

A Morbid Taste for Bones Study Guide

A Morbid Taste for Bones by Edith Pargeter

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

A Morbid Taste for Bones Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	8
Chapter 4.....	11
Chapter 5.....	13
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	18
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	22
Chapter 10.....	24
Chapter 11.....	26
Chapter 12.....	28
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	34
Themes.....	37
Style.....	40
Quotes.....	42
Topics for Discussion.....	44



Plot Summary

In 12th century England, a monk from the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul at Shrewsbury sees a vision of Saint Winifred pleading for her remains to be transported to the Shrewsbury Abbey, where she can be treated with the respect and honor she needs. The ambitious head of the Shrewsbury Abbey, Prior Robert, is more than happy at the news since the acquisition of such a relic is just the thing he needs to boost the reputation of their abbey and of course himself in the process. Brother Cadfael, a native Welshman and a monk in the Shrewsbury monastery, is sent as a translator along with the men Prior Robert decides to take on the expedition into the Welsh town of Gwytherin where Saint Winifred is buried.

The monks arrive to find the villagers passionately divided by the Prior Robert's proposition. In classic whodunit style, a murder is committed, and the rest of the story unravels the investigation led by the multi-talented Brother Cadfael. Brother Cadfael does not wait for the law to deal with the situation. He takes matters into his own skillful hands and sifts through possible suspects. Brother Cadfael, armed with real world wisdom acquired from a colorful past filled with travel, war and adventure, makes great progress in the case with the help of friendly villagers.

The murder victim is a rich landlord by the name of Rhisiart, and the list of suspects is divided between two groups. One is the man in love with his beautiful daughter, Sioned. The other group is the Benedictine brothers who have much to gain by the murder of the most ardent dissenter against their plans to go home with Saint Winifred's bones. Although Prior Robert tries to pin the murder on Saint Winifred herself and warns the villagers not to continue standing in the way of her will, he is more than happy when Engelard, one of Rhisiart's employees, is accused of the murder.

Brother Cadfael skillfully plots one plan after another and slowly uncovers all of the town's secrets and scandals in an effort to put the pieces of the murder mystery together. After going through a list of suspects, Cadfael, along with Sioned, discover that the murderer is Brother Columbanus. Peredur, Sioned's childhood friend and admirer and the man her father wanted her to marry, had found her father dead and stuck one of Engelard's arrows into him. Engelard is the man Sioned really loves. Peredur wanted to frame Engelard for the murder in order to get rid of him and have Sioned all to himself.

In a final twist, Engelard accidentally kills Columbanus, but Brother Cadfael rectifies the situation by placing Columbanus' dead body in Saint Winifred's casket and returning Winifred to her grave, where he believes she really wants to stay. They explain Columbanus' disappearance by claiming that Winifred has answered Columbanus' prayer to bless him with leaving his body in a final trance and joining her for good. This way Cadfael ensures that as many people as possible are happy. Prior Robert does not have to face the shame of having a murderer amongst his brothers. Engelard is free to be with Sioned, and most importantly Saint Winifred gets to remain in her grave in Gwytherin.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Brother Cadfael is working carefree in the monastery garden when he is called in for mass. There, he listens to Prior Robert whine about how crucial it is that they obtain a relic to add prestige to their abbey. A loud cry sends Brother Cadfael and the others rushing out to find Brother Columbanus convulsing and flailing his body against the ground. They immediately blame "falling sickness," a seizure-inducing illness, and restrain Columbanus. Abbot Heribert suggests taking Columbanus to the infirmary and praying for him. Prior Robert assigns Brother Jerome to watch over Brother Columbanus and care for him, and Brother Cadfael gives Brother Columbanus one of his famous herbal mixtures to help with sleep.

In the morning, Jerome bursts into the chapter with news of a miraculous night visitor. He tells his brothers about his sweet dream, complete with shining lights and a beautiful virgin girl who appears to him and tells him her name is Winifred. Winifred explains that in Wales, there is a spring that rose where she was martyred, and if Columbanus baths in that spring, he will be healed. Prior Robert is ecstatic, for this is just the lead he is waiting for. He asks an old Welshman, Brother Rhys, to tell Winifred's tale. Rhys tells them that Saint Winifred's spring is in Holywell, near Chester, and he tells them the story of Winifred's life.

Winifred is the only child of a knight named Tevyth and spends her life in devotion to God. One day, Prince Cradoc comes to her and tries to force his desire for her. She runs away in horror. Prince Cradoc chases her and cuts her head off in fear that she will expose him, but he gets caught, falls dead and melts into the ground. Winifred comes back to life and a holy fountain springs up in the place of her resurrection. Winifred goes on a pilgrimage and ends up as a prioress in Gwytherin, where she is now buried.

Prior Robert sends Columbanus to the well in Holywell, and Columbanus returns cured. This further ignites Prior Robert's certitude that Saint Winifred belongs within Shrewsbury, where she can be honored. Brother John sarcastically comments that this mission is meant to bring Prior Robert honor rather than the saint, but nonetheless John itches to go on this expedition for the sake of adventure. Brother Cadfael convinces Abbot Heribert that Prior Robert will need a Welsh translator, and the abbot agrees and decides to send Cadfael along with Prior Robert's entourage. Brother Cadfael requests a helper and suggests that it be John. He explains to the abbot that John should be the one to accompany him because John is experiencing doubts regarding his vocation as a monk. He could use a trip away to help him decide his path. The easy-going abbot agrees, and Brother Cadfael and John are set to join the adventure.



Chapter 1 Analysis

In this chapter, the readers are introduced to Brother Cadfael, an interesting, well-rounded character with wide ranging experiences and bags full of tricks. The reader begins to get a sense of Cadfael's cleverness when, at the end of the chapter, Cadfael convinces the abbot to allow him and Brother John to join the expedition to Gwytherin. This chapter also introduces another major character, Prior Robert, who is obviously out for his own glory and is willing to go far to achieve it. Brother John plays the role of the young skeptic who questions the sincerity of all who seem utterly devoted to their faith. In a way, he is Prior Robert's opposite in his lustiness, skepticism and hunger for adventure. Columbanus is also juxtaposed against John by his devotion, desire to please the Prior and his weakness and susceptibility to lose sense of his wits and fall into trances.

The first chapter sets the stage for the adventure to come. The Benedictine brothers are set to go on their journey to Gwytherin to retrieve the bones of Saint Winifred. The reader gains a sense of what this adventure may hold through the foreshadowing in the first line of the story. It mentions that Brother Cadfael is up early working in his garden with his mind on "birth, growth and fertility, not at all on graves and reliquaries and violent deaths, whether of saints, sinners or ordinary decent, fallible men like himself" (p. 5). This first line foreshadows the adventures to come, which include graves, reliquaries and the violent deaths of saints, sinners and ordinary men.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Prior Robert is not happy about the abbot's decision to include Brother Cadfael and John in the delegation, but he doesn't let it dampen his excitement for long. The journey is off to a smooth start, and Prior Robert feels this is divine doing since they are off on such a holy mission. They arrive at Gwytherin and meet Father Huw, the pastor, who offers them all the food and shelter he can muster. The whole town is curious about the new guests. Prior Robert explains their mission, while John busies himself with eyeing the pretty girls that pass by.

Prior Robert explains that Bishop David and Prince Owain, whose territory includes Gwytherin, have approved of this proposal, and Huw is surprised to hear this. He warns Prior Robert that the townspeople likely will not approve. Huw is also confused about something else. He asks Prior Robert why the saint would have summoned them to take her so she could be honored, when as far as he knows saints are not after honor, but live to honor the Lord. Prior Robert continues to advance the argument that the bishop and prince have agreed to the plan, and using this argument, he tries to close any doors for debate. Father Huw insists that the decision must be left up to the townspeople. He tells Prior Robert that he will call for a meeting the next day to discuss the matter. Father Huw shows each brother to his cabin. Prior Robert dismisses Brother Cadfael and John and calls the remaining three brothers for a meeting to reflect and think.

Cadfael takes time to explore the area before heading to his cabin. He comes across a Welsh girl, beautiful and witty. She recognizes him as one of the guests from England and speaks to him a few words of English, but she is nervous when she finds out he speaks Welsh. They briefly discuss the purpose of the Benedictine brothers' visit, and she expresses surprise at their objective. She takes off as suddenly as she appeared. Cadfael watches her and notices that she ran off to meet a man in the distance. Cadfael realizes that the young man is the ox caller he came across earlier and admired for his talent at creating devoted followers out of oxen. Cadfael thinks to himself that he needs a social fellow to have a drink with, someone who can help him understand the intricacies of the town.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Father Huw serves the important function of being the in-between person mediating between the people of Gwytherin and the monks from Shrewsbury. He rarely has an opinion of his own, but he does understand his people and has a sharp sense of what they may or may not accept. Also, Father Huw's warnings that the townspeople are likely to disapprove of the proposal foreshadows trouble to come. It hints to the reader that the expedition will not be a quick and easy mission for the Benedictine brothers.



The girl Cadfael meets along the way reacts to the brothers' mission the same way as Father Huw. She questions why a saint would want to be transported somewhere to be honored. This adds doubt to the authenticity of Jerome's dream and Prior Robert's belief that saint Winifred needs to be rescued. It also reinforces Father Huw's foreshadowing of the trouble to come.

In chapter two, Cadfael and John pass by an ox caller and observe how devoted the oxen are to him. They work for him as if out of love, and Cadfael and John liken the oxen to devoted followers. They claim that devoted followers bring just as much joy to their leader as these oxen bring to the ox caller. This begins the exploration of the theme of leaders, followers and devotion. Neither Cadfael nor John is a devoted follower of Prior Robert, whereas Brother Jerome and Columbanus appear to be wonderful followers devoted to doing or saying anything to please their prior. Later on, the sincerity behind this devotion becomes the real issue, and this theme is further explored. Prior Robert's sincerity to Saint Winifred and to his abbey is in question too, for he seems to be after his own glory more than anything else. The relationship between the oxen and the ox caller can be compared to the relationship between Prior Robert and his followers. He seems to be less skillful in creating a bond of love and in getting sincere devotion from his followers.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Prior Robert and Brother Richard sleep in Huw's house. Jerome and Columbanus set off to Cadwallon's holding. Cadfael is not ready to call it a day yet. He's enjoying the freedom of life outside the monastery and wants to squeeze out the most from each day. He finds himself in the Bened, the smith's house. The smith is a well-respected man in the town. He's muscular, bearded and of middle age. John and Huw are already there, and Cadfael finds out that the townspeople often hold small nightly gatherings at Bened's house. Cadfael learns much from this gathering. He finds out that Rhisiart is a big landowner and that Cal, a ploughman, works for him and so does the talented ox caller. He learns that Rhisiart is a widower with only one daughter named Sioned. Cadfael figures out that that Sioned is the girl he saw rushing off to meet the ox caller.

An old respectable man named Padrig is also at the smith's house. Padrig is a traveling bard, staying at Rhisiart's residence. Padrig is a talented poet and harpist, and he plays for the company as the men pass around a horn of mead. Bened tells Cadfael that Rhisiart is a patron of art and that his daughter often plays the harp. Padrig scorns the idea of women playing music. In this gathering, Cadfael also finds out about Cadwallon, another big landowner, the one whose house Jerome and Columbanus are staying in. The men discuss tomorrow's meeting. Padrig warns Brother Cadfael and John that they should not take whatever happens personally. If the Welsh reject the proposal, it will simply be because they see it as unfair and they're not the kind of people who keep quiet about an injustice. Cadfael agrees that fairness is important. Soon, the mead runs out, and the gathering disperses.

Cadfael walks off with Cal, and they chat. Cal tells Cadfael that Bened fancies Sioned and wants to marry her, but he knows his chances are slim because of the age difference. Anyhow, Rhisiart and Cadwallon have agreed for years that Sioned will marry Cadwallon's son and sole heir, Peredur. Peredur and Sioned grew up together and are good friends. Cal also tells Cadfael that Peredur is handsome, and all the girls love him as well as all the men love Sioned. Cadfael gently probes for more information, for he feels there's more to the story. Cadfael finds out that the problem is that Sioned likes Peredur only as a friend. She is actually in love with someone else. Rhisiart loves Sioned too much to force her into marriage, and Sioned reveres her father too much to reject his pleas bluntly. Cadfael realizes that Sioned's heart must belong to the ox caller he saw her meet earlier in the day. He also figures that Cal must know about this, since he works with the ox caller, but he is keeping quiet because he sympathizes with his coworker.

Eventually Cadfael gets that piece of information out of Cal, and Cal sadly tells Cadfael that Engelard, the ox caller, has an even slimmer chance than Bened because he is Saxon and an outlaw on the run from the bailiff of the Earl of Chester. Engelard is an outrageous deer poacher, a master with the bow and arrow. Engelard escapes to Wales



and does his best to fit in as a foreigner. During his two years as Rhisiart's employee, he proposes his marriage to Sioned many times, but Rhisiart always refuses him. Rhisiart and Engelard respect each other and try not to fight, although once they came close. Whatever dispute Engelard and Rhisiart have, they keep it between themselves and stick up for each other in public.

The next day, during mass, Cadfael meets Rhisiart. Rhisiart is a happy, bright, friendly and unpretentious man. After mass, the assembly of free men takes place, and the women leave the room. Father Huw begins by explaining Prior Robert's proposal and pointing out that the prince and bishop have already agreed. Cadwallon is first to give his opinion. He has no objections to the plan, but he is soon interrupted by Rhisiart. Rhisiart argues that Saint Winifred belongs to them and not the prince or bishop. The saint never told them she wants to leave. Prior Robert accuses Rhisiart and the other townspeople of neglecting Saint Winifred. He claims that she has come to the monks seeking help and transfer to a place where she will be honored. Rhisiart insists that if Saint Winifred wanted anything, she would come to her people and not to some "distant Benedictine house in England." The crowd roars in agreement. They argue back and forth about whether Saint Winifred really needs the foreign brothers to trim her grave and honor her or whether she is happy where she is.

Soon Prior Robert realizes that his arguments are not going anywhere and requests to continue the discussion in private. Prior Robert and Rhisiart meet at Huw's house and take Cadfael along for translation. Prior Robert tries to bribe Rhisiart with a bag of money, and Rhisiart is completely repulsed and furious. He tells the prior that they had their omens, and now Rhisiart has his. He feels even more strongly now in his disapproval of the prior's proposal. Cadfael instantly knows the bribe is a wrong move. Father Huw comes in soon after and expresses the same revulsion to the bribe. He explains to the prior that a bribe is no way to get through to a rich and dignified landlord like Rhisiart. Prior Robert makes lame attempts to fix the situation, but it is no use. In a last moment of desperation, Robert grabs Rhisiart's sleeve and begs him not to do anything rash. Rhisiart assures the prior not to worry because he is too ashamed to even tell his people that a prior tried to bribe him. Rhisiart returns to the congregation of townspeople and declares that he will oppose the transfer of Saint Winifred to the death.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The reader is introduced to many important characters and many plot lines in chapter three. Cadfael meets Bened, the town smith and an important social figure. He holds nightly gathering where the men drink mead and discuss town matters. Cadfael also meets Padrig, who offers a warning that the people of Gwytherin may not approve of the plan and that the brothers should not take that personally. This further foreshadows the townspeople's opposition to the proposal.

Cadfael finds out about the major town scandal involving Sioned, Engelard and Peredur in a tangled love triangle. Sioned loves Engelard, but she can't marry him because he is a fugitive and a Saxon. Peredur loves Sioned and has her father's blessings to marry



her, but he knows that he can never have Sioned as long as Engelard is in the picture. This conflict is important to the plot line because it establishes that some of the townspeople have some trouble of their own before the Benedictine brothers come along and bring them more problems.

Cadfael comes to know who the beautiful girl he came across is and her relationship to the ox caller, Engelard. He realizes that she learned to speak English from Engelard, who is a Saxon. This chapter begins to lay out the differences between the Welsh and the English and how they view each other with certain stereotypes. One of the reasons Engelard does not make a suitable suitor for Sioned is his Saxon background. A hint of Cadfael's pride in his Welsh background also surfaces when he gleams with joy as he listens to Rhisiart so articulately rebut Prior Robert's arguments.

Chapter three also illuminates 12th century prejudices against women. Padrig scowls at the thought of a woman playing the harp and states that women have no business playing music. Also, the women leave during the assembly of free men, demonstrating the townspeople's derogatory view of women. The women are not viewed as equals and are not included in the important town discussions or in the decision-making process. Bened mentions that Sioned plays the harp, and this suggests to the reader that Sioned may be one of those women who don't fit so well into the cultural stereotypes. This foreshadows Sioned's future stance as a strong and capable woman, ready to do what it takes to get what she wants.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Father Huw gently reproaches Prior Robert. Father Huw explains to Robert how he could have gotten through to Rhisiart by entreating his generosity and pleading for the English, who are in desperate need for the saint's favors. Robert reverts to repeating his only solid argument, that the bishop and prince already approved of his plans. Huw continues to remind Robert that their approval is not enough. During Vespers, Prior Robert takes the stand and warns of Saint Winifred's wrath to anyone who stands in the way of her will to be transferred to the Shrewsbury monastery. Prior Robert conjures up the image of Prince Cradoc, who melted into the ground for his trespass against Winifred.

Huw advises Robert again to approach Rhisiart differently and try to fix matters between them. They agree to invite Rhisiart to dinner the next day to try and work things out. Huw, Cadfael and John go to relay the message to Rhisiart. Rhisiart tells his people about the bribe and states that threats and bribes will not sway his opinion. Still, he accepts the invitation to dinner. Before Huw, Cadfael and John return to Prior Robert, Cal takes Cadfael aside and tells him, "Sweeten him and you'll get your way," meaning that if he gets through to Rhisiart, the townspeople will follow. (62) This reinforces Rhisiart's strong position in the community as a trusted leader.

When Cadfael and the others return from relaying the message, Prior Robert sends Columbanus and Jerome to Saint Winifred's chapel to pray for their cause. He tells them to stay there until he calls them back. They dutifully leave, but not before Columbanus vows not to touch anything but water until they get what they want. There is a short but heavy shower, and Rhisiart is late. Robert figures that Rhisiart must have grown fearful of his warnings against Winifred's wrath and skipped the meeting, but Huw asserts that Rhisiart would never willfully miss a meeting he had agreed to attend. They decide to send Richard to look for Rhisiart, but he returns empty-handed.

Hours later, Sioned arrives on horse with Peredur behind her. She asks about her father's whereabouts and tells them that the last time she saw her father, he was on his way to the meeting. She explains that her father left before noon on foot and was accompanied by Engelard, who was going to part ways with him after they passed the clearing. Her father should have arrived before noon. She includes that Engelard was going to continue down a different path to the bryres over the hill where two cows were ready to give birth. Roberts is clearly annoyed because he had figured that Rhisiart had dishonored the meeting and that no one would look up to his opinions any longer. Sioned accuses Prior Robert of hiding her father, but Peredur hushes her, since accusing a prior of such a sin is nearly blasphemous.

Peredur suggests to Sioned that they go look for her father, since he may be on his way back home. Sioned states that there is no way her father would dishonor the meeting.



Father Huw sends out search parties. He remembers Columbanus and Jerome, whom the prior had sent to pray at Winifred's grave. He sends someone to fetch them so they can help in the search. As everyone searches for Rhisiart, they hear a loud outcry from Bened. They all rush over to find Rhisiart lying on the ground with an arrow in his chest.

Chapter 4 Analysis

No matter how out of line Prior Robert wanders, Father Huw always reproaches him with kindness and gentleness. Huw's only concern is conserving the peace, and he constantly thinks about how he can keep everyone happy: the prince, the bishop, Rhisiart and Prior Robert. Prior Robert is not willing to abandon his aggressive approach and seems incapable of taking Father Huw's advice and approaching people in a gentler and more positive way. After his plan to bribe Rhisiart goes awry, he continues his approach of threats and bribes when he warns the townspeople of Winifred's wrath against anyone who stands in the way of her will. Robert's behavior contrasts with Cadfael's, who always seems to know how to get what he wants from people. Cadfael uses his people skills to intermingle with the townspeople and get all the information he wants about the important figures in the community.

When Cal tells Cadfael that the brothers can get what they want by winning over Rhisiart, it clarifies to the reader just how important Rhisiart's character is going to be for the brothers to complete their mission. When Rhisiart says he will oppose Robert's proposal to the death, the plot thickens because now the dilemma between Rhisiart and Robert seems irresolvable. Rhisiart's use of the phrase "to the death" also foreshadows his death.

Cadfael subtly expresses his opinion on the whole situation, and he often seems to agree with the townspeople when they feel that Winifred's transfer is unwarranted. He confides in Cal that he doesn't see why they can't honor the saint without moving her bones. He also says that he knows there is great rivalry for such relics among the abbeys these days. His lack of enthusiasm about his own monastery's proposal does little to help Robert's plans, especially since Cadfael is the one with the most friends in the town and the one who knows best how to get through to the people of Gwytherin.

The end of the chapter follows through on the foreshadowing of Rhisiart's death. The crime is committed, and the stage is set for the unraveling of a whodunit mystery. When Robert sends Columbanus and Jerome away to the Winifred's chapel, he allows them to become suspects in this case. They obviously have motive, for Rhisiart is the primary person standing in the way of their mission to obtain the relic they desire. We already know how devoted the two of them are to Prior Robert and to their faith, and Columbanus has vowed not to have anything but water until they obtain the relic. Perhaps he knows something is going to happen to make their mission easier. These facts make Columbanus and Jerome possible suspects. Ironically, Sioned is the one who creates suspicion over Engelard, when she tells everyone that Rhisiart and Engelard set off together planning to part ways after the clearing. Therefore, Engelard becomes a likely suspect as well.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Everyone rushes to the murder scene, including Sioned, who throws herself over her father's body. Cadfael stops her just in time and tells her not to disturb the murder scene because it has things to tell them. She sucks in her grief and does what Cadfael asks. As Cadfael blocks Sioned, he gets a feel of the ground beside Rhisiart's body. He notices that it is dry, whereas the rest of the ground around them is wet because of the heavy shower they experienced earlier. Cadfael takes a mental note of this first clue.

Prior Robert arrives at the scene, expresses his shock and then declares that this is the doing of Saint Winifred, her revenge against the man who stood in the way of her will. Many of the townspeople fall to their knees in awe. Peredur emerges from the crowd and objects to Robert's claims. Peredur says that this murder is man's doing, not a saint's, and that if a saint wanted revenge she wouldn't get it this way. Peredur adds that there are others whose plans Rhisiart may have been obstructing. Cadfael agrees and notes the slant of the arrow coming out of Rhisiart's chest. He concludes that the arrow must have been shot from a low angle, like someone in the bushes on his knees, and therefore this does not look like the doing of a saint.

Bened claims that he recognizes the arrow. It belongs to Engelard. Quickly, Engelard becomes a primary suspect in the case. Robert pushes this line of thinking happily. Sioned is furious and vouches for Engelard. In an uncontrollable outburst, she points out that off all people, Prior Robert and his men have the most motive. She explains that Robert has an urgent need to get rid of Rhisiart, whereas Engelard could easily wait for what he wants and has been waiting for a long time. Robert gets defensive and reminds them that he has been with Father Huw all day. Sioned points out that Robert has a history of bribing and need not have committed the murder himself. The townspeople are aghast at Sioned's audacity to accuse revered men of faith.

Engelard and Annest arrive at the scene. Sioned quietly pleads with Engelard to run, but Engelard is shocked and outraged at how quickly he has become a suspect. He refuses to run away as if he were guilty. The townspeople show him the arrow, and he admits that it is his. He asserts that he is not stupid enough to use his own arrow if he were going to murder anyone. The men ask Engelard for an alibi, but of course he was with the cows and all alone. The townspeople consent to hold Engelard prisoner until the prince's bailiff arrives and investigates the crime. As the men circle Engelard and close in on him, Sioned whispers something in his ear. Peredur slips and falls and creates an opening in the circle of men. Engelard runs. John and another man chase him. The other man catches up with Engelard and grabs hold of his tunic. John grabs the other man's leg, and Engelard is able to slip away and run. John knows there will be hell to pay, but he turns back and sees a bright smile on Annest's face. It melts away his fear.



Robert is furious with John and interrogates him. John replies with dignity and courage and explains that he believes that he has done the right thing, for he has met Engelard and believes that he is a good man and not capable of murder. Robert demands that they hold John prisoner until the law can deal with him. Prison is more than John has bargained for, and he considers running, until Sioned kindly offers her home and servants to hold John prisoner. John knows that Anest is one of Sioned's servants.

Sioned's servants prepare to carry Rhisiart's body home. Sioned looks around for Peredur, for she feels he should be a part of this process as a close family friend, but Peredur is gone. It's as if he has something to be ashamed of. Cadfael tells Sioned to take off her father's clothes and note where they are wet and dry. Sioned tells Cadfael to send a message to Engelard, telling him that his actions were generous and she is grateful.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Cadfael rises to the occasion and takes charge right away, starting with asking Sioned not to disturb the murder scene. He has a natural talent for investigating and immediately begins to note clues like the dry patch of grass beside Rhisiart's body. He does not call attention to himself or show off his investigative skills, but he works competently and keeps the clues to himself. The way Sioned quickly pulls herself together and follows Cadfael's suggestion demonstrates just how influential and trusted Cadfael has become in the town of Gwytherin in the few days he has been there.

Sioned mirrors Cadfael's competence. We begin to see a side of Sioned that contradicts all of the female stereotypes of the culture she lives in. Sioned's defense of Engelard and her accusation of Prior Robert take courage and clear thinking that most people could not muster after the sight of a loved one's dead body. She has the courage to speak out loud what most are thinking but would never dare admit. Sioned displays astounding self-control in the restraint of her grief when Cadfael asks her not to disturb the murder scene. The author repeatedly emphasizes Sioned's "dry eyes" and Sioned's "tearless sobs" (p. 71). Her ability to control her sorrow not only defies the female stereotypes but also demonstrates how she has taken on the huge responsibility of finding out who murdered her father in order to avenge his death. The Welsh hold the blood feud sacred and deem it a duty upon a murdered victim's family to avenge the death. This duty is expected to transcend even grief, and Sioned is not about to fall short of any expectations.

Sioned's passionate defense of Engelard must have been difficult for Peredur to hear. This may be why he leaves the scene suddenly before having a chance to help carry home Rhisiart's body, although the story suggests there is more to his sudden parting. The author suggests that Peredur took off as if he had something to be ashamed of and later Sioned sends him a message of thanks as if he had slipped on purpose and allowed for Engelard's escape. The reader is left wondering why Peredur would behave so strangely. Does he have something to feel ashamed or guilty about? Peredur's objection to Robert's claim that the murder is an act of revenge by Saint Winifred and



that it is obviously an act of man casts yet more suspicion on Peredur. The fact that Engelard's arrow seems to have been used in the murder suggests the possibility that Peredur committed the murder and tried to frame Engelard. The motive for that is clear, to free Sioned for himself.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Cadfael comes across Peredur and relays Sioned's message of appreciation. Peredur winces when he hears this. Cadfael continues on his way and finds out that Cal is assigned guard duty outside John's cell. He is relieved to hear it. Bened also informs Cadfael that the prince has gone south, and the sheriff and bailiff are busy keeping up with his absence and will not have much time for a small matter like John's crime. Cadfael and Bened discuss the murder, and Bened admits that he does not think that Engelard is capable of murder. It is apparent that Bened, just like most of the townspeople, cannot fathom that any of the Benedictine brothers could possibly have anything to do with the murder either.

Cadfael spends a lot of time contemplating suspects. He asks around whether Rhisiart had enemies, but he obtains no leads. Cadfael wonders about Peredur's strange behavior, but he realizes that Peredur liked Rhisiart and has much to lose from his death. After all, Rhisiart was the one pressuring Sioned to marry Peredur and the only one standing in the way of Sioned and Engelard's love. The next morning, Cadfael notices Columbanus looking withdrawn and different. Eventually, Columbanus breaks down and says he must confess that he fell asleep soon after he and Jerome began to hold the vigil at Winifred's chapel on the day of Rhisiart's murder. He claims that he did not wake up until Jerome shook him awake at the call of the messenger.

Father Huw arrives with the news that he has met with the heads of his parish and that most of them have accepted Prior Robert's claim that the murder is a sign of the saint's wrath. They have agreed to let the prior take Winifred's remains, and they want it done today. Prior Robert is pleased, but he insists that there is no rush and announces that they will hold a vigil at Winifred's grave for three days before they leave, just to confirm that they are indeed doing the right thing. When they arrive at the graveyard, Prior Robert tells everybody that he will ask Saint Winifred to guide him to her grave just to ensure he is in the right. Sure enough, he makes his way to her grave. Cadfael is skeptical of the miracle and figures it isn't really such a miracle because Robert could have easily found that information out earlier.

Cadfael goes to visit Sioned, and together they examine her father's clothing. They find that the front of Rhisiart's clothes is dry, and the back is wet. This does not make sense, because Rhisiart was lying on his back when they found him, and the rain should have fallen on the front of his clothes. Cadfael uses some of his superb investigative skills, and along with Sioned, he discovers that Rhisiart was stabbed from the back and then fell face down. Later, after the heavy shower, he must have been turned over onto his back. Someone pierced him with a knife to make way for an arrow. An arrow was thrust into him all the way to the back to conceal the original stab in the back. Of course, the murderer used Engelard's arrow to frame him. Cadfael and Sioned agree that the murderer cannot be Engelard, for Engelard is a master at archery and if he wanted to



murder someone, he would shoot an arrow at them from a far distance. Also, Engelard would never have to use a dagger to make way for the arrow first.

This chapter ends with Cadfael thinking about Jerome as a possible suspect. Sioned brings up the idea of the dead gushing out blood or showing some other sign to expose their murderer if the murderer happens to go near the corpse or touch it. Cadfael does not seem convinced of this myth, but he realizes that most other people believe in it. This could be of use to him and Sioned.

Chapter 6 Analysis

By the end of this chapter, Cadfael and Sioned have figured out exactly how the crime was committed, but they still do not know who committed the crime. The list of suspects is long. As Bened expresses his confusion to Cadfael about who the suspect might be, Cadfael ironically points out to Bened that not all holy men are perfect. Cadfael is casting doubt upon his own fellow monks, and himself for that matter. Bened's naivety contrasts with Cadfael's wisdom and knowledge of the real world. Cadfael explains, "There are holy persons outside orders as ever there are in, and not to trifle with truth, as good men out of the Christian church as most I've met within it" (p. 92). Cadfael adds, "We're all made the same under habit or robe or rags" (92).

Now the readers have a new suspect, Jerome, because Columbanus claims to have fallen asleep during the vigil. He can no longer offer an alibi to Jerome. Prior Robert's decision to hold a three-day vigil allows Cadfael more time to complete his investigation, although the question as to why Prior Robert wants to hold the three-day vigil arises. The narrator suggests that it may be to make it seem like Prior Robert is not rushing off with the prize and to allow time for more miracles to confirm that the transfer of Winifred's bones is truly her will.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In the evening, while Prior Robert and the other brothers are praying at Winifred's grave, they see Sioned approach with her servants, carrying Rhisiart's bier upon their shoulders. Sioned requests to leave her father's body by Winifred's grave for the three days that the brothers are staying and asks them to make one prayer each night for her father's soul. Robert agrees. Sioned returns in the morning and asks Jerome and Huw, who volunteer to hold the vigil for the first night, to place their hands on Rhisiart's heart and pray for him. Huw does as asked, but Jerome hesitates and claims that he wants to ask Prior Robert's permission first. Robert gives him permission, and then Jerome does as Sioned has requested without further hesitation.

The prince's bailiff, Griffith ap Rhys, arrives and talks to all the people involved in the case. Cadfael decides to keep some of his information to himself until he knows more. Cadfael does not worry about John because he finds out that John is happy and being cared for by Annest herself. John and Annest, who seem to have sparked an attraction for each other, are developing a cozy relationship as they take advantage of John's fateful punishment, which ends up bringing them together. John doesn't speak Welsh, and Annest doesn't speak English. They monologue, each in his or her own language. They seem to understand each other's declarations of love through tone of voice and body language.

Richard keeps the vigil the second night all alone. Prior Robert is supposed to join him, but he says that he is busy with the bailiff and can't make it. In the morning, Sioned arrives and asks Richard to place his hand on her father's heart and make a prayer. Richard does so without complications. On the third night, Columbanus and Cadfael are asked to hold the vigil. Cadfael wonders why Prior Robert hasn't held a vigil himself. Could he be trying to avoid Sioned's test in the morning? During the vigil, Columbanus suddenly goes into one of his mystic states of ecstasy and falls face down on the floor. Cadfael tries to rouse him but can't. He decides there is nothing anyone can do for Columbanus now and leaves him there until morning. In the morning, Roberts and some others arrive. They are concerned about Columbanus. They take him away to the church. The town prepares for Rhisiart's funeral, which will be held during this third day before the monks leave. Cadfael tells Sioned to personally invite Peredur to the ceremony. It seems Cadfael has yet another plan.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter, Cadfael implements yet another plan to trap the murderer. Cadfael knows that the people believe that the dead often show a sign to expose their murderer if the murderer comes close to the corpse or touches it. He uses this belief against the people by forcing them to come near Rhisiart's body and watching their facial



expressions for nervousness or fear. Several interesting clues arise from this experiment. First, Prior Robert gets out of vigil duty, and Cadfael wonders whether he is afraid of the test or whether he truly has a valid excuse. Richard and Huw pass the test easily. Jerome hesitates before going near Rhisiart. He claims to want the prior's permission, but that leaves the reader wondering whether he really reveres the prior that much or whether he is delaying something that makes him nervous. Columbanus gets out of doing the test by falling into a long trance. In the end of the chapter, Cadfael is thinking of a way to test Peredur, and he seems to plan on doing so during Rhisiart's funeral.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Columbanus awakens and tells everyone a fantastical tale about his experiences during the trance. Columbanus claims to have seen a beautiful virgin who comes to him and introduces herself as Saint Winifred. She tells Columbanus that they are on the right path and that she forgives all that have obstructed the way of her will, including Rhisiart. Furthermore, she offers Rhisiart her grave after she is removed from it. Sioned is enraged at the suggestion that her father has sinned and is in need of forgiveness, but she can do nothing but mutter a quick thanks. Cadfael comments about what a tidy and well-calculated solution this vision brings.

Sioned and Cadfael discuss what possible motives Columbanus might have. They believe that he may be after the glory of being the chosen one for communication with the saint. It also seems that Columbanus might be trying to tidily close a case that should remain open, since the murderer is still at large. Sioned vows not to rest until she finds her father's killer and avenges his death. Cadfael begins to conjure up another plan to help her.

The digging for Saint Winifred's bones begins. They dig and dig so many feet into the ground that some begin to wonder whether they will ever find bones, but Cadfael knows they will. Cadfael thinks about Saint Winifred while he is digging, but he pictures her very differently than everybody else. He imagines a romantic girl in love with celibacy and holiness. Then, Cadfael thinks about Prince Cradoc and feels sorry for him. He imagines him as a man in love rejected by the woman he desires. Cadfael thinks they should stop praying to Winifred so much and start praying for Prince Cradoc because he is the one who needs it more. Sure enough, they finally find Winifred's bones and very carefully lift them up. Then begins Rhisiart's burial into the same grave. As they are about to lower his body, Sioned calls out to Peredur, who attends the funeral only because Sioned has personally asked him to. She tells Peredur that he has been like a son to her father and she would like him to place a cross on her father's chest before he is lowered into the ground. She hands Peredur the golden cross she wears around her neck.

Peredur turns gray with fear. Beads of sweat form on his face, but he has no choice but to do as Sioned asks. Peredur cannot seem to get himself to go near the dead body. He yells out that he must confess, but he stresses that he is not confessing to murder. Peredur confesses to finding Rhisiart's dead body and coincidentally having one of Engelard's arrows with him. He explains that Engelard and he are friends and often practice archery together. Peredur says that he pierced Rhisiart's body from the front all the way to the back to cover any signs of the stab wound that really killed Rhisiart. It is clear the Peredur is shaking with guilt and fear, and he has been suffering terribly for his sin. Father Huw asks Peredur to go home and tells him that he will announce his punishment later. Peredur asks permission to place the necklace on Rhisiart's chest as



Sioned has requested. He no longer fears Rhisiart's reaction, for he knows Rhisiart would not accuse him of more than what he has already confessed to. Peredur places the necklace on Rhisiart's chest and then leaves. Sioned does not seem too upset with Peredur.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Cadfael's thoughts about Winifred and Prince Cradoc reflect his drastically different way of thinking compared to the community of people around him. His romanticizing of Winifred and his feelings of sympathy for Prince Cradoc are especially odd for a monk, but the readers know that Cadfael has a wild past and likely empathizes very well with Prince Cradoc and his troubles with women and love. At times, Cadfael also expresses empathy for Peredur, who is hurt by love.

Cadfael's plan to force Peredur near Rhisiart's body works well. Peredur is pressured to confess, and everyone finds out who has committed the second part of the crime. The real murderer is still unknown, but the list of suspects has significantly shrunk. Columbanus seems to be a likely suspect at this point, particularly because he has managed to squirm out of the Cadfael's test.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

After Rhisiart's funeral is over, Sioned tells Cadfael that she is not too upset with Peredur. She is more relieved that he is not the real murderer. As Cadfael walks by Cadwallon's house, he hears Father Huw beckoning him to come and offer a hand with Peredur's mother, Dame Branwen, who has gone hysterical with grief over her Peredur's troubles. Sioned wants to help. She has grown accustomed to Dame Branwen's mood swings, just as Cadfael has to Columbanus' trances. Cadfael finds Dame Branwen in a fit, one second chastising her husband for allowing their son to take blame for something he obviously could not have done and the other second yelling at Peredur for disgracing the family.

Cadfael remembers that Columbanus brought some of Cadfael's special poppy seed syrup and goes to the Columbanus' room to get some, hoping to soothe and relax Dame Branwen with a dose of it. Cadfael finds the bottle, but three quarters of the syrup, enough to put a man to sleep for hours, is gone. Cadfael is suspicious. Cadfael gives Dame Branwen what's left of the syrup and tells everyone that she is sure to have a good rest now. Cadfael advises Cadwallon to let Peredur rest too, not to bring up any problems unless Peredur brings them up first and to act like everything is normal.

Huw thanks Cadfael for knowing how to deal with women so well. Huw admits that women confuse him. Cadfael reflects on the women he has known in his past and says, "both men and women partake of the same human nature, Huw. We both bleed when we're wounded" (p.151). Cadfael then takes off to Bened's house where the men sit around and talk about how divided the town has become between blaming the Benedictine brothers and thinking that someone is out to frame them. Annest bursts into the meeting with bad news. She tells the men that Robert has asked the bailiff to arrest John as soon as possible and take him to serve his prison term because the brothers are leaving tomorrow and Robert wants John dealt with before they leave. Cal jumps up and tells them not to worry. He will set John free to flee long before anyone has a chance to arrest him. Annest insists on going with Cal. Before Annest sets off with Cal, she tells Cadfael that his opinion is the only one from among the monks that matters to her, and she wants to know if he thinks her love for John is wicked. Cadfael tells her there was never a relationship less wicked.

Cadfael goes to meet Sioned and plots to trap Columbanus, but he warns Sioned that this plot will be dangerous. Sioned declares that she is up for any task, no matter how daring. Meanwhile, the bailiff trudges along his way to arrest John. He would rather the English dealt with their own problems, but he feels he cannot refuse Prior Robert's request. They arrive to find Sioned's household in chaos. Annest worriedly tells them that the prisoner has escaped and the entire household is looking for him. Cal shows up with a bloody bandage around his head and tells the bailiff that John hit him on the



head. The bailiff checks out the broken lock, and all the evidence points to an escape plan. Robert is outraged, but the bailiff readily gives up on the ordeal.

The group gets back to the church just in time for Compline and to witness yet another one of Columbanus' miraculous trances and communications with the saint. It seems Saint Winifred is now his personal patroness. She heals him, favours him with visions of her and communicates her will through him. Everyone watches Columbanus in astonishment, except for Cadfael who has bigger but not unrelated things on his mind.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Father Huw speaks of women as if they are a different species from men and as if they are all the same. Cadfael juxtaposes with this medieval view of women with his insight that both men and women share the same human nature and that they both bleed when they are wounded. Cadfael has expressed this open-mindedness before when he says that within men of religion there are good and bad men and within secular men there are good and bad as well. The novel agrees with Cadfael's view in that it shows us the strong and the weak from among both sexes. Cadfael and Sioned represent the strong characters. Columbanus and Dame Branwen represent weak characters.

This chapter adds much to the growing suspicion against Columbanus. First, Cadfael finds three quarters of the poppy seed syrup in Columbanus' room missing. Second, Columbanus falls into another one of his trances. This time the sincerity of his apparent devotion and his divine connections seem really questionable. Cadfael begins to wonder about these trances and whether they are real or whether their purpose is to bring Columbanus the kind of reputation and glory expected of him from his high-class family.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Columbanus takes his post at Saint Winifred's altar. He makes himself comfortable and soon is fast asleep. He awakens to a soft but persistent voice calling out to him. The voice calls his name then says, "my false servant, who blasphemes against my will and murders my champions, what will you say in your defence to Winifred?"(161-162). The voice accuses Columbanus of killing the man Winifred herself sent to enforce her will to remain in Gwytherin. Columbanus is terrified. He resists the voice's accusations and insists that he is not guilty. As Columbanus refuses to admit guilt, the form of the saint appears to him wrapped in grave rags. The form inches closer and closer to him, and he steps back until he finds himself against the wall. The woman in the grave rags is Sioned. She gets carried away and moves a little too close to Columbanus. Columbanus shakes with fear and confesses to the murder. Sioned has gone beyond her plan with Cadfael by moving dangerously close to Columbanus and by tracking off the lines they rehearsed together.

Columbanus flails his arms to keep the terrifying form away from him. He feels skin under the veil Sioned wears across her face. Columbanus tears the veil off her face and stands face to face with Sioned. Columbanus grabs Sioned, pulls out his dagger and tries to kill Sioned. He manages to cut her arm before she escapes from his grasp. Cadfael intercedes and causes Columbanus to run out. Engelard is waiting outside the door. He catches Columbanus and beats him. When Engelard sees Sioned injured, he is enraged and beats Columbanus more furiously, even though Sioned assures him that her wounds are not serious. Engelard accidentally cracks Columbanus' neck, and Columbanus dies.

At first, they think he is faking sleep, as is his habit, but they soon discover that he is truly dead. Engelard is shocked at what has happened and suggests that they all go to the bailiff and explain everything. He expresses his faith in the law. Cadfael warns Engelard that the law might not believe the truth, and he comes up with a more intricate plan of how to get everyone out of the mess. Cadfael notes that if Columbanus is found guilty, it will be a big problem and shame for Prior Robert to deal with. On the other hand, if he is not found guilty, then Engelard may wrongfully be accused. He claims to have a plan to avoid all these negative effects.

Cadfael asks Sioned why she deviated from her rehearsed lines. Sioned explains that the words just seemed to flow out as if out of her control. Cadfael realizes that this may actually have been Winifred's voice telling them that she wants to stay in Gwytherin and that Rhisiart truly was the champion of her will. Sioned and Engelard explain to Cadfael what they will do after this whole mess is over. As Engelard's new lord, Sioned will make him a free man and then her uncle will have no claim against their marriage. Cadfael, Sioned and Engelard clean up the mess, fix the evidence to match Cadfael's new story and go home.



Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter brings a crucial point in the plot. Finally, Columbanus, who seems to be the most likely suspect, is put to the test. Columbanus' test consists of an elaborate plan that is potentially very dangerous. When Sioned, dressed as Saint Winifred's corpse, first appears to Columbanus and demands a confession, Columbanus refuses to confess. This makes the reader wonder whether Columbanus is guilty after all. The author creates great suspense by allowing Columbanus to hold off on his confession for longer than anyone expects he could. When Columbanus finally confesses, the conflict in the story apparently comes to an end, but the author offers a final surprise in the accidental death of Columbanus. The reader has to wait yet longer for the final resolution and to watch Cadfael's grand plan to make everyone happy unfold.

Chapter ten expands on the theme of innocence versus wisdom that has been brewing since the beginning of the story. In this chapter, Engelard's innocence and his naivety at how things work in the real world juxtapose with Cadfael's wisdom and his understanding of how the real world functions. Engelard's naivety is expressed in his childlike faith in the law. Engelard wants to trust the law to do the right thing, but Cadfael knows better than to allow that. Engelard also naively believes that Sioned and he have a good plan to make their marriage a reality. He doesn't seem to consider all the complications that may arise from such a seemingly simple plan.

Throughout the story, the reader sees examples of Cadfael's kindness and caring towards others. He is always ready to help when needed, like when he comes to the rescue of Dame Branwen as she breaks down in hysterics over Peredur's troubles. In chapter ten, we also see that Cadfael is a considerate person, even toward people he doesn't especially like such as Prior Robert. Cadfael considers how Robert will feel if one of his followers is accused of murder, and he does not have any desire to bring any suffering Prior Robert, even though he has not always treated Cadfael very well.

This chapter brings up yet another complication, in that it seems Saint Winifred truly is trying to communicate with them this time. Sioned claims that the words she speaks to Columbanus veer off her rehearsed lines against her will. The words she speaks are out of her control. This leaves Cadfael believing that Saint Winifred is communicating to them her true will. Saint Winifred wants to stay in her grave in Gwytherin. It is interesting that Cadfael, as sceptical as he is, now expresses faith in the saint's ability to communicate from the grave. Cadfael now has to cook up a plan that has many loose ends to tie up. He must satisfy Saint Winifred and Prior Robert and at the same time save Engelard from the law.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Chapter eleven begins with Prior Robert in church and in a great mood over the success of his mission. He decides not to allow John's escape to cloud his joy. Robert and the rest of the congregation at the church head out to Winifred's chapel. They pass by Cadwallon's house, and Cadwallon comes out to join them. Peredur cannot join them because Father Huw has ordered him to stay home until his penance is appointed, but then Father Huw kindly bids him to come forth and join them.

Peredur walks by Cadfael's side, and Cadfael explains what has happened and how he has rectified the situation. Cadfael says that he will mention this all to the bailiff. Cadfael explains to Peredur that this way, everybody wins including Sioned and Engelard. Peredur says he will be happy for them and that Sioned and Engelard will be fine, especially since soon everyone will forget about the deer Engelard took in Cheshire and Engelard will be able to go back to his home and claim his inheritance from his dead father. Peredur agrees to get the message of Cadfael's plan to the bailiff. Cadfael says that soon everyone in Gwytherin must know of the plan, but no one must speak of it aloud.

When Peredur and Cadfael arrive at the chapel, Robert delivers a farewell speech to make certain there are no hard feelings left between the people of Gwytherin and the brothers from Shrewsbury. The people of Gwytherin assure Robert that they harbor no hard feelings. Cadfael senses that the townspeople already know of his plan or at least sense it, and they also seem to know not to speak of it until the brothers leave their town. After Prior Robert's speech, they go to release Columbanus from his vigil duty and take Saint Winifred's bones away. They don't find Columbanus. They see only his black habit on the floor where he had been kneeling. The skirt is spread behind, and the body is in folds. The sleeves are spread like wings on either side and bent at the elbows, as if the arms that left them had ended with hands pressed together in prayer. The scene suggests a miraculous transcendence of the body. They readily accept the scene as a sign of a final miracle that befell their dear brother Columbanus. They conclude that Columbanus was taken up living out of this world just as he had requested in his prayers the previous day.

Cadfael seems to have overlooked one tiny thing. When the men come to carry the coffin, Cadfael is afraid that they will find it too heavy and realize that something is wrong. He is saved by Bened and his men, who rush up to help carry the coffin and distract the men from the extra weight. All the townspeople seem anxious to help the brothers be on their way.

Cadfael realizes that soon he will have to say goodbye to his new friends. He chats with them merrily. Bened tells Cadfael that he will see him soon, since he plans to make a



pilgrimage to Walsingham and Shrewsbury will be on his way. Cal tells Cadfael that a gathering of his friends will be there to say goodbye to him on his path out of town.

The Shrewsbury brothers leave. Cadfael sleeps most of the way, for he has much sleep to make up for. During a rest in one of the towns they pass, Jerome rushes to Cadfael in excitement and tells him that Saint Winifred's bones have already begun to bring miracles. Jerome explains that one of the travelers they came across was horribly sick and was crying out in pain all night until he kissed the foot of Winifred's casket. After that, he slept like a child. Cadfael has a hard time hiding his surprise, but Jerome simply attributes that to Cadfael's weak faith. Cadfael makes a silent observation that what happened is a miracle because there is no logical reasoning for it. Many more little miracles follow the Shrewsbury brothers along the way back to their monastery.

When they arrive at Shrewsbury, the brothers are greeted royally. One more miracle befalls them. The day of their arrival happens to be a dim and rainy day. Heavy downpours saturate the countryside, but not a drop falls on the procession as they carry Saint Winifred's casket to its final resting place on the alter of the abbey church. In the days that follow, miracle seekers come in great numbers, and most of them leave satisfied. Many want to make a second saint out of the lost brother, Columbanus, but they have no relic left of him but his discarded clothes. The chapter ends with Cadfael congratulating himself on a job well done and feeling happy to have all his old skills in tact and to still find them useful.

Chapter 11 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader slowly finds out how Cadfael pulls all the loose ends together, although all of the people of Gwytherin seem to already know the news. Through the unfolding of the plot, the reader discovers that Cadfael places Columbanus' dead body in Winifred's casket and reburies Winifred in her grave in Gwytherin, where he feels it is her true will to remain. This way, Prior Robert does not have to deal with the shame of a Shrewsbury brother being accused of murder. Saint Winifred remains in Gwytherin, and Engelard is a free man and available to build a life with Sioned.

Cadfael thinks a lot about the nature of miracles and the nature of faith in this chapter. First of all, the news of the miracles that surround what everyone believes is Saint Winifred's body shocks him, but then Cadfael realizes that miracles are not supposed to make logical sense or else they would not be miraculous. Cadfael understands the power of the mind to believe and see what it wills. He sees this earlier as well, when Prior Robert readily accepts Cadfael's explanation for why Saint Winifred's casket is so heavy. Cadfael suggests it is a miracle and because that explanation goes well with Prior Robert's beliefs, he supports it enthusiastically.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

More than two years later, Cadfael meets Bened again during Bened's pilgrimage to Walsingham. Bened brings Cadfael warm greeting from all of his friends and news of John and Annest, who have recently married and are expecting a baby. John has taken over the smithy while Bened is away. Bened also tells Cadfael that Sioned and Engelard married and have a baby boy. They have named the boy Cadfael.

The next day, Bened goes to send greetings to Prior Robert and Abbot Heribert. He tells them they are experiencing many miracles at the place that used to be Saint Winifred's grave. Bened relays one miraculous story after another, and Prior Robert grows more and more livid with every amazing story that seems to slightly outdo the miracles they are witnessing in Shrewsbury. Cadfael interrupts and tells Robert that this must only be taken as more proof of the surpassing merit and potency of Saint Winifred, whose relics they now own. Secretly, Cadfael thinks that Winifred must be expressing her happiness with the outcome of things by facilitating such amazing miracles at site of her true grave. Cadfael also smiles to himself as he thinks of Rhisiart, whose body remains in the grave along with Winifred's. He hopes that some of the thanks and gratitude recited at Winifred's grave will rub off on him, since he is a deserving man.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The way that Cadfael saves Prior Robert from exploding with anger when Bened relays the miracles they are witnessing at Winifred's old grave shows that Cadfael has learned how to appease Prior Robert. He simply takes the situation and turns it into a thing that adds more glory to Robert and the Shrewsbury Abbey, and this works every time. This further proves Cadfael's realization in the previous chapter that people will see and believe what they want to see and believe.

When the reader finds out that miracles are happening at Winifred's real gravesite as well as at the place everyone else thinks she is buried, it emphasizes the idea that miracles have nothing to do with logic. The only ingredient necessary for a miracle is enough faith. Of course, this creates great irony since the entire story is about the mission to obtain relics that are supposed to bring glory and miracles to the abbey, and in the end the story shows that these relics have no true value. In fact, the dead body of a murderer seems to be doing as well as the bones of a saint, as long as the miracle seekers who come hold the proper beliefs.



Characters

Brother Cadfael

Brother Cadfael is a monk in the Shrewsbury Abbey, but he has chosen life in a monastery only after a wild and colorful past. His worldly past includes travel, wars, women and even fighting in the crusades. As a monk in the monastery, he tends an herb garden and uses the herbs to make medicines and tonics to help those around him. Although his present life as a monk and his wild past seem to contrast, Cadfael has no regrets about the past and feels no contradiction between his two lives.

Brother Cadfael's life takes a twist when he is called upon to join the mission to obtain Saint Winifred's bones for the Shrewsbury Abbey. He joins the group of brothers led by Prior Robert as an English/Welsh translator. Brother Cadfael skillfully integrates himself into the Gwytherin community and makes friends with all the important members of the town. The townspeople take an immediate liking to Cadfael, confide much in him and eventually trust him to help them deal with their mounting troubles. The monks and the people of Gwytherin find themselves in the middle of a murder mystery, and that is when Brother Cadfael's talents, acquired from his adventurous past, prove to be a crucial asset. Cadfael uses his amazing investigative skills to plot one scheme after the other, and eventually he solves the murder mystery.

Brother Cadfael's character contrasts with most of the other characters in that he does not think like everybody or fall into the typical stereotypes of the times and culture he lives in. Cadfael displays an open-minded and progressive view on women, religion and equality, and he generally demonstrates much more wisdom than the average medieval man. Cadfael's character is so wise, open-minded and skillful that sometimes he is unbelievable.

Prior Robert

Prior Robert of the Shrewsbury Abbey is a tall man with aristocratic features and silvery hair. He is in his fifties. He is authoritative and bent on proving that he deserves authority and reverence. His jealousy of other monasteries and his desire for glory instigate his hunt for a relic that will bring him and the abbey high reputation. He is a strong man, who knows what he wants but does not always know the best way to go about getting it. He lacks the social finesse that would facilitate his quest to obtain the relics he so desires. He is not one to take advice, even though he really needs it when it comes to interacting with others. His means of convincing the people of Gwytherin to hand over their saint's bones is by bribing and threatening them. His methods often blow up in his face, but he does not see fit to change them. In the end, Prior Robert gets what he wants (the reputation of having Saint Winifred's relics, if not the actual relics) but not because of any skills of his. Rather, it is mostly the work of Cadfael, whom Prior Robert does not even particularly like.



Sioned

Sioned is the beautiful and highly sought after daughter of the rich landowner Rhisiart. She has long dark hair and is clever and patient in getting her own way. She is in love with Engelard, whom she cannot marry because her father refuses him. Her father insists that she marry her childhood friend Peredur. When Sioned's father is murdered, her friendship with Cadfael takes off. Together, they investigate and plot to solve the mystery of her father's murder. Sioned breaks many of the stereotypes about women in her time and culture. Sioned is brave, clever and never afraid to voice her opinion and stand up for the truth. Thanks to Cadfael, Sioned and Engelard are able to be together in the end.

Brother Columbanus

Brother Columbanus is an eager young monk who helps Brother Cadfael in the monastery gardens. Columbanus has a round formidable Norman head, stiff yellow hair and blue eyes. He comes from an aristocratic Norman family. He is the younger son sent away to the monastery to make his way up as the next-best option to inheriting land. His muscular physique is balanced out by his modest demeanor. He seems to be a dutiful and devoted worshipper, yet not without eccentricities. His sensitivity, possibly combined with his family's pressure for him to excel, makes him susceptible to fits of emotional stress and divine visions.

Columbanus starts out as a model worshipper, submissive to his prior and always ready to take on extra duties. Although he seems pious, there is something suspicious about his frequent falls into mysterious trances where he claims to communicate with Saint Winifred. By the end of the novel, there is much evidence to suggest that Columbanus' episodes are fake. Cadfael, through an elaborate scheme, proves Columbanus' guilt in Rhisiart's murder, but Columbanus ends up accidentally killed himself before he has a chance to face the law and the church.

Brother Jerome

Brother Jerome is the man who instigates the obsession with Saint Winifred. Prior Robert assigns Brother Jerome to watch over Brother Columbanus after Brother Columbanus falls into a sort of seizure and loses sense of his surroundings. During this watch, Brother Jerome claims to have a dream, in which Saint Winifred comes to him and tells him that Columbanus can be cured if they bathe him in the spring at Holywell, where she was martyred. After Columbanus' miraculous recovery at the spring, Prior Robert becomes obsessed with the idea of retrieving Saint Winifred's bones as relics for their abbey. Jerome is part of the group of monks who go on the expedition to Gwytherin, and he briefly becomes a suspect for the murder that takes place there. In the end, Jerome proves to be a deeply devoted and submissive follower of Prior Robert.



Brother John

Brother John is a young monk who helps Brother Cadfael in the monastery garden. He is the man Cadfael chooses to take with him as his helper on the expedition to Gwytherin. John is the voice of skepticism throughout the story, constantly whispering derogatory comments every time Prior Robert talks about their duty to save Saint Winifred from the shambles she is in and bring her to Shrewsbury where she can be honored and revered. John seems to see through the facade and does not know how to hide his feelings very well. Therefore, he earns the dislike of Prior Robert and the friendship of Cadfael.

John has a snub nose and untamable wiry russet curls. In Gwytherin, John falls in love with Annest, and in the end of the novel he marries her and never returns to the Shrewsbury monastery. During his adventures in Gwytherin, John befriends Engelard. When Engelard is framed for murder, John helps him flee from the men who come to arrest him. John ends up being captured by the townspeople, but Annest and other friends help him flee before the bailiff come to formally arrest him.

Brother Richard

Brother Richard is the sub-prior at the Shrewsbury Abbey. He is very different from the prior. He is a large man, without many ambitions, but he is amiable enough. He has a good mind, but he is often too lazy to make much use of it. His personality and lack of ambition make it unlikely for him to be promoted to prior. At one point in the story, he becomes a possible suspect in the murder of Rhisiart.

Father Huw

Father Huw holds an important role in the town of Gwytherin as the pastor. He is a small square man with a thicket of curly brown hair, a beard and big dark blue eyes. He wears a brown sackcloth, and his gown is hoisted to his knees. He is a deeply hospitable and kind man who offers his guests from Shrewsbury everything he has. Father Huw plays the crucial role as mediator between the guests from Shrewsbury and the townspeople of Gwytherin. He mediates well, but he rarely seems to have an opinion himself. He tries to gently advise Prior Robert about how to get through to Gwytherin's people, but the prior will not change his methods. Father Huw's sole ambition is simply to keep the peace between all parties.

Peredur

Peredur is the son of a rich landowner named Cadwallon. He is a very suitable suitor for Sioned, and he loves her. Sioned refuses him, though, because she is in love with Engelard. Sioned and Peredur grow up as close family friends, but that is as far as



Sioned wants to take the relationship. Peredur is heartbroken. Peredur is young and good looking and many of the town girls like him, except for the one he wants.

Peredur becomes a suspect in the murder, and through one of Cadfael's investigative plans, everyone discovers that Peredur had a part in the murder. Peredur admits to finding Rhisiart dead and sticking one of Engelard's arrows into him to frame Engelard so that he could have Sioned all to himself. Peredur suffers terribly from the guilt he feels and repents deeply for his sin. In the end, everyone seems more than happy to forgive Peredur, and Cadfael does not worry about him since Cadfael believes that Peredur will soon get over Sioned and build a bright future.

Rhisiart

Rhisiart is a rich landowner and a well-respected and trusted man in the town of Gwytherin. He is a widower with only one daughter as heir to his fortune. As a leader of his community, he bravely speaks out against Prior Robert's mission to transfer Saint Winifred's bones. Rhisiart sees no need or purpose for this move and stands up for what he believes, stirring up the rest of the town to do the same. Rhisiart ends up murdered early in the story creating the major plot line.

Engelard

Engelard is a young man, a fugitive from Cheshire where he is wanted for deer poaching. He escapes to Gwytherin and gets a job as an ox caller at Rhisiart's holding. He falls in love with Rhisiart's daughter Sioned, and Sioned reciprocates the love. They cannot be together, though, due to his status as a fugitive, and the fact that she is Welsh and he is Saxon does not help. Engelard is tall and slender with long, fair curls. Cadfael and many others notice how talented Engelard is at his job. The oxen seem to love him and want to do a good job for him. Engelard becomes the prime suspect in Rhisiart's murder because his arrow is found in Rhisiart's chest, and everybody knows that he has motive since Rhisiart was the primary person standing in the way of Sioned and Engelard's marriage. Cadfael and his skillful investigative skills eventually prove Engelard's innocence.

Annest

Annest is a beautiful young lady with light brown sun-flecked hair and one of Sioned's loyal waiting women. She is also Bened the smith's niece. She and Brother John fall in love almost at first sight and end up married at the end of the story. Annest takes after Sioned as a brave woman who does not sit by and neatly fall into stereotypical character traits. When John is about to be arrested by the bailiff, Annest discovers Robert's request to the bailiff to arrest John. She rushes into action and initiates the events that allow for John's escape.



Bened

Bened is a thickset, muscular town smith in Gwytherin. He is in his middle years and a widower with no children. He is a very social figure. He immediately befriends Cadfael and invites him to the regular nightly gatherings the men hold at his house. Bened introduces many of the important figures in the town to Cadfael and acquaints Cadfael with their backgrounds. Bened is the one to find Rhisiart's dead body and to point out that Engelard's arrow is sticking out of Rhisiart's chest. He may have some resentment towards Engelard, because Bened too, like many of the Gwytherin men, is in love with Sioned. Bened knows he can never have her because he is a widower and too old for Sioned.

Abbot Heribert

Abbot Heribert is the abbot at the Shrewsbury monastery. He is old, mild-mannered and pliant. The abbot wishes harmony for all and is easy going. He facilitates everyone's comfort and happiness. When Cadfael wants to join the group going to Gwytherin to obtain Saint Winifred's bones, he goes to Abbot Heribert for permission and bypasses Prior Robert, who he knows will be much harder to convince. Abbot Heribert kindly allows Cadfael to go on the trip and even allows him to take Brother John as his helper.



Objects/Places

The Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul at Shrewsbury

The Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul at Shrewsbury is the abbey that Prior Robert's monastery belongs to. Within the monastery is Brother Cadfael's beloved herb garden, which he tends to with the aid of Brother Columbanus and Brother John. Prior Robert sets off to obtain relics, claiming that his objective is the glory of the Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

The Town of Gwytherin

The town of Gwytherin is the Welsh town where Saint Winifred's bones lie in the ground. Therefore, this is where Prior Robert's expedition must head when they set off to obtain Saint Winifred's bones as relics for their abbey. The town consists of a small, tightly knit community headed by rich landlords like Rhisiart and Cadwallon.

Bened's House

Bened is the Gwytherin's town smith. He holds many nightly gatherings in his home where men drink and discuss the town's issues. These social gatherings are where many important discussions occur and where Cadfael gets acquainted with many of the townspeople.

Rhisiart's Holding

Rhisiart's holding is where Rhisiart and Sioned live. After Rhisiart dies, Sioned becomes the lord of the household and inherits all her father's land. This is also where Cal and Engelard work as ploughman and ox caller. Anest, who works as Sioned's waiting woman, also has a room in the huge household. When John is captured for his crime of abetting Engelard's escape, he is held prisoner in Rhisiart's house and guarded by Rhisiart's staff.

Winifred's Gravesite and Chapel

Winifred's gravesite is where many vigils are held and where many miracles occur. It is also the location of many important plot lines. For example, it is where Cadfael implements many of his plans to uncover the murderer. The final showdown with Columbanus also happens here. In the end, it become a place where people come for miracles and healing, as Saint Winifred remains buried there.



Well at Holywell

The well at Holywell sprung up where Saint Winifred was martyred and then rose back up from the dead. In a dream, Jerome sees Saint Winifred telling him to take Brother Columbanus to Holywell and bathe him in the well water so he can be healed. Jerome takes Columbanus to Holywell, and sure enough Columbanus returns miraculously healed.

Father Huw's House

Father Huw's house is the Shrewsbury brothers' first stop when they arrive at Gwytherin. Father Huw offers them his home to sleep in. As the story unfolds many important meetings happen in Father Huw's home. Prior Robert, Cadfael and Huw are all in Huw's home awaiting Rhisiart to arrive for the appointed meeting when Rhisiart is murdered.

Saint Winifred's Bones

Saint Winifred's bones are the driving force of the plot. Prior Robert decides that Saint Winifred has communicated to the Shrewsbury monks her will to be brought to their abbey where she will be honored. He goes to great lengths to ensure her retrieval. Prior Robert convinces the people of Gwytherin to hand over the relics, but Cadfael becomes convinced that Saint Winifred's will is to remain in Gwytherin. He cooks up a plan to trick Robert into thinking he is walking away with the real relics, when in fact Saint Winifred's bones remain in her original graveyard in Gwytherin.

Cadfael's Poppy Seed Syrup

Cadfael is a master herbalist. He creates many medicines and tonics from the herbs he grows. His poppy seed syrup is used to help people relax people and sleep. Cadfael gives some of it to Dame Branwen when she becomes hysterical from the news that her son has committed a crime. Columbanus uses the syrup to put Jerome to sleep while the two of them are supposed to be keeping a vigil at Saint Winifred's chapel. During that time, Columbanus kills Rhisiart. The mostly empty bottle of poppy seed syrup in Columbanus' room is one of the pieces of evidence that convinces Cadfael that Columbanus may be the murderer.

Engelard's Arrow

Peredur uses one of Engelard's arrows to frame Engelard for Rhisiart's murder. Engelard is a master at archery, and his arrows have a clear sign on them to indicate that they belong to him. Engelard and Peredur often practice archery together, and Peredur happens to have one of Engelard's arrows with him when he comes across

Rhisiart's dead body. The arrow causes Engelard to become a suspect in the crime, but Engelard is cleared by the end of the story.



Themes

The Nature of Miracles

Peters explores the nature of miracles in this novel. The characters seem divided between unquestionable faith in miracles and skepticism about miracles and the communication of divine will to human beings. Some of the characters clearly abuse other people's faith in the communication of divine will. Columbanus attempts to gain attention and glory to fulfill his family's high expectations by faking divine communication. Many of his peers and many of the Gwytherin townspeople readily believe his displays of divine ecstasy. Prior Robert abuses the people's faith in miracles and divine communication by blaming Rhisiart's death on Saint Winifred's wrath. He warns the people not to stand in the way of the saint's will, or else they may get a taste of her wrath as well.

The novel's plot suggests that miracles are often a result of blind faith. People see, hear and feel what they expect rather than what is the reality. Cadfael also expresses this point of view when he discovers that the casket with Columbanus' body is creating miracles for all sorts of people simply because they believe that the bones of Saint Winifred lie in it. This irony adds humor to the story. Although Cadfael believes that miracles are not always truly divine, he does not rule out the possibility that they may sometimes actually be real. Cadfael, in line with the plot, believes that the miracles that happen at Saint Winifred's grave after the monks leave Gwytherin are slightly more amazing and therefore more likely to include some real miracles. This suggests that he does have some faith in miracles, but he is wise enough to see that often miracles have nothing to do with reality and have more to do with faith and expectations.

Fairness and the Law

The novel explores the theme of fairness through contrasting different characters' beliefs and actions. In the beginning of the novel, Rhisiart is unable to permit Sioned's marriage to Engelard. This seems unfair, but he cannot allow it because it goes against his culture and beliefs. It would be a social disgrace if the daughter of a rich landowner married a fugitive, not to mention the fact that Engelard is a Saxon and Sioned is Welsh. Here we see the law and culture as things that stand in the way of fairness.

Robert, who represents the law of the church, is also unfair. He bribes and threatens and fills the hearts of the townspeople with fear in order to convince them to let him take Saint Winifred's bones to Shrewsbury. The people of Gwytherin resist Prior Robert's proposal largely because they see it as unfair, as foreshadowed by Padrig. They do not understand why their saint would want to leave them and implore monks in a far away town to take her away to honor her.



Many of the characters in the story express distrust in the law and its fairness, and often they take matters into their own hands in order to avoid the unfairness of the law. First, Sioned urges Engelard to run when she realizes he has become a suspect in the murder of her father. She knows very well that he is innocent, but she has no faith that the law will show the truth. The reader sees how easy it is to fool people. Most of the townspeople and certainly the law believe that Engelard is guilty because the evidence points his way. After all, they find one of Engelard's arrows in Rhisiart's chest. It doesn't occur to most people that appearances do not always reflect reality. Second, when Annest and her friends find out that John will be arrested by the bailiff, they rush to set him free. They have no faith that the bailiff will do what they know in their hearts is fair. Third and most importantly, Cadfael urges Engelard not to go to the law when he accidentally murders Columbanus. He wisely explains to the innocent and more naive Engelard that the law is not always the best and fairest way to deal with sticky situations. Engelard is one of the few characters who displays a childlike faith in the law and its fairness. Although he feels the law will understand his situation, Engelard takes Cadfael's advice, and thanks to that, he ends up a free man.

Cadfael's actions throughout the novel demonstrate that he does not have faith in the fairness of the law and furthermore that he believes that the end justifies the means. Cadfael employs deception, lying and many other sins to achieve his noble goals. Sioned seems to go along with this line of thinking. She believes that avenging her father's death is the right and noble thing to do, and she is willing to lie and deceive to achieve that goal. Columbanus employs many of these same sinful techniques, but because his actions are not for a noble end, he is portrayed as a bad character. Peredur also takes the law into his own hands when he allows for Engelard's escape. He does not believe that the law will find him innocent, as Peredur knows that he is.

Sincerity Versus Appearances

Many characters in *A Morbid Taste for Bones* put on appearances, and these characters contrast with the few who are sincere. Often times, the reader is not clear on which character is sincere and which character is faking. Columbanus, who appears to be the most devoted character of all, ends up being the grandest deceiver. His devotion and his divine connections are exposed to be nothing but a facade to bring him glory. On the other hand, Brother Jerome, whom Cadfael, John and sometimes even the narrator seem to look down upon and question, turns out to be a decent fellow truly devoted and sincere in his humility and submission.

These examples prod the reader to ask questions such as, how can we tell sincerity from a facade and what makes a person truly honorable? If a person seems to have divine connections, does that make him/her a good person or might that person have ulterior motives for faking such connections? The reader also questions the implications of appearances versus reality when Robert and Engelard's leadership techniques are compared. Robert is an authority figure, a prior at a monastery and a man with a large group of followers. Therefore, outwardly, one would guess that Robert must be a good leader and must have good social skills. When the reader compares him to Engelard,

though, and Engelard's amazing leadership skills that he displays through his profession as an ox caller, the reader may realize that appearance may be deceiving. Engelard, who is a poor fugitive, just may have more leadership and social skills than Prior Robert.



Style

Points of View

A Morbid Taste for Bones is told in third-person point of view, mainly following the actions and thoughts of the main character, Brother Cadfael. The narrator, though, seems to have a strong presence in the novel, as he/she unravels the tale with a distinct voice. The reader can accurately guess much about the narrator by the way the story is told. The narrator seems to mirror Brother Cadfael's beliefs and thoughts and sometimes even his sense of humor and sarcasm. For example, each of the supporting characters is described the way Brother Cadfael might describe them. Therefore, the narrator is not an objective teller of the story. In fact, the narrator emits a presence that cannot be ignored. This may be the reason why Brother Cadfael's character is portrayed as a perfectly wise and balanced being, rarely if ever making a mistake or a wrong move.

Setting

A Morbid Taste for Bones was first published in 1977. The story takes place in the 12th century medieval times and begins in the Benedictine monastery of Shrewsbury. Within the monastery, the monks live a quiet life of worship and solitude, until Prior Robert's ambitions to acquire a relic for the monastery result in an expedition that takes a group of the Benedictine Brothers into the remote Welsh village called Gwytherin. Gwytherin is a small town consisting of a tightly knit community, where everybody knows everybody else's business. The majority of the plot unravels either in one of the houses of the important figures of Gwytherin or at the graveyard where Saint Winifred is buried. The novel spans a period of a few days, except for the last chapter, which gives the reader a glimpse of the characters' lives two years into the future.

Language and Meaning

A Morbid Taste for Bones is a fast-paced and action-driven tale, nearly devoid of long expository paragraphs. The action-packed short paragraphs within short chapters keep the story interesting and suspenseful. The language Peters uses is not too difficult, although it is significantly different from modern English. Peters uses medieval terminology, but it is not difficult to pick up the meanings of those words simply from their context. *A Morbid Taste for Bones* is full of foreshadowing, and that helps to keep the reader guessing as to what the next plot twist may be. The author keeps the reader in suspense until the very end with one twist after another. Peters paints colorful and entertaining characters for the readers. This keeps the murder mystery light-hearted and fun to read. Peters employs a narrator with distinctive voice and opinions. The narrator depicts all of the characters that Cadfael seems to like in a positive manner. Those characters include John, Bened, Sioned, Annest, Engelard and Peredur. At the



same time, all of the characters Cadfael dislikes are depicted negatively. Those characters include Columbanus, Prior Robert and Jerome. Brother Cadfael himself is of course depicted as a perfect balance of all extremes and as a mine of wisdom and skills.

Structure

The novel consists of twelve short and fast-paced chapters. The main story line is about the expedition to obtain the bones of Saint Winifred, but many subplots develop during the expedition, including more than one romance. The story begins in the Shrewsbury monastery and then moves to the town of Gwytherin where much of the plot unfolds. The novel then ends back in the Shrewsbury monastery where it began. The last chapter takes the reader two years into the future where the reader gets to see what has become of all of the characters. *A Morbid Taste for Bones* also follows the structure of a typical whodunit story. The crime is committed in the beginning, and the rest of the story is an investigation of all the possible suspects, leading to a final resolution that occurs at the end when the criminal is uncovered.



Quotes

"Brother Cadfael himself found nothing strange in his wide-ranging career, and had forgotten nothing and regretted nothing. He saw no contradiction in the delight he had taken in battle and adventure, and the keen pleasure he now found in quietude. Spiced, to be truthful, with more than a little mischief when he could get it, as he liked his victuals well-flavoured, but quietude all the same, a ship becalmed and enjoying it." Chapter 1, pg. 6

"When you have done everything else, perfecting a conventual herb-garden is a fine and satisfying thing to do. He could not conceive of coming to this stasis having done nothing else whatever." Chapter 1, pg. 7

"'In my church,' said Huw humbly, 'I have never heard that the saints desired honour for themselves, but rather to honour God rightly.'" Chapter 2, pg. 31

"His voice was hoarse and tired with long use now, but still clear and merry, more effective than any goad, as he cajoled his weary beasts along the final furrow, calling and luring and praising, telling them they had done marvels, and should get their rest and their meed for it, that in moments now they would be going home, that he was proud of them and loved them, as if he had been talking to Christian souls. And the beasts heaved and leaned, throwing their weight into the yokes and keeping their eyes upon him, and plainly would do anything in their power to please him." Chapter 2, pg. 35

"'Women cannot be bards,' said Padrig with tolerant scorn, 'But she knows how to keep it tuned, and well looked after, that I will say.'" Chapter 3, pg. 40

"I could never see why a man can't reverence his favourite saint without wanting to fondle her bones, but there's great rivalry for such relics among the abbeys these days." Chapter 3, pg. 62

"And she came of proud Welsh stock to which the blood-feud is sacred, a duty transcending even grief." Chapter 5, pg. 70

"'Yet who can say,' said Peredur in a low voice, 'how far a man may step aside even from his own nature, for love?'" Chapter 5, pg. 74

"There are as holy persons outside orders as ever there are in, and not to trifle with truth, as good men out of the Christian church as most I've met within it." Chapter 6, pg. 92

"Meet every man as you might find him, for we're all made the same under habit or robe or rags. Some better made than others, and some better cared for, but on the same pattern all." Chapter 6, pg. 92



"Both men and women partake of the same human nature, Huw. We both bleed when we're wounded. That's a poor, silly woman, true, but we can show plenty of poor, silly men. There are women as strong as any of us, and as able." Chapter 9, pg. 151

"Justice can be arrived at by more routes than one." Chapter 10, pg. 171

"Miracles have nothing to do with reason. Miracles contradict reason, overturn reason, make game of reason, they strike clean across mere human deserts, and deliver and save where they will. If they made sense, they would not be miracles." Chapter 11, pg. 186

"Evidently the body of a calculating murderer does almost as well as the real thing, given faith enough. Almost but never quite." Chapter 12, pg. 191



Topics for Discussion

A Morbid Taste for Bones is set in Medieval times when women were portrayed very different than they are today. Compare the terms used to describe women in the novel to the terms used to describe men. What character traits are considered positive for a female or male character, and which are considered negative by the characters? What do your findings tell you about the gender stereotypes of the times?

Discuss characters that break the stereotypical gender roles expected from them in the time and culture used for the setting of *A Morbid Taste for Bones*. What are the results of their transgressions?

Jerome and John represent the two opposite sides of the spectrum when it comes to feelings about authority, particularly Prior Robert's authority over them. Discuss how these two characters differ in their views about authority, devotion and worship. How do they fare as followers? Choose one other character and explain where he/she falls within this spectrum.

What techniques does Prior Robert use to convince the people of Gwytherin to agree to his proposal? How successful is he in convincing them to see things his way? What do his methods say about him?

A Morbid Taste for Bones holds the reader in suspense until the very end. What techniques does the author employ to create this suspense and to hold the reader's attention until the last chapter?

How is Cadfael's role as translator crucial to the plot? What does his role as translator allow for?

What does the novel *A Morbid Taste for Bones* say about the law and its ability to deal out justice? What does the novel suggest about the age-old question: does the end justify the means?

Discuss the believability of Brother Cadfael's character. Is Brother Cadfael too perfect to be believable, or does the author mix in enough of a human touch to make Brother Cadfael realistic?

There is clearly some animosity between the English and the Welsh in *A Morbid Taste for Bones*. What are some examples that demonstrate these bad feelings? Historically, where did these bad feelings stem from? How is Welsh culture different from English culture?

What is the function of Father Huw in *A Morbid Taste for Bones*? How crucial is his character to plot development?

What are the investigative techniques Brother Cadfael uses to skillfully solve the murder mystery? What skills does he possess that are unique to him? What kind of careers or experiences might he have had in the past to help him gain such skills?