

In This House of Brede Study Guide

In This House of Brede by Rumer Godden

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Plot Summary

The novel *In This House of Brede* follows the journey of successful business woman Philippa Talbot as she leaves her life to become a nun at Brede, a Benedictine monastery. Although she joins the monastery at a more advanced age than most nuns, Philippa is able to use the life experiences she has had to help solve problems and elicit change at her monastery. Philippa ultimately lets go of the hurt and unforgiveness associated with her most painful experience, the death of her son, and is appointed prioress of a Japanese abbey. In the final chapters of the book, she is able to give her whole self to God, the ultimate challenge for any Christian.

Despite her own fears and the discouragement of friends and coworkers Philippa goes through with her intention to join the House of Brede. Four years after she has entered the monastery, Abbess Hester Cunningham Proctor dies, leaving this spot open for election. Catherine Ismay is elected abbess. She is immediately met with troubles as she learns Hester had commissioned an expensive stone work project depending on the dowry of a nun who has just left the abbey, taking her money with her. By what might be defined as divine intervention the cross worn by the abbey's abbess is accidentally broken to reveal a large ruby. This ruby is sold and the proceeds cover the debt owed by the church.

Along with the other nuns Philippa has many battles she must win before she can be fully used by God. The first of these battles involves the death of Philippa's young son Keith. A group of Japanese postulants have come to Brede and because she is familiar with Japanese Philippa is the obvious choice for zelatrix, or teacher, of these new nuns. If she is appointed zelatrix, however, Philippa must also teach Kate Farren a nun who is the daughter of Keith's nanny. Because the girl reminds Philippa so much of the hurt she felt when her son died Philippa begs to be excused from the position. Her unwillingness to be zelatrix means the Japanese postulants must wait a year to come, an option no one likes.

Again as if by divine intervention Philippa and Kate are isolated together with chicken pox. It is through this experience that Philippa is able to put away her aversion to Kate and accept the position as zelatrix.

Philippa's final test comes when Dame Colette the nun chosen to be prioress at the Japanese monastery dies suddenly. It is obvious Philippa is next in line for the position but again she falters. It takes a pep talk from Dame Agnes to make Philippa realize she must give all of herself to God. This includes going where He wishes and doing His wishes. Philippa accepts the position as prioress and in the end of the book waves good bye to her friends as she boards the plane to Japan.



Prologue and Chapter 1

Prologue and Chapter 1 Summary

The novel *In This House of Brede* follows the journey of successful business woman Philippa Talbot as she leaves her life to become a nun at Brede, a Benedictine monastery. Although she joins the monastery at a more advanced age than most nuns, Philippa is able to use the life experiences she has had to help solve problems and elicit change at her monastery. Philippa ultimately lets go of the hurt and unforgiveness associated with her most painful experience, the death of her son, and is appointed prioress of a Japanese abbey. In the final chapters of the book, she is able to give her whole self to God, the ultimate challenge for any Christian.

This brief prologue details Philippa Talbot's final day outside the Brede Monastery. At its conclusion she is drinking in a bar near the entrance to the monastery, trying to overcome the fear and doubt she has about her decision. Penelope Stevens or Penny, a worker in Philippa's office, shares the event of the day with her husband Donald. Penny knows something is happening from the beginning of the day. She believes, however, Philippa has been given advancement in the office. It is not until Philippa calls Penny into her office and tells Penny she is leaving that day to join a monastery that Penny begins to understand all the strange things she has seen that day. Philippa gives Penny a clock out of her office as a going away gift.

Philippa has lunch with Sir Richard Taft, a man with whom she had formerly had an affair, the boards the train to Brede. As she rides Philippa thinks of all the things she will miss, the food, her home, and her cat Griffon. She briefly remembers a boy named Keith who seems to be Philippa's son. She also thinks back over the path of events that brought her to make the decision to join Brede including an experience in Westminster Cathedral where she realized for the first time she was seeking God. Philippa admits to herself and others, however, that the closer she gets to Brede, the more afraid of her decision she becomes.

As Chapter 1 opens, Philippa describes the view from the tower of Brede Abbey. This tower is a place Philippa goes to pray and to get away from the others. She has been at the monastery for four years. On this day the abbey is cloaked in silence as the nuns realize their abbess, Hester Cunningham Proctor, is dying. Although there is no hope for her recovery, the abbess does not die quickly. The nuns believe she is troubled by something. The abbess' stroke oddly coincides with one nun's visit with the older abbess. It is learned that Sister Julian had told the abbess she would not be joining Brede but instead had decided to join the Brown Sisters. Although the nuns do not all agree this encounter caused the abbess' stroke there are questions raised. The dying abbess tries to communicate with her fellow nuns but no one can understand what it is she is trying to say. The abbess repeats the word "sorry" several times until Dame Catherine Ismay steps forward to comfort the dying abbess. The death bell rings, signifying the abbess has finally passed away.



Prologue and Chapter 1 Analysis

Godden begins to address the theme of the outsiders' lack of understanding about the life of a nun right from the start of her novel. The first mention is Penny's startled reaction when Philippa tells her she is going to join a monastery. Penny naively believes Philippa is too old to be a nun and shows surprise that she will be allowed to visit Philippa once she makes her profession. Sir Richard and McTurk make it obvious they believe Philippa is not suited for monastery life and will not stay. Philippa's action of leaving her cigarettes behind when she leaves the bar near Brede shows her determination to stay at the monastery and fulfill her calling.

There is a tone of mystery and sadness that begins in the prologue and builds through the first chapter. First, Philippa shares her sadness of losing her son, though the cause is unknown. Next, the nuns of the abbey prepare for the death of their abbess. Although there is not supposed to be mourning in the monastery, there is a hint of this feeling through the first chapter. Also, there is the mystery of the events surrounding Abbess Hester's stroke. Was it really Sister Julian's decision that brought on this attack? If so, why? Finally, note the reference to the new postulant arriving the same day as the death as being common in the monastery. This reference brings the theme of the cyclical nature of the abbey life. As one nun passes one, another one steps in to fill her place.



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

As Dom Grevasse gives the abbess her last rights, Philippa realizes how deeply this death has affected Cecily Scallion, the newest postulant. Philippa has been asked to take the girl under her wing so she makes her way through the kneeling nuns to hold the girl's hand. The privileged and dramatic Dame Veronica, who is cellarer of the abbey, is absent from the death scene, an action considered a disgrace by some of the nuns. Veronica is finally convinced by one of the older nuns to do her required work but not before others begin to wonder if something is really wrong. The sisters are busy with the work associated with the abbess' funeral.

There is a break as Godden pauses to describe the ceremony surrounding the entrance of a new postulant into the Brede community. The action of the novel picks up again as the nuns prepare to carry on with monastery life as usual. Even as they prepare to celebrate the feast of the Kingship of Christ, Prioress Dame Emily unexpectedly faints and has to be carried to a public hospital for complete bed rest. The prioress is upset with this decision first because modern hospitals are so different from a nun's accustomed way of life and second because a new abbess must be chosen. Dr. Avery allows her to interview only one person for this position.

As Chapter 3 opens the nuns learn of Dame Emily's ongoing fight with cancer and how sick she really is. Next, Sister Julian leaves the monastery and her dowry, ten thousand pounds, must be refunded. Dame Veronica is noticeably distressed over giving the money back to Julian's family. Dame Perpetua takes Philippa as her personal secretary to help with letters the abbey receives. All believe Perpetua will be named the next abbess. Dame Maura, Dame Agnes and Dame Catherine are also in the running for abbess, however. Philippa remembers a time when as a young postulant struggling with the changes in her life, Dame Catherine had offered comfort and companionship. Four votes are required before Dame Catherine is elected new abbess of Brede. She is encompassed by a deep sense of dread.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

As Godden writes about the Brede postulants, she broadens her theme of the lack of public knowledge about nuns. Cecily's mother, for instance, believes her daughter's desire to join a monastery is caused by anemia. Cecily is young and beautiful but has been abused by an overbearing mother. It was a struggle for the young girl to actually follow her own will instead of being married as her mother wished.

As Dame Emily falls ill, the atmosphere at Brede becomes speculative as the sisters wonder which one of them will be chosen as the new abbess. Hints of the mystery surrounding the boy named Keith arise as Philippa suffers with nightmares about this



child. Also note the reference to Philippa's knowledge of the Japanese language. Although Perpetua passes off this information as unimportant, it will be important to the entire monastery later in the novel.



Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Chapter 4 opens with historical information of Brede and its abbesses. The most important being the history of the pectoral cross worn by the abbess of the monastery. This cross was made from pieces of a broken chair by a princess as she and some Brede nuns were imprisoned together. This princess gave this cross to the abbess just as she was about to be killed. She claimed it was the most valuable thing that she possessed. The vows that the nuns take are also discussed in this chapter. These vows include stability, conversion of manners and obedience.

As Catherine realizes she has really been voted abbess, she struggles with doubts and apprehensions. She remembers the brother with whom she had made a vow to do everything as the other did. Her brother had become a bishop, now she was an abbess. She, however, had struggled more with her calling than her brother did and she struggles with her fear again. As she prays in the Chapel of the Crown of Thorns, she realizes she must depend on God for her strength and her guidance. At this point, she moves forward to take her abbatial duties. Later in her room, Catherine cries again as she reads the notes of love and support provided for her by her daughters. Sister Ellen comes in with fresh laundry to find the abbess in tears. She gives the younger lady a comforting hug.

Spring and summer bring birds, flowers and new life to Brede. The chapter continues by detailing the progress of both Cecily and Philippa. Cecily has made a name for herself in the choir with her beautiful singing voice and her ability to play the organ. While waiting to enter Brede Cecily was preparing herself for her music. Philippa, on the other hand, fights the opinions of others. Philippa met with great challenge in her inability to sing. She is also disliked by Dame Agnes because Philippa knows Latin better than Agnes.

The narrative rewinds to recall the Christmas following the abbess' death. Dame Veronica is outwardly ill at ease and depressed. Although the nuns are busy with the Christmas celebrations, Cecily can not help but remember the joviality of her Christmases at home. Christmas evening when the nuns are free to rest Cecily finds herself drawn to the organ loft where she longs to play the instrument. Instead she pillows her head on the bench and cries herself to sleep. Dame Maura finds Cecily sleeping in this way, sits on the bench next to her and begins to play. The music wakes Cecily and the two converse about music for a few minutes then Maura instructs Cecily to play. She plays so beautifully she is invited to play for Vespers that evening.



Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

The most significant aspect of the fourth chapter is the emphasis on Catherine's feeling of her own inability and ineptness to be abbess of Brede. Her struggle to give her cares to God and rely on His strength is the struggle of every Christian who tries to follow Christ completely. The idea of Sister Ellen comforting Catherine in such a personal way is significant because these personal encounters were discouraged at Brede. Although all of the nuns were to be friends and considered each other sisters, any show of favoritism or personal affection in excess was not encouraged.

Philippa's struggle to be accepted at Brede is significant because the nuns, like those on the outside doubt Philippa will stay at the monastery. Although the nuns understand what the monastery is all about, they also doubt Philippa's staying power. Philippa also does not have the traditional traits nuns should have. She is not able to sing and appears not to even like the music. Philippa, however, perseveres. Cecily, in contrast, has more musical talent than most at Brede. She develops quite quickly in this aspect although she appears to be very emotional and dependant on those around her.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

This chapter opens with a cell day, a day when the nuns are mostly free to do as they please. This day brings to mind the faults in Cecily's and in the other novice nuns' personalities. Questions of Cecily's stability and her strength are the greatest challenge, other than that Cecily seems to have no faults.

Meanwhile Catherine tries to get hold of her position as abbess and also studies the abbey's financial books. Catherine is surprised at the abbey's financial expenses. As she goes over the books, she is shocked by Dame Veronica's coolness and irritation when questions are asked. Much money had been spent on unnecessary renovations. Restorations and repairs completed during Abbess Hester's reign had taken their toll on the abbey's funds. In addition to these troubles, Dame Veronica has been complaining of heart troubles for which Dr. Avery has found no medical reason.

Catherine discovers a sinking fund which the former abbes had been keeping donations and proceeds from sales of some items in a money box. This money box, which should have contained about one hundred pounds, is empty. No one has an explanation. Dame Veronica is called to answer for the missing money. She is upset by Catherine's questions but admits the former abbess had been saving the money for a private charity on which Veronica will not elaborate, and asks permission to leave the room.

Meanwhile Philippa is opening letters for the new abbess. She comes across a letter from Stefan Duranski informing them that the stone for their altar and crucifix is finished and ready for the on site carving. Philippa takes the letter to Catherine who is shocked at the amount of money the new stone fixtures will cost. She calls for Dame Veronica to be sent back to her. Catherine shows Veronica the letter from Duranski who is in awe that the stonework is finished. The plans had actually been put before the council a year before and had been voted against. Abbess Hester, however, had gone ahead with the work as a surprise. Dame Veronica had been the only one other than Hester, who knew the work was being done.

When Catherine asks Veronica where the money for the work was to have come from Veronica admits it was to have come from Sister Julian's dowry. She blames Sister Julian's decision to leave Brede as being the cause of Hester's death. Veronica also takes blame for the entire situation on herself but will not answer when Catherine asks her why she did not share the problem with the others. Catherine tells Veronica she must tell the counsoulors about the stone issue as well as the fate of the money in the money box. Again Veronica leaves the Abbess' office. In the meanwhile Veronica begins to have heart palpitations again. She refuses to go to the infirmian and instead takes some of Emily's heart medicine and lies down.



As Catherine prepares to meet with the counselors Veronica is not there. She sends Philippa to fetch the woman. Philippa returns and instructs Catherine to go to Veronica's cell immediately because Veronica is in a coma. The nuns find the bottle of medicine and determine Veronica has taken five or six pills. They are afraid she has tried to commit suicide but after she is revived Veronica assures them she took the medicine truly believing it would help her heart condition.

Dame Veronica gives Catherine background information about herself no one had even known before. She admits that she changed her name to a less "horrible" one. Veronica also admits that although she grew up at Orford Hall, her family was the servants there, not the owners. She shares that she came to Brede because of the distinction she believed it would give her. Her brother Paul who had been in prison came to the abbey one day and threatened to tell the abbess about Veronica's real past if she didn't give him money. To pacify him Veronica had embezzled money from the abbey and disguised these amounts as building expenses. Finally after the abbess' death, Veronica gave Paul the money in the abbess's money box.

Catherine is torn when she realizes she must tell the council about the money Veronica has stolen from the church as well as Abbess Hester's charter of the stone work even though her request for support for the project was denied. The abbot helps Catherine form an explanation that will neither incriminate Abbess Hester nor allow all of Veronica's misdoings to be exposed. The council is shocked when Catherine tells them of the cost of the stone work and that Hester had these pieces made even though they were voted against. Dame Agnes suggests they spend their energy trying to find solutions for their problem rather than complaining.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Abbess Catherine is soon tried in her new duties as abbess as she learns that the former abbess charters a stone work project without the council's permission depending on funds from a nun who has since left the abbey taking her funds with her. The tone of this chapter is troubled as Catherine realizes how Veronica has taken advantage of her position as cellarer. The new abbess's position is precarious as she realizes she must tell the sisters of the faults of the former abbess and the cellarer without allowing them to lose respect for either woman.

Note the fervor with which it is thought the Veronica "must not die like this" after she has taken the overdose of quinidine. In the Catholic faith it is believed that any sin which a person has not confessed before a priest before their death will affect their entrance into heaven. Suicide is considered a grave sin by the Church. If Veronica had intentionally tried to kill herself, it would have been devastating to the other members of the abbey.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Abbess Catherine, a young abbess with little experience and no one to help her find her way tries to organize the ranks at the abbey despite the looming debt of the stone work. Some major changes are made in the administration of the abbey. Veronica is relieved of her duties as cellarer. Dame Beatrice is elected as prioress, Dame Agnes cellarer and Dame Winifred takes over duties as sacristan. Despite her desire to be punished, Veronica is given the challenge of writing a book of children's poems, an activity she loves. The money she earns from the book will in a way repay the financial debt she owes Brede.

In the Chapter of Faults, Cecily confesses accidentally breaking the new basin the novitiate bathroom. Hillary is sympathetic because she too is regularly making messes and causing trouble. Philippa admits to the young nuns she also had her turn with clumsiness when she broke the wing off one of the angels in the choir. Abbess Catherine notes that these problems pale in comparison to the huge amount of debt the former abbess put them in as she continues to look for ways to pay for the new stone carvings.

Philippa suggests a way to earn the money to pay the sculptor in full. Her plan, however, would require that the nuns give up seven of the fifteen acres of their park land. Houses would be built on these seven acres. Ten houses would be built per acre. The nuns are concerned about the noise and the loss of privacy. Meanwhile contractors come to clear the sanctuary so the new stone pieces can be installed.

Philippa's friend McTurk comes to visit her at the abbey and insists to her the idea of selling the monastery's land is not the best choice. He argues this land is fundamental to their health. However, he also mentions that Philippa is still working in reaction to her strong leadership personality. Philippa is relieved, however, because she sees herself only as an unimportant member of the abbey society.

In chapter 8 Sculptor Stefan Duranski arrives at Brede on the same day Dame Emily is allowed to return home from the hospital. Most of the nuns take an immediate liking to Duranski. In fact Dame Perpetua asks Catherine to suggest the sculptor find some way to fix the missing hand from the statue of the Virgin Mary. Interestingly Duranski finds a old stone watering trough in the abbey's yard from which he asks permission to carve a new Lady of Peace. In the act of the creating an atmosphere of hope begins to replace the atmosphere of worry that one filled the abbey.

Duranski leaves Brede week of Easter and the week following. Catherine thinks of holding a clothing for Hillary during this time frame but the nuns are still divided on Cecily's status. They finally decide Hillary will be clothed but Cecily will have to wait. Cecily is at first resigned but later goes to Catherine and begs to be allowed to be



clothed also. As a result of the urgency of her request, this request is allowed and Cecily is clothed also.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

While the tone of the novel is worried and slightly heavy as Catherine struggles with her new position as abbess and the problem of how to resolve the abbey's debt, this tone begins to change in the eighth chapter of the book. In this chapter Duranski begins his carving work at the church and his mannerisms and creativity serve as a sort of balm for the nuns' spirits. As he creates beauty from once ugly and in one cause utilitarian pieces of stone, they begin to see the real beauty of Hester's idea for the sanctuary.

Note the two areas of contrast given in these two chapters. The first occurs between the workers who come to clear the sanctuary and the sculptor himself. The workers are rough and crude, and have no respect for the nuns' beliefs or routines. They consider it a hardship to have to stop work while the nuns observe their holy times. Duranski, on the other hand, adapts easily to the nuns' schedules. Although he professes to be a nonbeliever, he respects the nuns' routines and even finds solace in their music and their quietness. In return, the nuns gain a great deal of respect for the sculptor as he creates beautiful stone works for their sanctuary.

The second area of contrast occurs between Hillary's Clothing and Cecily's Clothing. While Hillary's Clothing is an event, even celebrated by her family and friends, Cecily's is discouraged and laughed at by her mother. While Hillary's Clothing is bestowed upon her easily, Cecily finds herself begging the abbess for the right to wear the traditional nun's habit.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Duranski returns to finish his work, meanwhile the nuns try to skimp and save their funds. Cecily is tormented by a visit from Larry, a man who had been her lover before she entered the monastery. Meanwhile one day as Catherine tries to work in quiet, she is interrupted by a knocking at her door. She lets her frustration get the best of her after several knocks and opens the door angrily, breaking the wooden cross that hangs around her neck. There is no one at the door but to her surprise, she finds a large ruby hidden inside the cross. A jeweler is called in from Hastings to appraise the ruby.

In the meantime, Duranski finishes the statue of Our Lady of Peace and calls Catherine to see it. The statue is magnificent and Duranski suggests they sell it to help cover the expenses of the other stone work. After hearing this conversation Philippa speaks with Duranski and buys the statue for Brede using the money she received from her workplace as a gratuity. Philippa's only regret is that the money is not enough to cover the entire amount of the statue. At this point Catherine tells her about the discovery of the ruby, a combination of the funds will pay for all the stone work, plus give the abbey extra funds. Despite this happy news Philippa reacts peculiarly when Catherine asks her if she knows a lady by the name of Farren.

Chapter ten begins with an offer to buy the ruby by the jeweler in Hastings. The seven carat ruby is bought for the price of six thousand pounds. Philippa asks that no one know who donated the extra four thousand pounds but Catherine insists that the council be told the money was given as a donation. Shortly after this donation Philippa makes her solemn profession.

For the first time Penny visits the monastery claiming a matter of life or death. She tells Philippa she is pregnant but is afraid that Donald does not want the baby. In fact, she has not even told him about her pregnancy yet. Penny is considering an abortion but Philippa tries to talk her out of this procedure. Days later Penny's husband comes to see Philippa saying she is ill. Penny had a procedure to abort the baby but is now bleeding and won't allow a doctor to be called in to help her. Philippa sends him home immediately but before he arrives Joyce Bowman has already been to see the girl and has taken her to the hospital where the doctor begins to operate on her.

At this point Philippa tells Catherine of the problem with Penny. She is chided for not having shared the prayer need with the church earlier. All of the nuns pull together and pray through the night for Penny as she undergoes her surgery. Although she is very sick and weak from her ordeal, Penny survives.

Again Catherine asks Philippa if she knows a Mrs. Farren. She says Mrs. Farren's daughter Kate wishes to join the monastery primarily because of her adoration for Philippa. As Catherine questions Philippa about her acquaintance with Mrs. Farren,



Philippa shares with her that Kate's mother was Philippa's son's nanny. Philippa will only say that her son, Keith, died and that Mrs. Farren couldn't have guessed what was about to happen. Kate is admitted to the monastery but Philippa does her best to avoid the young woman.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Tensions are released at Brede as the debts owed to the Duranski are miraculously provided. Some nuns are actually disappointed the old wooden cross held a ruby. They had like the idea that Jesus was the princess's most valuable possession. As it turns out, they now believe she was actually referring to the gemstone of worldly value that had been hidden all the time inside the cross.

Philippa first helps the monastery by donating the proceeds of her gratuity to buy the statue of Our Lady of Peace for the monastery. She reverts to her individualistic personality, however, when she neglects to request aid from the other nuns when dealing with Penny and her troubles. Philippa realizes what good people her nun sisters are when they all pull together to pray for Penny through the night of her surgery and recovery. At the end of Penny's ordeal even the cocky Donald acknowledges the power the nuns' prayers had over the life of his wife.

A new mystery is uncovered as Philippa is disturbed by the admittance of a new nun, Kate Farren, into the monastery. Catherine learns the girl knows Philippa and thinks highly of her. The only clue Catherine can get from Philippa about her unusual reaction to the young lady and her mother is that the mother was the nanny of Philippa's child. It is hinted that Mrs. Farren was in some way involved with the child's death though even Philippa says Mrs. Farren could not have known how to prevent the tragedy.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Pope Pius XII dies and Cardinal Roncalli is elected to take his place. The nuns are upset by the election of this man who is both old and fat. Meanwhile the news reaches Brede they may be receiving the first Japanese postulants. There are five ready and willing to join Brede. Mr. Konishi, the man who wishes to open the Japanese abbey claims he has been lead to Brede and that his ladies are excellent choices for nuns. There is some concern among the Brede nuns that these women have not received a calling from God but Mr. Konishi insists that they have been called. He says his wife once visited with the former abbess at Brede. His wife was killed in the war but an oblate she had gotten from the monastery was found in a box of her treasured possessions. Believing that somehow the Abbess Hester has proclaimed this addition of Japanese postulants, the Brede nuns join forces with Mr. Konishi.

One day Philippa makes a comment about an experience she had while in Japan and the nuns crowd around her to hear her memories of the country from where their newest sisters will come. As Philippa speaks of the country her fellow nuns recognize her love for Japan. It is learned Philippa was born in Japan and lived there until she was twelve years old. She also speaks Japanese fluently. This discovery is an answer to a prayer since there would be no one to communicate with the Japanese postulants and explain things to them in their own language. An interpreter could not be allowed; even Mr. Konishi could not give the Japanese ladies all of the information they would need.

At the beginning of Chapter 12 Catherine informs Philippa because of her knowledge of Japanese she will be given the job of zelatrix, or leader over the new postulants. Philippa explains that she was expecting this appointment but begs the abbess to please consider someone else. She does not mind the Japanese postulants, she says, but cannot be zelatrix to Kate. When asked for a reason, Philippa relates the story of the death of her son Keith.

The family, along with Keith's nanny Mrs. Farren, had gone to visit friends who had an old gold mine on their property. Keith was excited at the prospect of finding a gold nugget. Keith is fascinated by the old mine but it warned not to enter the shafts as no one would be able to find him if he were to get lost inside the labyrinth of tunnels. Keith finds a nugget of gold the owner of the mine had planted for him to find.

The children go to the river to play. Soon one of the children comes and asks his dad to come help look for Keith. Apparently two of the boys had a fight about the gold nugget. Mrs. Farren had tried to take the nugget away from Keith. She tells Keith the nugget was planted for him to find. This angers Keith and he runs away into the mine in anger. She does not take this action seriously and instead of going after Keith, she goes back to talking. The boy with whom Keith had the fight goes after Keith instead and tries to



persuade him out of the mine. Instead of leaving, however, Keith only goes further in. The boy hears Keith fall, then hears crying.

It takes awhile for the adults to find Keith, he has fallen into a crevice about 18 feet deep and 14 inches wide, not wide enough for an adult to slide down, only a child. Every attempt is made to rescue Keith from the crevice but all attempts fail. At the end of the third day the decision is made to dig the boy out. Philippa stays and watches as her son's body is recovered. He is badly crushed by the falling rock and dirt. After hearing the heart wrenching story Catherine tells Philippa she will not ask her to be zelatrix of Kate again.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Big changes are in the air as a new pope is elected. The younger nuns hope for a progressive leader while the older ones want things to stay the same. At Brede it appears things will soon be radically different as a group of Japanese postulants seek entry to the monastery. They would learn the life and ways of nuns while at Brede then take their knowledge back to Japan where a Japanese monastery is being planned.

Interestingly the nuns credit Abbess Hester with the coming of the Japanese postulants. It seems years before Hester had spoken with a Japanese lady who had been highly impressed with the nun's way of life. After her death the wife's husband found a manual for oblates among her possessions. It is this discovery that leads him to decide his Japanese postulants should learn their skills from Brede.

In these chapters Philippa's life takes an interesting turn. She has been named sacristan and is kept busy with this work. However, it is obvious that she has been avoiding Kate. The girl herself says she had believed Philippa would have been kinder to her. Without giving a reason Philippa asks for permission to give herself extra punishment as a way to make herself behave. Against this background, it is learned that Philippa has spent much time in Japan and knows the Japanese language and customs. Catherine attempts to make Philippa the zelatrix, or teacher, of the new postulants, a group that would include Kate as well as the Japanese women. To Catherine's dismay Philippa begs not to be made to take this job.

Catherine questions Philippa about this strange request which brings about an explanation of what happened to Philippa's son and why Philippa stays so far away from Kate. The young boy died, not necessarily because of something Mrs. Farren did but rather because of the things she did not do. Seeing Kate reminds Philippa of the tragedy. After hearing the dreadful story of the child's death, Catherine relieves Philippa by telling her she will not force her to take the position.

In these chapters several questions are answered. The reader learns what happened to Philippa's son and also why the nursery rhymes have haunted her days and nights. The reasons for Philippa's aversion to Kate are also uncovered. New questions are also raised though. With Philippa unable to fill the spot as zelatrix for the Japanese

postulants, who will teach them the needed customs and traditions? The reader may also wonder if Brede will lose the opportunity to foster the Japanese monastery.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Chapter 13 opens with a description of the nuns' Holy Week activities. It is during this time that Cecily receives cards from Larry. She returns the cards because they are addressed to her baptismal name, an act Catherine says is unkind. She encourages Cecily to write the man back and tell him of her everyday life. Meanwhile Philippa feels heat from others about her refusal to take on the Japanese postulants. Because of her refusal the addition of the postulants will be delayed one year, a delay with which no one is happy.

As spring begins, there is an outbreak of colds and sickness at the abbey. Sister Polycarp, Kate, is diagnosed with chicken pox and unfortunately passes the disease on to Philippa. The two are put in isolation together. Because of her age Philippa has a much worse case than Sister Polycarp. Philippa is delirious with high fever. While Polycarp cares for her it is uncertain what she says while the girl is there but she takes tender care of the older lady. On her last day of isolation with Philippa, Polycarp tells Philippa she is sorry about what had happened to Philippa's son. She adds that her mother had never told her about what happened. After Philippa is deemed well she visits Catherine and announces she will take the spot as zelatrix.

At the beginning of Chapter 14 the Japanese postulants have been at Brede for nearly 8 months. The Japanese become part of Brede, sharing their similarities and differences with the English nuns. On New Year's Day the foreign postulants serve tea to the English nuns in Japanese dress and custom. The English nuns are awed by their grace and beauty. Meanwhile other young girls have entered the monastery. The older women are undone by these girls' new ideas and energy. Sister Philippa gains popularity with the new postulants English and Japanese as well. Catherine encourages the sisters to accept these new girls with their new ideas. Her hope is that one day all of them will be as one.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Despite Philippa's reasons for not wanting to serve as zelatrix to the Japanese postulants she is met with irritation by others around her. Instead of seeing her as a person with real feelings, Mr. Konishi believes Philippa should just be able to discard her feelings and serve as bidden. Luckily for Philippa, Catherine takes a less strict view of the matter. It is by mere coincidence that Philippa and Polycarp are isolated together with chicken pox. Although the novel does not indicate what Philippa may have said in her delusional state, it is assumed she spoke of her son and the events of his death. Despite the way Philippa had previously treated Polycarp, she gently nurses Philippa until she is nearly well. Polycarp's apology to Philippa seems to bring about a turning point for the two. After this experience Philippa accepts the position as the zelatrix. Even



Philippa's decision to take the job as zelatrix is met with displeasure as some nuns believe Philippa should have been able to do the job even before she fought the battle with herself and won.

The Japanese bring new life and new customs to the abbey. They find some English habits and foods disgusting. Special Japanese foods are brought for them while they acclimate themselves to English fare. The English nuns are in awe of the grace and beautiful manners of the Japanese girls. The two cultures are shown in greatest contrast as the Japanese postulants treat the nuns to Japanese tea in true Japanese fashion. The nuns are in awe of their brightly colored kimonos and their delicate and graceful movements.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Philippa's friend McTurk brings two Buddhist monks to Brede who agree that those at Brede have "the real thing." Philippa watches one turning a prayer wheel and thinks how the nuns at Brede work like this prayer wheel through the liturgical routines of the calendar year. After the episode with Penny, Philippa has found herself being called more and more often to the parlors to meet with guests. She is tired by her many duties but still tries to do her job completely. Dame Veronica's children's book has become a best seller. Veronica's mother and brother have both been to see her and those relationships appear to be mending. Although Veronica appears to have returned to her old self, she begins to let her writing and her poetry come between her and her duties at the monastery. Meanwhile Dame Agnes has finished a scholarly book about the cross only to find no publisher for it. This disgrace is seen as a sign of the times and Agnes is deeply disappointed. Meanwhile Philippa continues to minister to Penny and Donald. Penny is pregnant again. This time they will keep the baby. Philippa has also helped Donald get a new job.

One day one of the Japanese postulants who has had the most trouble adjusting to and finding her place in Brede is sent to the vestment room with a message. Dame Colette is alone in the room weaving a veil from silk thread, an activity that strikes a vein in Kazuko. Dame Colette allows her to approach the loom and realizes the girl has experience with the delicate work. To Colette's surprise and dismay the Japanese girl begins to work the loom. Soon she is in awe of the girl as she expertly works the loom. In exchange for Kazuko's help with the weaving Colette offers to help the girl with Latin and chant. Despite Colette's reputation for being too fierce, she and Kazuko soon develop a deep friendship.

Chapter 16 opens with Cecily requesting Catherine to end some of her extra organ playing and practice time. Other nuns begin to notice Cecily is not as happy as she used to be and associate her turn in emotions to the time when the novices were required to pick nettles for soup. If not pulled correctly the nettles would sting. Although her hands are blistered and swollen Cecily tries to play to organ anyway. Dame Maura notices her hands and asks the girl to hold them out. In her emotions over the girl's misery Maura kisses the injured hands, an action that scares Cecily with its unwelcome closeness. Maura asks to be sent away because she has become too close to Cecily. Catherine consents and Maura is sent to a monastery in Canada for five years. Cecily asks if Maura's leaving was in connection with her. Catherine gently tells her the truth and tries to help the girl understand how she can keep herself distanced from others.

Dame Veronica becomes problematic as her new ideas for children's books are not accepted by a publisher. She attacks Catherine by saying the new abbess had never liked her. Veronica leaves the abbess in anger just as Philippa comes to Catherine with an idea to have Agnes' book published. Philippa knows a professor in America who she



wants to share the book with to see if he can get it published. Catherine agrees to the idea.

As the time draws closer for Cecily's Solemn Profession Cecily's inner battle becomes stronger. At first she believes she might transfer to a Cistercian monastery. After seeing Penny's children Cecily hungers for children and a family of her own. She wonders what is causing her strange mood swings and decides to must be the spring vapors.

Dame Agnes receives notification her book will be published in America. Instead of allowing her to be happy, however, Veronica tells Agnes that Philippa had sent the book to America as a favor to see if it could be published. Agnes is hurt by this knowledge and tells Catherine of the hurt. She calls Philippa to them so she can explain her motivations behind her actions. They can only determine Veronica overheard the two of them talking about the book as she stood in the hall that day. Dame Perpetua has the chance to scold Veronica for her spiteful actions and does so.

Catherine, however, takes her troubles to Dame Emily and asks for advice. Her advice is to give Veronica something hard to do. Catherine gives Veronica the job of translating Rufinus.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Once again Veronica's spiteful side comes out in the open. Although she has written a book that has done well, she is still jealous of Agnes' success with her book. Veronica is quickly apologetic once she had rid herself of her bad feelings but by this time the damage has already been done.

Cecily continues to fight with herself over her profession. She finds herself one day wanting to be isolated from others and the next day wanting children and a family. These feelings seem to have stemmed from an incident where she injured her hands while picking nettles. Maura was so emotional at seeing the girl's hands that she knelt down and kissed her hands, an outpouring of emotion that startles Cecily. There have been shadowings of Maura's affection for Cecily earlier but Maura had managed to keep these emotions under control until she saw the injured hands. Maura asks to be sent away until she can separate herself from the girl. This circumstance brings light to an interesting rule in the monastery. Though all are to loving to each other, there are not supposed to be any favorites. Because of their similar gifts and talents, however, Maura and Cecily were naturally drawn together.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Larry's mother comes to see Cecily in person. Catherine first meets with Mrs. Bannerman. The lady tells Catherine she must tell Cecily what she is doing to her son. Cecily is called in and Mrs. Bannerman begs her to come home. Cecil asks for a few moments to decide what she wants to do. Cecily retreats to a corner of the Chapel of the Crown of Thorns and carefully considers her options. In her final thoughts it is the words of her mother that cause Cecily to realize that she must stay at the monastery. Cecily then goes to Mrs. Bannerman and tells the lady of her decision.

In Chapter 18 a television is brought in so the nuns can watch the council meetings in Rome. After serving only five years Pope John dies and is replaced by Pope Pius. Many changes are in store for the monastery. One of the biggest being the proposed change from Latin to English, an idea the nuns find ludicrous. Younger nuns are also looking for more fashionable choices than the traditional habit. Catherine tries to convince these troubles and changes are only a sign of better times. However, the peace and contentment seems to have left Brede.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

In Chapter 17 Cecily finally finds rest from her torn emotions. It is during a visit from Mrs. Bannerman that she realizes she is meant to be apart from other people, that she could not be a good husband to Larry and must not go to him only to make others happy. Ironically it is the words of her own mother, intended to make Cecily turn away from the monastery that seals her relationship. Cecily realizes her marriage is to Jesus and that she must be true to that relationship.

Much change makes tumultuous times for Brede. The nuns struggle with the new, modern ideas for nuns and wonder how and if their traditions will survive. These changes give the 18th chapter a suspenseful tone. It is unsure what will happen next.



Chapters 19, 20 and Enovie

Chapters 19, 20 and Enovie Summary

The Japanese postulants make their Solemn Professions and Mr. Konishi is eager to start on the Japanese monastery. Larry marries Cecily's cousin Jean and Cecily feels at last as if that weight has lifted off of her. Dame Maura comes back to Brede after her time in Canada. As she arrives the choir is singing. She finds she can at last listen to Cecily's singing without the rush of emotion she once felt.

Meanwhile in Chapter 20 Philippa has been moved to the job of infirmian. She now waits for Dame Emily to pass away. She thinks about the two years that have passed since she served as zelatrix. The Japanese monastery is ready for its inhabitants. The Japanese nuns and a few leaders from Brede will leave for Japan the end of June. Dame Colette is to serve the monastery as prioress.

Two martlets fly into the room where Philippa and Veronica kneel in prayer. Philippa believes the bird fitting to precede the death of Dame Emily but wonders why there were two birds instead of just one. Later in the choir Catherine appears white and tired, and the other nuns know that something is wrong. Dame Colette has died. The doctor diagnoses a coronary thrombosis which no one could have done anything to prevent. Dame Emily also dies the same day.

Again Mr. Konishi is distraught by the news that the one who was to be prioress in Japan has passed away. He wonders what will happen but Catherine encourages him not to worry and trust they will provide an answer. Later as Catherine sees Philippa comforting the Japanese nuns, Catherine knows who is the obvious choice to fill the position. Philippa feels cold dread enter her as she realizes what she will be asked to do.

The nuns discuss why Philippa is the obvious and best choice for the position and try to convince her that she is the one meant for the job. Philippa has her doubts but it is Dame Agnes who convinces Philippa she must give all of herself to Christ. Philippa accepts the offer.

Although they will not be able to see her well or speak to her Penny, Donald and Joyce are at the airport to see Philippa's plane off. Richard Taft, Philippa's former lover also goes to the airport to see Philippa off. Although it is uncertain if she sees him or not, Taft removes his hat and waves to Philippa, a final good bye.

Chapters 19, 20 and Enovie Analysis

Once again Philippa is required to make a hard decision. Once again she gives herself fully to God. She has now become fully and completely His. As the story closes, Richard Taft, her former lover goes to the airport to wave goodbye. Philippa doesn't even seem

to notice him, a sign that he is now in the past, she has more important and worthwhile things to look forward to.



Characters

Phillipa Talbot

Phillipa Talbot gives up a successful career, satisfying social life and ways of relative luxury and ease to join a Benedictine monastery. Although she seeks a life of quiet retreat and a respite from responsibility, Philippa becomes one of the more influential nuns at Brede. Philippa's accomplishments at Brede include helping a fellow nun get her book published by suggesting the book to an American professor as well as serving as zelatrix of the new Japanese postulants. Despite these positive outcomes, Philippa worked hard to win many battles that could have hindered her vocation at the monastery. For instance, she overcomes the lack of forgiveness she felt for the daughter of the nanny whose inattention Philippa believes led to the death of her young son. Philippa also had many strikes against her when she entered the monastery. These included her advanced age, her worldly experience and her habits of drinking and smoking. Although she entered Brede smelling of the whiskey she drank to give herself the courage she needed to enter the monastery Philippa leaves Brede's grounds on her way to become abbess at a Japanese abbey.

Phillipa is a very intelligent, well polished woman with a leader's personality. She is well liked both by her sisters at the monastery as well as those she knew on the outside. This likeness is evidenced by Penny's frequent trips to the monastery, McTurk's gifts and Sir Richard's final salute as Philippa boards the plane for Japan. She proves to herself and the nuns at Brede as well as her former friends and fellow employees that she does have what it takes to be a nun.

Abbess Hester Cunningham Proctor

Dame Hester is the abbess of Brede Abbey when Philippa enters. About four years after Philippa's entrance in the abbey Dame Hester suffers a stroke and dies. This fatal stroke is connected with Sister Julian's decision to leave the abbey and take her dowry with her. The Brede nuns later learn Dame Hester had depended on this dowry to finance a renovation project for the abbey's chapel. The new abbess discovers this renovation plan only after she receives a letter informing her that the stones have been carved and are ready to be set in the monastery. Dame Veronica is the only other nun in the monastery besides Dame Hester who knew of these renovation plans. As an abbess Dame Hester is greatly loved by all her daughters at Brede. Even after they learn of her scheme to remodel the sanctuary, the nuns can still not seem to bring themselves to think badly of their Mother. During Dame Hester's reign at Brede many renovation projects were completed including the addition of central heat to the monastery as well as a bathroom in the infirmary.



Dame Emily Lowell

Dame Emily is the prioress of Brede Abbey. Shortly after Abbess Hester's death Dame Emily suffers a physical breakdown and is sent to a public hospital to recover from her fatigue. It is only at this point the other nuns learn of Emily's battles with cancer. After she is allowed to come home to the abbey from the hospital Emily lives primarily in the infirmary. The other nuns often visit her room for the peace and confidence she gives to those around her.

Dame Veronica Fanshawe

Dame Veronica conspires with Dame Hester to finance a renovation project that is not approved by the council. After Dame Hester's death Dame Veronica is left to bear the brunt of the fall out alone. Shortly before the meeting where her faults will be exposed Veronica suffers with a chest pains and unintentionally takes an overdose of quinidine to try to help herself feel better. Dame Veronica is also responsible for the disappearance of about 100 pounds from a money box belonging to Abbess Hester. Abbess Catherine later learns this money was given to Dame Veronica's brother when he threatened to tell Dame Hester about Veronica's real history. Veronica had entered the abbey under an assumed name and had also lied about her family's ties to Orford Hall. Although she had grown up at the Hall it was as the child of a servant, not the owner. Dame Veronica is later given a project to write a children's book which turns out to be a best seller. She feels justified of her former sin by the money coming in from her book. However, Dame Veronica gets too caught up in the fame associated with writing and become jealous when another nun also has a book published. Veronica intentionally hurts the other nun's feelings. In other instances Veronica gets so caught up in her writing that she does not attend prayers and other rituals as she should.

Dame Catherine Ismay

Catherine is elected as the new abbes after Dame Hester's death. She finds she must depend on God to fulfill her duties as Mother of the abbey. However, Catherine shows leadership qualities from before the abbess' death when she is the only one with the courage to step out and comfort the dying abbess. It is after Catherine's comforting words that Dame Hester allows herself to die. From the beginning of her term as abbess Catherine is met with difficult situations as she learns one of the nuns has been stealing money from the abbey. This same nun conspired with the former abbess to renovate the sanctuary of the church, a project which was not granted approval and for which the monastery does not have the funds to pay. Under Catherine's direction, however, the sisters of Brede overcome this tragedy and go on to welcome postulants from Japan into their home.



Sister Cecily (Elspeth) Scallon

Despite her mother's displeasure Cecily becomes a nun at the age of twenty-three. This young woman reminds Philippa of Penny, a worker from her old office. Cecily soon impresses the sisters with her ability to sing and play the organ. Cecily is beautiful and easily loved, a combination which becomes a hindrance to her in her effort to fulfill her duties as a nun. It is Cecily's struggle with her decision of whether or not she should commit to Brede that the reader sees most clearly. Her fellow nuns at first believe Cecily joins the abbey to get away from her overbearing mother. Cecily also struggles with her natural desire to have children, to love a man, and to have a place of her own before she conclusively decides a life at Brede is what she has been called to.

Sister Julian

Sister Julian leaves Brede Abbey to join the Brown Sisters. Abbess Hester had been counting on the proceeds of Julian's dowry to pay for her stone renovation project. It is believed Julian's announcement that she will leave the abbey is what brought on Dame Hester's stroke and resulting death.

Sir Richard Taft

Sir Richard Taft is a man with whom Philippa apparently had an ongoing affair for several years before they decided mutually to stop the relationship. Taft questions Philippa's ability to do without the luxuries to which she has been accustomed once she has entered the abbey. He also offers to drive her to the monastery but Philippa refuses. When Philippa leaves for Japan Taft is among those gathered to see her off.

Keith

Keith is Philippa's son who died at an early age. Although he is never an active character in the novel, Philippa often has bad dreams about the circumstances surrounding the boy's death. Keith slides down a crevice in an old mine shaft where rescuers are unable to reach him. He is alive for three days before workers break apart the rock to remove his body. The boy's legs are broken and he is badly crushed by the falling rock. Philippa blames Keith's death on a nanny who chose not to try to find Keith even after another child told her he had gone into the mine shaft.

Kate Farren/Sister Polycarp

Kate is the daughter of the nanny who cared for Philippa's son Keith. She decides to join Brede Abbey because of her admiration of Philippa. Philippa, however, can not bring herself to face the girl because it brings back memories of her son's death. It is only after Philippa and Kate are sequestered together with the chicken pox that Philippa



accepts Kate despite her connection with Keith's death. During this three week time period, Kate nurses and cares for Philippa even though Philippa has treated her coldly.

Stefan Duranski

Duranski is a famous sculptor whom Dame Hester commissions to do stone work for the abbey's sanctuary. Although the nuns are at first dismayed by his presence at the abbey, they eventually gain a respect for the artist as he creates his masterpieces out of simple stone. They liken his work to that of God with each individual Christian. Duranski finds a stone trough in the abbey's yard out of which he carves a new statue of the Virgin Mary. Philippa later buys this statue of Mary for the abbey to help pay for the renovation project.



Objects/Places

Gold Clock

Penny Stevens takes a liking to this clock in Philippa's office and its chime. Philippa gives this clock to Penny on the day she announces she will be leaving for the monastery.

Brede Abbey

Brede Abbey is the monastery where Philippa chooses to reside and make her Solemn Profession. It is located in Sussex, England.

Westminster Cathedral

A church where ten years prior to her final step of joining to monastery Philippa sensed she was being drawn toward a life for Christ.

Stone Cross Interlaced with Thorns

This cross stands over the entrance of Brede Abbey's church. This symbol is said to be more than one thousand years old.

A crucifix

This ugly, oversized cross is a gift from a Yorkshire businessman moved by a book of poetry written by Dame Veronica. The crucifix is placed on the back wall of the proc's room where it cannot be easily seen.

Benedictine Nuns

This enclosed order of nuns devotes their life to worship and prayer. They make a profession of lifelong dedication to a particular abbey and are symbolically "married" to God.

Vespers

Vespers is an evening or late afternoon worship service observed on Sundays or other Holy Days.



A Wooden Cross

This wooden cross was made for the Abbess Flavia Vaux by Princess Marie Hortense of Savory while they were imprisoned together. Abbess Catherine accidentally breaks the cross and discovers a highly valuable ruby hidden inside.

Benedictine Vows

The vows taken by the Benedictine nuns are those of stability, conversion of manners and obedience.

Sext

This is the sixth hour of the day after dawn, accepted as noon, a fixed time for prayers and psalms for the nuns.

The Crook

This crook reminds the nuns of Jesus reference to Himself as the Good Shepherd. Abbess Hester had a crook made of rosewood and silver while Abbess Catherine prefers a plain crook.

A Stone Trough

Stefan Duranski finds this old stone trough on the grounds of the abbey and asks the nuns' permission to carve a new statue of the Virgin Mary from its stone.

Cistercian

The Cistercians are an order of enclosed nuns more strict even than the Benedictine orders. In her struggle with herself Cecily first believes she needs to join a Cistercian abbey.

Brompton Cocktail

A combination of heroin, cocaine, gin and honey given to Dame Emily by Dr. Avery in her last bought with cancer to help ease the pain.

Themes

Nuances of Monastery Life

The nuances of living at a monastery are the main theme explored in the novel *In This House of Brede*. The content of the novel explores and explains the reasons why monasteries exist, how they operate and how they are funded. Apart from the concrete facts of monastery life, the day to day events are also explored. Although one might think there are no conflicts tolerated at a monastery, the novel proves differently. The nuns react to each other much the same way lay people do; however, they seek a more Biblical more accepting way of handling their differences and approaching their problems.

While nuns are sometimes seen as women without feelings, gender or beauty Godden depicts her nuns in such a way that the reader understands how much these women give up when they decide to dedicate their lives to Christ. Cecily, for instance aches to feel a child in her arms and grieves for her inability to have a family if she decides to join the monastery. The abbess Catherine is described as beautiful and young. Her feelings of desire and pleasure are evoked when the sculptor Duranski looks at her and she realizes he sees her as a woman, not just a nun.

Rhythmic Pattern of Life at the Monastery

In several different places in this novel the years at Brede and the festivals associated with the passing of each year are described as being circular in nature. It is almost as if the monastery year were on a wheel and this wheel continues to turn, bringing each season and each holy day and festival around in what becomes a comfortable routine. Another striking description of life at Brede compares the life of the nuns to a prayer wheel. This example uses a water prayer wheel which turns continually when placed in running water. For those who use prayer wheels it is believed that just spinning the wheel will have the same effect as saying the prayers. Instead of a water wheel, however, Brede's prayer wheel is comprised of the nuns, each praying continually.

Reactions of the Public to Monastery Life

When Philippa announces to her fellow workers that she is leaving them to become a nun their reactions range from shock and disbelief to the simple assumption that a person such as Philippa will not last in a monastery. Ironically, when Philippa arrives at Brede, the nuns' reaction to her is much the same. They also doubt whether or not she will be able to withstand the hard life of a nun. Some reactions, such as Penny's, show how little people not familiar with a monastery actually know about the reasons these places exist.



Like Philippa, Cecily also has to fight public opinion in order to join Brede. Cecily's mother, for instance, first indicates she believes it is anemia that is causing her daughter to want to be a nun. She cannot believe that Cecily would rather live in a monastery than marry Larry, a man who seems to be crazy about Cecily. As the time draws nearer for Cecily to make her Solemn Profession she also questions whether or not she has made the right decision. At the end of her mental and emotional struggle, Cecily decides her calling is real and stays at Brede.

The reaction of Cecily's mother to the idea of the monastery and its rituals is also interesting. For instance, she sees Cecily's Clothing as a mock wedding. In reality this ceremony is a very serious one for the nuns as they symbolically "marry" Christ. Note that it is her mother's statement about the reality of marriage that causes Cecily to ultimately realize the monastery is her destiny. The mother, however, had intended her statement to turn Cecily away from Brede.



Style

Point of View

This story is written using the omniscient third person point of view, meaning that the narrator knows all of the characters' emotions and feelings. No one character in the story tells the story only from his or her point of view. This particular point of view works best for this novel because it tells the story of all the nuns living in Brede monastery. Had Godden chosen to write the story only from Philippa's view point, for instance, she would have not had the opportunity to tell the thoughts and emotions of Catherine as she is chosen as abbess or Cecily as she fights with herself over the reality of her calling.

Godden uses much dialogue in her writing which allows her characters to tell their story. This style works well since large portions of the book are dedicated to background information about Brede Abbey and life inside a monastery. Had these portions been told without the nuns' own views of the facts, they would have been much less colorful and interesting.

Setting

The majority of this story is set in the house and grounds of Brede Abbey an imaginary monastery located in the town of Sussex, England. The introduction, however, is set in Philippa's office, a restaurant, a train and a bar as Philippa leaves her old life and travels to Brede. The concluding section of the story is set at an airport as Philippa leaves England for the Japanese monastery. Specific places in the monastery which serve as a backdrop for the story include the grounds and gardens of the monastery, the bell tower, the chapel, the parlors, the abbess' rooms and the recreation room.

The prologue of the story provides a brief glimpse into Philippa's life before she joined Brede. The main novel section picks up in her fourth year in the confines of the monastery and covers a span of several years until she leaves to go to Japan.

Language and Meaning

Godden writes her novel in a way that beautifully combines both the heart of the story she tells with the history of Brede Monastery and the day to day life of the nuns. The story flows easily through the past and the present with just enough suspense to keep the reader interested and wanting to read more. The relaxed language and timely historical and informational passages make the plot easy to understand even for one with no prior knowledge of a monastery or the working of the Catholic Church.

Structure

This novel consists of twenty chapters including a prologue and an envoie or conclusion. Each chapter is given only a chapter number with no descriptive title. Chapter length varies with Chapter 6 being the longest chapter. Time changes frequently from the past to the present and back again as a way to explain the reasoning for certain actions in the novel as well as a way to give the reader needed information about the history and workings of Brede Abbey.

The main plot of the novel follows Philippa's maturity as a member of the monastery. Within this main story, however, there are many other different subplots being developed. These subplots include the discovery of the new stone pieces being made for the abbey as well as the resolution of the financial troubles brought on the abbey as a result of the stone work, the integration of Cecily into the monastery and the development of the Japanese monastery.

This story is extremely well-written and although the author does switch time frames often, these transitions are easy to follow. Although it is a fairly long book This House of Brede is very easy to read and very absorbing.



Quotes

"The motto was "Pax," but the word was set in a circle of thorns. Pax: peace, but what a strange peace, made of unremitting toil and effort, seldom with seen result; subject to constant interruptions, unexpected demands, short sleep at nights, little comfort, sometimes scant food; beset with bitter disappointments and usually misunderstood; yet peace all the same, undeviating, filled with joy and gratitude and love. "It is my own peace I give unto you." Not, notice, the world's peace." Prologue, pg. 3.

"An enclosed order is like a kind of power house,' said Mrs. Talbot. 'A power house of prayer; you protect a power house not to enclose the power, but to stop unauthorized people getting in to hinder its working.'" Prologue, pg. 17.

"People think we renounce the world. We don't. We renounce its ways but we are still very much in it and it is very much in us." Prologue, pg. 23.

"The church does not weep for death and, in the abbey, there was none of the funeral pomp of undertakers; there should have been no gloom, yet gloom there was, worse, almost a sense of doom and, oddly, of disorder." Chapter 3, pg. 87.

"You shall have a brave name, from a man's, Phillip; Phillip was one of the twelve, and there was St. Philip Neri." Chapter 2, pg. 98.

"You will be Cecily, from St. Cecilia because you have brought us music.' They did not know then what music." Chapter 2, pg. 99.

"Discipline. At the sound of the bell, a speaker must stop - "Well, not in midsentence," said Dame Clare, "but stop." A writer must stop, too, even in the middle of a paragraph, the artist must lay down her brush, the cleaner her broom or dustpan." Chapter 2, pg. 106.

"Yes, one suffers for the Office," Dame Clare said. "The getting up, and staying up; the continual interruption to ordinary work, singing, no matter how one feels, day after day. Nuns have no holidays.' That had been what Philippa had been most afraid of, the intensity of the work." Chapter 2, pg. 106.

"It had been no use, and in a moment she, dry-eyed stoical Philippa, who had not wept even when Keith died or when she and Richard had made their decision, was weeping in a storm of tears, perhaps the tears of a lifetime, that had shaken her as helplessly as the beech trees in the wind." Chapter 3, pg. 145.

"I think,' said Dame Maura, lifting her hands, 'that Thomas Aquinas and Johann Sebastian Bach must occupy thrones side by side in heaven.'" Chapter 5, pg. 205.



"'Not three,' the abbess could have told them. 'This is all one.' It stems from Abbess Hester. One fault allowed - no, encouraged - can grow in a community, like the mustard seed into a monstrous tree. 'No one lives to herself.'" Chapter 6, pg. 261.

"We can overcome our second natures, my dear, but not our first, and you were born to take responsibility, to lead." Chapter 7, pg. 307.

"From the worry and upset that had surrounded the apse and altar another feeling had emerged, one of hope and cheer." Chapter 8, pg. 319.

"'But...vocations are not 'got'; they must come, be inborn.'" Chapter 11, pg. 437.

"Yoko was a daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter of many generations of samurai, and she was brave, not stoically brave as the other Japanese, but brave enough not only to endure but also to try and comprehend with body, heart, mind and soul." Chapter 14, pg. 490.

"Perhaps tomorrow there will be no division among us, claustral or choir, when every one of us, with our different degrees of gifts, will be able to wear the cowl; when whatever our background, we shall truly be sisters. Perhaps Sister Polycarp is meant to teach us that." Chapter 14, pg. 504.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the significance names. Generally the Sisters of Brede receive new names when they enter the abbey. These new names signify their new lives. Philippa's name, however, is not changed. Discuss why this is significant.

Consider the knocks Abbess Catherine hears at her door which lead to the breaking of the cross and discovery of the ruby. Were these knocks divine intervention or just coincidence? Explain the reasoning behind your answer.

Discuss the Benedictine nuns' practice of not having favorites among the other nuns. Why is this practice important? Consider also the times this rule was not followed, specifically in the cases of Abbess Hester and Dame Veronica, and Cecily and Dame Maura. What was the result of these close relationships and their impact on the individuals as well as the nuns as a whole?

Explore Cecily's many personal battles with her own vocation. How did these battles make her more fitted for a life at Brede? Explain your answer.

How has your opinion and view of monastery life changed after reading this book? Do you feel it is a worthy cause? Explain your answer.

Compare and contrast the Japanese postulants with those from England. What similar trials do these postulants face? How are they different?

Devout Christians can often look back on their lives and see how God has brought them through certain circumstances and given them certain experiences which they have been able to use for God later in life. Examine Philippa's life and describe how God used her many experiences, both good and bad, to benefit the cause of the nuns at Brede.