

Painted Horses Study Guide

Painted Horses by Malcolm Brooks

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Plot Summary

Aspiring archaeologist Catherine Lemay travels to Montana in the summer of 1956 to give her opinion as to whether or not there is anything of historical value in a remote canyon that would be lost as a result of a hydroelectric dam project that would flood the canyon. While there she meets, and falls in love with, John H, an old mustanger and World War II vet. What he teaches her during their short time together in Montana forces her to choose between romance and ambition as well as tradition and progress.

River Basin Surveys hires Catherine Lemay on behalf of the Smithsonian and the Army Corps of Engineers to look for anything of Crow Indian heritage worth preserving that would prohibit the building of a hydroelectric dam that would flood the canyon. When she arrives, she expects to meet the head of the utility, but instead only receives a letter with her name misspelled stating that he does not expect her to find anything and that everyone, even the Crow, will only experience gains from the dam. The letter also states that he'll send a guide to help her navigate the canyon.

After a few days, there's no sign of the guide, so Catherine decides to explore the canyon on her own. She stops by a service station and gets advice from its owner, Max Caldwell. Still, she overestimates her capabilities. Her mode of transportation, an old Dodge ambulance, gets a flat tire and rolls into a ditch as she tries to change it. She's saved however, by John H who she's meeting for a second time. The first time she literally ran into his painted horse while waiting for her train journey to continue.

Her guide, Jack Allen, finally arrives. He knows the land, but can't help her in terms of Crow Indian lore and give her an idea of where to start. She turns to Max Caldwell who suggests that she seek out a girl named Miriam. Catherine follows his advice and convinces Miriam to help her. Miriam warns her, though, that she's doing it for her own best interest, not Catherine's.

The two women begin exploring the canyon with Allen, but soon realize that he's taking them all over the place and not even covering certain areas. They decide to attempt to beat him at his own game and suggests that they camp out. They do and Catherine finds a bird point. At the same time, Allen tries to find the horses that he's been looking for.

The three come out of the canyon and Miriam invites Catherine to the Crow Indian celebration that's taking place in town. Catherine attends and runs into John H again. The two talk and dance, but Jack Allen and Dub Harris interrupt their evening.

Jack, Miriam, and Catherine go back into the canyon and this time Catherine finds glyphs and stone carvings that she thinks may be valuable enough to save the canyon. Miriam also sees them, but Jack doesn't seem to. When Catherine announces that she has just gotten her period, Jack voluntarily leaves. The girls plan to return, but when Miriam finds out about the death of her great-grandmother, she goes back home.



Catherine decides to go alone because she's sure that Jack will be going back as he heard the horses he's been looking for.

Catherine goes back alone, but gets lost. In the end she follows what she thinks is a crane, or at least the spirit of a crane, to John H's house. The two have sex and while he does help her return to the glyphs and take pictures, she spends too much time with John H instead of continuing her work. When they return, they find out that Jack and Dub Harris' people have beaten them there. Catherine gives John H the film and tells him to send it to David on the East Coast. She faces Jack and they sweep her away to Billings where she's held captive until she writes a report saying that she didn't find anything and it's okay for the dam project to go ahead.

Even though she fights, she finds out just how powerful Dub Harris and his people are. They say that they will make John H's life miserable if she doesn't give them what they want. She finally calls David and tells him to send the film to an address they give her. Then she finds out that the film has been destroyed anyway. She worries about Miriam, but then finds out that Miriam willingly betrayed her and had sex with Jack.

Finally she goes back to the East Coast. She still works in archaeology but does not take on any big projects until a friend of hers convinces her to. This one has the support of the government and goes well. She returns home and one day gets a letter that has been to Israel and back. It is from John H. She writes back.



Catherine: 1 - 5

Summary

In the beginning of the first part of this chapter, Catherine Lemay wakes up from a dream. She's in London and on an archaeological dig, but things are not going well. A lady tells her that she's not ready and she's falling. In reality, Catherine is on a train traveling to Montana for the summer to complete an assignment in a canyon near an Indian reservation. She's recently off of a dig and has a fiancé who she's just gotten engaged to. He's in Manhattan. On the train she talks to the boy sitting near her and expresses her opinion about the West, which is not very high. She tells him that she's spent time in places that are older than the American West, in London.

The train stops and she has two hours to wait before continuing her journey. After eating a sandwich in a cafe, she takes a stroll and walks into a painted horse. It spooks her. She's scared again when the horse's owner appears from around the horse's backside. She knows she's showing her fear and this makes her mad and embarrassed. Seeing paint on the man she realizes that he is the one who painted the horse and to hide her reaction, sarcastically asks who would paint a horse. She rushes back to the train, but this time stays awake to keep from dreaming about warriors on their painted horses.

The second part of this chapter focuses on a man called John H. He had come to the canyon to work on a painting when his mare senses that there are horses around. John H gets up quickly, stumbles and feels pain in his knee. Still, he's able to get his own horses reigned which he's eager to do because, even though his horse was loyal, she was a mustang held in captivity and he didn't know if she would be more loyal to her own kind than him. He leaves his painting and rides her, letting her choose the path. They find the horses running wild and run with them for a bit. Then he sees the stallion. Finally they leave. His mare neighs as they go.

Catherine reappears in the third part. She had thought that she was going to meet the dam contractor, Dub Harris in Billings. Instead he left her a letter, spelling her name incorrectly. In the letter he outlines her mission which is to determine whether there is anything sacred enough in the canyon to keep it from being flooded as part of a hydroelectric dam project. In the letter he says that she was chosen, even though she's a woman, because of her experience on a previous project (the one in London) that interfered with a development project. He had said that he was going to send her a guide, but he hadn't shown up yet, so decides to go to the canyon on her own driving a converted Dodge army ambulance with the logo containing the words Harris Power and Light. It's a struggle for her to drive it.

She goes to a gas station to ask for the best route to the canyon and meets the owner, Max Caldwell. He knows about River Basin Surveys as he's worked on some himself. He tells her to be careful and to not rush. He gives her the best route to take, a map,



advises her to plan for the worst and extra gas. She sees the sagebrush and asks what it is. He tells her and says that it's sacred. The word sacred stays with her.

After a while she realizes that coming alone was a mistake. She has no idea where to start. She decides she needs an Indian to help her. Along the way she also sees a man violently capturing a horse. She gets a flat tire and tries to change it, but fails. Instead the Dodge ends up halfway in a ditch.

John H reappears in the fourth part of this chapter. He uses German binoculars to watch the heard. He decides that the red stallion would be one he would ride some day. As he rides he comes across a red ambulance that's stuck in the ditch.

The fifth and final section of this chapter initially goes back to London when Catherine first stumbles upon the dig there. She's there on a Fulbright scholarship to study the piano. However she's more interested in what seems to be the discovery part of a Roman fortification. The narrative switches back to the current day where she wonders whether she's been lucky enough to stumble on something as she had in London when she sees carvings and the words Gora Euzkadi. She thinks it may be an Indian name. She continues walking and runs into John H. who she recognizes as the man she had seen in Miles City. He helps her with the Dodge. When she asks him about the meaning of the words, he tells her that it is Basque.

Analysis

This chapter introduces several of the novel's main characters as well as several of its reoccurring themes. The characters are Catherine, John H, and Max Caldwell. Readers also learn about Catherine's fiance, David, who is not a main character in terms of the novel's plot, but contributes to the theme of identity and sacrificing the old to make way for the new.

The dream that Catherine has at the beginning of the novel tells readers a lot about her personality, what she really feels about her role in the London project and her feelings towards her current project. Basically, she feels as if she's not ready, that she's bitten off more than she can chew. A dominant woman is telling her that this is the case, making readers think that she is someone of authority who should know. The dream paints the picture of an insecure Catherine, but a Catherine who does not want to give in. She wants to prove that she has what it takes, so she keeps on digging, looking for something. She even thinks of her next essay topic which would be "Failure to Find Nothing in the Archaeological West." From this readers already know what Catherine is going to try to do. For her, success means finding something even though her true assignment is to discover whether or not there are any sacred relics that would keep the flooding of the canyon. No one has said that she has to find something, but her interpretation is that success means finding something. Thus, when Max Caldwell says that the sagebush is sacred, she hangs on the word sacred as proof that there is something sacred out there.



She, however, is inexperienced. She doesn't realize the massive size of the canyon. She thinks that the words she sees after her Dodge breaks down are Indian, but they are really Basque. Readers also come to realize that she doesn't like to appear stupid. When John H's horse scares her she's embarrassed and tries to make it look as if he's crazy because he paints horses. She brags to the boy on the train about her time in London when he mocks her because of her preconceived view of the west.

Readers also get the impression that Catherine fights between two worlds and is someone in search of her identity. This could be one of the reasons she decided to take this project, even though she suspects that she's not ready for it. She's a woman in a world that is usually inhabited by men. Dub Harris says as much in his letter. Yet, she accepted David's marriage proposal. Her reaction to her fellow train passenger when he asks her about her fiance gives readers the sense that he's right. David proposed to make sure she comes back after the summer and she said yes to please someone other than herself.

She also was supposed to be playing the piano instead of doing archaeology. She was good enough at playing the piano to get a Fulbright Scholarship, but her true love is archaeology, something that her instincts lead her to pursue.

Still, in spite of her experience in London, she feels insecure, but tries to hide this by taking on more than she can handle such as this project and going into the canyon alone.

John H's character presents a contrast. He's at one with nature and horses. He paints, however, displaying a sensitive soul in contrast to the bloodied horse wrangler. The fact that he keeps on running into Catherine and helps her foreshadows a relationship that may develop between the two.

Max Caldwell appears as a trusted advisor or a fatherly figure for Catherine. He knows the lay of the land, physically and politically.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Catherine agreed to take on this project?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Dub Harris meet Catherine as he's supposed to? Should his absence have sent a message to Catherine? Why or why not and if so, what is the message?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Catherine is the right person for this assignment? Why or why not.



Vocabulary

trowel, suction, sludge, gorged, ravages, mesas, spires, cocksure, ducktail, muster, pompadour, lapse, satchel, testy, bustling, bison, cronies, interminable, Fullbright, quaint, mammoth, ramshackle, flank, splayed, maniacal, batholith, neigh, cinch, strata, stalagmites, schussed, antagonist, chauvinist



John H: I

Summary

The chapter takes readers into the beginnings of John H's story. When he was 4 years old, John H's mother left him with his father. John H's father could have been a baseball player, but loses his eye right before the scout comes around with the contract. He ends up working under an old German horse trainer, who is getting older and older. While John H's father is optimistic that this is his lucky break, he really doesn't truly understand horses. John H does, however, and when the trainer drops dead and John H's father takes over his duties, John H ends up doing the job instead. News that the owners of the stable are going to hire another trainer, letting John H's father resume his original responsibilities, sends the father into depression. When the truant officers arrive, because John H skips school to do his father's job, his father meets them with a gun. They arrest him. John H escapes on a horse, but he finally turns himself in. He talks to his father, who has had a nervous breakdown, one last time and then goes to live with foster parents--the family of a Methodist pastor.

All of the children in the family are adults with the exception of one child, Cora. She's sensitive, has an older boyfriend, and appreciates his drawings. John H thinks she's beautiful. One evening Cora gets into trouble after she gets her boyfriend to drive her to Philadelphia to see a movie and the police identify illegal liquor as a contributor to a car accident she's in. Cora's parents send her to an aunts house in Ohio and that night John H runs away.

He takes different trains, almost gets raped by another man, but finally ends up in Montana with a man named Jean Bakar Arietta who takes him in because he knows horses.

Analysis

John H, the other main character in the novel has a different upbringing from Catherine's and this chapter shows that. While Catherine was born in a life of privilege, John H came from a broken home. However he, like Catherine, always knew what he was good at and fights from an early age to preserve his identity. He skips school to do his father's job, continues to draw and runs away instead of being caged by what people think he should be doing. Like Catherine he takes a train to Montana, symbolizing the journey to finding one's identity. Even though readers can't be sure at this point, the fact that Jean Bakar takes him in and says that he will do well because he knows horses foreshadows this realization.

Even though he doesn't come from privilege, John H has more confidence in his abilities than Catherine. He takes steps and lives with the consequences. He's a survivor who



suffers, but doesn't complain as Catherine does when she tries to do something and it doesn't work out.

He is also loyal and sensitive. He's so loyal to his father that when he sees how depressed he is at having to go back to his old job he skips school to do the job for him. He stays with his foster family as long as Cora is there, but leaves when her family sends her away. He feels with these people as he feels with the horses. His ability to render the horses in his drawings show how close he is to them.

It's ironic that society has put into place rules to understand and care for people that eventually drive them away. The officers don't understand that John H is better off left in the world of horses and that his father really doesn't belong in jail. He's just a broken man and putting him in jail and taking his son away from him is the last thing he needs.

Ministers are supposed to help people and forgive. Instead Cora's family is only worried about how her behavior reflects on them. John H reads them correctly and realizes that once she's gone, his life will be terrible. Life on the streets appears to be a better option than that in a box built by the confines of society.

Discussion Question 1

How did John H's upbringing contribute to his willingness to run away from his foster parents?

Discussion Question 2

Why did John H's father have a nervous breakdown?

Discussion Question 3

How would John H's life have been different if his mother had stayed? Why do you think she left him with his father?

Vocabulary

scout, spectacular, endeavor, equitation, truant, menace, bloodstock, pedigree, tamped, kennels, bluff, squint, Basque, sparse, ravenous, gaunt, molten, ingot, vagabonds, turmoil



Relics 1

Summary

After being in Montana for 5 days, Catherine looks at her dirty hands and thinks that she should get her priorities straight. So she decides to call her fiance, David. The call does not go well, however, as the two have an argument. After hearing about her experience thus far, he looks at the project from a business perspective and tells her to be careful. He also raises the idea that maybe she got the job because she is a student. He doesn't say that being a woman has anything to do with her getting the assignment, but she believes that he implies it. She takes a combative stance and tells him that she got the assignment because of her experience in London which gave her the unique perspective of being in between an archaeological and a development project. Realizing that she's upset, David tries to soothe things over, but she's still angry when she hangs up and she realizes that she hadn't asked him how he was doing.

Jack Allen, the horse wrangler who Dub Harris hired to serve as Catherine's guide, finally arrives. Catherine is still in bed and answers the door in her silk pajamas. He knows how to navigate the canyon, but Catherine has also realized that she needs to talk to someone who knows about Crow Indian history and can tell her where to start looking. Jack can't help her with that and suggests that she have a Crow Indian help her if she can get one to leave the bar. He starts to leave, taking her flat tire with him even though Catherine says she can do it herself. Without the tire she can't go to the canyon alone. Jack says that he'll be back tomorrow at 5:00 am with horses. As he leaves, he notices the handprints across the company logo. Catherine doesn't tell him who did it, but he says that he knew someone in the war who did the same thing.

Catherine talks to Max Caldwell again. He admires the fact that she went out on her own. He also knows that Jack Allen has been to see her. She tells him that she had seen him on the side of the road with a bloodied mustang in a truck. He tells her a bit about Jack who is a wolfer. Max says that wolfers are half canine and they talk about the horses that escaped cultivation. The notion of killing what you love arises. Catherine asks him if he knows an Indian who can help her figure out where to start and he suggests a girl named Miriam. Catherine finds her and she agrees to help. But she warns Catherine that she's doing it more to help her than to help Catherine.

Analysis

Catherine's hands tell a a lot about her state of mind. When they are dirty, she is pursuing the work that she wants to do. For the last five days that is what she's been doing, thus her hands and nails are dirty. This, however, is in contrast to what she is supposed to be doing, her duties. That, based on her status is life, is to marry someone like David. She feels that she has to choose between the two. Still trying to live by



society's rules, she decides it's time to call David. Their conversation highlights her need to prove herself and the fact that being married to David is not the life for her.

First of all, she doesn't totally confide in him as she wants to appear to be strong. She's also intent on proving that she's worthy and is blind to the idea that she's done her job if she finds nothing. David, being a business man understands this, however, and tries to help her. Instead of taking in what he says and weighing it based on the information she has so far such as the letter from Dub Harris, she takes the defensive and assumes that David has no faith in her. The fact that she won't listen to David shows that their relationship isn't solid on her side. She doesn't even care enough about him to ask him how he is. It's all about her. She's only engaged to David because he is the type of man she should be engaged to according to society. She does not really love him, though. He's only part of her priorities.

Catherine's ambivalent nature appears when Jack Allen arrives. He wakes her up and finds her in her silk pajamas, but he's impressed when he realizes that she went to the canyon on her own. Catherine wants to get gong, but when Jack says that he'll be there at 5:00 am, she doesn't jump for joy.

A foreshadowing of something that will happen in the future between John H and Jack Allen occurs when he notices the handprints on the truck. Jack Allen also serves as a foil against John H's character. John H runs with the horses and paints while Jack Allen fights with horses to restrain them to the point that it draws blood.

The power of Catherine's intuition displays itself when she doesn't tell Allen who put the handprint on the Dodge.

Once again, Max Caldwell plays the role of the trusted advisor when he praises Catherine for her spunk by surviving the canyon alone, filling her in her Jack Allen's background and directing her to Miriam.

Even though she does find the Indian she's looking for to help her, she warns Catherine that she's doing it for her own interest in the end. This should serve as a warning to Catherine, but she is so intent of proving herself and is so sure that tradition is important to the Crow Indians that she does not pay attention to the real implication of Miriam's words.

The theme of racism also appears in this chapter. While Catherine looks to the Indians for knowledge, Jack implies that they are all useless drunks. When he tells Catherine that they can go into the taverns to drink, he adds that he doesn't have anything against the tavers, implying that he has something against the Indians.

Between his attitude towards Indians and Dub Harris's letter, readers must wonder whether Catherine is really supposed to find anything or not. Could David be right in his belief that she should be careful and she was hired because they thought she wouldn't find anything? As an archaeologist what is her role in face of progress? This chapter sets the stage for these themes.



Discussion Question 1

Do you think David really loves Catherine? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jack Allen take Catherine's flat tire? Is he there to be her guide or sabotage her efforts? Support your opinion.

Discussion Question 3

Catherine looks at her hands and decides she should get her priorities straight. John H put his prints on the Dodge. Why is there so much focus on hands? What message do they give?

Vocabulary

betrotted, traipsing, precarious, pragmatic, hindrance, matinee, cognition, disintegrated, trenches, indubitable, trough, stoical, radiophone, demure, insolence, indignation, undaunted, spindles, ramshackle, obsidian



Relics: 2

Summary

John H listens to jazz as he prepares to leave for a job he has at a Basque friend's ranch. He's out of cash and food and he doesn't have many bullets. He's had the mare he rides for six years. He stole it, saving it from the slaughter house.

On the way to the ranch he hunts in order to eat and arrives at the ranch's kitchen by noon the next day. Once there he shaves and talks to his friend's wife who is cooking. When the rest of the men arrive, he eats. That evening he talks to his friend over a whisky. His mare shows signs of missing John H and the conversation turns to wives. His friends says that his wife can fix him up with a Basque girl, but John H says that he has already tried that.

The next day John H gets to work. A few days later he tells his friend that he's leaving because his mare has just come into her cycle. His friend doesn't understand him, but doesn't stop him from leaving.

Analysis

This section of the chapter sets up John H as a relic himself. He lives from the land, hunting for food and doing work in order to survive. Even though he seems to be a loner, he has friends and social skills. His friend's wife even wants to fix him up with her single friends.

His existence continues to be in opposition to Jack's rough nature and Catherine's privileged background. He doesn't sleep in silk pajamas and in his dealings with Catherine, he has always been a gentleman and has never said anything negative about the Indians. Jack has bloody battles with horses, but John H actually saved his horse from the slaughter house.

He may not have Catherine's cultural background, but he has a love for music, in particular jazz. Catherine was familiar with playing classical music, but John H has a no less significant understanding of sophisticated music. Their difference in music taste begs the question of what it means to be cultured and how Catherine and John H both display their cultural tastes.

Discussion Question 1

What makes John H likeable?



Discussion Question 2

What do you think John H finds appealing about jazz?

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think is more cultured, John H or Catherine? Support your opinion.

Vocabulary

vinyl, murmur, bluff, cairns, eons, stave, berserk, begrimed, aloft, pellmell, erstwhile, abattoir, rump, dilate, trough, hackamore, hobbled, marmots, slogged, flushed



Relics 3

Summary

Catherine, Miriam, and Jack ride into the canyon. Miriam flirts with Jack. Catherine is suffering as she rides the horse, but keeps on going. When she has to go to the bathroom, she doesn't announce it, she simply asks whether they can stop. Miriam knows she needs to go, however, and tells Jack. When Jack tells Catherine to watch out for snakes, she doesn't know whether he's threatening her in some way. She feels as if she has to prove something to him, but wonders whether he knows that her biggest fear is looking stupid. Miriam volunteers to go with her.

Once Catherine has finished, they discuss what they are looking for. Catherine admits that she doesn't know much about Indians. That's why she hired Miriam. Miriam lets her know that she's modern and would love to have some Wedgewood china. The two women also talk about the fact that Miriam has been flirting with Allen and Catherine reassures Miriam that she's pretty.

The two women join Allen and decide that they should start looking for signs of an old campground. The women realize that the time it takes to go to and from the site is going to slow them down. As they search, they come across migrating cranes. Miriam says that that is what she'll miss if she ever leaves. Catherine tries to take a picture, but misses her chance because she doesn't know how to use the camera. They join Jack Allen again. He's found hoof-prints and is interested in the idea that horses are in the area.

Later, Miriam tells Catherine a story about her great-grandmother who the soldiers called Crane Girl and her great-grandfather who fought with Custer at Rosebud Creek. Catherine doesn't know what Miriam is talking about so Miriam says that she'll continue the story if they can get something to eat. They go into town, but Miriam points out that the place Miriam chooses is for whites only. Catherine manages to get Miriam served and Miriam continues her story. Max Caldwell comes in and says that there's something that he needs to show Catherine. She and Miriam go with him the next day. Caldwell shows them some glyphs and raises the possibility that sacred things have happened there. Catherine takes pictures.

Analysis

This section of the chapter shows how much Catherine is a fish out of water in the environment in which she's operating in. She may be educated, but when it comes to dealing with nature, she's ill-equipped. She suffers as she rides the horse and her proper education doesn't even allow her to say that she has to stop in order to go to the bathroom. It also shows her wish to prove that she is able to do the job. In addition, she's been warned by two people--Jack and Max--to watch for snakes, but she still



thinks that Jack's warning is some type of threat. Finally, Catherine really doesn't know anything about the history of her own country although she is supposed to be a lover of the past. When Miriam talks about Rosebud Creek, Catherine has no idea what she's referencing.

Miriam appears as what Catherine might consider to be an atypical Indian. She shows signs of craving for the modern world and wanting things that Catherine takes for granted, like Wedgewood china. She also is almost more of a feminist than Catherine, doesn't hold her tongue and is intelligent. She also flirts with Jack Allen. Readers should pay attention to this as it may foreshadow future events.

It's interesting that Catherine enlists Miriam to help her find sacred relics, but Miriam says that the thing she'll miss the most if she ever leaves are the cranes. Is this a sign that sacred relics do not really exist even for the Indians? Is the hunt to find such a thing in modern times futile? Is it part of Catherine's job to pay attention to such signals? All of these questions feed into the theme of Preserving the Past vs Progress.

The theme of racism appears in this section when the girls look for a place to eat. Until that point Jack has traded barbs with Miriam that she has handled and Catherine has elevated her to the point of being her advisor. The rest of society, however, doesn't see her as a person. It sees her as an Indian. Miriam knows this and accepts it. This fact is something that Catherine is unfamiliar with and in her quest to prove her ability, she manages to get food for Miriam in a place that would normally deny her access.

This victory is almost as much as a win for Catherine as it is for Miriam. Catherine has had a day in which her insecurities and lack of knowledge have been exposed. Now, finally, she's able to exhibit her abilities.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Catherine raise the fact that Miriam is flirting with Jack Allen? Are there any dangers in this action? Support your opinion.

Discussion Question 2

Is Catherine the student of history she claims to be? Why or why not.

Discussion Question 3

Should Miriam accept her place in society or should she fight to change it? Support your opinion.



Vocabulary

torrent, indecorous, flatulence, boisterous, fundament, cuneiform, decipher, juttred, precariously, corrugated, nuisance, unmoored, motes, treble, chortles, humiliation, incredulous, abstraction, glyphs. splayed

John II

Summary

John II goes back to the time that John H was with Jean Bakar Arietta. Arietta's boss finds out that John H has been working with him and, after he tames a wild mare, agrees to let him stay. The next day John H gets some new clothes and goes to look at saddles. He says that he'll be back some day to buy one.

Jean Bakar teaches John H a lot. Then in 1934 The Taylor Grazing Act ends the type of work that Jean Baker, John H, and others like them did. It's a disaster for Jean Bakar because this is the only thing Jean Bakar knows how to do. John H notices a physical change in his mentor. He worries that the change will make Jean Bakar crack as his father had.

When John H turns 16, he celebrates with Jean Bakar and friends. They take him for a few drinks and then to a brothel. The girl he sleeps with reminds him of Cora. The next day, he buys his saddle and gets work as a horse hunter. He's going to be away from Jean Bakar, but in the same area he had worked in in the sheep wagon. He goes to goodbye to Jean Bakar who has been talking about going to Spain. John H tells him to wait and he'll go with him.

When John H comes off the range, he finds Jean Bakar who is ecstatic to see him. John H thinks that the two men are going to Spain. Jean Bakar, however has a radio that delivers news about turmoil in Spain. John H goes out with the cannery wagon again six months later. When he returns he finds that Bakar has suffered a bad accident and is lucky to be alive.

John H takes on local work and at Jean Bakar's insistence, tries to find his father, with no luck. The two men still talk about going to Spain, but news of civil war in Spain keeps them from going. At the same time a diminishing demand for horse meat keeps John H in town longer than normal. He's there when Jean Bakar hears about the bombing of Guernica on market day. This is too much for Jean Bakar to handle. He's in such bad shape, that when the cannery finally tells John H that they have work for him, he turns them down even though they offer him more money as the wagon master thinks he's a genius.

Jean Bakar finally goes totally crazy one day and dies. John H takes his body to an abandoned homestead, puts it on a bunk, and then burns the place down. Hungry, he kills a rabbit and prepares it as Jean Bakar had taught him to do. The next day he rakes through the ashes and digs out parts of Jean Bakar's body and puts them in a can.



Analysis

This sensitive John H finds a person who teaches him things, serves as a father figure, earns his loyalty, and is someone he in turn can help support in the figure of Jean Bakar Arietta. Jean Bakar takes John H in and stands by him. He initiates him into the world of manhood when he turns 16. Yet, he, like John H is a sensitive person with close ties to his own country. He's also someone who suffers due to progress. Losing what he aspires to breaks him as it breaks John H's father. Once again, however, John H manages to adapt and take care of the person who has done so much for him.

John H's loyalty appears in the fact that he returns to help Jean Bakar after his season with the cannery wagon. He also turns down work to take care of Jean Bakar when he realizes that he can't be alone. Even when he dies, John H remains loyal to him. He doesn't bury him, but cremates him in his own way. Readers think that he may have plans for Jean Bakar as John H takes the time to look for his remains after burning his body.

People stay with John H. Even when he's 16, he still thinks of Cora and the girl he chooses at the brothel reminds him of her.

The negative results of progress also appear in this section. While it may help some, it can end the livelihood of others as it does with John H, Jean Bakar and thousands of others. This fact sends the message of nature: survival of the fittest. One either has to adapt or else they are swept up and die.

The correlation between the lives of Catherine and John H also appears here. Catherine carries her rucksack which defines her. John H is anxious to get a saddle, but not any saddle, the right one that defines him. Buying his saddle is as much of an initiation as having sex is when he finally buys it.

Discussion Question 1

Why is John H able to adapt to changing times, but Jean Bakar can't?

Discussion Question 2

What does the saddle mean to John H?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't John H bury Jean Bakar?

Vocabulary

percherons, honyocker, burlap, snubbing, grub, corral, lariat, wince, hackamore, gutted, renditions, hefty, silhouette, junction, unshod, skulking, brutches, tatters, testament, bittersweet



Rites: 1 - 3

Summary

In the first section of Rites, John H and his mare go back to the canyon and he uses it to lure a red horse. As he does, he comes across the signs of Catherine's accident with the Dodge. He's thought of her since helping her and knows that she's the same girl he saw in Miles City. He knows she has something to do with Harris Power and Light and that she didn't know what she was doing and shouldn't have been sent there, at least by herself. He has a feeling that he'll see her again.

The second section takes readers back to what is happening with Catherine. Suspecting that Jack Allen is trying to sabotage her efforts, she and Miriam start using a map to trace each day's route in the evening. This action not only helps them get their bearings but also helps them realize that there are areas that they are not covering at all. Miriam remembers what Max Caldwell had said about campsites and thinking that a good campsite today would have been a good one in the past they plan to beat Jack at his own game by saying that they want to camp out and having him choose the location. When they tell him he laughs at them at first, but once he sees they are serious, he agrees.

The two women go to Billings to get the necessary supplies. While they're there, Catherine spontaneously decides to take Miriam to a movie that introduces her to rock and roll. The two women talk about stereotypes, compliment each other on the progress they've made in discovering themselves since they met in their lives and the amount of knowledge they've gained.

Jack Allen picks them up the next day and leads them to a campsite. Once they're set up, he goes off on his own. The girls try to figure out why he had chosen that spot and conclude that maybe people had come there in the past for church. For the next five days they leave the site to explore and Allen continues to go off on his own. During their time there, she tells Miriam about her experience in London and admits that it was disappointing because something that was significant was sacrificed for the sake of progress. The fact made her sad, but also drives her.

At one point Jack disappears for days and Catherine worries about him. When he finally returns she wonders if he has found the horses he's been looking for. She thinks that it's unfair that he may have and she tells Miriam that they have to find something. Three hours later she finds a bird point.

When they return to civilization, Miriam goes back home to prepare for a Crow tribe celebration. She tells Catherine that she should come to it as well. Catherine spends time trying to figure out what to wear and applies kohl to her eyes. Once there, she sees Miriam from time to time, often mistaking other girls for her.



In Part 3, she runs into John H in a tavern. The two talk and dance. This ends when Jack Allen and Dub Harris interrupt them. Jack and John H know each other, but aren't friends. After having a sarcastic exchange of words with Jack, John H leaves. Jack tells Catherine that he knows John H from the Calvary division in the war and that John H is a deserter.

Analysis

A rite is a religious or some other type of serious ceremony or act. It can also be a special custom. This chapter contains rites of some sort and allows readers to see that just because something is a rite, it doesn't mean that it's sacred.

For example, John H's mare is in cycle. Reproduction is a type of rite in itself. It is not a sacred rite, however. John H is not using it with the awareness that would make it sacred. He's simply trying to lure the red colt and figures that he can use his mare to do it. While he's using his mare as if he's going to mate her, he himself is in some sort of mating cycle. He's thought of Catherine since the day he first met her and he hopes to see her again. From what he knows of her thus far, it may not be in his interest to help her, but he also realizes that she doesn't know what she's gotten herself into.

Catherine, herself, realizes that Jack Allen is trying to keep her from finding anything that one could consider to be sacred. She has defined him as her enemy, meaning that progress is her enemy. She admits to Miriam that her experience in London had been disappointing because what they had found had been sacrificed for the sake of progress. This statement supports the idea that she sees her job not as being open minded and discovering whether anything is really sacred enough to stop progress. She sees herself as being successful only if she finds something.

If Allen really is trying to sabotage her efforts, then the people he's working for see the potential of the past as being their enemy as it could forestall progress.

The women do break from their roles of obedient women by saying that they want to camp out. Once everyone is on even ground, readers see Catherine's competitive nature, but also a bit of hypocrisy. She doesn't really care about the fact that Allen is trying to find the horses. She just cares about him finding what he wants before she finds what she wants. This type of behavior shows Catherine's immaturity. Also readers have to wonder at this point if she's really looking for the right thing in her search for something sacred.

Another rite takes place when the girls return from the canyon. Catherine tries to see this a something sacred, but Miriam can't even really explain it's meaning. Catherine turns it more into a mating rite herself by trying to look pretty and then getting her catch when she meets John H in the tavern.

Even though part of her actions show her lack of maturity, she is moving closer to her true identity by not letting thoughts of David keep her from dancing with John H. Their flirtation mimics that rite that his mare goes through at the beginning of the section.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think attracts John H to Catherine?

Discussion Question 2

What does Miriam's interest in rock and roll tell you about her?

Discussion Question 3

How would you describe Catherine's competitive feeling when it comes to finding something before Jack finds what he's looking for.

Vocabulary

lurch, harry, thurible, walloped, gouge, jostle, corrugated, synchronicity, aperture, shucked, subterfuge, bebop, anticline, founder, skulking, gullet, chagrin, revival, matron, acoustics

John III

Summary

This section tells the backstory of John H's army days. In spite of his bad knee, John H is drafted and reports to training to get mule packing skills. When he arrives, the officials take his saddle. He tries to get it back, but his training officer holds him back. This, and his limp, which the officer thinks that John H is faking, gets John H on the officer's bad side and John H can't do anything right. John H keeps on though, driven to get his saddle back. One day his actions get him thrown into the brig and he worries that he'll never see his saddle again.

Two weeks later, though, his old CBC foreman shows up and tells him that he's gotten him transferred to the Calvary unit, something that John H didn't know existed. Once he's convinced that it does, he asks about his saddle. Considering the trouble that John H had been in, the questions amuses the foreman, but he does get John H's saddle back. A week later, John H leaves for Italy with his saddle.

They assign John H to the provisional calvary unit because of his knowledge of horses. One evening, he meets the regimen's blacksmith, Yakima McKee. The two men become friends and go through battles together. On one battle, John H retrieves the binoculars of a dead German soldier. During slow periods, John H sketches.

One day, Jack Allen shows up. He knows John H from working together in the CBC. Allen recruits John H and McKee to run a mission for him. They ride out together, but in the end, he gives them maps of the German lines and tells them that they have to take them down the mountain on foot. As they descend, they find a deserted village and John H finds a horse. McKee suggests that he paint it to scare off the Germans.

Seven months later, he and McKee fight in a battle. Afterwards John H finds McKee's hat and later finds his name on a missing in combat list. John H writes a letter to McKee's family.

In the fall, a new officer arrives. He places orders to kill the horses to feed war refugees. All U.S. soldiers not assigned to a pack battalion would have to report to general infantry. That evening, John H takes his horse and a dominant mare. Other horses follow. He rides until he outrides the war.

Along the way he runs into some gypsies and trades the horses, with the exception of the gray and a blood bay mare, for food and a Mannlicher rifle. He makes the head of the clan promise that they won't eat the horses as he, himself, had made a promise to the horses.

He travels to Spain, finds Jean Bakar's home region, takes a tin out of his saddle and throws it into the void, thus bringing Jean Bakar home.



Analysis

John H's character shines through in this section. It shows him as a character who strives to do the right thing. He reports to duty even though he has a bag leg. This is nothing though compared to his dedication to Jean Bakar and making sure that Jean Bakar gets home in the end. John H also shows dedication to the horses, and even though he deserts, in his mind his role in the war is over. He was a member of the Calvary group and the army has disbanded that. His loyalties now lie with the horses that he manages to save -- horses that performed their duty and were now about to be sacrificed.

The saddle has two levels of importance. First of all it carries Jean Bakar. Secondly it is part of John H. It defines him and he will do whatever is necessary to keep this identity. Thus he's driven to work hard in basic training to get his saddle back. When he gets put in the brig, his thoughts go directly to his saddle.

John H also makes a new close friend in this part of his life. Once again he does the right thing by him when he's reported missing. He writes to his family.

Jack Allen appears as a foil to John H's character. He waltzes in like a real cowboy and he uses John H and McKee. He doesn't form close ties as John H does. He's only out for getting what he wants, no matter what the cost. So, once he gets what he wants, he's doesn't care what happens to John H and McKee.

This chapter also explains what gave John H the idea to paint horses. McKee gave it to him and in a way, by doing it, he's keeping McKee's spirit alive.

Discussion Question 1

How does Jack Allen's character compare to that of John H's?

Discussion Question 2

Is there anything about McKee that reminds you of Jean Bakar? If so what? If not, how are they different? Why do you think he and John H became friends.

Discussion Question 3

Was John H right to leave the war? Why or why not.



Vocabulary

harangue, ruse, requisitioned, provisional, monologue, motar, infinite, canines, partisans, noggin, detonates, catacomb, morphine, infantry, heritage, nicker, shards, slop, clan, dismounts



Glyphs

Summary

The narrative switches back to the current day. Catherine, Allen, and Miriam have found some horse hooves. They discuss why Allen wants to find the horses and Catherine pretends not to be interested. In reality though she is kind of interested as it keeps her from being bored as she hasn't found anything herself. She's also feels competitive and she's begun to feel the fear of failure. She has noticed, though, that Allen has started watching her moves closer than before. This observation makes her proud.

One day they follow a trail on that map that turns out to not really exist, although there are parts of a trail here and there. Jack keeps leading them on until it gets too dangerous. To get out of a difficult spot, he leads them uphill. During the process his horse neighs and they hear what Miriam first thinks is an echo. Jack knows that it's another horse. Catherine continues to climb towards where she thinks the noise originated from and finds a passage. Jack follows her even though she tries to stay out of his sight. She doesn't see any horses, but when she turns around she sees what looks like a braid. She then realizes that she was looking at an elephant and was standing on its trunk. She sees other likenesses of the elephant. Miriam realizes what she's looking at, but Jack doesn't appear to. At that moment Catherine realizes that her period has just started. The announcement makes Jack want to get back down the hill, quickly. Miriam thinks that Catherine just said that to get Jack away from the find, but Catherine assures her that the news is true.

When the two women get back to Fort Ransom, they discuss what they saw and make plans to go back to that same location, alone. Catherine says that they can avoid Jack for a couple of days by placing the blame on her period. While they're talking Max Caldwell comes by and delivers the news that Miriam's great-grandmother has died.

Analysis

Catherine's self-inflicted competition with Jack Allen heats up in this section. It highlights how strongly she feels the need to prove herself by finding something and not paying attention to the idea that finding nothing does not mean that she has failed. One thing that does make her happy is her realization that Allen is watching her closer than before.

Another characteristic that appears in this section is Catherine's intuitive nature and the fact that she isn't afraid to investigate things. When she thinks she knows where the sounds her coming from, she follow her intuition, even though the path is not the safest. To her credit, she finds something. She's so anxious to find something though that one has to wonder if what she finds is really sacred and is it enough to say that the dam shouldn't be built?



While Catherine tries to appear professional on the one hand, she still does unprofessional things such as announcing that her period has just started. Earlier she didn't even want to tell Miriam and Jack that she had to go to the bathroom. Her current announcement may show that she's lost some of the prim ways that she had when she first arrived.

It's interesting that Miriam's grandmother, the only real tie to a time when things really were sacred dies exactly during the period that Catherine thinks she's found something sacred. Her death could be literal -- meaning that it's time to let go of the past and move on to allow for modern times to come to the area.

Discussion Question 1

Should Catherine be paying more attention to Jack's interest in the horses? Why or why not.

Discussion Question 2

Is Catherine's find sacred? Support your opinion.

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Miriam's great-grandmother's death will influence her life?

Vocabulary

glyph, harass, elusive, tarp, runnels, stratified, beckoned, muzzle, strata, chute, tapered, notch, insolent, writhe, disgorged, bluster, unmawkish, euphoria, quarry, indisposed, salute



Pieces of God

Summary

Pieces of God goes back to Catherine's experience in London as they unearth parts of a building. During the project, everyone was excited because they thought they had found a Christian chapel. Once they find out that it isn't, the dig shuts down.

Catherine can't help but think about the other secrets that Walbrook might contain, but people will never know about them because a high rise will cover them. The image of people on the cover of a newspaper clamoring to look at the site also angers her. When she gets home she responds to a message from Audrey Williams and discovers that this very image has given them two more weeks to dig.

She goes back to the site and the dig continues. During the period, the public starts pushing for the preservation of the temple. The development company, however, loses its patience and starts to fight back. It is ready to start building. Enough money and time have been wasted. The words now floating around are preservation by record, which Audrey calls a compromise. Both Audrey and Grimes understand this, but Catherine still has to learn why this is the best they can hope for. In the end, the developers come in and start the project.

Analysis

The real story of what Catherine experienced in London reveals itself in this section. She was part of a dig in which the artifacts the team found were deemed not to be important enough to continue. It was only continued because of the public's interest and then ended up only being preserved by record in favor of the continuation of the development project.

Throughout the whole process, Catherine feels disappointment because one will never know what other secrets are underneath the development. However, she doesn't seem to be able to realize that times have changed and that maintaining what they found in the form of records is the best they can do.

She wants to preserve the past, but wants to keep it to keep it hidden from the public at the same time. She's angry when the public starts looking at the work the team has completed. This supports the theme of killing what one loves because by exposing it, there is no going back. It will no longer be what it was.

A parallel is seen here with her current work. Once again she's discovered something but has she matured to the point that she can recognize it's value compared to the building of the dam? In this respect the dream that she had at the beginning of the book could have been correct. It could be that she really isn't ready for the assignment after all.



Discussion Question 1

What are the parallels between the project in London and the current one Catherine is working on?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Grimes shut down the dig?

Discussion Question 3

Why did the development company allow the dig to go as far as it did if it was going to go ahead with the project anyway?

Vocabulary

estuary, resurrect, maul, perimeter, basilica, chiseled, oxidized, pagans, ply, gash, incongruous, gangplanks, gawkers, cobbles, pandemonium, hysterical, jilted, deity, perspective, docked, quid



Stone House -- Elixabette

Summary

Catherine decides to go back to the site on her own. She drives to the canyon and parks near the place she had her car accident during her first trip there. From there, she sets out on foot. She finds out, however, that she has over estimated her capabilities. When it gets dark, she camps and is happy that she's able to light a fire. The next day, disoriented and hungry, she thinks that she's chasing a crane with Miriam. Backpack in hand, she follows the crane and then the sound of the crane that seem to be coming from the stone as the sound of the horses had done the day before. She continues to weave her way forward and finds the print of a horse. She thinks she sees the crane again, or at least its spirit and ends up finding John H's house.

John H feeds her and then helps her find the area she was looking for. She takes pictures, but the light isn't good so they decide to come back the next day. While they're out, they hear the roar of a plane. She admits that it could be Jack looking for the horses.

The two go back to John H's house. Catherine makes herself look better. Afterwards, they have sex. When he sees blood, he fears that she had been a virgin. She explains that she's not, but that sex with David had not been satisfying.

Elixabette takes readers back to John H's past and another woman he had loved. After burying Jean Baker, John H finds himself in France. He gets a job and takes art classes. While completing an assignment he meets Elixabette. She comes from Bayonne, on the Spanish border. She's older than he is and introduces him to her friends. They think that he's a cowboy because that is the only thing he can make them understand.

He and Elixabette become lovers. The couple have lots of arguments and discussions about life and existence. One of his paintings transfixes her and one day she takes him to a hidden cave where he sees paintings like his that have been there for thousands of years.

In spite of thinking that she can't, Elixabette gets pregnant and John H marries her. He wants Bakar to be the baby's middle name. This makes her nervous, but he tells her she's just being superstitious. She never has the baby, however, because she wakes up one night in pain. John H gets her to the hospital, but she and the baby die.

John H takes them to her family to bury them. He tells them that the baby's name was Jean Bakar, even though it was a girl. He can stay there, but instead gets a false American passport under the name of John H. Borel and returns to the United States.



Analysis

These two sections show John H's relationship with women. This is something readers haven't seen since he was young and lived in the same household as Cora. In looking at the women John H lets into his life, readers realize that the first two are older women and could play the role of giving him the approval that his mother never did. Both of these women also appreciate his art which is part of his identity. Cora always looks at his drawings and says that she wishes she could draw like that and asks John H to draw a picture for her. He meets Elixabette while he is completing an art assignment. One of his canvases impresses her so much because of the subjects that she takes him to show him a cave with paintings that have existed for thousands of years.

Catherine, however, breaks the mold. She is younger than he is. In addition, unlike the other two women who show him things, he is the one who leads and opens Catherine's eyes. He saves her when she runs her car into the ditch. He takes her to the place she was looking for when she tries to go back to her "find" alone. At the end of the novel, he helps to save her from her mundane life when his letter reaches her. He's the one who shows Catherine what she should really be looking at.

John H is able to do this because he now knows who he is. His identity is set, so now he's able to give to someone else, as people have given to him. Catherine soaks in his guidance and she's someone who initially scoffs at his painting, asking, "Who paints horses anyway."

His sensitive side appears as he examines Catherine to obtain the state of her health when she wanders into his home. He also notices traces of blood after they've had sex and worries that he was her "first."

In terms of Catherine's personality, this section shows how much she wants to prove that she's found something of substance. She's willing to go out on her own and to keep on going even when the outcome looks dire for her. In the end, her intuition does lead to something, but it's not what she expected. It leads her to John H. As she follows it's almost as if Miriam's grandmother is there to help her. She always talked of blue shirts and she was called Crane Girl. In her delirious state, Catherine follows a crane, or as the narrator says, the spirit of a crane.

Discussion Question 1

Was the crane that Catherine followed real or a figment of her imagination? Explain.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that John H married Elixabette?



Discussion Question 3

Does John H really care for Catherine? Support your opinion.

Vocabulary

hamstrung, docile, menagerie, myopia, pronghorn, switchbacks, contemplated, peccadillo, insouciant, haunches, diaphanous, elude, palisades, plaintive, epic, buck, traipsing, silhouettes, striations, scuttle



Horses -- Epilogue

Summary

John H shows Catherine the horses. She spends the night with him and the next day they return to the site where Catherine found the glyphs. To their dismay, they discover that Jack Allen has beaten them there. Catherine convinces John H that he can help her best by getting the film to town and mailing it to the east coast right away. She tells him to look for Max Caldwell. He'll be able to find her through him.

Riding hard, John H gets the film to town just as the loading of the train has finished. At first the postman says it's too late, but then they start talking about John H's rifle. He's willing to give it to him if it means that he will put the film on the train. The postman said that it's enough to know that John H is a vet and he helps John H pack the film. When John H goes back outside, he discovers that his horse has died. He leaves it there.

Jack and his men take Catherine to a hotel in Billings. She's to write a report saying that she didn't find anything significant and the dam project can go on. She tries to convince Jack that she did find something. He doesn't listen to her and she begins to worry about Miriam. She tries to escape, but everyone is in on the plot to keep her captive until she complies to the company's wishes. Finally she talks to Dub Harris. She tries to stand up to him but once he and his men threaten John H, she gives in and calls David to tell him to send the film to the address they give her. In the end, she finds out that the film no longer exists. She also finds out that Miriam had betrayed her and had had sex with Jack Allen, all voluntarily. Her captives finally let her go home.

Once home, she continues to work in the archaeological field and has a few lovers. Finally an old friend convinces her to work on a project in Israel. It pleasantly surprises her. After she returns, an envelope arrives that has been to New York, Syria, Israel, and finally back to her. It's origins seem to be New York. She opens it and discovers that it is from John H. She writes back.

Analysis

The first part of this section, Horses, is where Catherine takes the first step in choosing love over ambition. Before finding John H she had realized the need to reach the site before Jack Allen. However, once she's with John H, her sense of urgency lessens.

She also comes to the realization that there's more to fight for than the glyphs and that many of the drawings she found may not have been all that old after all, much like the dig in London when the team realized that what they thought was a Christian chapel was really a pagan one. What is really remarkable is the fact that these horses exist because of the canyon. As it turns out, she's led Jack to the horses and the glyphs which they use explosives to destroy. She has managed to kill what she loves and isn't even able to preserve the glyphs by record as the company destroys the film. While it



seems as if she reluctantly gives up tradition for progress, she's much quicker to give up ambition for love. As soon as she hears that John H's life would be in danger if she continues her fight, she gives in.

Miriam is much quicker to give up tradition, thus living up to what she told Catherine when she first agreed to work with her. She was doing it more for her than Catherine. Progress meant more than traditions that she couldn't even explain. Also sleeping with Jack added to her confidence, even though she knows that he used her. The two had been flirting throughout the project so it was just a natural progression for both of them. So while Catherine was moving closer to an identity of appreciating what the West offered and sleeping with John H, Miriam was sleeping with the forces of progress, something that she yearned for.

For John H, it's much easier to sacrifice what's needed for his new found love. He's willing to sell his rifle and he drives his horse so hard that it dies. He also shows, once again, his power of adaptation. The letter he wrote is from New York, implying that he has a new home, close to Catherine. His letter is also able to find her, after all of this time.

His letter is the perfect follow-up to the project she completes in Israel. While she continues to work in the field, she does have a broken spirit when she returns. Once again her nails her clear. She's not broken enough, however to go back to a life that she doesn't want to live and thus, does not hesitate to write John H back when she receives his letter.

Discussion Question 1

Is Catherine's find worth fighting for? Why or why not.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Catherine seems more disappointed than angry when she finds out about Miriam's betrayal?

Discussion Question 3

What has this, as well as her experience in London and then Israel, taught Catherine?

Vocabulary

suss, gangly, artifact, whirlybird, permanence, infinitesimal, astral, falter, loiterers, spraddled, guffawed, flail, aggravation, compote, complicit, edification, inscrutable, premonition, infernally, contour



Characters

Catherine Lemay

Catherine Lemay plays the role of the novel's female lead character. She's a young archaeologist with the assignment of finding out whether there are any sacred remains of Crow Indian heritage in a canyon that would prevent flooding the canyon as part of a hydroelectric dam project. She has the summer to complete the project and taking the assignment means leaving her fiance who is in New York.

Considering that the novel takes place in 1956, the fact that she, as a woman leaves her fiance for her job reveals several character qualities. At times she shows determination, even staying when David suggests that she return to the East Coast. She is also a go-getter once she has a goal, whether it be to please someone else or herself, and adventurous. These same qualities exhibit themselves when she goes to England. Even though piano playing is not her chosen field, she excels to the point that she gets a Fulbright Scholarship to study in England. The idea of going to England to study doesn't phase her. Once there, her curious nature and sense of adventure leads her to the dig that her mentors, Audret and Peter, are working on. Her determination gets her on the team and allows her to study archaeology at Cambridge. Once she's in Montana, these characteristics cause her to get started without her guide, to hire Miriam, and to try to protect what she's found.

Yet, at the same time, Catherine at times feels incapable, ill-at-ease, and insecure. The novel begins with her insecurity. She dreams that she fails in her summer assignment because she's not ready. She gets upset when people spell her last name incorrectly. One's name is part of their identity and since Catherine struggles with her identity, she gets upset when people get her name wrong. In fact, after reading Dub Harris' letter, the first thing she thinks is that he spelled her name incorrectly. What's worse is that she's traveled all the way to Montana and he spelled her name incorrectly. Her push to succeed causes her to hire Miriam, but Catherine also hires her because she feels that she doesn't know where to start or what to look for.

While she's willing to learn, she can also be snobbish about what's important in history and even music. Valuable relics are in Rome, London, Egypt, not the United States and definitely not in the western part of the country. The classics also rate higher than jazz, in her mind.

Catherine does grow throughout the novel. She learns the value of her own country. She lets go of David, who would never have made her happy. While she seems to be a bit lost once she returns home, she wakes up again, thanks to her friend and takes a leap by writing John H back.



John H

John H plays the role of the novel's male lead because while the author structures the events that move the novel forward around Catherine's archaeological work, John H's story paints the picture of the west that stars so prominently in the novel. He is also the romantic lead as it is obvious from the first time that they meet that he and Catherine will get together at some point.

Like Catherine, John H fights to obtain the life he was meant to live. His is with horses. He grows up around thoroughbred horses and has obvious talents. When his father is put in jail and he has to live with a foster family, he loses his contact with horses physically, but he still draws them. This ability and his attraction to Cora, who recognizes his talent, keeps him in place. When she leaves, however, so does he even though he is only 14 years old.

His attraction to Cora is partly that of a young boy with his first crush, but it also shows elements of loyalty that he shows in future relationships. Readers see this sense of loyalty in John H's relationship with John Bakar Arietta, Yakimi McKee, Elixabete Borel, and his horses. He also shows loyalty to Catherine, displayed by the fact that he sacrifices his horse to help her and later initiates contact by writing her.

John H's letter to Catherine represents growth for him. He blames himself for Elixabete's and their baby's death and has not given himself to a woman since. His love was with the horses and this was safe territory for him. In reaching out to Catherine, he shows that he's ready to move on and try love once again.

Miriam

Miriam is a young Indian girl hired by Catherine to help her figure out where to start her search for sacred artifacts in the canyon as well as guide her in what to look for. She lives with her grandparents and sister. Miriam's grandfather is eager for her to help Catherine, but Catherine still needs to convince Miriam. She finally succeeds in doing so.

Like Catherine, Miriam suffers from a lack of identity.. She worries that she's not pretty enough. She doesn't see herself as having much of a future if she stays where she is. And even though she's a native of the land, she has a hard time explaining the dance ritual.

As the novel progresses, though Catherine expands her world by exposing her to movies and modern music. She also helps build Miriam's self confidence by truly collaborating with her. Still, Miriam lives up to the words she said during her first conversation with Catherine. She does what's good for her and betrays Catherine. She wants to live in the modern world.



Jack Allen

Jack Allen is a horse wrangler. Dub Harris sends him to serve as Catherine's guide, however she soon realizes that she can't trust him. Indeed, he's working at cross purposes. He's the one who uses Miriam to divulge Catherine's whereabouts and discovery. Jack also knows John H and served in the war with him. He knows that John H is a deserter and tells Catherine so.

David

David is Catherine's fiance. He represents what her life is supposed to be. He, however, seems to sense that he is at risk of losing her due to her passion for her work. Thus he proposes to her a week before she leaves for Montana. In the end, she returns his ring, proving that she has accepted that her identity is not the identity into which she was born.

Max Caldwell

Max Caldwell helps Catherine when she first gets to Montana. Not only does he answer her question about how to get to the canyon, but he gives her advice about what she is about to get into. He turns out to be a trusted character who sympathizes with her, but has lived long enough, and is experienced enough, to know the reality of life. He not only gives advice to Catherine, but also to John H and he's there to make sure Catherine is okay during the time she's being held captive.

Audrey Williams

Audrey Williams serves as a mentor to Catherine. She was the excavation supervisor for the Londinium dig. Not only does she encourage Catherine through her advice and what she teaches her, but also because she operates at such a high level even though she's a woman. It's Audrey who appears in Catherine's dream telling her that she's not ready, showing the pressure that Catherine feels to prove herself.

Peter Grimes

Peter Grimes is an archaeologist who Catherine meets through Audrey Williams. He, like Catherine, has a musical background and changed fields once the archaeologist bug bit him. His choice to work in a museum, however, did not take him into the trenches as he had hoped. Instead, he was a bureaucrat, mediating disagreements between the Corporation of London and the patrons of different antiquity societies. Grimes introduces Catherine to the Cambridge University's archaeology chair and she's enrolled in a program that offers her practical experience through working under Audrey Williams's supervision on the Londinium dig.



Dub Harris

Dub Harris is the dam contractor Catherine thinks she's going to meet when she arrives in Montana. Instead she gets a letter from him describing her role in the dam project. He provides Jack Allen who's to serve as her guide. She finally meets him towards the end of the novel in a battle in which he tries to get her to write a document saying that she had not found anything sacred and the dam project could continue.

Jean Bakar Arietta

Jean Baker Arietta is a Basque who takes John H in when he runs away from his foster parents' home. The two form a tight friendship that continues even after progress robs them of their way of earning a living and John H must leave in order to make money. As his work is seasonal, John H comes back once the season is over to help Jean. Jean talks about going back to Spain, but news of the Spanish Civil War crushes him. Finally John H down work to take care of Jean as he descends into madness and it is John H who takes care of Jean's burial in a way that he sees fit when Jean dies.



Symbols and Symbolism

Catherine's Nails

Catherine's nails symbolize when she is, and when she isn't, living the life she's meant to lead. When they are clean as when she plays the piano and comes back from the summer in Montana, she's not. When they are dirty as they are when she's on the dig in London and when she's in Montana, she is.

Catherine's Rucksack

Catherine's rucksack symbolizes the life of adventure that she wants to live as opposed to the safe, privileged life into which she was born.

David

David represents society's view of the life a girl like Catherine is supposed to lead in the 1950s. Even though she's well educated, she's expected to marry a man of good stock with a good education who has a good job and can take care of her. Catherine's rejection of him symbolizes her rejection of that kind of life.

John H's Saddle

John H's saddle represents the life he's meant to live. It is so much a part of his identity that he asks about it after getting into trouble in the army and takes it with him when his horse dies.

Miriam

Miriam symbolizes the new living within the confines of the old and wanting to break out. She has knowledge about the landscape, but she doesn't know the meaning of rituals that she takes part in. And while Catherine fights to save what she thinks is sacred to the Crow Indians, Miriam willingly betrays her, telling Jack Allen where he can find her.

The Dam

The dam symbolizes progress that sometimes has to be made through the sacrifice of something else.



Wedgwood Pottery

This symbolizes having made it, at least to some. Catherine's parents have reached this status and own Wedgwood pottery. Miriam wants this, thus Catherine sends her Wedgwood pottery as a wedding present. It is from her parent's collection, however. The fact that Catherine does not own her own, or does not buy it herself shows that she literally does not "buy" into this idea. Also the fact that she's able to take it from her parent's collection implies that it is just sitting there for show. No one really uses it.

Catherine's Period

When Catherine has her period, she's able to use it as an excuse to buy some time. This event also serves as a symbol of Catherine's femininity and inexperience. Having periods while on digs is something that women have to deal with and marks a liability. Professionals, however, would prepare for this. Catherine doesn't.

The Handprints

Handprints traditionally mean "triumph over another," however John H. tends to leave handprints to show what he considers to be sacred.

The Paintings of the Bison and the Tahitian Natives

Both of these paintings symbolize Catherine's experience in Montana. Progress and discovery kills the things that you love. Bisons, something people look think of with awe no longer exist and when man discovers a natural lifestyle like that of the people in Tahiti, they are bound to destroy it by simply making it known to the masses, who will then manage to destroy it in some way.



Settings

The Train

Catherine takes a train to Montana. Starting the novel with her train trip represents the journey she's taking. This journey is not just a physical one. It is also one that will help her grow as a person and find her identity.

John H also takes a train to Montana which represents the journey that lets him live out his identity.

The East Coast

Both Catherine and John H hail from the East Coast and for both it represents rules and restraints. There Catherine's family has Wedgwood china, Catherine has to watch her language and wears silk pajamas, has clean nails, plays the piano and gets engaged to the right person given her social status.

Society takes John H away from his father because he's working instead of going to school and the family he's sent to live with sends their own daughter away because of her rebellious actions.

Leaving the restraints of the East Coast allows both characters to embrace their identity. Catherine first does this when she goes to London and then later in Montana. John H accomplishes this feat when he travels west.

London

London represents one of the places where "real" archaeological items exist, at least in Catherine's opinion before she goes out west. It represents her snobbish nature when it comes to archaeology. It is also where she works on a project that gives way to modern development. For that reason, it also represents changing times for archaeology.

The Canyon

The canyon represents the intersection of the old days of the west and the encroachment of modern times. It is through the canyon that Catherine learns about, and begins to respect, her own country's history and beauty.

Miriam's Home

While the west spells freedom for Catherine and John H, Miriam feels that her home holds her back. She, like Catherine, would end up getting married and having a baby if she stayed. She would not have a fulfilling job. She longs for what lies beyond. It does not have the sacred meaning for her that Catherine hopes to find. Still, it does help define her identity as she becomes a vet.

Billings

Billings represents the modernization of the west. This is the location of Dub Harri's office. It has nice hotels and office buildings -- a great contrast to the area near the canyon.



Themes and Motifs

The Role of Women in Society

When considering the theme of the role of women in society, readers must remember that the story takes place in the 1950s. The odd nature of a woman traveling on her own for her job appears even before Catherine gets off the train where she has a conversation with a fellow traveler. When she tells him that she's going to Montana for her job, he calls her a modern girl. But all women aren't "modern" and Catherine's mother is one of the women who is not. These women think that women should stay at home and be housewives. Even though she was supposed to be a piano player, she was really supposed to get married and have children.

One thing that she was not supposed to do was to be an archaeologist. She wasn't even supposed to have her current assignment because she was a woman. Catherine thinks she got it because of her experience in London, but David raises the idea, indirectly, that she got it because she was a woman, and as such might not really know what she's doing. If this is true, it would benefit the dam builder as she wouldn't find anything. In the end, Allen and Dub Harris admit that they had underestimated her, thus supporting David's opinion.

While Catherine may stand up to others when they try to judge her abilities because she's a woman, she herself complains about it when she talks to Audrey. She says that she sometimes thinks that her life would have been simpler if she had been born a man. Audrey, though, has more confidence in her role and tells her not to be silly. She says that life is what you make it, everyone encounters resistance, and that resistance just makes you stronger. Indeed, Audrey does not let being a woman stop her. She's in command on the dig site.

Even though Catherine continues to work, society's view of the role of women appears again when she returns home. She "missed" her chance to get married. When she comes back with bruises everyone assumes that a romantic interest did it to her because why else would a woman have bruises on her face?

Miriam also suffers from the role of women in her society. If she stays, she's expected to get married and have children. This is not something she aspires to.

The Search for and Need for Identity

The identity theme that runs throughout the novel shows that an absence of a true identity leads to an unfulfilled life. Several characters know their identity, but when they lose it, they lose themselves. Other characters live under identities created for them by society and strive to find their true identities.



Jean Bakar is an example of a character who knows who he is, what he's good at doing, and his roots. As long as events in the world support these things, he lives a good life and is able to give to others, like John H. His world begins to crumble, however, with the changing of laws that take away his means of earning a living and causes him to live a different sort of life. Still he holds on to his Basque roots and talks about returning to Spain. Civil war dashes those ideas. Without his identity, he breaks. Realizing how important his former way of life and his heritage are to Jean Bakar, John H cremates him in a place representing his old way of life and makes sure that he does, in the end, return home.

In essence he helps Jean Bakar retrieve his identity, even though it is in death. This is something he was never able to do with his own father who also went crazy trying to find his own identity. He lost it once, when he lost out on the opportunity to play baseball, but thought he had found it again in training horses. When that's taken away from him, he has nothing left and he, like Jean Bakar goes crazy.

Elixabete also knows who she is and is living at one with her identity when she meets John H. That identity begins to change, but not in a way that's consistent with how she defines herself. She says that she will never get married, but does. She also says that she can't get pregnant, but does. In the end, she dies.

John H knows his identity and fights to keep it. He runs away from his foster parents who would have enforced a different type of life on him. After Elixabete's death, he knows that he can stay with her family, but also knows that this would be turning his back on his identity and leaves. He even becomes a deserter when the army tries to enforce a different identity upon him. Still, even though his sense of self is strong, he knows how to adapt. This ability allows him to keep moving on and readers never see him sink into despair as Jean Bakar and his father do.

Catherine and Miriam are two characters looking for their own identities. In the end, the two women help each other grow and move closer to their true selves. While Catherine's journey still continues at the end of the novel, readers see that she fights to live the identity that her rucksack signifies. She takes the job in Montana, she fights to support what she believes in, and even though her friend has to get her going again when she returns to the East Coast, she does not sink into the being of someone who gives herself up to please others. She knows that she's upset her mother and is sad that she does not have the grandchildren that her father would want, but she continues to live her life.

Miriam learns about the world outside the reservation and gains confidence in herself. In the end she does what's true to her identity, even though that means betraying Catherine. The "sacred" label is not her identity. She doesn't want to become an archaeologist as Catherine suggests at one point. She wants to live in the modern world. By betraying Catherine, she ensures that this will happen. Later she goes to veterinarian school and marries a classmate, thus taking her out of the world of the reservation. She joins the modern world.



Racism and Stereotypes

Racism is a strong theme that runs throughout the novel and along with that are the stereotypes that it creates. Stereotypes also appear, that come from the media's portrayal of other cultures as well as images people create themselves.

The American Indians suffer from others' racist views. Jack Allen tells Catherine that if she wants help in knowing where to start, she needs to find an Indian who can help her. He doesn't leave his statement at that though. He goes on to add that she's going to have to peel one off of the bar stool in the tavern in order to get one to help her and his tone shows that he has no respect for the Indians he lives with. Later she finds out that Miriam is not allowed into certain places due to discrimination.

Miriam often corrects Jack when he makes racist remarks and she teaches Catherine that what she thinks she knows about American Indians from movies is indeed fantasy.

At the same time, Catherine shows Miriam that the stereotype she has of white people living on the east coast with perfect lives is also not the way it is. This is a stereotype that Catherine herself fights as she often complains that people look at her and think that she's something she's not. The movie she takes Miriam to see actually opens Miriam's eyes to the fact that everyone living on the east coast does not live in the lap of luxury.

Women often suffer from stereotypes. Men think that Catherine can't do the job because she's a woman. Jack Allen scoffs at Catherine and Miriam because he thinks they are weak little women.

In addition to her view of American Indians, Catherine holds another stereotypical view. That is her view of the American west. She does not think that it holds the same type of value as places like Rome and London. She, like the Europeans John H meets, thinks that he's a cowboy when she first meets him. With the Europeans, John H settles on the definition of who he is as it is the only thing he can make them understand. That is their stereotypical view of the American west. He gets Catherine to see that there is more to him than this view.

An interesting comment about race arises with the horses. The ones that are of value have pure lines. It's interesting that it is okay to value this in animals, where it is continued to be racist to look at people in that way.

Sacrificing the Old to Make Way for Progress

Archaeology itself deals with the old and in this novel, Catherine works on two projects that involve a face off between the preservation of something old versus letting it go to make way for the new and the progress that people deem will come along with it.



The project in London is the first of such projects. In the end, the team finds relics. Even though it is not what they originally thought they were unearthing, the team gains public support and the dig continues. In the end, however, the developers shut it down and go on with their project. Should officials have stopped the development and somehow preserved the relics or must the past give way to modern times and modern needs? This is the question this story raises. Catherine is on the side of preservation. Audrey and Grimes, however, know the reality of the situation and try to get her to understand that preservation by record is a compromise and the best they can hope for in modern times.

The find in London also raises the question of what's worth saving. Grimes shuts down the dig when he realizes that they aren't excavating a Christian chapel. A pagan chapel isn't worth it to him.

These same questions appear in Catherine's current project. She stands between history and development. Is there something in the canyon that is valuable enough to prevent progress? Her view of archaeology makes her set out to find that something is there. Thus she clings on the word "sacred." In the end she finds something, but is this sacred enough to stop the dam project? Not even Miriam thinks it is. Most people are for progress just as the public was in the end in London.

The thing that progress really sacrifices in the novel is the way of life and often the livelihood of the people in its way. New laws take away Jean Bakar's way of life and thousands like him. A new officer calls the end to the Calvary unit in the army and new machines take over. John H shows Catherine that the horses are there because of the canyon. This is what the dam project really threatens.

While the majority of the people are for progress, the novel also shows that progress does not always make things better. Looking at the German binoculars, John H thinks that it's a wonder that they are beating the Germans.

Killing What You Love

The archaeologists in the novel are full of passion for their work. Jack Allen has a passion for horses, so does John H, yet in doing their work, they kill what they love in one way or another.

During the dig, Grimes "circles the dig like an assassin, stalks with his reflex camera poised." The description creates the image of him killing the very sense of history he exposes by doing his work. By making the relics known, he in fact makes it so that the only form of preservation is by record as it would cost too much to preserve them in their current structure. This is ironic because if the relics had remained undiscovered, they would still exist. The horses in the cave that Elixabete shows John H demonstrates the irony. They still exist because no archaeologist has found them.

Jack Allen literally kills what he loves--horses--and he captures them in a bloody inhumane way. Even John H worked for the cannery which killed horses. In addition,



even though he made the head of the gypsies promise that he would not eat the horses he traded for his gun there is no way of knowing if the gypsy kept his word. John H kills his own beloved horse as it has to be sacrificed to help Catherine.

Catherine's archaeological intuition and curiosity leads her to "unearth" John H. She almost "kills" him in an attempt to stand up to Dub Harris. In the end she has to kill her dream of becoming famous and saving the canyon.



Styles

Point of View

The author uses the third person perspective throughout the novel to bring its characters alive. By focusing on the present day story of Catherine Lemay and the backstory of John H, he's able to create several different worlds that combine history, nature, archaeology and romance.

Telling the story through the third person perspective allows readers to see into the worlds of Catherine and John H. This makes the romance between them stronger and more believable once they do get together as the narration has told their stories as well as their what they thought about each other and their former loves.

While using this point of view gives readers a pretty good idea of the basic story line, the predictable nature of the story allows readers to live through the different worlds in the novel. Both John H's and Catherine's story deal with real historical events. Readers can see the beauty of the West and are part of the dig in London.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel reflects the setting and the people speaking it. When Catherine is out in nature, much of the vocabulary focuses on nature. It also focuses on horses. The way the people speak reflects their level of education and where they live. Dub Harris speaks quite differently than Jack Allen. Miriam says things that Catherine would never have said before coming out West, for example.

The lyrical style of the language also serves to shape the reader's reading experience. This is an epic, sweeping novel set in a grand landscape. The lyricism in the sentences takes readers in, allowing them to experience the novel in a way that would not be possible if the author had used simpler language.

Structure

Most of the novel takes place in Montana in 1956 telling the story of Catherine Lemay's current archeological assignment there. Before long it diverges into two parallel stories that culminate in the romantic meeting of Catherine and John H and the dramatic collision of Catherine and the dam's contractor at the end of the novel.

The structure uses chapter titles to help readers keep their bearings. Catherine's story tends to take them to the present day. John H's story to his past. His past explains why he is where he is today and explains things that other characters say about him. For example, when Jack Allen tells Catherine that John H is a deserter, readers learn about his time in the army and what really caused him to leave, thus creating empathy for him.

While most of Catherine's story takes place in the present, readers have to go back to her past to understand her as well. Thus the structure takes readers back to events like her time in London and when she first started going out with David.

Using this structure, the author is able to create an entire world for the reader.



Quotes

She bought it before returning home, bought it because it suggested the sort of life she wanted to lead.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 76)

Importance: This quote refers to Catherine's rucksack. It is the type that European alpinists and adventurers used. The fact that she bought it because it suggested the sort of life she wanted to lead shows that she is suffering from an identity crisis. So far she does not see herself leading the adventurous life the quote suggests she craves for. Buying and carrying it seems to serve as much as a reminder to herself that she wants another kind of life. The quote gives readers insight into her character as the novel begins.

She felt the word as much as heard it, felt an eerie shiver she'd come to acquaint with London rubble.

-- Narrator (Catherine: 3 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote gives more insight into Catherine's character. She's so anxious to have another adventure and make a mark as she did in London that simply hearing the word "sacred" gets her excited. This is true even though she has no connection to the objects at all and they hold no special meaning for her.

The hard features of the ground she'd scanned and scoured and crawled across these last days had stamped a mark upon her.

-- Narrator (Rites: 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: Catherine grows and begins to find her own identity, not that of her parents or that society casts on her because of the family she was born in. What Catherine sees in the mirror literally reflects the change that is taking place within her.

Looking at herself now, she considered with a sort of odd pride that she might for the first time in her life pass for something other than a white girl, at least from a distance.

-- Narrator (Rituals: 2 paragraph 201)

Importance: Catherine has always felt that people identified her character by the life she had been born into. Not being seen as only a white girl with a certain upbringing gives her a sense of freedom and it is the first time that others may see her more as she sees herself.

The song rose like a fever, horrifying and beautiful at once, an ancient thing with ancient meaning and ancient power utterly intact.

-- Narrator (Rituals: 2 paragraph 225)

Importance: This quote makes readers wonder whether Catherine over romanticizes things that she thinks should have special power and meaning. Does this still hold



significance for those taking part in the ritual? Miriam cannot even truly explain its significance.

Couple of palm prints here and there.
-- Yakima McKee (John H: 3 paragraph 210)

Importance: This quote is significant because this is when John H gets the idea to paint horses.

The past will come through a lens and never vanish. You and I, miss, will constitute no mystery. We will appear to the future, and the future will already know us.
-- Peter Grimes (Pieces of God paragraph 22)

Importance: Archaeological digs expose parts of the past that time has buried. The death of one thing is often necessary in order to bring new life. Learning from history is not the same as keeping history alive, as Grimes says that the camera does. This distinction is important in this book because it raises the question as to whether or not it is a good idea to not have a clear distinction between the past and the present.

He circles the dig like an assassin, stalks with his reflex camera poised, in as primal a mode as Catherine can envision this otherwise rumped and scholarly person.
-- Narrator (Pieces of God paragraph 13)

Importance: This image of Grimes as an assassin supports the theme of killing what we love.

I've stewed for twenty years and I guess what I've come to is this: greatness gets built on destruction.
-- Max Caldwell (Horses: 4 paragraph 64)

Importance: Considering that Caldwell, a respected viewpoint in the book says that, this quote makes one wonder whether or not Catherine is really being a heroine by trying to keep the past from being destroyed by the present and future. Through Miriam, readers already have the sense that those who act out ancient rituals just do so because it is the thing to do. They don't even know the meaning behind them. Maybe Catherine is doing more harm than good by trying to protect what she thinks is sacred.

Maybe they're right, to waste not a minute wondering whether they might be wrong. How Would them pyramids have come to be, weren't for slave drivers and forced labor?"
-- Max Caldwell (Horses: 4 paragraph 65)

Importance: This quote drives home the contradictory nature of what it takes to make something great and supports the idea that the ends justify the means. It also shows the hypocritical nature of people. People think forced labor is terrible, but they travel from all over the world to marvel at its output.



Catherine holds up her hands, squints at her clean little nails.
-- Narrator (Epilogue paragraph 31)

Importance: Catherine's nails have always reflected the extent to which she is living her true identity. When she played the piano, her nails are clean. When she digs, they are dirty. Now they are clean again, proving her friend right, she is not living her true identity. In fact, she is not living at all. She is simply floating through life. That's why her friend's letter saves her. It saves her from living life like a zombie.

In the long view this isn't your parents' life. It's not even your culture's life. It's your own.
-- Audrey Williams (Relics: 1 paragraph 160)

Importance: Audrey tries to help Catherine realize that she has to do what is right for her and not live the life others want her to live, because in the end, this is not living. This quote, therefore supports the theme of identity.