The People in the Trees Study Guide

The People in the Trees by Hanya Yanagihara

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: The People in the Trees, by Hanya Yanagihara. Doubleday, 2013.

The body of the novel is written in the first person perspective of Dr. Norton Perina, and is bookended by framing first person narration by Dr. Ronald Kubodera, a friend and colleague of Perina's, who describes receiving correspondence from Perina and editing that correspondence into the main body of the narrative.

The book begins with a pair of newspaper articles that place Perina at the center of legal investigations into his behavior with his children. These articles are followed by a prologue written by Dr. Kubodera, explaining the origins of the material about to follow. That material begins in Part 1, as Perina describes his troubled childhood (including the origins of the complicated relationship he has with his brother); his discovery of science as a calling and career path; and the progress of both his education and his actual work. That work, he writes, became tied to that of anthropologist Paul Tallent, who asked Perina to accompany him on an expedition to the remote island of Ivu'ivu, where Tallent planned to investigate the legend of how certain of the island's inhabitants apparently became virtually immortal.

When the research team arrived on the island, according to Perina, they spent several weeks traveling through the jungle to get to its sole village. On their journey, they encountered a woman in excellent physical condition but psychologically close to being entirely dysfunctional. The scientists gave her the nickname Eve, making a deliberate connection to the first woman in the Bible, and came to believe that she could be of the same sort of immortality referred to in the legend. When the team arrived at the village, and as Tallent continued his research, Perina fulfilled his assigned duties while making close observations of his own. His research, combined with his observations of a series of village rituals (including the ritual sodomizing of young men, initiating them into manhood), led him to draw connections between the ritual consumption of a particular kind of turtle; the elimination of the physical aging process in those who undergo that ritual; and the subsequent psycho-social deterioration of those same people.

Eventually, Perina writes, he and the other researchers left the island, taking with them some of those experiencing "immortality" (nicknamed "the dreamers") and Perina, unknown to the others, taking with him examples of the turtle. Back in America, as observations continued on the dreamers, Perina conducted experiments on the turtles, and discovered there was, indeed, a link between consumption of the turtle and "immortality." Publication of those discoveries resulted in Perina becoming famous and eventually winning a Nobel Prize, but losing the friendship of Tallent, who mysteriously disappeared. Meanwhile, as both the turtles and the people of Ivu'ivu became exploited and overrun, Perina developed a habit of adopting / rescuing children from the island and bringing them home to be raised.

As the results of Perina's research brought him first more fame and later rejection (when other scientists discover the deterioration of those deemed "immortal"), he became more and more personally reclusive while, at the same time, adopting more and more children in an attempt to recapture a connection that he felt with a child on the island. Eventually, one of his adoptees rebelled beyond a point that Perina could tolerate, and an explosive confrontation eventually resulted in the arrest and conviction referred to at the novel's beginning.

Perina's narration concludes with contemplations of what it feels like in prison, but the book does not end there: there are, in fact, a pair of epilogues. The first is a brief narration by Dr. Kubodera of how he helped Perina skip out on his parole from prison; the second is a passage from Perina's writings previously omitted by Kubodera, one in which Perina reveals that the conflict with his adopted child ended with Perina sodomizing that child (a son) in the same way as the boys in the village were – and, finally, saying that he loved the boy.

Prologue and Preface

Summary

Prologue – A newspaper article from March of 1995 announces the arrest of “renowned immunologist” Dr. Norton Perina “on charges of sexual abuse … originat[ing] with one of Dr. Perina’s adopted sons” (3). Narration in the article describes Perina’s successful history as a researcher (including his being awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine), and particularly his research into the unique slowing of the aging process among the population of a remote island in Micronesia (Ivu’ivu). That slowing, the article also reveals, was the result of the population’s consumption of a rare turtle, the flesh of which contained a chemical compound that biologically slowed the aging and deterioration of human cells. Finally, the article references how Perina adopted 43 children from the island’s population, and concludes with a quote from Dr. Ronald Kubodera, described as one of Perina’s closest friends, commenting on how good a father and colleague Perina is.

A second newspaper article, from December of 1997, announces that Dr. Perina has been sentenced to two years in prison. This article reveals that the turtle from which the chemical compound that slowed the aging process has become extinct.

Preface – In first person narration, Dr. Kubodera introduces himself as a good friend and colleague of Dr. Perina’s, also revealing himself as Perina’s self-appointed defender. He describes a conversation with a colleague, who thinks Perina is guilty, while Kubodera not only believes that he is innocent, but that if he is indeed guilty, it does not, or should not, matter. “Norton is a great mind,” Kobodera says, “and that is all that matters to me and I should say to history as well” (9). Kubodera also reveals that many of Perina’s 43 children abandoned him, having been given great opportunities by him.

Finally, Kubodera reveals his ongoing correspondence with Perina, carried on while Perina was in prison. Kubodera describes learning of Perina’s deep boredom, in spite of having imagined what the two men call “sea time” (10), an open and interrupted stretch of time in which Perina, as he imagined it, could contemplate all the things he never had time to contemplate while he was working and researching. Kubodera reveals that in order to help his friend combat that boredom and keep his mind active, he urged Perina to write his own account of his time on the islands and among the people where he did his research. Perina agreed, and Kubodera reveals that what the reader is about to read is Perina’s narrative, sent to Kubodera as supplements to personal letters. Kubodera comments that he added footnotes with supplementary information, and that he has “cut – judiciously – passages that [he] felt did not enrich the narrative or were not otherwise of any particular relevance” (14). He closes his preface by commenting that he has undertaken the editing of this project with no less of a goal in mind “than to restore Norton’s reputation, to remind the world that what preceded the last two years is

immeasurably more important than what may or may not have happened for a few brief months" (15).

Analysis

These three introductory pieces of writing establish the identity of the novel's central character and protagonist (Dr. Perina). They also establish the narrative circumstances in which his story is to be told (in first person narration – that is, as something of a memoir), and the life circumstances within which Perina is telling that story. This last is perhaps one of the more noteworthy of all these introductory elements, in that the reference to Perina being an abuser of children underpins virtually a great deal of the narrative that follows without being overtly present. For much of that narrative, there are few if any direct references to this aspect of Perina's life: there are, however, key points in the story where events and descriptions clearly and vividly echo what is referred to here. This, in turn, means that there is a complex relationship between the past and present in the narrative: the information in the newspaper articles here can be seen as reflecting Perina's present, while the echoes in the following narrative (i.e. Perina's memoir) suggest ways in which Perina's past influenced that present.

A pair of even more significant elements of the overall narrative, also introduced in this section, emerge as a result of consideration of the writings of Dr. Kubodera. The first has to do with his stated, and demonstrated, beliefs not only in Perina's innocence, but more importantly in the importance of Perina's scientific successes – specifically, the belief that no matter what Perina did in his personal life, his achievements as a scientist are more important. This is the opening statement in the novel's thematic consideration of the tension between the values of science and the values of humanity in general. Perina's and Kubodera's writings both suggest that the needs and goals of scientific understanding are more important than any other consideration: what is important to note, however, is that the novel's ultimate perspective is actually quite different. As Perina's narrative progresses, the reader will come to an understanding of what, exactly that different perspective is.

This, in turn, relates to the final significant element introduced here. This is the idea, presented by Kubodera in his forward, that Perina's writings have been edited. On one level, this suggests that what is read may not be the entire truth: Kubodera indicates, in his forward, that he clearly has an agenda in offering what he does of Perina's writing (that is: to preserve and honor Perina's scientific reputation above anything else). This makes Kubodera, and by extension Perina, into unreliable narrators: as such, the reader must approach everything said and written with healthy skepticism. On another level, this one more structural, Kubodera's reference to Perina's writings having been edited foreshadows the inclusion, in the novel's final pages, of a profoundly significant piece of edited material, one that directly relates to the information contained in the newspaper articles included here.

Discussion Question 1

What events or circumstances referred to in this section (Prologue and Preface) can be seen as evoking the book's thematic consideration of the human relationship with death?

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the narrative, do you agree or disagree with the contention that career success in general, or scientific success in particular, should be of primary importance when considering the value of a person's life?

Discussion Question 3

What is your experience of unreliable narrators – that is, people whose word and/or stories cannot be trusted?

Vocabulary

immunologist, emeritus, prominent, consumption, enzyme, impoverished, exemplary, secretive, fervent, revolutionize, virology, anthropology, quotidian , invariable, treachery, duplicitous, incarceration, monotony, torpor, exsanguinate, temerity, leniency, arraignment, effete, ostentatious, relevant, expectant, flippancy, purported, congregate, salivate, infuriate, brevity, deteriorate, congenital

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 1, The Creek

Summary

1. In first person narration, Perina describes growing up in a small rural community in the American mid-west, established near to a generally quiet creek that once a year, swelled into a powerful, unpredictable torrent. He also describes his complex relationship with his brother Owen, a poet (Kubodera describes in a footnote that the relationship ended with an act of betrayal, on Owen's part, that Perina was never able to forgive). Perina then examines his relationship with his mother, whom he describes as delicate and distant, the subject of ridicule by both himself and his brother. Perina then describes the summer in which she died, commenting briefly on the daily activities he and Owen enjoyed at that time of year (all of which involve tormenting animals in some way). He describes initially being told that his mother had died from a disease carried by the mosquitoes that frequented the creek which, Perina says, triggered his interest in disease. Later, he writes, and as the result of an autopsy arranged by his aunt Sybil, Perina learned that his mother had died of a brain aneurysm in her sleep, a good death as his aunt Sybil described it.

Perina then narrates his relationship with his father, whom he describes as hardworking, reliable, and quietly wise, but lacking in ambition. Perina then describes his fantasies of being his family's hero, gaining wealth and reputation, while at the same time expressing his respect for his aunt Sybil, a pioneering early female pediatrician in a world and culture where such women were disregarded. In a lengthy footnote, Kubodera describes how Sybil became an inspiration to Perina, "one of the world's greatest medical minds" (33). Back in the main text, Perina describes her efforts to encourage him to further explore science, at one point giving him scientific equipment after watching him burn ants in the sun. Those efforts, he says, included giving him a publication that highlighted and summarized the accomplishments of noted scientists, a publication, he says, that he initially dismissed but in which he was nevertheless pleased, years later, to see himself included.

2 – Perina describes a large, ornate, improbable staircase in the center of the family home; how he once painted it in bright colors with the names of scientists; and how his father uncharacteristically laughed when he saw it. He also describes how, over the years, the staircase eventually fell apart, leaving a blockage in the middle of the house that, Perina says, his lazy father never cleaned up and had to constantly walk around – which, Perina adds, contributed to his eventually fatal heart attack. Perina then describes his father's sparsely attended funeral (Kubodera commenting in a footnote that the money Perina inherited from both his father and from Sybil enabled much of his career and life); and how, in the aftermath, he and Owen were closer than they ever were before or since. Finally, Perina describes how, while on a sea voyage on the one trip he and Owen took together, Perina realized that he loved his brother. "And although

it was never as intense as it was that day on the water, I grew to first accept and then long for that familiar ache, even though I knew that while experiencing it I was unable to accomplish, much less contemplate, anything else" (43).

Analysis

As Perina's narration – and what is arguably the novel proper – begin, this section develops several key elements: Perina's arrogance and high self-regard, his complex relationship with his brother, and another of the book's key themes. This can be found in the references to Perina's attitudes towards, and treatment of, animals, the first of several references to how he (and other scientists) treat them as subjects of experimentation rather than as individual entities, as being in existence for him to make use of as opposed to having a right to, or reason for, existing in their own right and their own nature. The references to animals here foreshadow several other instances throughout the narrative in which this attitude reappears, at times in relation to human beings whom Perina considers to be little more than animals.

Other elements introduced in this section include a pair of key images, metaphoric references to aspects of Perina's character that also function as important pieces of foreshadowing. The first is the creek which, in the description of its relative quietness, can be seen as representing the relative peace and lack of excitement in Perina's early life and, in the description of how it overflows its banks, can also be seen as metaphorically foreshadowing the sudden tides of fame, both scientific and criminal, that overwhelmingly force their way into Perina's life. The second important image introduced in this section is the staircase which likewise foreshadows both earlier and later elements of Perina's life – the building and defining of his life by science, and the subsequent deterioration and destruction of that life.

Perhaps the most significant element of this section has to do with its exploration of Perina's family relationships: his contentious relationship with his father, his admiring relationship with his aunt Sybil, and his initially affectionate, but always prickly, relationship with his brother. Here it is interesting to note that while Perina makes virtually no further reference, later in his narrative, to either his father or his aunt, his brother reappears several times, most often as the subject of derisive commentary resulting from, in turn, his disinclination to worship Perina in the way he seems to think is his right. The connection between the two of them, described in this section's final moments, doesn't last: as time and the narrative both pass, the affection between the two of them becomes overwhelmed by mutual antagonism until finally, in the book's final pages, Owen plays a fundamental role in events that eventually destroy Perina's career and reputation.

All that said, this section's final moments simultaneously foreshadow and define a key aspect of Perina's character and identity that shapes many of his relationship-based actions later in the narrative, most significantly at the novel's climax.

Discussion Question 1

How do events and circumstances of this section develop the novel's thematic exploration of the search for love and connection?

Discussion Question 2

Given what the narrative has revealed / suggested so far about Perina, why is it significant that his inspiring Aunt Sybil was a pediatrician (i.e. a doctor specializing in children)?

Discussion Question 3

In the novel's prologue, there are references to "sea time," a period of openness and freedom that Perina and Kubodera liken to the openness and freedom of the sea. How does that evocation of an experience of water relate to the evocations of water found here in the reference to the creek and to the open ocean?

Vocabulary

gesticulation, tributary, timorous, moronic, contemplate, chastise, imbue, minuscule, enigma, luminous, cosseted, rigorous, vacuous, portentous, frivolous, impassive, stoic, dolorous, corrosive, retaliation, cadaverous, insolent, erroneous, contrivance, augment, inherent, pathologist, aneurysm, flaccid, grotesque, frugal, placid, languorous, serpentine, continual, balletic, prescient, frivolous, condescension, torpid, lassitude, inertia, vocation, disassemble, reductive, squalor, embellish, arduous, passivity, scarcity, assuage, lascivious, prescient, dilettante, predilection, harmonious

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 2, Mice

Summary

1 – Perina describes his reluctant attendance at medical school, saying it was the only way in which anyone (such as himself) with any interest in the human body could develop that interest. He describes in some detail, his experience as a member of the staff of research scientist Gregory Smythe, something of a scientific celebrity at the time (the 1940's and 50's) because of his belief that all cancer was caused by viruses, and that cancer could be cured by vaccines. Perina describes the hierarchy of assistants in the lab and the animals with which they all worked, mostly mice, dogs, and monkeys. "One heard the mice's frantic, shrill peeping, the dogs' futile, squealing whimpers, only when they were being removed from or replaced in their cages … only the monkeys complained and chattered and screeched all day, shrieking at nothing" (54). He comments that his work was primarily with mice, describing in some detail how that work was designed only to prove Smythe's theories correct, and how he (Perina) conducted his part of the experiments – most specifically, how he killed the mice and used their spleens. He then describes how he only ended up staying in the lab for a single semester, describing how his attitude towards the work differed from that of his colleagues: "I had gone into science for its adventure, but to them, adventure was something to be endured, not sought, on the road to inevitable greatness" (59).

2 – Perina describes being invited to dinner at the home of Gregory Smythe, a house that seems strangely uninhabited (because Smythe was known to have a family) where the conversation was entirely dominated by Smythe, who seemed more interested in listing the wrongs being done him by his colleagues and the university than in talking about science. Eventually, Perina says, he was able to ask Smythe (whose eyes, Perina comments, resembled those of the mice that he – Perina – so regularly killed) why he, Perina, was hired. Smythe, who at that point seemed drunk, told Perina that they were very much alike in their desire to escape, and to realize freedom. And then, Perina adds, Smythe started to weep, leading Perina to leave quickly. For several days, Perina then says, he stayed home instead of going into the lab, eventually being asked to leave Smythe's lab and then returning to classes where, he adds, he sat quietly. He had learned, he comments, his first lesson in humility.

3 – Perina then describes being offered a position (by Smythe's colleague and rival, Adolphus Sereny) on a research expedition to the remote South Seas island of U'ivu, where he was to be an assistant to anthropologist Paul Tallent. Perina reveals that he had been recommended for the job by Gregory Smythe who, Perina assumes, simply wanted him out of the way after the embarrassing dinner. Perina describes accepting the offer, researching the island (and finding very little information), and packing extensively, revealing that he eventually realized that much of what he packed should have left behind.

Analysis

Aside from defining the circumstances through which Perina became involved with Tallent's expedition to Ivu'ivu (the expedition that ultimately changed Perina's life, first for the better and then for the worst), Part 1, Section 2 is most notable for the vividness with which it portrays Perina's attitude towards animals, arguably the attitude of science towards animals for decades, if not centuries and which, in many ways, continues in contemporary scientific practice. There are both echoes (of Perina's childhood attitudes) and foreshadowings (of Perina's future attitudes towards the subjects of his experiments, both animal and human) in this thematically significant development. Both echoing and foreshadowing reinforce the overall impression, developed throughout the book, of Perina's personal and professional arrogance, selfishness, and insensitivity.

A second noteworthy element in Part 1, Section 2 is the portrait of Gregory Smythe. In some ways, the character is similar to that of Perina's father and Perina's Aunt Sybil, in that all three characters play intense, significant roles in Perina's early life and career but then virtually vanish from his story. There is a sense here that Perina, in his selfishness and arrogance, only regards them as important in the parts of his life in which they played an active role where, in fact, their influence ultimately proves much more significant and lasting. All that said, Smythe is developed in greater depth, and arguably with greater sympathy, than either of those other two characters. There is still a sense of contempt and derision in Perina's writing about him, but also a recognition of his humanity and vulnerability which Perina seems to think of as weaknesses. As the narrative unfolds, he tries to suppress these "weaknesses" in himself but eventually, and to his detriment, proves unable to do so. In that sense, the references to Smythe's vulnerability are, in fact, important pieces of foreshadowing – specifically, of the eventual revelations of Perina's own vulnerability.

One last point to note is another piece of foreshadowing. This is the reference to Adolphus Sereny who, much later in the narrative, plays even more of a defining role in developments in Perina's career than he does here.

Discussion Question 1

How do events and circumstances in this section develop the novel's overall thematic exploration of the morality of science?

Discussion Question 2

Why, do you think, Perina finds similarities between Smythe's eyes and those of the experimented-upon mice?

Discussion Question 3

Why, do you think, Perina sees his experience with Smythe as a lesson in humility?

Vocabulary

tangential, matriculate, suffuse, diligent, promiscuity, trapezoid, periphery, coalesce, gird, visionary, eminent, eradicate, plausible, theorem, allegorical, hierarchical, vivacity, slurry, visceral, cognitive, perfunctory,, foist, loquacious, utilitarian, incinerator, abut, consequential, pipette, oxymoron, veracity, eradicate, fibrous, pulverize, inoculate, pliable, camphor, scrimshaw, furtive, eccentric, haphazard, persimmon, quandary, provocative, impede, rancor, sclera, stymie, notorious, ferocity

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 3, The Dreamers – Section 1

Summary

1. Perina describes his departure for Hawaii (following an uneasy farewell with Owen) and his eventual first encounter with Paul Tallent, his first reaction being an intense response to Tallent's physical beauty. A lengthy footnote by Kubodera sums up Tallent's career and the mysteries that thread their way through his life, particularly the nature of his disappearance and presumed death (which, Kubodera adds in a footnote, will be discussed by Perina later in his narrative). On their plane trip to U'ivu, Perina says, his contemplations of Tallent's beauty led him to contemplations of his own physical unattractiveness. There was no time for further contemplations, he suggests, on the rest of the journey – by smaller plane, by boat, and by foot through the jungle. Along the way, he writes, he and Tallent connected with Esme Duff, Tallent's research assistant, whom Perina immediately disliked. After arrival on the island of U'ivu, Perina says, the three scientists, guided by three U'ivuans (including the friendly Fa'a) made their way through the increasingly dense and uncomfortable jungle. During conversation with Perina while Esme slept, Tallent revealed his ambition for discovering a civilization that had been untouched by western civilization.

Tallent then recounted, Perina says, the myth of how the islands and its inhabitants were created, a myth involving a relationship between the sea god and the sky god; the role of a turtle (Opa'ivu'eke) as intermediary; the creation of children and the islands upon which they lived as a result of that relationship; and the ritual of thanks that the natives (descendants of those children) engaged in whenever they consumed a turtle (opa'ivu'eke). That ritual, Tallent added, was offered in the hope that the humans would, or could, become as immortal as their ancestors. Tallent then told how over time, both the inhabitants of the island and the people who colonized it gradually, and disrespectfully, destroyed it; how the gods became angry and sent down rain and destruction; and how one man, in a desperate, impulsive attempt to appease them, sacrificed and ate one of the turtles without making an offering to the gods. The gods, in turn, decreed that he could have immortality, but that he would cease to be able to function as a human being: no mind, no speech, no awareness, and no love. Tallent concluded his story by describing how Fa'a once saw a community of such people deep within the jungle, and admitting that that was his (Tallent's) quest – to find those people.

Perina describes how, as the journey through the jungle continued, and the research team arrived on the nearby island of Ivu'ivu where the real investigations are to begin, he become overwhelmed by the unchanging landscape; became upset when he learned that a delicately beautiful monkey was treated as food; became increasingly obsessed with observing Tallent; and became increasingly resentful of Esme. At one point, in a clearing in the jungle, Perina says he and the group encountered what the guides call an opa'ivu'eke (a sacred turtle). Perina describes being left with a sense of power and

personality in the animal, and the guides being left with a sense of terrified awe. Perina also comments on how gods (i.e. the opa'ivu'eke) were not meant "to be seen by men. But when we encroach on their world, when we see what we are not meant to see, how can anything but disaster follow?" (104).

Days passed, Perina says, and the journey into the forest continued, with no sign of the people reportedly seen by Fa'a. Eventually, Perina says, Tallent and Fa'a decided that the group should split up - one scientist, one guide – and search that way. Perina describes first finding this plan doubtful, then reminding himself of the experience with the turtle, and then telling himself that he is as lost, in his search for meaning, as Fa'a and the others.

Analysis

The first important element in the first section of Part 3 is the almost in-passing reference to Perina's attraction to Paul Tallent. Aside from its being part of the book's overall thematic consideration of aspects of sexuality, there are several points to note about this reference. The first is that Perina's attractions to, and longings for, Tallent play significant roles later in the narrative, particular when (as referenced here and in the prologue) Tallent mysteriously disappears. Another point to note is that Perina's attraction to Tallent might be a significant component of his resentful attitude towards Esme, a professional and personal rivalry that persists throughout the book.

A perhaps more significant point is that nowhere in the narrative, here or anywhere else, does Perina explicitly refer to himself, or his attraction to Tallent, as homosexual. Later in the narrative, he disparagingly refers to the same-gender attractions and relationships of another character which, in hindsight, perhaps explain why he is reluctant to refer to himself and his attractions as such here or anywhere else. Whatever the reason, it is an intriguing omission, which in turn leads to one last point to consider in relationship to this aspect of the narrative, and perhaps the most significant one. This is the reference, earlier in the narrative, to Perina's conviction on charges of sexually abusing one of his sons. There seems to be the possibility that in denying what seems to be his homosexual orientation, Perina is in some way preventing himself from acknowledging what is eventually revealed to be a truth of his relationship with that son.

A related point to the above is the almost missable reference to the creation myth involving the initial procreative relationship between two male gods. Here it is important to note that in other myths referred to in the story, there are references to female gods, using the term goddesses. This suggests that the reference to the two male gods is deliberate, and relates to the different considerations of homosexuality as discussed above.

A second important point to note about this section of Part 3 is the story that Tallent tells Perina about the opa'ivu'eke. Again, there are several noteworthy elements. The first has to do with the echoes, in this story, to creation myths in North American indigenous cultures, many of which include references to turtles, who are often portrayed in these

stories as carrying the earth on their backs, or their shells forming land masses. A second noteworthy element of this story is that it triggers, drives, and defines Perina's increasingly obsessive determination to get to the truth of what is presented here as a myth but which, as the narrative and Perina's investigations both continue, turns out to have more than a grain of truth at its core. Here it is important to note that even here, Perina's reaction defines him as more potentially engaged in the research than Tallent, an aspect of their professional and personal relationship that continues throughout the book. Yet another important point, also related to the introduction of the myth of the opa'ivu'eke, is the introduction of Fa'a, a character who plays a significant role in the action throughout much of the narrative.

One further point to note about this story is stylistic, more to do with the way in which the story is told than with the story itself. This is the way in which the author details the world of the Ivu'ivuans, not only in terms of this particular story but in the novel as a whole. There is a great deal of detail here, and throughout the narrative, about their rituals and myths, their daily lives, and the physical environment in which they live those lives. This is an example of the narrative technique of world-building, the creation and shaping of an entire world and its history. The sense here is that this careful crafting of the world is not only interesting to the reader, and evocative of the author's work: it is also appropriate to the character of the narrator / protagonist who is, after all, a scientist, a profession that relies on careful attention to detail for recognition and success.

A last point to consider about the story told by Tallent: its relationship to the book's overall thematic exploration of humanity's relationship with death. The story introduces the thematic and narrative presence that contemplation of death, throughout the story, is defined as much by contemplation of its opposite – immortality, or non-death – as it is by the presence of death itself.

Finally, there are some significant instances of foreshadowing here. First, Perina's encounter with the opa'ivu'eke foreshadows the growth of what becomes his obsession with them and how they impact human beings, morally, ideologically, and physically. Second, Perina's comment in narration about disaster foreshadows what eventually happens to virtually everyone who begins their association with the opa'ivu'eke here. Then, references in the myth to people losing their ability to function foreshadow exactly those circumstances, experienced both directly and indirectly, in the experiences of several of the characters. Finally, Perina's in-narration to being lost can be seen as foreshadowing his own experience of becoming lost in his search for glory and in his feelings for his family, as well as Tallent's eventual disappearance (i.e. becoming "lost") and the similarly eventual disappearance of many of Perina's adopted children (again, their becoming "lost").

Discussion Question 1

What aspects of the narrative and its events in this section reflect and develop the book's thematic exploration of the treatment of animals?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that Perina became upset about the monkey being used as food?

Discussion Question 3

Why, do you think, Perina refers to himself, at the conclusion of this section, as being lost in his search for meaning? What other elements of his experience in this section might be related to, or defining components of, this perspective?

Vocabulary

brusque, dubious, dissipate, tedious, simulacrum, meander, extravagant, enervating, proximity, solace, variegated, prodigy, scrupulous, definitive, predilection, lupine, deficiency, baguette, façade, usurp, rudimentary, fluency, tether, excruciating, pregnable, tourmaline, sarong, ferocity, expertise, latticework, peripheral, statuary, exertion, speculation, theoretical, presumptuous, eradicate, contradict, disquisition, miscreant, phrenologist, recitation, torrential, preposterous, discern, succumb, unsullied, incessant, profligate, fistula, malachite, fluent, penumbra, orifice, carapace, dromedary, fortitude, expunge, voluble, priapic, rivulet, equanimity, fibrous, thrum, pallid, chambray, furtive, spelunk, insensate, translucent

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 3, The Dreamers – Section 2

Summary

2. Perina describes the moment when, after a long delay, Fa'a and Tallent returned to their camp followed by another individual. Perina then recounts the story told by the two men – how they searched for a long time; how they eventually encountered a wild, aged woman who climbed down a tree headfirst; and how her initial screaming fear eventually calmed into a kind of unquestioning, thoughtless trust. As they returned to camp, the woman following, they found a spear stuck in a tree. This, Perina says, struck Fa'a as frightening, given that U'ivuans see their spears as an extension of themselves: to him the spear, with no apparent owner nearby, suggests that something bad might have happened. Perina, however, saw the spear as another suggestion that, like the appearance of the woman, indicated that the researchers were close to discovering "a different world. All he had to do was find it" (115).

Perina describes the group giving the woman the name Eve (the name of the first woman, according to the Bible); the rigorous examination he made of her (eventually theorizing that she was about 60); and the qualities of her personality (her essential quietness, occasionally interrupted by temper). He also describes how, as observations of Eve continued, Tallent showed Fa'a a tattooed mark he had discovered on Eve's neck (a circle with a line through it) which Fa'a identifies as the mark of the opa'ivu'eke, a sacred mark for the Ivu'ivuans, marking the age of 60 – except, Tallant says, no-one in Fa'a's tribe or history had ever reached that age.

Perina, Tallent, and the others (including Eve, now tethered permanently to the group by a rope to keep her from wandering) continued to explore the jungle. One night, Perina says, he followed Eve as she went into the forest and found himself, terrifyingly, in the middle of a small group of people like her. His screams woke the rest of the camp, who arrived and quickly took control of the group, who seemed to be the same age as Eve (they all had the mark) and as strong and healthy. One of them, Mu'a, was identified as their leader, and he and the others actually spoke with the guides, their words being interpreted for Tallent and the others. After full physical and psychological exams (during which Perina discovered that all the Ivu'ivuians had memory impairment and poor eyesight, but were otherwise extraordinarily healthy), Tallent asked Mu'a to tell his story, which Tallent translated and Perina recorded.

Mu'a, Perina writes, spoke of the traumatizing, mythic-sounding journey of his father from U'ivu to Ivu'ivu, a story that included his father riding on the back of a large, conveniently arriving turtle from one island to the other. Tallent then revealed that Vanu, another of the dreamers (as Perina calls them, because their walk resembled that of sleepwalkers) was Mu'a's father, and who, from evidence in Mu'a's story, could be as much as 130 years old. Perina describes reacting with disbelief and uncertainty, while

both Tallent and Esme seemed to believe that such a thing was possible. Perina describes Tallent's impatience with his doubts, and then looking at Pa'a next to one of the dreamers; seeing that they looked exactly the same age; and wondering "who was the madman and who was on my side" (143).

Analysis

With the events of this section, the novel's plot begins to move into clearer focus. Specifically, the introduction of Eve and the other dreamers transforms what had been an exposition-laden extended setup into an actual story with actual narrative events. In other words, the book's thematically central consideration of the morality of science is now explored through actual action: the way the scientific team treats the dreamers as subjects of an experiment (i.e. like animals) rather than variation on human beings – this in spite of Mu'a, and a couple of the other dreamers, actually being able to communicate. As well, these events directly involve and affect the novel's protagonist: up until this point, Perina had been what might be described as merely along for the ride, following in the footsteps of Tallent and others. Now, he becomes fully and actively (and selfishly) engaged in in what becomes his career defining work.

All that said, there is a great deal of information in this first section of Part 3 that becomes foundational to other explorations of plot later on in the narrative. That information includes the reference to the apparent age of Eve, Mu'a, and the other dreamers (60); the connection between the tattooed mark and the opa'ivu'eke; and the references to the contrasting physical and psychological states of the dreamers. In fact, much of the rest of the action in the narrative is associated with explorations of why these aspects of the Ivu'ivuans are as they are.

Discussion Question 1

What elements in this section can be seen as explorations of the book's interest in science's treatment of animals?

Discussion Question 2

What is ironic about giving the nickname "the dreamers" to the people who are found in the jungle? In what way might the term refer to other characters?

Discussion Question 3

What does Perina mean when, at the end of this section, he asks who is the madman and who is on his side, bearing in mind that his goal is success and renown?

Vocabulary

demarcation, copse, rapacious, phosphorescent, furtive, repulsive, preamble, oblivious, noxious, marionette, prise, truss (v.), magenta, bilious, calcify, hirsute, militaristic, forage, viscous, scabrous, strenuous, acquiesce, commensurate, auditory, dysentery, eradicate, assiduous, diorama, inscrutable, capricious, hieroglyphic, dexterous, exhilaration, perambulation, somnambulist

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 4, The Ninth Hut – Section 1

Summary

1. Perina describes how the scientists, guides, and dreamers finally found the village they were searching for on Ivu'ivu; how all the males of the village kept their spears constantly and noticeably close; how he realized, in the middle of the night, that there were no old people in the community. The next day, as Tallent and the others went off in search of the dreamers (who had separated themselves from the scientists and from the village, Perina explored the community, looking into a series of huts and discovering arrangements for storing food and for sleeping. In the ninth hut (which is decorated differently than the others), he discovers the carapace (shell) of an opa'ivu'eke. Later, after Tallent returned (without the dreamers), Perina learned that there several strict rules about interacting with the villagers have been established, including that the dreamers were to be kept away from the village – and yet, Tallent added, that Mu'a both wanted to be there and felt desperately that he had to stay away. Again, Perina says, his mind was full of questions.

2. Over time, Perina writes, he became more and more involved (as an observer) in the daily life of the villagers (in footnotes, Kubodera describes how those observations came to form the basis of Perina's famous textbooks on anthropology). Perina describes the sense of sexual freedom in the village, and the importance of ritual in village life. He pays particular attention to one that seemed to be a rite of passage for a young man, taken into the ninth hut, and then repeatedly sodomized by the adult men. Afterwards, Perina adds, the boy came out of the hut and was adorned with the same wreath of leaves as the other adult men. The next day, conversation between Tallent and the village chief revealed that not only was Perina telling the truth (Esme had said he was lying), but that there would be a chance to witness the coming-of-age ritual again, in another couple of nights. Perina writes that he, Tallent and Esme did observe the ritual, Perina revealing that in its aftermath, he found himself having frequent, but unremembered, dreams about Tallent.

3. Some time later, Perina writes, the scientists were invited to the ritual of the chief's sixtieth birthday, which involved the bringing-in of a giant opa'ivu'eke and the chief killing it and eating almost all of its flesh. Later, Perina writes, he had the instinct that the only way he could get answers to his many questions about the ritual was to speak with Mu'a. With Pa'a's help, Perina learned that everyone who turned 60 had the same ritual, but that it did not happen often, because so few people turned 60. Perina also learned that all of the dreamers had had the ritual, and that the giant turtle came from "the lake where the forest ends" (179).

The next day, Perina managed to get Mu'a to take them to the lake, which the scientists discovered was full of the turtles. Further conversation between Perina and Mu'a

(interpreted by Tallent) revealed that only those who were turning 60 could touch one of the turtles: if anyone else did, their descendants who got to the age to touch and eat a turtle would become an outcast. Perina and Tallent realized that the story Tallent had told (Part 1, Section 3) was about just such an outcast.

The next day, after organizing his thoughts, Perina had an interpreted conversation with the chief, in which Perina learned that Mu'a had been sent from the village because he was becoming mo'o kua'aus (another kind of outcast, without ability to function as an adult). Mu'a later admitted this was true, telling the story of how he and two others (his friends) had been sent from the village because of their turning mo'o kua'aus. Mu'a described how he found other dreamers while making his way through the forest, fighting some of them. Before Perina could get the information he wanted, however, Mu'a withdrew. The next day, angry and frustrated and upset by what seemed to be a great deal of sexual activity all around him (in the village and in the dreamers, and perhaps even in Tallent and Esme, who had disappeared), Perina went for a long walk, and found himself, late at night, unexpectedly in the company of the boy from the first ritual, who offered him physical comfort that eventually, in spite of Perina's attempts to resist, became sensual.

Analysis

This first section of Part 4 contains several of the book's most important events, moments of encounter that both echo what has gone before and foreshadow later important events. The first of these is the ritual sodomizing of the two young men, which can be seen as indirectly echoing the reference, earlier in the narrative, to Perina's abuse of his son. It seems very likely that at this moment in the story, the reader will make at least some kind of connection between the two moments, perhaps wondering how the exact connection will eventually be defined: the references are too closely related not to be connected. At the same time, the initial ritual (the one observed only by Perina) foreshadows important, and very telling, events later in the story to which Perina is intimately connected.

A related, and similarly important, event is the encounter between Perina and the first initiated boy, an encounter which, as the narrative eventually reveals, has a profound, life-changing impact on the once self-isolating scientist. Here it is important to note that the narrative stops short of explicitly indicating whether the encounter became sexual: it is sensual and intimate, but nowhere in the book is it suggested that it became anything more.

A second, and similarly important, event has to do with the second sort of ritual observed by Perina and the others. The killing and eating of the opa'ivu'eke, along with Perina's eventual discovery of the lake from which the turtles are taken, both lay the foundations for and foreshadow primary plot developments – the investigation into the relationship between the consumption of the opa'ivu'eke and the dreamers, and the eventual destruction of the island (as referred to in the prologue and on other occasions prior to this one).

All these events can be considered important pieces of foreshadowing, in that they clearly relate to important moments later in the narrative. Other foreshadowings include the reference, in Mu'a's story, to what happens if someone accidentally touches an opa'ivu'eke before the appropriate age, which foreshadows just such a situation down the line.

In and with all these events, the narrative continues to dramatize its exploration its primary theme – the morality of science. At the same time, it also explores a number of its secondary themes: both the description of the coming of age ritual and Perina's encounter in the forest can be seen as manifesting the book's thematic interest in expressions of sexuality, while there are also glimpses of the book's exploration of encounters with love and connection. At this point, it is useful and important to remember that all these events are being described from the perspective of a narrator (and an editor) who view the prioritization of science over anything else as natural, inevitable, and morally correct. It is also important to note, within that context, that everything about Perina's story to which the reader is exposed, here and throughout the book, is designed (according to the memoirist – Perina – and his biographer – Kubodera – to preserve and perhaps even enhance Perina's reputation. There is, in this context, a possible explanation for why the description of Perina's encounter with the young man in the forest stops short of any reference to it becoming sexual.

Discussion Question 1

What events in this section can be seen as developing the book's thematic interest in encounters with love and connection?

Discussion Question 2

How does the content of this section, in terms of both event and how events are portrayed, reflect the narrator's primary intentions (to essentially glorify Perina and his work)?

Discussion Question 3

The novel never explains the disappearance of Tallent and Esme. Given the book's thematic and narrative intentions, and what has been revealed about the two characters and their relationship to this point, what do you think might be an explanation for their disappearance?

Vocabulary

passel, catastrophic, tuberous, docile, exuberant, insouciant, conciliatory, mewl, auspicious, viscosity, tannic, placate, elicit, artifice, adjacent, omnipresent, benign, fraudulent, expansive, inexorable, fetishize, avidity, quorum, denouement, languor,

quandary, circumspection, attributable, exertion, perseverate, gestural, encumber, purgatory, clarification, detrimental, guttural, compliant, cumulative, omnipresent, petulance, lascivious

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 4, The Ninth Hut – Section 2

Summary

4. Perina writes that as a result of his contemplations of what he had learned from Mu'a, he realized that Eve was the oldest of all the dreamers, and her general wildness was the end result of the process of becoming a mo'o kua'au. He then realized that he needed to do some experiments and tests on both an opa'ivu'eke and an Ivu'ivuan, in order to find the connection between the former and the simultaneous physical agelessness and mental deterioration of the latter. Both Tallent and Esme argued against him taking one of the opa'ivu'eke, Tallent insisting that it would be a breach of the hospitality they had been offered, and Esme insisting that it was just wrong. That night, however, Perina woke Mu'a and got him to take him to the lake (after Mu'a made a stop on a plateau to look at the stars, an image that made Perina first think of Owen, and then weep). At the lake, Perina managed to capture and kill a trusting, gentle opa'ivu'eke, but not before being interrupted by an angry Fa'a who, after accidentally touching the opa'ivu'eke's body, collapsed into grief: Perina came to understand that Fa' believed he had been cursed. Back at the camp, everyone pretended everything was as normal, even though the discoveries about the opa'ivu'eke were profound and significant. When alone, Perina tried to eat a piece of the opa'ivu'eke, but failed: sure that his theory was wrong, but ultimately unwilling to test it on himself. The next day, he writes, Tallent announced that they were leaving.

5. As he writes about the sudden return of measurable time into their lives and work, Perina describes his growing belief that he was put into the expedition in order to get him out of the school, and also his vindictive happiness at the prospect of going back home with this accomplishment to his credit. He also managed to talk Tallent into taking some of the dreamers back to America, with Tallent talking the chief into the same thing – except that the chief wanted him to take all the dreamers. Tallent had no choice but to agree. Just before leaving, Perina writes, he asked the chief one more question: whether anyone who had eaten a opa'ivu'eke did not go (mad). The chief did not answer: Perina writes that that gave him the answer to his question. Perina then writes how, as the journey continued to the coast (where the expedition is to be picked up), the decision was made to leave half the dreamers behind (with food and supplies) and continue with the other half (including Eve and Mu'a) to America. After completing this arrangement, Perina writes, Fa'a became increasingly despairing, Perina commenting that it was probably also because of what he believed to have been his curse. One morning he was discovered to have killed himself. The other guides disposed of the body, and soon afterwards Perina, Tallent, Esme, and the four remaining dreamers boarded a boat for the next island. Perina writes that as they left, he never looked back.

Analysis

There are several key points to note about this section of the narrative which is something of a climax to what amounts to roughly the novel's first half. The departure from the island, with the dreamers and the secretly stolen opa'ivu'eke, marks the highest point of emotional, thematic, and narrative intensity to this point. It is what amounts to a game changer for the characters and the reader, sending the narrative irrevocably, and perhaps inevitably, in another direction – which, after all, is what a climax does.

Important elements, then, within that climax include the deductions made by Perina and the others about the connections between the opa'ivu'eke and the simultaneous longevity (i.e. lengthy physical life) and deterioration (i.e. decreasing psychological function) of the dreamers. Here it is important to note a key aspect of the myths associated with these circumstances that is, in fact, something of a red herring, or false trail. These are all the references to a curse, the falseness of which, interestingly, Perina in his narration does nothing to dispel, most significantly for the reader, who can see it as perhaps an unnecessary, authorial convolution (that is: why does the author add this element to the story?) There is no curse, in any form: the deterioration, as the narrative has made clear, comes to everyone who at the age of 60 participates in the ritual consumption of the opa'ivu'eke. Touching one inappropriately, at the wrong time, has nothing to do with it, for the toucher or, as the legend of the curse suggests, the toucher's descendants. Fa'a's death, in this context, can be seen as almost entirely avoidable: if the scientists had cared enough for him to tell him the truth of what they had learned (that is: to see him as more than something to just be utilized, as they tend to see anyone who is not them), he might have felt less driven to kill himself.

Given what he sees of the scientists' treatment of the remaining dreamers, however, perhaps Fa'a may not have been driving to kill himself. Both the kidnapping (which is what the removal of Mu'a, Eve, and the others amounts to) and the leaving behind of the dreamers reveal the callous selfishness of Perina, Tallent, and the other scientists. This is, in fact, the sort of "humans as animals" treatment that has been foreshadowed several times in the narrative, a development of two of the book's key themes: its exploration of the morality of science, and its exploration of how animals, and people seen as animals, are treated in the name of science.

Another significant event is the incident of Perina's failure to eat the opa'ivu'eke. On one level, his choice to not eat seems to be an act of arrogance: there is the sense that he believes that if his theory is correct and he does mentally deteriorate, all that is memorable about him will be lost. On another level, his choice is an ironic counterpoint to his previously referenced determination to have adventure, and that having adventure is a necessary component of scientific experimentation. In this moment, he reveals himself to be as both a scientific and a personal coward, a reaction to circumstance that seems, throughout much of the narrative, to haunt him and undermine his sense of self.

Another key point about this section has to do with the description of the gentle opa'ivu'eke itself, ironic for a couple of reasons. The first is that the reader, and Perina himself, know that the animal is going to be destroyed, while the reader also knows that the animal's environment is going to be decimated. The second reason the reference is noteworthy is that it is foreshadowing of how the many children brought into Perina's life also come to him trustingly, with at least one of them (the son referred to in the opening) being negatively affected (to say the least) by Perina's actions.

One last point to note about this section of Part 4 has to do with its final lines: specifically, Perina's reference to not looking back. This is deeply ironic, in that the final sections of the book are, in many ways, all ABOUT Perina looking back – as is, indeed, this entire memoir.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the events and circumstances of this section of Part 4 evoke, or explore, the book's thematic interest in human experiences of death?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Perina did the right thing in taking an opa'ivu'eke from the island? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Perina was unable to test the opa'ivu'eke on himself?

Vocabulary

stricture, ignominious, reprehensible, myriad, reverberate, explication, deleterious, decorous, cower, increment, primordial, pliable, covetous, intolerable, fecund, penultimate, cessation, commemorate, mundane

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 5, The First Child, Section 1

Summary

1. Perina's narration moves swiftly over the journey he, the other scientists, and the dreamers made to America (for much of which the dreamers were drugged), and the living circumstances into which the dreamers were placed (a small concrete room, half-heartedly disguised with plant leaves): he explains that those details were explored in more detail in the books written about him. He describes receiving funding for his research from some mysterious source (Kubodera's footnotes outline a couple of possibilities); the assistance he received from a mostly silent graduate student; and, most significantly, the rapidity with which the mental and emotional states of the dreamers deteriorated. Their physical health, however, remained robust. He also describes how he began his experiments with the opa'ivu'eke, which had to be kept secret from Tallent because he did not know that Perina had taken some opa'ivu'eke from Ivu'ivu. Those experiments, Perina says, involved feeding small portions of it to groups of mice to see what happened to their aging processes. Finally, he describes a somewhat awkward dinner meeting with Owen who, he says, came out to him as homosexual but, more importantly and inadvertently, reminded him of how much a superior being he (Perina) was, and had become.

2. Perina reports on his discovery that the mice fed the opa'ivu'eke aged past their standard lifespan, thus proving at least part of his theory (that consumption of the opa'ivu'eke triggered agelessness in humans). Later, he writes, he told interviewers that he felt amazed, but admits in narration that instead, he felt vindicated. "I was still endeavoring back then [i.e. when he was being interviewed] to be humble, as it was notable displays of humility that won young researchers grants" (236). As his experiments continued, he writes, Tallent published well-received anthropological writings about the Ivu'ivu, while his own paper (on how the aging process in the Ivu'ivuans was slowed) was received with intense disbelief and resentment. He adds that he was not upset because he knew he was right, a feeling that seems to have been reinforced by his being asked by Adolphus Sereny (who got him the job with Tallent – Part 2) for help in replicating the experiments. Perina writes that he sent Sereny some opa'ivu'eke along with instructions for its use. Eventually, the opa'ivu'eke-fed mice in Perina's experiment began to deteriorate psychologically and behaviorally, as Perina expected but did not reveal: he wanted, he says in narration, to wait until he could discover how to prevent that deterioration. Nevertheless, his initial research was supported by Sereny's, which (after two years of waiting and watching) duplicated his results. Suddenly, Perina writes, his research was much more highly regarded.

In the middle of a resulting onslaught of letters and invitations, Perina writes, he was visited by Tallent, recently back from a visit to Ivu'ivu, aware of Perina's research, and admitting that he suspected that Perina had taken the opa'ivu'eke. He then told Perina

that as a result of the publication of his (Perina's) paper, it was likely that Ivu'ivu would be taken over by those who would exploit the island, its people, and the opa'ivu'eke. Then, after angrily discovering the deteriorated state of the dreamers, he left, only to be reunited with Perina (along with Esme) on another investigative trip to Ivu'ivu.

Perina's description of the trip begins with a reference to his lingering, increasingly obsessive attraction to Tallent, and continues with his description of a pair of odd encounters – first with the dismissive king of U'ivu, and then with Fa'a's family, an increasingly uncomfortable conversation that Perina eventually learned, through his translator, that he was being asked to take responsibility for Fa'a's children. Subsequently, he writes, he journeyed back to the village, and once there, noted that the situation and lifestyle of the villagers had remained much the same; that the chief had not seemed to have started to follow the pattern of psychological deterioration; and that no-one had undergone the opa'ivu'eke ritual since the chief underwent his.

Meanwhile, Perina writes, he made plans to capture a pair of opa'ivu'eke and take them alive back to his lab, spending his days trying to find his way back to the lake. At one point he encountered the boy he found in the forest, but they did nothing more than exchange looks, Perina contemplating how important their meeting that night had been. Some time later, Perina had an encounter with a child that led Tallent to comment on how good Perina was with children, and wonder whether Perina had ever thought about having any. Perina admitted he never had, but later (after he had finally found his way to the lake and obtained a pair of docile opa'ivu'eke), he had an encounter with a gentle, friendly child in the village that made him realize that he would love to have children, but did not want a wife. He left the village, he writes, longing for something he thought he would never have.

Analysis

The first point to note about this section is how it sums up the passage of time. In the first part of the book, the passage of days was recounted in detail that seemed somewhat painstaking, appropriately enough for someone with as detail-oriented a scientific background as Perina. From this point on, however, narrative time passes very quickly: here, two years pass in a couple of sentences.

A second point to note is how once again, the narrative intertwines its thematic explorations of the morality of science and the treatment of animals. Here the point is made even more vividly, with the clear implication that the human subjects of Perina's experiments are treated in almost exactly the same way as the animal subjects. In many ways, the dreamers are in the same sort of barely welcoming cages as the animals in the lab: some effort has been made to warm the environment's coldness and soften its edges, but a cage is a cage no matter what size. It is deeply ironic that Tallent and the reader can both see this, but Perina clearly can't: this, his attitude towards Owen, and his attitudes about the reactions to his writing, continue to clearly portray him as arrogant, self-centered, and insensitive. Here it is interesting to note that the narrative does not paint all scientists with this same brush: Tallent, at least, has a degree of

compassion, an aspect of his character and identity that might, on some level, explain his eventual disappearance (as referred to in the prologue, and in the narrative since).

Tallent's compassion here can be seen as being something of a trigger, or catalyst, for stirrings of a similar feeling in Perina – specifically, in relation to his feelings about children, which can be seen as an ironic counterpoint to his feelings about the dreamers. What is interesting to note is how the references to Perina's attractions to children seem entirely devoid of the irony that exists on another level – specifically, the irony of that attraction being highlighted when, as the reader will undoubtedly remember, Perina's story includes incidents of child sexual abuse. The ground is being laid here not only for events that unfold in subsequent sections of the narrative, but also the climactic revelation, at the end of the book, of just what exactly is at the core of Perina's attraction to young men. One last irony – the fact that he so explicitly and so distastefully refers to Owen's sexual orientation. A psychiatrist might call such a reaction projection – that is, projecting one's own feelings about oneself onto another.

One key piece of foreshadowing in this section is the reference to Perina's keeping his knowledge of the dreamers' deterioration a secret. This foreshadows events later in the narrative in which the consequences of keeping that secret contribute to what becomes the downfall for Perina referred to throughout the book to this point.

Discussion Question 1

How do the events of this first section of Part 5 evoke the book's thematic exploration of the search for love and connection?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the reason for Perina changing the way he, in his narration, views the passage of time? What aspects of his personality, identity and / or story do you think the author is evoking, or suggesting?

Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about the fact that the boy from the encounter in the forest, remembered so fondly by Perina, does not remember him at all?

Vocabulary

numerous, embryonic, sartorial, denuded, superfluous, ensconce, procurement, albinism, metronome, osteoporosis, superannuate, copious, tenuous, non sequitur, cursive, vindication, regimen, granular, circumspection, superlative, meticulous, ostracize, voluminous, slaver, accolade, penance, tenacious, veracity, benediction, postulate, sonorous, liturgical, anticipatory, legitimacy, ersatz, ziggurat

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 5, The First Child, Section 2

Summary

3. Back at the lab, Perina writes, he realized that little had changed: the mice were still on the course of deterioration, and more and more people were searching for a way to get onto Ivu'ivu. Eventually, Perina then writes, he was forced to admit to Sereny, and in a published paper, that the anti-aging effects of the opa'ivu'eke had a significant failing – the deterioration of those who consumed it. He describes, in narration, how he had found it difficult to decide when to reveal that information – too late, and Sereny would figure the situation out and publish the information himself; too soon, and those trying to exploit the island would be alerted, and therefore risk the island even more.

On his next trip to Ivu'ivu (eight months later), Perina was able to capture two more opa'ivu'eke, reconnect with the friendly child in the village (which was still relatively as it was) and "somewhat smugly" (272) assure himself that Tallent had been wrong, and there had been no invasion of the island by those who would exploit it. This, he comments in narration, was before Tallent's prediction actually did come true: he adds that if he had the choice, even knowing what happened to the village, he would not hesitate to do again exactly what he did.

The narrative then jumps ahead two years to Perina's next visit to the island, during which he discovered how much western life had infiltrated the village (but had not extended as far as the interior of the ninth hut); how easily the pharmaceutical companies and others had found the lake, and virtually emptied it of the once-trusting, now terrified opa'ivu'eke; and, most significantly, how Tallent had disappeared without a trace. Perina describes his days and nights of desperate searching for him with no results; how there had been, in the time since, any number of rumors about where he had gone, including that he had eaten a piece of opa'ivu'eke; and how, with Tallent's disappearance, he came to feel as though something worthwhile had disappeared inside him as well.

4. Perina begins this section of his story with an implication that the reader will know the stories of what happened to Ivu'ivu (its being overrun and virtually destroyed), and of his research. In a sequence of sentences and paragraphs that each begins "Shall I tell you about …", Perina describes how that research was done by other scientists and by pharmaceutical companies on a range of animals (including mice, dogs, and monkeys), and that that research proved the link between physical immortality and the opa'ivu'eke, but was unable to prove what, exactly about the opa'ivu'eke caused the immortality or the deterioration – and therefore, unable to provide an antidote (a lengthy footnote by Kubodera discusses how contemporary science was able to identify the enzyme that caused the problem). In the same sorts of sentences, he describes what happened to the inhabitants of Ivu'ivu (taken from the island by missionaries, and absorbed into the

U'ivu culture) and to the dreamers (long-lived but constantly deteriorating, eventually taken from Perina – much to Kubodera's chagrin, as he indicates in a lengthy footnote). Again in the same sorts of sentences, he describes how, as a result of repeatedly returning to the island in search of the two young men he found and the feelings they awakened in him, he repeatedly adopted children from the islands and found comfort in them, but never enough, and never the right kind.

Finally, Perina discusses a trip to Ivu'ivu "in 1980, the trip that, although I was not to know it, would eventually destroy [his] life" (291), a point at which he had more than two dozen children in his care, much to the chagrin of many (particularly, he makes a point of saying, several women). He describes how he had gone back to the island several times; realized that doing so was a form of self-punishment; and how the people and life he found there seemed deeply sad and entirely focused on waiting for the past to return: the men, he adds, had entirely given up carrying their spears. He describes how, as he left, a man forced his young son on him to take home; how he refused, but eventually realized that the man was, in fact, the boy from the jungle (Part 4, Section 1); and how he got the boy onto the plane that was to take him back to America. He describes giving the boy the name of the plane's pilot – Victor – and comments in narration on how Victor's presence changed his life, and that of all the other children, beyond recognition.

Analysis

Much of this second section of Part 5 covers narrative ground that has been covered before in the story - the revelations of the island's destruction and of the disappearance of Paul Tallent had been extensively foreshadowed earlier, while there are reiterations of Perina's overwhelming arrogance and self-centeredness. Also, the revelation of the discoveries of modern science, relating to what caused the psychological deterioration of the dreamers, is actually an echo of material revealed all the way back in the prologue. There are, however, nevertheless new pieces of information here. These include the description of Perina's reaction to Tallent's disappearance (which suggest to the reader, if not to the self-deluded Perina, just how much of his feeling for Tallent had been sublimated for years), and the revelation of just how corrupt Perina was in not revealing all of what he knew about the circumstances of the dreamers. It could be argued that he simply made an error in judgment by waiting too long to reveal the truth: ultimately, though, the narrative of this section combines with Perina's unwittingly revelatory self-portrait to suggest that his arrogance was his downfall. This, in turn, relates to aspects of his more personal downfall (as opposed to the professional downfall outlined here) in the following parts.

Another important revelation here is how the dreamers were removed from Perina's care. Here again, the key point to note is how the scientist in Perina has overrun and overcome the human being, leading him to acts of deeply callous, almost horrific, insensitivity. One last, and perhaps most significant, revelation has to do with the story of Victor's identity and adoption. On the one level, there is clearly a tie-in between Perina's earlier actions (i.e. triggering the exploitation and destruction of the island) and these very human consequences: if he had behaved less selfishly, he would probably

not have ended up being pushed, or manipulated, into an act of self-lessness. In other words, while he tells himself (and the reader) that he is searching for love, affection, and connection (an evocation of one of the book's central themes), there is a clear sense, in the encounter he has with Victor's father, that Perina might have done what he did, in terms of the children, not out of compassion but out of guilt. This is a misfiring of intention that reveals its consequences in the following, and final, two parts of the book.

Discussion Question 1

How does the narrative entwine the central themes of the morality of science and the treatment of animals here?

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Perina's choice to not reveal the full truth about the consequences of consuming the opa'ivu'eke? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think are the true motivations for Perina's adopting the children?

Vocabulary

ersatz, antechamber, marmoset, exuberant, inquisitor, incredulity, penury, acuity, sentient, arduous, ignoramus, insensate, demarcation, trepidation, enormity, meander, rapacious, miscreant, sarong, epaulet, Dickensian, scullery, grotesque, foist, façade, squalor, phalanx

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 6, Victor

Summary

1. Perina describes the complicated circumstances within which Victor came to live in his home: the large, age-varied collection of children already in residence; and Victor's lasting, troubling difficulties with socialization. "Needless to say," Perina says, he (Perina) "spent as much time as possible abroad" (300). Eventually, he writes, Victor learned how to behave properly; several of the older children left; and he (Perina) began to travel for pleasure, including making a visit to Owen. After several years, however, he began to travel back to U'ivu, and once again started collecting children, wondering as he did whether there might be something wrong with him. "What was I hoping each new [child] might provide me that the previous thirty-odd had not? What was it that I wanted?" (310).

2. Perina then begins describing the rapid chain of circumstances that led to what he calls his destruction – his turning 60 years old, his seeing a photograph of his aging, fattened body, and his subsequent, deepening dislike of being a parent in general and of his children in particular. He writes of wanting to stop work and simply contemplate his remarkable achievements (of which, he adds, there were many), but could not – and that, even now, he cannot fully understand what happened to him. The central chain of events, he writes, had to do with an escalating conflict with Victor who announced that he was changing his name to Vi, and challenged Perina's authority in a number of ways. Perina writes that he believed, at the time, there was nothing different about Victor's rebellion, which resulted in Perina simply referring to him as "Boy": it was, Perina thought, the same sort of rebellion that all his children went through, and eventually recovered from, seeking more connection with him as they got older. He adds that "… you must admit that I have never demanded gratitude from my children, have never demanded that they thank me or behave well simply because I saved them" (320), but then writes that at times he began to wonder why he had brought this on himself.

3. Following a stretch of busy preparations for Christmas (at this point the narrative is taking place in the mid-late 1980's), Perina writes that on Christmas Eve, he had an argument with Owen, challenging him over his (Perina's) behavior towards one of his older children, with the result that Owen refused to come for Christmas. That evening (Christmas Eve), Perina took a break from his Christmas preparations and went outside, contemplating running away to Europe that very night. He tried to go back into the house but found he had been locked out by Victor who taunted him and then went to bed. The next morning, Perina was found and brought inside, and in the middle of the family's Christmas celebrations, confronted Victor, slapping him, calling him an animal, and banishing him to the basement. He then slept the rest of the day as the family carried on with Christmas without him Later, he writes that he left Victor food that remained uneaten, and later went to work, wondering what he would find when he got

home. When he did finally return, he found the dishes he had left for Victor cleaned and stacked.

At that point, Kubodera injects a footnote: “there is a section following this that I have, as an editor, elected to excise” (339)

Perina then describes how quiet and unengaged Victor’s life became for the next several months, and how, over the next few years, Victor became an acceptable student in both high school and college. He then describes how, on a relatively calm day, he was visited by a pair of policemen who told him to come to the station for questioning. Perina describes going to the bathroom to collect his pills, and looking at himself in the mirror, wondering what was going to happen. He then writes that if he had known what was going to happen to him, he would have stayed in the bathroom much longer.

Analysis

Finally, in Part 6, some 250 (or so) since it was first referenced in the prologue, the narrative starts to get to the reason why the narrative exists in the first place – the explanation of the charges of child sexual abuse against Perina. Here more than ever, everything else in the novel feels more like set-up than story: there is, for example, virtually no reference to the situation of Ivu’ivu, of the dreamers, or of the opa’ivu’eke in this section. Overall, the sense here and in Part 7 that the story of everything that happened on Ivu’ivu, with Paul Tallent, and of Perina’s research ultimately as the meticulously developed but over-emphasized sub-surface of a narrative iceberg, the tip of which (the Victor story) is the real heart of the book.

The reader must keep in mind, however, that the narrative has been ostensibly written by Perina and edited by Perina for the express purpose of preserving Perina’s scientific reputation. In that sense, it becomes possible to see that what at first seems like extended exposition is, in fact, extended deflection, the author allowing Perina to implicate himself by over-emphasizing, at distracting length, virtually everything about his life other than the circumstances of the charges. The question might then be asked why include this section, and the following one, at all. The answer - Perina’s self-justification.

At this point, it is essential to note that Kubodera’s footnote, referring to an excised section of memoir, is the only point in the book at which Kubodera clearly states that he has edited out some material. The point is not made to suggest that this is the only point at which Kubodera has done so, but rather the only point at which he admits to doing so. All that said, it must also be noted that all this is deliberately shaped by the author: Kubodera inserts this note, at this point in the narrative, for HER reasons, not his. It is worth the reader keeping this in mind when reading the following section.

In any case, there are a couple of specific points to note here: the reference to Victor’s choice to change his name (which plays an important role in defining the meaning of the book’s climax) and the reference to Perina’s Christmas Eve conflict with Owen, which

foreshadows profoundly significant revelations about their relationship in the following, final part of the book.

Discussion Question 1

In what way does Perina's treatment of his children, and specifically of Victor, echo what the narrative has previously explored as the morality of science?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the answer to Perina's question at the end of the first part of Part 6? What is it that he wanted in adopting the children?

Discussion Question 3

Given that Victor essentially means "winner," what is ironic about this choice of name?

Vocabulary

ascertain, labyrinthine, beneficial, affirmative, sensory, lugubrious, sartorial, populous, hilarity, interloper, angular, cholera, dysentery, gangrene, conjunctivitis, depravity, orifice, imperturbable, facsimile, rictus, mien, golem, infinitesimal, regression, simian, timbre, chrysalis, multitudinous, complacent, quandary, gourmand, impromptu, simper, demotion, emasculate, imminent, repellant, velocity, ferocity, finite, imbue, obligate, reactionary, contrivance, preposterous, eugenics, truculent, evince, brevity, palpable, tenacity, cordial, solicitous, pugilist, moronic, beatific, atrocious, lachrymose, hysterectomy, cavernous, tactile, despot, admonish, provocation, approbation, gaudy, indolence, succumb, solicitous, bursar

The Memoirs of A. Norton Perina – Part 7, After / Epilogue / Postscript

Summary

In his narration, Perina touches briefly on the humiliations of being interrogated and tried (again assuming the reader has heard all the necessary details), and reveals that he was accused of abuse by Victor, with the angry, vindictive support of Owen and Owen's boyfriend. He then briefly discusses his imprisonment: how he no longer had dreams (where once his dreams had been very vivid), and how as a result he spent most of his time daydreaming about Ivu'ivu – his time with the boy in the jungle, but mostly of his time with Tallent, imagining even more journeys with him. "Somewhere on the island," he writes as this section concludes, "is a place where we belong, where we will lie down next to each other and know we will never have to look again. But until we find it we are searchers, two figures moving through a landscape while outside and around us the world is born and lives and dies and the stars burn themselves slowly into darkness." This last piece of writing is dated December of 1999.

Postscript – A newspaper article dated January 2000 describes the disappearance of the "recently paroled" Perina (349), and the simultaneous disappearance of his "longtime colleague and friend" Dr. Kubodera to whom, the newspaper reports, Perina had transferred all his assets.

Epilogue – In first person narration, Kubodera describes, in limited detail, how far he and Perina have traveled, physically and psychologically, from their previous lives. He describes lingering longings for home which he believes will eventually dissipate. He then says that his and Perina's story could end there, but there are a few more pieces of information that the reader might value. The first, he says, is the piece of writing omitted from Perina's initially included writings which, he adds, should not make a difference to the reader's perceptions of Perina and his actions: his accomplishments should be enough, but the addition, Kubodera says, speaks to Norton's "tenderness … openheartedness … expressions of love … admissions of fallibility" (353). The second piece of information has to do with their disappearance: how Kubodera did several errands Perina asked him to (including collect several papers from his lawyer); arrived at the penitentiary, only to be told that there had been a miscommunication and Perina was not there, but at his lawyers; and how he, Kubodera, berated the guard, but left after realizing "that the guard was of limited intellectual capabilities" (354). He then describes being excited and eager to start his new life with Perina. This entry is dated December, 2000.

Postscript – This is the piece of manuscript missing from the earlier narrative, and the piece referred to by Kubodera in his epilogue. It describes the relationship between Perina and Victor in the aftermath of their fight at Christmas – how Victor developed a pattern of becoming reserved and then abusive, a pattern of behavior that repeated

several times, leading Perina to wonder if he was mentally ill. One night, Perina writes, he came home to find a crystal bowl – a gift from Owen when Perina won his Nobel Prize – smashed on the floor with a note: “Oops” (359). He realized immediately that Victor had broken it deliberately, went upstairs to find him, and discovered him asleep. He watched him for a long time, but then picked up a pillow, covered his face to silence him, and sodomized him violently, feeling an intense release of both anger and love. Perina then describes having had sex with several “boys” (361), including some of his own children, describing how he loved them, how he felt like he was teaching them something, and how he felt differently – and more intensely – with Victor than with any of the others. He describes having sex with Victor several times, each time saying both that he would force Victor to behave and that he loved him. He describes feeling like he was giving Victor what Victor himself had been trying to provoke from him, adding that every time he left the bedroom, he said “Vi … I love you. I give you my heart” (362).

The novel concludes with a timeline of key events of Perina’s research, and a glossary of U’ivuian words.

Analysis

Before considering the various meanings and implications of what is arguably the book’s narrative and thematic climax (that is: the revelation of the true nature of the relationship between Perina and Victor), there are several other elements worth considering. The first is the information that the charges faced by Perina in fact came into being as a result of not just Victor’s actions, but of Owen’s support of those actions. This, then, can be seen as the betrayal by Owen referred to in Kubodera’s introduction. The second is Perina’s dream about Tallent which, on one level, can be seen as an implied, and long awaited, admission of the depth of Perina’s feelings but which, given the context of Perina’s narrative, can also be seen as an attempt at self-justification, as is so much else of the narrative.

Another key point is the revelation of Perina’s and Kubodera’s disappearance, which similarly functions on a number of levels. First, the revelation means that Perina has skipped out on his parole, and that Kubodera helped him: both are criminal acts, a circumstance that suggests their being together and free was of vital importance. This, in turn, relates to the second level of function of this aspect of the story. Throughout the narrative, but particularly at its beginning, there has been a sense that the Perina/Kubodera relationship has been more than that of colleagues, or friends. The story of their co-disappearance tends to lend credence, or support, to this idea, as does Kubodera’s comment about the guard, which suggests that he and Perina share a common sense of personal arrogance, as well as a shared high opinion of Perina’s work and reputation.

Then, within the detailing of what happened between Perina and Victor, there are a couple of key points. The first is the unmissable use, by Perina, of Victor’s chosen nickname, as part of his (Perina’s) expression of “love.” Then, and also within the revelation of what happened between Perina and his son, there is the reference to

Owen's bowl. In many ways, that bowl symbolizes not only the best of the Owen/Perina relationship, but at least in Perina's mind, it also represents the best of his life – an acknowledgement of his success and value as a scientist. For Victor to destroy it as he does is clearly an attack on both aspects of Perina's life and sense of self, hence the violent reaction that it triggers.

Which leads, in turn, to considerations of that action – specifically, Perina's sexual assault on his adopted son. There are several points to note here. The first is structural: how the book begins with the description of Perina being criminally charged, and how it ends with a description of what exactly happened to lead to those charges. The second relates to the clear, deliberate echo, in Perina's assault of Victor, of the coming-of-age ritual observed by Perina (and eventually the others) on Ivu'ivu. This echo suggests that on some level, Perina might think that in sodomizing his son, he is initiating him into manhood, or at least human-being-hood, in the same way that the boys on Ivu'ivu were initiated. If this is in fact the case, then it is once again an example of Perina's deluded, self-serving, attitude and actions.

A third point to note about this incident is that it develops a number of the book's key themes quite clearly – its exploration of different types of sexuality, and its exploration of the search for love and connection. The two are in fact intertwined here, as Perina clearly thinks that he is expressing affection for his son in a way that he thinks is more than all right: it is ritualistic, powerful, and as Kubodera says in his comments on the excerpt, a manifestation of his compassion and open-hearted ness. Meanwhile, there is perhaps development in two other major themes, the often intertwined themes of the morality of science and animals as the subject of experimentation. Given that Perina, in what is clearly a deliberate authorial choice, calls Victor an animal suggests that, in the same way as Perina's science-oriented attitude towards experimentation on animals carried into his experimentation on human subjects (i.e. the dreamers) and, arguably, his children (i.e. experiments in parenthood), his treatment of Victor is likewise a form of experimentation in intimacy, power, or sexual expression?

All of which leads to the next major point about this revelation, or rather a question: why does Kubodera include it? He says it is to demonstrate the power of Perina's compassion, but is he really that deluded as to think that the reader will think that? And is he also so deluded as to think that inclusion of Perina's narrative of the incident will do what both he and Perina have vigorously claimed is their intention with the writing and publishing of this memoir – that is, the rehabilitation of Perina's reputation? There is a very, very strong sense here of paradox, of authorial intention (to reveal the truth of her characters) at war with the characters, the story, the world, and the themes that have clearly been painstakingly developed.

All that said, the portrayal of the true nature of the Perina / Victor relationship draws a vivid contrast to the above-referenced, and more affirming, portrayals of connection throughout the narrative; the sort of connection that Perina says he so desperately wants; and the sort of connection that, earlier in Part 7, he dreams of having with Tallent. That contrast lies essentially in the fact that what he deludedly sees as connection is, in fact, perverse, pedophilic, and beyond ironic, given the way he seems

to tie his actions in with earlier moments of more positive, more affirming, more vulnerably intimate (or intimately vulnerable) encounters. An aspect to that irony has to be that in those earlier intimacies, he refuses to allow himself to be truly changed by. He believes he is changed, and he experiences new longings, but because his orientations towards professional arrogance and personal shame are ultimately in control, this belief proves to be delusional at best, destructive at worst. Reputation and success are more important: therefore, he has to suppress the inclinations that he found repugnant in his brother, a suppression that led to a deep and profound curdling of what might have originally been a longing to express his true self.

This, in turn, leads to consideration of the final pieces of writing in the book – what might be considered appendices, material that returns the reader's attention to Perina's history as a scientist. There is very much the sense here that it is too little too late: the reader's view of Perina, much like what he says is the public's view, has been entirely altered, and not in the way that Perina and Kubodera seem to have intended. In other words, the symbolic return to Perina's career and to Ivu'ivu seems to be an attempt to again reframe the narrative of Perina's life in the way he wants to be remembered, in a way that suggests his scientific work represents his true self. But what he has said about himself, and the way he has said it, in fact reveals the opposite: that all his work was, in fact, a mask for a deeply troubled, deludedly dangerous man, whose desperate loneliness and insecurity led him into violence and pedophilia. Does all that excuse what he did? No, and it barely explains it. What the novel does is reveal it, leaving the reader to decide, ultimately, where the true meaning and/or value of Perina's life actually lay.

Discussion Question 1

Why, do you think, Kubodera would choose to reveal what he does about Perina? Does it feel like an appropriate choice this character would make? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What are the metaphoric implications of Perina's dream about Tallent? What is he saying about himself?

Discussion Question 3

Given what is revealed about Perina at the book's conclusion, and indeed throughout the narrative, what do you think is his intention by revealing what he does about the Tallent dream? In short, is what he says true?

Vocabulary

delinquency, magnanimity, missive, gluttony, fallibility, velocity, taciturn, automaton, defiance, provocation

Characters

Dr. Perina

Dr. Norton Perina is the book's central character, its protagonist and, for much of its length, its narrator. The book is presented as a sort of autobiography, or memoir, in which Perina discusses his life in reference to its primary focus – scientific research, more specifically his investigations into the apparent physical immortality of a few members of an isolated island community. That frame of reference, in Perina's perspective, seems to apply to his entire life: he sees everything he has experienced in relationship to his orientation not only towards science, but also, and perhaps more importantly, towards his success as a scientist and researcher.

This last aspect of his identity and personality comes through quite clearly: his writing about himself and his life tends to be self-aggrandizing, arrogant, and at times even delusional. By the time the novel reaches its climax, the reader gains a clear sense that this latter element – Perina's tendency towards delusion – has become something of a necessity for him, and is perhaps the most significant aspect of his character and identity. If he was not deluding himself, he would have to face the fact that the virtual destruction of a community and its way of life, the destruction of an entire ecosystem, the extinction of an entire species of animals, and the deep damage to the literally dozens of children he adopted are all entirely his responsibility.

Other aspects of his personality and psyche that contribute to what seems to be his need for self-delusion include his experiences of same-sex attraction in an era (the mid-1950's) in which such attractions were still believed to be symptomatic of psychological disease; his experiences of sexual attraction to children, and his acting on those attractions; and his participation in the casual, scientifically rationalized deaths of thousands of laboratory animals. Perina justifies all these experiences, with validity or not, as facets of what he sees as his invaluable, inevitable, all-encompassing commitment to science, a commitment that, the book ultimately suggests, has destroyed his essential humanity.

All that said, his writing about himself does contain occasional glimpses of self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility. All told, though, Perina's self-righteous self-delusion proves both pervasive and persuasive, as he seems to have somehow convinced at least one person (his ersatz biographer, Dr. Ronald Kubodera – see below) that he, Perina, is as significant a human being as he, Perina, believes himself to be. By the end of the novel, however, the reader can see the destructive, selfish truth at the core of that delusion.

Dr. Kubodera

Dr. Kubodera is Perina's friend, colleague, and defender, but there are hints that their relationship might be something more. Kubodera's passionate, almost worshipful determination to ensure Perina's reputation remains intact combines with early-in-the-narrative references to Perina's capacity for same-sex attraction and late-in-the-narrative references to their eventual cohabitation to suggest that the relationship between the two men has at least some element of homosexual attraction or connection, whether acted upon, realized, or not.

There are few indications elsewhere in the book as to other aspects of Kubodera's identity. The reader is told that he is a scientist, but not in exactly what field; that he has had a significant relationship with Perina but not for how long or on what specific terms; and that he has a limited personal life. His primary characteristic, and narrative function, seems to be related solely to his alliance with Perina: they seem to share common perspectives on other characters, but that in turn seems to be only because Perina has told Kubodera to.

A key question about Kubodera arises in the narrative's final moments - specifically, as a result of his inclusion of inarguably damning evidence, written by Perina himself, that he is in fact guilty of the crime of which he has been convicted (sexual abuse of one of his children). If Kubodera is as devoted to preserving and presenting Perina's reputation, why does he not withhold this information? His explanation, in narration, is that he wants the reader to perceive Perina in the way that both Kubodera and Perina himself see him - as loving, compassionate, and generous. Ultimately, though, the inclusion of what amounts to Perina's confession has almost the opposite effect - not only proving that Perina is guilty, but proving that both he and Kubodera are equally delusional about what it was that Perina did, and why. This, in turn, is yet another way in which both Kubodera and Perina become unreliable narrators, another way in which their narrations and inclusions are revealed to be almost entirely self serving.

Owen

Owen is Perina's brother, and is in many ways an important and very telling contrast. He is a poet and creative, where Perina is a scientist and puller-apart, analytical where Owen is interpretive. Owen is also an out-of-the-closet homosexual, an aspect of his personality and identity that Perina disparages, in part because he keeps his own same-sex attractions repressed.

There is, however, an intriguing point of intersection when it comes to the characteristics of the two brothers. Both have clear tendencies towards self-righteousness: Perina when it comes to his views of himself, his research, and his parenting history; and Owen when it comes to his attitudes about all those aspects of his brother's life. The important point to note here is that Owen's self-righteousness is arguably more justified than that of his brother: Owen sees Perina's abusive behavior towards his children for what it is, and takes morally righteous action to address the injustice of that abuse. Perina, by

contrast, takes the moral position that all his actions, towards the subjects of all his experiments (animals, dreamers, and children) are justified because they are grounded in scientific curiosity.

Ultimately, both the similarities and differences between the brothers drive wedges between them, in spite of Perina's early-in-the-narrative revelation that, at one point, he actually felt love and connection with Owen.

Perina's Parents

Perina's parents play indirect roles in the development of his career, his self-regard, and his arrogance. His mother was dreamy and ineffectual, both her life and early death inspiring him to be more determined to do something with his life. His father was successful, but in a non-ambitious way that pushed Perina further in the direction of influence, status, and reputation - in the direction, as he calls it, of greatness.

Aunt Sybil

Perina's Aunt Sybil played a more direct role in his development, inspiring him with her own love of science and commitment to the medical profession. It is important to note that Sybil became a physician at a time when being a doctor was, for the most part, a men-only profession. It was also, therefore, her determination, her commitment, her drive, and her tenacity that inspired Perina as much as her essential interests.

Gregory Smythe

The professionally famous but personally ineffectual Smythe is Perina's first mentor. A professor at the university where Perina ends up studying, he offers Perina a low-level research position that eventually leads to his joining Paul Tallent on the anthropological expedition that changes both their lives. Smythe is in many ways similar to Perina's father, in that both men provide examples of the kind of man Perina does not want to be.

Adolphus Sereny

Sereny is another of Perina's early mentors, but one who plays a less direct, less active role in his development. Sereny is the catalytic influence that contributes to Perina becoming affiliated with Paul Tallent: as such, he is, like Smythe (although somewhat less so) something of a mentor. Later in the narrative, his influence is more significant: his research into the relationship between consumption of the opa'ivu'eke and physical immortality supports and proves Perina's, thus defining and solidifying the latter's reputation. Sereny ends his connection with Perina when he learns that the latter withheld information about the inevitable psychological deterioration of those who

consumed the opa'ivu'eke: in other words, he suffers as a result of Perina's lack of scientific and personal integrity, and withdraws from their relationship.

Paul Tallent

Renowned anthropologist Paul Tallent is the leader of a scientific expedition that Perina is invited to join as an assistant. Physically attractive, intellectually dexterous, and emotionally somewhat remote, Tallent is, to both Perina and the reader, an enigmatic figure, somehow both peripheral and essential to Perina's story. He becomes the mysterious, unreachable subject of Perina's obsession, grounded in equal portions of suppressed sexual attraction, intellectual idolization, and professional envy (i.e. of Tallent's renown).

The few aspects of Tallent's moral and scientific identity that Perina's narration do inadvertently suggest that he has a significantly more developed conscience and sense of morality than his protege. He behaves with respect towards those he investigates; outrage when he discovers Perina's neglectful mistreatment of the dreamers; and grief when he comes to understand the extent of the destruction that his and Perina's research has brought to Ivu'ivu. His eventual disappearance, while never entirely explained, nevertheless seems clearly connected to these implied aspects of his identity.

Esme Duff

The gruff, outspoken, opinionated Esme is Tallent's research collaborator. Her closeness to Tallent, professionally and personally, is a powerful trigger for Perina's resentment, which continues throughout their time working together and beyond into his later life. Esme has a fairly rigid sense of morality that, at times, blinds her to the anthropological realities that she is faced with. Specifically, her moral judgment of the sexually-charged rite of passage that she witnesses in the Ivu'ivu village blinds her to the prospect of even considering its socio-cultural value and meaning.

Fa'a

Fa'a is an inhabitant of U'ivu, the more settled island that neighbors Ivu'ivu. He acts as a guide to Tallent, Esme, and Perina on their excursion into Ivu'ivu as part of their investigation of mythic reports of immortality in that community. He is knowledgeable of the physical environment, but superstitious when it comes to the spiritual and cultural environment, believing that the seemingly mythic aspects of the stories associated with the opa'ivu'eke are absolutely true. The intensity of his beliefs leads him to deep, self-torturing pain when he accidentally breaks one of the rules associated with interacting with the opa'ivu'eke, pain that becomes a key factor in his eventual suicide.

The Dreamers

"Dreamers" is the nickname given by Perina and the other scientists to the small group of "immortals" that they encounter in the jungles of Ivu'ivu. The term "dreamers" originates in the fact that the members of the group have lost the ability to function intellectually and psychologically, appearing "dreamy" when it comes to their interactions with the world, with each other, and with other people. Some of the dreamers are eventually taken, by Tallent and Perina, to America to serve as subjects in further scientific experimentation, where their deterioration into psychological absence from the world, even while remaining physically vital, intensifies.

Eve

Eve is the eldest of the dreamers, and the first one encountered by Perina and his team of scientists. Scientific testing and logical deduction eventually combine to suggest that Eve is close to 200 years old, her psychological state deteriorating as steadily as her chronological age increases. Her reversion to fundamental, basic functioning (basically eating, sleeping, and eliminating) is perhaps a key trigger for Perina and the other scientists to revert to treating her and the other dreamers as little more than animals.

Mu'a

Mu'a is among the youngest of the dreamers, and as such, has retained a degree of ability to communicate verbally. As his words and stories are interpreted first by Fa'a and eventually by Tallent, he provides several key points of understanding for Perina and the other scientists.

The Initiated Boy

As part of his study of the Ivu'ivu village, Perina observes what appears to be a coming of age ritual: a male youth is repeatedly sodomized by the mature males of the village, eventually emerging from the hut in which the ritual takes place and having a wreath placed on his head to symbolize having become an adult. A short time later, Perina (on a desperate search for the briefly missing Tallent) encounters the youth / man in the forest where he (Perina) is offered physical comfort, intimacy, and perhaps sexual release (the narrative never makes this point explicitly). Perina's memories of this encounter are, as he himself reveals, profoundly influential: he finds himself continually looking for opportunities to experience the same sort of intimacy, eventually deluding himself into believing that his sexual encounters with some of his adopted male children are successful recreations of that experience.

Perina's Children

Partly as penance for his part in the exploitation and destruction of Ivu'ivu, and partly as a result of his search to re-experience the intimacy he found with the young man in the forest, Perina adopts a series of children, removing them from both U'ivu and Ivu'ivu, taking them with him to America, and giving them a home, an education, and a new life. He describes these children as generally going through a predictable sequence of behavior and reaction to what he has done - gratitude, rebellion, deeper gratitude, and eventual moving away. As such, they eventually (and almost universally) prove to be dissatisfying, when it comes to meeting Perina's needs for comfort, intimacy, and redemption.

Victor

Victor is the last of Perina's adopted children, and arguably the most challenging. Portraying Victor as wracked with physical illness and seemingly psychologically delayed, Perina portrays himself as investing more emotionally in him than in any of the other children. Victor's eventual rebellion is more severe than those of Perina's other children, which leads to Perina responding in a much more severe way, becoming emotionally, physically, and sexually violent. With the help and support of Perina's brother Owen, Victor brings criminal charges against his father, and thereby ruins Perina's career and reputation. Perina, however, sees his actions towards Victor as the ultimate expression of his capacity for love and compassion.

Symbols and Symbolism

Science and Research

On one level, science and research represent, throughout the narrative, both opportunities for knowledge and, when those opportunities are selfishly exploited, opportunities for destruction. On another, and more personal level, science and research represent, primarily for Perina and Kubodera, opportunities for self-denial and self-delusion - specifically, of the fact that they are both essentially self-serving and, frankly, somewhat monstrous.

Water

Throughout the narrative, and in various forms, water represents possibility and opportunity. In the book's prologue, a reference to "sea time" refers quite directly to the openness of the sea as a metaphor for freely experiencing life as it comes. Early in the narrative, a slow-moving creek that occasionally erupts into stormy overflowing represents and foreshadows Perina's movement from a slow-moving rural life into the stormy life of a successful research scientist. Also early in the narrative, a moment on the open ocean provides a metaphoric echo, or context, for Perina's realization that he can openly care for his brother. Interestingly, as Perina's memoir progresses, inclusions of the water image become less frequent, eventually manifesting only in glimpses, and as representing something Perina must cross, or endure, in order to reach the places his ambition is taking him.

Animals

From the story's earliest phases to its ending, animals - and human beings that are treated like animals - represent the helplessness and vulnerability of those who fall prey to scientific ambition. Even in cases where their disposability is less a result of scientific ambition than of simple human need (i.e. hunger), animals - and more specifically their deaths (physical in the case of actual animals, spiritual and psychological in the case of humans treated like animals) - are powerfully evocative of sacrifice, to what those who consume them (literally or metaphorically) believe to be the greater good.

The Staircase in Lindon

The ornate staircase in Perina's childhood home, which he claims as his own but which eventually falls apart, represents and foreshadows Perina's reputation. In the same way as he paints the staircase with names of renowned scientists in recognition of the kind of success he wants to be, he works to ensure the growth of his own reputation. But then, in the same way as the staircase eventually falls apart, that reputation also falls apart.

Paul Tallent's Beauty

The physical attractiveness of the man who becomes Perina's mentor and friend, but eventually becomes estranged, represents an aspect of Perina's life that he cannot have. Beauty like Tallent's is for Perina personally unobtainable and something of a trigger for his inferiority complex, even as he longs to be more intimately connected to it. It is a trigger for simultaneous envy and joy, suffering and celebration that eventually results in a desperate desire for approval, which ultimately never comes ... just like physical beauty.

The Jungle

The jungle on the island of Ivu'ivu can be seen as metaphorically representing morality, compassion, and sensitivity, as it. is something be penetrated, an obstacle to be overcome. With this in mind, it becomes particularly powerful and particularly poignant when the narrative reveals that the jungle on Ivu'ivu has been destroyed as a direct result of events and circumstances triggered by Perina's ambition.

Spears

For the male villagers of Ivu' ivu, spears represent maturity, power, and status within their community. The narrative is clear that adult men of the tribe are never actually without their spears: the discovery of a spear with no male nearby to claim ownership is seen by Tallent, Fa'a, and the other more culturally aware members of their scientific expedition as a bad men.

Rituals

Rituals, here as in the non-fictionalized "real" world, represent transitions, formalized transformations that have both personal and cultural significance. In general and here, rituals are designed to represent ways in which people become "more" - more human, more adult, more mature. What is interesting here is that Perina tries, in a couple of circumstances, to obtain the result of the ritual without the meaning. The most vivid example of this is his echoing of the coming-of-age ritual of the male Ivu'ivuans in his treatment of his recalcitrant male children. But while the value and meaning of the ritual on the island is inbred into the members of the community who participate in it, Perina and those whom he "initiates" are separate from that inbred meaning, and as a result, the "ritual" ends up being more destructive than affirming.

The Opa'ivu'eke

The sacred turtle of the Ivu'ivuans represents, for them, the power and presence of the god in their lives. Their ritualized consumption of an opa'ivu'eke can therefore be seen

as representing a desire to get even closer to god (the echoes of the Christian ritual of holy communion are unmistakable). For Perina and the other scientists, however, the opa'ivu'eke represents knowledge and opportunity, with the fact that the opa'ivu'eke eventually becoming extinct representing the destructive force associated with seeking such knowledge and such opportunity.

Owen's Bowl

Late in the narrative, when Perina's troubled adopted son Victor destroys a bowl that had been given to Perina by Owen (his brother), it can be seen as representing the destruction of genuine connection between father and adopted son. This is because earlier in the narrative, Perina had described a moment relatively early in his relationship with his brother in which he (Perina) felt as though he actually, genuinely loved his brother. The destruction of what can be seen as a remnant, or reminder, of that love can therefore be seen as representing the destruction of the similar connection between Victor and Perina, as tenuous and fragile as that connection had been.

Settings

The United States

The United States of America, with its so called "American Dream" (of the individual's right to success) is the broad-strokes, overall setting for the story. There are references early on to that American Dream, with both it and the associated belief of American superiority (that is: the right to exploit and control) playing key roles in the development of Perina's character and perspectives.

The Mid-twnentieth Century

The novel is set in the mid-twentieth century - specifically, the nearly three decades spanning the early 1950's through the early 1980's. It was a period in which scientific experimentation in some ways flourished (i.e. in the aftermath of the role science played in the end of World War II) and in some ways stagnated. As Perina himself writes, research was generally conducted to prove, and reinforce, current discoveries, rather than make new ones. It was also a period of limited scientific and technological knowledge. It is also important to note that America in this time was, in many ways, particularly oriented towards ambition, success, and prosperity at virtually any cost.

California

This state on the west coast of the United States is what might be described as the more regional setting for the narrative. For decades, California has had both the reputation and the experience of being more experimental (when it comes to experiences of human interaction and exploration) than much of the rest of the country. That implied atmosphere and environment is an important background element to the narrative.

The Island of Ivu'ivu

Much of the action in the narrative's second quarter takes place on this extremely remote island, the home of a small but thriving community of indigenous citizens. Both the island and the community are the subjects of significant exploration and contemplation by Perina and his fellow scientists, the beauty of both generally disregarded, and ultimately destroyed, in the name of scientific research.

Perina's Labs

The laboratories where Perina does his research, both as a student and a successful career scientist, provide important contexts for explorations of his character and,

therefore, for the story. His lab when he is a student (or more specifically, Gregory Smythe's lab: Perina is a student assistant) is the place where he learns to justify his views and treatment of the animal subjects of his experiments, views that carry on into the treatment of his human subjects in his second lab. Meanwhile, both labs become places in which he seeks to define his personal exceptionalism as a scientist, and where, one way or another, he eventually succeeds at doing so.

Themes and Motifs

The Morality of Science

Virtually from its opening words, the narrative argues that the positive values and consequences of scientific research are of such relative value that any costs that result are ultimately insignificant. Human costs, socio-cultural costs, environmental costs – all, in the narrative's perspective, are less significant than the gaining of knowledge, whether that knowledge actually improves the human condition or not.

This argument is made initially in the comments of the first of the book's narrators, Dr. Ronald Kubodera, who maintains that the professional and scientific accomplishments his colleague and friend, Dr. Norton Perina, are more important than the criminal and personal damage he has done to, among others, the children in his care. This claim is echoed by Perina himself in the autobiographical narration that makes up most of the narrative: no matter what Perina the person has done, both men argue, the accomplishments of Perina the scientist are of unarguably more significance.

Here it is essential to note that while the tellers of the story hold this position, the authorial perspective – that is, the story itself – develops the opposite argument. In portraying two characters with such a strongly held perspective while, at the same time, vividly portraying the un-considered and undervalued consequences of their attitudes and actions, the author seems to be making a thematic point about the dangers of scientific exploration that veers into exploitation. The book's actual argument, in fact, is presented ironically. This is the suggestion that in fact science – even that which professes to be committed to the advancement of humanity – has the potential to actually undermine, devalue, and even destroy individual human beings, cultures, and the physical environments in which they come into being and in which they function.

In this context, "physical environment" has two key aspects, which might be summed up in the commonly / traditionally used terms flora and fauna – flora referring to nature-occurring plant life, fauna referring to nature-occurring animal life. While there are vivid descriptions, in the novel, of the destruction perpetrated on the jungle environment in which Perina and others undertake their experiments, the more significant acts of destruction are perpetrated, by scientists, on the animal life they encounter. This, in turn, leads to consideration of one of the book's key motifs – the treatment of animals within the context of scientific experimentation.

Animals as Subjects of Experimentation

On the majority of occasions, the motif of animals being treated as though they are easily disposable appears within the context of commentary on scientific procedure, from the descriptions of how animals were treated in the laboratory where protagonist Norton Perina first worked to the descriptions of how the sacred, powerful turtles on

Ivu'ivu were similarly treated. In both these contexts, animals are both viewed and treated as vehicles through which scientific ideas can be explored and tested, vehicles that are casually destroyed to either maximize their usefulness or dispose of them once that usefulness has come to an end. Here it is important to note that this attitude is clearly foreshadowed, in Perina's narrative of his childhood, by references to his tendencies to destroy ants and torture other wild animals.

Meanwhile, one of the more disturbing aspects of the novel, and therefore one of the most thematically telling, is the fact that some of the human subjects of scientific experimentation are treated by the scientists in a similarly exploitive way. This happens in two circumstances. The most apparent is how Perina, Tallent, and the other scientists (as well as entities such as pharmaceutical companies) treat the dreamers, those whose physical longevity (i.e. virtual immortality) is ironically, and pathetically, paralleled with complete psychological deterioration. They are studied for their behavior and physiological circumstances with little or no regard for their emotional and mental states – that is, beyond that which needs to be examined from a clinical perspective. They are not viewed as intelligent, autonomous human beings, a point that could very easily be made about the primitive villagers who do not become dreamers but who are regarded as objects of study rather than people.

The second way that the narrative develops the motif of human beings as experimental subjects is in the portrayal of Perina's relationships with his adopted children. Yes, he adopts them out of a sense of guilty compassion, or compassionate guilt: but the way he discusses them in the latter part of the novel suggests that his relationships with them, while tinted with fondness, are ultimately defined by a clinical, analytical perspective that, again, regards them (for the most part) as animal-like objects of study.

Expressions of Sexuality

On several occasions in Dr. Perina's first person narration, the motif of humans being seen as animal-like appears within the context of expressions of sexuality – specifically, within his observations of, and commentary on, the sexual behavior of the inhabitants of Ivu'ivu. Perina describes their sexual freedom, lack of boundaries, and promiscuity in terms that suggests he views their values and practices no differently than he views those of the mice, dogs, and monkeys in his lab. There is, in fact, a faint and lingering sense of disapproval in his writing about the villagers that suggests a personal perspective as well as a scientific one: a feeling that sexual expression is ultimately an activity that makes a person less human. This sense of disapproval is perhaps most apparent in his perspectives on a coming-of-age ritual that he and the other scientists observe: the repeated sodomizing of two mid-teen males by the adult men of the village, an incident that seems designed to shock the reader in the same way as it shocks the scientists and, at the same time, prepare the way for the narrative's climactic revelation of a truth hinted at in the novel's beginning.

An important to note about this aspect of the novel in general, and about Perina's perspectives on sexuality in particular, has to do with the very first words of the book:

their reference to Perina being convicted of sexually abusing one of his children. This reference establishes a sexual undercurrent to the story that alternately intensifies and withdraws as incidents of sexuality appear. These undercurrents appear, for example, in Perina's reactions to Tallent's physical attractiveness, to the possibility that Tallent and Esme are missing and having sex, and to the implied sexuality of the relationships between his brother Owen and Owen's increasingly younger boyfriends. Most significantly, the above-referenced ritual awakens powerful echoes of those first lines that, in turn, foreshadow the revelation appearing in the book's final moments: that Perina did, in fact, abuse one of his sons. While Perina's first-person narration of the incident in question is infused with what he calls love, the reader can clearly see, as a result of every reference to sexuality that has occurred earlier in the narrative, that the event is, in fact, infused with shame. More specifically, this is the shame of a man who regards himself as such an advanced, intelligent human being giving in to an instinct that he and those like him perceive as being merely animalistic. It could be argued that Perina's shame and distaste for sexuality is defined more by reactions to same-sex encounters, given that his reactions are strongest to those sorts of encounters. On the other hand, there are also significant reactions to heterosexual promiscuity which, when considered in conjunction with Perina's attitudes towards animalistic behavior in general, ultimately suggest that it is sexuality in general that is his issue.

Encounters with Love and Connection

A vivid, humanist counterpoint to both the pervasive attitudes and treatment towards animals and the generally negative experiences of sexuality in the novel is its occasional portrayal of moments of affection, connection, and love; these glimpses of a more human, vulnerable side to Perina seem to exist, in both his identity and his story, as telling contrasts to his generally more closed, reserved, and clinical scientific perspectives.

There are three encounters with more human connection in the narrative. The first occurs early on, in Perina's narration of a trip he took with his brother: at one point, he says, he realized that he loved his brother, a realization that led him, in turn and over time, to search for similar connections in other relationships. That search generally led to unsatisfactory results: for example, his long-frustrated (and frustrating) attraction to mentor Paul Tallent. That does not mean his quest was without successes: Perina's second encounter with intimacy and vulnerability, further into the narrative, took place in a situation in which he was not searching for connection, but found it anyway. This was the experience with the young man from the village, recently initiated into adulthood and unexpectedly encountered in the jungle in an exchange of touch that shocked and moved Perina with its generosity, its simplicity, and its sense of compassion.

Similar emotions infuse Perina's third encounter with affection and connection: his experience with an unconditionally open and affectionate Ivu'ivu child, an encounter that led him to search for such connections in adoptive relationships with other children, a

search that became increasingly and repeatedly both futile and frustrating. Those two reactions to his lack of success in establishing and maintaining such connections are, arguably, factors in his ultimately abusive relationship with his son Victor, an expression of desire for connection and love curdled by shame, anger, emotional limitation, and personal ego.

The Human Relationship with Death

The novel's thematic contemplations of humanity's relationship with death, like its contemplations of sexuality, lie just beneath the surface of most, if not all, the action. In the newspaper articles that form part of the prologue, for example, the concept of death is never explicitly mentioned: its presence, however, is implied by the reference to its opposite, the concept of immortality. This practice, of obliquely referencing death through directly referencing its opposite, continues throughout the narrative. Every reference to the search for insight into the apparent immortality of the dreamers implies that those undertaking that research are in fact looking for ways to eliminate death, with the same being true of every reference to the search for the reasons why that physical immortality involves psychological deterioration. Throughout all these references, the life of the body is juxtaposed with the death of the mind, a set of circumstances within which, the narration suggests, the concept of longer life is secondary in importance to that of psychological wellness.

Interestingly, there are few – if any – references to actual, bodily death in the narrative. There are the deaths of various animals as a result of scientific experiments, generally regarded as a necessary part, or result, of scientific experimentation which, as has been discussed, seems (in the minds of those participating in such experimentation) to justify just about anything. There are also the early-in-the-narrative deaths of Perina's parents, generally described with a clinical dispassion and lack of grief that speaks not only of Perina's overall coldness as a person but also his overall scientific, dispassionate sensibility: in his narration, the most significant result of his mother's death is its triggering of his interest in virology.

Perhaps the most notable actual death in the narrative is that, by suicide, of Fa'a, the islander who guides Perina, Tallent, and the other scientists while on Ivu'ivu. His death tends to be viewed (somewhat patronizingly) by Perina as the result of superstition and ignorance, a view that reveals a great deal of Perina's general lack of compassion for his fellow human beings. Fa'a's death does cause Perina to experience twinges of remorse, but ultimately, his scientific self-justifications take over once again, and Fa'a's death is ultimately perceived as a regrettable, but inevitable, consequence of scientific investigation. Thus consideration of the novel's themes takes the reader back to the beginning of the circle – into the place of how virtually everything the novel says, both narratively and thematically, exposes the relative shallowness, and lack of humanity, in primarily scientific perspectives.

Styles

Point of View

Throughout most of the novel, the point of view is that of its central character and protagonist, Dr. Norton Perina, who tells his story, in first person narration, through letters ostensibly written while he was in prison. Those letters were, in the novel, sent to Dr. Ronald Kubodera, a friend and colleague of Dr. Perina who, the narrative quietly implies, might be something more. The narrative also suggests, quite specifically and overtly (i.e. through Dr. Kubodera's own first person narration that bookends the main body of the novel), that the content of Dr. Perina's writing has been edited, and by Dr. Kubodera. In other words, Dr. Perina's point of view is that of a so-called unreliable narrator, one whose stories cannot be entirely trusted because they are presented as having been shaped and edited by another.

This, in turn, relates to the second important aspect of the novel's overall point of view – specifically, its thematic perspective and intention. There are two levels of consideration to this aspect of the book. The first is that of the book's two narrators. Both Perina and Kubodera write what they do (and in the latter case, omit what he possibly does) in order to preserve and in fact celebrate Perina's scientific accomplishments. Kubodera makes this point explicitly clear in his prologue: no matter what Perina may have done in his personal life, his scientific accomplishments are more important, and are what he should be remembered for. This, then, is the thematic intention of the narrating characters: it is arguable, however, that the thematic intention of the other is exactly the opposite – that is, to show that in holding that perspective, the characters are wrong, and so, by extension, is any member of the scientific community that reveres science above human dignity and integrity. By glimpsed extension, the novel suggests that this is also true of any individual or organization (i.e. pharmaceutical companies, the military) that profits from that work.

Language and Meaning

The first point to note about the use of language in the novel is related to the above referenced elements of point of view – specifically, the fact that the two first person narrators are both scientists. As such, the language they use to tell their stories is full of scientific terminologies, or jargon, which gives the novel a sense of correctness, and of accurate atmosphere. The narrators' language is also used to pursue the overall intentions of the narrating characters. That intention, common to both characters, is to simultaneously emphasize the scientific achievements of Dr. Norton Perina and downplay other, more unpleasant aspects of his personal life – specifically, his latent (and eventually quite overt) pedophilia.

A second point to note about the novel's use of language is the way in which the author engages in what is known as "world-building." The term is most commonly, or most

frequently, used in the genre of speculative fiction (i.e. science fiction and fantasy) to describe ways in which an author creates societies, histories, belief systems, and geographies that exist outside what might be called traditional, or earth-defined, systems. In this book, the author applies that technique to the building of the world of the Ivu-ivu – their means of communication, their rituals, and even the names of the flora and fauna on the island. There is a clear sense of place, of isolation of that place, and of socio-cultural autonomy resulting from that isolation that emerges quite clearly through the author's work in this area. The meticulous detailing of this world, and the sometimes over-exact use of terminologies, does come close to being somewhat self-conscious. This trap is mostly avoided by author placing the information about, and analysis of, this world in the words and understandings of scientists, whose work and very nature are arguably dependent upon complete accuracy.

In other words, language in this context is a function of character and situation, admittedly narrative elements that very thinly disguise what seems to be an authorial over-emphasis on research, preparation, and not entirely relevant detail, an aspect of the novel that extends into other areas as well – for example, the circumstances of Perina's laboratory situation while at university. In all these examples, detailed and specific language has the effect of slowing down development of story: again, while the character might feel that all this detail is appropriate, there is a sense that the author has let an interest in the truth of the characters get a bit out of hand.

Structure

The main body of the novel consists of the autobiographical first person narrative of Dr. Norton Perina, telling the story of one of the most significant elements of his life: his scientific career. The first part of that narrative is taken up with relatively short recounting of his childhood, discussed within the overall context of (and with references to) that career: the final part of that narrative is taken up with even shorter narrations of his life as his career wound down, and eventually came to an abrupt end.

On either structural side of those initial and concluding sections of Perina's narration are bookending comments by Perina's friend and colleague, Dr. Ronald Kubodera, establishing (at the book's beginning) the context within which Perina told his story, and explaining (at the book's closing) how the story of Perina's life seems to come to an end.

Here, however, it is important to note that the book's climax takes place outside the boundaries of both these narratives. After the bulk of Perina's writings are concluded, and after Kubodera's epilogue, there is a chapter (originally omitted from the main body of the story as a result of Kubodera's editing) that describes a sequence of events that ties together the narratives of Perina's scientific and private lives - Perina's repeated sodomizing of, and professions of love for, one of his adopted children. It is also important to note that the revelation of what happened between Perina and his son, revealed in the book's final moments, is referred to in the book's very first lines, which reference Perina's arrest on charges related to abuse of children. In other words, the

mystery of what happened is introduced at the very beginning, revealed at the very end, glimpsed in the epilogue, and almost entirely un-referenced in the main body of the book – or rather, not referenced directly. There are one or two moments in the main body of the book that hint at what has been suggested and what is to come: for the most part, though, the book's primary mystery becomes effectively and thickly overwhelmed by other elements.

Quotes

…science, specifically the science of disease, was all delicious secrets, dark oily pockets of mystery. Language could be misinterpreted, misconstrued, its rules imposed or ignored at whim. There was no discipline to it. It seemed sometimes a sort of game made up by man to amuse himself with, much as Owen did. But a disease, a virus, a wiggling string of bacteria, existed with or without man, and it was up to us to fathom its secrets."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 1)

Importance: This quote sketches in the beginnings of Perina's interest in science, which emerged as a result of the unexpected death of his mother.

…I can remember my sense, from my very early years, that life was not Indiana, and certainly not Lindon, and possibly not even America. Life was elsewhere, and it was frightening and vast and mountainous and uncomfortable."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 1)

Importance: This quote reveals another facet of Perina's driving ambition, and also a perspective, referred to throughout the novel, on the value and importance of adventure.

… this is really how they thought at the time, not just in medicine but in all the sciences: you make a bomb; you drop it on a troublesome people; the troublesome people are no more."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 2 paragraph 55)

Importance: This quote can be seen as evoking a couple of key elements associated with Perina's scientifically oriented views: a lacking of nuance or flexibility (which was appropriate to the approach to science at the time in which the novel is set - the mid-twentieth Century); and an overall disregard for the worthiness of the "other," or the non-understood.

Beautiful people make even those of us who proudly consider ourselves unmoved by another's appearance dumb with admiration and fear and delight, and struck by the profound, enervating awareness of how inadequate we are, how nothing, not intelligence or education or money, can usurp or overpower or deny beauty."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 3, Section 1)

Importance: This quote is offered in response to Perina's initial contact with the physically beautiful Paul Tallent. It is interesting to note that there are very few references to beauty in the narrative, which perhaps is reflective of Perina's perspective on himself: for the most part, and as he himself suggests in narration, he considers himself a superior human being. Contemplating beauty, it seems, contradicts that self image which is, perhaps, why he does not often refer to it in his writings.

… perhaps in compensation for the physical dimensions of the land, which became more pregnable the farther down its length we traveled, the plant life grew wilder and denser, so that the forest pushed all the way to the very edge of its earth … so think that you felt for a minute frightened of the jungle, its voracious appetite and ambition, its hunger to consume every surface it encountered.
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 3, Section 1)

Importance: This is one of several pieces of writing in the narrative in which Perina seems deeply unaware of the ironies of what he is saying. On several other occasions in the narrative, he refers to his own ambition: he does not seem aware, in this quote, that as he describes the jungle in this way, he is essentially describing himself.

All along I had prided myself on my curiosity, what I considered the unslakability of my intellectual thirst. And yet, once placed in a situation in which almost everything was foreign, I did nothing, saw nothing.
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 3, Section 1)

Importance: This quote reveals an essential paradox about Perina's character - for a scientist, he has a tendency to be unusually uncurious. It must be noted, however, that when it comes to researching something that Perina could conceivably benefit from, either financially or in terms of career, his curiosity knows no bounds.

Later, when I was older, I would remember with awe and envy another quality as well – [Eve's] apparent lack of loneliness, how she seemed to need no-one and nothing except food, how our company seemed not to disrupt the unchangeable patterns of her everyday existence.
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 3, Section 2)

Importance: This quote highlights the essential simplicity of Eve's life (and, by extension, that of the other dreamers as well). At the same time, it evokes a faint sense of longing, a sense of wishing for the same type of self-contained comfort with solitude that Perina, as hinted in narration, never develops.

One of the things that made our discovery so profound was that ours was a group of people who had not only never been seen by a white man, but rarely by a U'ivuan either. For hundreds of years they had lived and hunted and bred and died while remaining nothing more than a myth, a dark fable, half human and half monster, to the very people from whom they had originated.
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 4, Section 1)

Importance: This quote sums up a key element of the fascination that Tallent, Perina, and the other members of the research team find with the Ivu'ivuans.

…my time on Ivu'ivu taught me that all ethics or morals are culturally relative … while cultural relativism is an easy concept to process intellectually, it is not, for many, an easy one to remember."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 4, Section 1)

Importance: Keeping in mind that the purpose of Perina's autobiographical writings, and Kubodera's presentation of those writings, is to emphasize and preserve Perina's scientific reputation, this quote seems patronizing, self-serving, and self-aggrandizing. In other words, Perina is patting himself on the back here for being one of the few to recognize the value of cultural relativism.

Age, then, is not something that can be understood; it is a preoccupation of the old, and the old is anyone older than oneself. It is a subject that has no relevance, a subject that seems a bore, an indulgence and lament of the week-minded and feeble and querulous. As I have grown first older and now old, however, I have contemplated the dreamers' fate more and more, and today I see it very clearly for what it is – a curse."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 4, Section 2)

Importance: This quote, exploring as it does an aspect of the novel's thematic interest in human experiences of death (that is, the process of dying), reveals that as he ages, Perina sees his existence as paralleling, in some fairly fundamental ways, that of those whom he experiments on. It could be argued, in fact, that on some level Perina writes as he does about himself because he has, in some ways, been experimenting on himself, observing and tracking and recording his behaviors in the same sort of way as he does those of the dreamers. Is the narrative, in fact, Perina presenting scientific report on Perina?

… I reflected upon how fundamentally naïve [Owen] was, how small and plebeian his concerns were, and how he never could have endured what I had … I had no disdain for him, however, and indeed, it was soothing to be with someone for whom life was a series of the familiar, whose every problem was solvable, who could find such pleasure in the everyday. It was startling to remember that I had once been one of those people as well. Now, however, I no longer was."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 5, Section 1)

Importance: Perina's high level of self-regard, his arrogance, comes through loud and clear in this section. He is clearly deluding himself, in that the way he speaks about Owen, here and elsewhere, vividly reveals that he does in fact have a great deal of disdain for Owen. It is important to note, however, that everything Perina writes about Owen was written after what Perina experienced as Owen's profound, unforgivable betrayal: as such, everything about Owen can, as much of the narrative can, be viewed as somewhat suspect.

… I realize that twenty-four months is nothing: two million breaths, a slur of vision-blurred nights, a series of meals eaten and books read. Twenty-four months – exactly the time I will spend in [prison] – is brief, so brief that its days vanish before one can even record them."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 5, Section 1)

Importance: This quote adds an interesting, glimpsed facet into the book's overall

contemplation of human reactions to death which is, in fact, a state of forever-ness (as opposed to the relatively short twenty-four months referred to here).

That night in the forest, when I had crashed through the underbrush with my hands stretched out before more, running until I encountered him, had been one of the loneliest and most desperate moments I had had on Ivu'ivu. When I had found him, I had been so grateful … because it seemed as if he had been planted there to remind me of my own presence, my own realness… I could have been lost that night in the forest. But I hadn't been. He had found me.
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 5, Section 2)

Importance: In this quote, Perina reveals the depths to which he had been affected by his encounter with the newly initiated young man from the Ivu'ivu village. It is a clear and vivid evocation of the book's thematic interest in the power of connection, and on another, more implied level, of Perina's desperate need for such a connection, so long suppressed in the name of his ambitious pursuit of scientific glory.

It was clear that what had once been – from dress to food to even the children's play – was no longer valued, and the fact that no-one had thought to update the [ninth] hut with some recognition of the new world that had been visited upon them made me fear that it remained not as a symbol of something cherished but as a relic of something outgrown."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 5, Section 2)

Importance: This comment, offered by Perina in response to some of what he experiences during one of his last visits to the devastated, over-exploited Ivu'ivu, can also be seen as having echoes of his own experience of scientific success - again, it must be remembered that this was written, by Perina, while he was in prison and his reputation had been ruined.

…Norton did as much as he could for the dreamers for as long as he could. He did far more than he was ethically or legally required to do for them … they were never hurt under his supervision, or ill treated, or starved. He was, indeed, a pioneer in human experimentation, and under very difficult circumstances. For anyone to suggest anything else reveals not only a grave misunderstanding of his efforts but is scurrilous in the extreme."
-- Kubodera (footnote) (Part 5, Section 2)

Importance: This quote, taken from one of Kubodera's lengthy footnotes to Perina's memoir, is arguably one of the clearest examples of Kubodera's near-delusional determination to preserve the integrity and value of Perina's accomplishments and reputation. The way Perina describes how the dreamers were treated clearly reveals, in spite of the stated intentions of both Perina and Kubodera, that the dreamers were in fact profoundly mistreated: here, Kubodera virtually dares the reader, or anyone else, to see the situation differently.

This had never been a culture obsessed with the past, and why should it have been? Nothing ever changed. But now that everything had, all its inhabitants could think about was what they had lost. And so they remained frozen in their vigilance, toggling between hope and despair, waiting for their world to be restored."
-- Narration (Perina) (Part 5, Section 2)

Importance: As is frequently the case throughout the narrative, comments by Perina about the situation of others, primarily the Ivu'ivuans, can be seen as reflecting his own situation. In this quote, for example, the way he describes the Ivu'ivuans as "waiting for their world to be restored" can be seen as applying to Perina himself, waiting as he is for his own reputation (world) to be restored as a result of the publication of his self-justifying memoir.

I took you in because I pitied you. Because you were less than a human, less than a child. Your father would have sold you to me for a piece of rotting fruit … you are nothing. I gave you meaning. I gave you a life. And this is how you behave?'"
-- Perina (to Victor) (Part 6, Section 1)

Importance: While what Perina says here may be accurate, in terms of what happened between him and Victor's father, the quote is more significant for the viciousness, the self-righteousness, and the arrogance with which it is spoken to Victor. It is said to him to hurt, and as such it is perhaps one of the triggers for Victor's subsequent behavior.

I wondered if [Victor] felt as I did, as if my very insides were being scooped out and held aloft, the harsh, cold wind rushing through the cavity of my poor, filthy body, cleansing it and carrying away its impurities, scattering them to the night air."
-- Narration (Perina) (Postscript)

Importance: This quote is taken from Perina's climactic revelation of what happened between himself and his adopted son Victor - specifically how Perina, as an attempt at self-redemption, sodomized Victor in what he said was an act of love. This quote poetically evokes that feeling of redemption in Perina - or rather, what he felt was redemption when it was, in fact, more likely to be merely orgasmic.