The Known World Study Guide

The Known World by Edward P. Jones

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Known World: A Novel (2003) is the Pulitzer Prize-winning debut novel by Edward P. Jones. The book was praised by critics for its provocative depiction of the complexities of slavery in the United States and helped establish Jones's reputation as an author of note. Jones was inspired while attending College of the Holy Cross when he learned that a few free blacks owned slaves in pre-Civil War America. The author spent about ten years developing the story idea and reading books about slavery before writing the novel in late 2001 and early 2002.

While *The Known World* includes the truth about black slave owners and captures the essence of the era, its people, and its tensions, Jones did not rely on any of his research in writing the novel. He created the whole fictional world of Manchester County, Virginia, including specific historical facts, academic studies mentioned in passing, and other "evidence." The novel weaves stories about interconnected whites, both rich and poor, free blacks, free black slave-owners, and enslaved blacks. The plot revolves around the life and death of Henry Townsend, a free black man who was once a slave and became a slave owner in adulthood.

While Jones emphasizes how destructive slavery is for both slave and owner, he also highlights the importance of inner strength and familial relationships. Many critics note the effectiveness of his straightforward language and detached tone in describing these ideas in the novel. Jones told Robert Fleming of *Publishers Weekly*, "It was my goal to be objective, to not put a lot of emotion into this, to show all in a matter-of-fact manner…. In a case like this, you don't raise your voice, you just state your case and that is more than enough."

Author Biography

Edward Paul Jones was born in 1950 in Washington, D.C., where he was raised by his illiterate mother, Jeanette S. M. Jones. His father left the family when Jones was about four years old, and his mother supported Jones and his younger siblings by working as a hotel maid and kitchen worker. The family moved often, at least eighteen times before Jones's high school graduation.

Jones loved to read comic books as a child, and he became excited about longer fiction after reading his first novel at the age of thirteen. He was also a good student from an early age. After graduating from Cardozo High School, Jones entered College of the Holy Cross, a choice influenced by a friendship he had with a Jesuit priest, Joseph Owens, in high school. A scholarship student, Jones studied English and began writing fiction as a sophomore.

After earning his undergraduate degree in 1972, Jones returned to Washington to care for his sick mother. He took a job writing news releases for the National Park Service. Jones drifted a bit in life and was even briefly homeless after the death of his mother in 1975. Jones's professional and personal life improved in 1976 when he had a short story published in *Essence* and landed a job at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

Jones became part of a writing workshop while working at the AAAS for three years. After reading some of Jones's work, novelist John Casey convinced Jones to enter the MFA creative writing program at the University of Virginia. Jones graduated in 1981 and taught there for a year afterward. Though he later taught at other colleges, Jones needed a steady income and took a job at the Arlington, Virginia-based journal *Tax Notes* in 1983. There, he summarized news stories and pieces from editorial pages and worked as a proofreader.

While working at *Tax Notes*, Jones wrote fiction in his free time, only writing when he felt he had a story to tell. He published a number of short stories in major periodicals. Many of his stories were about poverty and hardships in the Shaw neighborhood in Washington, D.C., where Jones grew up. Jones published some of these stories in his first book *Lost in the City* (1992). The collection won the PEN/Hemingway Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award. Two years later, Jones was given a Lannan Foundation Grant in 1994 for his short fiction.

In the early 1990s, Jones began working on what would become *The Known World: A Novel*. Based on what he learned in college about black slave owners in pre-Civil War America, Jones spent ten years forming the narrative in his head. Taking a five-week vacation from *Tax Notes* at the end of 2001, Jones finally began writing down his story. He finished the first draft in two-and-a-half months. During his vacation, Jones learned that his position at the journal was one of many being eliminated in early 2002. Jones continued to write and revise his manuscript, living off his severance and vacation pay before collecting unemployment.

Jones published *The Known World* in 2003, the same year he received a second Lannan Foundation Grant. The novel garnered much critical acclaim and won many awards, including the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the 2004 National Books Critics Circle Prize for fiction, and the 2005 IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. In 2004, Jones also was given a $500,000 MacArthur Fellowship. As of 2006, Jones lives in Washington, D.C., where he focuses on fiction writing full time. He is the author of the forthcoming short story collection *All Aunt Hagar's Children: Stories*, planned for publication in 2006.

Plot Summary

Henry Townsend is born a slave, but dies as a prosperous slave owner, leaving his widow Caldonia a significant legacy to deal with. Like his father Augustus, Henry is extraordinarily talented and uses his gifts to buy his freedom. Unlike his father, Henry accepts that slavery is legal and purchases a number of slaves from his ex-master William Robbins, the first of whom, cruel Moses, he makes overseer. The revelation of this situation causes a break between father and son, healed only as Henry nears death.

Robbins, the largest and most powerful landowner in Manchester County, Virginia, is unhappily married to a white woman and involved for the second time with a slave, whom he comes to love dearly. He dotes on his black children, providing for their education from a black female teacher, Fern Elston, which connects them with Henry and Caldonia during their student years. Robbins also provides ongoing advice to Henry on the obligations and demands of slave owning, and controls who will serve as sheriff in the county.

John Skiffington becomes sheriff after his long-tenured predecessor disappoints Robbins. John, a fervent Bible reader, is personally determined not to hold slaves, but dedicated to maintaining a social institution he believes both civil and divine laws bless and guarantee. He and his wife, Winifred, are given Minerva as wedding present by his cousin Counsel. They feel Minerva will fare worse in any situation other than remaining with them, and they treat her as a daughter. As Minerva nears adulthood, John is ashamed and fearful to find himself lusting after her.

John's duties are few in this peaceful county until slaves begin disappearing from Caldonia's plantation. John suspects that the overseer Moses is involved, as indeed he is. Moses is determined to marry his widowed mistress and sends his wife and son away, in the company of the crazy slave Alice. The sheriff suspects Moses has murdered them and organizes an intensive search. John's fortunes further decline when his slave patrols illegally strip Augustus of his freedom and sell hip to a wandering speculator. Finally sold on the Georgia/Florida border, Augustus is murdered by his new master as he begins the long walk back north. Moses oversteps his bounds with Caldonia, realizes his plans have failed, and he also takes flight.

Realizing Robbins has lost faith in him, the sheriff discovers where Moses must be hiding, and while trying to shake off the agony of a toothache in order to do his sworn duty, he sets off with his deputy/cousin to Mildred's home. Moses is there, taken in by Mildred, who stands with a rifle and refuses to surrender him. Pain prevents John from keeping his usual calm, civil demeanor, and he lashes out at the poor widow Mildred. John accidentally shoots Mildred dead, and is in turn gunned down by Counsel, who believes he has found the treasure that will restore his lost fortunes. Moses surrenders to Counsel, who intends to blame the two dead people for each other's murder. Moses is taken back to town, and savagely hobbled by the patrollers en route, to prevent him

from ever wandering off again. Moses lives out his declining days cared for by the new overseer's cripple wife, for whose miscarriage he is responsible.

Robbins's white and black daughters meet after he suffers a stroke. Winifred and Minerva move to Philadelphia, but there they become parted. Caldonia remarries and remains with Robbins's black son, Louis Cartwright, on the plantation. Caldonia also learns from her brother Calvin, who has moved to Washington, D.C., that Celeste, Jamie, and Alice did not perish in the Manchester woods as many people thought, but are flourishing in the big city on the eve of the Civil War. Alice, no longer a crazy woman, has created two magnificent pieces of art depicting life in Manchester County and on the Townsend plantation.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

On the evening his master dies, Moses plows on after dismissing the other slaves. Moses tastes a pinch of soil to get the feel of the season, smiles at the scent of nearing rain, and walks to edge of the cornfield. There, he strips naked, sleeps, masturbates, and walks home to his wife and family, who are used to his tardiness. Alice watches Moses during her nightly wanderings, brought about, some say, when a mule kicked all sense out of her. Moses has been a slave for thirty-five years, twice to white masters and now, for ten years, as the overseer slave to a black master.

The master, Henry Townsend, a thirty-one-year-old free black man who owns 33 slaves and over 50 acres, has been dying for six days. He has been sick seven times in ten years, and his estranged father Augustus, sets aside past squabbles to visit. When Henry's parents visit, they stay in the slave quarters, not in the house. A white doctor predicts recovery, but Henry's wife, Caldonia, is sure the ailments of white and black people differ, so Henry may die.

Caldonia is always at Henry's side. She is a freeborn black woman, educated by Fern Elston, another freeborn black woman. Henry urges Caldonia to go to bed, but she declines and offers to read or sing to him. Henry wants only to get out of bed and love his wife. Fern and her gambler husband own twelve slaves. After the war, Fern tells a white pamphleteer from Canada that Henry was one of her brightest students.

Elias is whittling a doll for his daughter, when Moses passes, reminding him about coming chores. Moses has disliked Elias since Henry bought him. Moses is Henry's first purchase, from his own ex-master William Robbins. Moses takes two weeks to reconcile to God's letting blacks own blacks. Elias never believed in a sane God, so such questions never bother him. Elias' wife Celeste has a congenital limp, so Elias figures a minor defect in the doll will not matter.

Fern returns on the day Henry dies and sits with Caldonia. Henry tries to join in, but death takes him. Not realizing Henry has passed, Fern and Caldonia discuss the wretched fate of two slaves whose master has died. Caldonia's maid, Loretta, confirms Henry's death, and Caldonia, twenty-eight-years-old and childless, holds his still warm hand.

Alice belongs to Henry six months before he dies. Alice is a good worker, so her owners put up with her frightening the slave patrollers who drag her home. On the night of Henry's death, Alice shimmies down the muddy road, singing loudly about her dead "massa."

Henry's father, Augustus, is a master furniture builder who buys his freedom from Robbins and land from a poor, white man. Three years later, he purchases his wife

Mildred. Robbins and other prominent white citizens exempt Augustus from the 1806 act requiring freed slaves leave Virginia within twelve months. Mildred's cabin mate, Rita, takes charge of Henry when his parents move to their own property. As Robbins appreciates Henry's intelligence, the price of his freedom also goes up, and it takes Augustus longer than planned to buy his son.

Mildred prepares little feasts to take to Henry during Sunday visits. Henry is growing quickly and learning to carve. Henry sometimes fails to appear during the winter, and his parents may not set foot on Robbins's land. Once, when Henry arrives late, Augustus pushes him to the ground. Robbins punishes Augustus by forbidding visits for a month. Henry has not told his parents he is using Mildred's food to bribe Robbins's groom, Toby, to withdraw to let Henry have the position.

At least three times a week, Henry waits to care for Sir Guilderham, Robbins's horse, after the master returns from a night spent with his black lover, Philomena, and their two children. Robbins's white wife is bitter about the situation. The black children, Dora and Louis, remain slaves. Unlike others in Virginia's largest county, Robbins did not pressure the 1840 census taker to list them as white. Louis, who suffers a "traveling eye," cherishes his father's visits. Louis will learn to control the eye, earn a reputation for honesty, and marry Caldonia Townsend.

Robbins often suffers seizures while riding, and to repay a stranger for helping him home after one in 1841, Robbins sells him Toby and his sister cheaply. By the time Robbins realizes his mistake; they have vanished. Slave patrols organized to find them evolve into a permanent institution. Since 1837, when Jesse was killed and his companions hobbled, there have been few escape attempts. Rita recalls 1841 when she plans her break for freedom. Robbins appreciates Henry's dedication as a groom, and orders him good food and clothing. Love for the boy is another reason Henry's selling price keeps rising.

Chapter 1 Analysis

"Liaison. The Warmth of Family. Stormy Weather," introduces the story of Henry Townsend, a free black slave owner, whose weeklong dying is watched. We meet his former owner and benefactor, William Robbins, who loves a black woman and provides her and their children a home that no one else in the county would dare provide slaves. Henry, his wife, and her twin brother are literate, having been trained by Fern Elston, a freeborn black woman. From census data and touching narrative, we begin getting a feel for the horrors of slavery, including blacks owning blacks, in the late 1830s through 1855, the year of Henry's death at age thirty-one.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In the autumn of 1840, God-fearing John Skiffington decides to obey the Bible and marry. For two years, Skiffington serves as Sheriff Gilly Patterson's deputy, after leaving North Carolina with his father and his mother's remains, as his father has seen in a dream they must free their slaves and flee the state. Invited to the home of the Pattersons for Sunday dinner, John falls in love with cousin Winifred Patterson, visiting form Philadelphia. By March, John and Winifred are engaged, and in June they marry grandly. Cousin Counsel and his wife Belle represent the North Carolina clan. Their generous wedding present to Winifred is a nine-year-old slave, Minerva. John and the Philadelphians are stunned but polite. Belle warns Winifred not to spoil Minerva. Minerva longs for a sister she will not see for twenty years. Neither newlywed wants a slave, but selling or giving Minerva away might put her in the hands of someone worse, and freeing her in Philadelphia will compromise John's prospects as sheriff. Minerva hears Winifred weeping and creeps timidly into the bedroom to check on her. Winifred refuses to be called "mistress."

Robbins and fellow landowners summon Sheriff Patterson and Deputy Skiffington to confront their laxity in combating abolitionists. Robbins wants a militia. Patterson resents being thus summoned, defends their record, and promises peace. Two years later, he resigns bitterly over what Robbins calls a "hemorrhaging of slaves." Although Winifred yearns for Philadelphia, John loves the South, is anxious for success, and he sure he can do better than Patterson. He "takes up the mantle," and a hint to assemble a twelve-man team of slave patrollers, including kindly Barnum Kinsey, the poorest white in the county. Skiffington believes the Bible sanctions slavery and keeps the institution going. A later historian will hail the peace and prosperity of his tenure.

The last straw for whites, which brought Skiffington into office, is the "Rita thing." After bidding her ward good-bye when Henry's parents finish paying for his freedom, Rita chases down the Townsend's departing wagon and refuses Augustus's terror and tear-filled pleas not to endanger them in this way. Augustus provisions a shipping crate to take Rita to New York, covered with seventeen carved walking sticks. Only after the train departs does Augustus remember the party they had planned to celebrate Henry's freedom. Henry feels no different being free. Only when he has purchased his second slave, Zeddie the cook, will Henry understand his feelings. An expressionless Irish immigrant, Mary Conlon, and her son Timothy, free Rita from her stinking, dark crate after a forty-one-hour trip.

Chapter 2 Analysis

"The Wedding Presents. Dinner First, Then Breakfast. Prayers before an Offering," describes how Manchester County enters a period of peace and prosperity under

Sheriff John Skiffington, who believes the bible condones slavery, but he will not be a slave-owner. Relatives give him and his bride Winifred a slave, whom they treat more as a child, without setting her free. The white slaveholders put Skiffington in office after a spate of slave disappearances, climaxed by the escape of Henry Townsend's surrogate mother, Rita, on the day Henry's parents finish paying for his freedom. The rift between Henry and his father, Augustus, hinted at in Chapter 1, is mentioned again, but the nature of this remains to be revealed.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

At sunrise, Caldonia's maid Loretta informs Moses and wife Priscilla about the of Henry. Recalling how the widow of a nearby master reneged on her promise not to separate six slaves, and no two ending up together after the estate sale, Henry's slaves fear their fate. Loretta recommends fieldwork to be suspended until Henry is buried, lest anything spoil his soul's journey. She worries particularly about women-loving Stamford and his latest "young stuff," Gloria. Caldonia and Fern want the slaves to assemble after breakfast. Moses is to inform everyone. On her way back to the house, Loretta tells Elias. No orders need to be given about routine chores; death itself dictates all work.

Moses makes his way down the lane of slave cabins, eight on each side, which is according to Henry's dream plan. Elias has not bothered to tell his wife about Henry's death; neither of them cares about the late master, but Celeste is willing to show some charity. As Moses crisscrosses the lane, some women weep, but most say nothing. Being owned by a white man will somehow be not as strange. Alice, Delphie, and Delphie's daughter Cassandra share the last cabin. Moses warns the smiling Night Walker and Stamford, who is eying Gloria, not to start any foolishness. They must respect the dead. Delphie prays for Henry's soul to thank him for buying her and her daughter together.

The slaves gather before the veranda, where Caldonia, her in-laws, mother, twin brother Calvin, and Fern sit in mourning. Caldonia fights tears to address the slaves extemporaneously. She asks prayers for a man who cared for them as she does. She will not abandon them. Like Henry, she wants to be better to them than any white master could be. As she falters, her brother leads her into the house. Augustus walks among the slaves. He is saddened by Caldonia's words, having hoped and believed she would set them free.

Before Augustus reaches the end of the crowd, William Robbins arrives, driven by son Louis and accompanied by daughter Dora. The slaves are unused to seeing white people. They enter the house without knocking. Calvin is sent out to say Caldonia wants no one to work until after the funeral. He wants to shake people's hands, but fears they may resent the fact he holds slaves. Calvin wants to free them, but his mother Maude demands he not sell off his legacy.

Augustus and Mildred still refuse to stay in their late son's slave-built house, and accompany the slaves down the lane. They occupy the cabin in which Peter died after being trampled by horses. His widow May superstitiously refuses to enter the cabin for a month after his death, and decides to reoccupy it only after the funeral, convinced that Augustus and Mildred's staying there was a sign Peter wanted her to return. Augustus and Mildred take part in performing the routine chores that still must be performed.

Henry's grave is dug in the place he planned, near (but not among) the ten infants and a few adult slaves who have passed away since Henry began holding slaves. Among them was twelve-year-old Luke, a boy Elias and Celeste had loved. Calvin digs first, and then hands the shovel to Louis. Neither is used to hard labor but both dig zealously. Augustus takes over and digs until Calvin tells him he has done well and gives Moses a turn. Robbins and Dora come out to watch the work, silently, for half an hour as Moses digs. Elias and then Stamford, soon to die himself, take their turns, and the shovel returns to Calvin. The men's work turns to building Henry a pine coffin, while up in the house, Henry's body is washed, dressed, and laid out in the parlor.

Alice grows restless long before bedtime and takes to the lane, chanting, "Master dead." Moses tries to hush her and she obeys, but continues her pacing. After supper, veiled Caldonia, Calvin, and their mother fail to convince Augustus and Mildred to stay in the house, as does Fern on her first-ever visit to the cabins. They visit a few cabins, taking care of Caldonia's "legacy," but mostly so Caldonia can escape the new loneliness of her house. Moses and Priscilla accompany them. Fern prefers not to mingle with field slaves, having learned from her mother not to marry anyone darker than herself. Some of her pale-skinned relatives have disappeared into white society. Fern's mother would not approve of dark-skinned, one-legged, Jebediah Dickinson, who like Fern's husband is a gambler. As the lane quiets, Augustus and Mildred hold one another, working to recall all they can about their son. In the house, vigil is held over Henry's body.

Alice resumes her chant. Harvey Travis, Barnum Kinsey, and young new patrollers find Alice a mile up the road. Her singing and dancing always haunt Travis's sleep. That morning Barnum promises his wife he will stop drinking, so he is tense. Alice follows the trio as they nervously depart, singing until 4:30 AM, loudly enough for deaf angels to hear.

Elias finishes carving his daughter's doll and feels empty. It does not look as much like Tessie as he had hoped. His first carving had been a comb for Celeste. Alice frightens Elias as he begins carving a horse for his son. Now that Henry is dead, restless Elias no longer feels bound to the informal pledge he made to him not to run away.

Elias remembers his history as Henry's slave. He first sees Celeste two days after Henry purchases him. She is struggling to keep up with the other children's play. Elias is so intent on escaping, however, that he makes no effort to help her. At any rate, Proud Celeste resents being watched and does all she can to make Elias's life miserable. Elias falls very ill during his second week on the plantation. He hears the wind at night advising him to play while he can. Elias suspects Celeste has put a spell on him, when in fact her resentment is lessening. Elias's health returns, but not well enough for him to make a run to freedom. In desperation, Elias just walks away.

Elias's strength drops hour-by-hour, and he finally collapses. Hearing a horse, he hides in some tall grass. Robbins calls out for him to reveal himself, and he grazes Elias's thigh with a bullet. Elias admits he belongs to Henry. Robbins punches him twice in the face. In the morning, word has spread that someone escaped and people are happy for Elias. Celeste is happy, although she does not like Elias. Rev. Valtims Moffett is due to

hold Sunday services for the slaves. As Moses informs Henry, Robbins arrives with Elias, limping and in chains. Robbins declines Henry's invitation to come in and gallops smilingly away. Henry slaps Elias and declares he is disappointed. Other slaves gather to watch. Henry remembers Robbins's warning about the responsibility of owning slaves, and orders Moses to chain Elias in the barn while he decides how to punish him.

Elias wants to kill everyone in Virginia. Moses chains him in such a way that he cannot lie down, but exhaustion makes him doze on his feet. He awakes to see Luke offering him water and a piece of hoecake. They cannot make out Rev. Moffett's words, but know he is preaching that slaves must obey their masters and "just hang on" for heaven. Elias weeps as he realizes his hopes of freedom are gone.

Moffett always advised Henry that overwork is as much a sin as laziness as he takes tea with Henry and Caldonia after services. Few black slaveholders see any reason to pay Moffett for preached obedience, but Henry remembers listening to him while a slave and has pity on him. Henry decides whipping is not enough punishment for Elias and tells Caldonia he will hire Oden Peoples to slice off one of Elias' ears. Henry remembers how Robbins's slave Sam scared children with the sight of his mushroom scar, and how he overcame his fear at age 12. Caldonia cannot dissuade her husband.

Henry is quiet throughout dinner at Fern's house. Fern's husband Ramsey gets into a drunken argument with another guest, Saunders Church. A wisecrack by Ramsey makes Henry snap, and they have to pry Henry's fingers from Ramsey's throat. Fern accepts Henry's apology as all the guests depart. Henry and Caldonia make love twice that night, hoping to produce a son. Henry recalls that Sam made out all right, once he settled down. Moffett arrives home from his preaching to hear his wife and sister-in-law arguing as they have been for two months, since he began sleeping with the sister-in-law. Recalling David and Solomon, Moffett figures he has enough years left to repent that he can relish their battles.

Oden Peoples visits Sheriff Skiffington en route to the Townsend plantation and the sheriff joins him for the punishment. All watch Oden slice off a third of Elias's ear and apply a poultice to keep him from bleeding to death. Oden tells Henry he will remove the rest of the wounded for free if Elias runs again, but after that, he will have to charge for work on the other ear. Skiffington admonishes Henry to show vigilance and responsibility. Luke ignores Elias's objections and sleeps beside him that night, to fetch help if the bleeding gets bad. Caldonia begs a sullen Elias to rethink his path and behave. Few cabin doors open for Caldonia's nightly visit.

Elias comes upon Celeste comforting Luke in a field as he searches for the boy who has no fear of lightning. Celeste thinks the sobbing boy misses his mother and offers to be all the mother he needs. Elias and Celeste continue having nothing to do with each other until one morning Elias awakes to profound silence. Suddenly, Elias wants to be with Celeste. She continues to avoid him, however. One day he forces a confrontation, denies treating her badly, and she believes him. Elias gives Celeste a crude, ugly comb he carves for her, and she weeps for joy. After supper together, Elias goes to Henry's

house to ask for her hand in marriage. He convinces Henry that Celeste's love will anchor him more firmly than any chains.

While Moffett marries the couple, his sister-in-law nearly beats his wife to death and is arrested. Celeste and Elias are given a cabin to themselves and take Luke in to live with them. Henry rents Luke to Shaves Merle at harvest time, and the white man works Luke to death in the fields. Robbins demands Merle compensate Henry $100 as good business. Celeste has to drag her husband away from talking about Luke at his graveside.

Chapter 3 Analysis

"A Death in the Family. Where God Stands. Ten Thousand Combs," shows how Henry's family and slaves react to his death and prepare for his funeral. What follows explains how Elias and Celeste came to be married, including the savage practice of punishing runaways by mutilation. Henry has to go against his nature to be an effective slave owner, to Caldonia's dismay. Caldonia, however, shows no signs of freeing the slaves as her father-in-law had hoped.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

From the mid1870s through most of the 1880s, Anderson Frazier researches the "peculiarities" of the American people. Frustrated with rugged life in his native Canada, Frazier ranges up and down the Atlantic coast, but writes his popular pamphlets from Boston. He lives with Esther Sokoloff, a New Yorker who, without explanation, refuses to marry him. He is touring the South for a successful pamphlet series, *Curiosities and Oddities about Our Southern Neighbors,* which includes one on slave-holding free blacks before the war.

In August 1881, Frazier approaches Fern, whom he takes for a white woman, sitting on her porch, and she agrees to speak with him. Remembering siblings he has not seen in nine years, Frazier says blacks owning blacks is the oddest oddity he has come upon; it is like owning your own family. Hiding behind her wide-brimmed hat, Fern objects weakly: both law and God said it was legal to own slaves, so blacks owned slaves. Many factors keep her from being more forthright. Fern claims her memory of handsome Augustus Townsend is full of holes. Henry, too, was handsome, but did not live long enough to get beyond boyishness. She knew Henry very well.

The story then flashes back to the time when Henry is still a slave. Henry apprentices to the boot- and shoemaker and becomes so expert Robbins allows him to make him a pair. As Henry's freedom draws near, Robbins is surprised at how he will miss seeing Henry watching for him to ride up, as a father watches for his prodigal son. He publicizes Henry's shoemaking after Henry goes free, and often hires him to make shoes. Robbins teaches Henry the value of the money he begins accumulating. Augustus dislikes his son associating with his former master, but Mildred is glad to see Henry broadening his world.

Philomena longs to live in Richmond since first hearing stories about it as a girl on the Colfax plantation. Richmond slaves live well, own slaves, and enjoy fireworks at every celebration. Robbins, by contrast, considers Richmond a Sodom. Robbins notices how fourteen-year-old Philomena balances a load of laundry on her head, and purchases her, her mother, and her brother. Robbins, who recently fathered two children by a slave he now keeps distant, sets Philomena up on the edge of town. By her sixteenth birthday, Philomena is pregnant and set free. Robbins gives Philomena her mother, brother, and Sophie the storyteller, but the brother and Sophie run away. When Dora is born, Robbins draws closer to Philomena, allows her to call him by his first name, and to reprimand him for treating her badly. Louis's birth three years later turns Philomena morose and she lets her mother and maid care for the children.

Philomena first runs away to Richmond when Dora is six, and Robbins's overseer quickly brings her back, penniless. Two years later, Philomena flees again, with the children and more money. Robbins goes after her in person, taking along sixteen-year-

old Henry, on his second trip to Richmond. As they stand outside Philomena's boarding house door, Henry is uncomfortable. Robbins confronts his lover, slaps, and then punches her. Henry screams that she is dead, and Robbins sends him to find the children. Dora and Louis are in the next room, holding one another in fear from all the screaming. Henry comforts and sings to them. Robbins orders Henry to spend the night with the children and the boardinghouse owners to tend to Philomena's bloating face. Robbins fears Philomena will never love him again. Awakening late in the white hotel after drinking heavily, Robbins is surprised to find Henry and the children ready for the trip home. Philomena sleeps through the giggly children's visit. As they ride in the rented surrey, Robbins muses how good it would be to die among his children and is happy Henry will be in Dora and Louis's world. Robbins delivers the children to their grandmother.

Henry buys his first piece of land from Robbins at age twenty and tells his parents about it. He puts off telling them about buying his first slave, Moses, until the two complete a sizeable part of the two-story house he plans. Robbins rides up one day to see Henry tussling with Moses, takes Henry aside, and tells him he must treat Moses as a slave, not a playmate. Slave owning has social obligations, and the law will not defend his property rights unless he acts properly. When Henry has one hundred slaves, will he act like this with all of them? Henry learns his lesson, slaps Moses for disobedience, and rides off to his parents' home. Against orders, Moses works on, laying floorboards into the night.

Robbins heads from Henry's place to Fern Elston's place, thinking about the flaw in his former slave. Robbins believes the fewer flaws a person has, the fewer opportunities the gods have to pull him down. Frustrated that no one offers to help him from his horse, Robbins asks Fern to add a new student. Figuring Robbins has impregnated yet another black woman, Fern is surprised it is Henry. Fern likes to take children at age four; by 14 they are hopeless, and Fern does not want to take on a battle she cannot win. Robbins is paying Fern $20 a month for Dora and Louis and would add Patience, if his wife could abide that. Fern agrees to try at triple her normal rate, and orders Fern to tell Henry nothing about the arrangements. Robbins is concerned Henry is unprepared for life. As Robbins rides away, Fern dismisses rumors of something unnatural going on between Robbins and Henry.

Zeus, Fern's most trusted slave and best friend, follows her gardening instructions. As husband Ramsey requests whenever he goes off gambling, Fern has refrained from bathing. Ramsey won Zeus and Fern gave him this new name. Zeus would never retire from their employment. Fern has not followed her siblings and many cousins gone white, less because it would get obviously non-white Ramsey killed than that it never occurred to her. She dislikes white people. Fern confronted Sheriff Skiffington's patrollers early on, demanding they not abuse her and her servants in exchange for her promise not to abuse them. William Robbins rebukes patroller Harvey Travis when Fern reports his "disagreeable" behavior, and there are no more "episodes" with formidable Fern.

Ramsey's gambling is making them poorer, although they live comfortably by local standards. Ramsey travels to remote countries to find white men willing to gamble with him and honorable enough not to steal back his winnings from them. He is often gone a week at a time, while Fern oversees farming and handles money for city relatives. They treat their thirteen slaves more as neighbors than slaves. Fern reminds herself she is "a dutiful wife" while refraining from bathing while Ramsey is away. Ramsey enjoys the salt taste when they come back together. He is an attentive husband while home.

While speaking with Anderson Frazier, Fern withholds from him that Henry is the darkest student she ever taught, but tells him Henry was the first freed slave and probably the brightest. She does not explain what she means by saying Henry's blood was "untainted." Once Henry learned to read, Fern opens her library to him, but Henry is too busy to take full advantage. Henry loves Milton and Thomas Gray, not Fern's favorites, and believes only one who knows himself well can turn his back on God like the devil in *Paradise Lost.* Fern cannot break Henry of field hand diction.

After the confrontation with Robbins and Moses, Henry rides to his parent's home to surprise them with news he is building a house so big even white folk will be impressed. That he has also bought a slave is news Henry fears revealing, but it slips out when Augustus asks to help finish the construction. Augustus and Mildred demand to know how Henry could buy a man and not free him. They had taught Henry how to live: carry his free papers, say his prayers, and avert his eyes from white people. They had not mentioned not returning to Egypt after God has taken you out. It should not be necessary to say owning another person is wrong. Augustus has vowed no slave owner will ever set foot in his house, and demands that Henry leaves. When Henry insists he has broken no law, Augustus breaks Henry's shoulder with a blow from one of his intricately carved walking sticks saying, "Thas how a slave feel!" Mildred watches Henry ride angrily away.

It takes Henry three hours to reach Robbins's place. Robbins is drinking, alone on the verandah. Robbins allows Henry to sit on his step, but does not offer him a drink, lest Henry be led astray. Robbins says Tuesday is his lucky day. He advises Henry to acquire all the land he can, and to look out after himself. When the lecture ends, Henry says his shoulder is broken and he might need help getting off the steps.

Fern tells Anderson Frazier a woman born to teaching awakes every morning to be near to her pupils. She recalls inviting Henry to supper while he was her student. Dora and Louis adore Henry like an older brother, and Calvin, Caldonia's brother who is uneasy in his person, also takes to him. Towards the end of the evening, Henry tells Caldonia how to improve her riding style, demonstrating with a peppershaker. Caldonia, who never took notice of Henry before, cannot take her eyes off him. Caldonia's father gives Henry permission to court her; had he been dead, her mother would not have given it. Remembering Frazier is white, Fern declines to explain the reason: color discrimination among blacks.

Caldonia begins Henry's funeral herself, when Rev. Moffett is late. She rambles about her late husband, and Fern sings a song about Jesus, the words of which she has

forgotten. Neither Augustus nor Robbins speaks. Moses, Stamford, and Elias fill the hole and the farm hands are given the day off. The house servants work long and hard, caring for mourners. Robbins does not stay.

Philomena's jaw does not heal properly and Robbins warns her free papers mean nothing if he decides to sell her back into slavery. Philomena sees Richmond for a third and final time only after the Army of the North had burned it to the ground, thirty years after Robbins first saw her.

Chapter 4 Analysis

"Curiosities South of the Border. String Tricks in a Doomed City. A Child Departs from the Way. The Education of Henry Townsend," enlists a Canadian pamphleteer, Anderson Frazier, as a means of filling in detail on Henry's education and meeting his wife Caldonia. Fern reveals black people's attitudes towards skin color and reticence for whites to have knowledge of this. We see rich white Robbins falling in love with his black slave Philomena and the bounds of propriety, or lack thereof, in the relationship. We also learn how Henry's parents disowned him when he became a slaveholder. To them, obvious morality transcends law. White people in this novel use God and the bible to justify the institution of slavery, but Augustus articulates the obvious point: for slaves freed from Egypt it is unconscionable to act like their former oppressors.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In tranquil Manchester County, drunks, particularly Barnum Kinsey, are Sheriff John Skillington's major problem. In 1844, white people in the county hear about slave "restlessness" elsewhere. Among the most concerned is Winifred Skillington's fifty-four-year-old cousin, Clara Martin, whose hears from a distant relative about a woman killed by her long-time cook. Clara has one slave, fifty-five-year-old, longhaired, and arthritic Ralph. Suddenly, Clara forbids Ralph to cook for her. Barnum Kinsey reports Clara is merely skittish. She invites John and Winifred to spend time with her. The sheriff's father agrees to watch the lone prisoner, Jean Broussard, who maintains his innocence in killing his partner.

The Skiffingtons dine with Robert and Alfreda Colfax and reach Clara's by mid-afternoon. John's impression of Ralph is that he is a little slow, but fine. Clara picks at her supper, while the Skiffingtons eat heartily, to show there is no need for alarm. Five years earlier, three times Clara allowed Ralph to brush, oil, and plait her hair, but then forbade the practice. Although Clara charges Ralph with no crime, John agrees to talk "sheriff talk" with him to clear Clara's "miasma," without hurting the slave's feelings. After the women go to bed, John reads his bible as he often does at home, but sets it aside as he hears Ralph finishing his clean-up in the kitchen. They speak, awkwardly and unsubstantially, and John returns to his reading, settling on the Book of Job. In the morning, he advises Clara all is well, and goes to deal with two of his patrollers.

The patrollers receive $8 a month, from a per capita tax on slave owners. Oden Peoples, a full-blooded Cherokee, owns four slaves: his wife Tassock, children, and mother-in-law. Tassock's half-sister, a freed slave, is married to Harvey Travis, a good patroller but something of a lawless free-ranging cat. Travis sells a dying cow to fellow patroller Clarence Wilford and his feisty wife Beth Ann. The Wilfords' eight children need milk, but the cow turns out to be dry. Clarence is ready to slaughter it, when it begins producing abundant milk, and Travis demands it back. Beth Ann informs the sheriff about the lethal feud that is developing. Examining the emaciated cow, Skiffington sides with Wilford and is annoyed his patrollers are feuding and wasting his time. He negotiates a deal whereby Travis will get some milk twice a week, and is assured the shooting will end. Travis is bitter.

Skiffington is surprised things go so well, and is elated as he rides back to Clara's. He hopes all is well with troubled neighbors, including a boy who burned his leg, whom John likes to take fishing, as he hopes some day to have a child of his own. John stops to read his bible, landing on the tale of God's angel destroying Sodom. John is always troubled by this story. After moving on to the Psalms, he resumes the ride to Clara's.

Clara is quieter Sunday morning and willing to take John's word that all is well. Clara and Ralph will live together another twenty-one years, even after Emancipation. Clara

sleeps behind a locked door and with two knives in reach. They each prepare their own meal, but eat together. When Clara fails to come to breakfast, Ralph fetches two white men to check on her and they discover her dead. Ralph moves to Washington, D.C., and Clara's relatives sell her land to William Robbins, which causes friction with Robert Colfax.

As they ride home from Clara's, John speaks to Winifred for the first time about moving to Pennsylvania. He wants to settle in Darby and teach a hoped-for son to fish. His father Carl knows only the South, but will accompany them, moving his quiet evangelization there. If they move while Minerva is still a minor, they will take her too, but if she is grown, she will be free to do as she wishes. Winifred would hate being without Minerva, who is more a co-worker than a slave, and nearly a daughter to Winifred. Minerva is waiting as they drive up and reports Carl is caring for the prisoner, which he does not believe breaks the Sabbath.

Jean Broussard greets "Monsieur Sheriff" happily on Monday morning, expressing hope his trial will be expedited, and he will be freed. He claims to have killed his Scandinavian partner in self-defense. The town has had to summon a circuit judge only once before, in an assault involving Robert Colfax's lover. Skiffington begins filling out the required paperwork. Broussard has been a citizen for three years and has not seen his French family in eight years. Not knowing his wife has taken a lover, he plans on bringing the family over with his share of the sale of two slaves, Moses and a woman named Bessie. He and his late partner, Alm Jorgensen, got into a drunken fight after Colfax declined to purchase them because their papers were not in order. The Swede ended up dead.

William Robbins enters the jail, accompanied by twenty-year-old Henry Townsend, now a free man and accomplished shoemaker. Robbins reports Harvey Travis has mistreated Henry and would have killed him had Barnum Kinsey not intervened. The sheriff promises to speak to his troublesome patroller. Broussard recognizes Robbins's name from a tip given by Colfax, and strikes up a conversation from his cell. Robbins answers brusquely to the offer of two slaves for sale, but orders them brought over. Sawyer, who is housing Moses and Bessie in his barn for a fee, delivers them at gunpoint. At a glance, Robbins knows Bessie will not do, but orders Moses to strip for examination. While Skiffington fills out the court paperwork on Broussard, the two men haggle over Moses.

Moses boldly insists he and Bessie must remain together. They had met two months earlier in an Alexandria, Virginia, holding pen. Skiffington moves to block the window, lest innocent white women see a naked black man. Mrs. Otis and Mrs. Taylor are talking on the street, the former holding the hand of her finger-sucking, possessed twelve-year-old son. The Otis brothers and a slave named Teacher will burst into flames soon afterwards. Robbins buys Moses for $525. When they are gone, Broussard, grateful for the sale, offers to buy the sheriff an up-to-date version of the enormous three-century old map of the world that adorns his wall; Skiffington had purchased it for his wife, but Winifred would not have it in her house.

Broussard is convicted of first-degree murder and hanged in Richmond. The $525 makes its way to his confused widow. The $385 realized on the sale of Bessie two weeks later in Roanoke simply vanishes. A 1912 fire has destroyed Manchester County records, so there is no record of Broussard's one-day trial. Arthur Brindle, however, one of the jurors, says Broussard would have been acquitted had he not spoken with an accent, which gave him the "stench of a dissembler."

Chapter 5 Analysis

"That Business up in Arlington. A Cow Borrows a Life from at Cat. The Known World," concentrates on Sheriff John Skiffington and his wife Winifred. Through them we learn about white people's fear of slave disquiet and how one mistress-and-slave pair coexisted, even after Emancipation. We also learn how Moses came into Robbins's possession and gain a glimpse of the inhumanity of slave dealing. Moses and Bessie, who so quickly become "family" are separated. We see Travis's growing anger and financial desperation, which will figure soon in the abduction of Augustus Townsend, and the arbitrariness of Virginia justice in the 1840s.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Maude Newman begins pressuring her "poor widow child," Caldonia, to speed up her bereavement. Maude wore black for only a month after her husband Tilmon died. Normally strong Caldonia asks for a bit more patience, but Maude presses the point that her legacy cannot wait. She fears Caldonia may, like her late father, become mired in grief and not know right from wrong. Caldonia insists she has learned from Henry how to be a good slave shepherd-master and intends to carry on. Caldonia recalls meeting Henry when she was young and desperate to find a husband a year after Augustus broke Henry's shoulder over slaveholding. Henry had conceived of himself as a middleman between God and the slaves, feeding them well and beating them rarely. Henry had done his best to earn his slaves' recommendation to God on Judgment day. Caldonia recalls Fern's admonition to Calvin, when her ten-year-old brother punched another child lightly, that "only the receiver of the blow can tell you how hard it was."

Condescending Maude declares Caldonia shares her father's melancholy. After the death of their youngest child thirteen years earlier, Tilmon Newman had believed God wanted him to free his twelve slaves, but Maude was adamantly opposed. Caldonia's maid Loretta retreats into the shadows, wanting to be near her mistress if she is needed, but figuring Maude is the kind of white woman who does not want human property to overhear intimate conversations. Maude dismisses Caldonia's protests that Moses and Calvin are taking care of matters. Calvin, Maude declares, is more melancholy than Tilmon; he will surely destroy her legacy. Tilmon had purchased his own freedom and was intent on buying and freeing his relatives from beneficent Horace Green, but his bride convinced him to delay plans until they had settled and had a child. Tilmon's mother, father, and brother all died in strange circumstances before Tilmon could act.

Caldonia again objects that she will not squander Henry's hard work. Four generations removed from slavery but still destitute before marrying Tilmon, Maude demands Caldonia regain her strength and resolution. When Maude learned Tilmon had made contact with a white South Carolinian willing to take his slaves to freedom, she began poisoning her husband. Servants assumed the leftover arsenic was a remedy for Maude's frequent headaches.

Downstairs, Maude encounters Calvin, who hopes his mother has not been pestering Caldonia so early. Maude recalls Tilmon knew about the South Carolinian through Calvin. Within months, Maude will become terribly ill with something that perplexes the doctors. Calvin will nurse the formidable mother he no longer likes for years. Now that Caldonia has decided not to free her slaves, Calvin finds little reason to remain in Virginia. Maude demands Calvin not put his dreams in Caldonia's head and informs him, to his disgust, that she intends to leave him her legacy when she dies.

Sunday morning on his own, Moses orders the field slaves back to work. Caldonia dispatches Calvin to countermand the order and never again act on his own accord. Calvin has made an effort to learn all the slaves' names, but feels they dislike him. Stamford and Priscilla step forward to proclaim their loyalty to Caldonia. Alice chants in front of them about the massa being dead, and Priscilla orders Alice to go away. Calvin recalls with shame having knocked the hat off the slave of a friend in the past; that had ended Calvin's drinking days. Calvin wishes Louis Cartwright were with him. He has lusted for Robbins's slave son for years, and thinks that if they moved to New York, his feelings might be reciprocated. Calvin knows Louis would have tried to kill him, had he made the pass he wanted after swimming one day. Calvin knows no one in New York, but has seen a photograph of a family there. The dog in the picture appears frozen, and Calvin wants to find those people and learn what transfixed the dog.

Stamford knocks on Cassandra's door, having given up on Gloria but still intent on having "young stuff." Cassandra threatens to hit him if he does not leave, and gives him two light taps to the head. The next night, Stamford steals some of Caldonia's flowers to take to Cassandra, but Alice intercepts him and bites the heads off. Cassandra rebukes his thievery and slams the door. Stamford dreams about his parents, sold away thirty-five-years-ago. The dream makes Stamford think he will die alone in slavery. Stamford realizes he cannot remember his parents' names. Because he has a navel, Stamford realizes he had once had a mother. He remembers the advice of a childhood friend to say "JesusJesusJesus" rapidly to ward off "hants," and tries to picture his parents around the plantation, in hopes of conjuring up their names. "June" and "Colter" suddenly come to him. Afraid now of death, Stamford turns his attention back to Gloria. Gloria, however, has taken up with Stamford's cabin mate, Clement. A shoving match turns to blows. Moses and Elias are fetched and rescue a bleeding Stamford. The women tell Moses Stamford is badly injured, forcing Moses against his inclinations to report the incident to Caldonia.

A white agent of Atlas Life, Casualty, and Assurance Company of Hartford, Connecticut, is at the door, trying to sell Caldonia life insurance on her slaves. Having policies on all her slaves, Maude has summoned him, but Calvin dismisses him. On Robbins's advice, Henry had never insured his slaves. Caldonia hurries to Stamford's cabin. Caldonia has Loretta, who has healed many injuries, and Delphie to attend to Stamford, who is amazed at how quickly saying "JesusJesusJesus" worked. Caldonia would have received only part of Stamford's $450 purchase price had Atlas insured him, or had he died in a work-related injury, which this incident is not.

Stamford swears off both women and is sure he will die soon. He picks fights, curses children, and is said to consume only nails and muddy water. A slave introduces him to a vile brew stronger than whiskey that produces a nice state for a short time, followed by a wicked headache. Senseless from the brew on Sunday, Stamford makes a pass at Delphie; with winter coming, he is willing to take whatever age woman he can find. Delphie pities Stamford, but removes his hand from her breast. She is used to nursing people, but Stamford would be too heavy a burden to bear. Wandering the plantation, Stamford loses the will to live and asks God to take him, no matter what his eternal fate might be.

Nearing his cabin, Stamford meets seven-year-old Delores, leaving her cabin to collect blueberries for herself and four-year-old Patrick. Their parents are working. Stamford seizes the bucket and orders the children in doors. He will fetch the berries. Thunder and lightening are approaching, and Stamford is sure he will die, but this good deed may get him in heaven's back door. Stamford recalls two slave suicides and thinks about killing Gloria to get even. Lightning kills two crows and splits a very tall oak tree. The blue fireball burns down the trunk and explodes on the ground six feet from Stamford. He puts down the berries and walks towards death. He stops, to move the children's bucket closer to the slave quarters to make it easier to find, then runs towards the fireball. It shoots off away from him, however and destroys another tree, leaving Stamford in anguish at being denied death. He caresses the dead crows and is struck in the head with their nest and eggs. When the ground opens and takes the birds, Stamford weeps. (Thereafter, he is known as Stamford Crow Blueberry. He and wife Delphie establish the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans, and are later honored with a street name in Richmond.) As he eats a split berry, Stamford sees the children's cabin fly through the air and settle back in place. Stamford counts the cabins where children live and is perplexed by where he will find enough buckets to supply berries to them all. That night's flood claims twenty-one lives, none of them children.

Caring for Stamford breaks Caldonia's paralysis. When Moses on his own orders Stamford and Clement to work three Sundays as punishment, Caldonia demands he do nothing without consulting her, and requires he report to her every evening. Moses's reports lengthen and are augmented by stories that have nothing to do with the slaves. Moses tells about how Henry built the house to please her (although it was constructed before they met). Caldonia's favorite story is how Henry drove the first nail.

Five weeks after Henry dies, patrollers Barnum Kinsey, Harvey Travis, and Oden Peoples meet on a moonlit night. Barnum is determined not to die of drinking like his grandfather, and sobriety makes him jumpy. They encounter Augustus Townsend, returning, weary, from delivering furniture in another county. They demand his papers, which Travis studies. Travis is surly with his companions when they support Augustus's contention he is free. Travis is offended that this black man rides around without a care, and eats Augustus's papers. Barnum again protests Travis's actions. A large wagon approaches, carrying one child and four adult and slaves. Travis recognizes unkempt, fur-covered forty-two-year-old Darcy, and declares it is a divine miracle Travis is driving by. Travis offers to sell him Augustus, and Barnum warns Darcy Augustus is a free man and cannot be bought. Augustus tells Darcy he was freed by William Robbins. They dicker over price, Augustus's value as a furniture maker versus the risk of his perhaps being a free man as he claims, and settle on $50. Travis shows contempt for Darcy's reliance on his slave Stennis's opinions.

Protesting and struggling, Augustus is hauled from his wagon and chained with the other slaves. Barnum protests again, but Oden stands with Travis. At gunpoint, Barnum accepts his share of the money. Travis yells after him that he should report Barnum to the sheriff for dereliction of duty. Having caught and punished a criminal, they call it a night. Travis remains behind to burn Augustus' wagon, recalling how years earlier

Augustus had made a fine chair for a 400-pound man. Travis had wished he could steal that chair. Travis's horse takes him home as trained.

Chapter 6 Analysis

"A Frozen Cow and a Frozen Dog. A Cabin in the Sky. The Taste of Freedom," tells about how Caldonia's mother poisoned her husband, rather than allow him to free their slaves. Caldonia's brother Calvin shares his father's views on emancipation, and lusts for another male. Stamford's search for a young mate leads to his being nearly beaten to death, and causes him a revelation of several slave superstitions. Moses's response to the crisis moves Caldonia to demand nightly state-of-the-plantation reports, which will soon, deepen into a sexual relationship. Finally, we see Henry's father Augustus stripped of his freedom by Travis, still bitter over losing the custody fight over the cow. Writs of emancipation can be, literally, gobbled up without legal recourse. Might makes right. True to his nature, Augustus will not prove a cooperative slave as the narrative continues.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Saskia Wilhelm and never-do-well husband Thorbecke, married against her parents' wishes, contract small pox en route from the Netherlands to England. Exiled from England, they come to New York. Nasty Thorbecke fails as a fisherman and peddler, and when Saskia's wages as a maid do not suffice, Thorbecke sells her into prostitution in Philadelphia and eventually North Carolina. The Wilhelms and their dog appear in Calvin's photograph.

Manfred Carlyle, one of Saskia's regular customers, falls in love with her. Counsel Skiffington welcomes Carlyle's periodic "airing out" on his plantation, because Carlyle is one of his creditors. Counsel has suffered three years of failed crops, but was treated kindly by his creditors, and now is recovering. His slave overseer, Cameron Darr, suffers a cough and soon all the slaves develop smallpox. The quarantine is ineffective, and soon Counsel's plantation, "A Child's Dream," is in chaos. Half the slaves die, as do Counsel's children. Only Counsel remains healthy. Without care, the livestock decline in value, and the creditors pressure Counsel. After Belle succumbs, Counsel burns down the mansion and other structures, many of them still filled with the corpses of smallpox victims. The crops survive, however, even without care, and would have yielded a profit. The plantation burns for three days, and Counsel flees South Carolina, saddled with memories. He rejects turning to relatives in Washington, D.C., coastal Georgia, or Manchester County. He cannot imagine facing cousin John penniless.

Counsel becomes gravely ill in Estill, South Carolina, but recovers and steals back his horse and saddle from the kind couple that take him in. The disease returns in Chattahoochee, Georgia, a month later. Though living among free blacks is uncomfortable, Counsel is nursed by Matilda, a housekeeper/cook for the white man who takes him in as a laborer. Counsel steals money and a horse from the man and sets off for Alabama. Eventually, he wants to go to California, which is as far from North Carolina as possible. In Carthage, Mississippi, Counsel buys a pistol to replace his father's prized weapon, which was lost in the fire.

Outside Merryville, Louisiana, Counsel is relieved to see cypress groves and smell the sea. In the distance he sees a farm and heads for it. On inspection, it appears sufficient to just barely sustain a man and his family. The door is ajar when Counsel knocks. An attractive but unsmiling woman answers and calls her twelve-year-old son to the door. Counsel sees another man inside at the table. Two smaller girls are playing with dolls. The man at the table announces he is Hiram Jenkins and invites Counsel to join him. Meg serves stew and biscuits. The boy, Hiram IV, is rude to his parents and short with Counsel, who realizes how he misses life with Belle and his family. Counsel lies that he is from Georgia, where he farmed and ran a dry goods store. God mysteriously claimed three of his children, old Hiram announces, and then directs Meg to make Counsel comfortable in the barn for the night.

Counsel falls asleep, but is awakened by a touch on his shoulder. It is not the mule as he assumes, but Meg, who joins him wordlessly under his blanket, kisses him, makes love to him, and leaves. In the morning, Counsel's instinct is to flee. In daylight, the house appears smaller than the dark interior suggested. Assuming Meg will keep secret their liaison, Counsel knocks at the door to say good-bye. Instead, he is ordered to the table for a hearty breakfast. A gun lies between the two Hiram's plates, and Counsel is afraid. Meg has a fresh black eye. The older Hiram declares God demands people to care for strangers, because they may be angels in disguise. Meg has worked hard on the meal, and Counsel is encouraged to eat by having the gun pointed at his head. The old man suggests he would be hungry if he had been working as hard as Counsel. Counsel begs to be allowed to leave. The younger Hiram wants to take the cost of Counsel's lodging out of his hide, but the father allows the visitor to depart. Counsel wonders whether Meg was enjoying the drama.

Counsel crosses into Texas, growing nostalgic for the culture of the East coast. Near Georgetown a forest appears from nowhere on a flat plain, and Counsel rides toward it. He hears ground thunder and is surrounded by a strangely disciplined pack of dogs. Something tells Counsel to continue into the forest rather than shoot his way out of the pack. The thunder grows, but his horse shows no fear. He is met by a wagon train led by a black man who speaks a language Counsel cannot understand. An unsmiling woman Counsels takes for Mexican tells him the man is speaking American.

When Counsel drops his pistol in fright, the black man returns it to him and cleans away the wood sorrel it picked up. Counsel asks again only to be on his way, and he is allowed. Riding on he discovers he has underestimated the number of travelers by at least half. Counsel wonders if Texas authorities know about this mass movement. A pigtailed, fifteen-year-old Chinese boy smiles at Counsel and runs his hand down the horse's flank, chilling Counsel. He feels like he is being pulled through the wagons and horses by some counterforce rather than riding forward. People warn him about falling off Texas the way Counsel fell off Alabama, and offer to let him join them. They assure him the rest of Texas is not worth seeing. All they ask is that he not harm children. The crowd is content to let Counsel depart.

Counsel rides forward, feeling refreshed by the air, but the thunder behind him does not diminish. He comes upon a thicket so dense he must slash his way through with a knife. His horse balks at advancing, and after arguing with the animal, Counsels shoots it dead. He remembers his daughters' favorite story about a magic carpet. With the horse dead, the thundering ends, and Counsel asks God what he wants of him. Flies and buzzards gather faster than they should have, and Counsel remembers a family bible, filled with stories about God sometimes taking pity on his creatures and sometimes ignoring their pleas.

Chapter 7 Analysis

"Job. Mongrels. Parting Shots," begins with a strange aside about the Dutch couple captured in Calvin's New York photograph, and links them indirectly with Counsel

Skiffington, who had seemed to be a peripheral character. We learn the details of how small pox claimed Belle Skiffington, her children, and her slaves, which was suggested early in the novel, but we are unprepared to see Counsel burn down his plantation and strike out on adventures across Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. Twice Counsel falls ill and it is unclear when he is imagining events and when they are real. There are references to the Book of Genesis: Abraham's vision of God/angels and Jacob's terrifying dream.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Fern lives only eight miles from Caldonia, but feels it is vital to stay with her for over five weeks, bringing her comfort and helping prevent Caldonia from becoming adrift in a life of grief. By the fourth week, Caldonia is on the mend. When interviewed later by pamphleteer Frazier Anderson, Fern downplays her role as teacher; Caldonia comes from good stock. The night of Fern's departure, Moses first tells Caldonia the story about Henry driving the first nail on the house.

Maude is the first to go home, realizing her talk about legacy is hardening Caldonia. Maude is also anxious to return to the lover she took after murdering her husband. The slave Claude told her he had taught himself to read. She recalls how a white woman in a near-by county discovered her slave Victoria reading and had her whipped. Making love with Claude for the first time, she tells him if she were white, the people would tear him apart for this act, and figures they would do the same for her, if she were to scream. Calvin leaves two days later, although he has little to get back to, since Maude has been renting out portions of her land and the slaves individually for $25 a year. The pain of inactivity joins the pain of caring for Louis.

Driving home, Fern and her driver, Zeus, see someone ahead in the road, a man the color of a dark pecan. Fern is in no mood for riddles with Jebediah Dickinson, so Jebediah comes straight to the point: her husband Ramsey owes him $500, and he will not leave without being paid. Caldonia rejects the idea that Ramsey's debts are her own. She wonders when Ramsey began gambling with blacks and if he is still gambling with whites. During short visits home, Fern finds her husband increasingly erratic and undependable, even when he is not drinking. Fern and Ramsey's parents arranged their marriage, and Caldonia was unimpressed at their first meeting.

Jebediah camps out by the road, day and night, for a week. The patrollers examine, but do not challenge, his papers. On the seventh day, Jebediah comes to the house to borrow a gun and shovel to put his dying horse out of its misery. Slaves Zeus and Colley are dispatched to help. Ramsey never shows up or sends word about his whereabouts. At the end of the second week, patroller Oden Peoples tires of seeing Jebediah there, arrests him at gunpoint, and hauls the free man off to jail. Caldonia has someone bring Jebediah's saddle indoors.

The Manchester jail has never held a black man, because free blacks, knowing how tenuous their situation is, are careful to avoid trouble. Slaves are punished by their masters, but are rarely put to death because of the financial loss. Sheriff Skiffington is loath to put Jebediah in a cell whites will later inhabit, but regulations demand he keep control over his prisoner. Skiffington cables the Danville sheriff for confirmation of Jebediah's emancipation, but Rev. Wilbur Mann claims they are forged. He comes to reclaim his property.

Tall, gaunt, and with flowing blond hair, Mann explains his wife taught Jebediah to read and write. Skiffington points out this is illegal, but she has been dead for two years, replaced by an illiterate woman. The late wife's maiden name was Dickinson. Mann damns Jebediah's soul for causing him trouble and darkening his wife's memory, and swears that after he gets a bite to eat, he will flay Jebediah's hide until God tells him to stop. For the rest of his life, Jebediah's only task will be to grow new skin to be whipped raw.

Ramsey comes home and denies knowing any Jebediah Dickinson. In eleven years of marriage, Ramsey has gotten good at lying. Determined to learn the truth, Caldonia and Colley go to the jail. Skiffington explains the situation and Caldonia offers to buy Jebediah for $250, and Mann settles for $375. She does not correct Mann's assumption she is white. They chain Jebediah in Fern's barn, but Fern orders he be fed and blanketed comfortably. Confronting Ramsey, Jebediah is still boldly demanding his $500, but has his chains pulled tight with every outburst. Jebediah screams at Caldonia that he had not known Ramsey was married until he was awakened by the noise of his lovemaking with a lovely woman across the hall. Caldonia tells Jebediah he will remain chained in the barn until he learns some manners. Resentment at the messenger for revealing her husband's infidelity overcomes Fern's early resolution to free Jebediah. On the fourth day, Fern summons Jebediah and demands he do what she paid for and cause no trouble. She slaps him for a rude response, and he promises obedience after Colley throws him to his knees. Ramsey has gone gambling again, never having gone or will go to bed with Fern again.

Jebediah proves a good worker, although he often saunters off to fish, gorge on berries, or nap in a pasture. He never resists when dragged back. In the fourth week, Jebediah takes to wandering at night, and meets Alice talking nonsense and walking too fast for him to keep up. Jebediah forges passes declaring he is on his owners' business. Whenever he is near the house, Jebediah loudly demands his $500. Fern's patience wears thin, and Jebediah declares if she were his woman, she would not be sleeping alone every night. He knows he has gone too far, and accepts twenty lashes, passing out after fifteen. Fern rarely flogs slaves, because every lash decreases their value by $5. After a week's recovery, Jebediah returns to work and does not stray. He steps on a rusty nail, however, and his infected right foot has to be amputated.

Fern sets the cripple free. He corrects Fern's spelling of "manumit," and she comes as close as she can to saying thank-you. Jebediah refuses a place and job on the estate, determined to flee the demon state of Virginia and go to Baltimore. Fern gives him a wagon, horse, and $50; he reminds her they still owe him $450. Jeremiah is well treated on his way north because of his lost foot, but he is embittered. He gets no further than Washington, D.C. Later, Jebediah will name his two children Maribelle and Jim after the two horses he owned.

Caldonia and Moses develop a routine. Everything is going well on the plantation, so Moses's reports are brief. Someone is stealing molasses, however, probably children, Moses thinks, and names a few suspects. Caldonia wonders about Moses's fat son

Jamie, then orders Henry's pint per month molasses ration increased to a pint and a half. Henry had not wanted slaves to go hungry if he could help it.

Moses washes before his next evening visit to Caldonia, and Priscilla mocks him. Because Moses is not a good husband or father, Priscilla suspects he is being intimate with hip-swaying Loretta. Moses slaps Priscilla as he often does to his wife and other slaves. The slaves hear the nightly beatings and will later report them to the sheriff.

Moses spins tales of Henry spending months to get the house just as Caldonia will like it, and she does not let on she knows she and Henry had not met at that point. Moses claims Henry did not let him help build the parlor or upstairs bedroom, where he would be alone with Caldonia. Caldonia wonders what she was thinking about as Henry worked. Dismissed after an hour and a half, Moses lies to Bennett that the mistress wants him to have a new set of clothes. On the way to his cabin, Moses orders Elias to get to bed and threatens to report his disobedience to Caldonia unless he complies. Moses declines the dinner Priscilla prepared and eats the biscuits Caldonia gave him. He sees Alice sniff each cabin door and set out on her wanderings. When the sheriff later investigates slave disappearances, Elias will have the most to say, pointing the finger at Moses. Celeste will have the least to say. Elias will not be able to keep the truth trapped in his heart.

After receiving his new pants and shirt, Moses masturbates in the woods for the first time since Henry died. He finds such peace that he is willing for God to take him. He dresses hurriedly at the sound of someone approaching. It is not Priscilla, as Moses fears, but Alice, whom he orders home. Moses is tempted to strike Alice down. Moses begins following Alice every night, but she always vanishes. One night he is nearly captured by the patrol. He cuts his mouth on thorns, trying to stifle coughs caused by the dust the horses throw up. Moses worries Alice will spread word about him playing with himself in the woods and it will reach Caldonia's ears. Alice, however, continues to be a good field worker, even though she lost in her own world.

That evening, Moses tells Caldonia he is concerned about Alice traipsing off every night and suggests she be locked up. Caldonia refuses, not wanting to give Alice reason to grow more insane. Moses studies Caldonia's neck and bosom as she breathes, and envies Henry's ability to have her any night he wished. Caldonia asks Moses never to forget Henry and dismisses him. Moses takes the memory of Caldonia into the woods, it is the first time he has fantasized about a woman there since the early days, before Bessie's memory faded. He hurries for fear of being found by Alice. Back in the lane, Moses meets Alice and threatens to kill her if she does not leave him alone. She cries when he knocks her down, and Delphie comes to her aid. Moses renews his threat.

Moses does not leave his cabin on Sunday, but follows Alice Monday night. He hides from the patrol, watching them throw Alice off the horse she tries to climb onto. Alice cocks her head to indicate she sees Moses after the patrollers gallop off, then takes up her chant, but with less confidence than earlier. As he goes to sleep, Moses cannot recall any Townsend slave escaping.

Tuesday evening, Moses assures Caldonia Henry's well-built house will stand when Jesus returns, and Caldonia weeps as she again asks Moses to promise he will never forget Henry. Fighting back fears Loretta will come into the parlor, Moses kneels beside Caldonia, takes her hand, and kisses it. Caldonia kisses Moses on the lips. They embrace before Caldonia asks Moses to leave. The next night, as Moses weaves the myth of brilliant Henry, whose birth Moses had attended, Caldonia sits on Moses's lap. A week later they will make love, mostly clothed.

Chapter 8 Analysis

"Namesakes. Scheherazade. Waiting for the End of the World," explains Jebediah Dickinson, who is earlier introduced as Fern's third husband, but in a confusing manner. The patrollers' autonomy, and the sheriff's weakness, are again demonstrated. We learn more about how the law treats blacks, slaves, and free individuals. Moses's violent temperament and ambition are brought out far more clearly than before, and Elias's resentment of Moses's power is better established. With the beginning of a sexual relationship with Caldonia established, all the seeds for the coming tragedy are in place.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Darcy and Stennis reach South Carolina in under two weeks. Along the way almost-nine-year-old Abundance Crawford dies and her body is abandoned by the road. Augustus, who held her while she died, and his fellow prisoners beg to be allowed to bury her. It is too inconvenient to the slave merchant. Willis, a thirty-seven-year-old bricklayer, Selby, a twenty-two-year-old, newlywed baker, and Sara Marshall, a twenty-nine-year-old seamstress are sold before they reach Georgia. In North Carolina, Augustus asks Darcy to send word to Mildred that he is alive, but the business owner explains he cannot afford the cost. In Kingstree, South Carolina, Augustus pretends to be deaf and dumb in order to thwart a sale Darcy presses too hard.

The Skiffingtons own a wonderful bookcase carved by Augustus soon after he gained his freedom. Augustus sold it for $15 to help buy his family's freedom, and Skiffington bought it second-hand for $5 when the owner went blind. John reads only the bible, but Winifred is a prolific reader, enough to be a teacher, John feels, asking her not to teach Minerva. Minerva is careful not to let anyone see her reading. Many evenings, Winifred reads to the family from Shakespeare and Washington Irving.

The sheriff thinks of Rip Van Winkle when he first sees a mountain man walk into town. He is shocked to meet his cousin Counsel. The rumor had been that Counsel committed suicide after the arson. The relatives had never gotten along well, but in Texas God tells Counsel to give it a try. Counsel does not want Winifred to see him filthy, unshaven, and underfed, so John puts him up in a boarding house for three nights. The old, unpalatable Counsel returns, but John hires him as deputy nonetheless. Family is good for watching one's back, the sheriff figures. Counsel lives with John, Winifred, and father Carl for a month, resenting the fact he is not given his ex-slave Minerva's room. He wonders whether Minerva is wheedling into John's affections, as often happens. Back in the boarding house, the new deputy is given preferential rates.

Mildred watches for Augustus morning and evening, extending her arms to feel his spirit flow into her. She is not worried for two weeks, since in thirty-five years Augustus has often been delayed by business. Eventually, Mildred tells Caldonia, and with Fern, they go to the jail to report Augustus missing. Unfortunately, Deputy Counsel is in charge. Outside McRae, Georgia, Augustus speaks for the first time since South Carolina, making clear to Stennis he will get even with his kidnappers. Augustus suggests Stennis let him slip away, or even join him. Stennis instead rubs Darcy's feet on command.

Caldonia awakens the morning after first making love with Moses, trying to remember details of a dream about being in a smaller house in whose attic people are being burned. Caldonia is surprised she feels no guilt over being with Moses. She enjoys sounds of Celeste singing in the fields and wonders what to do with Moses. She does not feel toward him as she had towards Henry when they first met. Caldonia declines

breakfast and walks to the cemetery, as she does every other day. She asks Henry for forgiveness. That evening, Moses comes hoping for more sex. That will cement the new relationship. Caldonia, however, wants only to know how the harvest is going. After Moses leaves, Caldonia regrets not letting him hold her.

The next evening, Fern and her former student join Caldonia for supper. Fern is less talkative than usual and requests a second glass of wine. She is concerned about an "obstreperous" new slave causing her grief, making her feel like she is his property. All free blacks know they have less power than whites but feel their superiority will eventually put them in charge. Fern cannot admit it goes against her nature to free a slave. Caldonia, by now Fern's confidant who is allowed to use her given name, says everything will work out. Bennett whispers to Caldonia that Moses is waiting to report, but she sends word for him to come back tomorrow. Fearful of being discovered in the woods, Moses sharpens hoes in the shed.

Wine improves Fern's mood and the company discusses abolition. Pamphlets on the subject abound. Fern wonders why the slaves have not risen up and slashed their masters' throats by now. Louis, wishing to impress the women, particularly Caldonia, says the state would crush them to dust. Calvin disagrees. The state would hesitate, unwilling to sacrifice those upon whom the economy depends. Dora laughs at the thought of open war between slaves and masters. Remembering Jebediah's resolute defiance, Fern is certain war could break out. She cannot fathom being a seamstress or field hand, answering "Yessum" and "Yessuh." Teaching no longer holds much charm for her. Calvin believes he would free his slaves and not worry about his mother, who would have an impenetrable brick wall to guard her back. Fern asks who could have taught them to talk this way at dinner.

After breakfast the next morning, Louis hugs Caldonia unexpectedly; years later when he asks her to marry him, Louis says he had not felt worthy of her until that point. Everyone is worthy of one another, she will reply. By late afternoon, only Calvin remains. Caldonia declines to see Moses on the grounds that she is entertaining her brother. Moses knows her true desires, but leaves. Calvin tries to convince Caldonia to move with him to New York. Caldonia cannot abandon Henry's work. Against her wishes, Calvin leaves the next day to attend to business in Richmond, losing faith in his ability to convince anyone of anything.

Caldonia wants no status report from Moses that evening, just stories about Henry. She sits on Moses's lap and kisses him, but refuses to have sex. She confesses it is hard being apart and Moses agrees. Caldonia wonders how Virginia law would deal with them, remembering how 300 people in Bristol watched a white woman whipped for lying with a slave, and him hanged for the offense. Caldonia tells herself she loves Moses once he is gone, but is snapped back to reality by Loretta. As Caldonia washes inside she wonders what difference pregnancy would have made in Bristol.

Moses begins thinking his wife and child must be removed from the picture. Caldonia will have to free him if they are to marry. Alice passes by, neither singing nor dancing. Moses expects the patrollers to deliver her body by morning, but she is in her cabin,

come morning. That evening, Moses tells Alice he has a job for her. He intends to set her free. Alice figures all her singing to the angels has been worthwhile. She wishes she had cared about others as she sang and danced, and worries about being dragged back from the angels' hands. She remembers a slave on her last plantation who jumped down a well to swim her way home, and she had not been kicked in the head by a mule. Alice wonders if her mule will want to take back the kick.

Caldonia announces to her house staff she will have supper with Moses that evening in the kitchen. Loretta and Zeddie frown but obey. Moses is uncomfortable, dining at a table for the first time, and Caldonia leads him away quickly. They do not make love, but Moses leaves the house with a joyful heart, finds Alice, and tells her he is setting her free on his own authority. She must be ready to leave the plantation Saturday night. She will take along Moses's wife and son. Alice grows suspicious. She remembers how the slaves all wanted to taste water from the well the slave jumped down to swim home, but the white people bricked it over.

Moses tells his family he is sending them to freedom and promises to follow shortly. Alice will take them. Priscilla thinks the plan ridiculous and, trembling, demands to know why Moses is throwing them away. He has not been much of a husband, but he is all she has. Saturday morning, Priscilla works listlessly and Moses has to reprimand her. After nightfall, Moses walks the trio to the edge of the woods that lead to Robbins's plantation. The patrollers are likely to be drinking. In the woods, Priscilla begs Moses to come with them now. Alice slaps Priscilla twice to get her to stop crying. Jamie comforts his mother. Alice tells Moses to hold off telling anyone about their escape as long as possible. Priscilla begs Moses not to forget her. As they disappear, Moses begins worrying about what will happen if they are caught. He will be implicated. Moses runs after the trio.

Moses's heart beats furiously all night and is still running fast when he tells Caldonia about the three runaways. Caldonia is unconcerned. When they do not return by nightfall, Caldonia determines to report the "disappearance" to the sheriff Monday morning. She doubts the patrollers will have killed the slaves. Raping the women would bring no punishment, but killing them is a property crime. Caldonia writes Bennett a pass and a letter to Skiffington detailing the little she knows. Only briefly does Caldonia blame the sheriff for lax patrolling.

Bennett finds the sheriff and deputy outside the jail and presents the letter. Skiffington suspects Moses is involved. He accompanies Bennett back to the plantation, certain the slaves have not left the county. Caldonia is sure neither Alice nor Priscilla was likely to leave the plantation. She does not know how much they are worth. Henry always took care of such matters. Moses and Priscilla have been married for ten years, Caldonia answers the sheriff, and she thinks for the first time that she has been making love with someone else's husband. Skiffington remembers how, in his jailhouse, Moses had declared that he and Bessie were together.

Skiffington finds Moses in the fields and asks what he knows. Only that they are gone, Moses states, then adds his wife and son sometimes accompany Alice on her nocturnal

wanderings. He is building a story that Elias and others will easily destroy under questioning by the sheriff. Skiffington will not remember in the days ahead who first informed him mistress and overseer are dining together like man and wife, but will recall no vultures circled the woods. If the runaways are dead, someone has buried them. Skiffington begins suspecting Moses of murder. After he learns about the suppers with Caldonia, he knows the motive, but still wonders why Moses would not just dismiss his family. Caldonia being with Moses is not a Bristol-like crime, but murder is, before man and God. It is a good thing the Ten Commandments forbid lying.

Two evenings later, a drunken Barnum Kinsey tells Skiffington how Travis and Peoples sold Augustus to the slave speculator Darcy that the sheriff had told them to watch out for. Skiffington relieves him of patrol duties that night, gives him candy for his wife and children, and sends him home to rest. Telling him sooner might have done some good, he chides the patroller, who wishes he had been brave enough to report earlier. Kinsey is anxious that folks not think he has become a "nigger kisser" for reporting the crime, and wishes Virginia or the U.S. would pass a law giving sheriffs the right to have a lantern that folks could tell the truth under without fear of reprisal. Skiffington believes Kinsey is sincerely contrite. Eventually Kinsey moves with his family to Missouri.

In the morning, Skiffington rides fast as he can to the Townsend plantation, after sending telegrams to other sheriffs describing Darcy and Augustus, and leaving Counsel in charge. Skiffington wonders why Mildred did not report her husband's disappearance. He passes the charred remains of Augustus's wagon without know what it is. Skiffington finds Mildred in the garden, picking tomatoes. She asks if her husband is dead. Skiffington says all he knows is Augustus was taken by a speculator, confirms that his kidnapping is against the law, and promises to find him. He asks why Mildred did not report the disappearance, and she tells him about the visit she, Caldonia, and Fern paid to his office. The deputy promised to tell his boss. Skiffington is galled at having to discuss white people's failings with blacks, so he says no more than he has only just learned about it from Kinsey. Mildred appreciates Skiffington making the long trip to deliver the bad news. No one cares any more than the deputy had. Skiffington maintains the law always cares, but knows Mildred is closer than he is to the truth.

Skiffington declines Mildred's offer of food, and does not stop at the Robbins's plantation, but does pause twice to read his bible. Since seeing fifteen-year-old Minerva in her clinging nightgown three weeks earlier, he has been unable to get unholy thoughts about her out of his heart. He has known many white men who took black women, but believes if he does so, God will abandon him. Winifred will surely find out, even if Minerva says nothing.

Reaching the office, Skiffington assumes that no notes from Counsel means the day went smoothly. The sheriff's already weak faith in his cousin has crumbled. Lust flares when Skiffington sees Minerva on the porch and he wonders why he has been bothering to pray so hard. He has no appetite when Winifred offers to fix him some food, although he now thinks how delicious Mildred's tomatoes would have been.

He confronts Counsel as the deputy exits the outhouse, demanding to know why he failed to pass along Mildred's request for help. Counsel replies he has been hired to look after white people. Blacks are always complaining about other blacks, so he paid no attention. The sheriff informs him he serves the law, then considers that Counsel's growing relationship with his landlady is fornication, not adultery, and does not involve him. The lie about Augustus, however, is on his head because he hired Counsel and vouched for him before God. The sheriff gives his deputy just one more chance.

An hour out of town, the sheriff finds Travis and Peoples on patrol and asks about Augustus. Travis laughs and denies it, and Peoples backs him unenthusiastically. Travis demands to know if Kinsey pointed the finger at them. Skiffington remembers the cow incident, but it balances with the capture of Colfax's runaway slaves. They are effective deterrents. Skiffington has faith Augustus can be found and brought home, as God saved Joseph after his brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph forgave them. Skiffington is not pleased with himself that night, asks God's guidance, and dreams about Minerva.

Next morning, Skiffington writes to Harry Sanderson, who has often served as his liaison in Richmond, asking clarification of the law pertaining to the sale of free blacks into slavery. He also begins writing up the formal crime report, but is unsure what crime to report. He is also unsure what to do about Travis and Oden. Travis and Barnum's testimony cancel each other out, and Oden counts as only half a man, being an Indian. Everyone is talking about the dead cow incident, but Oden still puts Travis ahead.

Two days later, a sheriff near the North Carolina border reports Darcy has passed peacefully through. After Darcy was gone, they discovered a dead black child beside the road, but she was not their concern, since she was not a county resident. Three days later, Sanderson confirms a crime has been committed and promises to forward documentation. Four days after that, Graciela Sanderson writes to say her husband died and she has taken over his correspondence. She includes eight pages of information about selling free blacks. A despondent Graciela asks advice about whether she should return to her native Italy. Skiffington is too busy to answer this or several similar letters.

In Hazelhurst, Georgia, Darcy and Stennis try to convince a man outside a bar to buy Augustus. The starting price is $400, and they go down to $150 before the man walks away. He doubts they are right complementing Georgia on producing Bentley, the best U.S. president to date. Even if that is not the case, Georgia will surely produce the best five, ten, or twenty or more presidents, in Stennis's opinion. Darcy reins in his slave's exuberance, realizing it is ruining the deal. Darcy and Stennis determine to do better tomorrow. They want Augustus off their hands before they reach Florida.

Chapter 9 Analysis

"States of Decay. A Modest Proposal. Why Georgians are Smarter," concentrates on Sheriff Skiffington's striving to obey the law in the performance of his duties and to avoid temptation as Minerva comes of age. The bible fails to comfort or guide him. Skiffington

appears compassionate, sincere, mild-mannered, and conciliatory in every circumstance. We see Moses's determination to make himself lord of Townsend manor, which requires his wife and son to be eliminated. He could legally just disown them and cast them out, but sends them away. It is not yet certain that murder results when he chases them into the woods, but the sheriff sees both opportunity and motive, and the absence of vultures suggests willful murder, if the runaways are, indeed, dead. Memories of Moses and Bessie return to Skiffington, but why they trouble him and point to Moses's present guilt is left unclear. The author suggests that Skiffington will hold an inquest among the slaves to bring out the truth.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Caldonia has no appetite after Skiffington's visit, disappointing Moses when he delivers the evening report. She checked Henry's books and figures Alice, Priscilla, and Jamie are worth $1,500. Moses wonders how soon everyone will get over the disappearance. He tries to put his arm around Caldonia but she backs away and dismisses him. Caldonia goes to bed but cannot sleep. She imagines how exhausted the runaways must be. She wonders what Henry would say about this mess. She worries who else will flee, and who will remain. Would her household slaves remain? Would Moses? Caldonia is tempted to visit Henry's grave but does not want to disturb the household. Loretta knocks on her door, sensing Caldonia is upset and awake. Loretta does not know what is going on between Caldonia and Moses behind the parlor door, but knows it is not good for either of them. Loretta brings Caldonia a soothing drink and sits on the side of her bed, silently, until the mistress falls asleep.

The next day, Moses works the field slaves until Delphie complains everyone is tired and hungry and it is too dark to see what they are doing. He is still angry about hearing someone say his family ran away because they hated him and that being whipped or killed by the patrollers is better than living with him. Caldonia welcomes him warmly and watches him eat the bread, cheese, and coffee she brings to him. She asks why he works so hard in the fields; other overseers do not. Caldonia dabs the corners of Moses's mouth with a perfumed handkerchief, which disturbs him. He is fearful of answering wrongly, but says his wife's opinion is that hard work is in his blood. Hearing "my wife," Caldonia momentarily thinks Moses might be involved in Priscilla's disappearance. Caldonia holds Moses's leathery hands and compares them mentally to Henry's smaller, softer hands. Moses continues. He has been working like a horse since he was three. Horses will work themselves to death, but mules know better than that. They are smarter. He observes that some field songs make work easier and some make it harder. Caldonia recalls Henry singing to her as she curled up in his arms. Caldonia kisses Moses and withdraws. Moses's hope of sex vanishes. One more time, Moses figures, will allow him to enter the back door without knocking.

Skiffington returns next day and tells Caldonia the disappearances are a mystery. No one has seen the runaways. He does not believe Travis and Oden would dare kidnap and sell anyone so soon after being reprimanded about Augustus. The only thing he is sure of is that Moses is somehow involved. Skiffington says aloud that his patrollers have been diligent, so they are probably not hiding anywhere; they are likely escaped or dead. Caldonia wonders if Atlas insurance would have reimbursed her for her loss. Skiffington informs Caldonia he is going to see Mildred. Caldonia sends Mildred her best, along with a promise to visit tomorrow. Caldonia suggests the people who grabbed Augustus might be responsible for her loss as well. Skiffington admits he considered this but thinks her slaves are likely headed north, while Augustus was taken south. Caldonia gives the sheriff permission to question her slaves before departing.

As he walks his horse to the fields, Skiffington worries William Robbins will lose confidence in him as he did with Gilly Patterson. Moses does not look up from his work when Skiffington approaches. Skiffington sees Elias's daughter Tessie and through her summons Elias. As Celeste has been begging him, Elias holds back everything he wants to say. Five days later, he will tell all. Skiffington tells Mildred that there is no good news and again declines an invitation to come inside. Skiffington spends the night at the Robbins's. Robbins has posted a $500 dead-or-alive bounty on the speculator that took Augustus. The sheriff is grateful Robbins does not mention the three new runaways. Robbins's way is to give a man a chance to prove what he can do, so Skiffington figures he has a week. Skiffington stops again at Caldonia's plantation, long enough for Moses to know he is there. He sits on his horse, reading his bible, which settles his stomach.

Celeste, six-months pregnant, awakens feeling poorly and Elias says he will tell Moses she cannot work today. Moses barges into the cabin, demanding to know why they are tarrying. Moses grabs Celeste by the arm and Elias pulls him away angrily. He will do her share of the work. When Moses refuses, Elias demands he consult the mistress. Moses braggingly states he and Caldonia speak all the time. He then asks what Elias, and the others, now watching through the open door, are thinking about him and Caldonia. Celeste insists she is able to work and does fine until dinnertime. Pains drop her to her knees and she begs Jesus to spare her. With the slaves surrounding her, Celeste gives birth to a stillborn daughter and faints. Delphie takes charge. After carrying Celeste to their cabin, Elias vows to kill Moses. Delphie blocks Elias's exit as Celeste pleads for patience.

Moses stands at the spot where Celeste fell, calculating when it will be right to command work to resume. Clement has informed Caldonia, who with Loretta rushes to Celeste's cabin. Still restraining Elias by the throat, Delphie tells Caldonia Moses made Celeste lose her baby. Elias relents, but vows in Caldonia's presence that it is not over yet. Delphie agrees: it is not over.

Moses skips a night before returning, subdued, to Caldonia's back door. Caldonia demands to know why he would put a pregnant woman in danger. Moses responds that the slaves often "playact." Caldonia demands to be consulted every time a slave claims to be feeling badly. Moses responds this will make things difficult, wishing he could remind her she is talking to her lover. Loretta is glad she had not married Moses. Otherwise, she would be wherever Priscilla and the others are. Caldonia declares she is disappointed and Loretta makes clear it is time for Moses to leave. Moses wants to go to the woods to be alone, but not to be seen in the lane heading there. He stands for two hours, waiting for the conversations and laughter in the cabins to subside. He falls asleep just inside his doorway.

The next evening, Moses enters Caldonia's back door without knocking and heads straight to the parlor. "I needs to talk to you," he declares, ignoring Loretta. Moses raises a fist as he demands to know why Caldonia has not set him free yet. Loretta puts a knife to Moses throat and warns that she is not fooling with him. Moses is glad he had settled for the farm worker Priscilla instead of the house slave Loretta, whom he had thought was too good for him. As Moses and Caldonia watch each other, Moses

trembles, thinking about being discovered pleasuring himself in the woods by Alice or Priscilla. After Moses leaves, Loretta finds pistols for herself and Bennett. Caldonia forbids them to summon the patrollers. Loretta has Clement keep watch on the back door for the night.

All the slaves are murmuring as they wait for Moses to lead them to the fields when he awakens in the morning. He feels the whole world has changed. Loretta has ordered Elias and Celeste not to work today. Loretta holds a pistol as she turns Moses back from his evening visit to the house. Bennett backs Loretta up when Moses objects he has much to report. Visiting the woods does not cross Moses's mind that night. The day has been too painful to enjoy himself. He has not eaten all day, but realizes he is not hungry. Elias, Celeste, and the children buried Lucinda today and are weighed down with agony, but Celeste manages to wonder if Moses has eaten yet.

Moses hears the crowd gathering, laughing and singing, outside Moses's cabin before dawn, but he does not answer the door. He wonders if they will realize the bottomlands need a good rain before it can be worked. He has tasted that in the soil. He recalls how Henry had put him in charge of the plantation, third in authority after himself and Caldonia. Henry had pointed out in his big book the entry "Overseer Moses Townsend." As the lane grows quiet, Moses sits leaning against his door in the dark, wondering if Henry had actually given him his surname. He also thinks Priscilla had not been so bad a wife. He is thankful he had not married Loretta, who has now threatened him with a knife and gun. One of them would certainly have killed the other by now. Moses threatens to kill a chicken scratching at his door. He is sure he would have been a better master than Henry.

Moses dozes and talks to himself all day. He hears the laughter and conversations as the slaves return to their cabins and prepare supper. About 8:30, Celeste knocks at Moses's door, announcing she has brought him food. Moses remembers the day a slave told Celeste she would have been shot had she been a horse and wishes he could find that man and whip him until he takes back his words. Celeste returns three times more before leaving a pan of bread, meat, and an ear of corn on his threshold. Around midnight, Moses pulls in the pan, eats the bread and meat, and pockets the corn, hoping Celeste will not take offense at his not eating it. Moses imagines he sees Alice and hears her singing.

Loretta, keeping vigil at a window and holding her pistol, is not surprised to see Moses heading for the road. Confused at the crossroads, Moses walks south, believing he is northbound. Nothing looks familiar. He recalls Alice's song and decides it is a good work song after all.

Elias finds the empty pan in the morning and alerts Bennett that the overseer is missing. Bennett puts Elias in charge of the workers and goes to town to inform the sheriff. Skiffington reaches the plantation only late in the day, and in the confusion, no one notices that Gloria and Clement have also slipped away, never to be seen again. Celeste advises Elias not to send the workers into the fields. If Caldonia wants them to work, let her come down and order it herself. Elias reflects this is a perfect day for

running away, but a man with wife and family cannot think only of himself and flee. He kisses the top of Celeste's head. Elias is happy he will be overseer for a day or even a week and be able to rub that in Moses's face, but that does not equal the sorrow of losing a baby. Elias asks Celeste whether their disagreement over sending the workers out today will raise a barrier between them. Celeste is near tears. The children are playing noisily and distract her. She shakes her head no, but Elias believes she is answering his question and heads off to work relieved. Celeste is certain that the God of the bible will demand something back for giving the slaves such a beautiful day. He will demand poor Moses's life.

Skiffington knows as soon as he sees Bennett that Moses is the reason. Robbins had come the evening before to ask him, and Counsel, about progress on finding the runaways and Augustus. Escaping slaves jeopardizes everything they have done, Robbins warned menacingly. Skiffington should have fled to Pennsylvania by now, he realizes, and married Minerva to someone there so he would no longer be tempted. Skiffington has thought about lying with Minerva just once. It would harm no one, provided Winifred and God do not find out. Skiffington wonders, after that thought, whether God will ever let him see Pennsylvania. He heads for the boarding house to tell Counsel off for his and the patrollers' failure to find the lost slaves. He wonders if they were to move to Pennsylvania and Winifred were to bear him a daughter, would he think about that daughter the way he does about Minerva? Skiffington's only job now is to pull back together and make whole again all that God has entrusted to him.

Three days later, Bennett returns to report Clement and Gloria's disappearance. Counsel rides up and the sheriff lays into him about how lazy he is becoming. The townspeople hear him ranting and note this is not like Skiffington.

Chapter 10 Analysis

"A Plea. Before the Honorable Court. Thirsty Ground. Are Mules Really Smarter than Horses?" shows Moses in decline. Three of his charges have disappeared, the sheriff clearly suspects he is somehow involved, and after Celeste miscarries in the fields after he orders her to work, Caldonia turns against him. Her house servants take up arms against him. His plans to become master of the Townsend plantation appear to be crumbling. After a day of solitary torment, Moses himself runs away. Sheriff Skiffington, worried about his job and guilt-ridden over Minerva, lashes out at his deputy, with whom he has never gotten along, and the corrupt patrollers. Crisis is imminent, but no hint is yet given when and how it will be resolved.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Near Valdosta, Georgia, Morris Calhenny suffers crushing melancholy, which only his lifelong slave Beau knows how to alleviate. They were playmates, nearly brothers, until age fourteen, when social norms demanded they become master and slave. Beau still senses when Morris needs help and takes him out riding until Morris agrees he has had enough. While riding one day, they see a white woman, Hope Martin, trying to get her white mule to stand up and continue their journey. Arguing with it does no good, but having it watch Hope eat apples gets its attention. Beau tells Morris Hope is visiting her aged aunt and uncle and observes she would make someone a good wife. Beau says that only because he knows Morris is thinking the same thing.

Morris's son Wilson has completed a year and a half of medical school in Washington, D.C., but was expelled by professors who cannot accept that he is hearing cadavers speak to him and is learning more from the cadavers than them. Morris sends an emissary to Hope's relatives to arrange a marriage with Wilson. Instead, Hope marries Hillard Uster. Cadavers that speak makes sense to Morris, and it convinces him to wreck the Ulsters' lives. When Darcy and Stennis arrive, determined to sell Augustus before entering Florida, Hillard hands them the $53 he has managed to save.

Hillard makes clear to his new property he wants no trouble out of him. Augustus declares he will be nothing but trouble. He does not intend to feed the Ulster family on his own back. Getting his bearings from the sun, Augustus sets off northward. Hillard raises his rifle and demands Augustus return. He walks on and Hillard fires a bullet through Augustus's left shoulder. As blood spreads over his shirt, Augustus falls to the ground. Hope screams. Hillard pleads that all he wanted to do was get Augustus to stop, but as he dies, Augustus knows this is the biggest lie he has ever heard. The Ulsters carry Augustus to the barn and Hope tends to him into the night. A local healer cannot extract the bullet.

Augustus dies and his spirit hovers above the barn and flies towards Virginia a hundred times faster than it could have in his body. He finds Mildred sleeping in their bed and kisses her left breast. The kiss squeezes through to Mildred's heart and she awakens, knowing Augustus is gone forever. She stumbles outdoors, unable to breathe, falls to her knees, and weeps. After learning about Moses's disappearance, Skiffington begins suffering an overwhelming toothache. He spends Friday and Saturday in bed, thinking about where in the county Moses might hide. Bloodhounds have failed to pick up his trail. On Saturday, word comes that Gloria and Clement have also disappeared. Travis is mouthing off about a man dying and his widow running his place into the ground. No one is willing to pull his tooth for him. The search for the runaways has, logically, concentrated on the northern part of the county.

Robbins tells only Louis that he has lost faith in Skiffington. He sends Dora and Louis to Caldonia, and they pick up Fern on the way. Fern is happy to be away from Jebediah. Later, when Jebediah leaves for Baltimore, Fern vows to herself she will pay him the remaining $450 if she ever hears from him again.

Caldonia has taken to making a silent visit to the slave quarters, hoping this will keep anyone else from running away. She has put Elias in full charge and asks her mother to come and help her. Thursday, her guests ask to accompany her. They go into the lane silently. Celeste is the only one who replies to Caldonia's greetings. Tessie shows Fern the doll her daddy made for her. Tessie will ask her great-grandchildren to find that doll when she dies ninety years later. Louis declares he will join the search tomorrow, and Elias will join them Sunday. Elias, wearing a lock of his dead daughter's hair pinned to his shirt, tells Louis Moses is "world-stupid," meaning he cannot tell north from south. The men laugh, but Caldonia remains silent.

Celeste does not know what to do about Elias. She loves him but is troubled by his hatred of Moses. She knows Elias loves her as well. His eyes say, "Wife, trust me." The children flow to Elias's side when he beckons to them. Elias and Celeste's generations are destined to be legion in Virginia. Baby Ellwood squirms in Celeste's arms, but wants back up as soon as she puts him on the ground. Celeste takes her time in responding, in order to teach him that you do not always want what you think you want. Twenty years later, Ellwood Freemen will teach at Stamford Crow Blueberry's Richmond Home for Colored Orphans, and its founder, Stamford Crow Blueberry, will struggle to appreciate the chains are gone and the old sufferings no longer matter. Today, as the slaves gather around Caldonia not because she is their mistress but because they still share her suffering over Henry's death, baby Ellwood wants only to be held by Stamford, to feel every feature on his face, and hear the words a baby is accustomed to hearing. Glee spreads over the baby's face as he begins to sing and claps his hands just to release his happiness.

On Friday, Caldonia accepts Louis's advice and names Elias overseer. Louis and Elias grow close over the following days. That same day, Maude brings Ray Topps to Caldonia. Topps is an agent of Atlas Life, Casualty, and Assurance Company. He explains how slave insurance works: what it pays for and what it does not, generally "ordinary acts of God." Maude agrees with Caldonia's decision to go with the 15?-per-head bimonthly policy. Summarizing the policy, Topps, who aspires to a management job in Hartford, Connecticut, explains "perishment," is a term meaning the fragility of human life, and was invented by a Polish immigrant who aspires to publish two books he has written. A Bridgeport, Connecticut, publisher will agree to print it only if the author removes all the material dealing with Poland, a place he cannot even find on the map.

Chapter 11 Analysis

"A Mule Stands Up. Of Cadavers and Kisses and Keys. An American Poet Speaks of Poland and Mortality," describes how Augustus Townsend lost his life in Georgia, walking northward defiantly. His spirit's flight to Mildred is unexpected but moving.

Skiffington is not only under fire for his failure to keep order in the county, but suffering a terrible toothache. He now hates Moses, so a good outcome, should he find the runaway overseer, seems unlikely. Why Celeste so vehemently opposes her husband's views on and actions towards Moses, whom he succeeds, is puzzling. The twenty-year leap-forward, interwoven with Stamford holding baby Ellwood, is confusing, but the author uses this technique frequently.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Skiffington awakens Sunday morning kicking himself for not having realized earlier where Moses is hiding. Elias had declared Moses "world-stupid," but Skiffington had not shifted the search southward, to Mildred Townsend's plantation. Skiffington has seen enough crime and criminals to be certain about this hunch. Skiffington's tooth is aching badly, the undertaker who serves as Manchester's dentist is away, and Skiffington has been feuding with the white doctor for some time. Skiffington will endure the pain until Monday.

Skiffington dresses, skips church services and breakfast, collects hardheaded Counsel, and sets off for Mildred's place. Skiffington is angry to find Counsel cleaning his gun in the jailhouse office on the Sabbath and whistling a tune he is sure must have filthy lyrics. The sheriff dreads bouncing in the saddle all day, but it is his sworn duty to apprehend Moses. The lawmen set out at 10:30 and ride mostly in silence. The sheriff is annoyed by Counsel's new habit of chewing tobacco and they debate whether it is a sin. Both are now annoyed at the other. They arrive later than planned at the Robbins plantation, but are given dinner by Mrs. Robbins and Patience. Skiffington gingerly drinks a bowl of clear broth, and declines fervent requests he spend the night there. A slave provides a poultice that relieves Skiffington's pain for an hour or so. (Four years and a month after this day, William Robbins will suffer a stroke and linger three weeks, cared for by Patience and visited by Dora. Patience sees in her half sister a sunburned version of the face she used to see in her mirror. Blacks say God created Dora on a very good day, but held her back until a white version was born and grown a bit. Heaven gets rather rowdy with happy people on Saturday nights. When Dora rings the bell, Patience gently sends her vicious mother to the east part of the mansion and takes her look alike to the west part. Patience realizes this is the only other person who loves William Robbins.)

The lawmen reach Mildred's place, but wait at a distance until the dog's barking gives them away. Mildred comes out, holding a gun. This confirms Moses is here. Mildred declares "no more" when Skiffington demands she surrender the "property." Her obstinacy, combined with his jaw, which throbs every time air passes through his mouth, makes him lose his usual patience and civility. Counsel taking the Lord's name in vain further riles him. Skiffington lashes out, "I have a right to do what is right, and no nigger can stand and oppose that right."

Skiffington's finger slips as he draws his rifle, and a bullet blows Mildred's heart to bits. Mildred's soul floats upward, finds Henry and Caldonia resting together, and then curls up in Augustus's arms. Skiffington drops his rifle and prays, but can find no words and begins lamenting to his deputy about wanting nothing more than civility and righteousness. He orders Counsel into Mildred's house to find the murdering Moses. It is Counsel's sworn duty.

Counsel walks gingerly around the bloody corpse. He is surprised to find a black's house so clean. The floors and stairs do not squeak as he walks; even his fine house in North Carolina had creaked. Counsel reminds himself he is about to face a three-time murderer and grips his pistol more tightly. He sees Augustus's collection of carved walking sticks and cannot imagine how a black man came up with so many wonderful motifs. Skiffington continues to badger Counsel from outside the house. In a dresser drawer, Counsel finds five $20 gold pieces, which he pockets, and begins tearing the bedroom apart looking for more treasure. Skiffington continues yelling. Counsel knows he cannot tell his self-righteous cousin about the treasure.

Counsel leaves the house, announcing he has failed to find Moses. He picks up Mildred's bloody rifle and fires two rounds into his cousin's chest. Skiffington's soul enters his old house, finds his mother, father, Barnum Kinsey, and Minerva. He bypasses Winifred, holding her arms out to him, and prevents a bible three times larger than himself from toppling over. Counsel, who has not moved, figures people will accept his story about the sheriff and Mildred shooting one another to death, unlikely though it may be. Counsel hears the stairs creak behind him and Moses emerges, hands up. Moses knows nothing about Gloria and Clement. He is alone. Counsel figures that if Moses has been hiding inside, there are other places to search for treasure. Only Skiffington suspected Moses had killed Priscilla, Jamie, and Alice. Moses remembers how poor dead Mildred had taken him in and promised to find him a way out of his mess. Counsel puts his pistol into Moses mouth and warns him he will shoot him like a dog if he ever dares tell what he has seen. Moses gags agreement.

Counsel realizes Moses is incapable of murder and wonders what his cousin was thinking. Counsel generously allows Moses to say good-bye to Mildred, reflecting on how God is restoring his losses as he once had Job. Moses gives an unsatisfying funeral oration over Mildred's body; he had never paid enough attention to know what to say. Remembering how fond Mildred was of her tablecloth, Moses closes her eyes and wraps her in one, and lays her out on her kitchen table. Counsel smokes a cigarette on the porch while Moses is mourning. Skiffington's horse wanders away. Counsel will use some of the gold he intends to find still in the house to erect a giant tombstone over his cousin, and all Virginians will worship John as a god. When he leaves Mildred's shrouded body, Moses has no words to say over Skiffington, who will have plenty of mourners in town and had done nothing good for him.

Counsel does not notice Moses omitting "Master" or "Mister" from his name when he asks if his business with Mildred is finished. Without a wagon or second horse, Moses cannot figure how they will get Skiffington's body back to town. Counsel never intended to. Let others come get it. Moses passively extends his hands to be roped and tied. On the way back to town, Counsel and Moses encounter Elias, Louis, and the three patrollers. Counsel puts on an expression of appropriate grief as he explains the tragic recent events. Travis demands Moses be hobbled so he can never run away again. Louis objects that this is illegal; Moses is not their property. Moses is ultimately responsible for Skiffington's death, so he is everyone's property. Barnum suspects Counsel is lying, but says nothing. Elias is also silent, and when he can no longer ride his horse, Louis walks with him, and they fall behind the others. Elias longs for Celeste,

who had not spoken to him that morning. He worries the raging white men will kill all three blacks and perhaps the Indian.

Barnum tries to defend Moses, but Travis and Oden laugh. Counsel and Travis hold Moses down and Oden severs his Achilles' tendon with two swift back-and-forth passes of his knife. Moses collapses in screaming agony. Barnum rides away, realizing Virginia holds nothing for him any more. He is miles away before Moses's screaming stops. People who are hobbled leave curious marks in the dust ever after. Barnum moves his family to Hollinger, Missouri, where he dies, and his twelve-year-old son Matthew carves a tombstone for him, trying to be comprehensive of his entire life.

Everyone but Elias helps lift Moses onto Oden's horse, who is so touched by the man's suffering that he never puts his knife to anyone again. Moses clings to the horrible man only because he is afraid of falling off the horse.

In the weeks ahead, Counsel finds no more treasure in Mildred's house, and fails to realize the hidden compartments are part of the Underground Railroad. Counsel claims the walking sticks and other items, but the courts order him to turn them over to Caldonia. Counsel marries the boardinghouse woman but they have no children. William Robbins takes the side of his future daughter-in-law, which destroys the failing friendship with Colfax. Bad blood between Manchester County's wealthiest men polarizes the white population and turns their attention outward to allies in neighboring counties. After all judicial records perish in the fire of 1912, Manchester County is torn asunder and absorbed into four neighbors. It is the only county in Virginia to disappear.

Darcy and Stennis are caught without incident near the Virginia/North Carolina border, tried, and sentenced to prison for kidnapping Augustus and others. Stennis, however, is sold into slavery to help repay the victims' families. The Commonwealth of Virginia apologizes earnestly for failing to protect the free black population. A Kentuckian buys Stennis for $950, but is so annoyed by Stennis's yapping that he pulls a pistol on him.

Three years and nine months after Skiffington's murder, Minerva is in Philadelphia. Winifred's widowed sister has taken them and Carl Skiffington in. As she shops, Minerva is nearly run over by a very dark, handsome black man on a white horse. She follows him for three blocks as he rides away, each checking to see if the other is paying attention. Minerva tells him her story and he takes her to his home, where he lives with his parents and two sisters. Three days later, he sees posters announcing she is "lost or harmed." It describes her height and weight, and includes a daguerreotype portrait. Winifred, who has lived too long in the South, thought nothing of including the phrase, "Will answer to the name Minnie," to which Minerva takes offense and refuses to see her loving "mother" for years.

Calvin writes to his sister Caldonia, now married to Louis, from Washington, D.C. He doubts he will ever see New York, but is happily settled into a hotel hospitable to blacks in an otherwise frightening big city. Calvin tells how he has come upon two enormous wall hangings in the hotel restaurant signed "Alice Night." One shows a detailed map of Manchester County as God in heaven would see it. The second shows Caldonia's

plantation in minute detail, with all the inhabitants, living and dead, depicted as alive in front of their homes. Only Alice, Priscilla, and Jamie are missing. All gaze upwards to the eyes of God. Calvin recognizes every face and remembers every name. Henry stands beside his grave, which is covered with flowers as though he still inhabits it. Seeing the monumental work has brought back to Calvin many things he had forgotten. More surprising is to meet Priscilla as the artwork's well-dressed and confident conservator. The shock brings Calvin to his knees, but he is struck again to meet Alice, whom he feared would resent him for having owned black slaves. Alice, however, is magnanimous. God has made her life good. After caring for their mother for years, Calvin finds himself now happy and busily working for Alice, Priscilla, and James, who has grown into a fine young man. The three own the hotel/restaurant/saloon and employ many runaways. Calvin implores Caldonia not to forget him but to write.

Caldonia reads Calvin's comforting letter so often Louis is afraid it will disintegrate. She will have memorized it before that can happen, Caldonia assures her husband. She even reads it at Henry's grave, knowing her first husband had been fond of her second. Caldonia's heart stops every time she sees Moses limping around the plantation. Tessie and Grant deliver to Moses the meals their mother Celeste prepares for him, but often he does not eat them. He cannot remember their names or that of the son he once had. Moses remembers only that Jamie was too fat for his own good. Moses prays for Celeste, who will always have a limp. Moses has difficulty moving in the morning, the result, he is sure, of all the time he spent in the damp woods. Light bothers Moses's eyes. Celeste never goes to sleep without wondering if Moses has eaten, even after Moses dies.

Chapter 12 Analysis

"Sunday. Barnum Kinsey in Missouri. Finding a Lost Loved One," brings an unexpected ending to the mystery of Moses' disappearance. It seems likely anyone who caught Moses would slay him, so greatly had the pursuers' passions risen. Instead, he is merely hobbled, and the agent of his agony, Oden, is so touched by his agony that he forsakes mutilating slaves. Augustus's kidnappers are punished, with an ironic touch as the Commonwealth of Virginia seeks to compensate the culprits' victims. Skiffington's toothache transforms him into a racist maniac whose continuing piety so annoys his cousin that the latter guns him down in cold blood. Counsel's hopes for vast fortune, which he sees, Job-like, as God's compensation for the loss of "A Child's Dream," come to nothing. Mildred, it turns out, has been part of the Underground Railroad, smuggling runaway slaves to freedom in the North. The mystery of what happened to Priscilla, Jamie, and mad Alice remains unresolved. Counsel realizes his late cousin is wrong; Moses could not have killed them.

The trio's fate is revealed, even more surprisingly, in an addendum to Chapter 12. It consists of a letter from Calvin to Caldonia, telling about how the three runaways have prospered in Washington, D.C., and Alice has turned out to be a renowned artist. Moses continues, inexplicably, to be cared for by Celeste, who should have hated him like her husband.

Characters

Moses

The overseer of Henry Townsend's plantation, Moses is thirty-five, married to Priscilla, and is an ineffective father to son Jamie. Moses is the first slave Henry purchased, ten years earlier, for $325 from Henry's former white master, William Robbins. It takes several weeks for Moses to come to grips with how God could allow blacks to own fellow blacks, and at first Henry relates too casually, even playfully, to Moses. Robbins sets Henry straight.

Robbins had purchased Moses for $525 from the jailed Jean Broussard, but rejected Bessie, Moses's companion of several months since they met in a Roanoke slave pen. Moses had risked a beating by reiterating too often to Robbins that he and Bessie were family; they were one. Moses helps Henry build a house, and after Henry's marriage to Caldonia Newman, receives authority over the growing slave population. Before marrying a field laborer, Moses had his eye on Caledonia's maid, Loretta, but decided she was above his station. She also rejected him because of the cruelty she perceived in him. Moses is closely attuned to the earth, tasting the soil to determine when to perform farming tasks, and he works shoulder-to-shoulder with the slaves, rather than merely ordering them around as other overseers do. Labor is in his blood, Priscilla says.

Many nights Moses walks into the woods to masturbate before going to his unhappy home. After Henry's death, Caldonia depends on Moses to run the plantation, but he oversteps his authority and Caldonia requires daily reports. Generally, he has little news, so Moses spins tales, and finds Caldonia responds best to stories about how he and Henry built the house. Caldonia makes sexual advances to Moses, which he enjoys and sees as a means of obtaining his freedom. Caldonia could not, after all, marry a slave. Moses arranges for crazy Alice to take his wife and son away to pave the way for his new life, but Caldonia grows suspicious and Moses is barred from the house. Moses also disappears and becomes the subject of a massive search as the missing trio's presumed murderer. Moses is discovered hiding out at Henry's parents' plantation, a stop on the Underground Railroad. Moses is hobbled to keep him from ever running away again, and he declines both physically and mentally, fed until his death by his neighbor Celeste, who had miscarried when Moses forced her to work in the fields.

Alice Night

Henry Townsend's perpetually wandering slave, Alice is believed to have had the sense kicked out of her by a one-eyed mule. She was purchased for $228 and two bushels of substandard apples six months before Henry's death. Known before the incident as a sweet girl of sweet words, Alice is a good worker, which makes up for the grief her wanderings cause. The slave patrollers continue to stop her, largely for their own amusement, although she also scares them. No longer do they bother to drag her back

to her owners. After Henry's death, Alice begins singing a song about the dead master that unnerves people, and dances seemingly before the funeral. Overseer Moses wants to lock her in her cabin at night, but Caldonia Townsend refuses, fearing this might deepen Alice's insanity. Moses also fears Alice may reveal his secret nocturnal masturbation in the woods, which she several times witnessed.

As Moses believes his goal of marrying Caldonia and taking over the plantation is coming to fruition, he tells Alice he is setting her free on his own authority and orders her to take his wife Priscilla and son Jamie away, to prepare for his own run to freedom. Alice obeys and the trio disappears, never to be seen in Manchester County again. The sheriff wrongly suspects Moses has murdered them. In fact, they make their way to Washington, D.C., where they jointly purchase and run a successful hotel/restaurant/saloon that employs many runaways. On the restaurant walls hang two enormous, intricate, and skillfully executed wall hangings signed "Alice Night." One shows a detailed map of Manchester County as God in heaven would see it, and the second portrays Caldonia's plantation is minute detail, with all the inhabitants, living and dead, depicted as alive in front of their homes. Only Alice, Priscilla, and Jamie are missing. All gaze upwards to the eyes of God. Calvin recognizes every face and remembers every name.

Henry Townsend

A black plantation owner, the son of Augustus and Mildred, and husband of Caldonia, Henry is a fulcrum of the novel more so than a protagonist. Periodically sick for years, Henry is shown dying, dead, laid out, and buried early on in the novel. How his widow Caldonia manages the legacy he dies is the driving action of the narrative. Henry is entrusted at age nine to Rita when his freed parents move to their own plantation. While Augustus saves money to free his son, Henry's purchase price continues to rise as William Robbins comes to appreciate Henry's value, first as a groomsman and later as a shoemaker. Some people suggest an unnatural attachment between master and slave. Robbins promotes Henry's shoemaking and allows him to apply part of his earnings towards purchasing his freedom.

Henry accompanies Robbins on a trip to Richmond to recapture his runaway black mistress and children, and demonstrates an affinity for children. Eventually, Henry and his parents save up enough to buy his free papers and some land. Henry purchases Moses from Robbins, and is instructed by Robbins about his new duties as a slave owner. Henry and Moses begin building a house on Henry's new land. Henry withholds his news from his parents until the first floor of the house is nearly finished. That he has bought Moses slips out, and Henry's parents are aghast that an ex-slave would own another human being. Augustus breaks Henry's shoulder with a carved walking stick to remind him how a slave feels. They reconcile only years later, when Henry begins to be sick. Henry buys additional land and slaves. Robbins had been concerned that Henry would know how to deal with the real world and paid for Fern Elston to accept him as an adult student. In Fern's home, Henry meets Caldonia Townsend, falls in love, and

marries her. The couple never has children. At his death, which begins the novel, Henry has left Caldonia a considerable legacy to preserve.

Caldonia Newman Townsend Cartwright

Henry Townsend's freeborn black wife, Tilmon and Maude Newman's daughter, and Calvin Newman's twin sister, Caldonia is introduced caring tenderly and tirelessly for her stricken husband, but quickly widowed at age twenty-eight and left childless. Caledonia's father is deceased, but her mother is at her side, demanding that she get over Henry's death and get on with preserving her legacy of land and slaves. Emancipation is an illness Maude is determined to keep Caldonia from catching. Caldonia does not intend to free the slaves. Instead, she will continue Henry's legacy of being the ideal master. Caldonia is most comforted in her mourning by her former teacher, Fern Elston, at whose home she first met Henry. Caldonia is the only former student Fern allows to call her by her first name, and Fern has become Caldonia's close adviser.

Caldonia confirms Moses as overseer of the plantation, but becomes concerned he is making unwise decisions on his own authority. Caldonia requires Moses visit every evening to give a report on the state of the plantation. Real news is rare, so Moses makes up stories to amuse his mistress. Caldonia makes sexual advances on Moses, but is shocked when he demands his freedom. Caledonia's house servants arm themselves to protect her from Moses's retaliation. Instead, Moses disappears, following his wife, son, and another slave, Alice. Caldonia is certain they will return, and reports the disappearances to the sheriff only as a formality. Two more slaves disappear, and Caldonia rightfully begins to worry that Henry's legacy might completely slip away. Moses alone is found and returned to the plantation, but Caldonia has made Elias the overseer. Years later, Caldonia marries Louis Cartwright, the son of William Robbins and his black mistress, and another of Fern Elston's former pupils.

Fern Elston

A formidable, freeborn black woman, Fern is a professionally trained teacher to Henry, Caldonia, and several other principal characters in the novel. Like her relatives, Fern could pass for white anywhere except Manchester County, where everyone knows her, but this never occurs to her. She dislikes both whites and blacks whose skin is too dark. One of the latter is Fern's first husband, Ramsey, an inveterate gambler who demands Fern not bathe for the duration of his gambling trips. This is uncomfortable for Fern, but she wants to be a dutiful wife. Ramsey and Fern own twelve slaves, including Fern's best friend, Zeus. Trained in Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia, Fern teaches free black children whose parents can afford her fees.

Fern numbers Henry Townsend among her best students; she also taught Caldonia and her twin brother Calvin when they were children, and William Robbins's two black children, Dora and Louis Cartwright. Fern keeps miniature peach and magnolia trees in

her home, which amaze visitors. White people never visit Fern, but in 1881, she talks with Canadian pamphleteer Anderson Frazier about antebellum black slaveholders. Fern has retained her first husband's surname, but has been married twice more, the third time to Jebediah Dickinson, a pecan-colored slave she purchased and freed to redeem Ramsey's gambling debt, but who angrily fled to Baltimore. With Jebediah, Fern is said to have born two children, but their fate after Moses's capture, which closes the novel's action, is not even suggested.

John Skiffington

The large, bible-reading sheriff of Manchester County, John stands for law, order, and justice. John comes to the county from his native North Carolina when his father Carl is told by God in a vision to rid himself of his slaves and remove his wife's remains and his son from the state. John his hired by Sheriff Gilly Patterson as his deputy, and meets Gilly's niece Winifred, at a Gilly family Sunday dinner. They fall in love and marry grandly within half a year. John and Winifred are both opposed to slavery, but are given a slave as a wedding present by John's cousin Counsel, with whom he grew up but with whom he never bonded. When Sheriff Patterson resigns in 1843, twenty-nine-year-old Deputy John takes his place, feeling he is better prepared to keep the peace. Sworn not to hold slaves, John nevertheless has no trouble keeping the institution going for others, considering it ordained by God and the bible.

John proves himself civil and judicious in watching over a peaceful county. His greatest problem is drunkenness, and the worst drunk is one of the slave patrollers he is pressured by the great landowners to employ. The peace is shattered, however, when three of Caldonia Townsend's slaves disappear, followed by Moses the overseer, and in the growing confusion two others as well. John rightly fears prominent William Robbins, who brought about Sheriff Patterson's downfall, will lose faith in him. As the search for the runaways begins, John is disabled by a toothache, which strains his nerves and makes him lash out at everyone.

John has also found himself recently lusting over the wedding-present slave whom he and Winifred have treated almost like a daughter. With cousin Counsel, whom he hired as deputy out of family loyalty, John sets out painfully for Mildred Townsend's plantation, convinced runaway Moses will be hiding there. John's toothache, aggravated by the long, jarring ride, makes him lose patience with the former slave who confronts him with a rifle. John's own rifle goes off accidentally while he draws it, and Mildred falls dead. Counsel is sent into the house to find Moses, but instead discovers some gold pieces. Convinced this is only the tip of the iceberg, Counsel shoots the nagging Sheriff John dead in his saddle.

Augustus Townsend

Henry Townsend's father and Mildred's husband, Augustus buys himself out of slavery at age twenty-two. His master, William Robbins, admires Augustus's carpentry, and

allows him to keep a portion of the fees he receives for building furniture for others. Augustus uses this to buy his own freedom and for some land from a poor white man at the farthest point from Manchester County's slave plantations. Three years later he has enough money to purchased his wife Mildred, and begins saving to buy nine-year-old Henry, who is left behind in the care of Mildred's cabin mate, Rita. As Robbins comes to appreciate Henry's talents, the price keeps going up, but eventually Henry is freed and settles on land of his own.

Augustus is mortified when Henry lets slip he has purchased a slave, Moses, to help him build a house. Augustus breaks Henry's shoulder with one of his intricately carved walking sticks, to remind him of how it feels to be a slave. Father and son do not speak for many years, until Henry begins frequently falling gravely ill . They reconcile, but Augustus refuses to stay in Henry's house because it was slave-built; instead, he and Mildred occupy a cabin in the slave quarters when they visit. Augustus has nothing to say at his son's funeral. Augustus continues making fine furniture and delivering it to neighboring counties. He is often gone longer than expected, but Mildred has little concern to worry about his safety.

One night, however, the slave patrollers challenge him on the road, and Harvey Travis eats Augustus's free papers to show contempt for his claims of legal protection. The patrollers sell Augustus and his mule for $50 to a slave speculator, Darcy, who is passing through Manchester County on his way south. En route to South Carolina, Augustus asks permission to bury a slave child who dies in his arms, but is turned down. Darcy also refuses to send word to Mildred that Augustus is alive. Augustus pretends to be deaf and dumb in order to thwart a sale Darcy presses too hard, and several other sale opportunities are missed, leaving Darcy desperate as he nears the Florida border. Augustus is sold to Hillard for $53, refuses to serve his new master, and is shot in the shoulder as he walks northward. The Ulsters carry Augustus to the barn and Hope tends to him into the night. When Augustus dies, his spirit hovers above the barn and flies towards Virginia a hundred times faster than it could have in his body. It finds Mildred sleeping in their bed and kisses her left breast. The kiss squeezes through to Mildred's heart and she awakens, knowing Augustus is gone forever. She stumbles outdoors, unable to breathe, falls to her knees, and weeps.

William Robbins

A white plantation owner, holding 113 slaves, Robbins is the wealthiest and most powerful man in Manchester County. Married ten years to Ethel, with whom he has a daughter, Patience, Robbins falls deeply in love with his slave, Philomena, with whom he has two children, Dora and Louis. Several times a week, Robbins rides his beloved horse, Sir Guilderham, to the lodgings he has provided for his second family and spends the night there. Often on the ride home, Robbins is stricken by what sounds like epileptic seizures and does not remember how he gets home. Robbins is amazed at the depth of his love for his black mistress and children (unlike an earlier dalliance with another slave woman). This is also true for Henry Townsend, a slave Robbins greatly values, even cherishes and promotes, before selling him his freedom and continuing to

advise him on the duties of slave ownership after providing Henry his first slaves. Regardless of these feelings, Robbins is capable of cruelty towards blacks, which he regards as inferiors as fully as his white neighbors.

With rival landowner Robert Colfax, Robbins determines who will serve as sheriff. After three slaves disappear from the estate of the late Henry, Robbins allows Sheriff John Skiffington sufficient time to find them, but when three more Townsend slaves disappear, Robbins loses faith in the incumbent. No indication is given as to what Robbins does after Skiffington is murdered, but it is revealed that Robbins lives another four years and a month before suffering a stroke. Robbins lingers three weeks, cared for by his doting white daughter Patience and visited by his black daughter Dora, who except for their age and complexion are identical. The rift between Robbins and Colfax polarizes whites in Manchester County, which ultimately is absorbed into neighboring counties.

Loretta

Caldonia Townsend's caring, thirty-two-year-old personal maid, purchased by Henry not long before his death, Loretta once thought Moses would make a tolerable husband, but dropped the idea after hearing how he screamed at people. After Henry Townsend's death, Loretta becomes Caldonia's sympathetic emotional supporter, chief liaison with the slaves, and ultimately her knife- and pistol-wielding protector against Moses. Loretta never sees Caldonia and Moses's intimacies, but suspects them and knows it will end badly. After Emancipation, Loretta refuses to adopt any surname, including that of the sailor she one day marries, a man who loses heart for the sea after watching a fellow sailor disappear mysteriously on a calm sea.

Elias Freemen

Henry's second slave, a determined runaway until he is caught, has an ear sliced off as punishment, and more importantly, falls in love with Celeste. Marriage and fatherhood anchor Elias to the Townsend plantation. Moses has been hostile to Elias from the day Henry purchased him, and takes every opportunity to lord his authority over him. Elias frequently sits at the door of his cabin in the evening, whittling toys for his children. Elias won Celeste's heart by making her a crude comb. Previously, she had shunned him, convinced he was laughing at her crippled leg. Celeste is three months pregnant at the start of the novel and six months near the end, feeling poorly but ordered into the fields by Moses. There she miscarries, and Elias swears vengeance on Moses. Elias and Celeste disagree sharply about Moses. When Moses disappears, Caldonia names Elias the new overseer, and Elias provides the sheriff with the key hint he needs to apprehend Moses.

Celeste Freemen

Elias Freemen's wife, Celeste is so painfully crippled in one leg from birth that, had she been a horse, she would have been shot. She is a good worker, however. The mother of three, Celeste is three-months pregnant at the time of Henry's death, and gives birth at six-months to a stillborn daughter, Lucinda. Celeste and Elias clash sharply over runaway Moses, and Celeste feeds Moses to the end of his days, when he is captured and, like her, crippled to keep him from ever running away again. Why Celeste has such an affinity for Moses is never explained or even suggested.

Counsel Skiffington

John Skiffington's North Carolina cousin, Counsel's wife is Belle. He suffers three years of crop failures but is on his way back to profit when small pox kills his family and most of the slaves. He burns down the plantation, named "A Child's Dream," and flees to California. Twice en route he falls desperately ill and robs his benefactors after recovering. In Louisiana, a farmer's wife, Meg Jinkins, seduces him, but he escapes without harm, and in Texas he encounters a bizarre mixed-race wagon train that tries to recruit him to join them. Counsel reappears in Manchester County looking like a mountain man. John takes care of his cousin and hires him as his deputy.

Counsel is an immediate disappointment, failing to tell the sheriff about a visit from Mildred Townsend, reporting her husband Augustus's failure to return home from a trip. John takes Counsel along on his mission to arrest runaway slave Moses, whom he is certain is hiding at Mildred's plantation. Counsel guns down his cousin in cold blood after discovering a few gold coins that he is sure are just the tip of a financial iceberg. God, Counsel is sure, wants to restore him as he did Job. No one doubts Counsel's improbable story that John and Mildred shot each other, and returns many times to sack the Townsends' house, but finds no riches. Caldonia successfully sues to obtain the items Counsel does appropriate. Counsel marries his landlady, but they fail to have children. Counsel's fate is not indicated.

Zeddie

The Townsends' able cook, Zeddie is the second slave Henry purchases, through Robbins, since until 1850 blacks could not bid for slaves directly. She and husband Bennett control the back door through which overseer Moses gains access to Caldonia Townsend.

Bennett

Zeddie's husband, Bennett keeps the fire going and does other odd jobs around the Townsend house. He helps Loretta defend the mistress against Moses after he grows

demanding, and is sent to town to tell the sheriff about the growing problem with runaway slaves on the plantation.

Priscilla

Moses's wife and Jamie's mother, Priscilla tries to please her husband but is shut out. Priscilla was Moses's second choice for a wife and was selected because, as a field worker, she is not his social superior. Priscilla believes Moses is involved with his first choice, Loretta, while in fact he is having sex with his mistress Caldonia and determined to win freedom and take over the plantation. To this end, Moses orders Priscilla to run away with Jamie and the crazy slave Alice. Priscilla obeys, begging Moses not to forget her. The sheriff wrongly suspects Moses has murdered the trio. They make their way to Washington, D.C., where they jointly purchase and run a successful hotel/restaurant/saloon that employs many runaways.

Jamie

Moses and Priscilla's mischievous, fat son, Jamie is the best of friends with Elias's daughter Tessie. He talks about marrying her, but they never do. He accompanies his mother and Alice when Moses sends Priscilla away, and ends up co-owner with them of a successful hotel/restaurant/saloon in Washington, D.C., where he is also studying.

Tessie Freemen

The oldest of Elias and Celeste's children, Tessie is rebuked for skipping after Henry's death; until her death at ninety-seven, she cherishes the doll her father carved for her.

Grant Freemen

The second of Elias and Celeste's children, Grant and another five-year-old, Boyd, are plagued by identical dreams.

Ellwood Freemen

The third of Elias and Celeste's children, Ellwood is thirteen-months-old when Henry dies. He will go on to teach at Stamford Crow Blueberry's Richmond Home for Colored Orphans after the Civil War.

Lucinda Freemen

Lucinda is the stillborn baby Celeste delivers in the fields after being forced to work by Moses.

Stamford Crow Blueberry

Henry Townsend's trouble-making forty-year-old slave who is convinced the only way to survive slavery is to always have "young stuff," Stamford fights with Gloria so violently Henry orders them separated, and Stamford turns his interest to Cassandra. Stamford is beaten nearly to death, and turns his attention to the older Delphie, whom he eventually marries. Badly drunk, Stamford picks berries for Delores and Patrick, certain he will die during the lightning storm. Two crows and a tall oak tree are destroyed, but Stamford survives, earning the "Crow Blueberry" surname. He and Delphie form the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans. Eight decades later, their great granddaughter gets the Richmond city council to name a street for them. Stamford hires grown Ellwood Freeman as a teacher there.

Delphie Crow Blueberry

Cassandra's nearly forty-year-old mother and crazy Alice's roommate, Delphie figures God has greater dangers in store for people than a crazy black woman. After Cassandra survives childhood, Delphie shifts her primary goal to living until she is fifty. She prays for Henry's soul to thank him for buying her and her daughter together. She is protective of Gloria. When both Gloria and Cassandra reject Stamford, Delphie also declines the difficult job of saving him, but relents and they marry. They form the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans. Eight decades later the Richmond city council name a street for them.

Gloria

A twenty-six-year-old slave whom Stamford pursues, Gloria and Stamford injure one another in a fight, and Henry orders Moses to separate them, and Stamford moves on in his determined pursuit of "young stuff."

Cassandra ("Cassie")

Deliphie's cherished daughter, Cassie is the second object of Stamford's desire.

Mildred Townsend

Henry Townsend's mother and Augustus's wife, Mildred was bought from William Robbins by her husband at age twenty-six. She supports her husband's views that it is wrong for blacks to own fellow blacks as slaves, but is sad to see Henry chased off their land. Mildred is resigned to Augustus's loss after he is kidnapped by a slave speculator. When Moses runs away from Caldonia's plantation, Mildred takes him in and is preparing to smuggle him north through the Underground Railroad when Sheriff John Skiffington appears to reclaim Caldonia's property. Mildred confronts him with a rifle and refuses to stand down. The sheriff's rifle goes off accidentally, killing Mildred instantly.

Rita

Mildred Townsend's cabin mate, Rita becomes nine-year-old Henry's second mother when his freed parents move to their own plantation. After bidding good-bye to Henry when his parents finish paying for his freedom, Rita chases down the Townsend's wagon and refuses Augustus's terror- and tear-filled pleas not to endanger them by running away from her master, William Robbins, who named Rita as a baby. After a forty-one-hour trip in a box load of Augustus Townsend's carved walking sticks bound for a customer in New York, Rita is set free. The "Rita thing" is the last straw for whites, who demand Sheriff Gilly Patterson's resignation and put deputy John Skiffington into office.

Ramsey Elston

Fern's first husband (whose surname she retains), Ramsey is a free black from north of Charlottesville, and is quite light-skinned but clearly not white, and a gambler who often accuses people of owing him money when he gets drunk. Henry Townsend chokes Ramsey at the dinner table when Ramsey insults him. Ramsey wins a twelve-year-old slave Zeus, who becomes his wife's best friend, and loses $500 to Jebediah Dickinson, but refuses to pay his debt. Jebediah reveals Ramsey's infidelities, estranging Ramsey and Fern. Ramsey's fate is not told, but Fern goes on to marry twice more, the last time to ex-slave Jebediah.

Zeus

Fern's most trusted slave and best friend, obtained as partial payment for a gambling debt when he was twelve, Zeus received the Greek god's name from Fern and no one remembers his original name.

Colley

Another of Fern's slaves, larger than Zeus, Colley is as close to an overseer as Fern has.

Gilly Patterson

John Skiffington's irascible, long-time predecessor as Manchester County sheriff, Patterson earned a reputation for toughness against runaway slaves. He introduces his deputy, John Skiffington, to his niece Winifred, and they marry in 1841. Soon after the wedding, Skiffington stands beside Patterson in resisting William Robbins's attempt to form a militia, but eagerly takes his job when Patterson retires at age thirty-eight, after being taken to task for a series of unexplained slave disappearances. Returning to the

life of a shepherd in his native England, Patterson recalls America as a wonderful place but spoiled by the presence of Americans.

Winifred Patterson Skiffington

The wife of John Skiffington, Winifred is a sensitive, well-read alumna of the worldly Philadelphia School for Girls. For their wedding, John's cousin Counsel and wife Belle give them a slave girl Minerva as a gift. Winifred treats Minerva as a daughter rather than as a slave. Winifred longs to return to Philadelphia, but John resists for professional reasons. Only after John's death do Winifred, Minerva, and Winifred's father-in-law settle there with Winifred's widowed sister. Minerva disappears and Winifred lovingly and innocently publishes a poster that claims Minerva also answers to "Minnie," which offends the ex-slave and they lose contact for years. Winifred's fate is left untold.

Minerva ("Minnie") Skiffington

Winifred Skiffington's maid, Minerva joins the household at age nine as a wedding present from Counsel and Belle Skiffington of North Carolina. John and Winifred treat Minerva as a daughter rather than a slave, and Manchester County whites are amused at the relationship, but accept it. As Minerva turns sixteen, John sees her getting dressed through a door accidentally left ajar and begins lusting for her, much to his spiritual dismay. After John's murder, Minerva accompanies Winifred to Philadelphia, where she meets a handsome black man and shares her story with him. She goes missing and Winifred publishes help notices with her picture and description. The signs innocently mention she also answers to the name "Minnie," which Minerva hates, and she avoids Winifred for years thereafter.

Carl Skiffington

Sheriff John Skiffington's pious, widowed father, Carl is a principled opponent of slavery who takes up evangelizing in Manchester County, helps watch the jail in his son's absence, and accompanies his daughter-in-law to Philadelphia after John's murder.

Clara Martin

Winifred Skillington's paranoid fifty-four-year-old widowed cousin, Clara worries her long-time slave, Ralph, will poison her as she has heard another slave did this to his mistress. Sheriff John assures Clara there is no danger, and Clara and Ralph live together another twenty-one years, even after Emancipation. Clara sleeps behind a locked door and with two knives in reach. After her death, Clara's relatives sell her land to William Robbins, which causes a rift with rival landowner, Robert Colfax.

Ralph

Clara Martin's fifty-five-year-old, longhaired, arthritic slave, Ralph is forbidden to cook for Clara after she hears about a white woman being killed by glass ground in her food by her trusted slave cook. Ralph remains with Clara after Emancipation, and moves to be near relatives in Washington, D.C., only after Clara's death.

Epetha

Epetha is the Arlington, Virginia, slave accused of killing her mistress by grinding glass in her food.

Jean Broussard

A talkative prisoner in the Manchester County jail, French-born Jean is the first white person charged with capital murder in twenty-six years. He maintains his innocence as he is held pending arrival of a district judge. He is charged with murdering his partner, Alm Jorgensen, with whom he jointly owns two slaves, Moses and Bessie. Jean sells Moses to William Robbins when the county's biggest landowner happens into the jailhouse to talk with the sheriff. Jean is convicted because the jury dislikes his accent and is hanged in Richmond. His unfaithful but beloved wife in France inherits the money he earned from Moses's sale.

Alm Jorgensen

Jean Broussard's partner, with whom he came to Manchester County to sell two slaves, the Scandinavian Jorgensen is killed after a drunken fight with Broussard.

Ethel Robbins

William Robbins's white wife of ten years, with whom he has a daughter, Patience, Ethel knows about his relationship with Philomena Cartwright and their daughter Dora, but not about son Louis. Ethel has not yet accepted that the black woman has stolen his heart. Ethel lives sourly in the part of the mansion Patience designates "east" and refuses to lend a hand caring for William after he suffers a stroke.

Patience Robbins

William and Ethel Robbins's white daughter, Patience is the only one who cares about her father after he suffers a stroke. Patience has to be educated at home because William knows his wife will object to her attending Fern Elston's school for free blacks, to which he sends his black children, Dora and Louis Cartwright. Dora is a younger, darker mirror image of Patience. They meet only after their father lies dying.

Philomena Cartwright

William Robbins's black mistress, mother of Louis and Dora, Philomena wants to move to Richmond, and runs away there twice. The second time, Robbins and Henry Townsend go personally to find them, and Robbins beats Philomena badly.

Dora Cartwright

The eldest child of William Robbins and Philomena, Dora is, except in the color of her skin and difference in age, the image of Patience Robbins, whom she meets only after their father suffers a stroke.

Louis Cartwright

The youngest child of William Robbins and Philomena, Louis is born in 1832, and in 1840 bounces with joy on the days his father is scheduled to visit. Louis has a "traveling eye," an affliction that endears him to his father. Louis learns to control it and earns a reputation for honesty by concentrating on looking people straight in the face. Louis is protected from much of the maltreatment blacks suffer because he is known to be Robbins's son. His fellow student in Fern Elston's school, Calvin Newman, secretly lusts for Louis, but in the end, Louis marries Calvin's twin sister, Caldonia Townsend.

Harvey Travis

A slave patroller, Travis is illiterate and combative. Fern Elston reports his behavior to William Robbins rather than Travis's boss, Sheriff John Skiffington, and Travis is ordered not to abuse her again. The sheriff sides with Travis's fellow patroller, Clarence Wilford, in an argument over a cow. Thus, a bitter Travis sells free man Augustus Townsend to an itinerant slave speculator, a crime for which he is implicated too late by Barnum Kinsey. Travis is adamant that runaway slave Moses must be punished after he is apprehended, and laughs when Moses is hobbled.

Barnum Kinsey

A slave patroller, and the poorest white man in Manchester County, kind-hearted, literate Barnum has a slave, Jeff, for whom he and his wife care tenderly when he grows unable to work. Barnum objects when Harvey Travis illegally sells free black Augustus Townsend into slavery, but gets up the courage to report this to Sheriff John Skiffington only after too much time has passed to do anything to save Augustus. Barnum pleads with his companions not to hobble runaway slave Moses after his capture, and in disgust moves his family from Manchester County to Missouri, where he soon dies.

Oden Peoples

A pony-tailed slave patroller, and part Cherokee, Oden's specialty is cutting off slave's ears with a razor without causing them to bleed to death. Oden began his trade after a white man lost his $515 investment doing it himself. Oden owns four slaves: his wife Tassock, children, and mother-in-law. Tassock's half-sister, a freed slave, is married to Harvey Travis. On his own initiative, Oden arrests the vagrant Jebediah Dickinson, tired of seeing him outside Fern Elston's home. He agrees with Harvey Travis when Travis sells Augustus Townsend back into slavery to a passing speculator. He does as Travis says when runaway Moses is captured, and slices his Achilles heel to prevent his every running away again. Carrying the agonized victim home on his horse cures Oden of ever again using his knife on another human being.

Clarence Wilford

A slave patroller, Wilford and his feisty wife Beth Ann buy a cow from Harvey Travis and begin a shooting feud when Travis tries to reclaim it. Skiffington sides with Wilford, leaving Travis bitter.

Calvin Newman

The unhappy son of Maude and twin brother of Caldonia Townsend, Calvin wants to free the thirteen slaves who form what his mother calls his "legacy," but she forbids him to do this. Calvin recalls with shame having knocked the hat off the slave of a friend in the past; that had ended Calvin's drinking days. He lusts for Robbins's son Louis Cartwright and nearly made a pass at him, knowing he would have been fought off.

Calvin knows no one in New York, but has seen a photograph of a family there. The dog in the picture appears frozen, and Calvin wants to find those people and learn what transfixed the dog. There, Calvin hopes, he and Louis could love each other. Calvin is destined never to see New York. After Henry's death, Calvin becomes his sister's advisor. He cares for his mother for years as she mysteriously dies of symptoms like those of her late husband, whom she poisoned with arsenic. On the eve of the Civil War, Calvin moves to Washington, D.C., where he settles happily into the hotel owned by runaways Priscilla and Jamie Freemen and Alice Night.

Maude Newman

The formidable, widowed mother of twins Caldonia and Calvin, Maude never shared her late husband Tilmon's abolitionist views, and prevents Calvin from freeing his "legacy" of thirteen slaves. When she learned of Tilmon's plans to free their slaves, Maude gradually poisoned him to death by lacing his food with arsenic. She takes a slave, Claude, as her lover. She stays with her daughter after Henry's death, but is the first comforter to leave, figuring her importuning Caldonia not to desert her legacy has only

hardened the new widow. Eventually she convinces Caldonia to take out insurance policies on her slaves.

Tilmon Newman

Caldonia Townsend's late father, and a former slave, Tilmon was murdered by his wife Maude when she learned he was intent on freeing their slaves. At the time of their marriage, Maude convinced Tilmon to put off purchasing his parents and brother, who died before he could act. Tilmon falls under son Calvin's influence and is preparing to free the slaves, but takes ill with a mysterious disease. Tilmon succumbs to the arsenic Maude is slipping into the meals she lovingly feeds to him.

Claude

Maude Newman's slave, Claude becomes Maude's lover after she murders her husband Tilmon.

Robert Colfax

A prominent Manchester landowner, Colfax's friendship with William Robbins begins to wane after the confrontation in 1841 with Sheriff Patterson over formation of a militia. It worsens when Clara Martin's relatives sell her land to Robbins. Robert and wife Alfreda own ninety-seven slaves. Robert is proud of his collection of antique European pistols. Colfax and Robbins eventually break with one another completely, and due to fellow whites siding with the two rivals eventually leads to the dissolution of Manchester County into neighboring jurisdictions.

Anderson Frazier

A Canadian pamphleteer writing about the "peculiarities" of the American people, Frazier interviews Fern Elston in 1881 about free slave-holding black people for inclusion in *Curiosities and Oddities about Our Southern Neighbors.* Frazier deals with up and down the Atlantic coast, but writes his popular pamphlets from Boston. He lives with Esther Sokoloff, a New Yorker for whom he converts to Judaism. Fern carefully keeps from Frazier details of black life that she considers embarrassing.

Jebediah Dickinson

Fern Elston's third husband, with whom Fern bears two children late in life, Jebediah is a pecan-colored, one-legged, literate, gambling blacksmith. They meet on the road to Fern's home as she returns from tending to Caldonia. Jebediah claims her husband Ramsey owes him $500 on a gambling bet and refuses to leave without payment. After a week of camping out, Jebediah is hauled off to jail by Oden Peoples, and the man

said to have emancipated him, Reverend Wilbur Mann, comes to reclaim his property. Mann says his late wife, whose maiden name Jebediah uses, illegally taught Jebediah to read and write, and Jebediah forged his papers.

Caldonia buys Jebediah for $350 and keeps him chained in her barn until he learns manners. Jebediah forges passes and wanders around at night, and often drops work to fish or nap during the day. For an impolitic comment about Fern's sleeping arrangements with her husband (non-existent after Jebediah reveals Ramsey's infidelity on the road), Jebediah is given twenty lashes. He mends his ways, but stepping on a rusty nail requires his right foot be amputated. Fern manumits Jebediah, and gives him a wagon, horse, and $50 to go to Baltimore. Jebediah gets no further than Washington, D.C. When and how Fern and Jebediah got together again is left untold.

Reverend Wilbur Mann

A tall, gaunt clergyman with flowing blond hair, Mann arrives to reclaim Jebediah Dickinson, claiming Jebediah forged his emancipation papers. Mann savagely vows Jebediah will spend the rest of his life growing new skin for him to whip raw.

Reverend Valtims Moffett

Moffett is a freeman preacher who holds services for the slaves every Sunday, exhorting them to obey their masters and "hang in there" to reach heaven. Moffett suffers gout and rheumatism, which he accepts in imitation of Jesus Christ's cross. His wife Helen is a tiny woman, as is her sister Pauline, who is Moffett's slave. After services, Moffett normally takes tea with Henry and Caldonia, collects his $1, and moves on to two more pulpits.

Belle Skiffington

Counsel's well-born, spoiled wife, as a child Belle replaced her first maid, who suffered an annoying cough. On the night Belle dies, that maid, Annette, no longer coughing and free in Massachusetts, finds a North Carolina apple leaf she took as a good luck charm during her flight from slavery. The last of Belle's children and her second maid, Patty, and Patty's three children, all die of small pox within the next few days, and Counsel burns down the plantation and flees North Carolina.

The Jenkinses

A dirt-poor farm family outside Merryville, Louisiana, the Jinkingses take Counsel Skiffington in for the night during his wanderings. The middle-aged wife, Meg, seduces Counsel in the bar, and her belligerent twelve-year old son, Hiram, wants revenge. He is restrained by his father, also named Hiram.

Darcy

A notorious slave speculator, fur-wearing Darcy buys Augustus Townsend from patrollers charged with apprehending him if he is found in the county. Darcy and his slave Stennis, whom he trusts implicitly and silences too slowly, fail several times to sell Augustus before unloading him on the Georgia/Florida border. William Robbins demands justice after word comes that Augustus is murdered by his new master, and Darcy is convicted of kidnapping and is imprisoned.

Stennis

Darcy's slave, upon whose advice he depends heavily, Stennis is given to annoying exaggeration. Stennis and Darcy are convicted of kidnapping Augustus Townsend, and instead of prison, Stennis is sold into slavery to provide restitution money to white survivors of their victims. Stennis's yapping about Tennessee so angers his Kentuckian master that the latter pulls a pistol on him. Whether he fires is not indicated.

Abundance Crawford

A free black girl, just short of her ninth birthday, kidnapped by Darcy and Stennis before Augustus Townsend, Abundance dies along the way to South Carolina and her body is abandoned by the road. Augustus, who held her while she died, begs to bury her but is ignored.

Willis

A thirty-seven-year-old bricklayer, Willis is kidnapped by Darcy and Stennis before Augustus. Whites in Roxboro ignore his loud cries that he is a free man. Augustus comforts Willis when he begins to despair. Willis is sold in Charleston for $325 to schoolteachers suspicious of Darcy's documentation, but deaf to Willis's claims that he has been illegally kidnapped. Willis and Augustus promise to see each other in the "bye and bye" as they part.

Selby

A twenty-two-year-old, recently married baker, Selby is kidnapped by Darcy and Stennis before Augustus. Selby is sold for $310.

Sara Marshall

A twenty-nine-year-old seamstress, given her owners' surname when she is set free, Sara is kidnapped by Darcy and Stennis before Augustus. Sara is sold for $277 and a defective nineteenth-century pistol. The new owner is impressed Sara has a surname.

Toby

Toby is William Robbins's groom, whom Henry Townsend bribes with his mother's food to withdraw from the job Henry wants badly. Henry's food makes Toby and his sister very attractive prospects for sale, and Robbins lets them go for $233 as a pair. They are later resold for $527 and later for $619, landing them in South Carolina. Their mother wastes away with grief and is sold at no profit for $257.

Tom Anderson

Anderson is a forty-six-year-old Manchester County slave who disappears in 1842 after his preacher master, for whom he is named, agreed to turn him over in payment for a $350 debt. Folks debated whether the slave was sold, ran away, or was spirited off by abolitionists, but his loss to the new owner fed William Robbins's argument that Sheriff Patterson was incompetent.

Ophelia

A Manchester Country slave who disappears in 1843, Ophelia is taken, according to slave legend, into heaven by the Virgin Mary, who admires her singing.

Mary O'Donnell Conlon

Mary is the Irish immigrant who receives the crate containing run-away Rita in New York. Mary lost her husband and infant baby Agnes during her transatlantic passage aboard *HMS Thames,* and son Timothy recited the Lord's Prayers and Hail Marys as their bodies were consigned to the sea. Mary never forgave America for her loss.

Caldonia and Henry

Three-year-old twins at the time their master Henry dies, Caldonia and Henry are bonded for life by surviving a paralyzing and feverish malady, relieved by Delphie's knowledge of spells. When Caldonia died at eighty-eight, Henry wills himself to death, after a good life with a wife and many children and grandchildren.

Peter and May

Henry's married slaves, it is Peter and May's cabin that Augustus and Mildred occupy at the time of Henry's funeral. After Peter is killed by two stampeding horses, May superstitiously refuses to live in the cabin for a month. Peter is buried in the cemetery to which Henry's body is committed.

Sadie

Sadie is a tall forty-year old slave who dies shortly after Henry purchases her. Her former owner allows Andy, with whom Sadie had sexual relations but never married, to attend the funeral.

Luke

Luke is a sweet, gangly twelve-year-old slave who dies of overwork when Henry rents him to a neighbor for $2 a week. Elias and Celeste love Luke. Henry brings Luke's mother in from another county for Luke's funeral.

Sam

Sam is Robbins's slave whose right ear was cut off as punishment for running away twice. Henry remembers how Sam took glee in grabbing small children and making them scream at the sight of the mushrooming scar tissue. At the of age twelve, Henry found himself no longer afraid.

Saunders Church

Church is a free black friend of Fern Elston, whose drunken husband Ramsey accuses of owing him money, ruining a dinner party with the Townsends.

Timmons

Timmons is the Robbins plantation boot- and shoemaker to whom Henry Townsend apprentices brilliantly.

Sophie

Sophie is a thirty-five-year-old Colfax plantation slave who fills nine-year-old Philomena Cartwright with stories about life in Richmond. William Robbins purchases Sophie for Philomena after he frees his pregnant paramour on her 16th birthday. Sophie and Philomena's brother run away, which pleases Philomena, who claims ignorance of their plans.

Otis Brothers

Together with a slave named Teacher, the Otis brothers burst spontaneously into flames in front of a dry goods store. The younger boy, the first to go up, is mentally retarded, fearful of demons eating his private parts.

Bessie

Bessie is a slave woman whom Moses met two months earlier in an Alexandria, Virginia, holding pen and he boldly begs not to be parted from her. Robbins buys Moses for $525 but rejects Bessie. Bessie is sold two weeks later in Roanoke to a blind man and his pious wife for $385.

Thorbecke and Saskia Wilhelm

Immigrants from the Netherlands, the Wilhelms and their dog appear in Calvin's photograph of New York. Thorbecke fails as a fisherman and peddler, and when Saskia's wages as a maid do not suffice, Thorbecke sells her into prostitution in Philadelphia and eventually North Carolina. There, a regular customer, Manfred Carlyle, falls in love with her.

Manfred Carlyle

One of hard-pressed Counsel Skiffington's creditors, Manfred falls in love with the prostitute Saskia Wilhelm.

Harry Sanderson

Sheriff Skiffington's unofficial liaison in Richmond, Harry clarifies for him the law pertaining to the sale of free blacks into slavery: it is illegal. Harry dies three days after writing the letter.

Graciela Sanderson

Harry Sanderson's Italian-born widow, Graciela takes over her husband's correspondence and forwards the promised legal documentation to Sheriff Skiffington. Despondent, Graciela asks Skiffington's advice several times about whether she should return to her native Italy, but he is too busy to reply.

Morris Calhenny

A prosperous man near Valdosta, Georgia, Morris Calhenny suffers crushing melancholy, which only his lifelong slave Beau knows how to alleviate. Morris wants Hope Martin to marry his son Wilson, and vows revenge when she instead marries Hillard Uster.

Wilson Calhenny

Morris Calhenny's only white son, Wilson is expelled from the George Washington University Medical School in his second year for revealing that he thinks cadavers are talking to him.

Beau Calhenny

Beau is Morris Calhenny's slave, who alone understands his mastery's profound melancholy and is able to get him out of his moods.

Hope Martin Ulster

A beautiful young woman in Georgia, Morris Calhenny wants Hope to marry his son Wilson, but instead she marries Augustus Townsend's killer, Hillard Ulster. Hope cares for Augustus in his final hours of life.

Hillard Ulster

The poor farmer who wins Hope Martin's heart, Hillard gives his life savings of $53 to purchase Augustus Townsend from Darcy. When Augustus begins walking away northward from the Ulsters' land, Hillard shoots him dead, claiming he wanted only to stop him.

Ray Topps

An agent of Atlas Life, Casualty, and Assurance Company, Topps is brought to Caldonia by her mother Maude to write policies on her remaining slaves after six escape. Topps aspires to a management job in Hartford, Connecticut.

Objects/Places

Manchester County, Virginia

The setting of most of the novel, Manchester County is the largest county in the Commonwealth of Virginia, heavily wooded, prosperous, and largely crimeless. The dusty town is sketched only lightly. The sheriff's office and the barn behind it which sometimes houses prisoners, alone receive attention. Spreading out around the town are plantations, most prominently those of rivals William Robbins and Robert Colfax, who largely determine who will serve as sheriff. Henry Townsend's land neighbors Robbins's land. Townsend bought his first acres of land from Robbins. Henry's parents moved as far away from the white-owned plantations as they could, on the southern border. Fern Elston lives about eight miles from her friend Caldonia.

The Townsend Plantation

Henry's death leaves widow Caldonia substantial cotton fields, a slave quarter, a still little-used cemetery, and the fine two-story house he and slave Moses built. The Robbins plantation neighbors it, separated by several miles of dense woods.

"A Child's Dream"

The name refers to Counsel Skiffington's plantation in North Carolina, which he burns down after smallpox claims his family and slaves.

Themes

The Law

The Known World deals with the law most pointedly in the context of Sheriff John Skiffington request for guidance from Richmond about what can and should be done about the sale of free blacks back into slavery. The definitive answer is that such sales are illegal and should be punished. More broadly, the novel deals with the legality and extra legality of human slavery. That the U.S. Constitution forbade any interference with the "peculiar institution" for twenty years and that it formed the backbone of the southern plantation economy before the Civil War, is not mentioned. There is no need. Everyone, black and white, takes for granted that slavery is warranted by both human and divine law. Blacks are by essence of their skin color slaves.

William Robbins makes clear that the manumission papers he has given former slaves mean nothing if he chooses to renege. Masters have absolute rights over their slaves' bodies and lives. They can be beaten, mutilated, and even hanged arbitrarily, usually for trying to escape, but also for any act of impudence. Several cases in which a master is questioned about killing a slave, and what today would be called a "human rights violation," the law (in the person of the sheriff) sides with the master. The master, by losing the slave's work and potential sale value, is held to have suffered enough. Fern is shown to be loath to whip a slave not only on humanitarian grounds, but also because she has heard slaves' value goes down $5 a strike. Virginia's official position that freed slaves are free is moot. Much of the novel deals with black ownership of blacks, which enjoys only slightly less energetic protection under the law.

Religion

The Known World is suffused with references to religion. The bible-studying Sheriff John Skiffington wants to hold no slaves personally, but defends the institution based on the bible. He and his evangelist father pray long and hard daily. John is tormented by impure thoughts about Minerva, and grows frustrated when prayer and bible study fail to exorcise these feelings. He is conflicted by several stories from Genesis, particularly how God could destroy Sodom so savagely and completely, and prefers to take comfort in the Psalms. Still, he feels obliged to read and reread the uncomfortable parts. John is judgmental of others in such formal matters as keeping the Sabbath and taking the Lord's name in vain, but looks for ways of excusing offenses that cannot be prevented and concern only the participants.

John's non-religious cousin and deputy, Counsel, identifies with the biblical character Job, whom God allows to be destroyed by Satan as a test of his faithfulness, then restores his wealth and adds to it. Slaves, who every Sunday hear preaching about how only obedience to their master will bring them into heaven, are shown to be divided on how they view God. Some accept the "party line," others are troubled over how God

could allow blacks to own blacks, others give little or no thought to the white man's religion. Two white clergymen are portrayed as not only ineffectual ministers but profoundly wicked people, unaffected by the words they preach.

Race

The Known World is a novel about race. Whites own blacks, which they consider subhuman property, and yet on several occasions cross-racial ties of love and concern are formed. Blacks also own other blacks, and console themselves that this abomination is legal in terms both of human and divine law. Blacks, free and slave, share prejudice about the intensity of skin color. Lighter skin is preferable to darker, and it is realized how shameful it would be for white people to learn this nasty secret. Teacher Fern Elston is central to the theme. Fern hates white people and rarely talks with them, but also hates dark-skinned, rough-handed field slaves and would not marry one. Like her siblings and cousins, Fern could pass for white and blend into society, but does not. Her light-skinned husband has non-white features and even in the North they would be persecuted and he would probably be lynched.

A second focus of this theme is William Robbins. He mentors his slave Henry and loves him. He has fathered children with a slave woman and abandoned them, and with a second one visits them openly and regularly. He is amazed how he can love these black people so completely. A third focus is pious Sheriff John Skiffington, who tries to treat blacks civilly and fairly, but when a toothache torments him, he falls into calling poor, kind widowed Mildred "nigger," and demanding that she not dare oppose him as a lawman, but also as a white man. The slaves in general are shown as resentful and submissive. The three escapees to Washington, D.C., are shown helping fellow black runaways get a start on freedom on the eve of the Civil War, and Stamford and wife Delphie are followed a decade after Emancipation, forming the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans. Stamford is shown forcing himself to appreciate freedom, even though illegal discrimination continues to limit it.

Slavery

Slavery is one of the primary ideas explored in *The Known World: A Novel*. It is an accepted norm in the book, rarely challenged. The book is set in a fictional but realistic Virginia county in the antebellum South, where both whites and free blacks own slaves. However, white slave owners generally wield more power than their free black counterparts. William Robbins and Robert Colfax are the two richest, most prominent white slave owners. Robbins, especially, is seen as a community leader who, for example, controls who is sheriff—he forces out Gilly Patterson in favor of John Skiffington—and can ensure patrollers will not bother certain free blacks—one complaint to Robbins about the patrollers' behavior ensures Fern is never bothered by them again. Some poor whites also own at least one slave.

What makes *The Known World's* exploration of slavery unusual is its focus on free blacks who own slaves. Before his unexpected death at the age of thirty-one, Henry Townsend had a number of slaves and an expanding plantation. Henry had been born a slave but his father, Augustus, worked to buy his freedom as he had purchased his own as well as his wife's. After Henry's death, his free black widow, Caldonia, continues to run the plantation and keep the family's slaves. Other free blacks in the novel also own slaves, including Caldonia's mother, Maude, who secretly poisoned her husband rather than allow him to free their slaves, and Caldonia's teacher and friend, Fern. While Moses finds being owned by a fellow black man unusual at first, few free blacks question this situation. Only Henry's parents raise a significant objection. Augustus beats his son when Henry tells him that he bought Moses, and he refuses to stay in his son's house or allow his wife to do so the few times Augustus and his wife visit Henry's plantation.

Racial Tensions

Though the institution of slavery is generally accepted in Manchester County, there are significant racial tensions between whites and blacks as well as between certain blacks. For example, though Sheriff John Skiffington tries to enforce the law fairly for both blacks and whites, many of the men who work for him do not share this approach. Patrollers like Harvey Travis resent all blacks, especially free ones, and unfairly harass them. Harvey eats the papers that state Augustus is free and then sells the free black man back into slavery. Harvey has the help of Oden Peoples, though Barnum Kinsey is uncomfortable with the action. Even the sheriff's cousin, deputy sheriff Counsel, does not care when Mildred reports that her husband is missing. John only learns of the situation with Augustus when Barnum's conscience bothers him enough, though he tells the sheriff, "don't put me on the nigger side."

There is also tension between free blacks and enslaved blacks. Moses finds it simply odd to be owned by another black man at first, but the situation grows more tense when Henry changes his attitude toward him after William Robbins finds them wrestling in Henry's partially completed house. Robbins tells Henry how he should treat someone he owns if he wants to be in control, and Henry changes his behavior accordingly. While Calvin tries to treat his sister's slaves with care and dignity, his mother looks at them as her daughter's "legacy." Caldonia also cares about her slaves, but she comes in conflict with Moses after they become physically intimate. Moses believes that Caldonia will free him and perhaps marry him, putting him in charge of the plantation. These hopes are dashed by Caldonia, who wonders about the legality of their relationship at one point. Moses responds to the rejection by running away, creating havoc for Caldonia, the plantation, and the community.

Interpersonal Relationships

Underscoring much of the plot in *The Known World* is an emphasis on the importance of familial and interpersonal relationships, sometimes across racial lines. Though Caldonia

is sometimes in conflict with her difficult mother, Maude and Caldonia's twin brother are supportive after Caldonia is widowed. They stay with her for a long time, though Calvin remains longer than their mother. As close as Caldonia is to her family, her bond with Fern, her friend and former teacher, goes even further. Fern is in the room with Caldonia when Henry dies and stays with Caldonia longer than Maude and Calvin. Fern does all she can to support Caldonia.

Even though Augustus and Mildred take issue with Henry's decision to become a slave owner, they also come to the plantation every time he is sick. They love their son. Augustus worked tirelessly to buy himself, his wife, and his son out of slavery from William Robbins. Augustus even smuggled Rita, Henry's caretaker on Robbins's plantation after his parents were free, out of slavery for Henry's sake, though Augustus did not want to take the risk. Many of the slaves on the Townsend plantation watch out for one another, even when in conflict with each other. Though Celeste has reason to hate Moses—he forced her to work when she was ill and six months pregnant, resulting in the loss of the child—she tries to give him food when he locks himself in his cabin after Caldonia's rejection before he runs away.

One of the more unusual interpersonal relationships in the book is between Robbins and Henry. Robbins treats Henry like a son, similar to the way he treats Dora and Louis, his beloved children by his former slave Philomena. While Henry is still on his plantation as a slave, Robbins finds him to be intelligent and an extremely reliable groom. Robbins also gives him a trade by having another slave teach him how to make shoes and boots. After Augustus buys Henry's freedom, Henry sometimes returns to the plantation to make shoes and boots for Robbins's white guests. Such visits concern Henry's parents, but they do not stop him from going. Robbins goes on to teach Henry about finance, helps him buy his first slave, sells him his first piece of land, and stands up for him as necessary. Henry and Robbins are as close as a son and father, a relationship that emphasizes the complexities of race relations in Jones's novel.

Love Relationships

Like family and interpersonal relationships, there are many types of love relationships in *The Known World*, some of which are not as reliable as those between family and friends. Fern has a difficult marriage to a gambler named Ramsey, who is often gone on gambling sprees. She learns that he has probably cheated on her, though she remained faithful. Caldonia looks for comfort in the words and arms of Moses after her beloved Henry's death, though she will not allow the relationship to go beyond physical intimacy. Her brother Calvin is in love with Louis, but Calvin knows that Louis will not return his feelings and does not even try to have a relationship with him. Moses arranges for his wife and son to escape with Alice so that he can be free for Caldonia. While Robbins loves Philomena more than he loves his white wife and gives her much in the way of financial support, he also physically abuses her when she runs away to Richmond with their children. Not all love relationships are unhappy in the novel: Augustus and Mildred have a solid marriage. While John lusts for Minerva, he is faithful to Winifred until his death. Elias and Celeste also have a genuine, loving relationship. All of these love

relationships show the depth and breadth of feelings, and ultimately the humanity of all involved.

Style

Point of View

The Known World is narrated in the third person, past tense by someone who appears not to be related to any of the characters, but is privy to their innermost thoughts. The narrator, whose motivations for telling the story are never revealed, also appears to possess historical records thought to have been destroyed in a fire, in a desire to explain life and society before the Civil War, and in particular examine the oddity of blacks owning blacks. There is a curious intensity to the narration, however, and the narrator often jumps forward to tell how fate will deal with some minor character, or back to why or how some situation came to pass. The choppy narration is clearly intentional, meant to heighten the sense that the narrator is urgent and earnest about the way things were in rural Virginia before the Civil War, that the episodes resist a more disciplined telling. The perspective shifts only once, at the very end of the novel, as Calvin sends a first-person letter to his sister, summarizing and dramatizing the fate of the three runaway slaves.

Setting

The Known World is set in Manchester County, Virginia, during the summer of 1855, from when Henry Townsend dies in July until harvest time when five of his slaves disappear and one of them, the overseer Moses, is apprehended. The narrator looks backward to chronicle the main characters' development, all in Manchester County, and follows two characters on travels elsewhere in the South. White Counsel Skiffington flees North Carolina, where he burned down his smallpox infested plantation and wanders through the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, providing several glimpses of life there. Black free man Augustus Townsend, sold back into slavery, is carted south through the Carolinas and Georgia, and sold on the Florida border. Glimpses of his experience are also given.

Finally, the novel shifts to Washington, D.C., on the eve of the Civil War, to show four of the Manchester County natives surprisingly flourishing in the big city. The narrator jumps decades forward several times to reveal how characters and their descendants will fare, but these scenes are incidental to the story.

Language and Meaning

The Known World is told in standard American English, often in complex and convoluted sentences and paragraphs, and rich physical descriptions. References to events past and future are frequent, and details build very gradually, episodically, and sometimes confusingly. It appears the confusion is intentional on the author's part. Dialogue, both mental and spoken, is authentically Southern, and there is no attempt at avoiding the racist terms that would have been in use at the time. These are so blatant it can make

for uncomfortable reading in an era of political correctness. Doubtless the black author, Edward P. Jones, intends it to be uncomfortable. Nineteenth-century euphemism when discussing sexual matter such as masturbation and homosexuality is scrupulously observed, reducing the suspicion that these scenes might be anachronisms. Allusions to the bible are frequent, some explicit (Sodom, Job) and others implicit (Abram leaving Ur for Palestine, the exodus from Egypt). References to Shakespeare, Milton, and Thomas Gray make clear the major characters are literate and well read.

Structure

The Known World is divided into twelve numbered chapters, each bearing the kind of summaries common in nineteenth-century novels. These are quoted in the chapter analyses above. The primary story line moves linearly forward from Henry Townsend's deathbed, through the breakdown of order on his plantation, to the capture of his former overseer, Moses, and his hobbling, lest he ever try again to escape. Flashbacks are used to provide context throughout the novel, but more important and striking are leaps forward to suggest something major (or minor) that will happen. Most of these are later developed fully, but are sometimes left intentionally hanging. Major threads are: 1) Henry's growing years, freedom, estate building, and premature death; 2) Fern Elston's teaching career, troubled marriage, and interview with a Canadian pamphleteer, used to reveal dirty secrets of black society; 3) Moses's career as overseer, would-be master, and hunted fugitive; 4) Augustus Townsend's career as slave, skilled free man, and kidnap victim; 5) Sheriff John Skiffington's mediocre career as sheriff; and 5) Deputy Counsel Skiffington's journey from haughty rich farmer to penniless wanderer to cold-blooded murderer. Only rarely is an entire chapter devoted exclusively to a single string. Like Alice Night's two works of monumental art described in the final pages, *The Known World* is a complex and richly detailed tapestry of antebellum plantation life.

Nonlinear Plot

The Known World features a nonlinear plot: The action in the book does not move in a straightforward, chronological fashion. Instead, it moves back and forth in time and between the stories of different people, linking the events with common characters and situations. The primary plot focuses on the death of Henry Townsend and both its short-term and long-term effects on his family, slaves, and community. Woven around this primary plot are the backgrounds of Henry and his family as well as other characters such as Fern, John Skiffington, Winifred, and slaves such as Elias and Moses. Other stories are also included, such as the adventures of Counsel after his family and plantation are lost. The nonlinear plot creates drama and complexity as the action builds throughout the novel.

Digressions

Digressions are sprinkled liberally throughout *The Known World*. They are stories or episodes that are tangential to the primary action at hand. At the beginning of chapter 4, for example, Jones describes the background and motivation of Anderson Frazier, a white Canadian pamphlet writer who interviews Fern about blacks owning slaves, her friend Henry, and other matters in 1881, years after the novel's primary action takes place. Jones includes much information about Anderson, his life, and his writing, which has nothing to do with the novel's main story or his interview with Fern. Similarly, in chapter 2, Jones describes the life and background of Mary O'Donnell Conlon, the New York woman who opens the crate hiding Rita among Augustus's walking sticks. Other tangents provide more specific information on what happens to characters after the end of the novel. In chapter 6, Jones reveals that Stamford eventually marries Delphie and starts his own orphanage. One of his great-granddaughters even gets a street name changed to honor him and his wife in the late 1980s. Such digressions enrich Jones's novel while tying up loose ends.

Epilogue

At the end of *The Known World*, Jones includes a postscript that acts as an epilogue. The epilogue is the closing section of a novel or play that often answers some of the questions left unanswered by the novel's end. Jones's epilogue centers around a letter written by Calvin to Caldonia, which reveals the fate of Priscilla and Alice. Readers also learn that Moses stayed on the plantation until his death.

Diction in Dialogue

The dialogue in Jones's novel often reflects a colloquial diction: The arrangement and use of words in the dialogue reflect the every day speech of the time, place, and person in the story. Educated characters such as John, Caldonia, Fern, and Robbins generally speak in clear, correct English. Robbins tells Elias upon his capture, "I know Henry Townsend and if I have to pay for a dead one, then that is what I will do. Come here." Colloquial phrasing, however, are still a part of their speech. Talking to Caldonia one night, Henry tells her "I'm tryin…. I spect I'll have the full armor by day after tomorrow." Less educated characters, such as the patrollers and the slaves, speak with even more of a colloquial touch. At one point, Priscilla tells Moses, "You best tell her bout Stamford." Writing the dialogue this way adds to a historical novel's authenticity.

Historical Context

Though much of the historical data (such as census records), facts (such as the burning of a courthouse in 1912), and academic reports, as well as the county of Manchester, were created by Jones, the basic premise of the book is based in truth: Some free blacks did own other blacks as slaves in pre-Civil War America. In 1830, census figures show that free blacks owned slaves in at least four states: Louisiana, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia. These free blacks owned at least 10,000 slaves in total, with most concentrated in Louisiana. Thirty years later, while the vast majority of the approximately 385,000 people identified as slave owners were white, free blacks continued to own slaves. In the states where slavery was legal in 1860, there were about four million black people, and only about 270,000 were free.

Some of the free blacks who were listed as owning slaves actually had purchased a family member such as a spouse or a child. For legal or other reasons, such owners were unable to free the family member whose freedom they purchased. In *The Known World*, for example, Augustus purchases the freedom of his wife Mildred and his son Henry, but they are legally his slaves. Concerning Henry, Jones writes, "people in Manchester County just failed to remember that Henry, in fact, was listed forever in the records of Manchester as his father's property."

Other free blacks owned slaves who were unrelated to them and used as workers. For example, in South Carolina in 1830, it was estimated that about 25 percent of all free blacks who owned slaves possessed at least ten slaves. There were eight who owned more than thirty slaves, including Justus Angel and Mistress L. Horry. Angel and Horry each owned eighty-four slaves in 1830. Another example can be found in New Orleans, Louisiana, where over ten thousand free blacks lived. About three thousand of these free blacks were slave owners.

Like their white counterparts, the vast majority of free black slave owners owned fewer than five slaves. In South Carolina in 1860, there were 125 free blacks who owned slaves, but only six owned more than ten. William Ellison owned more slaves than any other free black man in South Carolina in 1860. Ellison was born into slavery with the name of April but, like Henry Townsend, learned some trades and bookkeeping. He was freed by his white master, also known as William Ellison, at the age of twenty-six, and he became a significant slave and land owner who made a fortune manufacturing cotton gins and breeding slaves.

Free blacks owned slaves in other states as well just before the Civil War began, including Virginia, where several hundred free blacks owned land and other property. Some of them owned slaves, though they had once been slaves themselves. One such person was Gilbert Hunt. A former slave, Hunt lived in Richmond, worked as a blacksmith, and owned two slaves. In 1860 in Louisiana, at least six free blacks owned more than sixty-five slaves. The owners of a sugar cane plantation, a widow named C. Richards and her son P. C., owned 152 slaves, the most in the state. Another free black

man with a significant sugar cane operation, Antoine Dubuclet, also owned more than one hundred slaves.

Some free blacks even became voluntarily enslaved. In a biography of William Ellison, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*, authors Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roak claim that there were several examples of free blacks going to court to be allowed to become slaves again. Such free blacks made this choice primarily because of their difficulty providing for themselves.

Critical Overview

In general, *The Known World* was lauded as an extraordinary novel when published in 2003. Critics praised Jones's subject matter and the way in which he handled it, as well as his characterizations, prose, and the way he paced and constructed the story. Calling the novel "the best new work of American fiction to cross my desk in years," Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post* went on to state, "*The Known World* ventures into previously uncovered places and shines a light on them that is at once blindingly bright and surpassingly warm."

A number of critics admired how Jones drew his characters and interlinked their stories. For example, Conger Beasley, Jr., of the *National Catholic Reporter* commented, "where Jones really succeeds is in the depiction of character, the interaction between the myriad figures—black-white, black-black, white-white—who populate this excruciating world." Writing in the *Black Issues Book Review*, Carroll Parrott Blue asserted, "Jones's characters, whether slave, worker, woman, child or owner, are engaged in an individual quest for freedom. Jones's brilliance as a writer stems in part from his proportioned sense of each individual's struggle."

Though *The Known World* is complex, many critics believe that Jones succeeded at balancing the many threads of his story. In *Time*, Lev Grossman wrote, "*The Known World* is a glorious, enthralling, tangled root ball of a book—but always returning to the story's tragic core."

Some critics took issue with the novel's convoluted stories and characterizations. The critic in *Kirkus Reviews* commented, "The first hundred pages are daunting, as the reader struggles to sort out initially glimpsed characters and absorb Jones's handling of historical background information." Echoing this sentiment, Trudier Harris-Lopez of *Crisis* found the novel bogged down and believes at least one hundred pages could be cut from the text. Harris-Lopez also stated, "All the things I found engaging about the novel were subsumed by the exasperation of having to go through so much detail about minor characters." While Susannah Meadows of *Newsweek* praised Jones's storytelling, she also wrote, "The human mystery that drives the narrative is the question of how a freed man could own another, and Jones never quite solves the puzzle of Henry's odd spiritual kinship with his former master."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Petrusso is a freelance writer with degrees in history and screenwriting. In this essay, Petrusso examines the female characters in the novel, comparing the varying degrees of power they wield.

In an interview about *The Known World: A Novel* with Sarah Anne Johnson of *The Writer*, Edward P. Jones had the following to say about the "dynamic women" in his book:

There are such women nowadays, and these women can't be the first ones. There must've been women like that before. I'm not doing anything extraordinary with them. I don't have some woman running for the Senate in Virginia in 1855—that would be ridiculous. You have women who, within the scheme of things, are able to stand up and assert themselves.

Jones goes on to point out that Fern "knows that she has a certain power" because she taught the children of William Robbins, the leading white citizen, landowner, and slave owner in Manchester County. Specifically, Fern is able to put the white men who work as patrollers in their place after just one incident of harassment because of her connection to Robbins, who takes care of the matter for her. Fern is not the only female character who has power and uses it in some significant way in the novel. Other characters—Caldonia, Maude, Philomena, Dora, Alice, Loretta, Gloria, Minerva, Mildred, Winifred, and even Patience and Ethel Robbins—display at least some independent sense of self. None become passive victims of their circumstances but assert varying, and sometimes surprising, amounts of influence considering the time and place of the novel. Though they must all struggle with the effects of male domination, their strength allows them some amount of control over their own destinies in certain circumstances.

Arguably the most powerful woman in *The Known World* is Fern, and not simply because she can count on Robbins to right race-related wrongs for her. Fern chooses to live as a free black when she could pass for white, as other members of her family do. She could walk away from her life as a free black woman if she so chose, an option few others in the novel possess. Even living as a free black, Fern still has power because she is educated and has passed on that education to other free blacks, such as Louis and Dora Cartwright and Caldonia and her twin brother Calvin, as their teacher. Her position gives her status in the community and a following she could potentially draw on if she desired. In addition, Fern owns a house and slaves.

However, like every powerful person in *The Known World* (and the world itself), Fern has an Achilles heel. She is married to Ramsey Elston, a free black man who leaves her when he goes on gambling and drinking sprees. While, Fern remains loyal to him, even to the point of not bathing while he is gone as he desires, her loyalty does have limits. Fern's world becomes unstable when she learns from Jebediah that her husband has been unfaithful to her in Richmond. But because the novel moves around in time,

readers learn that Fern overcomes this problem, marries other men, and retains her property and influence. It is significant that the pamphlet writer Anderson Frazier seeks out Fern—not anyone else—in 1881 for information about the area, its people, and slavery. Fern is embodies authority, reason, and support to many, especially Caldonia.

Like Fern, Maude and Caldonia have power and influence as free blacks and slave owners. Maude is a formidable woman from a long line of free, though poor and non-slave owning, blacks. She marries a former slave, Tilmon Newman, who had bought his freedom. Later in their marriage, Maude convinces her husband to focus on building up their own family and financial circumstances, including purchasing slaves, instead of following through with his original plan to buy the freedom of his parents and two other family members. Those four people die while still enslaved. Maude goes as far as to murder her husband by poisoning him with arsenic rather than let him free the slaves he owns. Maude is enthralled with economic power, what she terms "legacy," and she plans to pass the slaves and wealth she has on to her son Calvin. Maude also exerts power over her son in another way. She forces him to care for her for many years while she is sick with a mysterious illness, even though she "really didn't like him anymore." With this power play, she manipulates him into accepting another kind of family legacy.

Maude tries to influence Caldonia in a different way. Maude's first concern when Henry dies is that Caldonia will be like her father and want to free her slaves, instead of embracing the economic power Henry's death gives her. Maude glosses over Caldonia's grief about Henry. The mother does not stay as long as Fern does when Caldonia needs her love and support. Yet Caldonia understands what she has inherited and the problems that go with it. As with Maude, Caldonia's power is primarily economic and is derived from owning the land and slaves that Henry left her, though she also is educated and can count on Robbins's support as needed because of the connection he had with Henry.

But Caldonia's sorrow over the unexpected death of her husband and inexperience as a slave owner lead to problems that undermine that power. She starts an ill-advised sexual relationship with her slave overseer, Moses, in an attempt to feel closer to Henry. Caldonia also does not manage her slaves as well as she could; six run away, and only Moses is caught and returned. Jones implies that the situation at the Townsend plantation stabilizes when Caldonia marries Louis Cartwright, Robbins's son with his former slave Philomena Cartwright.

Philomena and Dora Cartwright do not have the same kind of power as Fern, Maude, and Caldonia. While they are free black women, all of their power and prosperity comes directly from their relationship with Robbins, and thus has its limits. Philomena was a teenage slave whom Robbins bought from Robert Colfax, another rich white man in Manchester County, after seeing her at the Colfax plantation. Robbins soon begins a sexual relationship with Philomena and treats her more as his beloved mistress than slave. He moves Philomena off the plantation and into a house with a maid; he frees her and buys her mother, brother, and friend Sophie for her as she requests; and he has two children with her, Dora and Louis, whom he adores. Robbins also has Fern educate both of his children, spends time with them, and showers them with love and affection.

Yet Philomena is still in some sense enslaved to Robbins, as he has control over her life. Everything she has comes from Robbins, which keeps her from the one thing she desperately wants: a life elsewhere. For years before Philomena left the Colfax plantation, Sophie filled Philomena's head with ideas about the greatness of the city of Richmond, though she had never been there herself. After Philomena is living in her own home, she runs away to Richmond at least twice. When Philomena goes to Richmond with young Louis and Dora, Robbins beats her so severely when he finds her that she cannot eat as well on one side of her mouth for the rest of her life. Though there is no doubt of Robbins's intense feelings toward Philomena and Dora, they would have very little in the way of economic power or any other type of power without him.

In some ways, several of the slave women in *The Known World* have more power than the "free" Philomena. Alice, especially, knows how to create power in difficult circumstances. As Moses comes to realize, Alice's whole "crazy in the head" persona is fake. She was allegedly kicked in the head by a mule years earlier and has been eccentric ever since. Alice chants, sings, and dances seemingly without regard to time, place, or circumstance. Creating this persona allows her to roam around freely at night despite being enslaved. Patrollers learn to just avoid her for the most part, creating a limited freedom many slaves would envy. These skills also come in handy when Moses decides to rid himself of his family. Alice agrees to take Priscilla and Jamie and run away. Alice is able to get away in part because of what she has learned while acting insane. The situation ends in economic prosperity and power for her as Alice and Priscilla are owners of a hotel for blacks in Washington, D.C.

While slaves like Loretta, Gloria, and Minerva also have some power, it is much narrower. Loretta is a house slave, the long-time maid to Caldonia, but she is more of a companion than anything else. Loretta has one powerful moment when Moses gets angery when he learns that Caldonia does not intend to free him or marry him. It is Loretta who gets the situation under control by holding a knife to his throat; Loretta's power extends to Moses's life at that moment. Gloria's power is more personal. She decides to end her relationship with Stamford and start a relationship with Clement. The men get into a fight over her, evidence of the power a woman can have over men. With Clement, Gloria eventually successfully escapes the Townsend plantation.

For a slave, Minerva has as an ideal situation as possible. She is treated not like a slave but kind of like a beloved thing—daughter or pet—by the Skiffingtons. They do not want to own slaves, but the child Minerva is thrust upon them as a gift. The couple does not want to sell her and risk what could happen to her, but they do not free her either. Minerva does not really do any work that would not be considered chores by any other child, has her own room, and receives an education. This kind of power is derived from the Skiffingtons' choices, not Minerva's own, but it is significant nonetheless. Minerva's own power comes in young adulthood when Winifred takes her to Philadelphia after John Skiffington dies. Minerva asserts her personal power by becoming involved with a man and choosing not to respond to Winifred's attempts to find her because a phrase on the "missing person" sign offends her. Minerva chooses who she wants to be at that moment: a truly free individual.

The last four significant female characters—Mildred, Winifred, and Patience and Ethel Robbins—paradoxically have the least amount of power when it seems that should have the most influence and freedom. Mildred is technically owned by her husband because he bought her from Robbins. She exists in support of others, primarily Augustus. Mildred follows Augustus's lead, even when she does not agree with him. She is willing to stay in the main house and not a slave cabin after her son's death, but Augustus will not. When Augustus is sold to a slave trader, Counsel dismisses her concerns. Mildred has to depend on others to get the sheriff's attention. Mildred's most powerful moment is when she successfully hides Moses from the sheriff, showing she has fortitude. It is not until Skiffington accidentally shoots and kills her that Moses's true location is discovered.

The white women in *The Known World* have less power than any other female characters in the book, even less than a number of the slaves. Winifred, Ethel, and Patience are trapped by their circumstances. While Winifred is a Northerner with Quaker leanings, her anti-slavery views are compromised by the wedding gift of Minerva. She eventually loses Minerva because of what living in the South has done to her way of thinking. Winifred has some power in her marriage, but it is limited. Ethel has it even worse: Her husband loves one his former slaves more than he loves her. Ethel is able to retain some semblance of social standing because her husband does not physically leave her, divorce her, or throw her out. However, all Ethel is left with is bitterness and a wing in Robbins's home to which she can retreat as needed, trappings of power from a lost life. Patience loves and is still loved by her father, which does give her more power than her mother, yet even her father admits her education is inferior to that of her half-siblings.

Jones's depiction of women in *The Known World* is as varied and complex as the novel itself. While the male characters lust for and grasp at power in many different ways, Jones's female characters display a more subtle approach to control and influence in their lives and circumstances. In some ways, their power comes from the fact that the novel focuses as much on them as it does on their male counterparts. They are an essential part of a stunning novel.

Lost in the City (1992) is Jones's first book. This collection of short stories explores the lives of African Americans in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (1971), by Ernest J. Gaines, is a fictional autobiography of a woman who began life as a slave and dies many years later as a free woman.

Roots (1976), by Alex Haley, explores seven generations of the author's own real-life family, beginning with his ancestor Kunta Kinte, who is captured by slave traders in his native Gambia and forced into slavery in the United States.

Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790–1860 (1995), by Larry Koger, is a historical account of free black slave owners in a southern state in pre-Civil War America.

Source: A. Petrusso, Critical Essay on *The Known World: A Novel*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Graham explores the literary heritage of The Known World *and discusses its innovative plot and techniques*.

Revisiting the slave narrative has become a seemingly obligatory rite of passage for contemporary African-American novelists. This compulsion has been most fortunate for American literature: novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* represent some of the finest works by those or any other late twentieth-century writers. To that august catalog must now be added *The Known World*, the astonishing debut novel from Edward P. Jones, which recently won the 2003 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

Early reviews of *The Known World* have justifiably emphasized the unusual twist Jones gives to the typical slave narrative by illuminating a largely overlooked aspect of U.S. slavery: free blacks who owned slaves. The novel opens with the death of Henry Townsend, and then gradually fills in the back story of how Henry became a man of substantial property, including many slaves, much to the disapproval of his father Augustus, who had bought his son out of slavery when Henry was a teenager. Jones adeptly uses the relationships between masters and slaves to dispel any reductive black-versus-white readings of antebellum American history and to expose the complex dynamics of freedom and domination, wealth and poverty that underlay the hierarchies of power in Virginia in the 1840s and 1850s. For example, William Robbins, the wealthiest and most powerful man in the county, enjoys an almost paternal relationship with his former slave Henry and half-openly acknowledges and provides for the children of one of his slaves as his own. Of the three patrollers profiled in the novel, the mean-spirited Harvey Travis is married to a Cherokee woman whom he bought out of slavery; Oden Peoples, himself a Cherokee, owns a few slaves but "wasn't as white as he always thought he was"; and Barnum Kinsey owns no land and no slaves and thus is, "in the eyes of that world, little more than a nigger." Fern Elston, who teaches free black children, is fair-skinned enough to easily pass for white, but chooses not to do so, though she owns several slaves over the course of the novel.

As the reader may have gathered from this barrage of character names, *The Known World* is far more than just a story about slave-owning free blacks: It is a portrait of virtually the entire population of Manchester County, Virginia—from field slaves to plantation owners—over the course of several generations. The novel offers a metaphor for itself in the last chapter, when Henry Townsend's brother-in-law Calvin Newman stays in a hotel in Washington, D.C., and sees hanging there a work of art created by fugitive slave Alice Night: "a grand piece of art that is part tapestry, part painting, and part clay structure … [It is] a kind of map of life of the County of Manchester, Virginia."

The tropes of maps and map-making are central to Jones's novel. The book derives its title from the legend "The Known World" inscribed above a sixteenth century world map that Sheriff John Skiffington hangs on the wall of the jail: "The land of North America on

the map was smaller than it was in actuality, and where Florida should have been, there was nothing. South America seemed the right size, but it alone of the two continents was called 'America.'" The image suggests that the geographies of power in the U.S. are still being explored and surveyed, and hints at the complexities of such a project. But mapping takes on a more literal importance in the novel as well: Alice Night, the narrator tells us, "mapped her way again and again through the night." By faking brain damage after being kicked in the head by a mule many years before, Alice is able to roam about the countryside freely at night, unmolested by the patrollers who long ago tired of hauling a crazy slave woman back to the Townsend farm. This knowledge of the world beyond her master's property ultimately enables her to make her way to freedom in the North.

Navigating *The Known World* requires a fair bit of map-making on the reader's own part. In addition to presenting a huge cast of characters, the narrative also moves erratically through time, perhaps validating the views of one white slave-owner that "Time has no meaning anymore…. The world is turning upside down." One of Jones's characteristic devices is the flash-forward to events far beyond the focus of the novel. For instance, after describing the infant slave Ellwood playing with his mother, the crippled field hand Celeste, the narrator suddenly tells us what Ellwood will be doing in twenty years, and then informs us that "In 1993 the University of Virginia Press would publish a 415-page book by a white woman, Marina Shia, documenting that every ninety-seventh person in the Commonwealth of Virginia was kin, by blood or by marriage, to the line that started with Celeste and Elias Freemen." The fact that such citations are entirely fictional is irrelevant to the connections these flash-forwards suggest between America's Slave-holding past and its race-divided present.

The Known World implicitly acknowledges the impossibility of ever fully conveying the intense brutality of slavery. Thus, when the narrative encounters the inevitable scenes of horrifying violence, the descriptions tend to be understated and oblique. Yet with the accumulated effect of multiple intensely violent incidents, the reader's discomfort is only compounded by the casualness and lack of affect with which these scenes are presented; that discomfort is compounded further by the sympathy the narrator establishes for many of the authorities and slave-owners, white and black, who participate in the system that condones and relies on such violence. Jones has tackled U.S. slavery in all its complexities and shades of gray. In rendering for us such a multi-faceted view of our history, he has created perhaps the first American classic of the twenty-first century.

Source: Shane Graham, "*The Known World* by Edward P. Jones," in the *Texas Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3/4, Fall/Winter 2004, pp. 156-58.

Critical Essay #3

In the following interview, Jones talks to Publishers Weekly *about the literature that inspired him to write, as well as how he developed the idea for* The Known World.

PW: How did you get the idea for a historical novel, *The Known World*, after writing a contemporary work, *Lost in the City*?

Edward P. Jones: The seeds for *The Known World* were planted over 10 years ago. When I started writing the book in 2000, I had about 26 pages of chapter one done and a few pages of the section where the sheriff realizes he might know where Moses is hiding. In a certain way, I didn't know it would be a full-length book, but I stuck with it. The story carried me along with it.

PW: How did you get the idea to use a black man as a slave owner to address some of the ironies of slavery as an institution?

EPJ: That idea was what kept me interested in this project. I guess the real beginning of that choice grew from my reading of a small book about a Jew who had joined the Nazis during World War II. In college, I came across a book which spoke of blacks having slaves, and it was a shock, just the idea of it.

PW: How can one become an owner of human beings without suffering the corruption of the soul and spirit?

EPJ: I developed that idea once I did the revisions. It all came out then. You know, once you cross that line, you are the same as the others, no matter what race you are. No matter how much good you want to do, once you step over that line, into the role of master, you become the very thing you despise. You are subjugating other human beings.

PW: What inspired you to become a writer?

EPJ: I always loved reading. When I started reading black writers, I discovered two books that had a great impact on me: Ethel Waters's *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. I felt as if they were talking to me, since both books had people in them that I knew in my own life. I was shocked to learn black people could write such things. A memorable moment for me occurred when I finished Ellison's *Invisible Man*, turned it over and saw the picture of the author. I was amazed that a black man had written something like this.

PW: Getting back to your new novel, why did you include vignettes about the brutality of slavery?

EPJ: To highlight the inhumanity of the whole situation of slavery. I didn't want to preach. It was my goal to be objective, to not put a lot of emotion into this, to show it all in a

matter-of-fact manner. But still I knew I was singing to the choir. In a case like this, you don't raise your voice, you just state the case and that is more than enough.

PW: How much research did you do?

EPJ: Doing too much research can get in the way of a novel. Since 1992, [I've been] reading books on slavery, but at some point, I decided I'd absorbed enough and trusted what I had in my head about the characters and their world.

PW: At the book's core, you are saying something significant about the will to survive.

EPJ: I was trying to find out how these people survived in these horrifying conditions. I think one way the slaves survived was through the strength of their families. In many ways, we are facing the same problem: the unraveling and destruction of our families and the consequences of that. Families indicate we have a love for something beyond ourselves and that is the key to our survival.

PW: What do you think of some of the current popular trends in African-American literature?

EPJ: I refuse to write about ignorance, despair and weakness, [or] about people going to clubs and doing dumb things. I don't want to write about "you go, girl" people. I want to write about the things which helped us to survive: the love, grace, intelligence and strength of us as a people.

Source: Robert Fleming, "Just Stating the Case Is 'More Than Enough,'" in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 250, No. 32, August 11, 2003, p. 254.

Quotes

"That Sunday Augustus pushed Henry, the three of them ate, once again, in silence.

"The next Sunday Robbins was waiting. 'I heard you did something to my boy, to my property,' he said before Augustus and Mildred were down from the wagon. '"No, Mr. Robbins. I did nothing,' Augustus said, having forgotten the push. '"We wouldn't,' Mildred said. 'We wouldn't hurt him for the world. He our son.' "Robbins looked at her as if she had told him the day was Wednesday. 'I won't have you touching my boy, my property.' His horse, Sir Guilderham, was idling two or so paces behind his master. And just as the horse began to wander away, Robbins turned and picked up the reins, mounted. 'No more visits for a month,' he said, picking one piece of lint from the horse's ear. '"Please, Mr. Robbins,' Mildred said. Freedom had allowed her not to call him 'Master' any more. 'We come all this way.' '"I don't care,' Robbins said. 'It'll take all of a month for him to heal from what you did, Augustus.'" Chapter 1, pgs. 19-20.

"As long as Skiffington and Winifred lived within the light that came from God's law, from the Bible, nothing on earth, not even his duty as a sheriff to the Caesars, could deny them the kingdom of God. 'We will not own slaves,' Skiffington promised God, and he promised each morning he went to his knees to pray. Though everyone in the country saw Minerva the wedding present as their property, the Skiffingtons did not feel that they owned her, not in the way whites and a few blacks owned slaves. Minerva was not free, but only in the way a child in a family is not free." Chapter 2, pg. 43.

"It was said by many a slave that a servant's feeling about a master could be discerned on any given day by whether the slave called him 'Master,' 'Marse,' or 'Massa.' 'Marse' could sound like a curse if the right woman said it in just the right way." Chapter 3, pg. 59.

'"It ain't that small, Caldonia. It's a bad apple in the barrel, right down at the bottom, not even at the top where you can pick it and throw it away. Something gots to be done,' he said. Sometimes he talked the way Fern had tried to teach him and sometimes he did not. He was especially 'deviant and lazy,' as she called it, when he was tired and uncertain. Caldonia sensed the exhaustion now and went to him, putting her arms around his back." Chapter 3, pg. 89.

"Augustus Townsend would have preferred that his son have nothing to do with the past, aside from visiting his slave friends at the Robbins plantation, and he certainly would have preferred he have nothing to do with the white man who had once owned him. But Mildred made him see that the bigger Henry could make the world he lived in, the freer he would be. 'Them free papers he carry with him all over the place don't carry anough freedom,' she said to her husband. With slavery behind him, she wanted her son to go about and see what had always been denied him. That it was often Robbins who took him about was a small price for them, and, besides, he was the one who had limited his world in the first place. 'All this takin him about is just redeemin hisself in God's eyes,' Mildred said." Chapter 4, pg. 113.

"'No, Papa. I got my own man. I bought my own man. Bought him cheap from Master Robbins. Moses.' The pie had made him drowsy and he was thinking how good it would be to go upstairs and fall asleep. 'He a good worker. Lotta years in him. And Mr. Robbins lend me the rest of the men for the work.' "Mildred and Augustus looked at each other and Mildred lowered her head. "Augustus stood up so quickly his chair tilted back and he reached around to catch it without taking his eyes from Henry. 'You mean tell me you bought a man and he yours now? You done bought him and you didn't free that man? You *own* a man, Henry?' "'Yes. Well, yes, Papa,' Henry looked from his father to his mother. "Mildred stood up, too. 'Henry, why?' she said." Chapter 4, pgs. 136-137.

"So she was a daughter and yet not a daughter. She was Minerva. Simply their Minerva. 'Minerva, come here.' 'Minerva, how does this taste?' 'Minerva, I'll get the cloth for your dress when I come home from the jail.' 'Minerva, what would I do without you?' To the white people in Manchester County, she was a kind of pet. 'That's the sheriff's Minerva.' 'That's Mrs. Skiffington's Minerva.' And everyone was happy with all of it. As for Minerva, she had known nothing else. 'You done growed,' Minerva's sister was to say years later in Philadelphia." Chapter 5, pg. 166.

"It seemed to Loretta that Maude rose each and every morning with the heat under her blood and a sword in both hands, and even her own children had to make known their loyalty to her all over again. Mistresses like that could be far more brutal on a slave, whether she owned the slave or not, and would do everything to separate a nosy slave from what little life she was used to." Chapter 6, pg. 182.

"He stood there a very long time, and the longer he stood, the more he sank. All the heart he had for living in the world began to leave him. He could feel the life running down his chest, his arms and legs, doing something for the ground that it had never been able to do for him. If God had asked him if he was ready right then, there would have been only one answer: 'Just take me on home. Or spit me down to hell, I don't care anymore. Just take me away from this.'" Chapter 5, pg. 200.

"As far as anyone could remember, there had never been a colored man in the Manchester County jail. None of them, free or slave, had ever done anything to warrant a stay. The free men in Manchester knew the tenuousness of their lives and always endeavored to be upstanding; they knew they were slaves with just another title. Most crimes and misdemeanors were dealt with by their masters; they could even hang a slave if he killed another slave, but that would have been like throwing money down a well after the slave had already thrown the first load of money down, as William Robbins once told Skiffington." Chapter 8, pgs. 251-252.

"He turned on Augustus and poked him in the chest with two of his fingers. 'What is the gallumpin about you, nigger? You ain't no more def and dumb than Stennis is. What is the gallumpin?' Augustus said nothing. 'You done lost your hearin here in south Carolina, that it? Lost your tongue, too, huh? What did you lose in North Carolina? Your pecker? And Virginia, your brain, what little there is of it? And what it gonna be in Georgia? Your arms? And then your legs in Alabama and Mississippi, if we git that far? Just wastin away with every state we come to. That it?'" Chapter 9, pg. 278.

"'I told you to stop. All I wanted was for you to stop.' "Augustus was on his back and he looked up at the man and at the boys. He didn't look at the girls and the woman with the baby because by the time they got there his eyes were closed, which helped with the pain. "'I told you to stop, dammit! Nigger, all I wanted was for you to stop.' "Augustus heard him and he wanted to say that that was the biggest lie he had ever heard in his life, but he was dying and words were precious." Chapter 11, pg. 346.

"Stamford that day would realize for the fist time just how far they had come. He would have cried as he had that day after the ground opened up and took the dead crows, but he had in his arms a baby new to being an orphan. Stamford, it don't matter now, he told himself, watching Ellwood and the horse saunter away. It don't matter now. The day and the sun all abou thim told that was true. It mattered not how long he had wandered in the wilderness, how long they had kept him in chains, how long he had helped them and kept himself in his own chains; none of that mattered now. He patted the baby's back, turned around and went back to the Richmond House for Colored Orphans. No, it did not matter. It mattered only that those kind of chains were gone and that he had crawled out into the clearing and was able to stand up on his hind legs and look around and appreciate the difference between then and now, even on the awful Richmond days when the now came dressed as the then." Chapter 11, pgs. 353-354.

Topics for Discussion

How moral is Henry's attitude about slavery, by antebellum standards?

How does William Robbins's morals and ethics match or conflict with by antebellum standards?

What does Moses mean by "meeting the mule" in the morning, when he challenges Elias in the evenings?

How are horses used in the novel?

What is Maude's function in the novel?

What is Fern's function in the novel?

What is Alice's function in the novel?

What is the function of the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans in the novel?

Why are Moses's solitary visits to the forest given so much emphasis?

How do you account for the intensity of hatred between Elias and Moses?

Do the discussions of insurance policies on slaves add or detract from the story?

Before the final scene in Washington, D.C., what did you think happened to Priscilla, Jamie, and Alice?

- There are several other books and poems, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Bible, mentioned or discussed in the text of the novel. Pick one of these texts and write a paper in which you discuss the relationship between the book or poem and the themes and/or action of *The Known World*.
- Divide the class into at least four groups. Each group should represent a primary group found in the novel—enslaved blacks, free blacks, poor whites, and white slave owners. Stage a debate in which each group discusses its role in the novel, addressing such issues such as power, social status, and self-image.
- Conduct research into the psychological effects of slavery on those enslaved as well as those who enslave others. Create a class presentation or write a paper in which you relate your findings to Jones's depiction of slaves owner, slaves, and the wider effects of slavery on the community in *The Known World*.
- Parent-child relationships are central to *The Known World*. These relationships are often markedly different from such relationships today. Write a paper in which you explore one set of relationships—perhaps between William Robbins and Louis and Dora Cartwright or Augustus, Mildred, and Henry Townsend—and compare them to your own experiences and observations about parent-child relationships in the twenty-first century.

- Pick one of the many digressive or tangential stories that Jones includes in his book, such as the story of the woman who found Rita in the box in New York or the story of Anderson, the Canadian pamphlet writer who interviews Fern. Write a short story in which you more fully explore one of these marginal characters. Include details about his or her role in the novel described from his or her point of view.

Further Study

Johnson, Michael, and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*, W.W. Norton, 1986.

While this history is ostensibly about the lives of biracial people in antebellum South Carolina, it focuses primarily on the life of a freed slave named William Ellison, who became quite wealthy.

Johnson, Walter, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Harvard University Press, new ed., 2001.

This book is a comprehensive history of slave markets in the United States, including information on how slaves were treated from market to plantation and how slaves struggled to preserve their humanity.

Lester, Julius, *To Be a Slave*, Penguin Modern Classics, 1968.

This compilation includes first-person accounts of what it was like to be a slave in pre-Civil War America and related historical commentary.

Link, William A., *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*, University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

This book is a history of Virginia in the 1850s, focusing on politics, slavery, free blacks, and other issues related to the state's secession.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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