brown told his men to remain calm and keep shooting. More and more soldiers arrived. Kagi worried they would be trapped, so Brown sent some men to cover one of the bridges. He sent Stevens, O.P. Anderson and "Onion" back to the farmhouse to retrieve the black fighters he believed would be there ready to join the fight.

Henry was both happy to leave and also unwilling to say goodbye to Brown. He also worried that they would be killed by the angry armed crowd outside. He felt very afraid and began to pray aloud. Kagi warned Brown to leave before it was too late, but Brown ignored him, in part because "Onion's" prayers appeared to him to be a good sign. Henry and his two cohorts shot their way out of the armory out the back and escaped under fire. As they left, they could see the battle and dying men in the armory yard. Henry asked O.P. if they would return, and they both agreed they would not. They ran after Stevens.

Chapter 30 is titled, "Un-hiving the Bees." On the way to the farm, they ran into Cook, who told him they had "hived some bees!" He led them to a schoolhouse where a couple of Brown's men had gathered two white men and ten bewildered looking slaves. He told the newcomers that one of the hostages was Colonel Lewis Washington, a great-nephew of George Washington, and a slave plantation owner. Brown's men gave the slaves pikes and rifles, who didn't seem very happy to get them. They were confused, but most took the weapons. Henry noticed that the Coachman was among them, but realized it was better to pretend not to recognize him. The Coachman decided to stand and fight, taking a pike and asking for a pistol. When Washington chastised him, the Coachman gave his former master a terrible look and told him he would never again take orders from the man. This shocked Washington, who tried to say he'd been good to the Coachman and his family. The other men had to restrain the Coachman from murderously attacking Washington in response. Stevens threatened to shoot the Coachman if he acted in revenge, declaring that they must act for liberation.

Stevens told them they had to return to the armory, which worried everyone, who didn't want to have to fight their way back into a siege. Stevens told them his plan, which was to take Washington's coach down the hill. Washington was taken at gunpoint, and told he had to offer to exchange himself and his slaves for the white prisoners. As the coach

raced back to the Ferry with several black men clinging to the outside, Henry and O.P. resolved to jump off at the bottom of the hill, but couldn't when the coach scattered a crowd of militia there who fired their guns at them. The Coachman stuck to the plan, and they were allowed through. When they came into sight of the armory, they saw there were hundreds of militia men and they were riding into a trap.

Henry's terror caused him to feel the presence of Jesus in his heart. He resolved to tell Brown about his revelation, but believed he wouldn't get the chance. Henry and O.P. said goodbye to one another. O.P. deliberately allowed himself to fall into the river as they crossed the bridge, and Henry noted to himself that this was the second black man to die for Brown's scheme. They saw many dead men in the yard and managed to get inside one of the buildings. Henry saw the fighters looked exhausted. Steven gave Washington's sword to Brown. Brown used the moment to declare that as president of the provisional government all the slaves were now freed.

The eight ex-slaves looked confused at this, and Brown invited them to join the fight if they liked. When Brown asked what happened to O.P., Stevens said he went to gather more supporters. Brown shook all their hands and welcomed them, not noticing their grim mood. Henry believed it likely that the Brown supporters who were outside the armory had probably fled, and he didn't blame them. Brown was confused and unhappy to see that "Onion" had returned. He put his hand on Henry's shoulder and said he was glad "she" was there to witness and tell the tale of "her" people's liberation for posterity. He also declared that he had never lost a battle when "Onion" was there. Henry remembered this wasn't true at Osawatomie. Brown prayed in thanksgiving. Henry interrupted by saying he was thirsty and "feeling Jesus." This stopped Brown from making a lengthy prayer and made him happy for Henry. He held up the sword and announced that "Onion's" religious conversion would serve as a symbol of inspiration for their fight. There was no talk of escaping. Everyone, including the freedmen, prepared their weapons and prepared themselves for death.

Analysis

There is a mix of tragedy and comedy in these chapters, which make up the climax of the novel. The fact of the Rail Man's death still seemed unreal in the face of Brown's largely unbelievable audacity. The sleepy town took hours to realize what had actually happened, because it was just so unbelievable that the mythical John Brown had taken the armory. In this way, the reader sees that all the loose talk that may have occurred around town was not a problem, because no one appeared to have believed it possible anyway. There is humor in disbelieved identity, big talk threatening hostage death in exchange for food, and hostages trying to get released by pretending to be someone else. It was only when the crowd began to believe that the insurrectionists in the armory were African-American that things got serious. White criminality could be taken light-heartedly by the crowd. But a slave insurrection was no joke.

Again there are moments when the narrator expresses hindsight about how things might have been more successful. If Brown hadn't released the rail workers, and the passengers were taken hostage as well, might the outcome have been different?

Henry's confrontation with what he felt was certain death brought him to a religious awakening. Whether this was a sort of deathbed conversion under duress or whether it could be seen as a heartfelt expression of faith is open to interpretation. On the one hand, Henry was still seeking a way to escape death, but on the other, he didn't take any of the opportunities that came his way. Henry as "Onion" continued to be seen by Brown as a good omen, a harbinger of victory.

The Coachman's willingness to take up arms and expose his true self to his former master was a moment of victory and liberation, but it was only the hands of a white man who restrained him from taking vengeance as well. When he was restrained from killing his former master, the two of them embody the ultimate conflict between slave and slave master. The master believed he had been merciful and kind to his slave, while the slave was finally freed to speak and act on his own behalf. It might occur to the reader that if Brown had succeeded truly in "hiving the bees," the bloodbath would be extreme, because there would not be enough philosophical fighters to restrain the large numbers who would seek righteous vengeance on those who had abused them for their entire lives.

The symbolism of George Washington's sword being taken from a slave master and passed into Brown's hands is apparent. Brown declared himself "president" of the "provisional government"—which was again the height of audacity and yet also tragic in its denial of reality.

Discussion Question 1

Why didn't the townsfolk believe John Brown when he declared who he was and why he had taken the Ferry?

Discussion Question 2

What caused the Coachman to want to kill his former master?

Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion of Henry's religious conversion?

Vocabulary

slunk, arsenal, taffy, facets, affirmative, mirthful, carbine, wheedled, sabotaged, emissary, boisterous, unruly, brandished, sanctimony, strutted, befuddled, gingerly,

flummoxed, stammered, retribution, fixated, penitentiary, ferocious, bodacious, emeritus, brethren, wistful, trance

Part III: Chapters 31 - 32

Summary

Chapter 31 is titled, "Last Stand." After two hours, the militia outside the armory realized they'd been tricked into allowing more insurrectionists and hostages to enter the armory without any trade coming. When they demanded to know about the colonel and how many hostages would be released, Brown responded that none will. Two hundred militia marched into the yard and opened fire on the engine house. Brown's army held fast despite the building being blown part around them, and kept firing. They drove the militia back outside the gate. The militia was disorganized, angry, and drunk. Some fled and more came to replace the dead. The militia attempted to enter the gate again and again was driven back. Many were killed. Any who entered the yard were shot at by Brown's men.

The mayor, who was trying to broker a truce, was shot. This enraged the mob outside. After a time, there was silence outside the gate. Brown believed they had neutralized the enemy. But then 400 militia charged in. Kagi and another of Brown's men were driven from the building they occupied into the river and killed. One member of the army got into a standoff and was arrested. The narrator notes he would hang a month later. Various of Brown's men were shot dead, sometimes repeatedly. When the first black insurrectionist was killed, the mob desecrated and cut apart the corpse.

As the building became fully surrounded, Henry experienced a religious epiphany, as he stared down death or worse. Every black man in Brown's army knew they would be tortured before they were killed. Henry called on Jesus, pulled the Good Lord Bird feather out from under his bonnet, and prayed.

Brown refused to accept defeat. He ordered his son Watson to take a prisoner out with him and try to parley a trade of hostages for black men. He expected more black fighters to arrive and cover their escape to the mountains. Stevens disagreed, saying it was too late. He was told to have faith and continued to follow Brown's orders. Brown shouted out his intentions to negotiate a trade of hostages for safe passage for their "Negro army." When they opened the door, two members of Brown's army were shot, Stevens and Brown's son Watson. Watson managed to crawl back inside to his father, who knelt over him in disbelief. Brown told his dying son that he'd done his duty and that he should die like a man. It took ten hours for him to die.

Chapter 32 is titled, "Getting Gone." Night came and the militia retreated out of the yard with the wounded Stevens. The U.S. Army arrived. The lieutenant in charge was an officer that knew Brown from their encounters in Kansas. He demanded their surrender; Brown again demanded freedom for the slaves. When he recognized Brown as the real John Brown, the officer informed Brown that he had no choice but surrender since he was surrounded by 1200 troops. Brown again countered that he would not, but was willing to exchange prisoners for safe passage for him and his men across the bridge.

The officer said this was impossible, so Brown concluded their parlay. The officer was stunned by Brown's stubbornness.

The slave owner hostages began to speak with hostility to Brown for the first time, telling him he would hang for treason. The Emperor threatened to shoot Colonel Washington, who was especially insulting, but Brown talked him down. Henry began to think about what would happen to the black people in the room, especially those who joined the fight with enthusiasm. They looked to the Emperor for leadership, but he looked tense and defeated. Finally, he gathered up the black fighters and told them Brown's plan for first light, which was to distract the troops so the black fighters could escape out the back window. He told them this was their choice, and if they were caught they should claim to be hostages. Henry talked to the Emperor, wondering what he himself should do. The Emperor told him plainly that they would all hang. Henry said that the white hostages didn't really know who he was, and he shared his true gender with the Emperor. He asked the Emperor to help him acquire some male clothing off one of the dead slaves so he could escape with the others. The Emperor wondered if he wouldn't rather die like a man, but Henry protested his age and the fact that he hadn't lived as a man yet, so it didn't seem fair that he would have to die like one. The Coachman and the Emperor talked to one another. They laughed at him a little, which annoyed Henry, but the Coachman gave Henry his clothing because he planned to stay and fight it out. The Emperor also gave him a worn out Good Lord Bird feather, but Henry told him he'd already got his own. The Emperor insisted he took it. The clothing was way too big for him, and Henry wondered if this wouldn't be suspicious. The Emperor told him that if he got stopped, he should say he was owned by a nearby slave owner who had a slave about his size.

At dawn, Brown gave the order and they began to fire toward the troops as a distraction for those who needed to escape. Four of the black fighters escaped out the back window, including Henry. They were immediately caught by the U.S. Cavalry. When questioned, they all claimed they were hostages and thanked the soldiers for saving them. One soldier was suspicious of Henry, and insisted on giving him a ride back to his master. Henry directed him to the farm. There they found O.P. disguised as a slave. O.P. was shocked by the sight of Henry in male clothing, and didn't immediately respond when the soldier asked who owned the farm. Owen stepped out and confirmed Henry and O.P.'s claims to be slaves. Owen too was shocked by Henry's clothing, and accidentally called him "her." This amused the soldier, who thought that Owen couldn't tell black people apart, chastising him for treating his slaves poorly, as opposed to how they did down in Alabama. The soldier believed this mistreatment was what had caused them to have an insurrection in Harpers Ferry.

When the soldier left, everyone remaining at the farm packed up and rode away. O.P. and Henry soon separated from the white men, believing they would be safer on the Underground Railroad. Two of the white men were caught a few days later, while the rest escaped.

O.P. and Henry were separated for caution and escaped via the Underground Railroad. Henry never saw O.P. again. Henry went into hiding for four months. While in hiding with

an abolitionist couple named George and Connie Caldwell, he heard what happened at Harpers Ferry. He heard that just minutes after Henry and the three others escaped, the Cavalry broke into the building and killed many, including the Coachman and Brown's sons. The Emperor survived only to be hung later. The army attempted to kill Brown, but he survived, despite having been run through with a sword. He was jailed for trial.

The white townsfolk in the region went into a state of panic and retribution, cracking down on all the black people living there. People were jailed and questioned randomly. Slave owners were terrified of being killed by their slaves. Many were sold south and many ran away. Gun purchases skyrocketed. There was some sabotage on plantations, and Henry wondered why the saboteurs didn't step up during the insurrection, but Caldwell disagreed with his regret, saying Brown was doing more good for the cause in jail than he did before.

The jailed members of Brown's army were being held in the same town where Henry was hiding. Because of all the letter writing and visitors, Brown had become a celebrity prisoner. The narrator notes that more people became abolitionists in the last six weeks of Brown's life than all the time he spent making speeches in New England or fighting in Kansas. White abolitionists had to give their lives for people to pay attention and listen. The idea of slave insurrection terrified them, and Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry was setting the stage for the war to come. Brown was promptly convicted at trial, and awaited execution.

Henry asked Caldwell if he should move on to Philadelphia, but he was told that things were still too hot, since Brown was still alive. Henry persuaded Caldwell to arrange a meeting between him and Brown in jail. This was arranged by the jailhouse janitor, and the night before Brown was to die, Henry went to see him. He was given a train ticket to Philadelphia and told not to return to the Caldwells. Henry posed as an assistant to the janitor and he went to see Brown. Brown's cell door was unlocked and Henry realized that Brown was favored by his jailers. Henry asked him why he didn't escape, but Brown responded that he wouldn't do that because he was the luckiest man in the world, having completed his purpose before God. Henry believed that Brown was delusional and told Brown that the slaves didn't rise up, and it was Henry's own fault. He began to tell Brown about the Rail Man. Brown stopped him and answered that the "hiving" would probably take years to happen, that the light would spread. He also told "Onion" that it did his heart good to see that he had accepted God into his heart. Brown prayed for a while. Henry asked Brown why he never asked about why Henry dressed as a girl. Brown gave a genuine, full smile, the first Henry had ever seen him give, and realized that Brown knew he was a boy all along. Brown told Henry that whatever he was, he should be it fully, that he loved him and should look in on Brown's New York family.

Brown pulled out a Good Lord Bird feather from his pocket and told Henry how the Good Lord Bird flies alone, looking for the right tree, and when he finds the tree, he pecks at it until it falls down and fuels the earth for other trees. He gave Henry the feather and sat down to write more letters. Henry left and never saw Brown again. As he went, he saw a long line of soldiers going to prepare for Brown's execution. He heard later that no people of color were allowed within three miles of the hanging. Thousands

of soldiers assembled to watch his death, including Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. The narrator muses about the war to come.

Henry and the janitor rode past an African-American church and heard the congregants singing loudly about Gabriel's trumpet, John Brown's favorite song. As the song rang out into the sky, they saw a Good Lord Bird circling around, looking for a tree to fell and feed the earth so others could grow.

Analysis

Most readers will know from the beginning of the novel that the Harpers Ferry attack was a failure, and therefore this denouement at the end is not a surprise. In this way, Brown's insistence on his cause has been the height of tragedy, doomed to fail and cause much death. However, in the end, Brown seemed more conscious of the disproportionate consequences waiting for his black fighters, and gave them the opportunity to escape. They were destined not to be treated with the dignity given a soldier, but rather to be mutilated and tortured before death. The first black man to be killed suffered exactly this fate, and his body was mutilated after his death. This made clear the savagery doled out to the slave willing to revolt, in opposition to Brown and Brown's men, who were simply treated as fighters for an incorrect philosophy. So Brown's offering of escape to those who wished it was compassionate.

Amongst this compassion, however, there was the fact that Brown clung to the unrealistic idea that his black "bees" were still on their way to join the fight. Henry must have felt a lot of guilt about this, but perhaps his youth prevented him from dwelling upon it, until much later when he went to see Brown in his jail cell. He found then that Brown had acquired (if he didn't have it all along) a great perspective about the long game. Brown realized he would achieve his goal in death, and that the fight had only begun. He would not witness the defeat of slavery himself, but he could see that he had set the fight on its way. Henry didn't need to feel guilty, because the defeat of slavery would be achieved, and black people would take up arms in the war to come.

The theme of "being a man" comes up several times in these chapters. When Brown's son Watson was wounded and dying, Brown told him he had done his duty well and should die "like a man," which he did after several hours. Dying like a man in this case apparently means having fought for an honorable cause and not terrifying the others with his obvious pain. When Henry asked for male clothing so he could escape, the Emperor wondered if he didn't want to "die like a man" with the rest of them instead. Henry rightly protested that he had never been allowed to live a single moment as a man, so it didn't seem fair to have to die like one. This is the first time the reader hears a reasonable argument spoken aloud by Henry about his gendered disguise. His disguise began as an accident, but he continued to dress as a girl to protect himself as a young person from the obvious terrors of what it meant to be a young black man in his environment. Then, when asked to "die like a man," he was correct in pointing out the unfairness of that request. He was too young to die for any cause, no matter how righteous. He was not a coward, but a boy who wished to become a man. In the end,

when he saw Brown for the last time, Henry found that Brown had seemingly known all along of his true gender. This brought a whole new perspective to how Brown had treated him: accepting his supposed cowardice as rational and necessary in the face of the reality they lived in. Henry had dressed as a girl because he wasn't ready to "be a man." The reader may remember the first sentence of Part I, however, in which the narrator says he "lived as a colored woman for seventeen years." So, Henry wouldn't be ready to be a man for some years to come. Why he reverted to women's clothing after reaching freedom is an open question.

The symbol of the Good Lord Bird feather makes several appearances in these chapters. First, Henry prayed over his feather as he stared down the very real possibility of death. Then the Emperor gave Henry his Good Lord Bird feather before Henry made his escape. Why the Emperor did this is unclear. Perhaps he was feeling that as he was sure to die (though he didn't until later), he didn't need its "good luck" anymore in this world. Perhaps in a way he was passing on the symbol of the cause to the next generation by giving it to Henry. Or perhaps he was simply wishing Henry good luck in his escape. When Henry went to see John Brown the night before his execution, Brown gave him his Good Lord Bird feather as well. He told Henry about how the Good Lord Bird fells trees so that other trees may grow, which was an obvious allusion to how Brown saw himself. Brown and his supporters sacrificed themselves so that the fight might grow, the light might spread, and slavery would be defeated.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Henry refuse to "die like a man"?

Discussion Question 2

What are some possible reasons Henry continued to dress as a woman long after Harpers Ferry?

Discussion Question 3

How did John Brown succeed?

Vocabulary

saviors, discombobulated, fife, bloomers, stampede, horde, pummeled, conjured, treason, impudent, conflagration, frolic, commenced, mount, providence, convicted

Characters

Henry Shackleford

Henry Shackleford is the narrator and the main character of the novel. The entire novel apart from the prologue is told from his point of view as a very old, light-skinned black man telling about his experiences as a boy in slavery times. The story's action encompasses Henry's life from about age ten to thirteen. (As a slave, he is uncertain of his true age.) He is known by almost all of the characters in the novel by the name of Henrietta and/or Little Onion. The story begins when Henry is ten years old, enslaved with his father and other relatives by a tavern owner and prominent business owner in a town on the Kansas frontier. His mother died giving birth to Henry. John Brown comes into the tavern and gets into a confrontation with his owner, which results in the accidental death of Henry's father. From that point forward, Henry accompanies Brown in his abolitionist fight from Kansas and points east until ending up at the historic raid on Harpers Ferry.

From their first meeting, John Brown assumes that Henry is a girl, and from that point onward, Henry is presumed to be female by most of the people he encounters. Throughout the novel, Henry must deal with his internal conflict over what this disguise means in terms of his approaching manhood. Through his eyes, the reader learns about the mental as well as physical restraints that are suffered by the black people of his time, whether they are enslaved or free. Brown gives Henry the nickname "Little Onion" because when he offers his good luck charm to Henry (an old onion), Henry eats it, and thereby becomes the embodiment of his good luck.

Henry's experiences throughout the novel give the reader a front row seat on the true historical events and circumstances surrounding the pre-Civil War years of conflict over slavery in the United States. He accompanies John Brown on his battles through Kansas and Missouri and abolitionist fund raising tours of New England, meets prominent African-American leaders Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, and witnesses the final siege at Harpers Ferry. He falls in unrequited love twice—once to a traitor who knows his gender identity, and once to a true-hearted white girl who knows his heart but not his gender.

Throughout the novel, Henry experiences the variety of ways slavery and racism dehumanizes him and his fellow slaves, the ways abolitionism expresses faith and philosophy in a better future, and how men of faith or belief fight the most pressing battles of their time. Through it all, he sees through hypocrisy, imperfection and ignorance. He sees how both bravery and cowardice can change history, and how despite his own cowardice, overwhelming odds, and even repeated defeats, abolitionism will win in the end. He sees heroes and their flaws, and wrestles with his own flaws. In the end, he sees that despite his best effort to remain invisible, he has been seen by the best of men and women to have potential.

John Brown

John Brown—sometimes called Old John Brown, the Captain or the Old Man—is based on the historical and radical abolitionist John Brown who conducted the historic raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. He appears in Henry's life in 1856 in the midst of the "Bleeding Kansas" period in the pre-Civil War midwestern United States. In the novel, as seen through the eyes of a ten year old boy and remembered many years later by the elderly Henry, he is a combination of Biblical prophet and mythological super hero, who stands firm and unwounded in the midst of armed battles. He takes Henry from slavery as a boy in what can only be termed a kidnapping, since Henry's consent or interests are not truly consulted after the accidental death of his father. In the interest of avoiding the authorities, he sometimes takes on aliases.

Brown is portrayed as fanatically religious and perhaps mentally unbalanced, praying long and hard at inopportune times despite the desires of those around him to eat or move in the interest of their own safety. He believes God speaks to him personally and directs his every action. He is elderly, tough as nails, sometimes seems not to need food or sleep, and completely disregarding of his own personal safety. He is described as very skinny, very wrinkled, with a long beard that becomes white by the end of the novel. His lips are in a permanent frown. He is an abolitionist who believes that direct action, even violence, are necessary to end slavery, and is willing to risk his life to accomplish that end. He holds conservatively Christian beliefs about swearing, drinking, tobacco and chastity but believes that stealing from or murdering Pro-Slavery people is acceptable. He has a guilty but strong belief in good luck charms, despite being aware that it is pagan.

Brown is rough and gruff in demeanor, but kind hearted and generous to all children. His cause has made him leave his family behind in New York to homestead in Kansas with his sons to help keep that state free of slavery. He is often in debt because of his commitment to abolitionism and is reticent about talking about his own history. More than anything in the world, his purpose in life is to rouse African-Americans in the United States to rise up and revolt against slavery. He will do anything in his power to make this happen.

Brown adopts Henry as the embodiment of his good luck when Henry eats his good luck onion, gives him his nickname, and treats him in some ways as his own daughter. He often attempts to get Henry out of the way of violence, and is deeply pleased when Henry exhibits any sort of religious sentiment.

He takes Henry from Kansas, through the middle of the United States, on his trip through New England to fundraise and visit Frederick Douglass and to travel Canada to meet Harriet Tubman. He sends Henry to Harpers Ferry to "rouse the negroes" in the interest of his cause. He is executed after the failed raid on Harpers Ferry.

Brown's army, which evolved from a group called the Pottawatomie Rifles, is a group of volunteers who come and go as they please, never amounting to more than about fifty men, but usually steady at around 20. Early on, they are Kansas Free State supporters,

but later members tend to be more philosophical abolitionists. They are very loyal to Brown, despite the fact that many of them don't share his religious fervor.

Frederick Brown

Frederick Brown is John Brown's mentally disabled son. He is a huge strapping youth of about twenty years old. He habitually carries weapons strapped to his person and is very fearsome looking. He becomes Henry's closest friend and teaches him how to hunt, how to use a gun, and how to make baskets. He is illiterate and envies Henry when Henry learns to read. During a horse accident, he discovers that Henry has male genitalia, and so labels him a "sissy" despite not knowing what the word means. He agrees to keep this fact secret, but because of his mental disability, Henry doesn't trust him completely in this area.

Frederick introduces Henry to the glory of the Good Lord Bird, telling him that a feather of the bird gives the holder lifelong understanding. In order to distract Frederick, Henry gives him the Good Lord Bird feather given him by John Brown, which Frederick treasures.

During a battle between Free State Natives and Missouri Pro Slavery forces near Osawatomie, Fred and Henry are left behind for Henry's safety. Henry tells Fred he is hungry and so they go hunting. Fred accidentally shoots a Good Lord Bird, which he considers to be a terrible omen. Fred is later shot dead by Reverend Martin, a former member of Brown's army. He is buried with the Good Lord Bird. Before they bury him, however, each of Brown's men takes a Good Lord Bird feather from the dead bird to remember him and to symbolize their commitment to the cause.

Nigger Bob

Nigger Bob is described as hardy, fit, and tall, under age 25. He is a slave and wagon driver that Henry meets when he is attempting to escape back to Dutch Henry's after the Doyle killings. Bob is well versed in survival skills as a slave, and advises Henry to go back to John Brown and retain his disguise as a girl for his safety. He assists Henry in finding his way back to John Brown. Later, Bob is forcibly freed by John Brown and brought to Brown's army encampment. He adamantly does not want to take up arms against slavery because he understands clearly that as a black man he will be held to account far more severely than any of Brown's white supporters. His main aim is to run for the North and freedom. He is returned to slavery with Henry when a rebel kidnaps them and uses them to repay a debt. While Henry serves inside the hotel, Bob is kept in a dirty slave pen and loaned out to a saw mill.

Bob's friendship with Henry is permanently damaged when Henry doesn't recognize the vast difference in the way they are treated in Pikesville. When they are freed by Brown's army again, Bob reluctantly rejoins Brown's army, but continues to attempt to find a way to escape northward. When Henry is in the East with John Brown, he hears that Bob escapes and never hears about him again.

Pie

Pie is a light-skinned, very beautiful, and popular slave prostitute at the Pikesville Hotel. Her slave master is Miss Abby. A rebel named Chase owes her money and repays his debt by bringing her and Miss Abby Henry and Bob. Pie quickly discovers Henry's secret gender, but keeps quiet about it because she fears they will both be killed if it is discovered. She teaches Henry how to be a better girl, and keeps him safe in the hotel. She holds herself separate from the darker-skinned slaves; essentially she is hated and hates them back.

Pie is Henry's first unrequited love. He eventually learns that she exposed the planned slave revolt in the slave pen, possibly because she was promised her freedom by Judge Fuggett. After the insurrectionists are executed, she becomes depressed and self-hating, and she and Henry become alienated from one another. Henry discovers that she has a sadomasochistic sexual relationship with the hated slave Darg. After Pikesville is attacked by Free State forces, Henry does not see her again.

Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass is a character based on the historical figure. Henry meets him when he goes to Rochester, New York in the company of John Brown. He is described as a light-skinned black man, stout and handsome with long dark hair. He dresses fastidiously well and holds himself with great dignity and pride. John Brown introduces him as the foremost American black leader, and his most trusted ally. In the novel, he is portrayed as having two wives—a German white woman and a black Southern woman who hate one another. (These two women are real historical figures, but historians don't think he married the German woman. It is true that they lived together in the same house sometimes.)

Douglass is portrayed as fairly arrogant and extremely dignified, possessing a booming voice. During Henry and Brown's visit, Douglass walks around the house practicing his speeches and writing in his office. He eats very good food and spends most of his time in his office. He invites Henry to visit him there one evening, and lectures Henry on the issues of racism, slavery and feminism. At the same time this is happening, he makes sexual advances on Henry, despite Henry being a child. To distract Douglass, Henry gets him very drunk.

Though Douglass is Brown's most trusted ally, he fails to support or join Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. This is Brown's greatest disappointment.

Annie Brown

Annie Brown is John Brown's sixteen year old daughter. She comes to the farm outside Harpers Ferry with Martha, Brown's daughter-in-law. She cooks and maintains the farmhouse, holding down the fort as the group assembles and waits for the raid. She

and Henry become close friends, and Henry falls in love with her. She talks to Henry often about his plans after slavery is abolished and admires his singing voice. She is also very religious. When a nosy neighbor invades the farm, Annie loses her cool, which leads the neighbor to call the sheriff. She fears and respects and loves her father. She leaves the farm for the North with Martha and Henry before the raid begins. When Henry realizes he forgot to share important information with Brown, he leaves them to run back to Harpers Ferry. Before he does so, he confesses his love to Annie and rips off his dress and bonnet, possibly revealing his true gender.

O. P. Anderson

O.P. Anderson is a black man and ex-slave who joins with Brown's army in Chatham, Canada and returns with the army to Iowa. He is the only volunteer Brown gains at the conference in Canada. O.P. is not a rough pioneer type like many of the other men, but rather a printer who is small, slender and delicate. Until the move to Harpers Ferry, he is the only black member of Brown's army.

During the raid on Harpers Ferry, Henry thinks he commits suicide by throwing himself into the river on the wild coach ride to the armory. Later, Henry finds him back at the farm, disguised as a slave. After the raid, Henry and O.P. escape via the Underground Railroad. They are separated for their safety, and Henry doesn't see or hear from him again.

The Coachman

The Coachman is a conductor on the Underground Railroad who is enslaved at Colonel Washington's plantation, near Harpers Ferry. He comes into contact with Henry when Henry bumblingly talks to the Coachman's untrustworthy wife in the field, in his attempt to "hive the bees" as ordered by John Brown. The Coachman initially believes Henry to be a rather stupid runaway slave, and attempts to pass him along to the next stop to freedom. He doesn't believe Henry's story that he's been sent by Brown, because of Henry's age, size and confused gender presentation. However, he does send a woman to the farm to investigate his story.

Later, the Coachman is freed by some of Brown's army with some of his fellow slaves. He joins the fight in part because of his deep hatred for his former master. He joins the fight at the armory by deceiving the militia. Later, he gives his clothing to Henry so he can present as a boy again during his escape. He is killed during the final assault on the armory by the U.S. Army.

Owen Brown

Owen Brown is one of John Brown's many sons. He is not the eldest, but he is the natural leader, being the most confident and willing to speak up when practical against his father. He is described as short, stocky, red-haired and having a crippled arm. He is

the least religious of Brown's sons, and sometimes cuts his father's long prayers short. He is also the most like his father.

Owen is the one who finds Henry at the Pikesville Hotel after losing him during a battle. They connect with one another over the fact that they've both had their hearts broken by unrequited love. Owen is one of the few of Brown's army to escape after the raid, in part because he was ordered to stay behind at the farm to distribute guns to the rebel slaves that never came.

The Rail Man

The Rail Man, whose real name is Haywood Shepherd, is a wise and cautious porter on the B & O railroad. He also is a leader in working the Underground Railroad. Most of his family remains enslaved. He grants Henry a meeting during Henry's efforts to "hive the bees." He admires John Brown, but informs Henry that he thinks their plan is foolish. Nonetheless, he offers to help spread the word about the plan amongst the African-Americans of Baltimore via the numbers runners. He demands a lot of money to make this happen, which he gets, but follows through on his promises. He is shot in the back by a member of Brown's army during the raid when he doesn't receive the password to signal the black fighters on the train. He dies some time later, never confessing his role in the raid. The fighters who didn't receive the signal ran away instead of joining the fight.

Sibonia

Sibonia and her sister Libby are slaves in Pikesville who live in the slave pen. Sibonia pretends to be insane while planning a slave revolt. When they are foiled in their plan, Sibonia readily admits her role as leader. Her religious faith and belief that slavery is a mortal sin leads the white preacher in Pikesville to change his mind about slavery and quit being a preacher in Pikesville. Henry fails to follow through on his promises to Sibonia. He admires her greatly for her great dignity in death, and her admonition to a fellow insurrectionist to "be a man" when facing his death.

Chase

Chase and another rebel Randy pick up Henry and Bob outside Osawatomie after the massacre there. Henry and Bob pretend to be slavemaster and slave, which they believe, but also mistakenly understand Henry is a prostitute. Chase brings Henry and Bob to the Pikesville Hotel in repayment of a debt. Later, Chase and Henry bond over their mutual love for Pie.

James Doyle

James Doyle and his two eldest sons are Pro-Slavers in Kansas who are murdered by Brown's army as an act of terrorism. This act causes dissension amongst Brown's army members and upsets Henry.

Darg

Darg is a large, strong and treacherous slave who lives in the slave pen outside the Pikesville Hotel. He acts as a spy for the slave owner Miss Abby. Later, Henry discovers that Pie and Darg have a sadomasochistic sexual relationship.

Kagi

Kagi is a member of Brown's army after Black Jack. He is a schoolteacher and one of the more intellectual of Brown's followers. He is a natural leader, philosophical abolitionist and atheist. He is killed in the raid on Harpers Ferry during a charge by the militia.

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman is based on the historical figure. She comes to the abolitionist conference in Canada and shames several of the attendees to promise support to Brown's army. She warns Brown repeatedly not to change the plan or the date, in order to get as much support as possible. She promises to come to the raid but is ultimately too ill. She gives her shawl to Henry and tells him he needs to be himself, seeing clearly that he is a boy in drag. It is her shawl that persuades the Underground Railroad people that Henry is telling the truth about John Brown's plan.

Reverend Martin

Reverend Martin is a member of Brown's army who objects to Brown's theft of Henry from the slave owner Dutch Henry. This dispute splits Brown's army. Martin joins the other side and eventually shoots Frederick Brown in cold blood as Henry watches from his hiding place.

John Cook

John Cook is a member of Brown's army who sent as an advanced guard to Harpers Ferry with Henry. He is a talkative, womanizing scoundrel who fails to keep Brown's plan secret. After the raid, he is caught by the authorities and jailed with the remaining members of the army in Chambersburg.

The Emperor

The Emperor, whose real name is Shields Green, is a black man who joins Brown's army after his meeting with Frederick Douglass. He fights with honor and helps Henry acquire boy's clothing to escape the raid. He is caught and jailed with the others in Chambersburg.

George and Connie Caldwell

George Caldwell, a barber, and his wife, Connie, are helpers on the Underground Railroad who harbor Henry after the failed raid on Harpers Ferry.

Gus Shackleford

Gus Shackleford is Henry's Pa. He is an enslaved black man from Osawatomie, Kansas Territory who runs his master Dutch Henry's Tavern on the California Trail. He is a barber by trade and also acts as a preacher to all his customers. He dresses in an eccentric fashion, wearing fancy cast-off clothing. He is very short and speaks in a high, thin voice. He is accidentally killed in a confrontation between John Brown and Dutch Henry.

Symbols and Symbolism

Good Lord Bird Feather

The Good Lord Bird and its lucky feathers are the most important symbols in the novel, and give the novel its title. The novel begins with the find of a fireproof box containing the written history (i.e. the entire novel) of Henry "Little Onion" Shackleford. The box also contains a feather of the large and presumed extinct Ivory-billed woodpecker. This large black and white woodpecker has several colloquial names which the author of the novel has altered slightly to the Good Lord Bird. The name is derived from what people would say when they see one.

In the novel, Henry is first given a Good Lord Bird feather when John Brown gives him all of his good luck charms. Henry then gives it to Frederick Brown after Brown shows him a Good Lord Bird and tells him that its feathers are lucky and give the owner lifelong understanding.

Months later, Frederick accidentally kills a Good Lord Bird while hunting for food, which he sees as a bad omen. Later that day, Frederick is murdered. He is buried with the dead bird, but only after its feathers are distributed amongst Brown's army.

After he is confined for several months in Pikesville, Henry recognizes Owen Brown only after discovering a Good Lord Bird feather in his saddle bag. In Boston, when Henry wants to get Brown's attention when he thinks he sees a federal agent coming to arrest him, he waves a Good Lord Bird feather he always had hidden away in his bonnet. When Henry feels he's going to die at Harpers Ferry, he takes out the Good Lord Bird feather and prays with it held tightly in his hands as a talisman. When the raid on Harpers Ferry is reaching its tragic end, the Emperor gives Henry his Good Lord Bird feather. Henry tells him he has his own, but the Emperor insists he take it as a good luck charm for Henry's escape.

When Henry goes to visit John Brown on the last night before his execution, Brown gives Henry his Good Lord Bird feather and tells him about how the Good Lord Bird flies in a solitary way, seeking out a tree to peck at until it falls down, fueling the earth for the growth of new trees.

In essence, as his living good luck charm, Henry is the human embodiment of the Good Lord Bird, and is explicitly said to be so by John Brown himself when he sends Henry off to Harpers Ferry. Anyone who furthers the cause of the abolishment of slavery is basically a Good Lord Bird in the novel, a person who spreads the light of a more enlightened world.

In the final paragraphs of the novel, as Henry hears the congregants of a black church singing John Brown's favorite hymn, he sees a Good Lord Bird flying.

Onion

When Henry is first taken to John Brown's army encampment, Brown hands Henry a dusty old onion. Henry is terrified and eats it, thinking he is being offered food. However, the onion turns out to have been one of Brown's many good luck charms. As a result of this incident, Brown gives Henry all of his good luck charms, and gives Henry the nickname "Little Onion." He believes that Henry is now his human good luck charm, and believes Henry's presence brings him victory and protection in battle.

Bible

The Christian Bible appears in many places in the novel. First, Henry's Pa is illiterate and tells several religious stories he believes are in the Bible but are not. Despite this, he thinks of himself as a Bible expert. Pa and John Brown bond over a bit of a Bible story contest before Brown begins to talk about slavery and Dutch Henry arrives. During an altercation, Brown is asked to swear on the Bible he is pro-slavery. When Dutch Henry throws the Bible on the ground and swears, this causes John Brown to lose his temper and draw his weapons. It is due to this altercation that Henry's Pa is killed and Henry is taken into Brown's army. Henry is first taught to read using Bible stories. In Pikesville, Henry is summoned by Sibonia under cover of a Bible meeting in the pen.

Dress and Bonnet

Henry is first given a dress and bonnet by John Brown, who has bought them for his own daughter. Brown assumes that Henry is a girl because he is wearing only a potato sack when he is taken, and like his father he is petite and small-boned. He doesn't want to wear the dress, but is afraid to contradict Brown's wishes, believing the man to be a ruthless kidnapper and murderer. Henry's maleness is revealed in the presence of Frederick Brown when the dress falls up when he is knocked unconscious after falling off a horse. He comes to terms with wearing the dress and bonnet after being persuaded to continue wearing it by Nigger Bob, who advises him to return to Brown's army rather than going back to his slave master.

Though Henry often hides a set of male clothing in his traveling bag, and sometimes even wears them when the current dress he owns falls apart, he is still believed to be female by all members of Brown's army except for Frederick and Bob. As such, he is the only female member of Brown's army. Before Henry runs back to Harpers Ferry, he rips off his bonnet and exposes his male chest to Annie before declaring his love for her.

Henry's disguise is sometimes seen through by various black people along his journey, but Henry continues to wear the dress until he escapes from Harpers Ferry the final time, wearing the Coachman's too-big clothes.

The clothing is like armor for Henry, protecting him from the horrors of being a young black man—and therefore a bigger target and threat—in slavery times. Because of his

presumed female status, he is relieved from hard work and not expected to take up arms in Brown's army. On the other hand, he is also sometimes seen and pursued as a sexual object by men. Through his wits and guile, Henry uses the dress and bonnet to his advantage whenever possible. Some people assume that because he wears the dress Henry is a "sissy" or homosexual, but he is never presented as anything but a heterosexual pre-pubescent male. In the first sentence of Part I, though it is never explained or discussed, the reader finds that Henry lives as a female for many years after Harpers Ferry. Whether Henry accomplishes this years long female gender presentation as a presumed woman wearing men's clothing or whether he continues to wear women's clothing during those years is never made clear.

Books

Because reading is generally not taught to slaves, literacy and reading are a symbol of slave insurrection and revolt in the novel. Henry's father cannot read the Bible, which leads him to make an unknowing fool of himself when drunks and miscreants mislead him into believing in Bible stories and books that don't really exist. Henry is taught to read during his time with Brown's army, which causes the mentally disabled Frederick to be jealous of him. When a bunch of rebels attempt to conduct a kangaroo court to carry out a personal vendetta, a farce occurs in which not a single reader is found to be among them to read the court order they have.

Later, in Pikesville, Henry uses this skill to gain favor with Pie and Sibonia. When he goes to Harpers Ferry and is unable to explain his mission to rouse the slaves to insurrection, he tells the Coachman's wife he wants to teach people to read, which the Coachman later tells him is synonymous with rebellion and a dangerous skill to hold publicly in slave territory.

Bees and Hives

When John Brown speaks of inspiring a slave uprising, he speaks in a sort of code, referring to the slaves and other abolitionist free blacks as "bees." Inspiring that uprising is always called "rousing the hive" or "hiving the bees." Henry's primary job in Harpers Ferry before Brown's army arrives is to "hive the bees" by spreading word of Brown's coming raid on the armory. This code causes problems for Henry in this task, because no one knows what he means when he speaks of it.

Harriet Tubman's Shawl

When John Brown and Henry go to Chatham, Ontario to gain support at a black abolitionist conference there, Harriet Tubman shows up and inspires the men to pledge their support for Brown, vouching for him publicly. Afterwards, she talks with Henry, telling him he should do his best to be himself, recognizing that he is actually a boy. She gives her shawl to Henry. Later, when Henry is doubted by the Harpers Ferry

Underground Railroad folks, it is only the shawl that convinces them Henry is telling the truth that John Brown is on his way.

Rifle

Black slaves generally were never taught to use or allowed to touch firearms. This makes John Brown's stockpiling of rifles for the expected slave uprising problematic. As a result, he also brings pikes for slaves uncomfortable with taking up arms. As a girl in Brown's army, Henry is not expected to use a rifle, but he does learn to use one. He never takes up arms in any battle, however. Brown continues to hope that all black men will be willing to take up a rifle in ending slavery, though only a few do so.

The Slave Pen

The Slave Pen behind the Pikesville Hotel is where all Miss Abby's slaves live, with the exception of Pie and Henry. Sibonia and Libby plan a slave revolt from the slave pen. It is at Darg's hut in the slave pen where Henry espies the secret sexual relationship between Darg and Pie. When Henry manages to go to the pen to warn the slaves of the coming attack on Pikesville by Free Staters, he is there when the attack begins, despite the fact that as a "house slave" Henry is forbidden to be there. The slave pen is also where Bob is kept, while Henry enjoys all the comforts of the hotel.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad is well known to be a human chain of abolitionists, a secret group of people willing to help slaves escape from the South to the North. Henry comes into contact with the Underground Railroad in Harpers Ferry when he goes to Colonel Washington's plantation and talks to a woman about teaching people to read. As a result, he meets the Coachman, who believes Henry is a runaway slave who's been sent to him but is too stupid to explain what he needs. Through the Coachman, Henry comes to know of others on the Underground Railroad, and meets the Rail Man, who uses his employment as a railroad porter to move people along the Underground Railroad. When Henry and O.P. Anderson escape from Harpers Ferry, they are taken to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

Settings

Dutch Henry's Tavern

Dutch Henry's Tavern is an isolated frontier tavern, barber shop, and general community center on the California Trail in southern Kansas Territory. It is owned by a successful businessman named Dutch Henry, who is a hard worker and slave owner. The tavern is run by Dutch Henry's slave Gus Shackleford, and it is where Henry works as a shoeshine boy. It is also where Henry meets John Brown, who gets into an altercation with Dutch Henry, which leads to Henry's Pa's accidental death. Henry tries to get back to Dutch Henry's after being taken by John Brown, but is dissuaded from this idea by Nigger Bob.

Osawatomie

Osawatomie, Kansas Territory, is a Free State town where John Brown and his sons have homesteads. The town is attacked by Pro-Slavery rebels, many people are killed, and their homes are burned. During this battle, John Brown is hit by a cannon ball and believed to have been killed. He survives, much to everyone's surprise.

Pikesville

Pikesville, Missouri is where Henry and Nigger Bob are returned to slavery by Chase, who gives them to Pie and Miss Abby in repayment of a debt. The Pikesville Hotel, owned by Miss Abby, is where Henry works as a tavern helper. There is a brothel upstairs, where Pie has a room. Outside, across the alley, there is a slave pen where slave owners can keep their slaves confined and under supervision while they are in town doing business. Several slaves owned by Miss Abby live in the slave pen, including Darg, Sibonia, and Libby. A foiled slave uprising there leads to a mass execution. After Henry spends nearly two years there, Free State forces attack the town and the slaves are freed.

Rochester, New York

John Brown and Henry spend several weeks in Rochester, New York visiting Frederick Douglass. They spend the entire time in Douglass's house where Henry is scrutinized for his bad manners and frontier ways by the two ladies of the house.

Boston, Massachusetts

During John Brown's extensive tour of New England with Henry fundraising for the cause they stop twice in Boston. During the rally and speech there, Henry has been told

to watch out for federal agents seeking to arrest Brown. When he spots a suspicious man, he tries to warn Brown, but it turns out to be a man Brown has been waiting for. The man turns out to be a swindler.

Chatham, Ontario

John Brown takes Henry and several members of his army to Chatham, Ontario for an African-American abolitionist conference. It is not well-attended, and Brown has difficulty gaining the attendees trust and support. It is only when Harriet Tubman and Henry shame the men that they agree to support Brown's effort, despite the fact that he doesn't share his explicit plan with them. Only one attendee joins Brown's army outright: O.P. Anderson. John Brown confers with Harriet Tubman there after the conference, and she warns him to stick to a date, advice that John Brown does not follow and thus dooms his mission.

Tabor, Iowa

Tabor is a town in Iowa where Brown's army spends several months before the raid on Harpers Ferry. They are shunned when seeking shelter there but are finally admitted by farmers in a nearby village.

Harpers Ferry

Harpers Ferry, Virginia is a small town hosting the U.S. Armory that John Brown plans to raid for weapons. His plan is to steal large numbers of guns and distribute them to slaves and spark a massive uprising against slavery all across the Southern United States. Brown sends Henry and Cook there for several weeks as advance guard. They rent the Kennedy Farm, just outside town. Brown's raid fails in part because the expected slave uprising never happens. Several hostages are taken, many people are killed, and surviving raiders are arrested.

Chambersburg

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania is a small town near Harpers Ferry, Virginia. It is where John Brown goes to meet secretly with Frederick Douglass. It is also where Henry hides out after the raid on Harpers Ferry with a couple working on the Underground Railroad. Surviving members of Brown's army who are arrested are jailed and executed here, including John Brown himself.

Themes and Motifs

Christian Faith

Christian Faith is a major theme in The Good Lord Bird. The entire contents of the novel are fictionally attributed to a true history found after a fire in a church, written by one church leader in the words of his friend.

The main character's life is dominated by two men, both of them extremely religious. The first is Henry's Pa, whose primary occupation and passion is preaching the gospel to customers of Dutch Henry's Tavern while he cuts their hair. He considers himself a Bible expert, despite the fact that he cannot read and sometimes becomes confused about the contents of the book. When Pa and John Brown meet, it is their mutual love of the Christian Bible that bonds them. Henry is passed from the custody of his Pa to the custody of John Brown, whose whole purpose in life is to be God's instrument. Both men are considered to be religious fanatics by most observers, including Henry.

John Brown's Christian Faith is wholly dominating, and he is presented as a sort of modern-day prophet who listens to God speaking in his ear at all times. He is strict with his men about some Christian rules, prohibiting swearing, drinking alcohol, and use of tobacco. But on the other hand, he believes that God is one his side in his fight against slavery, and murder and theft in that aim is perfectly fine according to his moral code. When Henry is enslaved in Pikesville and after his son is killed, John Brown goes off into the wilderness to speak with God, a common trope with prophets and saints. He comes back looking more like a prophet than ever, speaking in archaic King James Bible English and with a long white beard. His lengthy prayers take precedence over all things, including eating and ensuring one's personal safety. To observers, it is Brown's complete faith in God that protects him from danger, even when bullets are flying all around him and even when a cannonball hits him in the back.

Certainly John Brown is seen by religious black folk as a true Christian, possibly one of the few they have heard of, since while abolitionists tended to be Christian, Brown acts more like an avenging angel than all those who think they can defeat slavery by appealing to Christian morality supposedly held by the majority of the nation. It is to be noted that at the time, slavery was both justified and condemned by people who called themselves Christian.

Henry spends much of the novel certain that faithful Christians are also lunatics, because of the primary examples he's been given. Toward the end of the novel, however, as Henry confronts death, Henry believes he feels the spirit of God moving in his heart more than once. He wants to share this fact with Brown, wanting him to know that his example has brought him to Jesus. It is left up to the reader to decide whether this is a true conversion or more of the "there are no atheists in foxholes" variety.

Gender and Gender Expectations

Henry is assumed to be female by John Brown immediately upon meeting him. This is very confusing and shaming at first for Henry, who wants nothing more than to tell Brown that he is mistaken. However, because Henry is a child and because he was a slave, he cannot imagine contradicting Brown in his assumption. In the end of the novel, when Henry visits Brown before his execution, Brown smiles in a way that leads Henry to believe that Brown knew all along that Henry was really a boy. However, Brown gives no indication of this for the entirety of the novel.

At first, Henry is upset by being transformed into a girl and seeks to escape Brown back into slavery. However, the wiser and older Nigger Bob explains to him that being presumed to be a girl might be a tool to protect him from being seen as a threat by those who see all black men, especially enslaved black men, as a dangerous entity to be closely watched. As a girl, Henry escapes hard labor expected of boys and isn't expected to take up arms in Brown's army.

Beginning with when Frederick Brown discovers that Henry is a boy, Henry is accused of being a "sissy," or homosexual. Neither Henry nor Frederick knows what that means exactly, except that it is a gender transgressive way of being, and not something to be respected. Most of the time, as a girl, Henry is invisible to the white world as a non-threat. However, several times, Henry's invisibility is pushed aside and he is truly seen for who he is by a variety of black people. It is telling that Frederick the mentally disabled man is the only white person to know that Henry is a boy. However, amongst the black people Henry encounters, he frequently runs into black people who see who he truly is, beginning with Libby in the slave pen. After that, he is seen as a boy in drag by Harriet Tubman, the Coachman's wife, the Rail Man, Becky and the Coachman.

In the course of the novel, Henry grows more and more confident in his disguise, refusing to accept the insults passed his way for hiding his gender in a dress. He justifies this to himself when he realizes that being black means having your true self hidden from the world, while white people are allowed and expected to share their true feelings. As a slave, being true to oneself is the height of danger and can mean one's death. For Henry, the dress is armor, and it saves him from being killed as a man.

There are few times when Henry seeks to show his true self, and this usually involves removing a portion of the dress. He does this when he declares his love for Annie and when he wants to prove to Bob that he isn't a prostitute. When he seeks to escape into the world after Harpers Ferry, he returns to wearing boy's clothing, and finds that Brown perhaps knew all along who he truly was. If this is the case, then Brown understood better than Henry knew why he needed the dress to protect him, and enabled this to protect his "good luck charm."

Throughout the novel, Henry struggles with the people who see him and try to persuade him to be his true self. He also struggles head on with Sibonia's words to the man on the scaffold: Be a Man. The idea of dying like a man, i.e. without crying or whimpering, is frequently referred to. In the end, when the Emperor questions him on whether he

wouldn't rather die like a man, Henry replies that since he hasn't had a chance to live as a man, it seems unfair he should have to die like one. Regardless of the dress and his gender presentation, this is a fact: Henry has never been able to be a man because he is only fourteen years old. He hasn't yet reached puberty and is still a boy.

The greatest unanswered question in the novel is from the first sentence in Part I, in which the narrator says he "lived as a colored woman for seventeen years." Why Henry does this or how he accomplishes this fact is not addressed in the novel in any way.

Hypocrisy

Henry encounters hypocrisy in the adults around him throughout the novel. In particular he sees the very Christian and heroic John Brown murder and steal in the name of his cause. He also sees Frederick Douglass, the great black orator and leader, abolitionist and feminist, acting in contrast to his stated beliefs. These flawed heroes are shown to have blind spots in their moral codes and act in ways contrary to them. The most blatant is when Douglass talks to Henry about the ways black women are victimized while attempting to sexually abuse Henry while believing him to be a young girl.

There are other forms of hypocrisy depicted in the novel, especially in the ways that Christian people speak about the immorality of slavery but aren't willing to do anything about it but talk and perhaps donate money to the abolitionist cause. When it comes to putting their lives on the line, few are willing. It is only through John Brown and his followers' sacrifice that the way is paved for the Civil War, in which many people will die for that cause.

Frederick Douglass is the most primary example of this hypocrisy, when he promises to support Brown but then withdraws that support when it seems the plan is suicidal. This turns out to be Brown's greatest disappointment. In addition, Henry sees that the Rail Man and the others risking their lives on the Underground Railroad as acting on their beliefs, while others stand idly by while writing letters about what they believe instead of actually doing anything.

Henry also sees that white abolitionists are fully capable of turning their backs on the cause when the chips are down, or aren't firm in their beliefs. It is only after Bleeding Kansas that Henry sees abolitionists join Brown who hold abolitionist philosophy close to their hearts and act on those beliefs unto death.

Another example of hypocrisy is seen in Pie's hatred of the other slaves and her exposure of the slave uprising. This hatred is obviously self-destructive to her, however, and leads to her alienation from those who truly love her and push her into the arms of Darg the abuser.

Freedom

In the novel, freedom is a concept that is difficult to grasp for those who are enslaved. John Brown repeatedly frees slaves who are unable to seek freedom for themselves, and do not know how to free their minds enough to pursue it.

For Henry at ten years old, freedom isn't even sensible, because he's been a slave for his entire life. His only family are slaves. He sees John Brown, his liberator, as his kidnapper, and at first can only think of finding his way back to his slave master. It is only through talking to Nigger Bob, an older slave, that Henry learns of the value of freedom and runs back to Brown's army.

For his first few years of freedom, Henry goes hungry for the first time and encounters the first obvious dangers to his life. He remembers being enslaved as being well-fed and relatively comfortable as opposed to the privations of the frontier and being on the run.

Henry's experience of being re-enslaved at the Pikesville Hotel brings him to a greater understanding of what freedom and slavery really mean. He sees what is in store for him as an adult slave, and how full of treachery, deceit and danger the world of the slave truly is. In essence, by the time of the public execution of the insurrectionists, the scales have been removed from Henry's eyes and he sees that he must seek his freedom at all costs.

Later, when Henry goes East with Brown, he sees the comforts of freedom, fully exemplified by the good food, nice house and fine clothing exhibited when he visits Frederick Douglass in New York. For the first time, Henry experiences true luxury.

However, Henry also comes into an understanding of how a few slaves are willing to escape for themselves, few are willing to go back and risk their lives in the interest of others' freedom. It is monumentally difficult for slaves, even when handed guns, to be willing to risk their lives and take up arms against slavery. For generations, self-preservation has been foremost in the mind of slaves, and it is difficult for them to break out of those mental bonds and fight for their freedom. For the few who do, they find themselves to be truly men who die as men. When Henry is offered the same, however, he must go on to experience freedom as a man before he is willing to die as one.

Being Yourself

From the first time Henry puts on a dress, he struggles with the theme of being himself. All around him he sees slaves hiding their true selves as a way to preserve their safety, and so follows that lead to keep himself alive. He masquerades as a female as a way to preserve his safety, but struggles with it constantly.

Again and again, Henry meets wise people who see his true self and remind him that someday he must be his true self, or die an enigma. He most struggles with his hidden

self when he is in love, first with Pie and then with Annie. While Pie knows he is a boy, she doesn't know that Henry loves her, or at least Henry doesn't know she knows. In addition, Pie's self-hatred and inability to be herself brings her to displace her self-hatred by having sex with Darg. She ultimately loses herself utterly through prostitution and her desire to see herself as above others of her race.

Annie sees Henry's true self when he sings to her, but she doesn't know he loves her or that he is male until he blurts it out before running back to Harpers Ferry to take part in the raid.

Henry repeatedly sees himself as a coward, but also consistently puts himself in great danger to be close to John Brown. He is far more courageous than he gives himself credit for, and so in the end the reader realizes that John Brown sees Henry's true self from the beginning. In John Brown's eyes, Henry's gender is irrelevant; Henry's true self is as "Little Onion," brave member of Brown's army and brave representative of his people. Henry inspires others to step up and fight for their freedom, though he almost never realizes it.

Ironically, Henry hides his true nature for years after the action of the novel, and the reader can only speculate as to why. Whether Henry's true self wears a dress or not is eventually found to be irrelevant. Henry is the last surviving witness to John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, and his gender or gender presentation ends up being a part of the story but also secondary to how it plays out and its success in sparking the Civil War.

Styles

Point of View

The Good Lord Bird is told, with the exception of the Prologue, entirely from the first person point of view of Henry Shackleford. The novel is told by the very elderly Henry to his likewise elderly friend many years after the events of the novel. As a result, the narrator can be seen as somewhat unreliable, and some events seem exaggerated or almost cartoon-like, especially when bullets are flying or John Brown is present. There are repeated inconsistencies or holes in Henry's re-telling of the tale, but this should be seen as a realistic way an historic event is told when the witness is far removed from the action. Most of the time, Henry is speaking as a pre-pubescent boy, with all the ignorance and larger than life experiences that entails. Sometimes, the narrator interjects with information from the point of view of the elderly Henry, who possesses more life experience and more knowledge about the subject at hand. In this way, the narrator sometimes comments on events in the future that are relevant to the reader's understanding of what is happening.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is that of the time, and as such uses words that are widely considered offensive today in describing and naming African-American people. Also, the narrator speaks in the vernacular of his environment and time, using slang and figurative language that is archaic and representative of the time and place. The usage of this language brings an element of realism to the novel.

The novel is structured in linear time, reflecting the author's fictional interpretation of true historical events in real places from 1856 to 1859. The author attempts to bring to life real historical figures and attempts to stick as closely to realism as he can, while likewise embellishing unknowables with humor and dramatization of those events. With the exception of Henry, most characters are based on real people.

Structure

The novel contains a short Prologue depicting a fictional but seemingly realistic newspaper article. The rest of the novel is divided into 32 chapters which are likewise separated into three parts of non-equal length. Each of the three parts encompass events in different areas of the country: Kansas, Missouri, and Virginia. Each chapter is titled in a way that hints at the contents of that chapter. Part I is about Henry's "Free Deeds"; Part II is about Henry's "Slave Deeds." These two parts are approximately equal in length. Part III is about "Legend," and is by far the largest section in the novel, depicting the most famous deed of John Brown and his raiders, leading up to and encompassing the famous though unsuccessful raid on Harpers Ferry.

Quotes

Whatever he believed, he believed. It didn’t matter to him whether it was true or not. He just changed the truth till it fit him. He was a real white man.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 1 paragraph 88)

Importance: This quote explains a bit about John Brown's approach to religious faith and his view of the world. Henry learns throughout the novel that Brown's beliefs about people tend to stay firm despite how they may falter or disappoint him. In particular this refers to his faith in Henry from the very beginning and his assumption that Henry is a girl. It also reflects Brown's unshakable belief that the slaves are ready to take up arms for their freedom, seemingly oblivious to the well-earned sense of self-preservation slaves must hold. As a white man, he is unable to see that slaves' shackles are not just physical, but also mental.

They say a feather from a Good Lord Bird’ll bring you understanding that’ll last your whole life.
-- Frederick Brown (Chapter 2 paragraph 66)

Importance: The Good Lord Bird feather becomes a symbol of Brown's army and their faith in each other and their cause. It represents good luck and acts as a good omen. For Frederick, it represents more, because he feels insecure about his mental disability and inability to read. Henry gives Frederick the feather he's been given by John Brown in order to fool Fred into forgetting he knows Henry's secret, but to Fred it is a talisman of wisdom and friendship. When Fred accidentally kills a Good Lord Bird, it is an omen of his death. He is buried with the bird, and his friends all take one of the feathers as a symbol to carry on the fight.

He was a plain terror in the praying department. Just when he seemed to wrap up one thought, another come tumbling out and crashed up against the first and then another crashed and commingled against one another till you didn’t know who was who and why he was praying it, for the whole thing come together like the tornadoes that whipped across the plains, gathering up the sagebrush and boll weevils and homesteads and tossing them about like dust.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 3 paragraph 5)

Importance: John Brown is known for his lengthy, prophet-like prayers. He often takes much time with them when others are impatient to get on with business. He also tends to pray at inopportune times, but he doesn't heed the haste of others, certain that his communication with God must take precedence before all earthly things, including eating and fleeing from the enemy. His prayers show his unyielding faith in God and also bring home the idea that he is similar to a Biblical prophet in that he believes strongly that God speaks to him and leads his every action, even when he is killing someone.

Nobody asked the Negro what he thunk about the whole business, by the way, nor the Indian, when I think of it, for neither of their thoughts didn't count, even though most of the squabbling was about them on the outside, for at bottom the whole business was about land and money, something nobody who was squabbling seemed to ever get enough of.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: From Henry's point of view, all this fighting between Pro-Slavery and Free State supporters in Kansas is less about slavery and more about land and money. He sees that Brown and pretty much everyone is oblivious to the fears and thoughts and desires of the enslaved. Even though they are supposedly fighting about slavery, no one cares what the slaves think about it. Over and over, Brown frees slaves without even asking them whether they want to be freed. Henry himself is freed against his will.

If I could get Old John Brown to favor me and carry me to freedom, why I'd dress up as a girl every day for ten years.
-- Nigger Bob (Chapter 5 paragraph 121)

Importance: It is through Bob that Henry learns just how useful it might be to keep his disguise as a girl. Instead of seeking to run back to his slave master and shed the female clothing, he learns to embrace it as a tool to save him from the risks inherent in being a black boy and see the way John Brown is secretly seen as a hero by the enslaved.

We'll be colored when the day's done, no matter how the cut comes or goes. These fellers can go back to being Pro Slavers any time they want.
-- Nigger Bob (Chapter 7 paragraph 53)

Importance: Bob is an older man with much more experience than Henry, and so he is knowledgeable in the survival skills necessary to a slave. He knows that if the Pro-Slavery fighters win, then they as former slaves and people of color will be severely punished if they are known to have fought against slavery whereas the white fighters can simply change sides without any negative consequences. In fact, they have been known to and may change their allegiances at any time.

Nobody lets my Little Onion go hungry, for you is halfway to being growed now, and you needs your rest and victuals so you'll grow into a great big sissy.
-- Frederick Brown (Chapter 8 paragraph 26)

Importance: Fred discovered early on that Henry is really a boy, and calls him a "sissy," despite the fact that neither of them is clear on what the word means. In any case, Fred is the only white person in Brown's army to know Henry's secret. The fact that this mentally disabled man might reveal his secret worries Henry, and he wants to escape the army before that happens. Henry tries to distract Fred by telling him he's hungry. This leads to the accidental shooting of the Good Lord Bird, a bad omen. The shots draw the attention of the enemy, who kill Fred.

It’s your load. You carry it. Ain’t nobody judging you out here. But dodging the white man’s evil takes more than a bonnet and some pretty undergarments, child. You’ll learn.
-- Libby (Chapter 12 paragraph 43)

Importance: Libby pegs Henry as a boy in disguise right off. She uses her knowledge to take Henry's arrogance down a peg when he goes out to visit the slave pen, looking for Bob. Libby is the first person to really see Henry for who he is, which frightens him. As a person colluding in the slave revolt, she knows what the consequence of the fight really will be.

I had a plan, Reverend. But I failed. I was betrayed. But I tell you now, if I had succeeded, I would have slain you and your wife first, to show them that followed me that I could sacrifice my love, as I ordered them to sacrifice their hates, to have justice for them. I would have been miserable for the rest of my life. I could not kill any human creature and feel any less. But in my heart, God tells me I was right.
-- Sibonia (Chapter 13 paragraph 75)

Importance: When the town preacher goes to speak to Sibonia about the foiled insurrection, she tells him that she would have killed him and his family first, to prove that she was willing to sacrifice for their cause. This confession causes the preacher to publicly renounce slavery and leave town.

The white man put his treachery on paper. Niggers put theirs in their mouth.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 14 paragraph 14)

Importance: When Henry finally comes to terms with the fact that Pie is the one who exposed the slave revolt, he has some understanding of her reasons for doing so. He has observed that most people aren't very loyal to one another regardless of race, but that the added complication of being enslaved will make people betray on another to gain the slightest advantage or the possibility of freedom.

I’m Captain John Brown! Now in the name of the Holy Redeemer, the King of Kings, the Man of Trinity. I hereby orders you to git. Git in His holy name! Git! For He is always on the right side of justice!
-- John Brown (Chapter 16 paragraph 56)

Importance: When Brown's army attacks Pikesville, there is much chaos. Bullets fly around. Finally, the escaped slaves get a cannon and go to fire it at the rebels. Brown steps out in front of the cannon and orders the rebels to leave, which they do in the face of his mighty will. This is lucky since the cannon's fuse runs out and doesn't fire. This fiery order brings home Brown's complete belief in the rightness and godliness of his cause.

Talk, talk, talk. All the Christians can do is talk. And that, men, is our true battle. Your basic slave needs freedom, not talk.
-- John Brown (Chapter 17 paragraph 29)

Importance: John Brown is a man of action, not the constant debate and arguing over slavery. Most abolitionists take a philosophical approach, believing in "moral suasion" rather than taking up arms. Brown believes this is being a weak Christian in the face of the great evil of slavery. When Brown's army looks for a place to hold up in Iowa, free territory, they find that most of the local farmers will not take them in.

I has been disappointed many times in my life. But this is one man on whom the Old Captain can always depend.
-- John Brown (Chapter 17 paragraph 63)

Importance: John Brown is speaking here of Frederick Douglass, who he believes he can trust to join the fight when necessary. It is a tragically ironic statement, because this trust is misplaced, and Douglass fails to follow through on his promises.

You're but chattel to them, stolen property, to be squeezed, used, savaged, and occupied.
-- Frederick Douglass (Chapter 18 paragraph 55)

Importance: Douglass at first treats Henry paternalistically, sitting him down to teach him about slavery. However, Douglass soon reveals that he is a hypocritical womanizer, making a pass at Henry despite the fact that his "wives" are in the house and Henry is inappropriately young. He doesn't see Henry as a person, and as he instructs Henry about how the slave owner treats enslaved women, he treats Henry in the same objectifying way.

It was like a big, long lynching. Everybody got to make a speech about the Negro but the Negro.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 19 paragraph 24)

Importance: As Henry travels from town to town in New England raising money for the armed struggle, Henry finds that few if any black folks attend these rallies and gatherings, and those few who do show up are ignored. He finds that all this talk is a big show without any understanding or interest in what black folks want regarding their own collective fate.

Start down the road and don't go sideways. If you deviates your people will lose confidence and fail you. Take it from me.
-- Harriet Tubman (Chapter 20 paragraph 44)

Importance: Harriet Tubman comes to the conference in Canada and advises John Brown to stick to the date and overall plan he shares with everyone. As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, also called "the General," she again and again advises "the Captain" to follow through without deviating, in order to make his plan successful. Brown doesn't end up following her advice, which is part of the reason for his plan's failure.

Onion, I will miss you, for you is dutiful and our Good Lord Bird besides.
-- John Brown (Chapter 22 paragraph 13)

Importance: John Brown sends Henry and Cook ahead to Harpers Ferry. He will be missed as "Onion" the good luck charm, and as the reader later learns about Brown's interpretation of the Good Lord Bird, Henry is going off to be the bird who fells trees in order to enable new trees to grow. Henry is the Good Lord Bird, the ultimate omen of what is to come.

Being a Negro's a lie, anyway. Nobody sees the real you. Nobody knows who you are inside. You just judged on what you are on the outside whatever your color. Mulatto, colored, black, it don't matter. You just a Negro to the world.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 25 paragraph 31)

Importance: As Henry spends more time with Annie, he comes to realize the truth of his invisibility and that of people of color in general. He enjoys talking to Annie and falls in love with her, but doesn't believe they can ever be together because of the reality of race.

If you can't be your own self, how can you love somebody? How can you be free?
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 27 paragraph 109)

Importance: Henry is very conflicted at realizing he forgot to share the password given to him by the Rail Man and his hidden love for Annie. He can hide his true self no longer, and so jumps up, tells her he loves her, tears off his dress and runs away. He does not, however, completely leave behind his disguise, and continues to pretend to be a girl until the end of the fight at Harpers Ferry.

It was the first time I ever saw him smile free. A true smile. It was like looking at the face of God. And I knowed then, for the first time, that him being the person to lead the colored to freedom weren't no lunacy. It was something he knowed true inside him. I saw it clear for the first time. I knowed then, too, that he knowed what I was—from the very first.
-- Henry Shackleford (Chapter 32 paragraph 148)

Importance: Henry visits John Brown in jail the night before his execution and realizes that he isn't as crazy as he always thought, that he has achieved what he set out to do, and what's more, always saw Henry for who he truly was.