

John Crow's Devil Study Guide

John Crow's Devil by Marlon James

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This guide refers to the Kindle Edition of John Crow's Devil by Marlon James, Copyright 2005.

In Marlon James' novel, John Crow's Devil, Pastor Hector Bligh is supposed to be the religious leader of the people in the small village of Gibbeah. He is indifferent at best, spending most of his time drinking and ignoring the needs of his congregation. The people of the village consider him a joke and ignore any preaching he does. While they make fun of Bligh, they are also aware that it is nice to have a preacher who cannot afford to actually expect anything from his congregation.

The majority of the property in Gibbeah belongs to Mr. Aloysius Garvey. Mr. Garvey feels important. He had tried to change the name of the village to Garveyville, but no one was interested in making that change. He always attends church services with some young men he refers to as "nephew," though no one really believes that family relationship exists. It was Mr. Garvey who hired Pastor Bligh.

One woman in the congregation is named Lucinda. She has written many letters, complaining about Pastor Bligh's performance. These letters have met with no success, though Lucinda has contacted every official she can think of. Meanwhile, Lucinda is struggling with her own demons, including a heightened sexual nature with no outlet. She privately admits that she prays to a heathen deity, not God. She learned black arts from her mother and now struggles to keep her two sides separate as Day Lucinda and Night Lucinda. She lets others see the actions of Day Lucinda, but she hides the activities of Night Lucinda.

One day, a man arrives unexpectedly at the church. He calls himself Apostle York. He bodily throws Pastor Bligh out of the church. Over the coming days, Pastor Bligh falls into deep despair. Then, he begins to work through his own shortcomings and realizes that he owes his congregation more than he has been giving. But, Apostle York is firmly ensconced. He has developed some followers, and he continues to thwart Pastor Bligh's efforts to take back the church. Lucinda quickly becomes one of his most avid followers.

Over the next few months, Apostle York works the congregation into a fury of self-righteous actions. They murder a man herding a cow home and brutally beat another man.

By this time, a young widow, Mary Greenfield, has taken Pastor Bligh into her home. She soon discovers that Apostle York was one of the "nephews" brutalized by Mr. Garvey.

Eventually, Apostle York pushes the people to stone Pastor York, and they kill him. Over the weeks of the battle, black birds known as John Crows, have plagued the village. In



the moments after Pastor Bligh dies, doves arrive in huge flocks. They put out the eyes of one man, drive one to fall off a cliff and die, and terrorize the people for hours.

Apostle York has the bridge destroyed, which literally cuts the village off from everyone. They build a fence, and anyone trying to get out is punished. Then, a young man named Clarence discovers that Apostle York has given him syphilis as well. He murders Apostle York. By the second day, people are wondering about Apostle York. When people see another dove, some begin to run away but others remember that the dove is a bird of hope and promise.



The End, The Rum Preacher, The Preacher and the Apostle

Summary

The opening section of John Crow's *Devil* serves as a preface, but the title is "The End." The village of Gibbeah is quiet. Though there are no birds in the sky, the people are afraid to look up for fear that they might see an omen. A man named Apostle York is locked in a room where he remains for three days before he issues his decision. During that time, a man named Clarence waits by the door. The Apostle York tells Clarence to stack and burn the bodies of the men, women, and children at the place where the roads meet. Clarence goes outside and calls for anyone who can hear him to help. No one answers at first, but Clarence shouts that the Apostle is calling on them to do this.

They are all afraid of birds, and Clarence has a large scratch on his face from a dove's claws. However, there are some things more frightening than the birds, so they answer Clarence's summons.

Three days earlier, the villagers had killed Pastor Hector Bligh. Apostle York says their current situation is "judgment." The people are already building a fence around the village. All signs of what happened here will be erased soon. A woman named Lucinda is among the villagers. She used to see two faces in the mirror. After Hector Bligh's death, she went crazy and then saw three. The Apostle York had called Hector Bligh names, including Antichrist. Lucinda knew him as the Rum Preacher.

The first chapter of Part One is titled "The Rum Preacher," referring to the fact that Pastor Bligh drinks a great deal. The novel begins with a brutal scene in which Lillimae Perkins murdered her father by cutting off his penis. He woke briefly only to see the blood. Lillimae is then confronted by "the Five," which are five deacons that serve the church. None of them can hold her. Pastor Hector Bligh tries to grab her, but she pins his hand to the wall with a knife. She shouts that he should have tried to control her when she was "one" but that she is now host to eight demons. She then runs away and no one sees her again until her body is found floating down a nearby river.

Pastor Bligh is a drinker. Some people point out the Biblical passage in which Jesus turned the water into wine as a support for Pastor Bligh's drinking. Others simply say he is a man, and a man has a right to drink. One morning, he stops to urinate on the sidewalk and trips over his pants. He knocks himself out. The churchwoman who finds him is initially fearful, thinking that he might be a rapist. She is relieved that it is Pastor Bligh. A preacher with so much sin in his own life has no time to criticize others. One woman, Lucinda, writes about all of pastor Bligh's transgressions to everyone she can think of, but no one responds. Pastor Bligh's tenure continues.



The second chapter, “The Preacher and the Apostle,” opens with the arrival of a flock of crows. When the birds land, they turn their heads so the villagers can identify them as vultures. They are called John Crows.

The Astor Sugar Plantation fell as a direct result of the end of slavery when the former slaves were forced to leave the plantation. The village of Gibbeah was one of several created as a place for slaves to live, but they had no way to even feed themselves. They returned to work on the plantation. However, the whites who pushed for an end to slavery refused to have anything to do with the former slaves. Many whites left the region altogether. Over time, the country changed, including the rise of other crops like beets instead of sugar.

Aloysius Garvey, who owns most of the area, had wanted people to call Gibbeah “Garveyville,” but no one complied. He has a white father and black mother, and there are rumors about his sexual proclivities. He always attends Ash Wednesday services along with his nephews. His presence is a show in and of itself. On the Ash Wednesday after the John Crows appear, Mr. Garvey does not show up for church. People pay little attention.

On this day, Pastor Bligh is sober, but none of the congregants pay him much attention. Attendance has fallen off to a fraction of what it once was. Bligh urges the congregants to repent, saying there is little time to do so. It takes time for them to answer the call to ask for forgiveness, but some of them do. Then a man bursts into the church. He beats Pastor Bligh mercilessly and throws him out of the church. He tells Lucinda that he is there to answer her pleas, acknowledging that she is probably tired of writing all those letters about Pastor Bligh. He condemns the parishioners, saying they may have had the pastor they deserved. He pledges to clean out the temple and to start a revival. Then he identifies himself as Apostle York.

Analysis

The preface of the novel is ironically titled “The End,” and it involves a scene that happens about midway through Part Two. The purpose of calling it “The End” is that this signals the end of the battle between the two main characters, Apostle York and Pastor Bligh.

There is a great deal of information in the opening pages, called “The End,” but most of it will not make sense until the reader has more information from the novel. Four characters are introduced. Lucinda, Hector Bligh, Apostle York, and Clarence are all identified. Details include that Hector Bligh dies at the hands of the villagers and that there is an issue with birds that has made the villagers afraid.

Many of the characters are introduced in roundabout ways. Lucinda is a prime example. The story line is focused on the scene in which Pastor Bligh has fallen down with his genitals exposed. Lucinda is not identified before the reader discovers she has begun a letter-writing campaign to get Pastor Bligh removed from the church. Details about



Lucinda are provided in pieces, and the reader begins to get a clearer picture of her. For example, she has no education other than what she gleaned from reading the Bible. She also prays to “someone” other than Jesus, but that deity is not named.

Slavery is one of the issues briefly discussed in the novel, though slavery was eliminated before the time of the events in this novel. While formal slavery was not in effect, the people of this time and place endured other kinds of slavery, such as a slavery to poverty and religion.

The author uses literary tools throughout the novel. Personification is seen in the second chapter. The author is describing how the country changed after slavery was abolished. He mentions that “King Sugar” was once the main crop, but it has been “dethroned” by beets, which was one of the “lesser suitors.” Personification is seen later in the chapter when the sun and wind are each portrayed as a woman.

There is a stark change in language and tone during the scene of the stranger who arrived at the church, accusing Pastor Bligh and the congregation of needing forgiveness. It appears that the author is submitting the majority of the story from a neutral point of view up to this point. Then, there is a switch to a specific perspective, that of “pop.” These abrupt changes indicate that the rest of the scene, all the information from “pop's” perspective, is dialogue, though there is no traditional punctuation to support this. There are some lines in this section that indicate “pop” is talking to another person. This back-and-forth is presented without quote marks and in the traditional Caribbean dialect.

Apostle York knows things he should not have known without mystical or divine intervention. Key among these facts is that Lucinda has been writing letters complaining about Pastor Bligh. He might have known this because others in the village knew it, but he also knew about a secret ritual she had involving tea. His knowledge of the tea makes her fearful of what else he knows, which is another indication that Lucinda is not a truly religious character, but that she has something to hide.

Discussion Question 1

What is the purpose of the chapter titled “The End”? Why do you think the author chose this title?

Discussion Question 2

What do the people think of Pastor Bligh?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Aloysius Garvey? What is his standing in the community?

Vocabulary

colossus, opalescent, heresies, dastard, recoiled, nebulous, diminished, assail, prostrate, manifest, intercessory, yearning, prophesy



Dead Nephews, Revival Part One

Summary

The chapter titled “Dead Nephews” opens with more information about Apostle York. He is the strongest force ever to arrive in Gibbeah. He brings an immediate change. Lucinda loses her customary tension. She thoroughly cleans the church and then Pastor Bligh's office, throwing away all the books except those with the word “Bible” in their title. She then puts all of Apostle York's books in place,

Pastor Bligh is living in the woods near the river that circles Gibbeah like a moat. He has a shady past. His brother died of a broken neck in 1927. He apparently found his wife in bed with Pastor Bligh. Their father died of a broken heart. Pastor Bligh then joined the seminary but led few to salvation. He thinks back to Sunday but then tries not to think about it. He drinks so he does not have to think. During his years as Pastor Bligh in Gibbeah, he had allowed others to talk about him and all his failures. He knew if they ever stopped talking and started to think, they would know he was not qualified as a preacher.

The story then reverts to a conversation between two people, Pop and Puttus. They discuss the fact that Pastor Bligh is living in the woods in poor conditions.

No one talks to Apostle York about Pastor Bligh. The church is packed the following Sunday because everyone wants a chance to look over this new man. Apostle York calls for everyone who was not in church the previous Sunday to stand. Those who do are ashamed and embarrassed. He then says he does not care how they came to be in church, as long as they are there. He preaches that anyone who is not serving God is a servant of the Devil and no one who is sleeping in another person's bed is serving God. Clarence quivers at this statement.

Back in the woods, Pastor Bligh considers that Apostle York might be a blessing. He is not exactly happy, but he does feel a huge sense of relief. He takes off his pastoral clothes, “baptizing” himself in the river. He winds up having to chase his shorts as the current carries them. Widow Greenfield finds him like this and says he “might as well” go home with her (30). He follows her toward her house, which is directly through town, and everyone watches. He is shamed beyond belief.

In “Revival Part One,” Apostle York holds revival services. During one of the services, Apostle York calls The Five to the front of the church. He speaks in a strange language and all five are healed of the injuries Lillamae Perkins inflicted two years earlier. A man named Tony Curtis screams out, which amazes everyone because he had been mute since a childhood accident. One of The Five, Brother Jakes, is cured of his impotency. Another, Deacon Pinckney, has the sight in his right eye restored.



Meanwhile, Pastor Bligh is at the Widow Greenfield's house. She sees little sense in giving him privacy as he prepares to take a shower, and he knows this is just a foretaste of what his life will be like living under her roof. He has a shower for the first time ever and marvels at the way it makes him feel. He feels momentarily younger and filled with purpose. Then, he realizes that he is fooling himself and that the shower cannot really change him as a person.

When he gets out of the shower and before he can even cover himself with a towel, Widow Greenfield enters, saying she has to use the toilet. She pulls down her panties and takes a seat as he rushes from the room. She takes him to a bedroom, saying she does not sleep there since her husband's death. She invites him to dress in her husband's clothes. She calls him to dinner, and he is surprised at the array of food. He is uncomfortable, fearing he will look ungrateful if he takes too little and will seem gluttonous if he takes too much. She refuses to put food on his plate, and he takes a lot. She is pleased that he eats so much and that he obviously enjoys her food.

Widow Greenfield was spared the trials of seeing her husband grow old and die. He was at a bar, "cursing his hard-to-please wife" with each drink (37). He left the bar and stepped out in front of a truck. He died there. Pastor Bligh was remarkably sober at the funeral. The Widow Greenfield walked up to the casket, whispered something, and walked away. She did not attend the funeral.

Pastor Bligh returns to his room and tries to occupy his mind. He gives up and announces he is going out. He goes to the bar where a young girl tells him the woman who owns the bar is studying the Bible at home. He is soon very drunk and falls from his seat. Everyone assumes he is having some sort of seizure. When he stops the violent shaking, the girl at the bar offers three free drinks to the man who carries him outside. She says she does not care where they take him. The men drop him at Widow Greenfield's gate. She drags him inside. When he wakes, he has flashes of memory. He knows the Widow undressed him, bathed him, dried him, and put him in her dead husband's bed.

Analysis

The title of the chapter, "Dead Nephews," is significant though the meaning is not fully revealed until later. During this chapter, the villagers barely notice that Mr. Garvey and his nephews are not present at church services. Later, the reader learns that the reason for them not being in church is that they are all dead.

Attitude and expectations play a role in people's actions, and this is seen fully in Lucinda's reaction to Apostle York's arrival. She loses the tension that had been her trademark. She then cleans Pastor Bligh's office and throws away all the books that do not have the word "Bible" in the title. Then she puts Apostle York's books in place, even though there are only a few with titles that indicate religious content. This indicates that Lucinda is willing to accept Apostle York, regardless of whether he is showing himself to be a true man of God. She feels vindicated that she got rid of Pastor Bligh and feels this



has to be the next, correct move. Her attitude is odd considering that she apparently prays to someone other than Jesus.

There is a metaphor in the author's description of Widow Greenfield's situation that compares marriage to a journey. The author takes that one step further, saying that neither the Widow Greenfield nor her dead husband had "packed" for the trip, so there were no children. The Widow Greenfield is actually a young woman, too young to be widowed, which could account for the lack of children. Pastor Bligh knows about the seven stages of the death of a marriage. The stages include that moment when the husband finds a place he can hide, when he begins to drink, and when she has to care for him like an infant. He may be trying to say that the Widow Greenfield was fortunate that she did not have to live through all those stages.

Pastor Bligh's first shower is a symbol of his effort to cleanse himself. He has begun to change his life, though no one knows it yet. He will step up and literally give his life as he tries to save the village from Apostle York. He feels younger with a sense of renewed purpose as the shower begins to wash him clean. Then, he remembers what brought him to this point. He thinks that the shower "led him to believe too much" (33).

Discussion Question 1

What new information is revealed about Pastor Bligh while he is living in the woods?

Discussion Question 2

How does Pastor Bligh end up at Widow Greenfield's house? What is his attitude as he follows her home?

Discussion Question 3

How do you explain the miracles that occur during Apostle York's first services as a preacher in Gibbeah?

Vocabulary

withered, servile, torpid, decreed, shrouded, tribulations, ambiguity, extravagances, zesty, bliss, swirling, absurd, context, matronly, vignettes



Wilderness, Revival Part Two

Summary

In "Wilderness," Pastor Bligh is looking at the ornate bed that seems "alive" and decides that he has "finally drunk himself to death" (44). He considers that he might actually be in hell. He knows that he has already experienced more damnation than hell can hold. He imagines a face that is alternately a cherub and an old, evil person. He feels he knows her. He wakes choking on his own vomit. He rolls over and throws up on the floor. The Widow arrives and is angry at having to clean up after him. She reminds him where the bathroom is as Bligh continues to hear a voice saying there are "things that must happen to you" (45).

The Widow tries to help him, but he orders her away. He hears his brother's voice from Heaven, asking for an explanation of Bligh's betrayal. Bligh believes he is being attacked by rats and his screams bring the Widow running. The Widow offers him liquor, saying it will help his body level out. Bligh counters, saying the liquor is killing him. He says that is the same liquor that killed her husband. She is obviously hurt at his words. When he orders her to leave and lock him in the room, she complies. He soon imagines that his brother's wife is straddling him to have sex, and he screams until the image disappears.

The Widow waits a day and a half before entering the room. She wakes Pastor Bligh and announces that God has left him.

In "Revival Part Two," people are gathered for the services on the third Sunday since Apostle York's arrival. Lucinda is there, but she is shocked by having seen the Apostle York in the nude less than an hour earlier. He was in his office and she had opened the door, planning to tell him she had stacked up the hymnals. He was staring at himself in the mirror. Books were scattered around the floor. She was shocked and ran from the church. Now, she sits in the back of the church and does not pay attention to the sermon.

After church is over, Lucinda is the last person remaining seated. Apostle York approaches. He says he was in the middle of getting dressed for the service when God spoke to him. He goes on to say that a person ignores God when He speaks and that is what happened in his office. He urges Lucinda to say she understands, but it is obvious that she remains skeptical and upset. He asks if she is ticklish and threatens to "call down one of God's angels to tickle you" (55). Lucinda laughs then and Apostle York says he is pleased that they are friends and pledges that he will only change in the bathroom from this point.

Lucinda had a brutal childhood. Her mother was prone to erratic behavior. "Day Lucinda" talked to her mother about friends that she really did not have and made pious remarks. She hid the bruises under demure dresses and made references to Sunday



School. “Night Lucinda” helped her mother find the rare calloo plant that they used when they communed with darkness. She would often “speak to the Sasa in secret” (55). She stole her mother's potion ingredients, such as knotted cords and cat's teeth. With the Apostle's arrival, her two parts were conflicted. The Day Lucinda sat in church but saw the bulge in the Apostle's pants. His face has the look of Jesus, but there is a “serpent in his pants” (56). She began flagellating herself in an effort to get control.

After whipping her back, Lucinda wears torn cloths over the bloody welts and covers herself with two shirts. She goes to the church each day, a self-appointed secretary. She throws away the desserts the unmarried women of the village bring the Apostle each day.

Apostle York arrives. Lucinda calls him “Pastor” by mistake. He asks if she misses Pastor Bligh. She is adamant that she does not. He then asks if God gave her permission to rebuke Pastor Bligh. He says he is not proud of himself for throwing Pastor Bligh out of church and that Bligh is still one of God's children. Apostle York asks if Lucinda knows where Pastor Bligh is now. She says she does. He says she should take a message that Bligh is welcome back in church.

Analysis

The title “Wilderness” refers to Pastor Bligh's trip through detox as he sweats the liquor out of his body. He has a brutal few days when he is very sick, but he continues to fight for sobriety. At this point, he does not see himself in a bigger role in the coming battle between good and evil, though he seems to sense that there is a reason he needs to be sober. When the Widow offers him a drink to sooth his frayed body and mind, he refuses.

The Widow is becoming increasingly attached to Pastor Bligh, though she does not voice that or even admit it to herself at this point. She is called “widow” because her husband died, but he died at a young age, Widow Greenfield is still a relatively young woman. It would be natural for her to desire companionship, even if sex was not part of the relationship.

Lucinda is a needy person. The depth of her need will be further revealed in the coming chapters as the reader learns more about her past. In this section, she rushes to tell Apostle York that she has stacked the hymnals. This is a mundane chore, but Lucinda is taking on many chores in the church only because she wants Apostle York's attention.

The relationship between Lucinda and Apostle York is becoming complex as each hides aspects of their personalities from the other. Lucinda hides how much she longs for a sexual relationship and the Apostle hides his sexual depravity. Lucinda also needs Apostle York's attention and approval, but Apostle York also needs the attention and approval of his congregation, including Lucinda. He is happy that she is devoting herself to his ministry, and he seems to pay her just enough attention to keep her near.



Discussion Question 1

Describe what you know about Lucinda at this point. Predict her role in Apostle York's life at the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

What is the situation that occurs between Lucinda and Apostle York in which he is nude? How does he explain himself? Do you believe his explanation? Do you think Lucinda believes him?

Discussion Question 3

Compare Day Lucinda to Night Lucinda. Why do you believe this split personality occurs? Why does it continue?

Vocabulary

perverse, conjured, divine, stench, perspiring, apathy, illusion, feeble, wretched, seduced, podium



Schism, 777

Summary

In "Schism," Lucinda heads to Widow Greenfield's house, knowing that she cannot put off delivering the Apostle York's message. Just before she reaches the Widow's house, she encounters lots of crows. She cannot tell if it is hundreds or thousands, but she feels she will be caught up in the wind from their wings. She screams. Then, she forces herself to hum a hymn. When she opens her eyes, the crows have vanished. She runs the rest of the way to the house. The Widow answers the door. Lucinda calls her "Mrs. Greenfield." The Widow asks why, since there is no Mr. Greenfield. The two women argue. Lucinda says she is not the reason Mr. Greenfield died. The Widow counters, saying at least he no longer has to hide from Lucinda. The Widow is angry that Lucinda has brought back memories of her husband's face, crushed by the truck, hidden by a closed casket. In her anger, she asks if Lucinda has climbed any ackee trees recently.

The story reverts to memories. Lucinda had brewed a tea just as her mother had done. She gulped the hot liquid and spit water into the fire, then found herself out of her clothes and traveling mystically to the place where Mr. and Mrs. Greenfield, young and newly married, were having sex. Mrs. Greenfield opened her eyes and saw Lucinda in an ackee tree. Lucinda fell out of the tree as Mrs. Greenfield watched.

Lucinda is then as angry as the Widow. She delivers the message that Bligh is welcome to come back to church, then leaves. The Widow, still angry herself, asks Bligh if he expects them to have a celebration for him. He slinks off to his room, leaving her alone.

It begins to rain. A villager named Clarence is headed home. He has just had sex with Mrs. Johnson while her husband slept soundly in the same bed. Clarence realizes he forgot his underwear at the Johnson's house, but the lightning scares him and he rushes home. Meanwhile, lightning kills a man who had rigged up a pulley system that allowed him to have sex with "cows of any size" (64). The man is charred, and no one cut him down until a dog ran off with some of the toes. The cow was unharmed.

Pastor Bligh cries in his room. The Widow opens the door, and her heart goes out to him. Bligh begs for forgiveness, which he had never done. He pleads with God for the chance to do God's will. God answers, saying that forgiveness was granted with the blood on the cross and that he has no right to feel such anguish.

He wakes in the morning and dons the white suit the Widow had washed clean for him. When he leaves his room, she has cooked bacon and eggs. He says he does not have time to eat, but she says he is going to need his strength.

Lucinda arrives at church early. She tells herself she does not want to see Apostle York naked, but she knows that is a lie. She bends down by the door, looking through the keyhole. She gives up and stands, running into Apostle York. He grabs her by the throat



and asks if she is sleepwalking or maybe she dropped something. She rushes to the bathroom. He follows and asks if she is okay. She says she is sick. He says a sick body is better than a sick mind.

Pastor Bligh trains the rest of the week for his coming battle with Apostle York. He spends time getting physically fit and studying scripture. One day, Widow Greenfield asks why he has faith when it is obvious that God has cast him aside. At one point, Bligh says, "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away" (69). Widow Greenfield becomes furious, saying that God did not want her to have a husband and that she wants to be a woman again. She grabs Bligh in the crotch, and he shoves her onto the bed. She cries and she tells him to get out.

That Sunday, York is preaching when Bligh interrupts from outside the church. He screams the words "disgrace," "abomination," and "Antichrist." Bligh feels the weight of years of guilt drop away. York confronts Bligh, asking whether his brother fell or was pushed. He asks how the Widow Greenfield is doing. Bligh stammers. He says Bligh's brother probably forgives Bligh. Then, he says his brother's widow is in an insane asylum. He then suggests that Bligh could become the church janitor. As York walks back toward the church, Bligh quotes a scripture related to "the lusts of your father." York stops and Bligh quotes two more, both related to liars. Bligh says he knows why York is in Gibbeah. The argument continues until York hits Bligh and rushes into the church.

In "777," villagers take up the story in the stilted dialect. Easter is approaching, and York has a special service planned. Bligh arrives in the church and shouts "Hellfire and damnation" (79). The villager is surprised at the change in Bligh's bearing. Apostle York has The Five remove Bligh. They slam his head into the door on the way out.

The narrator picks up the story. Bligh begins singing in the road, and York goes outside. John Crows surround Bligh. York watches in amazement as the entire area around Bligh is littered with dead crows and blood, but Bligh kneels in a small circle untouched by crows. Another day, Bligh breaks up a church service by carrying a cross up the road.

A villager picks up the story. He says things have changed in Gibbeah. Some people feel the Widow Greenfield is to blame. The Five find her outside her house and beat her brutally. Brother Vixton holds her by placing his foot on her chest while others tear up the inside of her house. She spits on Brother Vixton as he is leaving. He kicks her and spits on her. She lies crying in the dirt.

A villager continues the story. A few people begin to think Bligh makes sense, and they join him in the road where they listen to his sermons. The Apostle York says there are demons in Gibbeah already and that the people have to watch who enters the village. He demands that the church members give up everything that could be considered sinful, including radio and movies. He warns the congregation not to talk to anyone who does not attend church. While the Apostle's words are harsh, the villager believes they are necessary. She points out that the Apostle York has brought about miracles, which Pastor Bligh never did. One day it comes down to a battle between the two preachers.



With a word, York talks in tongues and Bligh falls down, foaming at the mouth. The foam turns red and he flops around. He is finally still. Widow Greenfield arrives and drags him away.

Analysis

Many of the words in the story are dated or have older meanings. This is the case with the word “schism.” It is the title of a chapter and the word refers to a break within the church. The reader who knows the meaning of the word will understand that there is a break coming in the church of Gibbeah.

The lightning is used as a metaphor for God's judgment, and the story of a man who was killed by lightning is the example used to prove the truth of that comparison. In the story, a man had built a contraption that made him the correct height to mount “cows of any size.” The graphic scene is one of many that some readers might find offensive.

The birds are an important symbol seen throughout the book. The villagers believe the John Crows are symbols of the devil or evil. They arrive in the village by the hundreds and their presence is making the people uneasy. At this point, it is left to the reader to decide who is evil. The Apostle York arrived just about the time the birds arrived, which seems to indicate that he is the evil person and that the birds are a warning about his presence. But it may also be that the Apostle York is there to confront Pastor Bligh and that Bligh has somehow caused the birds' presence. The fact that York is the evil one will be revealed later in the book, but the author keeps the question alive for the reader until that point.

The scene in which Pastor Bligh falls down on the road, foaming at the mouth and apparently having some sort of seizure, is one of many events that is not explained. The Apostle York speaks some words before the seizure happens, and it may be that he calls for some kind of curse. These and other events are never explained. It is left to the reader to decide if the event is an act of God, the result of black arts, or simply some coincidence.

York is beginning to try to control the people of Gibbeah. He says the radio and movie theater are wicked and that the people should not have anything to do with either. He also tells them outsiders are evil and that they should be wary of strangers. These are the first steps toward total isolation. Later, he orders them to cut themselves off completely from outside influences. Some readers will naturally compare York's mandates to those of other religious fanatics who led groups of people into isolation and sometimes caused them all to die.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author switches between the voice of a narrator who speaks in modern-day English and a villager who speaks the local dialect?



Discussion Question 2

At this point in the story, what do you know about the history between Lucinda and Widow Greenfield? Keep the list and add to it as more information is revealed.

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Bligh has changed his attitude by this point?

Vocabulary

schism, vortex, banished, shrieked, blaspheming, begrudged, corrupted, abomination, wretched, cynical, evangelize, lethargy, moribund



Rolling Calf Part One, Rolling Calf Part Two, Rolling Calf Part Three, Up! Jumped the Devil

Summary

In "The Rolling Calf Part One," a woman named the Widow Fracas finds a deformed calf. Its head is on upside down. Clarence sees it as well. They are both convinced it is the Devil's handiwork. The Apostle York directs them to burn it. Back in the church, Lucinda finds a book with strange writing, including the word "calloo." She is shocked and the Apostle chastises her for being nosy. She rushes from the church.

The local store owner refuses to serve the Widow Greenfield and she has to walk miles to the next store. When she gets home, a group of rough boys confronts her, frightening her into running the rest of the way home. Bligh is mostly unconscious and she hates that she has allowed herself to become attached to him.

The Obeah is "collective wisdom" and the "obeah man or woman" was a dispenser of oils, but also "a collector of secrets" (99). Oil was responsible for Mrs. Johnson's screams of ecstasy during her sex sessions with Clarence. It was also responsible for a pregnancy without a male contributor.

There is another brief look at Lucinda's childhood. She and Mary, who later becomes Widow Greenfield, were children together. Lucinda had no friends. Mary and her friends made fun of Lucinda which prompted Lucinda to curse the others.

In "Rolling Calf Part Two," a villager picks up the story. There is a rumor that Mrs. Johnson is expecting. Her husband has been impotent since he came home from the war. He sleeps so soundly that he never wakes except occasionally when he believes he is under fire. One night, he rushes under the bed, thinking he is running from gunshots. He finds a pair of white briefs. He says he does not wear white briefs and threatens to kill her. She runs out of the house, and Mr. Johnson chases her with a gun. The Apostle York intervenes, saying "Vengeance is Mine, sayeth the Lord" (105). Mr. Johnson hands over the gun. A few minutes later, The Five arrive, dragging Clarence.

York says Clarence has broken God's heart and pledges punishment. Some think it must be a joke, but others believe it is the right thing. At the appointed time, Clarence and Mrs. Johnson are tied to a tree. She is whipped first, then Clarence. People expect Mr. Garvey to arrive, but he does not. Bligh and Widow Greenfield are also absent and some believe they will be the next to be punished. When the whipping is over, everyone goes home. Mr. Johnson goes home alone. York says they can take Mrs. Johnson and Clarence down after a few hours. The next day, the villagers find another deformed calf.



In “The Rolling Calf Part Three,” Apostle York learns that Massa Fergie is responsible for the cows. He questions the man who initially denies that it is his cow despite the brand. York says it is Satan's work and orders the cow burned. The Apostle issues a call to anyone in need. Eight women are cleansed of demonic possession.

Lucinda has beaten herself harder in an effort to control her thoughts, but it is not working. She has so many rags wrapped around her back that she looks like a hunchback.

As night draws near, Massa Fergie fears being caught outside with his cows. He was afraid that he might meet the Devil in the dark or another deformed cow. He discovers one cow is not with the others and rushes back to find it. Apostle York pushes a crowd of villagers to become a mob. They walk into the night just as Massa Fergie is trying to get the cow loose from a fence. The crowd believes he is having sex with the cow and they run to him. He screams only twice before they beat him to death. They immediately feel guilty.

In “Up! Jumped the Devil,” York says the people are wrong to feel guilt. He reminds them that they are involved in a war and that Satan is a real enemy. He then reads scripture about Moses calling for the deaths of people who were worshiping the golden calf. Pastor Bligh arrives in his white suit carrying a muddy bag over his shoulder. He drops the bag and the church empties. As Apostle York causes the doors of the church to slam closed, York, Bligh, and a deformed goat are the only things left inside. For a brief time, Bligh sees “right through the eyes to a second face” deep inside York (124).

Analysis

There is one of the first looks at Apostle York's true character in the book Lucinda finds. The calloo plant is used in the dark arts. Lucinda and her mother have both used it. The fact that the Apostle has written about the calloo plant indicates that he has evil intentions. This is one of several references to Caribbean culture and lore.

Lucinda's mother was a student of the black arts and Lucinda learned from her mother's example. At one point during her childhood, Lucinda wrote the names of all the children who tormented her, including Mary (who would become Widow Greenfield) and cursed them all. It might be that her curse was a literal curse and that might be the reason Widow Greenfield's husband died at an early age. The Widow says that any man she loves will die, which seems to indicate that she believes she is somehow cursed or destined to be alone.

Apostle York happens to be in the right place to intercept Mr. Johnson when he is trying to kill Mrs. Johnson and Clarence. This is one of many events left to the reader's imagination. There is no explanation as to how York knows he should be there. Another important aspect of this scene is that York calls on the villagers to help punish Clarence and Mrs. Johnson. The people are initially interested in the prospect and are ready to help with the punishment. This is very much like some people who believe that war will



be an adventure but who discover that the horrific reality of blood, mutilation, and death. As the whipping continues, the people become quiet and feel sympathy for Clarence and Mrs. Johnson. They touch their own backs because they can imagine the pain being inflicted. While the two have sinned, probably most of the people there can imagine themselves on the receiving end of similar punishment.

Apostle York whips the villagers into a mob-like frenzy and then he lets them pass him so that he is not directly involved in the murder of Massa Fergie. However, as soon as Massa Fergie is dead, the people slow down and consider what they have done. The author notes that the rage is experienced by the mob as a whole but the guilt is always a personal emotion.

The confrontation between York and Bligh is one of several battles between good and evil. This is one of many examples of the theme, black and white. In the brief moment before the battle truly begins, Bligh sees a face deep inside York's eyes. That face is not explained. The reader decides if Bligh sees Satan, Jesus, or something else.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the people kill Massa Fergie? What is their reaction? What is York's response?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the deformed animals? What was their origin?

Discussion Question 3

Why are Clarence and Mrs. Johnson whipped?

Vocabulary

poise, scepter, regally, rotund, ravenous, intercession, renege, momentum



Lucinda, The Recovery, The Healing, Jubilee, Leviticus

Summary

Part Two opens with a chapter titled “Lucinda.” When Lucinda was almost 10 years old, some children glued her clothes to the seat at school. She sat there long after school was over and wet her pants. The teacher felt the “devil” got into the children but was more angry that they wasted the glue than their bullying of Lucinda. She lived with her mother in a shack at the edge of the village. The house was filled with things stolen from the long-abandoned plantation. There were red chairs “blackened by coal and black magic” (127).

Lucinda managed to sneak home by a roundabout route. She hoped to reach her room without her mother noticing her but found her mother was having sex with a man who suggests he have Lucinda next time. Lucinda is outside when her mother brutally kicks her. Lucinda's mother was involved in the black arts. Once she spewed water into a bonfire and disappeared. One day, Lucinda used her mother's ingredients and caused a classmate to fall off a cliff to her death. Lucinda's mother warned that the things that happened at night should never come to light during the day.

When Lucinda was an adolescent, she often watched the boys swim in the nude. Clarence was different because he had red hair in a place where the other boys had no hair. Lucinda told him to meet her in the cemetery one night and they had a brief sexual encounter. Lucinda “cried for days” (131).

When Lucinda was 21, her mother found religion and Lucinda dutifully joined her at church but kept some of her mother's “witchery” items. Lucinda's mother desperately wanted Lucinda to marry before she was too old to have children. One day, Lucinda encountered Mr. Greenfield at the river. Lucinda invited him to have sex and he agreed. She asked if they were going to marry but he laughed as he returned to Mary, his future wife and the future Widow Greenfield. Lucinda's mother had another in a series of strokes while at the river and Lucinda drowned her. Mary and Mr. Greenfield married but there were several miscarriages and a lack of trust.

Back in the present, Lucinda and the Widow Greenfield are each tied to men they do not understand. Widow Greenfield suddenly has the feeling that something is wrong and she runs to the church.

In “Recovery,” Lucinda and Widow Greenfield enter the church to get their men. Widow Greenfield finds Pastor Bligh in the aisle and drags him out the door. Lucinda screams when she cannot find Apostle York, but she locates him under torn tapestries and pieces of furniture, including the organ.



Both women put the men to bed. Both men seem to be dead but they are breathing. Widow Greenfield looks out a window and sees crows covering the roofs of the Garvey house and the church. Lucinda washes Apostle York's body though he carries the scent of incense. She cannot stop thinking about his manhood. The thoughts of the Night Lucinda battle with those of Day Lucinda.

Widow Greenfield determines that she will not care about Pastor Bligh, but she cannot help herself. She decides to go to Mr. Garvey. She believes that Mr. Garvey has the power of a master during the slavery days, and that he is responsible for Apostle York's presence in Gibbeah. She hopes to convince him to "bring order" back to the village (138). On the third day, she wakes to a scratching sound and finds Pastor Bligh is writing on the walls of his bedroom.

Lucinda and Apostle York are both nude. He wakes and stands up. She notices that there are red spots and scars on his buttocks, thighs, and chest. She had noticed a small one on his lip before. He asks if she knows anything about "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (141).

In "The Healing," Apostle York stopped very near Lucinda. She wants sex but prepares to perform oral sex on him instead. He stops her, obviously furious. He says he should have her banished. He says he has work for her to make up for her sin.

Back at the church, York orders the Five to bring Clarence to his office. Clarence is initially angry and fighting. York causes Clarence to be frozen, unable to say the hateful words he is thinking. York dismisses the Five. Clarence feels something on his back and believes snakes are crawling on him. York prompts him to look in the mirror and he sees the wounds from the whipping miraculously heal. He says he knows what Clarence's real desire is. York touches Clarence's crotch.

York opens his office door and tells Lucinda that she should send men to the Johnson house and that they should carry knives. When the men arrive, they find Mrs. Johnson on the bottom step at the back of the house and Mr. Johnson hanging in a tree, dead.

In "Jubilee," many attend church service because they believe Pastor Bligh had killed Apostle York and that York rose from the dead on the third day. They are interested to see Clarence, dressed in Sunday clothes and standing at the pulpit. York preaches about being dead, saying he rejected death. He says he has had new revelations and that the villagers can have a Paradise on earth if they follow his commands. The first is that everyone will attend church every night.

In "Leviticus," villagers take over the story. There is a conversation about the events happening in Gibbeah, including the sins of people such as Mrs. Johnson and then men involved with the cows. They talk about the fact that Mr. Garvey has nephews who look nothing like him and that he never has adult nephews around. They talk about the judgment that is sure to come down on Pastor Bligh and Widow Greenfield because they are bound to be sinning together. The chapter ends with the question of who will be judged next, and the answer that it could be anyone.



Analysis

Lucinda's mother practiced the black arts and there is little doubt that Lucinda picked up things from watching her mother. Her mother had spewed water into the bonfire to make herself disappear from the forest, apparently reappearing somewhere else. Lucinda used that same method years later when she appeared near the spot where Mary Greenfield and her husband were having sex. Lucinda claims she used a potion to cause the death of a classmate who had tormented her. Lucinda's mother said she noticed some ingredients were missing, making her certain that Lucinda had done the deed. An interesting aspect of the scene is Lucinda's reaction. When she attends the funeral, she is forced to fully understand the finality and totality of death. She vomits at the funeral and at home, she seems on the verge of begging her mother for comfort. Her mother is brutal in her reaction, saying Lucinda has to be careful that her deed remains hidden. This brutal childhood with a heartless mother and the children who bully her all combine to create the adult Lucinda.

There is a comment in the chapter devoted to Lucinda's past regarding Mary Greenfield's marriage. The author notes that she suffered miscarriages and a lack of trust in her marriage. It seems that Lucinda might have been behind the lack of trust and she might have even been responsible for the miscarriages.

There are several metaphors related to traditional religions, including the passage in which York was supposedly dead for three days before coming back to life. That mimics the Bible story of Jesus who was crucified and remained dead in a tomb for three days before ascending into Heaven. York's comatose state is not explained, nor is the similar state of Pastor Bligh. York does cash in on the event, saying that he was given new information while he was fighting death. He continues to seek deeper control of the villagers, and they seem to be following where he leads.

There is an interesting difference in the healing of Pastor Bligh and Apostle York after their battle. Both are basically out for three days with Lucinda looking over Apostle York and Widow Greenfield caring for Pastor Bligh. The two women are unable to do anything significant for the men but both men recover. The significance is that York claims to have been dead and that he was resurrected by his own power. There is no doubt Lucinda will back him on whatever story he has, even though she was with him and knows that he was not really dead. Bligh could have told the same story about his own recovery, but he does not. This is a look into the inner character of each man.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Lucinda's childhood.



Discussion Question 2

What happens to Pastor Bligh and Apostle York after their battle at the church? What is the difference between their healing? Why does York say he was dead and rose again? Why does Bligh not say that same thing?

Discussion Question 3

Describe what the villagers say about the judgment that is occurring at Gibbeah. What do they predict will happen to those who sin?

Vocabulary

impudent, louver, inquisition, lethargy, devastation, infuriating, cutlass, scaly, compounding, flinched, discipline, wrenched, merged, consuming, armor, perish, vicar



Cloven Feet, An Aroma, Bang, Tonight, The Black House, The One who Dip Is the One Who Know

Summary

In “Cloven Feet,” Apostle York issues an order that all cows and goats were to be killed. The villagers killed the first bull in a brutal slaughter. Meanwhile, the Widow Greenfield sat in her house and did not disturb the Pastor Bligh but decides to visit the Apostle York. Lucinda is at the church door and both women remember the last time they were in such proximity to each other. Lucinda had talked freely about her relationship with Mr. Greenfield, bragging that they were going to marry and vowing that he was not going to marry Mary. One day, Lucinda followed Mary and Mr. Greenfield but Lucinda's mother found her, dragged her home, and beat her. That was shortly before Lucinda drowned her mother in the river. Now, both women realize that Lucinda has the power that Mary had back then.

Lucinda says the Apostle will not see Widow Greenfield but Clarence interrupts and takes her to his office. He obviously makes fun of her but she summons her courage and asks him to leave Pastor Bligh alone. He refuses but says she can still repent and join the church, saving herself. She rushes home and feels a renewed sense that God is working through Bligh, and that Bligh is somehow working through her. She locks her door and waits to see what will happen. She does not know whether to expect God, the Five, the Apostle, or the Devil.

In “An Aroma,” Lucinda goes home. She is upset that the Apostle now depends on Clarence and that she is an outsider. When she returns to the church later, she explains to the Apostle that her house caught on fire while she was cooking. She suggests that she could sleep in a room in the steeple and he gives in, saying she can stay there for the time being. She watches from her new room that night and notices that Clarence does not leave the Apostle's room.

In “Bang,” Apostle York warns the people that these are the end times and gives them scripture from Mark as a means of protecting themselves. On Monday, a truck arrives as usual to pick up rocks. The villagers usually break up the rocks and the truck drivers collect them. When the driver emerges from the truck as usual, the villagers begin to throw rocks at him. They beat him but he manages to get back in the truck and he rushes to leave the village. The Apostle warns against all kinds of sins. Those who had briefly listened to Pastor Bligh “repented” and returned to church. Everyone was afraid of the Apostle and The Five.

In “Tonight,” Clarence and Apostle York are in the bathroom. Clarence unfastens the Apostle's belt and York digs his hands into Clarence's shoulders. York then begins to



thrash around and winds up in the bathtub, screaming nonsense words. He says that Bligh is “attacking” him. York sends Clarence for the Five, saying the battle with Bligh is going to end.

At the Widow Greenfield's house, dead black birds are all over the lawn. Each time one lands, it mysteriously dies. Brother Vixton, younger than Widow Greenfield and acting as if he has right on his side, quotes scripture and then steps onto the Widow's yard. He immediately falls down dead. Widow Greenfield is not sad nor frightened, but she cries and falls asleep while all the villagers run away.

In “The Black House,” Widow Greenfield works up her courage late the next day and heads to Mr. Garvey's house. No one answers the door and she smells a strange odor when she goes inside. It is dark but she can tell the house has been wrecked. She finds Mr. Garvey sitting in an office with his back to her. She says he has to take control of the town but he does not react. Finally, she grabs the chair in anger and shakes it. His head falls off. He is holding his genitals in his hand. One of the “nephews” is under the desk, dead. Another is dead in a bedroom. Widow Greenfield gathers up some photos from the bedroom, shoves them into her dress, and rushes from the house.

When she arrives at home, Lucinda is waiting. She sounds frantic and says Apostle York is going to murder everyone.

In “The One Who Dip Is the One Who Know,” Lucinda continues to insist that York is going to kill her. She is afraid to walk on the lawn until Widow Greenfield holds her hand and drags her to the house. Lucinda shows Widow Greenfield bruises that she says Clarence inflicted. Lucinda says she saw Apostle York and Clarence having sex, and that is why York wants to kill her. Lucinda says Pastor Bligh is the answer, that he can save the people of Gibbeah. The Widow enters the room and tells Pastor Bligh that Lucinda is there and sees that he has written on everything, including his own body. He closes the door, shutting himself inside and the Widow out but emerges, fully dressed. All his clothes are covered with writing as well. Bligh asks Lucinda about her claim that she saw Apostle York and Clarence having sex. He calls her a liar. He says the two men have had sex, but that Lucinda did not see or hear them. The three remain in the house until morning.

Lucinda asks Pastor Bligh if he is going to kill Apostle York or if he is going to drive a demon out. Bligh says York is not possessed by a demon but is mad from syphilis. As they walk toward the church, three of the Five attack Bligh. Clarence is among them, having taken Brother Vixton's place. Bligh runs but they beat him and drag him to the church.

Analysis

The opening scene of “Cloven Feet” is a brutal description of the villagers killing a bull. The bull was frightened as soon as it saw the weapons, cutlasses and axes, the villagers carried. One villager tried to strike the bull who then gored the villager “straight



up the ass.” (156) Another villager cut the bull's tail off, which made it difficult for the beast to balance. Another chopped the bull's back leg, causing the animal to collapse. After that, the villagers chopped it to death. This kind of language is typical of the book and is one of several passages readers might find disturbing or offensive.

The Apostle is fighting to keep strict control of the villagers by the time they stone the truck driver. The driver had come to the village before and had no reason to believe that he would not be welcomed as usual. Instead, the villagers stoned him, in keeping with the Apostle's mandate that they isolate themselves in order to eliminate any new evil from coming into the village. Another part of his plan is to rule by fear. He uses the Five to punish anyone who argues. At the end of the chapter titled “Bang,” those who had followed Bligh were whipped and promised anything the Apostle demanded in order to stop the beating. The “youngest and weakest” was a girl and she collapsed on the ground after the whipping. This serves the purpose of making everyone fear the Five.

The scene in which York and Clarence are in the bathroom has elements of mysterious acts and none of them are explained. The York falls into the bathtub and the water begins to run. He holds up two fingers and the water stops. That signal is seen later in the book and it is left to the reader to decide what it means. Another of these mysterious acts happens when Clarence feels himself shoved across the room. He compares it to a hand pushing his chest backwards, but York does not use his hands. These and other actions that seem to be acts of God are never explained.

When Lucinda arrives at the Widow Greenfield's house, she says that she is afraid to walk on the grass. The Widow insists that it is just grass, and that grass cannot hurt anyone, despite the fact that all the birds and Brother Vixton died on her lawn for no apparent reason. Lucinda then says that the Devil is responsible. This stops Widow Greenfield short. Despite the fact that she has claimed she does not believe in God, she is afraid when Lucinda mentions the Devil by name. This reaction seems typical of the people of the village. From a literary standpoint, it seems to be in keeping with the attitude of the Caribbean culture.

When Lucinda arrives at Widow Greenfield's house, she seems sincere and the Widow believes that she is telling the truth. When Lucinda says that Pastor Bligh is the answer to saving the people of Gibbeah, the Widow grabs onto that information. She has hoped that there would be something that would make sense to her and she has hoped that Pastor Bligh would somehow be the savior. The fact that the Widow believes Lucinda immediately is an indication that she is desperate for that resolution.

Discussion Question 1

What details are revealed about Lucinda's history with Widow Greenfield? What does this mean about their current relationship?



Discussion Question 2

Why do the villagers follow Apostle York's demands regarding getting rid of outside influences?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Lucinda's visit to Widow Greenfield's house in this section.

Vocabulary

proclamation, consequence, akimbo, iniquity, mockery, pious, fidget, subdued, gait, rebuke, feigned, betraying



Making Plans for Thursday, Golgotha or the Incident, Reckoning, The Beginning

Summary

In "Making Plans for Thursday," Lucinda cooks breakfast for the Apostle York. York had convinced her she was the only person who could lure Bligh out of the Widow's house. She allowed Clarence to beat her and Clarence had happily complied. Then York told her how to lure Bligh out of the house and sent her to the Widow's house. As she works, she imagines her mother's voice, taunting her. Lucinda pledges that York will remain by her side, unlike her father who left her mother. Then she begins singing a hymn to get rid of her mother's presence.

Lucinda takes the breakfast tray to York's room and finds Clarence pulling up his pants, pushing his penis inside. Lucinda takes in all that information and rushes to her room where her mother and Night Lucinda taunt her more.

In "Golgotha, or the Incident," the Widow wakes and realizes that the pictures are still in her dress. She takes them out. She had always suspected that there was something wrong about Mr. Garvey's relationship with his "nephews," but she looks at the pictures and sees the proof. She sees a familiar face in one of the pictures and calls for Bligh, but the house is silent.

Pastor Bligh is chained up in Apostle York's office with chains found at Brother Vixton's house. Bligh reveals that he knows York from a time he preached in a hospital in Kingston. He says York has syphilis. York is surprised that Bligh knows but says "Lucas York is dead" and moves on to taunt Bligh with threats of demons raping him and offers of liquor (198). York says God is imaginary and that he has become God. Bligh says God was with York, even while he was a child being abused. York says that God was only with the preacher who raped him. He says Bligh's predecessor, Pastor Palmer, raped him as well as Garvey. York says he was in Gibbeah for a full year after Bligh arrived and that Bligh never even noticed York among the "nephews."

York says Garvey sent the boys away when they became too large and strong for him to control them. He reveals that he killed Garvey when he first arrived back in Gibbeah.

York orders a group of boys to destroy the bridge, the only way in and out of the village, and they do. He then orders all the villagers to gather and they do with Bligh tied up and Deacon Pinckney yanking the chain often, causing Bligh to fall. York drives the villagers into a frenzy and they begin to stone Bligh. He tries to talk, eventually saying that he sees Heaven, then he dies. They continue to throw rocks until York raises two fingers.

Just then, someone screams and the villagers realize there is a "cloud of doves" rushing toward them. Birds claw out the eyes of Brother Jakes so he is blinded. Birds drive



Deacon Pinckney over the cliff and he falls to his death. Some birds fly into walls and kill themselves but many others chase men, women, and children, slashing at them. Some break through Lucinda's window and attack her. When the birds clear, Pastor Bligh's body is gone and the rocks that were stacked on top of him are gone.

Apostle York goes to the Widow Greenfield's house. He can smell burned chicken she began cooking earlier. The shower is on and a dress laid out, but she is gone. York smiles until he sees the photo on the table. He hears a voice say "Lucas" and slaps the table so hard that he breaks it. Then he leaves the house.

In "Reckoning," three months pass after Clarence goes out to call on the people to help burn the bodies of the five who died when the doves came. A month after Bligh's death, Lucinda killed herself by jumping from her window. She was pushed to the act by the three voices that spoke to her. A dead dove was on her back as she lay on the ground.

Gibbeah is completely under Apostle York's rule. He teaches the children himself, saying they are "useful to the Kingdom" (212). When the girls come of age, members of the Five rape them, bringing "them into glorious womanhood" (212). There are new members of the Five, all very young. The villagers complete the fence around Gibbeah, finishing the process of cutting it off from outside. York says the Lord will soon return. Everyone eats together, rationing the food, and drinks water from the river. Anyone who complains is punished. Occasionally, young people try to run away. They are punished severely, as is anyone who complains.

Garvey's house is cleaned on York's instructions. One morning, Clarence discovers that he has bloody sores on the bottom of his feet and that he leaves blood on the toilet seat. Clarence goes to York, who begins spouting scripture, including that anyone who believes will never die. Clarence is furious and repeatedly strikes York with a lamp until the Apostle is dead. Clarence is covered in blood, as if he has been baptized.

In "The Beginning," Clarence continues to say that Apostle York wants to rest for two days, covering York's absence. He puts York's body in the bathtub that is red from the blood. Then the people want to know where he is and Clarence knows they will soon find York's body. Clarence gets in the tub with York's body and embraces him. They sink together under the water.

Outside, some of the people see a dove and run away in terror, but others remember that a dove is traditionally a symbol of hope and promise. The bird flies across the river and the people look in that direction, seeing the Widow Greenfield. They alternate, seeing her as "judgment and redemption, rescue and damnation, despair and hope." Then, she raises her hand and points two fingers.

Analysis

When Lucinda lures Pastor Bligh out of his house, she still believes that she and Apostle York are going to have a future together. She has submitted to letting Clarence beat her and knows that York and Clarence are having sex together. However, she still



believes that she and York will leave all the chaos behind and live happily ever after. Her naivete is out of character. Lucinda remembers seeing a movie at the Majestic Cinema that featured a man carrying a woman up the stairs. This is likely a famous scene from *Gone with the Wind*. Lucinda was a preteen when she saw this movie, but she knew that the man and woman were going upstairs to have sex. She also knows that her mother has sex for money and is angry that her mother might have wanted to be treated like the woman in the movie. All these emotions seem contradictory in that Lucinda is alternately naïve and worldly, but Lucinda has had a brutal childhood and a contradictory life. Her mother has pretended to be pious at times but dealt in the black arts at other times.

There is another scene near the end of the novel with the representation of the two fingers. The villagers stone Bligh to death and keep throwing rocks on him until he is virtually buried in rocks. Then York raises two fingers on his hands and the villagers stop. This sign has been seen before and it will be seen again near the end of the novel. The author does not say which two fingers and it may be the forefinger and middle finger, which traditionally signifies peace.

The opening chapter, titled "The End," belongs at the end of the chapter titled "Golgotha, or the Incident." There is religious significance in the word "Golgotha." This is where Jesus was killed. Though Jesus was crucified and Bligh was stoned, there are some similarities. Both were killed for crimes they did not commit.

By the time Clarence and York are living in Garvey's house for a couple of months, it becomes obvious that Clarence is no longer enamored with York or with the lifestyle. He notes that other members of York's followers are happy to follow York's instructions, especially when they have the chance to be brutal with people who disobey or the chance to rape young girls. Clarence's attitude seems to be such that he might have distanced himself from York whether he had developed the symptoms of syphilis or not.

The author describes four stages of syphilis. The first is an occasional lesion that just appears and then goes away. The second is stronger with sores and obvious bloody lesions. The third is "deeper" than the first and the final stage includes blindness, madness, and trouble breathing. Clarence is in the third stage. While some modern day readers tend to see this novel in an older setting, possibly from a century or more ago, there are a few modern conveniences such as electricity and showers, that indicate a more modern time frame. Clarence might know about syphilis on his own or he might have understood the implications when Pastor Bligh said that York has syphilis. Either way, Clarence has at least some knowledge about the disease and that it means he is going to die because of his relationship with York.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the arrival of the white birds. Compare them to the black birds. What are the people's reactions to each?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Pastor Bligh's death. What do you believe happened to his body?

Discussion Question 3

What happens when Clarence discovers that his feet are bleeding? What is his reaction?

Vocabulary

majestic, thatch, sentimentality, province, winced, perversion, uppity, shackles, irony, comprehend, cataclysmic, stunned, decree, gawked



Characters

Pastor Hector Bligh

As the story opens, Pastor Hector Bligh is a fallen preacher who does not really care about anything other than his next drink. By the end of the novel, Bligh has become a crusader against the evil man who arrives in Gibbeah. The most significant act in Bligh's past was the affair he had with his brother's wife before Bligh became a man of the ministry. His brother discovered the affair and died from a fall. Whether he jumped, fell, or was pushed, Bligh blamed himself for the death. He said his father died of a broken heart because of the situation.

Bligh had been destined to join the ministry and apparently saw no other option available, so he went through with his plan. Aloysius Garvey, the man who owned most of the property in the village of Gibbeah, hired Bligh as the preacher there. Bligh was never interested in doing his duty, but most of the people were happy with that. Bligh was an indifferent preacher. People often had no idea of what he was talking about.

When Apostle York arrived and physically threw Pastor Bligh out of the church, Bligh's first reaction was to hide himself away in the nearby woods, feeling relieved that he was no longer responsible for the church. However, he soon began to believe that York was evil. He set out to get his church back. Bligh reveals that York is actually dying of syphilis just before York leads the congregation to stone Bligh to death.

Apostle York

Apostle York arrives in Gibbeah as an adult posing as a minister and physically throws Pastor Bligh out of the church. Over the coming weeks, he begins to lead the church in an ever-increasing level of fanatical worship that is not in keeping with traditional Christian attitudes. He leads the congregation to murder a cow herder by saying the man is involved in bestiality then has them brutally attack a truck driver by saying anyone outside Gibbeah is evil. Through it all, most of the congregants follow blindly though there are a few who briefly step away and follow Pastor Bligh.

No one realizes that York is actually suffering from the effects of syphilis. He seems to be fanatical, but does not have outward signs that he is physically ill. Bligh is the first to discover the truth and he tells York what he knows. York continues with the appearance that he is fine and that there really isn't anything wrong. With that attitude, the people do not seem to give much credence to Bligh's claim.

Mary Greenfield is the first who knows the truth about York's childhood. He was a preteen boy when he was living with Aloysius Garvey as one of Garvey's "nephews," though none of the boys were actually related to Garvey. Garvey kept York as a virtual prisoner, used for sex by both Garvey and Gibbeah's former preacher. After Mary learns that information, York reveals his real reason for being in Gibbeah. He was actually



there to seek revenge on Garvey and on the people of the village who did nothing despite the fact that they knew what Garvey was doing to the boys in his care.

York pretends to take special interest in one of the villagers, a young man named Clarence. Clarence welcomes the attention until he discovers that York has given him syphilis. Clarence soon has the opportunity to kill York, and he does. Then, he hides the body from those who are still following York's commands.

Widow Greenfield/Mary Greenfield

Mary is best known as the Widow because her husband died at a young age after getting drunk. She has hardened her heart to avoid being hurt. Despite her claims that she is not interested in religion at all, she finds herself opening up to Pastor Bligh. When it becomes clear that Pastor Bligh and Apostle York are going to have a fight to the finish, Mary pleads with York to simply leave Bligh alone. Mary is the first to discover that Mr. Garvey and all his “nephews” have been murdered, and she finds the photo of a very young Lucas York involved in sex acts.

Lucinda

Lucinda is apparently a churchwoman, but she prays to someone “other” than Jesus. She writes letters to anyone she thinks has the authority to remove Pastor Bligh from his position in the church. She is happy when Apostle York arrives and takes over the pulpit. Lucinda is a complex character, mainly because of her brutal upbringing. Her mother was sometimes involved in black arts and sometimes devoted to the church. She demanded that Lucinda join her. She beat Lucinda on a regular basis, regardless of her current leanings. As a result, Lucinda has two distinct personalities – Day Lucinda and Night Lucinda – representing the public actions and the private actions that she hides from others.

Lucinda becomes enamored with Apostle York and appoints herself as his secretary. She takes care of many of his needs and desperately wants to have sex with him. She becomes very jealous when she discovers that York is expending so much time and attention on Clarence.

Aloysius Garvey

Aloysius Garvey owns most of the property in Gibbeah. He is a self-important man who tries to make the people of Gibbeah change the name of the village to Garveyville, but he finds no support for that plan. He is usually surrounded by a group of young men he calls his “nephews,” though most people do not believe that he has any familial relationship to them. Once the young men near adulthood, he sends them away and replaces them with younger boys. Apostle York was one of those young men. When Apostle York returns to Gibbeah, he murders Garvey and all the young men living in the house with him at the time.



Clarence

Clarence is a young man who lives in Gibbeah and who has an on-going affair with a married woman, Mrs. Johnson. The woman's husband is a veteran and sleeps so soundly that Clarence and the woman have sex in the bed while the husband is sleeping beside them. York has Clarence whipped for his sins. York then heals Clarence and Clarence becomes York's devoted servant. However, when Clarence discovers that York has given him syphilis, Clarence kills York and puts his body in a bathtub to hide the murder from others in the village.

Mrs. Johnson

Mrs. Johnson is a married woman who is having an affair with Clarence. They have sex in her bed while her husband, a disabled veteran, sleeps soundly beside them. She is whipped alongside Clarence after Apostle York finds out about the affair. Her husband later commits suicide.

Brother Vixton

Brother Vixton is one of The Five. He is anxious to prove himself to Apostle York. He is the first man to step onto the Widow Greenfield's lawn when the villagers arrive to force their way into her house, and he immediately falls down dead.

Lucinda's Mother

Lucinda's mother dies long before the story opens, but she is a very important part of Lucinda's life, even after her death. Her actions during Lucinda's childhood warped Lucinda to the point of mental illness. She was alternately a practitioner of the black arts and a pious, church-going woman, which caused Lucinda to have a split personality. Lucinda routinely argues with her mother even though her mother is dead.

Massa Fergie

The villagers call "Master" Fergie, Massa, indicating that he holds a level of respect. He is driving cows home at dark when the villagers find him trying to free a cow from a fence. They assume that he is having sex with the cow and kill him. The villagers find themselves struggling with their actions, but Apostle York says they are involved in a war and that they did the right thing. In reality, their action was nothing more than a mob murder.



Symbols and Symbolism

John Crow

John Crow is the term used to describe the murder of crows that arrive in Gibbeah. The term could be considered symbolic of the mystical things that are going wrong in Gibbeah. The crows are considered to be “messengers of the Devil” and are present in huge numbers. They continue to appear at various times and in various places. The people are wary of them.

Doves

The doves are symbolic of hope and goodness, though they are not calm and tame as might be expected. They arrive when Pastor Bligh is being stoned to death. They maim and kill several people who participated in the murder. When a few doves are seen after the murder, the people are afraid because they remember the way the birds attacked. Then, the people begin to remember that doves are symbolic of hope and peace.

Obeah

The term "obeah" is symbolic of the mystical or magical arts. Obeah is literally defined as the collective wisdom, but not in the traditional sense that people have a specific knowledge because they belong to a particular group. In this case, the obeah man or woman collects secrets as part of his or her skill set. The obeah man or woman also serves as something like a medicine man, providing oils and spells to those who ask.

Day Lucinda and Night Lucinda

Lucinda refers to the difference between Day Lucinda and Night Lucinda as symbols of her public self and her private self. Day Lucinda attends church as an upstanding member of the community. Night Lucinda prays to deities other than God. She has sexual longings.

Pastor Bligh's Brother

Though never named, Pastor Bligh's brother symbolizes the guilt that plagues Pastor Bligh. The brother died when he fell from the balcony of the family home after seeing Pastor Bligh having sex with his brother's wife.



Syphilis

Apostle York has syphilis, which has caused his madness. The disease is symbolic of the crimes perpetrated against him as a young boy. He contracted the disease at some point during or after being sexually abused by Mr. Garvey.

Mr. Garvey's Nephews

Mr. Garvey has a series of boys living with him and he introduces them as his “nephews,” though everyone knows they are not really related. The term is symbolic of the sexual depravity that is happening at Mr. Garvey's house.

The Bridge

Gibbeah's bridge is symbolic of the village's connection with the outside world. Apostle York instructs the people to destroy the bridge to keep evil out of the village. Because the village is literally an island surrounded by the river, they are cut off from any outside influence once the bridge is eliminated.

The Five

The Five is a group of men who symbolize the authority of the church. They are supposed to be working for the good of the people, but they are cruel and readily follow the Apostle York's orders even when it is obvious the people are suffering. Members change several times over the course of the book as some die. The list includes Brother Jakes, Brother Patrick, Brother Vixton, Deacon Pinckney, and Clarence.

The Deformed Calves

All of the deformed calves have heads that are on upside down. The calves are symbols of the evil that Apostle York says is present in Gibbeah. He explains that calves are supposed to be innocent and beautiful, making the contrast between good and evil. The reason for the calves' deformity is never explained.



Settings

Gibbeah

Gibbeah is the village where most of the action of this novel takes place. The village was established as a home for former slaves when slavery was abolished. There are two main roads in the village – Brillo Road that ran longways and Hanover Road that crossed near one end. Most of the land is owned by Aloysius Garvey. Garvey tries to change the name to Garveyville, but no one cooperates. The village is literally surrounded by a river so that it seems to be an island with only one bridge linking it to the outside world.

The Church

The church is a building where Pastor Bligh leads worship services until Apostle York's arrival. The building seems typical of a small country church. It has a steeple, a sanctuary for services, an office, and a room upstairs where Lucinda lives after her house is damaged by fire. The church becomes a battle ground when Pastor Bligh and Apostle York fight for the right to lead the people.

Mr. Garvey's House

Mr. Garvey's house is the largest in the village, befitting his role as the major landowner and wealthiest man. The house is mysterious in that the villagers pretend they do not know what happens there. Garvey lives there with a group of young boys he calls his “nephews.” The boys leave as they become older and they are replaced by younger boys. Mary finds the bodies of Garvey and his current group of “nephews” when she seeks his help to stop Apostle York. Later, Apostle York moves into Garvey's house. Clarence kills him there and hides his body in the bathtub.

Mary Greenfield's House

Mary Greenfield lives alone in a house she owns because her husband died in an accident, leaving her as a widow. The house seems ordinary for the time and place, including a bedroom where Pastor Bligh stays after Apostle York kicks him out of the church. That room becomes an important setting when Bligh locks himself in the room for an extended period of time. He writes on every available surface with an array of instruments including charcoal. Mary fears that he would write with his own blood if she did not continue to provide him with options.

The Astor Sugar Plantation

Astor Sugar Plantation was a working sugar plantation until the end of slavery put a damper on its ability to function. The slaves were forced to leave the plantation. Then, when they had no way to support themselves, they returned to the plantation to try to help it survive. The whites either abandoned it or were glad to see it fail. In the end, it did not survive the transition and was out of business before the time setting of this novel.



Themes and Motifs

Sex and Sexual Depravity

Several characters in the story are highly focused on sex, and much of the focus is on deviant behavior and sexual depravity. There seem to be no healthy sexual attitudes in the entire book, and some of that can be traced back to Aloysius Garvey. Garvey is a pedophile, and he is interested only in young boys. He has a group of youngsters living with him at any given time whom he introduces them as his “nephews.” Most people do not believe there is any family relationship, but they do not confront Mr. Garvey regarding his sexual practices. Apostle York was living with Mr. Garvey as one of Garvey's “nephews.” Both Garvey and the former preacher abused York until he was apparently too old for their tastes. When York talked to Mary Greenfield about his time with Garvey, he pointed out that everyone had suspicions about what Garvey was doing to the boys but that no one took steps to try to help the boys. York was so injured by the situation that he killed Garvey as soon as he arrived in town.

Apostle York publicly confronted Clarence because Clarence was having an affair with a married woman, Mrs. Johnson. He had Clarence and Mrs. Johnson whipped for the offense, which seemed to indicate that Apostle York was calling for purity. Apostle York pushed Lucinda away when she made her sexual attraction clear. He prayed about her and told her to stay away from him, but he began a homosexual relationship with Clarence. After York healed Clarence's back, Clarence showed the utmost devotion to York. That may be why he is so willing to have a sexual relationship with York while York is publicly condemning sexual behavior of any kind. It is only after Clarence realizes that he has caught syphilis from York that Clarence takes action against York. He murders him and hides the fact for several days.

While Lucinda was never able to have a sexual relationship with York, she thought it about it constantly. Taking a cue from York, she began to whip herself in order to get past her sexual desires. It makes little difference to her thoughts.

Lucinda's sexual proclivities are probably a result of her demented childhood. Her mother seemed to have no healthy sexual relationships. She had sex with various men for money. Lucinda sometimes had to help throw them out of the house if they were too drunk to leave on their own. Lucinda was sexual herself at an early age and had a quick sexual encounter with Mr. Greenfield who later married Mary. Lucinda was furious over that situation and she spied on Mary and her husband while they were having sex.

While Mary and her husband were married when they had sex, that relationship was also an unhealthy one. Mary compares herself to the pictures she finds at Mr. Garvey's house, saying that she assumed one of those positions when her husband wanted sex but did not want to see her face.



Supernatural Events/Acts of God

There are several events that are never explained, and the reader is left to assume that these are supernatural events or acts of God. Most of these events take place when Pastor Bligh and Apostle York battle each other. The most memorable of these events involve the arrival of doves and black birds that are identified as John Crows or vultures. Shortly after Apostle York's arrival, hundreds of black birds invade the village. These birds become a problem as they literally line the roofs of some of the buildings. The villagers believe these are the devil or at least a sign of the devil, which makes their arrival a bad omen.

When the villagers threaten the Widow Greenfield, one of the deacons steps onto her yard and is immediately struck down. He dies on her lawn. His body remains there with lots of dead birds. Again, the birds seem to be an omen.

When the villagers begin to stone Pastor Bligh, dozens of doves arrive. These birds attack the people who killed Pastor Bligh, killing several and seriously injuring several more. One of the men is knocked off a cliff and dies in the fall. While the birds seem to be a miraculous event, the birds then flock to Pastor Bligh's body and it disappears.

Another event takes place when Pastor Bligh and Apostle York square off in the church. They have a figurative battle that becomes literal when some of the church caves in. Both men fall into a coma of sorts. Apostle York makes the claim that he was actually dead and that he rose on the third day.

Soon after Apostle York's arrival, he holds revival services. He calls The Five to the front of the church and they are afraid the Apostle York is going to make examples of them like he has others in the congregation. However, the Apostle York begins to speak in a strange language and all five of the men are healed of the injuries Lillamae Perkins inflicted on them two years earlier. The healing seems to be genuine and all five claim the injuries are mysteriously gone. One of the men had lost the sight in one eye and another was impotent, but these and other injuries are all healed. This seems to be a miracle. Like all the events, it is up to the reader to decide what it means and how it came about.

There are also two deformed calves that are found dead in the village just after Apostle York's arrival. Both have their heads on upside down, but there is no evidence that they were cut off and sewn back on, meaning they were born that way.

The Cost of Sin

Whether the reader considers the wrongs committed by the characters as sin or simply as mistakes, there is no doubt that the various characters pay a price – sometimes the ultimate price – for those actions. Aloysius Garvey is one of the first examples that comes to mind because his sins set several additional sins in motion.



Garvey is a pedophile who keeps a group of boys at his house. He lies to the people of Gibbeah, saying the youngsters are his nephews, but he is actually brutalizing them sexually. When Apostle York finally reveals all the details to Pastor Bligh, he says that he was raped repeatedly by “Uncle Aloysius” and by Bligh's predecessor, Pastor Palmer. Garvey returns to Gibbeah to exact his revenge. Probably the first thing he does when he arrives is kill Mr. Garvey and all the youngsters who are living in his house at the time.

Apostle York tells Mary Greenfield that the people of Gibbeah knew what Garvey was doing to him and the other young boys, or that at least had strong suspicions. The people of the village seem to believe that Mr. Garvey is above reproach because of his wealth or his standing in the community. They never confront Garvey about his actions or tell him that he is wrong. That inaction is why Apostle York returns to Gibbeah and winds up leading the villagers into a horrific situation. They are cut off from every outside influence and from outside help. They literally isolate themselves at Apostle York's insistence and several of them die as a direct result of his actions. He indicates that this would not have happened if the people of Gibbeah had stood up for the young men Garvey was abusing, and especially if they had stood up for York.

Lucinda and her mothers are also examples of this theme. Lucinda's mother was brutal and obviously suffered from mental issues. She wavered from an accomplished professor of the black arts to being pious to the point of fanaticism. She deeply damaged Lucinda with her actions. When Lucinda's mother had a stroke at the river, Lucinda took the opportunity to push her underwater until she drowned. She got away with the crime to the degree that she was never punished, but she saw her mother's face and heard her mother's voice for the rest of her life.

Pastor Bligh is another example. He had an affair with his sister-in-law prior to joining the ministry. When Bligh's brother caught his wife and brother in the act, he fell to his death. He paid with his life and Bligh's father died “of a broken heart.” Bligh went on to join the clergy but he never recovered from the guilt and therefore never did his best. Not only did Bligh deal with the guilt but the people he was supposed to be leading were left with a preacher who did not care about their needs.

Black and White

The colors black and white typically indicate evil and good. While the same is true in this novel, the colors also represent other concepts. Two examples are day compared to night and clarity compared to things that are unclear.

Pastor Bligh wears white throughout the story, though his clothes are sometimes dirty. Apostle York wears black. No one really knows the true intentions of either Apostle York or Pastor Bligh as their battle begins. It seems at the beginning that Pastor Bligh is worthless and that he cannot possibly be a good leader, but he changes dramatically a few days after Apostle York's arrival. The actions of Pastor Bligh before Apostle York's arrival and his actions after are as different as black and white. At least on the surface,



he seems to have become a true man of God who is fighting for something he believes in, though months pass before Bligh reveals the truth about Apostle York.

The birds are another important example of this theme. The John Crows are black birds that some villagers call vultures. They arrive by the thousands and frighten people. At one point, there are dozens of the birds in Mary Greenfield's yard. They seem to be dead but rise up when she kicks them as she is walking through them. The sight of the birds feel ominous and helps to lead the reader to the conclusion that either Pastor Bligh or Apostle York is evil, though it is sometimes difficult to be certain which is which until days into the battle.

The doves arrive as Apostle York has worked the crowd into a murderous frenzy so they are throwing stones at Pastor Bligh. The white doves could be seen as a sign that Pastor Bligh might have divine intervention, but that is not the case. He is actually dead. Doves, a traditional symbol of peace and hope, do not seem to be a threat at first, but that perception changes quickly. The doves shove one man off a ledge and blind another. People run away in fear. Later, when someone sees a dove, their first instinct is fear, but then they remember that the dove is actually a symbol of hope.

Lucinda's split personality can also be seen as an example of this theme. She refers to herself as Day Lucinda and Night Lucinda, with Day Lucinda exhibiting the traits people expect from her and Night Lucinda as that side she must keep hidden. The Day Lucinda attends church and behaves in an acceptable way. The Night Lucinda serves the dark arts and is obsessed with sex, causing her to flagellates herself as punishment.

Similarly, Mr. Garvey has a side that he shows in public, complete with well-mannered young "nephews" who attend church services. The other side of Mr. Garvey is that of a child molester who brutalizes those young boys and sends them away when they are too old to interest him.

Guilt

Guilt is an emotion that can cause long-term pain and affect a person for many years. Several characters in this story are guilt-ridden, and their actions are often driven by this guilt. Other situations show characters who have done things that probably should have prompted guilty emotions, but they apparently do not feel any guilt regarding their actions. The responses – whether showing guilt or a lack of guilt – are important looks into the the various characters.

Pastor Bligh is a prime example. He had an affair with his sister-in-law that directly led to his brother's death and indirectly led to his father's death. The story of the affair and his brother's death is told in pieces. It is left to the reader to fill in some details, but the basic information is that Pastor Bligh betrayed his brother in a very basic manner. He says he lied to his brother, coveted his brother's property, and stole. It is clear that Pastor Bligh (before he had joined the clergy) had sex with his brother's wife. Apparently, his brother caught them in the act. Pastor Bligh often thinks about his



brother's body at the bottom of the balcony with blood spreading from the wound on his head. The maid screams at the sight, and Pastor Bligh looks at the scene from upstairs. It is not clear whether Pastor Bligh pushed his brother or if the brother fell in his haste to get away from the scene. Pastor Bligh continues to see the scene, over and over, and his guilt has become a near-tangible part of his life.

The reader does not know what kind of minister Bligh would have been without that death on his conscience, but he is completely indifferent by the time he takes the job at Gibbeah. He should feel guilty about his performance toward the people of his congregation, but he does not show any remorse until Apostle York arrives and literally kicks Bligh out of his church.

Lucinda is another example of this theme. She wants to be a good, pure person. However, she has serious problems with that. After she sees Apostle York naked, she finds herself thinking about his body and she begins to flagellate herself in an effort to stop the thoughts. While Lucinda undoubtedly feels guilt, she is also willing to push herself into situations that will only lead to more guilt, such as inserting herself into Apostle York's inner circle and trying to be near him all the time. She literally tries to burn her house down so she can stay at the church. Lucinda reveals that she murdered her mother and feels no guilt for that. Some readers may feel that Lucinda was justified considering how brutal her mother was toward her.

Another example of this theme is seen in Garvey's abuse of the young boys in his care. He sexually assaults them repeatedly until they are too old to be of interest to him. Then, he sends them away and replaces them with new boys. The perspective never includes Garvey's thoughts or feelings, but he is outwardly unrepentant and feels no guilt for what he's done to the boys. Apostle York takes revenge by killing Garvey, and he seems to feel no guilt for that action.

The people of Gibbeah brutally murder a man who was trying to herd his cow home. They justify it by saying that he was committing the sin of bestiality. They never feel guilt for their actions. They also stone Pastor Bligh to death. When the doves arrive, some of the people are afraid. However, they apparently never feel that they have done anything wrong.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is presented in past tense from varying perspectives. The majority of the novel can be read as if a narrator is presenting the details. Even with a narrator, the reader has a limited perspective and some information is never revealed. For example, Clarence watches his back in the mirror as he undergoes what appears to be a miraculous healing. He had been whipped, but his back literally goes from bloody open slashes to healed in a matter of seconds. The reader must decide how that happens. Apostle York, who is responsible for the healing, does not give any indication that he has called on a demonic interference. By this time in the story line, it seems clear that Apostle York is not a good man and probably does not have the ability to call on God for divine intervention. The narrator never reveals any other information about it.

The narrator sometimes steps aside for one or more members of the village to take over telling the story. When this happens, the tone and language changes abruptly. The villagers are not named, and their identities are not important. The point of the change is to give the reader a closer look at how the villagers view specific events rather than how Apostle York, Pastor Bligh, or even an uninterested narrator see them.

There are some stark changes in tone, such as the one seen in the opening chapter, "Rum Preacher." After a passage in the Caribbean tone, the narrative becomes modern-day English including articles and correct use of pronouns. This gives the feel of two narrators, one speaking traditional Caribbean English complete with the accent and a second who speaks perfect American English.

Language and Meaning

Some passages of the novel are difficult with strange words and phrases, many that are specific to the Caribbean language. In the opening pages, Clarence threatened "frigery" on anyone who refused to help dispose of the dead. While some passages are written in a fairly straightforward style, others have a Caribbean sound that will make most readers imagine the Caribbean accent talking. This is undoubtedly done on purpose and the goal is to take the reader directly into the Caribbean culture. However, some modern-day English readers will find the narrative difficult to follow, much like the old texts of Homer and Shakespeare. The difficulties may put off some readers so they prefer not to read the book. The author is bound to have considered this when he chose the language.

In some passages, the language is not that far off what a modern-day reader will understand. For example, articles are omitted so that "the man" becomes "man," which reads awkwardly but most readers will instinctively understand. On page 108, there is a scene in which Clarence is being whipped. A passage reads, in part, "Clarence not



saying nothing, but him grind him teeth ...” The use of “him” instead of “his” and the use of double negatives will be difficult for some readers to follow.

The novel is filled with metaphors, personification, and symbolism. Some of these are written in clear language so readers will readily pick up on the meanings. Others are obscure, such as the fact that Lucinda worships Sasa. Sasa is likely a traditional African action that includes telling stories, both recent and historical. Readers most familiar with African history will probably find these meanings clearer than the reader who has no background to provide information.

Structure

The novel is divided into Part One and Part Two. The book opens with a preface that is titled “The End.” In this chapter, the reader gets some preview information, such as the fact that Pastor Bligh was killed three days earlier. Chronologically, that chapter belongs a little more than halfway through Part Two.

After “The End,” Part One opens. The first chapter, “The Rum Preacher,” is largely an introductory chapter. This chapter drops back in time to talk about several people in the village of Gibbeah, including Pastor Hector Bligh, the man they call the Rum Preacher. Part One includes twelve chapters in all and covers about half the novel. Part Two consists of fifteen chapters.

With the exception of the opening chapter, “The End,” the novel is presented roughly in chronological order. There are some pieces of history that are presented just as a matter of course. Pastor Bligh's background, including the death of his brother, is one of those. Lucinda's childhood and the way her father died are also shared.

The final chapter is titled “The Beginning.” From that title, readers may assume that the story will revert to the beginning. It actually falls chronologically at the end of Part Two, but it includes the death of Apostle York, which puts the people of Gibbeah in a position to begin recovering.

Each chapter has a title that might help some readers figure out what is happening. A major example is seen in the chapter that appears early in Part One titled “Dead Nephews.” There is a church service that Mr. Garvey always attends with his “nephews,” but he does not attend this time. The reader does not see that Garvey and the boys are all dead until much later, but it is evident that their deaths occurred prior to this point.



Quotes

Fool. You should a do this two years ago when we was one. Now we is one and seven,' was all she would say."

-- Narrator (The Rum Preacher paragraph 13)

Importance: The "she" in this quote is Lillimae Perkins. She has just killed her father who was raping her and hurt "the five" deacons and the Rum Preacher. The eight she mentions is a reference to demons. In the next paragraph, the narrator notes that no one will confront a woman with eight demons.

God had sent him to Gibbeah. Jesus looked just like him."

-- Narrator (Dead Nephews paragraph 1)

Importance: The wording is significant because a person would typically say that someone looked like Jesus, but the author writes here that Jesus looks like "him," meaning Apostle York. It gives the impression that Apostle York is somehow more powerful or more important in God's eyes than Jesus.

Pastor Hector Bligh was fifty-three years old but guilt had pulled down his face. The promise of towering height was thwarted by his slouch."

-- Narrator (Revival Part One paragraph 10)

Importance: Pastor Bligh is at Widow Greenfield's house having his first shower ever. He is momentarily amazed by how good he feels to be under the jets of water, but then he remembers that he is not a good man because of the guilt he feels over his brother's death. Later in that paragraph, he knows that the "dirtiness" can never be washed away.

Evening rain made a day forget herself, but never her purpose. Rain did the same for people, frightening them to cover or freeing them to expose, but never allowing them to forget their purpose."

-- Narrator (Scism paragraph 1)

Importance: This is one of many examples of personification. The author refers to day as "her" and makes it seem that rain affects the day the same as it affects people. The fact that rain causes different people to react in different ways is an important aspect of the story. One of the novel's themes is sexual depravity, and an effect of that is seen in the way people react. The rain is often considered a means of cleansing, but the people in this case can never be cleaned to the point that they "forget their purpose."

Him goin make the pickneys put on show right in the church! We no see so much excitement since Miss Fracas dog give birth to cat."

-- A Person from Gibbeah (chapter 777 paragraph 2)

Importance: This is one of the passages presented in the Caribbean dialect. By this point, some readers will begin to understand the language even though it is not like



modern-day American English. The “him” is Apostle York. The fact that the speaker compares the coming Easter event to the dog that gave birth to a cat indicates that the people are mainly interested in church because of the shows Apostle York is putting on.

A dead calf was nothing new to Gibbeah, or to Miss Fracas, who fainted at the sight of her. There was no sign of what contributed to the cow's demise except one: Her head was upside down.”

-- Narrator (Rolling Calf Part One paragraph 1)

Importance: This is the first dead calf with a head upside down. The calves become symbolic of demonic forces at work in Gibbeah. At this point, it is unclear whether Pastor Bligh or Apostle York is responsible, but the people are immediately afraid.

It took the Apostle's holy thunder and a couple verses from the Book of Daniel to mix the crowd's fear and rage into a mob. They moved as one beast.”

-- Narrator (Rolling Calf Part Three paragraph 48)

Importance: This is the first time the people have begun to obey the Apostle as a group. Later, they catch up with a man trying to herd his cow home and declare that he has committed bestiality. That use that to justify their action when they murder him. A significant word in this passage is “beast,” because they are supposedly trying to eliminate evil from the village but are off track.

What do you think this is? Pin the tail on the donkey, church? This is war!

-- Apostle York (Up Jumped the Devil paragraph 11)

Importance: Apostle York is addressing the church members after they moved together as a group and murdered the man herding his cows. He says he understands that they are feeling guilty, but that they have no reason to feel anything but justified. The reader is just now realizing that depths of the Apostle's control over the people and the depth of his madness.

Outside in the dark, the half moon saw her. In the silver light, Lucinda saw herself for what she really was.”

-- Narrator (The Recovery paragraph 13)

Importance: Lucinda is one of the characters who hides a part of her true nature. She goes on in this passage to remember that she prays to a deity she refers to as Sasa and smears “goat blood on her breast.” The Sasa is probably a reference to a spiritual African tradition. The purpose of the goat's blood is not explained. It is not necessary for the reader to understand all aspects of Lucinda's life. It is enough to accept that she is not a God-fearing church member.

His back was healing itself through the grooves of his wounds. The cuts closed like zippers and disappeared into the smoothness of his skin.”

-- Narrator (The Healing paragraph 45)



Importance: Clarence was whipped a short time earlier, and his back was shredded with deep wounds. In this scene, Clarence watches in a mirror as the wounds on his back magically heal. This action is one of several examples of mystical events that are never explained. From this moment, Clarence is loyal to Apostle York until the day he discovers York has given him syphilis, which prompts Clarence to kill York.

She was his John the Baptist, Clarence was merely a Magdalene with a penis. She was disturbed to see them together.”

-- Narrator (An Aroma paragraph 1)

Importance: This is seen from Lucinda's perspective. She was the first to be devoted to Apostle York and she's angry that Clarence now has all the Apostle's attention. The fact that both Clarence and Lucinda want Apostle York's attention is a fatal mistake because York has syphilis.

Syphilis, the great imitator, is a symphony in four movements. Like religion, it has no being in itself, but lives in the lives it touches. Like a God or a Devil.”

-- Narrator (Reckoning paragraph 12)

Importance: Clarence has just discovered the pus-ridden sores on his feet that leave a trail wherever he walks and that he left blood on the toilet seat. This changes everything because Clarence kills Apostle York, mainly as revenge for having contracted the disease.