Shadow Country Study Guide

Shadow Country by Peter Matthiessen

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Matthiessen, Peter. Shadow Country. Modern Library, 2008.

Shadow Country has three books—Book I begins with a third-person narrator describing Edgar Watson's death on the shore of Chokoloskee Bay. Book I then features 12 first-person narrators who recount Watson's adventurous life in the Ten Thousand Islands. The narrators are Watson's neighbors, friends, and family members, and each has their own distinct remembering of Watson's time in Chokoloskee. Despite the contradictions and complications that plague many of their engaging oral histories, almost every narrator agrees that Watson is an attractive, clever, and an ambitiously handworker who helped revolutionize Florida's sugarcane industry. But as universally as Watson is respected, he is similarly feared. Watson is known for his temper, his drinking, and his deadeye shot.

In due time, Watson's Chokoloskee neighbors learn about Watson's involvement in many murders ranging throughout the South, most notably the murder of Belle Starr. Watson does not denounce these rumors as untrue because he uses his intimidating reputation as a "desperado" to his advantage; no one messes with Edgar Watson and lives to tell about it. But eventually Watson is accused of murdering a young Chokoloskee couple named the Tuckers, and Watson's "desperado" reputation works against him. Because he is the only suspect in the Tucker murder, Watson flees his home on Chatham Bend. Seven years later, he returns to Chokoloskee with a new young wife and children, but with him he brings a slew of new rumors—murders he may or may not have committed and trials he was narrowly acquitted from. Many of Watson's old friends and employees shun him and his new family. Not long after his return to Chatham Bend, three of Watson's harvest employees are reported dead. Unable to prove his innocence, Watson is murdered by a posse of his neighbors in front of his wife and children.

Book II is a third-person narration from Lucius Watson, Edgar's son, that details his obsessive quest for the truth about his father's life and death. Lucius longs to discern fact from fiction in his father's convoluted and rumor-filled life, and travels throughout the South in search of the truth. Lucas interviews old family, friends, and former employers. Along the way, Lucius reunites with his long-lost brother, Rob, who, because of his fugitive status, is disguised as Arbie Collins. With Rob's reluctant assistance, Lucius does uncover the truth behind some of his father's most notorious rumors: Did Watson kill the Tuckers? Did he murder his employees before paying them? Did Henry Short shoot Watson first? The truth Lucius discovers at the end of Book II is not exactly the truth he was looking for, but it does conclude his frantic quest to better understand his father's shadowy life.

In Book III, Edgar Watson finally tells his side of things in a first-person narrative that recants his entire life. Growing up in the pre-Civil War South, Watson was physically abused as a child and taught thorny codes of Southern honor by his father. To protect

himself from his raging father, young Watson developed a violent and murderous alter ego, Jack Watson. After nearly killing his father as an early teenager, Watson set out on his own, traveling the South in hopes to develop his own agriculture enterprise. Everywhere he goes, however, Jack Watson overpowered the compassionate Edgar, and either engages in actual trouble or is accused of it. Still, Watson found success, love, and happiness throughout his travels, but more often than not he was inundated with scandal. Book III continues to tell Watson's life story up until his death, shedding light on many of Book's I and II's most tantalizing mysterious. Book III concludes with a moving and reflective passage of Watson coming to grips with his crazy life, and he finally explains the truth behind his murder on the Chokoloskee Bay.

Book I, Section 1

Summary

Prefaced quote (1) — "Look at a stone cutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without so much a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred-and-first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not the last blow that did it, but all that had gone before – Jacob Riis" (1).

Prologue: October 24, 1910 (3-8) — In the wake of a hurricane on an “Indian shell mound called Chokoloskee” in the Ten Thousand Islands of Southwest Florida, a motorboat approached shore (3). An unnamed woman watched the boat near, whispering, “Please no, Mister Watson” (4). Postmaster Smallwood, the first character introduced by name in this third-person narration, hoped Mr. Watson would not return. Smallwood urged Daniel David House, Bill House, and the House family’s black “help,” Henry Short, to not approach Watson’s boat with their rifles (5). The Houses ignored Smallwood and joined a dozen or so armed men at the shore. Smallwood noticed Henry Short hiding his rifle behind him, remarking that he is “here against his will” (5). Smallwood was the only character defending Watson against a potential lynching. Bill House responded that “this ain’t no lynching” and that they were going to do what they needed to do to protect their town (5). Smallwood returned to his house, hurrying a young woman, Edna, and her children, inside. Smallwood saw Watson’s boat reach land; Watson held a shotgun. After several minutes of talking, two gunshots fired. Smallwood’s wife, Mamie, cried out that the men have killed Mister Watson.

Erskine Thompson (9-15) — In a first-person narrative, Erskine Thompson recalls that Watson turned up at Half Way Creek, a town in the Ten Thousand Islands, in 1892. Watson was a strong and good-looking man, who “the first time you seen [Watson] you wanted him to like you” (9). Erskine recalls working and spending time with Watson, remembering his “deadeye shot” and the fear he instilled in other men. No one knew where Watson came from, but Erskine later found out that Watson was fleeing law enforcement. Erskine began working for Watson despite Watson’s shaky reputation: “With so many storied growed up around the feller, who is to say which one was true?” (12). Watson had ambitious plans to develop and aggregate unused land in the Ten Thousand Islands, a largely uninhabited region. Shortly after Watson arrived in the Ten Thousand Islands, he bought property on Chatham Bend, where he began farming sugarcane. He also hunted plume birds; his only plume-killing competition was a Frenchman named Chevelier.

Richard Harden (16-25) — Richard Harden first met Chevelier when Chevelier rowed to the shore of Richard’s property. Chevelier says he was visiting America to hunt egret plumes, and the Ten Thousand Islands had the most abundant source of birds in Florida. Richard invited Chevelier to “stay awhile, get to know the place” (18). The Hardens were Native Americans, more commonly referred to as “Injun” throughout the novel. Chevelier was deeply knowledgeable of Native American culture, and took a

keen interest in the Hardens' heritage. Within the year, Chevelier bought Richard's quit-claim on Chatham bend. After some time, the Hardens and Chevelier became close, like "family," although Richard commonly "shakes his head over Chevelier's terrible French ways" (23). Richard noted that E.J. Watson was his closest neighbor, and although Richard thought Watson was a good neighbor, Richard warned his Harden family to keep their distance.

Richard then segues into his personal background story, recalling his town-wide label of "dang half-breed"; he was part Injun and Mormon. Richard eventually married a white woman, though, as Richard mentioned, his wife Marry is also mixed-breed with darker skinned than him, but was socially deemed white (23). Chevelier told Richard that people of all colors should mate so man could "breed his way back to mud color of Early Man" (24). Richard, who had been oppressed his whole life because he is "Indin," thought "skin color don't matter. It's how you respect our mother earth, not where you come from" (25).

Henry Short (26-28) — Henry's narrative opened with insight into his heritage: his mother was a white woman born in Georgia who slept with a black soldier passing through her town. Although Henry's father had legal status as a free American in Reconstruction times, he was lynched because he impregnated a white woman. Henry's grandfather was enraged by his sinful daughter and sold baby Henry to a farmer. Then one day, Mr. Daniel David House was heading south to Florida and passed this farmer on the side of the road whipping young Henry. Mr. House saved Henry from the abusive farmer and inaugurated Henry into his family, though Mr. House later admitted that had he known Henry was a "nigger," he would not have taken him. As a child, Henry was treated like one of the House children, but as he aged, they increasingly treated him like a slave. Henry had "very light-colored skin" and "tight blond curls," but everyone in town called him "'House's nigger' or 'Black Henry'" (28).

Bill House (29-38) — Bill and Henry worked for Chevelier, shooting wild birds. One night after hunting, Chevelier told Bill and Henry that earlier in the day, Ed Watson shot at him, clipping his hat. From then on, Chevelier despised Watson. On the next day, Chevelier and Bill rowed by Watson's property on their way to visit the Harden's. Chevelier pointed a gun at Watson, but Bill urged him to sit down: "Don't go pointing guns at Mr. Watson," he instructed (31).

At the Hardens, Bill admitted that he was not "easy in their company"; the Hardens were neither "Injuns nor nigras but nowhere near fair-sinned enough to suit most whites" (32). When Richard asked Henry if he is "Choctaw like us," Henry retorted, "Chock-full o' nigger is more like it" (32). Henry says this to show the Hardens that he knew his place as inferior to white and Native Americans. Richard's son, Earl, identified as white despite the Hardens mixed-race.

Later in Bill's narrative, he told a story he overhead from Chevelier's plume trading partner, Captain Eben Carey. Allegedly, Ed Watson came into an auction room somewhat drunk, seeking advice about filing a land claim. A man named Dolphus Santini, who had "heard rumors that Watson was an outlaw," says "Florida don't

welcome desperaders, Mr. Watson" (34). Watson put a knife to Santini's throat and drew blood before being hauled away by other men. In court, he says he never meant to kill Santini "because otherwise…he would have done it" (35). Bill then mentioned that Watson was once accused for murder of Belle Starr, "Queen of the Outlaws" (35). No one was quite sure if Watson did it or not, because the accused was an Edgar A. Watson, and the Watson they knew was an Edgar J. Watson. But, as Bill pointed out, "except for changing 'A' to 'J,' he was always exactly who he says he was" (36).

Erskine Thompson (39-43) —Watson scarcely mentioned his wife and children around Erskine and Erskine's mother, Henrietta Daniels, who had moved to the Bend to work with Erskine and Watson. Henrietta soon bared Watson a child. Erskine recalls the morning Watson informed Henrietta that his lawful family was arriving, and that she had to pack up and leave. Erskine was embarrassed, because, as he says, "Mister Watson was kind of like my dad" (39). Erskine was deeply hurt that Watson kicked Henrietta out. Watson then told him, "you are not my son but you are my partner and my friend. And Ed Watson needs every friend that he can find" (41). As Henrietta prepared to leave, she told Erskine that he was going home with her. "Where's home at? Where the heart is?" Erskine scoffed (43). He felt lonely, missing "somebody real but didn't rightly know who it could be" (43).

Carrie Watson (44-49) — In a diary entry dated September 15, 1895, Watson's young daughter Carrie was en route to see her father, traveling with her mother and three brothers, Lucius, Rob, and Eddie. Watson—who Carrie called Papa or Mister Watson—left their family when Rob was 12 and Lucius was a baby. Carrie knew that her father fled after being accused of killing Belle Star. Carrie's half-brother Rob had "acted mean about coming to see Papa" (45). Rob resented his stepmother for not being "his real mother," and although he acted tough around others, Carrie had seen him cry in private (46).

Next, Carrie recalls reuniting with Watson. Although Carrie was excited to see her father, the rest of the family was shy and uncomfortable, especially Rob, who refused to acknowledge Watson. Eventually Rob broke, barking at his father: "How come you run off? Never left word and never sent for us? Never would of neither if your wife hadn't come crawling!" (49). Watson, who called Rob "Sonborn," much to his and his stepmother's dismay, slapped Rob to the ground before stolidly explaining that he had a lot to explain to them, but would do so when the time was right (49).

Analysis

The prefaced quote on page one is spoken by Jacob Riis, an early twentieth century American writer and photographer. In his quote, he uses the analogy of a "stone cutter hammering away at his rock" (1). After many hammered blows, the rock finally splits in two, his analogy continues. Riis concludes that this split does not occur on the final blow, but occurs because of many small and repetitive blows. After the prologue informs the reader of Watson's eminent death, Riis's analogy crystallizes, inferring that Watson's

murder is not an isolated incident, but dependent on many choices and instances that lead to that one moment.

Shadow Country's narrators portray Watson as somewhat allegorical, as the author evokes the use of community folklore in order to establish Watson's near mythical identity in the Islands. In the opening narratives, Erskine, Richard, Henry, and Bill express deep respect for Watson; he is hard working, attractive, and strong, someone who does not "cause trouble, not amongst his neighbors" (9). Despite his positive qualities, Watson also provokes substantial fear in these characters—fear of his "deadeye shot," his instinct to kill, or as Erskine suggests, his promise to give "any company that shows up . . . a nice warm welcome" (10, 13). Defaming rumors define Watson's character—his status as a desperado and fugitive, as well his involvement in the murder of Belle Starr. Erskine addresses the role of legends and tales regarding Watson, stating: "Folks ask, 'Would you have worked for Watson if you knowed about him what you know today?' well, hell, I don't know what I know today and they don't neither. With so many stories…around this feller, who is to say which one was true" (11). Here Erskine establishes Chokoloskee's slippery and enigmatic perception of Watson, one in which foreshadows the novel's aim in rendering Watson as a folk hero.

The Chokoloskee community is obsessed with classifying and marking race as important and immediate identity-descriptors, and the hierarchy of their social world is defined through these markings. With the increased number of "mixed-blood" citizens in Reconstruction era United States, the author portrays race as ambiguous, uncertain, and dependent on cultural and personality variants rather than skin pigmentation. This racial confusion is epitomized excellently by Henry Short's character, who has light-skin and blond hair. Henry is frequently confused "for a white boy with a drop if Indin," and is lighter-skinned than "many of these crackers" on the Island (32-33). What posits Henry as black, however, is not his skin color, but his social conditioning. Although his race is primarily determined by his "sinful" interracial conception, his classification as black is more dependent on the pressure to act black, to "know his place" among whites, and to "think like a nigger" (32). The author uses Henry to demonstrate irrational racial prejudices: teach someone to be inferior, even when their supposed inferior characteristic is absent, and they will be consider themselves irrevocably be inferior. The Harden family similarly address racial bias in post-Civil War America, stating, "Skin color don't matter," and what determines your identity is cultural nurturing and self-perception. Interestingly enough, Richard's son Earl desperately wants to identify as white despite his skin-color, and thus acts white through intolerant racism, disrespect for wildlife, and fascination with development, in order to overpower his heritage.

In the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, Chokoloskee, Florida, is represented as an impartial region between Yankee and Confederate states. Erskine says, "Most of our old Glades pioneers was drifters and deserters from the War Between the States," creating a populous with conflicting values (12). Although Chokoloskee is mainly white, Richard mentions that colonized Native American's "watch" from the wilderness; Erskine says that blacks migrate to southern Florida to find work; Bill House notes the "rich Yankee" tourists developing in north Florida and moving downward, threatening, he says, the values of "our kind of men"; the Frenchman,

Chevelier, still dreams of colonizing uninhabited land, idealizing a society blind to “this skin color business” (21, 24). The author establishes these contrasting perspectives in order to show a rapidly changing America, and the devolving identity of the United States post Civil War.

Discussion Question 1

What commonalities are apparent in the narrators' language? Is their rural cadence authentic? Is it convincing?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Richard warn "his Harden family to keep their distance" from Watson? Richard and Watson were friends, and Richard admittedly liked him. So why was he scared of him?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Henry Short is socially considered "black" if he looks like a "white" man? What does Henry's racial identity suggest about this time period in American history?

Vocabulary

canal, humidor, conch, burial, debark, schooner, snicker, afflicted, skiff, mangy

Book I, Section 2

Summary

Erskine Thompson (50-55) — Erskine accompanied Watson to meet Watson's family. Erskine was immediately taken with Carrie's beauty, and other than Rob, who "didn't look nothing like them others," thought Watson's family was kind (50). Noticing Erskine's attraction to his daughter, Watson warned, "Carrie weren't but only ten years of age" (51). Carrie stole Erskine's heart, "and I ain't so sure I ever got it back" (52). As the family headed back to Watson's home on Chatham Bend, Watson talked excitedly about developing the islands, and being at the forefront of American progress. Mrs. Watson—also referred to as Jane or Aunt Jane—shook her head in amusement. She was sick when she arrived on the Bend, and her illness only worsened within her first year there. Jane, noticing Erskine's aforementioned loneliness, told him, "'You may call me Aunt Jane.' When she seen the tears come to my eyes, she took me in her arms" (53).

Erskine's narrative concludes by depicting a scene in which a posse of men arrived on Watson's lawn and attempted to detain Watson with citizens arrest. Watson, in protest, shot the tip of posse member Tom Brewer's mustache off, forcing the men to flee.

Bill House (56-60) — The man Watson shot at, Tom Brewer, "killed more redskins than the soldiers ever done," and also habitually raped a nine-year old "squaw girl" (56). Although Tom passed as a white man, he appeared to be mixed-race and part Native American. Tom aspired to develop land on Ed Watson's property, but Captain Carey informed him Watson had filed a claim. But after uncovering Watson's alleged fugitive status, he, Carey, and Chevelier imagined a citizen's arrest of Watson would be enough to confiscate his land. Tom, Carey, and Chevelier discussed the Watson rumors, asserting their desire to put him away. After shooting off Tom's Mustache, Watson was publicly deemed "the Barber." Chevelier called him "Emperor Watson" because of his ambitious desires to develop the islands. Although the men did not successfully arrest Watson, their threat prompted Mrs. Watson to move her and the children away from Chatham Bend and into Fort Myers, where they would be safe from her husband's enemies.

Sheriff Frank B. Tippins (61-64) — Tippins opened with a new Watson rumor: "He wiped out a local gunslinger named Quinn Bass" (61). This incident was a few years before Watson arrived in Chokoloskee. Tippins heard that after Watson was arrested, a lynch mob formed outside the jailhouse wanting to hang Watson. Tippins asserted that the sheriff at the time helped Watson escape the jail to avoid an unjust lynching. Eventually Watson escaped custody. Tippins heard this story from Walt Langford, the son of a rich cattleman. Mrs. Watson and her kids were boarding at Walt's fathers house, and both Langford and Tippins almost immediately fell in love with Carrie Watson upon meeting her. Walt's family sought to marry him, and Walt selected Carrie as his preferred bride, though Tippins doubted that Ed Watson would permit the marriage. When Carrie and Walter suddenly got married that July, Tippins reluctantly and mournfully attended the

wedding. He was excited to meet Carrie's famous father, but was intrigued and confused as to why the "notorious Mr. E.J. Watson never appeared" (64).

Richard Harden (65-71) — Richard's children Owen and Liza tended to the old and sick Chevelier. Chevelier said he would leave the Hardens his property as a sign of gratitude. One day, when Earl and Owen rode their boat out to visit Chevelier, they saw Watson in the Frenchman's yard. Watson told the boys that he found Chevelier dead. Watson was naturally accused of murdering Chevelier, largely because the town knew he had an interest in buying Chevelier's property, which he did once Chevelier passed away. Although Richard did not believe the rumors, he observed, "Ed Watson . . . never quiet denied them" (67). Earl Harden was convinced Watson killed Chevelier, and angrily told everyone he knew, although, as Richard points out, "Earl was scared to death of Watson" (69). Richard did not think Watson killed Chevelier, and that Watson only wanted people to think he killed Chevelier, to incite fear.

Owen Harden (72-73) — Richard's son Owen reported that Gilbert Johnson and his attractive young daughters built a small cabin on the edge of the Harden's new property. Owen developed a crush on Gilbert's daughter, Sarah, who, as Owen describes, "had a way with E.J. Watson" (73). Owen discovered that Watson confided in Sarah and told Sarah deeply personal anecdotes that she then kept in total confidence.

Diary of Miss C. Watson (74-85) — Carrie admitted that she had no say in her marriage to Walt Langford, nor did she particularly like her suitor. Carrie was skeptical of her fiancé, sighting his "side-interest in business makes him pay more mind to profits than to people" (76). Later in her diary entry, Carrie recalled her parents discussing the Spanish War. Her mother Jane criticized the "tin patriotism" of sending young men to war "while our rich businessmen wave the flag and rake in fat profits" (77). Watson, although "fiercely patriotic," was similarly cynical of the war, which had earned families like the Langfords profit (77). Despite Watson's criticism, he defended his American ideals to Jane. She continued to lament the poor condition of black Americans, Native Americans, and women, citing the violent, prejudiced, and self-interested hate crimes the American government permitted toward "citizens [who] are so inferior" (78).

Later in Carrie's narrative, Jim Cole brought Jane a book called Hell on the Border. In the book, an Edgar A. Watson was accused of killing Belle Starr in the Oklahoma Territory. Carrie denounced this as "the wrong Edgar Watson entirely," but once Jim Cole left, Jane assured her daughter that the story had some truth. Jane said that Watson was not indicted criminally for the murder and the real killer was Uncle Billy Collins's brother. Because Jane and Watson were married when he was accused of the murder, she described the world in which Belle Starr inhabited: the "wild border country," where the "most barbaric savages were white" (80). In her description of this wild border country, she examined southern honor, where "a man's whole honor might depend on . . . a duel over almost anything" (80). Jane informed Carrie that Edgar Watson was born and bred in this culture, and though he was raised by a "good family," he was a byproduct of this southern honor (80).

Jim Cole spread Hell on the Border around Fort Myers and soon caused a public scandal. The Langfords, who were “much perturbed” by Watson’s murder accusations, told Watson that he should not attend Carrie’s wedding. Watson, who had done business with the Langfords and the Coles, “refused to be banished from his daughter’s wedding” (83). When Carrie confronted her father about the book, he said: “E.J. Watson will [not] take these insults lying down” (83). Watson disclosed to Carrie that he initially refused the Langfords marriage proposal, but was forced to reconsider, because the marriage would be “beneficial to our family” (84).

Erskine Thompson (86-90) – When Jane and the children left Chatham Bend to live in Fort Myers, Rob chose to stay with his father. Erskine asked Rob why he did not join his family, and Rob responded, “That’s not my family” (86). With Carrie married and Jane approaching death, Watson has become depressed. Erskine’s aunt, Josie Jenkins, eventually moved into Watson’s house with her brother, Tant Jenkins. Watson and Josie had a baby. Tant was easy-going, warm, and humorous. He avoided hard work and goofed off, two things that Watson typically did not tolerate. But Tant was one of the few people who made Watson laugh, and so got away with behavior many others could not. The other workers at Chatham Bend were “drifters, wanted men, runaway niggers” (89). Jane heard rumors about the fugitives working for Watson and told her husband that he had grown “hard-hearted” (89). Watson would argue that “them capitalists and tycoons” emblazoned slave labor from blacks and immigrants, and he was doing no different than them (89).

Carrie (91-93) — Carrie recalls an instance when Sherriff Tippins met with her and her mother, Jane. Carrie was well aware Tippins still loved her, and was also attune to his great fascination with Watson. After discussing Fort Myers before all of the recent development, Tippins slyly asked Jane about Watson’s Belle Starr murder accusation. Jane responded: “You appear to be very interested in Carrie’s father, Mr. Tippins. He takes care of his family, helps his neighbors, pays his bills. Can all of our upright citizens say that?” (93). Carrie observed her mother only showed her “feisty side” in defense of her husband (93).

Bill House (94-95) — Bill remembers a time when a man named Isaac Yeomans asked Watson if the Belle Starr accusation was true: “How come such a friendly feller as yourself is always getti'n into so much trouble?” (94). Watson stared Isaac down in hatred. While observing the stare down, Bill perceived Watson’s personality conflict: “You never knew how anything was going to strike Ed Watson: another day, he might have played it as a joke” (94). But Watson did not consider Isaac’s question a joke. Watson then informed Isaac, and the other men around, that Watson did not hunt trouble; he took care of it when it hunted him. Chokoloskee was split on their perception of Watson: some were convinced he was a killer, other deemed him innocent. Bill noted that, regardless of opinion, everyone “was always glad to see” Watson (95).

Analysis

Through their obsession with progress and development, Jim Cole and Walter Langford symbolize the turning tides of American capitalism. Cole, for instance, is urgent to disrupt Native American habitat and undeveloped, sacred land in order to advance agricultural and architectural development. When Cole seeks to purchase land that the Mikasuki tribe resides on, he says, “They won’t be civilized . . . sooner or later they will get in the way of progress” (77). Progress is important to men like Cole and Walt: it signifies increased profits, power, and property control. This profit-driven notion of progress is so important to men like Cole and Walt that they support war and injustice in order to earn more money. Cole remarks to Carrie that “war is the best d— business there is,” and Watson suspects Walt’s family of selling cattle to Spaniards during the Spanish War (77). Matthiessen, however, does not portray progress as a positive force in the novel. Characters such as Jane question the price of progress, most pertinently the indifference and cruelty perpetrated to others who stand in the way of profit-driven ideals: “So even when our women have no voice—and our poor darkies are tormented burned, and hung,” American capitalists thrust forward, pursuing profit.

Amongst Cole, Walt, and even Watson, this obsession with progress and American advancement is considered to be patriotic. Jane, well read and wise, criticizes contrived notions of patriotism by unpacking its evident hypocrisy. Regarding the recent Spanish War, Jane says, “its all this flag-waving and fine speechingfying. Our brave young men, who have no say about it, are sent off to be killed, while our rich businessmen wave the flag and rake the profits” (77). Jane exposes patriotism as a flawed concept: progress and patriotic attitudes are only appealing to those yielding wealth and opportunity from it, and devastating to those it subjugates. Those who are negatively affected by patriotism—soldiers, indigenous peoples, blacks, and women—are nevertheless forced to subscribe to a philosophical doctrine that actively works against them. By confronting her husband about these pressing issues, Jane confirms her ability to challenge and critique institutional coercion, and demands her husband to do the same.

Watson’s Americanism appears to be in constant conflict. He identifies as a fierce patriot, cherishing a romanticized version of a lawless south. He tells Jane he will “never salute the Stars and Stripes,” and that the Spanish War, like the Civil War, is simply a “War of Yankee Aggression” (77). Yet, when Jane supports her husband’s statement with an excerpt from Mark Twain, who suggests the United States swap its American Flag for a pirate flag, Watson denounces Twain for his unpatriotic musings. Similarly, Watson resents Cole and Walt’s war profits, but alternately applauds Cole’s eye for development. Lastly, Watson appraises “them capitalists and tycoons” for exposing “gangs of niggers and immigrants, treating ‘em any way they want [with] no interference from the law, having paid of all bureaucrats and politicians,” but then subsequently employees outlaws and blacks, paying them little and forcing them to work long hours (78). Watson’s contradictory opinions regarding patriotism also clarify what is known about his personality. He is kind, gentle, and warm with his family and friends, but sinister and violent with his enemies. He has Jane’s sensitivity and wisdom, but Cole’s

inhumanity and quick temper. By proposing these inner conflicts early in the novel, Watson’s character deepens into a complex and mysterious commodity.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Chevelier call Watson, “Emperor Watson”? Do you think this is a fitting title?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Earl Watson convinced Watson killed Chevelier? Why do the other Hardens think Watson is innocent?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Jane's comments on the Spanish War. What is her definition of Tin Patriotism? What parallels can you draw between Jane's political critiques and today's political climate?

Vocabulary

flume, vigorous, mettlesome, provoke, perturb, veranda, consort, hanker, innocuous, saline

Book I, Section 3

Summary

Owen Harden (96-108) —Wally and Bet Tucker were a runaway couple that took work with Watson. One day, without prior notice, the couple quit, demanding their pay from Watson. Watson's consistent rule was not to pay workers if they left before the harvest. Furious that Watson will not pay them, the young couple left Chatham and built a small cabin on Lost Man's Key, just north of the Harden house. Watson was in the midst of acquiring as much land as possible, with the intention of digging an oyster bar and dredge to create a protected harbor. Watson was attempting to register claims on many different plots up and down Lost Man's Key, including the unregister plot Wally and Bet had just settled on. After purchasing the land, Watson found out Wally and Bet lived on it. The Hardens suggested that Watson allow Wally and Bet, who was pregnant, to finish out their planting season and have their child in peace. But Watson was indignant, citing that he "paid cash for the title, and the Law's the law" (101). Wally told Watson that he would not leave until Bet had her baby and Watson gave him his overdue pay.

Several weeks later, around New Year's Day, gunshots were heard on Lost Man's Key. Henry Short, Owen, and Earl investigated the next morning, and discovered Wally's dead body floating in the river. The boys eventually found Bet's body facedown in the muck. Henry spotted Watson's "keel track in the marl," as well as another set of footprints. Owen assumed the stay footprints belonged to Rob, but then remembered Rob and Wally were good friends. Henry and the Hardens assumed Watson killed off the Tuckers. When the deputies came to Lost Man's Key to investigate, Earl was the only Harden that accused Watson of the murders; Owen and Richard stayed silent, despite their "sick angry" feelings toward Watson (107). Richard warned Earl that, "the law ain't got nothin on Ed Watson, and you will have to live with him after these fellers are gone" (107). When the deputies arrived at Watson's house, both he and Rob were gone.

Erskine Thompson (109-112) — Erskine saw "black smoke of a cane fire" coming from Watson's property (109). Erskine thought, "the Boss had gone crazy" (109). Erskine approached the house at night, and Watson appeared jumpy and paranoid, cocking back his gun and asking Erskine if he was alone. When Watson settled down, he told Erskine that he had no money and that his harvest was ruined. Watson was leaving Chatham Bend in the morning, and asked Erskine to look after the property while he was gone.

Slightly drunk, Watson confided his "bygone life story" to Erskine (110). Watson told him that his first wife died in childbirth with Rob, and how in this event's traumatic aftermath he drank and behaved recklessly. After remarrying, he moved to the Georgia border with his new family. Many "renegade Injuns" lived on the Georgia Border, also, the most notable Cherokee chief named Tom Starr (110). Tom Starr had killed many people, including women and children, which Watson detested. Belle Starr and Tom's son, Jim,

were Watson's neighbors. After only a year of living next to each other, Belle Starr was shot and killed. At her funeral, Jim accused Watson of murdering her. Although Watson was briefly arrested and later released for lack of evidence, Watson did not feel safe in Georgia, so he fled to southwest Florida, "the last place left where man could farm in peace and quiet" (111). On his way to Florida, he killed a man named Quinn Bass in self-defense.

Frank B. Tippins (113-116) — Tippins received word from a neighboring county sheriff that an E.A. or E.J. Watson was suspected of killing two black runaway workers.

Sarah Harden (117-118) — Sarah had recently married Owen Harden. Sarah said that Watson had come back to Chokoloskee two years after the Tucker incident, and was only seen twice a year. Watson and his neighbors acted like the whole Tucker incident never happened. The reason for this community indifference, Sarah thought, was a deep fear of Watson, "the bold killer" (117).

Bill House (119-121) — Bill described dark times in Chokoloskee: other than the Smallwood's, everyone was "dirt poor," the soil was "tuckered out," and the hunting and fishing had dried up (119). Hunters fought competitively over the remaining plume and egret birds, as bird hunting was one of the few sources of food and income. But in 1901, Florida banned plume hunting, or as Bill said, "passed a law against our good old native way of living" (119). Three wardens enforcing the new law were killed, and naturally Watson was blamed.

Erskine Thompson (122-123) —Watson's ex-mistresses and Erskine's kin, Josie and Henrietta, spread "wild stories about Mister Watson to get attention to themselves" (123). The women most notably told a tale called "Watson Payday," which accused Watson of killing off his harvest help before he had to pay them. Erskine said that these rumors negatively impacted Watson's ability to sell his cane syrup.

Mamie Smallwood (124-133) — The Smallwood's were "the biggest farmer and trader and owned most of Chokoloskee" (124). Mamie said that the two year since Watson fled, the town assumed he was on the run for murdering the Frenchman, the Tuckers, various plume wardens, and the many other miscellaneous murders he was accused of. In Watson's absence, Chokoloskee's men talked tough, alleging they would lynch him if he ever returned. But then, one day, Watson approached Chokoloskee's shore for the first time in two years. Watson had a new young wife and two young children with him. Upon his arrival, he was greeted with nothing but respect, and even, as Mamie pointed out, hearty compliments. Mamie considered why they townsmen were enamored with Watson: "Ed Watson . . . looked and acted like our idea of a hero" (125). Men in Chokoloskee treated Watson like "the greatest American since . . . Robert E. Lee," obsessed with his tough-guy persona and honorable ability to ward off his enemies (129).

Mamie's brother, Bill House, was not obsessed with Watson like other townsmen were, but he "would puzzle over E.J. Watson his whole life" (127). Much to Mamie's dismay, Ted invited the Watson family to spend the night in their house. Ted told his frightened

wife, “There ain’t no proof he ever killed a single soul” (131). Together, the Smallwoods speculated about the Tucker’s death; Mamie found his immediate departure a sign of his guilt, whereas Ted said Watson’s departure was a safety precaution from the townsmen that would inherently blame him. Mamie, fond of Watson’s new wife and slightly persuaded by Ted, decided to give Watson a second chance; besides, “his great plans for the Islands gave us up that the Twentieth Century progress we had heard about might come our way” (133).

Carrie Langford’s Diary (134-137) — Carrie discovered that when Watson left Chokoloskee, he was held on trial for murder in Colombia County. Walt and Cole apparently “got him acquitted” regardless if he was innocent or not (134). To pay for the lawyers, Watson had to sell much of his land. When Carrie asked Walt if her father could work for him, he emphatically said no. After helping acquit Watson in his murder trial, Walter “wants nothing to do with Papa,” and forbade Carrie from allowing him in their home (135).

Bill House (138-141) — As Watson acclimated again to life on Chatham Bend, his only harvest help was Green Waller, a former hog thief. Bill had seen Waller around town with a gigantic woman called Big Hannah. Hannah was smart, strong, and clever, and Watson hired her to work for him.

Mamie Smallwood (142-147) — There had been no accusations or suspicions since Watson reappeared until Erskine told Mamie that two black harvest hands disappeared from Chatham Bend. Erskine’s inkling further emblazoned the “Watson Payday” rumor, insinuating Watson murdered his help before paying them. Mamie, disconcerted with this recent rumor, asked Henry Short if he thought Watson really killed the Tucker’s: “ ‘Mist’ Watson always been real good to me, Mis Mamie.’ Not denying. That was Henry’s sign” (144). Mamie spoke highly of Henry’s character, calling him a smart, hard-working Christian. She told a story about a time when Henry sailed Watson’s produce to Key West for Erskine, who was unable to sail it himself. In a storm, Henry’s boat capsized, and he lost the boat and the produce. Henry took accountability and told Watson it was his fault. Watson eventually recovered his boat, and never got mad at or punished Henry.

Owen Harden (148-152) — A dangerous man named Dutchy Melville was Watson’s current foreman. According to Owen, Dutchy replaced Watson’s son Lucius as foreman because Dutchy scared the harvest help so bad that they worked harder. But when Dutchy and Watson had a dispute over money, Dutchy sabotaged Watson’s cane syrup supply, preventing Watson from selling hundreds of dollars worth of product. After Dutchy left, John Smith came, though that name was just a cover. His real name was Leslie Cox, and he knew Watson from Colombia County; Leslie was a known killer who was running from the law. Leslie was instantly disliked on Chatham Bend. He captured, raped, and impregnated a young Native American girl. Feeling so begotten, the young girl hung herself in Watson’s barn. Still, Watson overlooked these atrocities and made Leslie his foreman. Dutchy eventually returned, but was disappointed to find his foreman position filled with a new dangerous runaway.

Analysis

Posed with crisis, Owen, Earl, and Henry grapple with their masculine and racial identities when they find the Tuckers' deceased bodies. When the boys find the bodies, Owen and Earl “hollered and swore to keep from crying,” but Henry remains stolidly still, who, as Owen says, “was not free” to show emotion “with Earl watching” (104). In his dire fear, Earl barks orders to Owen and Henry, attempting to mimic manly behavior he has seen from other white men. When they reel the bodies into the boat, Earl sternly forbids Henry to touch or look at Bet’s corpse: “Don’t go lookin up her shift, you hear me, boy?” (105). Webster, who has joined the boys to bury the bodies, sharply tells Earl, “White boys only, right?” (105). Meanwhile, Henry’s expression is as “dead” as the Tuckers' (105). Owen, who is fighting back tears as he shovels dirt over Wally’s body, says he “was ready to fight Earl if he noticed” (106). What this convoluted and condensed scene shows is a confliction between assigned societal roles and authentic emotional response. Owen, Earl, and Henry’s collective reaction is to cry, but they instead respond consistently with how they think they are supposed to: Earl acts like the indignant and aggressive white man, Owen the calm and still Native American, and Henry the emotionless, inhuman black man. Owen almost cracks as they bury the bodies, but scared of getting caught out of character, resolves “to fight” to defend his masculinity (106).

After the boys find the Tuckers, the many rumors that attribute Watson as a murderer are finally rooted in reality. This inevitable immersion between myth and fact finally comes to fruition in Watson’s first admission of guilt to Erskine Thompson on Chatham Bend. Up until this point in the novel, Watson has yet to respond to the many rumors that ascribe him as a murderer; as Erskine said, Watson used the townsmen’s belief in these rumors as leverage to intimidate and incite fear. But finally faced with a palpable accusation, Watson drops his desperado front and confides his “bygone” life to his friend, Erskine. In doing so, Watson admits to a murder several years ago that he committed in self-defense on his way to Florida. Watson’s acknowledgment of past wrongdoing instills confidence in the readers that, when confronted with the truth, Watson will admit misconduct and take accountability. But when the novel’s various narrators toss around rumors, and Watson is not offered the opportunity to defend himself, the author suggests that the rumor has little basis in fact.

At times, the fear and terror Watson incites in others is symbolized by the metaphorical treatment of sharks and bears. These animal analogies are evoked not only when Watson’s shadow is cast in his absence, as when Owen sees “the shadow of a shark” circle his boat when he finds the Tuckers' bodies, but also when Watson is present. Owen describes Watson as a bear who “raises up and . . . gets your scent,” and even if “you load” your gun, the bear will still attack (151). When boats pass Watson’s property, people feel sharks underneath, sensing their presence. The novel’s continued use of bear and shark symbolism clearly reflects the unknown and dangerous elements people fear in Watson—his ability and willingness to attack apparent threats, his omniscient and shadowed presence, and his domineering and alpha personality.

Watson’s continuous connection with progress and capitalism is directly tied with his lawless and renegade persona. Before Owen finds the Tuckers' bodies, he is in the Smallwoods' shop, boasting about how his “grand plan was working . . . spreading capitalism, democracy, and God across the world” (99). Watson is excited because his sugarcane profits are high, and he is planning to expand his land “south to Lost Man’s” (98). When Wally Tucker gets in the way of Watson’s progress, he dies. This thorny relationship with spreading progress and capitalism no matter what the cost ultimately costs two people their lives. But yet, somehow Watson is not viewed utterly as a villain; on the contrary, people in Chokoloskee treat Watson like “the greatest American since General Nathan Bedford Forrest and Robert E. Lee,” two men who Mamie describes as bloody renegades (129). But Matthiessen is positioning Watson aside Confederate Generals to illuminate the connection between economic and political gain and immoral behavior; the most powerful men do what they must to advance what they think is right. Like many capitalists and colonialists before him, Watson has killed for American progress.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the Chokoloskee men both fascinated and fearful of Watson? What do their behaviors toward Watson indicate about American culture?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Earl Harden immediately convinced that Watson is guilty of the Tucker murders? Why is Richard so upset that Earl accuses Watson to the authorities?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Watson permit fugitives to work on Chatham Bend? Is this an indication of his positive or poor ethical character?

Vocabulary

coarse, curlicue, contraband, britches, confidant, tamarind, squawk, mislaid, beguile, blasphemy

Book I, Section 4

Summary

Tant Jenkins (153-154) / Bill House (155-156) — In October 1909, a hurricane “tore away half of Key West” (155). Before the hurricane, Watson rushed his wife and kids into Chokoloskee to stay with the Smallwoods, “because his crazy foreman was out to kill somebody” (155). Later that month, Watson visited his family in Chokoloskee, bringing with him Dutchy Melville. In front of a crowd, Dutchy became furious with Watson and accused him of wanting him dead: “Back-shooting, Ed? I always head that was your damn specialty” (156). Dutchy was never seen again after that day.

Owen Harden (157-158) —The Hardens — other than Earl — never usually paid attention to the Watson rumors. But in his old age, Richard began to entertain the “Watson Payday” stories. Now even the Hardens were scared of Watson.

Hoad Storter (159-163) — Hoad was good childhood friends with Lucius Watson, but had not seen him since he left Chatham Bend after “some trouble” with the new foreman, Leslie Cox (159). One evening Hoad, his brother Claude, and Henry Short found two bodies floating dead in the water. The next day a search party went out to scrounge the river for evidence. The search party found a third body — Dutchy Melville. The men gathered in town after the burial. A black man, who they recognize from working with Watson, stumbled into town, hollering about murder on Chatham Bend. When asked who had done it, the black man said, “Mist’ Watson—” and then, “Nosuh, I mistook myself! Mist’ Watson’s fo’man” (161). The townsmen took the black man’s initial accusation of Watson as evidence of Watson’s guilt.

Henry Short (164-171) —Hoad instructed Henry and the other black man, Frank, to sleep aboard his boat, to prevent the drunk and angry townsmen from instinctively blaming and lynching two black men. Alone on the boat, Frank told Henry his story. Frank’s story started when Green Waller and Big Hannah found the dead Native American girl, hanging in Watson’s barn. Hannah confronted Leslie about this girl. After calling her bad names and spitting on her, Green stood up and defended her, in which Leslie responded by pulling out his pistol. Leslie shot Green in cold blood. Big Hannah fled as the shot fired. Leslie chased after her, but Hannah found an ax, which she swung down on Leslie’s head. Leslie eventually overtook Hannah with his pistol. Frank, who watched all of this, was implored by Hannah to run for it. Frank was already running when the two shots fired into Hannah. Leslie chased after Frank and overpowered him. Leslie began desperately describing his rationale for killing the innocent couple. Then, they heard Watson’s boat approach. Watson dropped Dutchy off on the dock and turned around. Leslie murdered Dutchy on the spot. Leslie then locked Frank in a shed with four other black field-hands, who Frank assumed Leslie forgot about it: “Nights passed and days. The prisoners, starved, thirty, and half bit to death, were crying out for mercy” (170). Late one night, Frank unhinged the lock with a pick. He knew he could not bring the field hands with him; they would not fit on his boat, and

if they made too much noise escaping they would die. So Frank fled alone: “Those four young men would always be his lonely secret” (171).

Hoad Storter (172-173) — Another big hurricane approached the Ten Thousand Islands. Every one who lived on the coastline ushered onto the high ground at Chokoloskee. The only person who refused to leave her low ground home was Josie Jenkins and her daughter, Pearl. As Hoad and Henry prepared for the hurricane, Henry told him Frank’s story. When Hoad asked why Frank initially accused Watson before officially accusing Leslie, Henry said, “he believed this man had implicated Mister Watson because Watson had betrayed Melville to Cox” (173).

Sarah Harden (174-176) — Several days after the murders, Watson turned up at the Hardens'. Feeling unwelcome, Watson did not approach the house. Richard was inside, pointing a gun at Watson through the window. “My respect to Mr. Harden and the boys!” Watson said as he left (176).

Mamie Smallwood (177-178) — When Watson walked into the Smallwoods store, he seemed unaware of the recent murders on his property, When informed of Green and Hannah’s death, he jolted up, enraged. “Was I the only one suspected that E.J.’s outrage was put on to fool us?” Mamie wondered (178).

Hoad Storter (179-180) — Watson offered Hoad and his dad money to ride him out to find Sheriff Tippins. Scared of what Watson would do if they said no, they agreed.

Mamie Smallwood (181-182) — After Watson left to find Sheriff Tippins, the townsmen gathered at the Smallwoods and “got real busy spreading blame” (181). Mamie noted that as soon as Watson was out of sight, the men harden their principals; they say they should have arrested him, lynched him, and not let him escape town. Later that night, the hurricane hit Chokoloskee; “nine tenths of Chokoloskee Island and ten tenths of Everglade went underwater” (182).

Owen Harden (183-184) — The Hardens' house went down in the tremendous storm. Owen remarked that, “Such a terrible storm, just seven days and seven nights after so much bloody murder, could only be sign of the Lord’s Wrath” (184). The hurricane’s only known fatality was Watson and Josie’s infant son.

Erskine Thompson (185-187) —Although no one other than the infant died in the hurricane, people's homes and land was destroyed. Every one who lived on Lost Man’s River moved after the storm, including the Hardens.

Frank B. Tippins (188-194) — After Tippins locked Frank in jail, Tippins visited Bill Collier, a storekeeper and postmaster in Fort Myers. Tippins asked Collier if he knew Watson’s whereabouts. Collier reported that Watson came through his shop the night before looking for Tippins. Several men in the shop expressed respect for Watson, one man saying that Watson had a “big heart” (189). Others ridiculed this stray man's comments, calling Watson a murderer. Suddenly, the door busted open and Watson stood staring at Tippins. The two men walked outside to talk alone. Watson tried to convince Tippins to deputize him so he could lawfully kill Leslie and prove his

innocence, but Tippins was not convinced that Watson was not guilty of the murders. Watson explained that he did not kill anyone nor did he order Leslie to kill anyone. Watson defended himself by telling Tippins about his plan to develop cane fields at Deep Lake. Watson said Dutchy, Green, and Hannah were all his friends, that he would never have killed them. Tippins still refused to deputize him, finally telling Watson that he was under arrest for murder. Watson laughed and called him a “fucking idiot” (194). He then took off for Chokoloskee.

Analysis

Richard Harden’s increased attention to gossip illuminates the interdependence between rumor and despair. Owen Harden describes his father, once immune to gossip, as increasingly interested in sensationalist conversations: “Only now in his despair did Richard Harden listen to . . . gossip about Watson” (158). By tying gossip and despair together, Shadow Country explains its deployment of conflicted, unhappy people grappling with truths they cannot alone comprehend. Mamie supports this logic by criticizing men whom praise and criticize Watson: “No sooner was E.J. Watson gone than some started arguing how he should have been arrested . . .” (181). The men exclusively criticize Watson when he is absent, but when he is present they are generous and kind, forgiving of all his importunate deeds. This lack of “principal,” as Mamie puts it, explains why people engage in defaming rumors (182). The author seems to be commenting that people cling to gossip as a guiding source of principal and meaning to distract them for their own despair; however, when that gossip is disturbed or confronted, people shrink back into a speculative innocence, unsure of how to act or feel about uncertain reality.

Fact and fiction is in constant conflict in the novel. The truth is not only blurred by gossip and opposing perspectives, but by racial and ethnic characteristics, too—a black man’s truth is taken with a grain of salt, and his lies are punishable by death. But determining fact and fiction with characters of color is not as important as holding true to the conduct code set forth by their racial identity. For example, when Frank runs into the town yelling abut the murders on Chatham Bend, white townsmen are “outraged [by] any nigra who would dare to get his white boss into trouble” (161). Even as the men gather and gripe about the dangerous Watson, they would rather a black man be loyal to a white man than suspect a white man of wrongdoing, implying that even a white man at his worst—a murderer or criminal—is superior to the highest character of an honest black man. When Henry meets with Frank and insists he “get his story straight,” he reflects on the black man’s role in the American frontier: “All my life in a frontier settlement where black folks were not tolerated” (165). This lack of racial and cultural trust among characters provides interesting insight when assessing a narrator’s truthfulness.

There are moments in the novel, however, when dark-skinned characters' humanity and authenticity supersedes their assumed racial identity. After the hurricane, when homes are destroyed and land put underwater, Erskine, who is openly racist throughout his narratives, notes the resolve and strength of the Harden family: “Say what you like about that family, them Hardens was the only ones that never left. I’m talking about real

pioneers trying to make a life down in the islands, not moonshiners nor fly-by-nights that came and went" (187). Erskine's recognition of the Hardens as pioneers is admittance that pioneer qualities are not limited to racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather an earned and proven title. "Moonshiners" and "fly-by-nighters" are typically white outlaws who exploit the land and resources for personal gain. The Hardens however, respect the land, their neighbors, and a sustained sense of permanence; as Erskine notes, they're the "only ones that never left" (187). Erskine also considers the attitude people of color must implement in the American frontier in order to survive: "All them people ever wanted was, Let us alone . . . mulattas never had no right to that proud attitude" (187). By accepting their ascribed racial identities, the Hardens were able to rebel against social norms—they built land, kept it, and proved themselves to be "real pioneers" (187).

Not stilted by race or class, Watson is able to pursue his "imperial prospects" by "prospering on forty acres of hard shell mound," encouraging him to believe that "there's no limit to what such a man could do" (193). But when the law catches up with his alleged murders, his future as a great capitalist is in danger. Defending his innocence in an informal interrogation with Sherriff Tippins, Watson exposes the ethical hypocrisy of the American Frontier, alleging the immoral and criminal things people in power must do to advance their futures. Watson says, "Why would I risk such a great future by doing something stupid at the Bend?" (193). When Tippins says that "cold-blooded murder" was not "stupid," Watson challenges Tippins' ethical decisions that has led him as county sheriff: "Big scandal . . . Slave labor at Deep Lake?" inquires Watson, referring to illegal activity Tippins engages in to acquire profit and power. Tippins, though, argues a difference between justice and progress; killing minorities in the name of justice is different than killing whites in "cold-blood" (193). Later in the conversation, Watson ridicules Tippins' logic, calling him, "a fucking idiot" (194). What this interaction exposes is the muddled lines between right and wrong, justice and injustice, causing even the county Sherriff to question a potential murderer's innocence.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Frank initially accuse Watson of murdering Green, Hannah, and Dutchy?

Discussion Question 2

Richard points a gun at Watson when Watson shows up at the Harden house after the Chatham Bend murders. What compels Richard to do this?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Tippins not deputize Watson? It appears that Tippins believes Watson's account of events. What are the Sheriff's motivations for not allowing Watson to legally kill Cox?

Vocabulary

squall, contour, careen, jeer, nicker, chisel, unseaworthy, peculiar

Book I, Section 5

Summary

Mamie Smallwood (195-196) — Watson returned to Chokoloskee “half-crazy with exhaustion” (195). Out of ammunition, Watson purchased shotgun shells from Smallwood, which were waterlogged because of the storm. Smallwood told Watson, “These ain’t the shells you want when you go man-hunting” (195). Desperate, Watson took them anyway. As Watson was about to leave Chokoloskee, the townsmen gathered around his boat. Watson told them his plan: he would go to Chatham Bend, kill Leslie, and return in the next few days. D.D. House, Bill and Mamie’s father, said Watson needed to bring back either Leslie’s head or body to prove that Leslie was dead, or the townsmen would assume Watson was guilty of murdering Dutchy, Waller, and Hannah. Before he left, Watson called for his wife Edna Kate. She emerged out of the Smallwood house. Watson promised Kate that he would return for her birthday, which was in a few days.

Henry Short (197-198) — Several days later, Henry heard Watson’s boat approach shore. The House family grabbed their guns and left to meet Watson at shore. Ida House, D.D.’s wife, forced Henry to accompany D.D. and Bill. Henry, knowing that “no nigger had no business over there,” strongly resisted Ida’s request (197). But because Ida was so concerned with her husband and son’s safety, she forced Henry to go and protect them. Henry retrieved his rifle and reluctantly joined the crowd.

Bill House (199-206) —An armed crowd greeted Watson, who smiled and waved from his boat. Watson approached the crowd, asking for his wife and kids. D.D. House raised his gun and demanded to see Leslie’s dead body. Watson did not have Leslie’s body, but he did have Leslie’s hat, which featured a fresh new bullet hole that marked the place Watson shot him in the head. Supposedly, after Watson shot him, Leslie’s body fell into the water and was carried away with the current. D.D. House told Watson that the hat was not sufficient evidence to prove that Leslie was truly dead. House’s speculation made Watson angry. Watson’s anger increased when he noticed his friends Alderman, Erskine Thompson, and Henry Short armed in the crowd. D.D. House told Watson to hand over his weapons. Watson refused. Silence spread along the crowd until Bill shouted, “Mister Watson, you are under arrest” (204). After a period of stillness and uncertainty, Watson swung his shotgun up. Bill fired his gun, and “after that, all them guns let go together” (205). Watson lay dead before them, dozens upon dozens of shotgun shells buried into his body.

Hoad Storter (207) — Hoad was not a part of the crowd that killed Watson, but Hoad did come to the Chokoloskee shore soon after hearing gunshots.

Bill House (208-209) — After Watson was shot, Kate sat sobbing on the Smallwoods' porch. Mamie instructed Kate to hide—the vengeful mob would take their anger out on Watson’s wife and kids. As Kate crawled under the Smallwood store with her children,

men jeered and shouted at her. Bill House tried to settle the men, but they would not listen. When the mob left, Mamie brought Kate and her kids into their house, mainly because no one else would take them.

Hoad Storter (210-213) — The Storter family was shocked when Hoad returned home and reported Watson's death. After several days, Lucius Watson showed up at the Storters. Lucius had heard about the awful hurricane and wanted to check-in on his family. He initially went to Chatham Bend but found no one there. Next, he went to the Storters', who had to break the news to Lucius that his father was killed in Chokoloskee.

Bill House (214-220) — Bill was convinced that he and his neighbors did the right thing by killing Watson: "If Watson's gun had not misfired, Daddy House would have been dead" (214). Watson's body lay dead on the shore overnight, which bothered Bill. In guilt, Bill visited Watson's body: "It ain't that I'm sorry . . . men like me that weren't never cut out to be killers" (215). The next morning Bill and a few others buried Watson. Later that day, Tippins visited Chokoloskee. The townsmen told Tippins that Watson was not lynched, but shot in self-defense. Tippins found this story unlikely. Tippins accused Bill of organizing a murder mob, in which Bill responded: "We was just ordinary fellers that never knew how to handle this wild hombre til we had him laying face down in the dirt" (218). As Tippins left Chokoloskee, he told the men that they were scheduled to appear in the Fort Myers court.

Mamie Smallwood (221) — Ted Smallwood was one of the few men who did not participate in the shooting, and thus, had a clear conscious. But Mamie was scared either Bill or her father would be prosecuted in court for being the first ones to shoot Watson.

Sherriff Tippins (222-232) — Tippins did not believe the self-defense story. "Never mind if Watson had it coming . . . there was murder perpetrated on the shore of Monroe County" (222). But Tippins, being a hard-nosed racist, wanted to believe the Chokoloskee white men instead of Watson's black field hand, Frank, who was the Chatham murders only witness. Once in court, Tippins was certain Bill House was guilty; Bill appeared to be the posse's only leader. When the trial began, the men pled innocent under self-defense. Tippins noted that "these men weren't killers. They were honest settlers . . . Yet when twenty men slay one, some responsibility must be taken" (223). Watson's son Eddie worked as a courthouse clerk and aimed to assist on the trial.

After hearing depositions, Cole and Walt Langford entered the courtroom and tried to persuade Tippins to drop the case. When Langford began defending the killers, one of the posse members shouted at Tippins, "Justice was done, you stupid bastard, and I'm proud of it" (226). Cole and Tippins discussed the matter privately, and Tippins expressed his need for justice, which Cole scoffed at: "[Justice]? How about it, Frank?" (227). It is revealed that Tippins sold black prisoners as slave labor at a Cole-owned property. Embarrassed by Cole's leverage, Tippins went back into the courtroom and deputized the posse, which effectively declared them innocent. But Tippins was still left with many unanswered questions: Why did the black man, Frank, initially accuse

Watson? Did Watson actually attempt to fire into a crowd of 20 armed men? With no clear answers, Tippins “had to conclude [Watson] told the truth” (229). Tippins transferred Frank to another County jail, and Tippins and another Sheriff joke that they would treat this “damn nigger . . . right” (229). On the boat ride to Key West, Frank jumped overboard and drowned.

Carrie Langford (233-238) — Carrie deeply mourned for her father’s murder. She noticed a different sort of grief in Eddie, who had hardened ever since he worked on his father’s murder trial. Eddie hated discussing his father and refused to talk to Lucius or Carrie about him. Lucius had taken Watson’s death harder than anyone. Carrie was unsure how Kate felt; Kate was always quiet and sullen, and her kids were “muted desperate creatures and no fun at all” (236). When Carrie told Kate that they reburied her husband, she asked kindly, “Next to Mrs. Watson?” (237). Carrie remarked, “After six years of marriage, three young children . . . she has never really seen herself as his honest-to-God-wife” (237). Kate wanted to forget about Watson completely, which Carrie found terrible.

Nell Dyer (239-242) — Nell was a 12-year-old girl whose family once lived on Chatham Bend with the Watsons. Her father, Fred Dyer, was the former foreman on Watson’s land. As a small girl, Nell developed a crush on Lucius, who was nearly a decade older than her. One day, Nell’s father decided to leave Chatham Bend, and demanded Watson pay him his earnings. But knowing Watson’s rule about leaving a harvest early, he left empty-handed. Enraged, Fred moved his family away from the Bend. This broke Nell’s heart; she liked Mister Watson and was in love with Lucius. The next time Nell and Lucius saw each other was five years later, at Watson’s burial.

Carrie Langford (243-248) —At Watson’s burial, Carrie asked Tippins, “Was justice done here?” and Tippins responded, “This was murder . . . but some would say that was justice, too” (244). Carrie reflected upon the last time her father and mother were together: in 1901, Watson visited their house in Fort Myers, when Jane was dying. They met for some time before Watson took off. Jane later told Carrie that “there is a great wound in your poor father” (247). Back at the burial, Carrie resolved to repress her grief like Eddie, because it appeared easier than Lucius' openhearted grief.

Hoad Storter (249) — Hoad thought mainly of Lucius when he paid his respects to Watson’s gravesite after the burial. Lucius had recently left the Ten Thousand Islands, instructing Hoad to look after his boat until he returned, “to reclaim the Watson place and get to the bottom of this ugly business” (249).

Analysis

Henry Short continues to experience great personal and racial conflict. He is posed with an impossible proposition when Ida House forces him to join the Watson murder mob: join the mob and be inevitably accused of killing a white man, or defy his white family and face grave punishment. When D.D. and Bill House grab their guns and walk to the water, Ida begs Henry to follow and protect them: “No nigger had no business over

there, she knew that . . . she never cared what fool thing she told a colored man to do" (197). Henry cries and begs her to reconsider. Ida gets angry, saying she "done saved this colored child . . . was this the gratitude they got?" (197). Henry now faces the bind between obeying his white family or defying them. Either circumstance likely leads to death or incarceration: "I known right then that Henry Short was done for," he says (198). Henry then meditates on his personal freedom: "being a nigger, I never had no choice . . . All I wanted was some place I could hide out from life til I was safe again . . . safety was all a black man could ask for" (198). This scene aptly symbolizes Henry's greatest life quandary: if he defies white order he faces inevitable pain and punishment; if he obeys white order he sacrifices his personal choice and freedom. In this scene, Henry chooses his life over his freedom, unsure of what is more valuable.

Watson's personal conflicts take alternative forms. Throughout Book I his character evokes contradictory biblical imagery—Mamie remembers, "Looking straight at Satan" when she sees Watson, but then compares him to the "Prodigal Son" as he draws a crowd of townsmen. Mamie notes that the men who laugh at Watson's jokes would "laugh at the Devil Himself" (178). Later Bill House compares Watson to some kind "old-time prophet in the Bible" (205). Even after he dies, Bill at once says, "He looked like he had fell all the way from Heaven," and then that he was "dead and on his way to Hell" (206, 208). Hoad Storter adequately summarizes these contradictions by saying, "His neighbors were split bad over Ed Watson and they are today" (210). This split over Watson signifies the subjective perspective of moral imperatives. Watson is at once Satan and the Prodigal son; he embodies the townsmen's notions of good and evil, and they have a challenging time distinguishing one concept from the other.

After Watson dies, Hoad Storter evokes the connection between natural disaster and human destruction. The great hurricane of 1909 is sandwiched between the three murders on Chatham Bend and Watson's death; the hurricane is said to metaphorically murder many people's homes, settlements, and lives. Reflecting upon the hurricanes devastation, Hoad remarks: "all a man had cleared off, hoed, and built all the hard labor and discouragement of years and years, could be washed away over night" (211). Using the hurricane to support "those murders that came after the hurricane," Hoad grapples with loss and impermanence (211). He mentions that other people in Chokoloskee are musing similar concepts, which is why many townsmen turn to the Lord: "Folks saw all these calamities as signs of the Lord's wrath. In order to comprehend the natural disaster and the murders, people in Chokoloskee turn to religion, finding refuge in neither man nor nature.

The dichotomy between moral and legal justice is in constant conflict throughout the novel. For the many narrators, justice is a subjective variable that is flexible and permissible depending on circumstance. When Walt Langford addresses the defendants in the Watson murder trial, he laments that there is "no way justice could be done" through the courts (226). One of the posse members, Isaac Yeomans, then shouts "Justice was done . . . and I'm proud of it" (226). Tippins is steadfast that justice must resolve the injustice of Watson's murder, but is ultimately talked down by Cole, who says, "these men are not murderers" (225). What "about justice?" Tippins asks. Cole reminds Tippins of his illegal slave trading, and asks him if he deems that just. Later,

Tippins tells Bill House that Frank “is gonna see some justice, Bill. Same justice you gave Mr. Watson” (228). Thus, this fragmented and manipulated vision of justice is proven to be ineffective for dealing with serious offenses. The posse’s logic for killing Watson is “just” under moral principal: Watson’s immorality made murdering him moral. But Tippins argues that a mob murdering a white man cannot be moral, and it was imperative to “establish responsibility” (227). But Tippins view of justice is similarly narrow, as the killing and enslavement of blacks is “just” because their skin color is, according to him, inherently immoral.

Discussion Question 1

What do you make of Watson getting killed at the shore? Was his murder justified given the circumstances or completely unwarranted?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Jim Cole want to dismiss the Watson murder trial?

Discussion Question 3

What do you make of Tippins telling Carrie: “This was murder . . . but some would say that was justice, too” (244). Was Watson's murder justice? How?

Vocabulary

calamity, thrum, bridle, procure, debilitate, felonious

Book II, Section 1

Summary

Prefaced Quote (251) — "Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably. – John Milton" (251)

"A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see [its] mystery." – John Keats" (251)

"If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat and we should die of that roar which is the other side of silence. – George Eliot" (251).

Winter (253-255) — Book II begins one year after Watson's death. Lucius Watson was "hobbled by melancholy and introspection . . . he was thought unsociable" (253). Hoad and Carrie suggested that Lucius stay away from Chokoloskee for a while; the neighbors' emotions were "a volatile bad mix of guilt and fear" and Lucius's relation to Watson "would be asking for serious trouble" (253). Throughout this time, Lucius had wondered where his half-brother Rob went after the Tucker murders. Lucius was the only family member close with Rob, and he sorely missed him. Lucius was not as close with Carrie and Eddie, who learned to shun their father's memory. When Lucius went to visit his young stepmother, Kate, she said, "Watson is a closed chapter in my life" (255). Kate remarried her childhood sweetheart, Herkimer Burdett.

The Undiscovered Country (255-257) — Lucius enlisted in the Merchant Marine. When he returned to Fort Meyers, Carrie insisted he attend state university. He did so, and for his senior thesis he proposed to write an objective study on Everglades pioneer Edgar J. Watson. The proposal was rejected on the basis of Lucius's familial subjectivity, and instead Lucius wrote his senior thesis on the "unknown region called the Everglades Frontier" (255). Lucius struggled to write the thesis, as he frequently wandered "off course to work on the aborted biography of E.J. Watson" (256). Struggling to complete his work and harboring difficult emotions, Lucius turned to alcohol. He drank heavily and stumbled into trouble late at night. The university suspended him after he got arrested. Lucius's brother Eddie, now working as a bank officer under Walt Langford, scoffed at Lucius's immaturity. Shunned by his family, Lucius turned to Nell Dyer as "his only confidante" (257).

Nell Dyer (257-262) — The Dyer family worked on Chatham Bend with Watson when Lucius was little. Fred Dyer was once Watson's foreman. His wife Sybil Dyer was a beautiful, smart woman who Watson deeply admired. Jane Watson had recently passed away and Watson was lonely. Watson "would confide in his foreman's wife the saga of his shadowed childhood and the loss of his family plantation," and soon, fell somewhat in love with her (258). But after the murder rumors increased, Fred Dyer dragged his family away from Chatham Bend without pay. Lucius was fond of Nell as a little girl, and

was sad to see her leave. Back in present time, Lucius reconnected with Nell and realized that “her face had been dear to him forever” (259). The two of them began spending time together, and fall fast in love. Nell confided in Lucius that Sybil admitted to sleeping with Watson before she married Fred, thus implying her brother Watt Dyer was likely Watson’s biological son. One day, “Lucius vanished without warning” (262). It was over a year before his family and Nell learned he had enlisted in the Army.

No Man’s Land (262-266) — Lucius shot excellently, like his father, and was soon promoted to a sniper in the Army. While enlisted, Lucius acted “cold and mechanical . . . accepting his assignment as his patriotic duty” (262). One day, in a foggy battle, Lucius was separated from his patrol. When the fog cleared, he saw a young German crouching to defecate —“He murdered that young soldier as the face turned toward him” (263). Lucius, haunted by his decision to kill this young man, resigned from the Army, citing that war “was the greatest of all sins against Creation” (263). Despite these newfound opinions on the war, Lucius felt self-hatred toward his inability to complete his civic duty: “Useless Lucius . . . Couldn’t even die for his own country” (264). Lucius returned to Fort Myers; he saw Nell in town, but was so ashamed that “he pretended he hadn’t seen her” (264).

Living in shame and disillusionment, Lucius again turned to alcohol and “nursed thoughts of suicide” (264). Walter no longer allowed Lucius in his and Carrie’s home. Lucius believed the only way he could reclaim his salvation was to take over his father’s old house on Chatham Bend. He also felt responsible to discover the “true circumstances of his father’s death and the identities and motives of the men who lynched him” (265). Eddie ridiculed Lucius’s obsession with their father, and in turn, Lucius criticized Eddie and Carrie for believing the fake and terrible stories about Watson.

To Lost Man’s River (266-269) — Lucius returned to Lost Man’s River, which was still wearing signs of the Great Hurricane. No one lived on the land anymore, but Yankee developers were planning on building a wealthy winter community. Lucius journeyed down Lost Man’s River to visit his old friends Owen and Sarah Harden. Owen told him that Bill House was scheduled to become the next caretaker of the Watson place. Lucius established himself in a side cabin outside Sarah and Owen’s house, and began inquiring about his father’s death. The locals nicknamed him “Colonel” for his educated speech. Rumors spread throughout the island that Lucius was researching his father’s death and making a list of all the men involved in the shooting. People soon grew weary and cold of him.

Nigger Short (270-275) — If people did confide information with Lucius, they usually blamed things on “Nigger Short.” Lucius, tolerant of black people, dismissed these claims as racist. But even Lucius’s trusted friend Hoad told Lucius that Henry was at the shooting. Richard and Sarah told Lucius about Henry’s life since Watson’s death—he married Liza Harden, who ultimately left him because “Henry never talked” (271). Henry was incredibly sad and lonely and had a “low opinion of himself” (271). Lucius then tracked down Henry. Reluctantly, Henry told Lucius about the day Watson died. Henry said that Ida House forced him to go and that he did not want to be at the shooting.

Henry liked Edgar Watson. Lucius believed him, realizing “his whole inquiry [with Henry] seemed unreasonable” (274). Still hesitant, Lucius told him, “You have nothing to fear, Henry. Not from me” (274).

The List (275-278) — After listening to outlandish gossip and measured accounts from townsmen, “Lucius learned the names of every armed man present” at his father’s murder (275). Developing this list became an obsession for Lucius; “it helped compensate for a wasted decade of inaction” (275). Lucius was unsure what he was going to do with this list—he would not kill the men on it. Because he was not a killer, Lucius feels as if he had failed his father, who was honorable and able to stand up for what he thought was right. Later on, Lucius heard that Walter Langford died. Hearing the news late, Lucius missed the funeral. Eddie and Carrie were deeply upset by Lucius’s absence. When Lucius returned to Lost Man’s River, the Hardens told him a stranger named John Tucker came looking for him. Owen thought that this stranger was the long lost Rob Watson.

Owen and Sarah (278-280) — Although Lucius felt sorrow over not marrying Nell, he had developed a desperate attraction to Sarah Harden. Owen was gone all the time, doing illegal work with the dangerous Speck Daniels. Sarah told Lucius that she was scared Owen was losing his sense of “lawfulness” (279). Lucius resisted making any advances on Sarah, mainly because of his friendship with Owen. But one day, when Sarah walked by him in a towel, Lucius embraced and kissed her. Realizing her mistake, Sarah cried and ran away. Ashamed by his disloyalty to Owen, Lucius left the Hardens property on Lost Man’s River and moved elsewhere.

Caxambas (280-283) —Lucius accepted an assistant teacher’s position at the university. Over the next year or so he completed his doctoral thesis, A History of Southwest Florida and the Everglades Frontier. The thesis proved to be successful, which allowed Lucius to pursue his “objective biography of the pioneer sugarcane planter E.J. Watson” with support from the university (281). Invigorated, Lucius wrote a biography proposal to the university: “the real [Watson] has been virtually entombed by tale and legend since his death … perpetuated by the Islanders themselves” (282). His proposal concluded: “To redeem my subject’s essential humanity is the task before me” (283).

The Indian (283-286) — An Indian visited Lucius and gave him a burial urn with Rob Watson’s remains inside. The Indian said a man named Chicken Collins told him to give the urn to Lucius.

In The Backcountry (286-297) — Florida was undergoing lots of development—a massive road was being built between islands, and “the last Indians would be driven from Shark River to make way for a huge wilderness park” (287). Lucius drove along the unfinished road, which ceased in the midst of a wooded swampland. Amid this swampland was the “Gator Hook Bar,” a slum spot for outlaws and drunks to do dangerous things without consequence. Rumor had it that Leslie Cox hid out there. Lucius entered the bar and asked for Chicken Collins.

Several men in the bar recognized Lucius as Watson's son, telling him, "You sure come to the wrong place . . . lest you want trouble" (289). Despite the warning, Lucius entered the bar and sat down next to a familiar face, Crockett "Speck" Daniels. Speck complained about all of the recent development around the Islands, saying it was putting people out of work, stopping "a man from supporting his family" (291). Speck then explained that he was the current caretaker on Chatham Bend, hired by a Miami attorney, Watson Dyer, to maintain the place until a quitclaim is settled. The attorney, Speck said, seemed to have motivation to preserve the Watson house. The conversation tightened between Speck and Lucius when Speck confronted Lucius about his list. Speck baited Lucius, calling him "weak-hearted" and unable to act upon his urge to kill the men on his list. Lucius did not bite; he instead persisted the whereabouts of Chicken Collins. Someone finally pointed him out, and Lucius dragged Chicken out of the bar. Speck followed Lucius and continued to bait him, calling Lucius a coward and "nowhere near the man his daddy was" (297). As Lucius left the Gator Hook, he noted, "Crockett Daniels . . . was not a man to turn your back on in the backcountry" (297).

Watt Dyer (297-299) — Lucius received a letter from Attorney Watson Dyer, urging him to "refile the late Mr. Watson's claim on Chatham Bend before the U.S. government condemned" it (297). Lucius called Dyer to have him explain his letter. Watt wanted to protect the Watson house, and not have it become a nature reserve. When Lucius asked why he had taken an interest in protecting the house, Dyer cited "sentimental reasons" (298). All Dyer needed was power of attorney. Lucius recalled how unlikable Watt Dyer was as a child; he seemed not to have changed much.

Analysis

Book II's introductory quotes signify a common theme: that life is a vast mystery, and the human experience cannot be categorized into binaries. This theme carries heavily throughout Book II; Lucius Watson embarks on a polarizing quest for truth and his linear approach to a dynamic subject is often confronted and challenged.

Lucius's self-hatred and emotional numbness are clear sings of his unexamined trauma. After Watson died, Lucius was unable to adequately express his emotions—Eddie and Carrie shunned their father's memory, leading Lucius to internalize his grief. Lucius's sudden decision to enroll in the Army without the consultation of his friends and family is indicative of his greater emotional detachment. Nell observed that Lucius's selfish decision to leave unannounced reflects "a poor opinion of himself . . . only Lucius despised Lucius" (262). While in the Army, Lucius said his mind became an "iron wall of cold and mechanical inhumanity . . . and that illusion, for a time, sheltered his sanity" (262). Lucius's inability to cope with his grief forces him to disassociate from feeling and thought; he seeks serenity by absolving himself for consciousness. After killing a German soldier in combat—a young-faced boy defecating in the bushes—Lucius was frightened by his innate and immediate reaction to take a life. Lucius left the military, and fell deeper into his grieving spiral. There seemed to be no available outlet in which Lucius could alleviate his sadness.

Paradoxically, Matthiessen portrays Eddie's blunt coping mechanism as even less effective than Lucius's aforementioned detachment. Although Eddie has a good job, a home, and a family, his father's death has left him sour and unhappy. Eddie denies his father's innocence, refuses to discuss his memory, and feares his likeness to Watson. Eddie declares Lucius's grief a "morbid obsession," and that Lucius needs to "get on with [his] life" in order to be free from their father's burden (265). But Lucius notes that Eddie's "lived in dread" of what their shared "ancestry might signify if even one of those terrible stories about 'Bloody Watson' proved to be true" (265). In other words, Eddie's trauma is rooted in fear of public damnation; if he were to accept and acknowledge his father's flaws, Eddie fears he would become his scorned father. Lucius's trauma, however, is much more nuanced; he chooses to "sniff out the truce circumstances of his father's death" in order to make meaning of his personal grief (265)

Henry Short's self-hatred differs from Lucius's in that it is inextricable to his character; he hates himself because he is black and unable to defy the boundaries predetermined by white society. Owen Harden called Henry a "high type of man who had a low opinion of himself. White people had robbed him of his chance for a home and family and now they had taken his self-respect as well" (272). Atop his ascribed racial inferiority, Henry is haunted by slanderous rumors that "Nigger Short" was the first one to shoot at Watson. Whether Henry shot Watson first or not seems beside the point; what is evident is that Henry's white neighbors impinge their guilt and disbelief onto Henry, thus taunting Henry with their own self-hatred, insecurities, and regrets. By inheriting the white man's problems, Henry's struggle signifies a larger concept—oppressed peoples mirror their oppressor's pain and weakness. Because of his skin color, Henry has a disorienting vision of himself.

The glitzy prospect of progress and capitalism in Book I is steeply contrasted with the collapsing, disheveled architectural development and environmental degradation in Book II. Yes, south central Florida is "emerging into the 20th century" (145), as Mamie Smallwood predicted in Book I, but the reality is not as pretty as was once imagined. Cruising through the Everglades, Lucius noted the disappointing development that was destroying the surrounding ecosystem: "Only in this last decade had the sparkling expanses been torn and muddied by steam shovels and drag lines, until wild human inhabitants . . . could scarcely be imagined anymore" (286). This separation between destructive development and "wild human inhabitants" signifies the illusion of American progress. While profits would surely rise for the wealthy investors and developers, "Indians would be driven from Shark River to make way for a huge wilderness park," remarked Lucius, who had a deep passion for Native American culture and Florida geography (287). Matthiessen crystalizes his critique of obscene development by depicting the expensive "Chevalier Road," a corporate investment that died "in the intoxicated days of the Florida land boom" (287). Chevelier Road was cut "ten miles short of its destination" and fed into a woodland swamp, making it quite literally a road that leads to nowhere (287). This metaphor implies that destroying the environment in a wasted industrial effort is futile.

Discussion Question 1

How does Lucius's response to his father's death compare to his siblings, Carrie and Eddie? What does Lucius's "self-hated" say about his relationship with his father?

Discussion Question 2

What is the deeper meaning behind Lucius's desperate attraction to Sarah Harden? Does Lucius's lust simply reflect his longing for human connection or something else?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lucius' depiction of south Florida in Book II differ from Watson's vision of development in Book I? What might Matthiessen be suggesting about industrial progress?

Vocabulary

stirring, senescence, obdurate, volatile, enshrouded, mundane, taciturn, annul, scrupulous

Book II, Section 2

Summary

Affidavit of Bill W. House (299-303) — While doing research for his Watson biography, Lucius discovered Bill House's affidavit that described Watson's death. Bill's affidavit claimed that Watson raised his gun with "intent to kill," which is why the men killed Watson (300). Using this information for his book, Lucius said House's account "raises more questions than it answers" (301). Self-defense did not seem like a reasonable defense granted Watson never fired at the men. In preparation to file claim on Chatham Bend, Watt Dyer requested to review Lucius's initial manuscripts. Dyer was particularly taken by Watson's accomplishments as a cane planter, discovering "the huge new agriculture in central Florida" (302). Dyer shared Watson's sugarcane story with United Sugar Associates, a corporation interested in Watson's story for profit reasons. They offered to subsidize Lucius as he wrote the biography. Their only stipulation was that Lucius use a pen name, so that his account appeared more objective. Although Lucius resisted, Dyer insisted he comply with the corporation's request.

Sarah Harden (303-308) — Sarah also suggested Lucius use a pen name, and together they created the pseudonym, "L. Watson Collins." Sarah then informed Lucius that she had left Owen. Owen's work had become too dangerous and too unlawful, sending guns to Spanish countries for Crockett Daniels. Weeks later, Lucius sought out Sarah. They smoked weed in Lucius's car and experienced intense sexual tension. They finally kissed and leaned into one another. But then Sarah sporadically turned, yelling at Lucius to "stop lookin me over like some mutt dog eyein meat . . . find your own damn women!" (207). Sarah continued her barrage, calling Lucius a "fanatic" who cared only about his "daddy's death . . . the past" (307). Lucius felt deep regret—"how could he have consider an affair with his friend's wife . . . he needed Nell" (307). They exchanged harsh words, until finally Sarah softened once more, and they wordlessly decided to make love. Lucius "heard himself cry out that he loved her, which in that moment was true" (308). The next morning, they both agreed to not make love again. Sarah said she and Owen were going to try to make it work.

Arbie Collins (308-314) — Returning home, Lucius found a dirty, unkempt man waiting for him by his cabin. The man announced himself as his cousin Arbie Collins, a friend of the late Rob Watson. Arbie told Lucius that Rob gave him his list before he died. Lucius asked Arbie about Rob's life—what he did after he left Chatham Bend and how he died. Arbie said he helped Rob escape Key West after the Tucker murders. Lucius expressed deep sadness that he never got to say goodbye to Rob. Lucius invited Arbie to stay with him indefinitely in order to keep him company and tell him more stories about Rob.

Learning about the Watson biography, Arbie became enraged, saying Watson was not someone who needed to be defended. Rob told Arbie many bad things about Watson. Watt Dyer then phoned Lucius and told him that the sugar company would like to pay him to do a series of lectures regarding Watson's influence on the sugar industry. Lucius

was skeptical, as he had recently learned troubling information about the sugar company's slave-like labor practices and "massive use of chemical fertilizers" (314). Lucius nevertheless agreed to give the lectures.

Murder in the Indian Country (314-317) — Arbie inherited a bag of Rob's belongings after he died, in which was an investigative notebook about Watson's past. Lucius read the notebook and parsed together important information pertaining to the Belle Starr murder, as well as Watson's middle initial that changed from "A" to "J." Lucius deduced that Watson never killed Belle Starr, and only changed his name as a wrongly accused fugitive fleeing a lynch mob.

Black Moon Mirrors (317-320) — Lucius invited Arbie to accompany him on trips to Fort Myers and Chatham Bend. Although reluctant at first, Arbie eventually joined Lucius on his journey, constantly criticizing Lucius's "white-washed" Watson research (312). Lucius wondered why Arbie took mention of Watson so personally. When Lucius told Arbie the plan to preserve Watson's house on Chatham Bend, Arbie responded, "Historic monument? How about a murder monument?" (318). Arbie hypothesized that Lucius wanted to write about Watson as a hero instead of a killer because Lucius had never seen or committed murder. Arbie apparently had, as he suggested by saying, "I know what I'm talking about" (318). Lucius had a traumatic flashback to killing the German in the woods. Arbie continued to beleaguer Lucius about his biography's motive, saying that Watson was a murderer and does not deserve heroic treatment.

In Columbia County (320-328) — Lucius called his cousin Julian Collins, requesting to visit Columbia County, his father's hometown. Julian welcomed his cousin, but told him, "Uncle Edgar remained a forbidden topic in the family" (320). Still, Lucius traveled to Colombia County with Arbie. Lucius researched records in the county clerk's office and stumbled upon files that indicated his father's involvement in D.M. Tolen's murder. Both Watson and Frank Reese were held on trial, and Julian Collins had been arrested as an accessory to murder. The defendants were finally found not guilty and discharged. While reading cross-examinations, Lucius discovered that Leslie Cox had been indicted for Sam Tolen's murder. The next day, a local newspaper interviewed Lucius under his pen name, L. Watson Collins. In the published article, Lucius was cited saying that the Watson murder rumors were greatly exaggerated. Not knowing Lucius and L. Watson Collins were the same person, Julian Collins and his family read the article and demand L. Watson Collins come visit them at once, because "he should know the truth" (328).

Watson Dyer (328-333) — Hearing news about the Tolen trial, Dyer rushed to Colombia County to talk with Lucius. Dyer told Lucius that it was important that he "point out the complete absence of hard evidence that E.J. Watson had ever committed murder," in order to embolden Watson's status as historic frontiersman (331). Arbie, who was accompanying Lucius, ridiculed Dyer for this approach. Dyer then questioned Arbie's identity, asking him if his name was "Arbie" or "R.B." Arbie defiantly asked why Dyer was involved in filing the land claim anyway: "Call it nostalgia for the old family place, call it my sense of fair play," responded Dyer (330). When Dyer left, Arbie instructed Lucius to "stay away from him . . . he's bad news" (332).

Ann Marry Collins Watson (333-334) — Lucius visited Watson's first wife's gravesite. She died when she was 17.

The Deacon (334-336) / The Empty Manor (336-337) — At the gravesite, Lucius met Deacon Grover G. Kinard, who claimed he was one of the few people alive who truly knew Edgar Watson. Kinard brought Lucius to Watson's old home. Kinard said that the Carolina Watsons "was good people, prosperous farmers, all but Edgar's daddy" (336). Kinard told Lucius that the major tension between the Tolen's and the Watson's was land—Sam Tolen somehow wrongfully acquired Watson's family property, which "drove Watson crazy" (336).

The Fastest Fastball in the U.S.A. (338-342) — Kinard told Lucius that Sam Tolen built a baseball field on his plantation, and although he did not play himself, he coached a team. Leslie Cox was the best player on Tolen's team and he threw "the hardest ball I ever head of and he never minded throwing at your head" (338). Although Leslie had Major League potential, he had an erratic and scary temperament: "nobody like him much" (338). Watson's niece, May Collins, had a big crush on Leslie, and he used to hang around her house on the weekends. This is how Watson and Leslie got to know one another. One day Sam Tolen had some harsh words for Leslie's dad, so Leslie threatened him with a shotgun. Sam was found dead soon after that. Watson was tied to the murder but there was no incriminating evidence. Mike Tolen accused Watson of killing Sam. Mike was mysteriously murdered soon after. Watson was then arrested for killing Mike Tolen. After Leslie and Watson were acquitted for the respective Tolen murders, they fled Colombia County knowing the townsmen would take revenge.

The Banks Family (342-344) — Calvin Banks was a quiet and respectful black man who was known to stash all of his money in his cabin. Before Leslie fled Columbia County, he killed Calvin, his wife, and his nephew, and took his $300. Leslie bragged to friends about murdering Calvin, and before he could part, he was arrested and sentenced to life in prison. Leslie had only been in prison a few months when he escaped and "never been seen since, not by the law" (344).

Fort White (344-345) — Kinard brought Lucius to Watson's childhood home. Although Watson had a difficult childhood, he was a "good farmer . . . thick through the shoulders and uncommon strength" (344).

Crazy Watson Eyes (345-348) — Under the guise of L. Watson Collins, Lucius visited his cousins, Hettie and Ellen Collins. Lucius was ashamed to lie to his own family, but he knew they would not speak with him if he were Watson's son. Ellen and Hettie began sharing stories and information about Great-Uncle Edgar: "Uncle Edgar could be so pleasant and considerate, but nobody dared cross him" (347). They "knew something dreadful happened in his youth in Carolina," but are not sure what that was (347). As they talk, the cousins became comfortable with one another, especially Lucius and Hettie, who were latently flirtatious.

Raking Leaves by Moonlight (348-352) — Paul Edmunds entered the house and interrupted Lucius and Hettie's conversation. Edmunds had heard that a famous

historian L. Watson Collins was interviewing people about Watson. Edmunds sat down and recanted his Watson memories: “We think we’ve got the history down as good as you’re going to get it” (350). Edmunds said that Colonel William Myers originally bought a plantation in Colombia County during the War. When he died, he left the land to his wife, Granny Ellen, with instructions to give it to her nephews, one of whom was Edgar Watson. Because Ellen despised Watson’s father, she grew to despise Watson, too. Edmunds informed the room that “Uncle Edgar was thought guilty of many things he didn’t do, which made him bitter . . . father came home from war a brutal drunkard who beat his son unmercifully. You keep whipping a good dog, he will turn bad” (352).

Analysis

Bill House’s assertion that Watson was killed in self-defense makes little logical sense to characters like Sheriff Tippins and Lucius, who want to avenge Edgar Watson with a narrow vision of justice. But Bill’s self-defense interpretation, which Lucius reads in Bill’s affidavit, goes beyond what transpired at the Watson murder scene. Considering the narratives in Book I—the fearful and skeptical elucidations regarding Watson’s character—“self-defense” can be opined not just as defense against Watson raising his gun, but the prolonged defense of Chokoloskee. Hoad expressed town-wide relief when Watson died. The self-defense described in Bill’s affidavit evokes Chokoloskee’s collective opinion that Edgar Watson was a widespread threat. Killing him extended far beyond the night he died.

A reoccurring thread throughout Shadow Country is the ambiguity of race and ethnicity in an America inundated with mixed blood. The social response to mixed-race identities was far from ambiguous, however, as people often took a polarizing approach to what race they, or someone else, was. Sarah Harden addressed this theme in a conversation with Lucius. She relates a story about a Native American Chief who coupled with white settlers and procreated many mixed-race children. Sarah observes the “mixed-up bunch that’s running around south Florida,” confused about who they are and where they come from (306). Sarah has particular authority, as she is mixed-race but classified as white, and her husband, Owen, is mixed-race, and classified as Native American. This polarizing perception of race and ethnicity constantly plagues and burdens minority characters, as they confuse their humanity with social-prescribed identity.

Lucius contemplates the troubled and convoluted legacy his father left behind and how it has impacted his children. Yet, despite these musings, Lucius does not permit himself to criticize his father. Drinking late at night, Lucius considered “how the Watson children, and especially the sons, had been bent by the great weight of the dead father—pale saplings yearling for the light twisting up and round the fallen tree” (319). By critically identifying his dead father as a source of complication in his life, Lucius makes strides toward personal salvation. He is weighed down by his father’s life and death, and has thus far only found personal redemption by attempting to research and redeem his father. But by considering the unfair and hefty burden Watson endowed upon his children, Lucius foreshadows a showdown between living in his father’s past or living his

own life. Although Lucius recognizes this potential conflict, he has yet to be critical of it, and yet to seek internal salvation.

Baseball serves as a subtle and nuanced symbol for innocence in troubled times, as well as a mechanism to overshadow moral conflict. In a life suffused with death and suffering, dangerous characters such as Sam Tolen and Leslie Cox are portrayed as using baseball as a means of escape: “Besides whiskey and cattle, the only thing Sam [Tolen] cared about was baseball,” said Grover Kinard (338). Leslie Cox, on the other hand, is a borderline baseball prodigy, reported to throw “the fastest fastball in the U.S.A.” (338). Both Sam and Leslie markedly hate each other, and both are characterized as “raspy tongued” and “lonely” (338). But baseball offers these emotionally illiterate men an outlet. Leslie pours his heart and anger into every game, leading to an awful in-game attitude; “nobody liked him very much” (338). Tolen is similarly disliked in Colombia County, but exhibits a happy and generous demeanor on the baseball diamond. Matthiessen uses baseball as a metaphorical device to demonstrate his characters' complexities and trivialities, but also to personalize his characters identities.

In a powerful scene, Grover Kinard grapples with mortality and impermanence, two themes subject to indirect scrutiny throughout the novel. After Lucius discussed Watson’s life and death, Kinard remarsd, “Just goes to show how life leaks away when you ain’t paying attention. One day you look up, look around, and the world is empty. Not empty exactly but something is wrong, there ain’t no color left to life” (345). Kinard articulates the grief and trouble that plagues many of the novel’s characters—death is certain, and we all must live on despite death’s decisive impacts. Lucius cannot comprehend the gravity of Kinard’s sentiment because he is too transfixed with his father’s past. To this Kinard retort, “Watson’s long gone . . . gone away like they was never here at all” (345). Lucius has not yet accepted Kinard’s inevitable reality: that we all must move on, or life will pass us blissfully by.

Discussion Question 1

How does Leslie’s volatile relationship with baseball successfully foreshadow his future as a murderer?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Lucius is objectively researching his father’s murder? Why does he not believe Bill House’s affidavit?

Discussion Question 3

Is Kinard’s perspective of mortality overly morbid or adequately realistic?

Vocabulary

stipulated, scraggy, strenuous, negligible, dissuade, peregrine, primordial, peruse, titillate, rheumatism

Book II, Section 3

Summary

Shining on Unseen Beneath the Pines (352-354) — Edmunds recalled when Watson returned to Colombia County after a long time away, sliding into town in the night and building a small shack on his “Collins tract” (352). Watson had a good relationship with the Collins’s at the time, and many of them lived and worked with him after he married Kate. The Collins family was living with Watson when Sam Tolen was murdered. When Watson was accused of committing said murder, the Collins family did not want to testify against their generous and loving uncle who housed them and gave them work. Calvin Banks, however, did testify against Watson. Supposedly, Calvin knew about a stash of hidden gold. Rumor had it that Watson instructed Leslie Cox to kill Calvin and take the gold. When Lucius questioned the validity of these rumors, Edmunds retorted: “Can’t put no trust in us local folks that has lived in these woods all their lives” (353).

Witched Apples (354-357) — Hettie said that Leslie Cox worshipped Watson, and was excited to marry May Collins so he could be kin with Watson. But Leslie was arrested for murdering Sam Tolen the day he and May got married—“So in the Lord’s eyes . . . that unholy wedlock was never consummated” (356).

A Failure of the Spirit (357-360) — Lucius asked Ellen and Hettie what they knew about Julian and Willie’s accessory to murder charges in the Tolen trials. Lucius knew he had breeched an unspeakable subject—“if the brothers had testified against an uncle of their own blood, they had transgressed the oldest code of . . . archaic honor” (358). Hettie explained to Lucius that the boys “refused to tell lies under oath” because they were “honorable young Christian men” (358). Still, the family felt shame at Julian and Willie’s “intractable dilemma . . . inflicted on this family by Papa” (358). Lucius now understood the vow of silence that the Collins’s have taken; Watson’s transgressions had caused a “painful splinter of ambiguity and guilt” (358).

Two Green One-Cent Stamps (360-362) — Hettie confirmed Arbie’s story about Rob selling Watson’s ship in Key West. When Lucius mentioned Arbie’s involvement in this incident, both Ellen and Hettie claim that they have never heard of an Arbie Collins, and the cousin that helped Rob sell the ship was Lee Collins. Ellen said that the only R.B. in the family was an “R.B. Watson . . . and that’s cousin Rob, of course” (361). As Lucius prepared to leave, he regretfully informed his cousins that he was actually Lucius Watson. Lucius apologized for deceiving them. He explained his reasoning, and seeing tears form in both his cousins’ eyes, he left. Lucius ruefully walked away from the house. Turning out of the driveway, Lucius ran into a woman who introduced herself as Jane Straughter. Lucius briefly recalled the “crisis over Jane and Henry Short” (362). Jane then asked Lucius to tell Henry Short, if ever saw him again, to give Henry the “warmest wishes of Miss Jane Straughter” (362).

The Clarity of Churchyards (363-365) — Lucius realized that Rob is Arbie. Walking through a churchyard, Lucius reflected upon his lonely quest for the truth. What was he really hoping to find? “Belonging,” he considered, “his encounter with his kin would not change his fundamental isolation from his family” (364).

Alachua Prairie (365-369) — Lucius walked by the Cox family home, and found Leslie’s dad, Will, standing in the doorway. Lucius asked Will if he had seen his son in recent years. “If Les ever come back, folks would of knowed him,” said Will (366). Will said that when Sam Tolen tried to bully him at his home—tell “me what I could do and could not do”—Leslie went to Watson for advice on how to deal with the Tolens. “We wasn’t lookin for no trouble but Tolens brought it and my boy Les took care of it” (367). Will said that Watson was not involved in the shootings; Watson only gave Leslie advice on how to deal with enemies. Then Will inquired into Watson’s death: “Heard it was a nigger man killed him” (368). Upon departing, Lucius contemplated his father’s innocence: “the murders behind much of the Watson myth had been committed by another” (369).

In the Fall (369-375) — Lucius flashbacked to his last night in Chatham Bend, the last night he spent with his father. Lucius was preparing to tell Watson that either he stayed or Leslie Cox left. Leslie was scaring all the harvest hands and threatening their lives. Whenever Lucius had tried to confront his father on Leslie’s cruelties, Watson waved him off. That night, frustrated that his father would not budge on Leslie’s bad behavior, Lucius questioned him about Rob’s whereabouts. Watson admitted that the past few years had been hard on him; his own neighbors feared him, and his reputation had been damaged beyond repair. In response to Rob’s whereabouts, Watson said he did not know; Rob fled after the Tucker incident. “Was Rob guilty, Papa?” asked Lucius (370). Watson responded that the ordeal was an accident, and he took full responsibility for what happened. Lucius, who hated how terribly his father treated Rob, asked if Watson loved Rob: “No. Yes. Much too late. I never realized it until that day at Lost Man’s. After I’d harmed him” (371). Lucius had trouble decoding his father’s abstractions, and Watson would not specify what he meant. Watson did not admit to killing the Tuckers. Lucius and his father went to bed in a tension, because “there was no healing the disease between them” (374). Lucius left the next morning and Watson did not stop him.

Lucius reflected upon all of this one night, sleepy and drunk. Then, in an epiphany, Lucius remembered the four black cane cutters who were never accounted for after the Chatham murders. A few weeks later, Lucius found out that the four men had not been seen since they went to Chatham Bend, and that they were probably dead.

A Memory of Shadows (375-382) — Lucius visited his father’s widow, Kate. Lucius scheduled the visit with his half-brother Addison, who was hostile and skeptical of Lucius. At their new house, Addison showed great resentment toward Lucius, who had dropped Watson as a last name and took his stepfather's name of Burdett. Edna did not wish to speak about Watson, and kept her message brief: “Your father was always good to me and kind and loving with his children” (376) she said, and Lucius noted that she was being honest and did not hold resentment. When Lucius asked about the day Watson died, Edna said: “That day was my twenty-first birthday. That’s why he came

back” (378). Edna did not believe many of the negative rumors about Watson, and trusted that he was a good man. She said Leslie was a real killer, unable to socialize or make friends, that all he thought about was killing. Leslie constantly sexually harassed Edna. Lucius left the house concluding that Edna and Addison are both deeply traumatized after watching Watson get gunned down, and were both doing their best to move forward with their lives.

South (382-383) — Lucius headed south to Arcadia, where Watson killed the outlaw Quinn Bass. When Lucius went to the country clerk’s office to inquire into the murder, there were no records proving it ever happened.

The Domesday Book (383-385) — Arbie (or, from now on, Rob) left a note in Fort Myers for Lucius that scheduled a time for them to meet up. While waiting for their evening meet up time, Lucius continued researching for his biography. He read about Sheriff Frank Tippins who “had always been frustrated by the unsolved killing of Ed Watson” (383). Intrigued by Tippins interest, Lucius went to the Fort Myers county clerk's office to find Tippins records on the Watson murder. But to Lucius’ surprise, the records were missing. Lucius suspected his brother Eddie disposed of the records. Lucius asked a deputy if he knew anything about the missing records, and as he asked, he saw Speck Daniels sitting in a cell, staring at him.

Crockett Daniels (385-388) — Lucius inquired about the Watson trial, and Speck opened up about his recollection. Speck said that Tippins heard “some crazy story how a nigger was the first man to fire at Ed Watson” (386). Because Tippins was a stark racist, he took this account seriously. Knowing Henry Short was present at the murder scene, he hunted him: “Tippins could not tolerate that any colored man would think to raise a gun against a white man” (387). After several years of attempting to get a grand jury to hear a retrial for the Watson case, Tippins gave “up on common justice” (388).

Bullet Necklace (388-393) — Speck related a story about how Watson once slit a harvest hand’s throat because he disrespected Josie Jenkins’ cooking. The man did not die, but everyone that worked for Watson was terrified after that. Lucius angrily told Speck to stop spreading stories; he only wanted the truth. Speck scoffed at Lucius’s naïve notion of truth: “Truth? Which one you aim to settle for and make your peace with?” (390). Lucius then noticed that Speck was wearing a necklace made of bullets. Speck admitted that they were the bullets that were extracted from Watson’s corpse. Speck laughed when Lucius demanded Speck to hand over the necklace. As Lucius stood to leave, Speck advised Lucius to stay away from Watt Dyer, who was involved with the KKK and aimed to be a politician. Apparently, Dyer hired Mexicans to kill his enemies.

Tant and Pearl (393-396) — Lucius visited Tant Jenkins. Tant informed Lucius that Speck always thought that Watson was his rightful father, and still did to that day. After catching up a bit, Tant told Lucius his opinion on the Tucker murders: he did not know the truth, but that “there’s a screw loose in [Watson’s] brain” (395).

Eddie (396-398) — Lucius and Tant saw Eddie across the street. Lucius approached Eddie and kindly asked if he could answer a few questions. Eddie lost his temper, erupting at Lucius over his Edgar Watson obsession. After Eddie stormed off in anger, Tant told Lucius that Eddie had been using his relation to Ed “Bloody” Watson to help sell insurance at the bank.

Analysis

Lucius’ polarizing quest for truth is often complicated by moral and cultural elements that have divergent implications on factual honesty. When discussing the Tolen murder trial with Hettie and Ellen, Lucius is forced to consider the complexities beyond the truth he seeks. Hettie and Ellen describe how Julian and Will Collins were required to either testify against their uncle or lie under oath: “If the brothers had testified against an uncle of their blood, they had transgressed the oldest code of the Celtic ancestors” (358). The brothers did ultimately testify against their blood-related uncle—it was that or get charged as accessories to murder. Because of the inevitable “weight of shame” Julian and Will felt after testifying against a family member, the Collins family collectively agreed to never “discuss or mention Edgar Watson” again (358). While Lucius initially considered this vow of silence disrespectful and deceitful, he now understands it as tragic and sensible, a coping mechanism implemented to heal rather than suffer. As Lucius describes it, “these years of silence . . . embedded that painful splinter of ambiguity of guilt” rather than heal old wounds (359). Without commending or accepting the Collins’s vow of silence, Lucius deepens and matures his relationship with truth and history, understanding that there are hidden stories beneath every apparent certainty.

After Lucius’s new insights into how and why his family neglects his father, he rouses feelings of belonging and nostalgia, “sensing long-buried roots” (363). Lucius realized that his quest to unlock his father’s secrets is actually an attempt to “sort his feelings” and rid his own “vague sadness he thought of as ‘homegoing’” (363). But Lucius also realizes that he has been searching for home and belonging in all of the wrong places; he is disconnected from his living family and disillusioned by the dead, thus clouding his vision of what it truly means to belong to a community. So what is Lucius searching for if not community? “Simplicity? Was simplicity the true nature of homegoing? . . . or Belonging?” (364). Lucius decides that “his kin would not change his fundamental isolation from his family” and that in order to reconnect with “the bonds of space and time,” he must dive into “the great emptiness” of himself (365). Through Lucius’s reflective and metaphysical musings, he exposes his true motives behind researching his father’s life and death: it is an attempt to establish long-lost familial connection, and perhaps a natural order to his chaotic and unsettled life.

Shadow Country continuously alludes to the honor of defending and avenging one’s family or reputation, and if murder must be committed to accomplish revenge, then so be it. Will Cox demonstrates this logic while justifying his son Leslie’s murders to Lucius. When Lucius confronted Will abut Leslie’s involvement in the Tolen murders, Will responded: “We wasn’t lookin for no trouble but Tolens brought it and my boy Les took care of it . . . Les done ’em both” (367). Lucius notes that “whatever Leslies might have

done, he was their blood and, for better or worse, had stood up for his family" (367). Here Lucius recognizes the rural code of ethics Leslie abided by: a family threatened his family, and he responded by killing them. The court system, too, must have acknowledged this commonplace interaction with honorable killing because Leslie was acquitted for the murder.

Watson's conflicted and furtive life story is symbolized by shadow imagery. Throughout the novel, almost every character Lucius interacts with shares similar doubts and uncertainties about Watson's life. This is especially so for Watson's widow, Edna Kate, who's short time with her older husband is shrouded in mystery and rumor. When Lucius visits her, she tells him, "That's all we have—that shadowed face. A memory of shadows" (377). Kate's evocation of shadows alludes to the continued futility in Lucius's quest for truth. Watson's truth is not clear or cloudless; it is shadowy and covered in fog. Or as Speck Daniels tells Lucius, "Truth about Ed Watson . . . which one you aim to settle for and make your peace with?" (390). Choosing truth and seeing beyond shadows—these concepts challenge Lucius's desire to know what is and is not real.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rob pretend to be Arbie? Is it because of his fugitive status, or does he have an ulterior motive?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Lucius feel guilty about lying to Ellen and Hettie about his identity? Is Lucius's obsession with truth so intense he must lie for it? What contradictions does this present?

Discussion Question 3

Lucius's half-brother, Addison, is hostile and non-responsive to Lucius. Why might Addison act this way toward his brother?

Vocabulary

inviolable, transgressed, tantamount, slander, abyss, estimable, desiccation, notation, gaggle, hostile

Book II, Section 4

Summary

Carrie Langford (399-402) — Lucius visited Carrie, who was now widowed. Lucius asked her why she did not like to talk about their father. She said that after Watson died, journalists and neighbors pestered her and Eddie nonstop and wrote slanderous articles that had “no regard for the truth” (400). Carrie lightly scolded Lucius for constantly running away, for not being there for her when she needed him most. She was hurt that he did not attend her husband’s funeral. They talked about Eddie and his erratic behavior: “the poor stick is always out to prove something,” Carrie said (401). Lucius, guilty and sad, apologized to his sister. Carrie forgave Lucius, and as they shared stories about their father, they were “brought back to childhood” (402).

Rob’s Visit (402-404) — Apparently Rob visited Carrie several years prior, and Lucius asked her what he was like when he came. She said Rob was looking for Lucius, and when he discovered Lucius was in the war, he hastily left. Lucius told his sister that Rob had returned. Carrie was thrilled but scared for Rob’s wellbeing. She then inquired into Nell—had Lucius called her? Carrie gently reprimanded Lucius for how he treated her, telling him how devastating it was for her when he left without word: “Are you really so damn blind?” she asked (403). Lucius apologized to her again, more ashamed than ever before. But Carrie urged him to “call [Nell]! . . . Maybe it’s not too late!” (404).

Nell Summerlin (405-410) — Lucius called Nell and they scheduled to meet at the cemetery so Nell could lay flowers on her dead husband’s gravestone. While Nell kneeled before her husband’s stone, Nell told Lucius that she “hoped you might return one day” (406). Nell then said she saw Rob recently, and Rob told her that he was a wanted man fleeing Fort Myers law enforcement. Nell told Lucius that Rob went by a fake name in order to protect Lucius “from getting in trouble for harboring a fugitive” (410). Concerned, Lucius stood up to take off. Nell teased him that he is running off again. “Do you ever mourn the happy man you might have been?” asked Nell (410). “Forgive me,” he replied (410).

Desecration (411-413) — Rob was already drunk when Lucius found him at the bar. Rob told Lucius that he had “written down that Tucker stuff for your Watson whitewash” (411). Lucius asked him what was in the urn if not his ashes. Rob said that they were Watson’s. Rob recalled one night, several years ago, when he dug up Watson’s body and beheaded the corpse. “You really hated him that much?” asked Lucius (412). “Who hated first? It wasn’t Sonborn,” responds Rob (412). Lucius asked Rob if their father killed the Tuckers, “yes or no” (413). Rob responded that there is no yes or no; the Tuckers death was complicated, and that it is fully disclosed in his aforementioned letter.

The Carver (414-418) — Lucius and Rob met Dyer for diner. Dyer informed Lucius that he had a lecture scheduled for the following evening at the Naples Historical Society. Lucius said that he could not speak there because too many people knew him in the

area, and they would recognize him despite his pen name. Dyer said Lucius would not receive the sugar corporation's money if he did not speak under his pseudonym.

Meanwhile, the meat carver working at the restaurant was a jovial black man playfully serving his white customers. Rob loudly critiqued the white guests for treating their black server as a "house nigger" (416). The carver turned to Rob, intuiting "the archaic spirit behind his parody of that safe racism considered suitable for family gatherings" (416). Understanding Rob's aim, the carver laughed along with him. Dyer, however, was disgusted by the black man's loose behavior. "Never mind the minstrel show. Just carve . . . Carve, boy," barked Dyer (416). The carver darkly stared at Dyer, and whispered, "Back off muthafuck. Get outta my face" (417). Dyer stormed off and reported that their black server cursed at a white man. Lucius tried to apologize to the carver, in which the carver responded: "I'se the one gets to be sorry . . . los' me my damn job!" (418).

Power of Attorney (418-421) — Back at their table, Rob felt incredibly guilty. Dyer, meanwhile, said the carver was a "loudmouth nigger who had never learned his place" (419). Dyer then abruptly told Lucius that he, Dyer, must be made full power of attorney in order to protect the Chatham Bend property; it was, allegedly, the only way they could save the house. Lucius, rushed and confused by the evening's events, signed the necessary documents without properly considering the full meaning of doing so. Rob on the other hand, told Dyer that he "won't sign a fucking thing," and stormed out (419). Alone, Dyer told Lucius that Arbie Collins was really the fugitive Rob Watson, which Lucius of course already knew. "The federals may be in town looking for him," threatened Dyer (420). Dyer suggested he would have Lucius arrested for harboring a fugitive, and if Lucius did not cooperate with him, Dyer would persecute Lucius to the fullest extent. Their dinner concluded by Dyer telling Lucius, "You don't want me as an enemy" (421).

Gunslinger Style (421-424) —Lucius walked into Rob's room. As he did so, he watched Rob fire a gun from his window. The gun hit a car tire halted at a stoplight. It was Dyer's car. Lucius reprimanded Rob, but Rob did not care: "Seeing Sonborn work his shootin' iron would have made ol' Bloody Watson proud" (422). Rob handed Lucius his note and told Lucius to "go home, nail down your alibi" (423). With the understanding that Rob was going to flee to escape the law, he told Lucius, "I'm no killer. Remember that, no matter what" (424). Then Rob disappeared.

Panther Acres (424-429) — Lucius called Bill House to schedule a meeting. Bill was skeptical to meet with a Watson, but Lucius insisted he meant no harm. When Lucius met Bill at his house in Naples, Bill told Lucius that after the Watson shooting, rumors spread around Chokoloskee that the Houses fired at Watson because they were jealous of his cane crop. The Houses became a scapegoat to rid the town of its guilt. Bill asked Lucius why he made a list if did not intend to seek revenge, and Lucius admitted he made it "just to be doing something" (427). Bill House agreed: "you weren't nothing like your daddy, you just weren't that kind" (427). Lucius continued to pester Bill about the Watson shooting, and Bill finally obliged to open up.

Watson Dying (429-432) — Bill House doubled down on his story that “a man we’d known near twenty years aimed to fire into a flock of neighbors like so many turkeys” (430). Lucius asked if Henry was there. Bill said Henry was present, albeit reluctantly, and only came because of his familial obligation to the Houses. Watson saw Henry, “anger flickered” over his face (431). Watson said something to Henry, but Bill was not sure exactly what he said, as there was so much else going on. Bill said Henry never fired at Watson, that those were rumors assigned to his skin color and not his innocence. Bill House, on the other hand, fired and aimed to kill Watson, and he openly admitted it.

Lonelihood (432-434) – Henry fled Chokoloskee the night Watson died. Although white men had a fond opinion of Henry before Watson died, afterward Henry was commonly known as “That Nigger Who Raised a Gun Against a White Man” (432). Henry was taunted and tormented for many years. After some time on his own, Henry moved back in with the Houses. One day Bill suggested Henry go south to Honduras and make some money, more money than the Houses could ever pay him. “Looks like your family getting shut out of me before I get too old to work,” Henry told Bill, one of the only times he ever raised his voice at him (433). Henry left the House farm and never visited them again. Bill said he had not seen Henry since, and expressed sincere interest in seeing him again.

North (434-441) — Bill and Lucius went north toward Ommokalee to visit Henry. Bill recalled when two unfamiliar white men visited the Houses when Henry still lived with them. They called themselves the Grahams, and they proudly informed Bill that Henry was their half-brother. The Graham brothers pulled Henry aside, introduced themselves, and handed Henry a letter from their mother. From then on, the Graham brothers came south to visit Henry every year. Bill was initially shocked that two white men were willing to defy common prejudice and be so kind and loving to a black man. But watching the Grahams interact with Henry, Bill had “changed my whole way of thinkin about nigra people” (436). In contrast, Bill said, Sheriff Tippins was one of the cruelest men in south Florida toward black people. Tippins killed many blacks, and ran the slave-labor trade for Jim Cole. Considering this, Bill said that people “blamed too much on your daddy . . . forgot how much competition that man had on the frontiers” (438). Once they reached their destination, they asked some town members about Henry’s whereabouts. Bill and Lucius discovered that Henry was in the hospital; he was caught in a fire and not expected to live.

The Burned Man (441-444) — Lucius and Bill rushed to the hospital to see Henry. Henry’s head was wrapped in bandages, obstructing the view of his visitors. “Them ain’t angels,” said Henry (441). Both Lucius and Bill were speechless at the sight of Henry. Henry claimed that a big man lit a cane field on fire and clubbed him over the head while he was working. Later, the Graham brothers entered the hospital room, thanking Lucius and Bill for coming. Henry asked Lucius why he came to visit him: “You ain’t come all this way to Immokalee to tell this nigger to just rest . . . I believe you still huntin fo’ yo’ daddy” (443). Henry then told Lucius that he had lied to Lucius several months ago when they met: “Been tellin lies about that autumn evening all of my whole life” (444).

A Human Man (444-446) —Henry said that although he was always scared of Watson, he did not resent him because Watson treated Henry like a human: “Seen me as a man . . . not just any-old-nigger with no face but only just his two hands for work” (444). Henry said that no other white man had ever treated him how Watson treated him, and that he was a very “uncommon white man in that way” (444). Henry told Lucius the true story about the night Watson was killed.

When Watson brought up his gun, Henry figured that Watson was going to shoot Henry in order to scare the other men. So when Henry raised his gun to match Watson, Watson was caught off guard. Henry fired his gun; he admitted that he was the first one to fire, the true one to kill Edgar Watson. Lucius was taken aback. The rumor floating around all these years turned out to be true. “Henry, I’m sorry. You must think I’ve been hunting you all my life,” Lucius said, who felt no resentment toward Henry (446).

Analysis

Nell Dyer’s sacrifice for Lucius symbolizes the limited and immobile roles women were still forced into in early twentieth century America. For much of the novel, Nell Dyer’s love for Luciusis filtered through Lucius’s narrative anecdotes and observations: Lucius mourns Nell’s absence; he laments their past; he desires a happy life with her. But rarely has Lucius considered Nell’s sacrifice and suffering. As Lucius pities himself, Carrie reminds him of Nell’s quiet and strong sacrifice: “Have you called on Nell? . . . To go off to war without a word then run away to the Islands after she’d sacrificed her reputation? Do you care? Were you even aware of the guts it took to live on in a small noisy town after you disappeared? Of how much she was willing to give up for you against all advice?” (403). Carrie’s feedback clarifies the masculine worldview of the American Frontier. As the white man quests for freedom and truth, exploring themselves and the land, they ignore and stifle the needs and suffering of women, blacks, and indigenous peoples. Carrie continues to berate Lucius with Nell’s sacrifice, telling him, “Women need security. Are you really so damn blind?” (403). Nell was willing to risk social damnation for Lucius, and Carrie is appalled he Lucius has not yet considered this.

Lucius and Rob’s dichotomous relationship with their dead father gains clarity when Rob’s true identity is revealed. Throughout Book II, Rob (referred to as Arbie) expresses hatred and disgust for the dead Watson, although Lucius subtly senses a fondness behind his brother’s retribution. Lucius, comparatively, loves his father, and seeks to honor him by restoring his poor reputation. But in the moment that Lucius and Rob reestablish their brotherhood, they blur their paradoxical relationships with Watosn. After discovering that Rob beheaded Watson’s corpse, Lucius asks: “You really hated him that much?” to which Rob responds, “Who hated first? It wasn’t Sonborn” (412). Lucius assures Rob that Watson loved Rob after all; Watson admits as much to Lucius after the Tucker incident. Rob does not directly respond to this, but instead proclaims, “The Watson brothers!” (412). What this scene does is depict the different traumatic reactions Lucius and Rob have had to their father’s death. Rob has “spent years in prison” (413), whereas Lucius has, in effect, has spent years in the prison of his mind. What they

share, however, is their lineage and blood, and to them, this is what binds them deeper than any conflict could ever divide.

A nagging awareness Lucius endures throughout Book II is “the price of progress” that Watson was once so proud to be apart of (415). As a child, Lucius sees the American Frontier develop and boom into its twentieth century ethos of advancement, building, and profit. Yet these capitalistic virtues are at odds with Lucius’s matured moral code—he learns about the “tons of chemicals dumped into the pristine waterlands, the wretched slave camps for the migrant workers—the price of progress, Papa would have said, celebrating any and all such evidence of the twentieth century cavalcade” (415). By contrasting Watson’s vision of progress with the iniquitous undercurrent of such developments, Lucius firmly places Edgar Watson within the moral code of modern America. This inserts complexity into Watson’s character: if it is true that Watson killed field hands who prevented him from advancing his profits, or neighbors who hindered his land accumulation, what is the difference between men like Tippins, who enslaved and murdered black workers on railroads, or Cole who earned war profits in which hundreds of Americans died so he could make money? “We blame too much on your daddy,” admits Bill House, who similarly sees these contradictions, “we forget how much competition that man had on the frontiers with . . . Christian businessmen who work their feller men to death to make more money (438). Bill’s acknowledgment that Watson’s behavior is consistent with many of America’s prominent frontiersman is an incredible insight into the country’s misguided moral conduct.

To further highlight America’s disillusion with progress, Watt Dyer’s character represents the successful institutionalist with self-interested and malevolent intentions. Dyer is a profit-minded private lawyer who manipulates the legal system to benefit himself and his financial interests, yet he perpetuates false American ideals to support his immoral actions: “Fundamentalist Americans are proud to pledge allegiance. Proud to worship the Father and the Son Who is Jesus Christ . . . I hate to hear a feller American speak sarcastically about our flag” (420). The irony here is that Dyer’s actions are detrimental to other peoples American liberties—whether that be the black Americans he kills and ridicules, the Mexicans he hires as assassins, or the rural landowners he wrongly manipulates.

Discussion Question 1

What does the carver scene tell us about racial attitudes in the early twentieth century? Were Rob’s criticisms fair? Was Watt’s reaction justifiable? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

After spending years researching the truth about who shot Watson first, why does Lucius not negatively react when Henry clarifies his guilt?

Discussion Question 3

Does Watt Dyer’s character represent a larger ideal? If so, what values does he possess that point to this greater concept?

Vocabulary

cavalcade, shrouded, lurch, phalanxes, appraise, notarize, cormorant, satchel, skedaddle, pileated

Book II, Section 5

Summary

Heinous Murder (447-451) — On their way home, Bill asked Lucius if Henry finally told him the truth. Lucius said yes, and asked Bill why he hid Henry's secret for all of this time. Bill said that on his father's deathbed, D.D. House revealed that Henry shot Watson first; he heard the distinct sound of his rifle fire first. D.D. House instructed his boys to keep Henry's murder a secret. Still, townsmen speculated that Henry was the killer, mainly on the basis of his race, and white men hated to think that a black man took out Watson over them. Bill and Lucius parted ways, and Lucius went inside his cabin to read Rob's letter.

Night Rivers (451-459) — Rob's letter began on New Year's morning, 1901, the day Wally and Bet Tucker fled Chatham Bend. That morning, Wally found two harvest hands dead in the woods. He recognized them as two young men who asked Watson for their pay before the year ended. Watson must have killed them in order to avoid paying them, concluded Wally. As the Tuckers frantically packed up to leave Chatham Bend, Rob went to see them. Wally told Rob that Watson had killed "Ted and Zachariah" (452). Angry that Wally accused his father of murder, Rob went to inspect the bodies themselves: "No question it was Ted and Zachariah" (452). When Rob returned home, the Tuckers had left and Watson was dead drunk in the house. Naturally, Wally told people about the two dead cane cutters. The rumors spread throughout the Ten Thousand Islands. Watson became incensed with Wally's slander, telling Rob that "Tucker better be damned careful" (452). Rob confronted his father about the dead bodies in the woods, and Watson did not bother lying. Watson justified killing the men by telling Rob that they were criminals.

Rob fast-forwarded one year to when Watson bought the quitclaim that the Tuckers were living on. Watson demanded the Tuckers vacant the premises in three days. Wally responded to Watson's message by saying he refused to leave his property. The next morning, a drunken Watson and a scared Rob traveled to the Tuckers' cabin. Watson told Rob to stay home, but Rob accompanied him anyway. Wally was working in the early dawn when Watson and Rob docked their boat. "You people get the hell off of my claim," Watson barked as he walked toward Wally holding his double barrel shotgun (455). Watson ordered Rob to fetch Betsy and bring her outside. "Please, Rob. Don't let him harm Bet," whispered Wally. Rob refused to get Bet. During this moment of confusion and hesitation, Wally grabbed for his gun, and as Wally pointed his gun to shoot, Watson fired at Wally. Rob did not believe his father wanted to kill Wally; he was forced into shooting him after Wally made a move to his gun.

Meanwhile, Bet rushed outside and darted into the woods. Watson, who looked weary and sad, handed Rob his revolver. "We have to finish what we started," he told Rob (456). Watson explained that he could not catch Bet, he was too drunk and slow, but Rob could. Rob protested wildly, but Watson calmly retorted, "If she gets away, we are

going to hang" (457). "Don't make me do that, Papa. I can't," cried Rob, but Watson gave him a reassuring smile and sent him off (457). Rob ran and cried. After only a moment, he heard Watson's voice calling for him. Rob soon overtook Bet: "Please, Bet, don't look" (457). Bet cried in Rob's arms; they were good friends on Chatham Bend. "Forgive me," he said as he shot her (457). "Rob Watson was dead from that day forward and forever" (458). When he and Watson returned to the Bend, Watson resumed drinking and shouting. Rob snuck into his father's boat and sailed away. Rob concluded by writing that he had spent much of his life in prison "and the rest mostly in flight—another sort of prison" (459).

The One Surviving Witness (459-460) — Lucius considered the decision his father made that morning: "Bet Tucker's life or his family future: that was the terrible choice and he made it" (459). Although Lucius justified and understood his fathers reasons for killing Wally in self-defense, and killing Bet in order to avoid prison, Lucius could no longer justify writing a book about his father being an upright frontiersman. If Lucius were to accept Rob's letter as truth, his biography became "utterly invalidated" (460).

Bloody Watson (460-467) — That night Lucius had his scheduled lecture in Naples. He heard on the radio over that a black man had been charged with shooting prominent attorney Watson Dyer's tires. Lucius was pained that an innocent man was being unjustly charged, but without risking his brother's imprisonment, he could not defend the guiltless black man. The lecture room was crowded, and Lucius recognized many faces: Speck Daniels's gang, Owen and Sarah Harden, and his friend Hoad Storter. Lucius began his speech, but was frequently interrupted by people chiming in: "he was bad news!" one voice shouted (462). Multiple crowd members accused Lucius of being Watson's son. The audience was livid with accusations, convinced Watson was guilty of ever rumor. Many of the outspoken crowd members were old men. After Nell's father Fred, angrily identified Lucius, the men shouted slurs at him. Soon, the lecture hall became a venue for people to share their arsenal of Watson tales. After listening for quite some time, Lucius interrupted the men, saying that much of what they said was far-fetched and unproven, whereas his research was fact based and unbiased. But "by questioning and elder's recollections," Lucius had "undermined local tradition" (466).

Attorney Watson Watson (468-469) — Watt Dyer and Speck Daniels had kidnapped Rob, and Lucius stormed outside the lecture hall, demanding his brother's whereabouts. Dyer continued to blackmail Lucius, threatening that he would take him to court for harboring a fugitive. Lucius retorted by digging into Dyer's motives for protecting Chatham Bend: "Do I smell big money, Wattie? Big land development?" (469). Dyer laughed and asked Lucius if he ever "found that nigger you've been looking for" (469). Lucius then realized that Dyer was the one to kill Henry—"Watson honor? Right Brother Lucius?" (469). Dyer drove away as Lucius called for Rob.

Belt Buckles and Buttons (469-473) — Back inside the lecture hall, Lucius asked Owen what he knew about "Watson Payday." Owen recalled a story about how he, Henry, and Richard found human bones on Chatham Bend after Watson died. Lucius wondered if the skulls were from Leslie Cox's murders or his father's. Lucius reckoned he would never know.

Gator Hook (473-476) — On his way home, Lucius was peeing on the side of the road. As he was doing so, Speck Daniels nudged his back with a gun. Speck told Lucius that Dyer hired him to kill Rob. Speck then said that Dyer never wanted to preserve the Watson house; Dyer just wanted to own the high ground the house sat on so he could develop on it.

The Terrible Knowing and Not Knowing (477-480) — Lucius walked around the next day attempting to sort out the conflicting information he had recently undertaken. Everywhere he went in south Florida, he was disheartened to see the coastlines being destroyed, the environment eroding, and development going awry. At night, Lucius was haunted by visions of Rob. What would happen to his beloved brother? The next morning, Speck visited Lucius with news that Rob had gone missing. Lucius took this as code for murder, but Speck sincerely told him that Rob ran off.

Wild Hog Jambaree (480-483) — Lucius confronted Speck Daniel's gang about Rob's whereabouts. The gang told Lucius what Speck told Lucius: Rob ran off and they could not find him.

Everglade (483-485) — Lucius visited Hoad. Hoad told Lucius that the big news around town was that "the E.J. Watson claim on Chatham Bend had been dismissed by the state court" and that "the new park was on the way" (484).

Gone and Lost Forever (485-486) — Lucius called Nell and asks her to marry him. Nell was taken aback, and responded: "Since your father died, you've never permitted yourself happiness, so how could we be happy? It wouldn't work" (485). Nell then suggested that they no longer talk or see one another. Lucius continued to stammer on the phone, but Nell had already hung up.

Homegoing / Dead Reckoning (486-490) — Hoad and Lucius rode their boats to Chatham Bend, so Lucius could say goodbye to the house. Hoad told Lucius on the ride that, "all us local folks have left was our long memories" (488). When they got to the house, Lucius found a note on the front door; it was from Rob. It instructed Lucius not to look for him, that he was doing okay. Walking back to the boat, Hoad asked Lucius if he was going to include "all the bad stuff in your book" (489). Lucius nodded his head no. Lucius withdrew his biography manuscript and lit it on fire.

Analysis

If Chokoloskee locals are to believe Henry shot Watson, then they must accept that a black man showed more strength and determination than a white man did. Bill House explained that Chokoloskee townsmen resented Henry for shooting Watson: "They never let on to their sons how scared they was—so scared they forgot the color of a man because he could outshoot the man who scared 'em" (447). The white man's insecurity was a role reversal of traditional racial identities; Henry's fearless humanity was threatening to white men who "hated to think that a black man might of took care of

Watson and their scared daddies only finished off the job" (447). Thus, Henry's heroics become vilified, demonized to fit his ascribed racial inferiority.

Bill House's guilt about his complacency in racism demonstrates moral and empathetic progress among twentieth century Americans. Shadow Country is fraught with minor racial incidences, whether depicted acts of discrimination, or indifferent descriptions of racial inferiority. Bill admits that although he "never did commit a crime against a black man and darn glad of it . . . I never done nothin for 'em neither, not even when I had the chance. You reckon that's why I feel so bad about Henry? Because I know better?" (449). Bill's notion of "knowing better" signifies Shadow Country's characters coming to terms with America's purgatory between pre and post Abolition. Black Americans have been legally deemed human, but are still treated and thought of as animalistic inferiors. Bill's recognition of his role in racial discrimination marks great empathetic and emotional progress for Shadow Country's main characters.

When Watson instructs Rob to kill Bet Tucker, he tells him, "It's her life or ours" (457). But when Rob kills Bet, he learns that killing someone else in order to save yourself is spiritually, morally, and, ultimately, mortally destructive. Rob pleads with his father not to kill the pregnant Bet: "Don't make me do that, Papa. I can't do it" (457). Of course, Rob eventually overtakes Bet and shoots a revolver into the back of her head. As Rob prepares to shoot Bet, he sees "new life in her"; after he shoots her, he says, "Rob Watson was dead from that day forward" (457). This contrast between Bet and her unborn baby's redemptive life and Rob's now irreconcilable life as a murderer assesses an important theme throughout Shadow Country: killing for self-preservation is really killing for self-destruction, and, ultimately, leads to metaphysical imprisonment.

Near the end of Book II, as Lucius helplessly looks for Rob, Lucius dejectedly tells Speck Daniels, "I want to know the truth" (480). Speck mocks Lucius's feckless quest: "By the time you stumble over it, it ain't the truth no more. Unless there's death in it. I reckon death was about as close to truth as a man can come" (480). Speck aptly digs at Book II's major conflict—that searching for indefinite truth is a futile purpose; the only certainties one is permitted in life are birth and death. All other information is interpretive, meddled, and subjective. As Speck instructed Lucius earlier in the novel: "Truth? Which one you aim to settle for and make your peace with?" (390). Shadow Country's truth is that human life is complex, involved, and interdependent—there is no singular, unifying answer. Our lives are drenched in shadows, unseen and unknown by others.

Discussion Question 1

What does Rob's letter tell us about Watson? Does this change Lucius's perspective about his father? How?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Lucius ask Nell to marry him? What does Nell's rejection mean for Lucius moving forward?

Discussion Question 3

What does Lucius's incineration of his biography signify? Does this reflect a greater moving on or something else?

Vocabulary

succumb, silt, variant, recrimination, raucous, inference, inert, insinuation, defunct, strewn

Book III, Section 1

Summary

Prefaced quotes (493): "There is a pain—so utter—

It swallows substance up—

Then covers the Abyss with Trance—

So Memory can step

Around—across—upon it—

As One within a Swoon—

Goes safely - where an open eye—

Would drop Him - Bone by Bone

– Emily Dickinson" (493).

"Sir, what is it that constitutes character, popularity, and power in the United States? Sir, it is property, and that only! – Governor John Hammond of South Carolina" (493).

"For the final consummation, that I might feel less lonely, it was my final wish that as I climbed the scaffold, I would be greeted with cries of execration – Albert Camus" (493).

Chapter 1 (495-558)

District of Devils (495-497) — Book III is a first-person narration by Edgar Watson. The story begins with a six-year-old Watson living in Clouds Creek, South Carolina. His father rode off to fight in the Civil War, as did many of his uncles and cousins. As these men gathered in town, ready to depart for the war, the South Carolina Governor called out: “To those brave boys of Edgefield who will sacrifice their lives for our southern right to enslave the darker members of our species!” (496). Watson recalls growing up on a plantation, working and playing with black children. Even as a little boy, Watson was sympathetic and kind to people of color.

Claxton (497-500) — Watson watched a lot of black people get killed on his family’s plantation. Most memorably, Watson saw a white man named Mr. Claxton shoot a runaway slave. As the black body jerked on the ground, a young Watson protested that Claxton and the other adults around do something to help the young black man. But the grown men simply laughed at the naïve Watson. After the slave died, Watson buried him properly in the woods.

The Clouds Creek Watsons (500-507) — The Watson family had a rich history in South Carolina. The Watson lineage was full of Revolutionary War Captains and plantation proprietors. Watson's father, Lige, was the grandson of a massive property owner and Confederate hero. Lige, however, was less successful. He returned home from the war entitled and bitter. Watson's older cousin Selden Tilghman returned also, but Selden was racially sympathetic and well educated. Selden tried to separate himself from his racist and uneducated roots, while Watson's father defended his family honor and was especially brutal toward blacks. Lige was also a drunk who physically abused his family, particularly his son.

Cousin Selden (507-511) — Watson notes that the Reconstruction Act passed in 1867, allowing black people to be "protected henceforth as citizens and voters" (507). The white townsmen of Clouds Creek hated Reconstruction and disregarded the new law. Black people were killed in the streets and law enforcement did nothing to protect or prevent these attacks. Selden Tilghman defended black rights and publicaly spoke out against these atrocious crimes. Clouds Creek townsmen saw Selden's racial tolerance as Confederate treachery. When Watson's mother told Lige that she agreed with "Selden's Abolitionist convictions," Lige lost his temper (509). Watson informs the reader that whenever his parents argued, his father punished him.

Regulators (511-513) — Will Coulter, Claxton, and Lige comprised the Regulators, a group of vigilantes who defended Confederacy and Southern honor from "Yankee aggression" (511). As Watson puts it, "Papa was barely competent in most of these attainments, which he confused with manhood" (511). One day, Selden Tilghman found three murdered black bodies in the road. When Lige and Watson rode by on their horse, Selden asked them to help bury the slain bodies. Lige was outraged by Selden's request. In a heated exchange, Lige admitted to killing the black men, and Selden challenged Lige's morality and dishonorable war record.

The Traitor (513-516) — One day, Watson followed Selden into town, where Selden was prepared to publicaly denounce the "murder of three Negro youths on the night before last" (514). Selden urged the group gathered before him that Clouds Creek must "accept the freedmen as new citizens" (514). Selden continued to ask logical, compassionate questions to the crowd: "Have not these poor souls suffered enough? What fault of theirs that they were enslaved and then turned free?" (514). Selden further denounced the Confederacy as having "no greatness in it and no honor," which prompted the crowd to shout "Traitor!" at him (515). The Regulators rushed him and beat him unconscious. When Selden regained consciousness, the Regulators demanded he apologize. Instead, Selden called the Regulators cowards. They continued to beat him, but did not kill him.

Ring-Eye Linge (516-517) — Lige sold his share of the plantation to another family member. Lige began drinking more and violently bemoaning "Southern honor . . . and the Great Lost Cause" (517). As Lige preached about lost Confederacy virtues, former veterans who fought beside him challenged his war record, claiming that Lige was dishonorably discharged and unfit to fight.

Rabbit Gum (521-525) — Watson recalls that from age five to 15, all he did was work, hunt, and gather. He was taught many of his outdoorsman skills from Tap Watson, a former slave on the Watson plantation. After Lige sold his plantation share, Lige struggled to feed his family. Ensuring the family had enough to eat, Watson would pluck turnips from Tap's garden. When Tap caught Watson stealing, he happily allowed him to take some crops, "jus' so's you know dat Black Man gots to eat, de same as you" (521).

Watson's mother was grateful for Tap's generosity, and lamented the awful discrimination and living conditions black people endured in the South. These discussions infuriated Lige, who argued with his wife and mercilessly beat his son. Watson was furious that his mother continued to argue with Lige, knowing that Watson was the only one who suffered. After so many ruthless beatings, Watson "conceived out of loneliness . . . a shadow brother" named Jack (524). This alter ego Watson developed was tough, mean, and could defend the meager Edgar against his father's punishment.

Turnips (525-531) — When Lige discovered that Watson took Tap's turnips, he was livid that his son accepted "Charity from niggers" (526). Lige beat Watson into "blackness and oblivion" (526). Watson was unconscious for hours after the beating. When Watson finally awoke, he stared at his father and announced: "If you ever lay hands on me again—on any of us, Papa—I will kill you" (527).

One day, Watson's father was humiliated in town by a former Confederate General who accused Lige of dishonorable conduct in the war. When Watson defended his father, Lige hit his son for talking back to a war hero. Back at home, Lige promised to beat Watson for being disrespectful to a Civil War veteran. When they entered the house, Watson grabbed a thick branch to protect himself. When Lige approach his son, Watson struck him hard with the wood. Watson beat Lige terribly, whacking the wood heavy against his father. After the beating, Watson left his family behind, departing them forever.

Amongst My Dead (531-533) — With nowhere to go, Watson visited his cousin Robert Briggs Watson. Watson proposed to work for free on Robert's land as long as he was given a slight plot to build a cabin on.

Hogs (533-535) — Robert Watson was an advanced farmer who "had outgrown the sorceries of our Border ancestors," and was progressive in his work ethic, spirituality, and vision (533). Watson felt happy in Robert's company, as Robert treated him like an equal and taught him many valuable lessons. Robert had grand plans for his post-Reconstruction farm: he wanted to be the "first Carolina planter ever to shop peaches outside the state" (535). Watson was inspired by Robert's ambitious attitude, and wanted to emulate that ambition in himself.

Rogue's March (536-538) — The Watson kin that lived in Clouds Creek tried to distance themselves from the dangerous Lige Watson, also known as "the Bad Elijah" (536). This separation affected Watson; much of Watson's extended family was weary that he would turn out like his crazy father. Robert told Watson that alcoholism ran in the

Watson lineage, and if Watson wanted to avoid being like his father, he should avoid liquor.

Watson inquired Robert about Selden Tilghman: was he dead or alive? Robert did not know. Like Selden, Robert was opposed to the Regulators vision of Southern honor. Watson was surprised to hear these sentiments come from a former Confederate officer.

A Somber Hard-Faced Boy (538-540) — Robert's wife Lucy was among the many family members who were weary of young Edgar Watson. One day, Watson overheard a conversation between Robert, Lucy, and his Aunt Sophia. Lucy and Sophia claimed Watson was an unclear "hard-faced boy," like his father (539). Robert defended Watson, and said he had "wretched like a slave since early childhood: he had been deprived of education" (539). Robert thought it unfair to judge Watson on the merits of his bad father and that Watson was "bright, industrious, and very able" (539).

Jack Watson (540-543) — Despite his tutelage under Robert, Watson felt very alone. His Cloud Creek kin now completely shunned him. One day, when Watson was working for Robert, he met a dark-skinned boy who Robert hired to help with the harvest. This boy was named Jack, and claimed to be Watson's half-brother. Robert confirmed this. Watson could not believe that he had a brother, and that his brother had the same name as his self-proclaimed alter ego.

Some time after, Watson's mother visited him on Robert's property. She told Watson that her and Min, Watson's sister, were fleeing Lige and moving to Florida. She implored Watson to join them. Watson declined his mother's request.

Deepwood (543-547) — Watson felt guilty that he was not more supportive of his desperate mother and sister. He sought to find them and offer them gifts for their long journey to Florida. Not knowing where to go, Watson went to Selden Tilghman's abandon house. Once there, he scoured the property, and saw a huge, feathered figure in the shadows. Watson chased after it and charged through a door where he saw the figure enter. To his surprise, Watson found his family huddled together in a room.

The Owl-Man (547-549) — Watson went to find the figure, which he deemed Owl-Man. Watson found a trail of blood that led to a hole in the floor. Watson bent over the hole and instructed Owl-Man to come out. In response, a voice croaked, "The Coward . . . Watson" (548). Suddenly, Owl-Man grabbed Watson's rifle and attempted to take it. Watson shot the Owl-Man before he could seize his gun. Taking a life instantly traumatized Watson, especially when he realized that Owl-Man was really a badly injured and humiliated Selden Tilghman, who had been hiding from the Regulators. Watson felt helpless, and he "knew my life had lost its purchase" (549).

Tap (549-552) — Watson ran away from Selden's house and across to Tap's garden patch. Tap offered Watson some vegetables, but in Watson's fragile state, he yelled at Tap. Tap asked why Watson carried his father's gun. Watson, paranoid, told Tap to mind

his own business. Tap, however, questioned Watson. Scared that Tap would report him to law enforcement, Watson pointed the gun at Tap and told him to kneel down.

Flight (552-554) — Watson decided not to kill Tap, hoping that he would stay silent. But the next morning, when Watson returned to Robert's property, Robert knew that Watson had killed Selden. Robert gave Watson money and told him to flee immediately; men were already out looking for him. Robert believed Watson when he said that the murder was an accident. Watson then left Clouds Creek.

The Coward (554-558) — While the sheriff and deputies were hunting the young Edgar Watson, Watson slipped into the county jail to visit his father, who had been arrested for disorderly conduct the night before. Watson yelled at Lige, "I am no longer your son" (555). But Watson knew he had more to say to his father, but did not know how to express his undecipherable feelings. As Watson turned to leave, he looked at his father and said: "I will be back, I promise. I aim to kill you, Papa" (557). Watson stole his father's horse, which was tied up outside the jail, and fled Carolina.

Chapter 2

On Echo River (559-564) — Watson met up with his mother, sister, and Aunt Cindy, who was Tap's wife and the Watson's maid. Watson knew that the Regulators would find Tap and ask where young Edgar fled to, and when he would not say, the Regulators would likely kill Tap.

When Watson and his family crossed into Florida, he introduced himself to fellow pioneers as "overseer of the Artemas Plantation at Clouds Creek, South Carolina" (560). No matter how badly Watson wanted to start a new life in Florida, he could not shake his thought from his "unjust exile" and his "misbegotten father" (560). Watson sought revenge on his father and the Regulators for pushing him out of Clouds Creek. Despite his grief and anger, Watson was stunned by Florida, "the undiscovered country," where Native Americans still roamed, and land was largely undeveloped (562).

Ichetucknee (564-567) — Ichetucknee was a few miles from Fort White, and Watson's family aimed to stay at their Great Aunt Tabitha Watson's plantation. Tabitha's daughter, Laura, and her husband, oversaw the plantation, but left the management to a man named Woodson Tolen. Tabitha specified that when she died her nephews, who were the Watsons, would inherit the plantation. Tabitha was skeptical of the young Edgar Watson, however, hearing dark rumors about his past. Watson, determined to inherit this new plantation and decided to work as hard as he could to win Tabitha over.

Woodson Tolen (567-572) — Watson worked hard on his first day of spring planting. As he surveyed the other workers, he "felt confident I could run this place as overseer, thought it might take a year or so to prove it" (568). Woodson Tolen disliked Watson immediately because of his relation to Tabitha; Tolen wanted to inherit the plantation when Tabitha died, and likely would have if the Clouds Creek Watson family did not show up.

One day hard at work, Watson stripped off his shirt in the late day sun. Woodson rode by on his house and threatened to tell Tabitha that young Edgar stripped naked "longside the niggers" (569). Amused, Watson yelled at Woodson to get his "fat kid over here . . . 'stead of giving him stupid orders" (569). Sam and Watson had become casual friends, and the two laughed off Watson's clear disrespect toward Woodson. But Watson's joke incited Woodson, and Woodson threatened to tell Tabitha that Watson was a bad worker who frequently disrespected his overseer. Watson retorted by calling Woodson a "white trash sonofabitch," which led Woodson to uncoil his whip and ride straight toward Watson (570). Watson drew his knife, and the two men circled one another. Woodson eventually rode away, calling out, "This ain't finished, boy!" (571). Watson knew that Woodson's "vow of vengeance was an oath more sacred than . . . the family Bible" (571).

Fort White (572-574) — Watson walked straight to Tabitha's house to explain the ordeal before Woodson did. Watson told Tabitha he could not work with the Tolens anymore, and as a bluff, threatened to leave and find work elsewhere. To Watson's surprise, Tabitha waved him away, wishing him luck finding other fieldwork. Watson's mom was greatly disappointed that her son spoiled "all our prospects" (573). Watson found work at Tom Getzen's plantation, where he aimed to make a good name for himself and then return to Tabitha's plantation.

The Tolen Boys (574-576) — Watson kept a pistol with him everywhere he went, keeping his eyes peeled for the Tolen family revenge. Watson informs the reader that Woodson had left Florida for Georgia, and that Jim Tolen was now overseeing Tabitha's plantation. But soon after Jim took over, he left for Georgia, leaving the overseer position to Sam. Watson's plan was to wait until the Sam ran the plantation into the ground; Tabitha would assuredly come begging for Watson to take over.

Unholy Wedlock (576-577) — Watson's sister, Minnie, said that Sam Tolen and Tabitha's daughter Laura were having an affair. Soon thereafter, Sam moved into Tabitha and Laura's house, positioning himself well to inherit the plantation.

Charlie Is My Darling (577-580) — Watson experienced "love at first sight" when he met Minnie's fiancé's sister, Charlie Collins (577). "My life had been breathed back into me," he exclaimed, feeling pure happiness for the first time since childhood (578). Watson was hesitant to tell Charlie his deepest secrets—killing Owl-Man, beating his father, and running away from Clouds Creek. Watson ultimately told Charlie his secrets and Charlie lovingly accepted his difficult history. Charlie's family grew to respect Watson, as he helped them with chores and harvest every Sunday.

The Virgins (580-583) — Watson and Charlie got married, and Watson leased an old cabin west of Tabitha's plantation. They made love for the first time, and Watson exuberantly described his fulfilling and gracious wife.

Gone and Lost Forever (583-584) — Watson informs us that Charlie died two years after they married, when she was just 17 years old. She died giving birth to their first child. Watson impinged his grief and anger onto the "murderous red thing" alive on the

ground between Charlie's legs. For two days Watson laid with Charlie's corpse, writhing with pain and anguish. After two days, Watson built Charlie a coffin and buried her. Discovering this, Charlie's family was livid with Watson: "We loved her, too," they told him (584).

Miss Suebelle Perkins (584-587) — In the aftermath of Charlie's death, Watson went on an alcoholic binge. Watson would attend bars and cause trouble; he developed a reputation for violent and volatile behavior at every bar within 20 miles. Another vice Watson indulged into cope with his grief was prostitutes. Watson's favorite hooker was a black woman named SueBelle Perkins. He became addicted to her, visiting her most every night. One night Watson found SueBelle weeping; she begged him to see another hooker: "I had knowed you all my life!" (585). SueBelle was really Lulalie Watson, Tap and Cindy Watson's daughter. Together they developed an unhealthy but comforting sexual relationship—"Hard drinking and hard fucking were my sole forgetting," said Watson after he departed the whorehouse (587).

Suwanne County (588-589) — Minnie and Billy Collins gave birth to their first child, Julian. That spring, Watson gave up his visits to the whorehouse and cut down on his drinking. Instead, Watson put his energy into making a good crop for Tom Getzen.

The Farrier (589-591) — Watson's cousin Lem Collins killed his mistress's husband after the husband found Lem and his wife in bed. Laura Myers helped pay Lem's court bills, and when Lem was found not guilty, he fled to Georgia without repaying Laura. Lem also accused Watson of giving him his murder weapon, which somehow morphed into a town-wide rumor that Watson killed Lem's mistress's husband: "Here I was, still in my twenties, and for the second time in my young life, my reputation was buried deep in the mud" (591).

Sonborn (591-594) — Watson was 29 when he married Jane Dyal. Jane was well educated, intelligent, and beautiful. Soon Watson and Jane give birth to their first two children, Carrie and Eddie. Although happy with her own children, Jane was worried about the child Watson had with Charlie—the child was living with Charlie's parents several towns over. This forgotten son was legally named "Son Born," because in Watson's despair he did not register a name for his newborn son at the county clerk's office. Jane insisted that Watson reclaim Sonborn and immerse him into their new family. Watson angered at the subject, and forbade Jane to discuss Sonborn. But Jane did not back down from Watson—"my refusal to acknowledge Charlie's child could only breed guilt regret . . . what Jane said was true" (592).

Watson went to pick up Sonborn. Strict and formal, Watson demanded his son from Charlie's parents. Sonborn's grandfather responded, "We are entitled to some say in the matter, Edgar" (593). But Watson heartlessly demanded Sonborn to accompany him back to his home. Sonborn joined Watson on his horse and they took off. Watson instructed an eight-year-old Sonborn—who Charlie's parents named Elton—that his new name was Robert. But Watson could not bare to look at Rob—he looked too much like his beloved Charlie.

Wild (594-598) — One day, Watson stumbled upon SueBelle in Lake City. During a tense interaction, SueBelle informed Watson that they were biological siblings—Lige raped Cindy and birthed her. Angered by this dreadful knowledge, Watson pulled out a knife and held it to her throat. It was the middle of the day, and many townsmen gathered around and watched the spectacle. When Watson let go of the knife, SueBelle bled and vomited. SueBelle fled Lake City in fear of Watson, and on her way, spread rumors about Watson: he shot every black man he worked with and was a dangerous fugitive from South Carolina. These rumors permeated Fort White, and soon Watson's friends and family heard them. Tom Getzen suggested that Watson clear out of the area before law enforcement arrested him.

Night Roads North and West (598-600) — Watson and his family left Ichetucknee by night.

Analysis

In both the Emily Dickinson poem and Albert Camus excerpt from Book III's prefaced quotes, themes of despair, loneliness, and death's resolution to end such emotions are present. Watson's character embodies Dickinson's and Camus's sentiments, as he feels the "pain" that Dickinson describes, while also seeking Camus's inkling to "feel less lonely" through execration (493). Throughout Book III, Watson's troubled and disturbed psyche folds inward and battles with itself, highlighting the Dickinson and Camus quotes as indicative of his deeper human struggle.

Watson's southern upbringing on a plantation gives him expansive exposure to black life and culture. But unlike many of his white counterparts, Watson cherishes and befriends black people rather than disdain them. In the years before the Civil War, Watson "ran with the black children," playing games on "the bare earth yards" (497). Watson's friend Joseph "made this white child welcome," treating Watson with care and respect. When Overseer Claxton killed Joseph, Watson "wept for poor, gentle Joseph," and found Claxton's murderous act cruel and inhumane (497). When Watson's compassion towards blacks was challenged and confronted by racists like Claxton, Watson doubled-down on his belief that black people were humans the same as whites. But Claxton dehumanizes the dead Joseph by leaving his body "with the owls and the varmints," whereas Watson wants to bury him "like a man" (498). Watson further humanizes Joseph by closing his dead eyelids—"who could have imagined that the human eye would be so hard!"—and lamenting the viciousness of unwarranted murder (499). Scenes such as this evoke Watson's sympathetic and compassionate approach toward black people, an attitude that defies his cultural upbringing and informs his lifelong empathy toward people of color.

The popular racial attitude during Civil War time clearly differs from Watson's. Characters like Claxton, Lige, and Coulter symbolize the immoral and racist backbone of "Southern Honor," and the entitled, demonstrative behavior of the Confederacy. As the Clouds Creek men prepared to fight in the Civil War, the South Carolina Governor announces: "To those brave boys of Edgefield who will sacrifice their lives for our

southern right to enslave the darker members of our species!" (496). In the aftermath and defeat of the war, many southern men sought to defend and continue Confederate tradition, despite federal laws that granted rights and citizenship to black Americans. The Regulators, the vigilante group that slaughtered innocent blacks in the name of Southern pride, thus represent the vengeful bigotry that guises itself in subjective constructs, such as honor and pride. Lige Watson claies that the Regulators "served that honorable company . . . in these dark days of Yankee Reconstruction" (510). But Watson notes that his father "joined the vigilantes less out of conviction than because he knew no better place for a man with battlefield demotions . . . he confused manhood with these attainments" (511). Watson demonstrates that southern racial prejudices were less founded on reason and mostly predicated on irrational and unexamined hatred.

Selden Tilghman's character signifies advanced and progressive attitudes, someone who can challenge dominant dogma and understand discrimination as unjust and immoral. Selden makes these opinions known, too, confronting the Regulators dishonorable actions. Selden publicaly condemns a social infrastructure that treats black people "as dangerous animals . . . every day black men are terrorized, not by outlaws and criminals but by so-called good Christian men" (514). Selden's identification that injustice and murder are wrongly committed under the mask of morality and spiritual doctrine is an important elucidation in Shadow Country. In a novel consumed with tradition, honor, and heritage, Selden's embodies a critical observer who is able to critique such untouchable forces in search of a greater good.

Fittingly, the first murder Watson commits is against his cousin Selden. Watson's biggest fatherly role models as a child were Lige, who taught Watson thorny southern virtues; Robert Briggs, who taught Watson work ethic and toughness; and Selden, who taught Watson bravery, compassion, and intelligence. So Watson's murder of "the wounded creature," who he does not know is Selden at the time, signifies the constant conflict within Watson's character (548). Selden, who Watson called the Owl-Man as he chased him through the woods, is an ambiguous figure, who Watson cannot fully see —"Black nor white . . . taking shape in cold shadows . . . blood had probed and found a passage back into the burned earth" (548). These chilling descriptions of the unseen person identify Watson's internal struggle: to embrace his father's qualities or Selden's. When Watson kills Selden in an act of self-defense, a part of him dies too: "I knew my life had lost its purchase" (549). Watson then feels "burdened with my father's heavy musket," further deepening the strain between his identities (549).

Murdering Selden not only demonstrated the divide in Watson's psyche, but also permanently separated his identity into factions. Although Watson is a complex character, he can be said to have inherited three distinct personas: Lige's vengeful temper, Robert Watson's loyalty, and Selden's brains and sympathies. And while these conflicting personalities battle throughout the book—his business knowledge and capabilities, his respectful and considerate relationships, his intimidating and dangerous demeanor—the "angry and dangerous as a gun-shot bear" identity (which Watson calls Jack) tends to guide Watson's decision making throughout his life. Watson acknowledges his inner-darkness—or his shadow brother, as he calls it—and uses it to

his advantage. Watson's inner-darkness is put on display when Woodson Tolen threatens him in the field. After Watson petulantly threatens Woodson back, he thinks, "Had they glimpsed Jack Watson? . . . that horrible Edgar mask?" (570). Watson is aware of his inner-darkness but is unsure how to harness it or use it productively.

Watson finds equilibrium when he fell in love with Charlie Collins. Charlie accepts the dynamic Edgar Watson and loves him regardless: "Whoever you are, I believe in you, and that is truth enough for me" (579). Because of Charlie's love, Watson nearly forgets Jack Watson and embraces his more positive attributes. But when Charlie dies, Watson "lay amongst the dead," and experienced a spiritual death of his own (583). He feels as if love and compassion have "destroyed" him, thus he turns his confused and devastated energy to Jack Watson, where he seeks "a terrible revenges . . . but upon whom?" (584). This unspecified revenge follows Watson throughout his life. As he gives into vice, violence, and liquor, he concluds that he "failed once more to escape into obliteration" (585). Watson's traumatic experiences have left him stolid and cold, which allows his inner-darkness to vie for dominance over his other, more compassionate personas.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Watson stand up for the murder slave whom Claxton killed? Why does Watson then bury the slave?

Discussion Question 2

What significance does Selden's disguise as Owl-Man represent? Is it a comment on multifaceted identities, and if so, how does Watson's narration support this?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Watson react the way he does when Charlie dies? Why does he shun his newborn son rather than embrace him?

Vocabulary

summon, bluster, overseer, afflicted, crucible, unheeded, melancholy, desolation, sneer, raucous, imbue, abate

Book III, Section 2

Summary

Chapter 3 (601-640)

In The Indian Nations (601-602) — The Watson family arrived in Arkansas Territory. They spent the winter there and then departed for Oklahoma in autumn. Watson informs the reader that in Oklahoma, “all breeds of the human animal were mingled here in various shades of mud” (602). This is in part because Oklahoma had a solid mixture of Confederate and Yankee values.

Younger’s Bend (602-604) — Jane befriended Maybelle Reed, better known as Belle Starr. Belle Starr had recently remarried Jim Starr, a “bloodthirsty Cherokee” who housed outlaws on his property (603). Watson remarked that Belle was “the most shameless liar and noisy show off I ever came across” (603). Belle’s reputation as “Queen of the Outlaws” was a lie she peddled on behalf of her new husband’s involvement in criminal activity (603). One evening, Jane confided in Belle that Watson had been unjustly accused of murder in Florida, which is why they fled to Oklahoma. Despite her friendship with Jane, Belle was deathly attracted to Watson, and when Watson turned down her advances, Belle booted the Watson family out of their cabin.

Cherokee Funeral (604-608) — Watson’s family moved into another cabin on the other side of town. Their neighbor was Belle’s son, Eddie Reed. One day, Watson heard news that Belle Star had been murdered. Knowing of Belle’s hard feelings toward Watson, Jim Starr accused Watson of killing Belle. Watson was arrested, but was confident that he would be rightly acquitted. Watson spent two weeks in jail before the case was thrown out. Later, Jim admitted to killing Belle himself. However, Watson knew that Jim did not kill Belle Starr. Eddie Red killed Belle Starr; he told Watson as much.

A String of Ponies (608-611) — Watson and Jane gave birth to their third child, Lucius. Soon after Lucius’s birth, three horseback riders approached the Watson house. They offered Watson money for their horses, instructing him that some men would be by in a fortnight to pick up the horses. Desperate for money, Watson obliged. The next morning, the sheriff knocked on Watson’s door, pocketed the money Watson earned, and confiscated the horses—“In the territories, stealing horses was a crime far worse than murder” (610). Watson was sentenced to ten years in prison.

Black Frank (611-614) — Watson had been in prison for a year. He was nervous about how his family was faring without him and he longed desperately to escape. One morning, Watson, “a bull nigger named Frank, and a scrawny halfbreed, Curly” escaped prison (611). When they jumped across a river, Curly was shot. After difficult consideration, Frank and Watson opted to leave Curly. After escaping, Frank and Watson aimed to find horses. Frank had some “unfinished business” to do, and Watson was heading back to Clouds Creek to kill his father.

The Shadow Cousin (615-621) — It had been 20 years since Watson left Clouds Creek. When he returned he went to the country clerk's office to find the location of his father. Watson researched his fathers criminal history and talked and discovered that his father had been involved in several crimes within the past year. Watson asked about his father, Lige, around town, and everyone he asked scowled with disapproval.

The Gravedigger (621-625) — Watson found out that his father was working as a gravedigger. Watson rode up to the cemetery and dismounted his horse. He approached his father with a revolver in hand. Lige Watson looked terrified: “Come to kill me, Edgar? In cold blood? . . . Still need revenge? After twenty years?” (623). But as Watson observed his pathetic father curse and gather himself, Watson no longer felt the need to kill his pathetic dad. Watson walked away from his father and mounted his horse. When Watson left the cemetery, he stopped by Robert Watson’s house, the cousin he stayed with so many years ago. Watson expressed gratitude to Robert that he supported him in his time of need.

The Road to Georfia (625-627) — As Watson rode through Georgia, he noted the difficult circumstances black Americans were presently in. Although slavery was technically abolished, Jim Crow laws, the KKK, and low-paying and abusive field labor still plagued many black people.

Miss Jane Straughter (627-631) — Watson sought out Billy Collins, his sister’s husband. Watson inquired as to the local attitudes toward him, and if it was safe for him to return to Ichetucknee . Collins told Watson that it was not safe to return to town, that the sheriff’s office had hear about his arrest and were prepared to detain him. As Collins and Watson talked, “a lovely girl with a shadow in her skin” sauntered across the lawn (629). Collins informed Watson that the young girl was Jane Straughter, and Watson “knew right then I meant to have her” (629).

Arcadia (631-634) — Watson stopped in Arcadia, a county in Arkansas. He met a man named Will Durrance, who hired Watson to do work on his property. Durrance and Watson get to know each other well, and Durrance confided in Watson that an outlaw named Quinn Bass was aiming to kill Durrance over an old dispute. The local sheriff had posted a $1,000 reward for the capture of Quinn Bass, dead or alive. Durrance offered Watson an extra $500.00 if he took out Bass. Watson was hesitant to accept work as a hit-man, but desperate for money and nothing to lose, he accepted Durrance’s offer.

Quinn Bass, Dead (634-637) — One week later, Watson was at a bar with Durrance’s friend, Tommy Granger. Quinn Bass strutted into the bar, a pistol on his hip. Bass knew Granger worked with Durrance, and after a heated exchange, the two men stood up and fought. Granger was terrified of Bass, but still he withdrew his knife and circled Bass. After a squabble, Watson toed Bass’s behind with his boot. Bass turned angrily around at Watson and charged him with his knife. Watson shot Bass as he rushed toward him.

The Bounty Hunter (637-640) — Watson and Granger walked to the jailhouse to collect Watson’s reward. In an odd turn of events, the sheriff threatened to lynch Watson for killing Bass, and refused to give him his reward. Durrance shortly arrived in town, and

he, too, refused to fork over Watson's reward money. After Watson talked tough to Durrance and the sheriff, they reluctantly paid Watson his reward. Outside the jailhouse a mob was forming, intending to lynch whomever unjustly killed Quinn Bass. Watson strategically fired his gun into the air and held Durrance in front of him as he exited the jailhouse and mounted his horse. Watson then rode until he intersected with a ship leaving for Fort Myers, Florida. On this boat Watson met Bill Collier, where Bill told him about the excellent development opportunities in the Ten Thousand Islands.

Chapter 4 (641-700)

Ten Thousand Islands (641-645) — Watson sailed into the Chokoloskee Bay. He was excited to see so much "virgin land," and felt great ambition to settle here (641). Watson met the Storter, Smallwood, and McKinney families on his first day in Chokoloskee, and was warmly greeted into their town. Watson began cutting sugarcane for the Storters, which he figured was the crop he would have to grow and harvest in order to make a living on this island. While Watson worked with the Storters, he hired a young boy named Erskine Thompson to teach him boat mechanics and "sea rudiments" (642). On his boat rides with Erskine, Watson scoped out Chatham Bend as the best piece of land in Chokoloskee. Unfortunately, a grizzled fugitive named Will Raymond occupied the highest piece of ground on the Bend, property in which Watson aimed to acquire. One day, Watson rode up to Raymond's house and offered him cash for his property. Raymond denied him, telling Watson he would kill him if he trespassed on his land again.

Cayo Hueso or Bone Key or Key West (645-649) — Watson traveled to Key West, where he reported Raymond's whereabouts to the Monroe County sheriff. The reward for capturing the murderer Raymond was $250. Watson found Raymond's wife in town and gave her the money. They then slept together, and Raymond's wife implored Watson to take her husband's quitclaim off her hands. From then on, Watson owned the property on Chatham Bend. Shortly after this experience, Watson gained the acquaintance of successful entrepreneurs Broward and Penny, who Watson impressed with his ambition to "get ahead in life" (647). Broward had political aspirations and told Watson that if he were ever elected governor, he would assist Watson in his capitalistic endeavors.

On Chatham Bend (649-654) — Watson got to work building on Chatham Bend. He began building his home and clearing ground for sugarcane crop. Watson decided to specialize in making cane syrup, because he noted that no other planted in the area was doing so. Around that time Erskine's mother, Henrietta, moved into the Bend to housekeep for Watson. Tant Jenkins also began working for Watson, who Watson found hilarious and endearing. A year after moving onto Chatham Bend, Henrietta birthed Watson a child.

Casting Asparagus On A Man's Honor (654-657) — Watson's wife, Jane, wrote to Watson and asked if the family could join him on the Bend. Watson told Henrietta she had to leave the Bend, to which she reacted negatively. The day before Watson's family was scheduled to arrive in Chokoloskee, Watson made the acquaintance of Dr.

Langford and Mr. Cole, to businessmen who “wished to invest in . . . my cane syrup operation” (656).

Works and Days (657-661) — Watson sailed north with Erskine to meet his family. When the family arrived on Chatham Bend the next day, they were all enamored with their new home; Watson said his house was the “finest house between Fort Myers and Key West” (658). Watson taught his children about Native American history and wildlife. Lucius, Watson noted, was the one child who seemed interested in these subjects.

Gator Sloughs (661-662) — Watson went gator hunting with Tant and Erskine. Lucius also asked to come along. When Watson spotted a massive gator wading in the water, he struck it on the head until it finally died. Watson decided not to skin its belly, as they did with other gators, and rather chose to leave it. Lucius asked why Watson killed the gator if he did not intend to make use of it. Watson said killing the gator protected the potential lives this big gator would one day take, either a dog or a child. Lucius never went gator hunting again.

The Frenchman (662-668) — Jane fell ill during her first summer at Chatham Bend. Because she became so sick, Jane had planned to move to Fort Myers with the children so she could be closer to a doctor. Before Jane left, Watson brought her to have “cultured conversation” with the Frenchman, Chevelier (662). During their conversation, Watson, Jane, and Chevelier discuss flora, fauna, and American culture. Chevelier could not understand the indifference in which “Americans regarded slavery” (664). About one month after their conversation, Watson opted to visit Chevelier again, this time on his own. When he entered the Frenchman’s house, however, Watson found him dead. The Harden boys came rowing by, and when Watson told them that Chevelier had died, Watson knew he “would be blamed for the Frenchman’s death” (668).

The Great Calusa Clam Bed (668-669) — Before Chevelier died, he told Watson about an abundant clam bed near Gopher Key. Watson had ambition to establish a large clam fishery.

Watson went to visit Jane in Fort Myers. She had gotten extremely ill, and Watson knew she would die soon.

1898 (669-675) — Carrie and Walt Langford were set to marry in a matter of months. Watson agreed to his daughter’s marriage because developing ties with a profitable and prosperous family like the Langford’s was advantageous for Watsons' future. Before Watson gave his permission, he met one-on-one with Walt. Watson instructed Walt to not make love with her until she was ready. Watson’s insinuation that Walt would not respect Carrie was “an insult to his honor as a Southern Gentleman” (670). The conclusion of this section features an involved conversation between Watson and Jane regarding the Spanish War and American conquest.

Hell on the Border (675-679) — The book that accused an Edgar A. Watson of murdering Belle Starr, entitled Hell on the Border, arrived in southern Florida to great fanfare. The townspeople of Chokoloskee began talking about the book, and soon

enough Carrie and Jane heard the negative rumors, too. But Jane knew the truth, and assured her husband that she did not believe the rumors. Soon, “Mr. E.J. Watson had become the most celebrated . . . notorious citizen in town” (678). Because of the recent rumors, the Langfords and the Coles, once interested in doing business with Watson, no longer want to include him in any entrepreneurial discussions. The Langfords also suggested that Watson not attend Carrie’s wedding, as Watson would bring too much shame to the Langford family’s reputation.

Blood Shadow (679-682) — Despite the drama, Watson’s cane syrup operation was doing well. Many of the men who worked for Watson were outlaws and drifters, and in order to scare them into working, Watson threatened to shoot them in the head if they did not follow orders. Of course, this was what began the “Watson Payday” rumors that quickly circulated Chokoloskee.

Zachariah (682-686) — One of Watson’s cane cutters, Zachariah, was complaining that cane cutting was too dangerous and required a higher pay in order to compensate for the risks. Zachariah threatened Watson that he would organize a strike and form a union. Watson did not heed Zachariah’s complaints; Watson was too busy keeping his cane syrup operation afloat after a capital setback that occurred several months prior. If Zachariah was successful in throwing a strike, Watson’s syrup operations would almost assuredly crumble. Watson wanted to get rid of Zachariah badly, and opined, “men who stood in the way of Twentieth Century progress had only themselves to blame” (683). Desperate to keep his syrup operation afloat, Watson woke up Zachariah and his friend, Ted, early and ordered the out into the forest. In the quiet of the woods, Watson had the two men dig their own graves. He asked the men to stand in their graves and turn around before bludgeoning them on the heads and murdering them. Although Watson had considerably justified this murder prior to committing it, he now feels “sick to death” by the terrible deed he committed.

The Tuckers (686-689) — Watson’s foreman, Wally Tucker, found the dead bodies and fled with his wife, Bet. First Wally asked Watson for his earnings, but after being denied as much, Wally and Bet fled. They told Rob they feared for their life. About a month later, after Watson found out that the Tuckers had built a cabin on his quitclaim, he demanded that they move immediately. Watson also knew that Wally was spreading rumors about him, which enraged Watson. Rob tried to ease his father from kicking off the Tuckers but Watson would not listen. Rob was the only one left at Chatham Bend and every time Watson looked at him he desperately remembered his first love, Charlie. This remembering led Watson to increasingly despise Rob. On New Year’s morning, drunk and ecstatic, Watson decided to take care of the Tuckers. Rob wanted to join but Watson told him no. When Rob insisted, Watson told him to get in the boat and row.

At Lost Man’s Key (690-692) — On the way to the Tuckers, Rob attempted to talk his father out of killing the innocent couple. When they arrived to the shore, Watson instructed Rob to “stay in the boat . . . you were never here” (690). Again, Rob disobeyed his father and followed him toward the house. Wally was outside working, and Watson yelled at him to vacate the property immediately. Watson told Rob to retrieve Bet and usher the couple off the property. As Rob reluctantly walked toward the

house, Wally reached for his shotgun; Rob tried to grab at it, but Watson fired at Tucker in defense, killing him. Watson and Rob were both shocked and beside themselves.

Meanwhile Bet had run off into the woods. Watson instructed Rob to kill Bet “quick and merciful . . . temple or base of the skull” (691). Rob resisted, crying in terror, but finally obliged to his father’s command. Realizing what the terrible order had just told his son to do, Watson ran after Rob, yelling at him to stop and come back. Then Watson heard the gun go off. He knew right then that Rob “had destroyed himself” (691). Watson realized in this moment, watching his devastated son holding the gun, appalled with the unthinkable act he just committed, that he had always loved Rob. Watson felt an immense wave of guilt and grief fall over him.

Turning and Returning (692-696) — Rowing his boat home, Watson directed Rob to lie by his feet and to remain unseen. “I had done this brave wild boy a lifelong harm,” thought Watson (693). Back at Chatham Bend, Watson set fire to his cane harvest, because he knew he would have to leave Chokoloskee until the murders blew over. Watson realized after that Rob had taken his boat and run off. Watson declared that if Rob ever returned into his life, he “would kiss him on the forehead,” and love him the way he always deserved to be loved (694). Watson left for Oklahoma by first light. Watson discovered the next day that the Hardens and Henry Short found both of the Tucker bodies.

Forever After (696-700) — Watson stopped by Fort Myers before he fled Florida. He needed to see Jane before he left, as he knew she would be dead by the time he returned. Watson told Jane he loved her, and realized that he loved Jane just as much as he ever loved Charlie, maybe even deeper. Before Watson and Jane parted, he confessed to her that he was a murderer. “May God rest her soul,” said Jane, as Watson left (700).

Analysis

After Watson was sentenced to prison for horse thievery, he contemplated life’s unfairness. “Was it Plato who said, Life is terrible, but it isn’t serious? Did he mean that man is a hostage to his life while held captive by death, so why take such a life seriously? Fuck it, I thought. Fuck God, fuck everything” (609). Watson’s nihilist denouncement of spiritual and secular meaning offers tremendous insight into his ethical and moral code throughout the novel. Because of the difficult circumstances Watson had been dealt, he has vowed to seek sovereignty in himself rather than in religion or relationships. This newfound and unapologetic self-reliance guides Watson’s decision making throughout the novel, and at times lends him major success, and others, deep failure. But by condemning God in such a bombastic way—“Fuck God”—Watson takes control of his fate by establishing accountability over his life (609).

Although Watson views black people as humans, he still has southern prejudice that impacts his behavior toward the black community. Watson escapes jail with a black man, Frank Reese, who is a quiet, stolid man. Watson asks Frank why he talks so little,

and Frank responds: “Man got his honor to think about,” to which Watson replies, “To err is human” (613). At first, Watson humanizes Frank by confirming his value system, but then claims, “If a black man sasses me—well, I won’t tolerate it” (613). Watson then goes on to argue that Union soldiers respect blacks but do not defend them—“the bluecoats never raised a hand to stop the Regulators” (614). By contrasting “those damn-Yankee hypocrites” with his own southern value system, Watson finds a new avenue in which to structure his life—pick and choose upheld values and disregard the others. This mishmash of ideals embodies the modern American Frontiersman.

Watson’s inventive and untraditional value system is constantly at odds with his upbringing as a confederate officer’s son. But Watson learns that in order to survive and prosper within modern American, he must adopt a new code of conduct. Watson experiences this value clash when he is hired to kill Quinn Bass. Watson struggles to determine if being paid to kill someone is honorable or not, until finally he remarks, “I knew all along I would kill Quinn Bass. For a Watson of Clouds Crooks, this was dishonor. I had to accept that and I do today” (634). In order to make the decision to kill Bass, Watson admits to counseling “that promising young farmer Edgar A. Watson,” or in other words, the kindhearted boy he once was prior to killing Selden. Reward money is a major consideration while Watson makes the decision, and after he accepts the money, he says, “many a prosperous businessman and proud American honored for his enterprise in his community got his start in unmentionable dealing such as these” (634). Watson complicates American values by claiming that progress and advancements have been made unethically, and at some point or another, one had to chose whether to “kill or be killed” (634).

Watson’s aforementioned decision to become “a prosperous businessman and proud American honored for his enterprise” is crystalized as he envisions developing an agriculture empire on the Ten Thousand Islands’ “virgin coast awaiting man’s dominion” (640). Watson’s vision fills him “with excitement, even hope,” as he seeks to impose his will and ownership over “a huge wilderness to be tamed and harnessed” (640). While considering his great business opportunities, Watson thinks, “I had the strength and ambition made more fierce by so much failure. It was up to me” (640). Again, Watson demonstrates his clash of complex values in these statements. His great ambition to develop and build an enterprise is remnant to the lessons Robert Watson taught him. But these opportunities were made possible by killing for profit, a decision that reeks of his father’s dishonor. But together, these convoluted decisions compromise the new American frontiersman, willing to risk anything to find success within the stream of American progress.

In a conversation with Chevelier, Watson and Jane discuss the elements of “the new American man” and what it means to be “honorable” in the wild American frontier (665). Chevelier proclaims that the new American “is neither a European nor the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood you will find in no other country. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men!” (665). Chevelier evokes America’s melting pot analogy here, but then later addresses America’s profound denial and discrimination of other races: Chevelier is “appalled by the callous indifference with which most Americans regarded slavery” (664). Thus, Chevelier,

dispels racial and ethnic discrimination as foolish granted that America's new ethnicity is a blend and mixing of Native American, African, and European. To not embrace this rich and abundant source of culture would be a disgrace.

Watson embraces his newfound American Frontier principals when he kills Zachariah and Ted in order to avoid business failure. Zachariah longs to form a union, and threatens Watson to pay higher wages and offer fairer treatment for his workers. Watson opts to kill these two challengers because "great Americans let nothing stand in the way of their own ambitions—that's the secret of their greatness" (683). Watson's commitment to progress and development is endangered by equal rights and fairness, and like his American predecessors, Watson chooses "excessive violence" in order to cure his problems and progress his ambitions (683). But after Watson kills these two young men, he remarks, "You have just deprived two human beings of their lives. How can this river and this forest look the same to you?" (685). By contrasting life and nature with murder and progress, Watson offers significant insight into the misguided route he has taken.

Killing Zacariah and Ted leads Watson to consider the moral imperatives of right and wrong: "There is a difference between right and wrong, always was and always will be, but each man's wrong and each man's right a different, just depends," thinks a troubled Watson (686). Watson convinces himself that killing two innocent men is inconsequential in the grand scheme of his family's broader success. However, Watson concludes that "what I'd done must have been wrong by my own lights because I'd hated the ding of it and still felt sick to death, no matter how often I insisted to myself that my business and my family's future . . . were more important that the loss of two anonymous brown men" (686). In the clarity of the moment, however, Watson realizes that this line of thinking is not true. Human life cannot be bargained.

Discussion Question 1

Is Watson's decision to kill Quinn Bass justified? Is it morally decent because the killing is protected under the law? If so, why does Watson have such a hard time making the decision?

Discussion Question 2

Is there truth behind Watson's claim that America was founded upon "excessive violence?"

Discussion Question 3

Why does Watson instruct Rob to kill Bet? What does Watson realize about his firstborn son after Rob has done the murderous deed?

Vocabulary

rudiment, skiff, implore, bereft, hellion, extradite, heinous, lament, rumpus, begrimed, consignment

Book III, Section 3

Summary

Chapter 5 (701-734)

An Obituary (701-704) — Watson returned to Ichetucknee to visit his family. The former Ichetucknee of Myers Plantation was now known as the Tolen Plantation; Laura had died and signed off the quitclaim to Sam Tolen.

Burnt Ham (704-708) — Watson stayed with his friend Will Cox, who occupied Watson's old cabin. Watson reunited with "Black Frank Reese from Arkansas," who had turned up at Will's cabin shortly after fleeing prison with Watson (705). Sam Tolen was cocky and confident, and tried to intimidate Watson with his newfound power. Watson returned Sam's threats, but secretly vowed to put his "gun away for good" (707).

Carrie sent word to Watson that Jane passed away. Soon Eddie came and worked with his father. Doc Staughter also worked with Watson, and Doc's daughter Jane was a gorgeous young woman. Watson developed an intense infatuation for Jane, and was protective of her around other men.

At Pavillion Key (708-713) — Watson returned to Chatham Bend. Bill House, Henry Short, and Erskine Thompson were working in Fort White and camping on Pavillion Key, so Watson saw a lot of these young men. Watson admired Henry Short's work ethic, and thought him to be a good young man. Henry and Jane Straughter fell in love. Defensive, Watson ran Henry off his farm and told him to stay away from Jane. Jane was enraged that Watson sent away Henry, and confided that they intended to marry. After some time, Jane and Watson began making love in the evenings, although Watson knew Jane did not love him.

Nigger to the Bone (714-717) — Watson learned of Henry's family background from D.D. House, how Henry's mother was white and father was black, and how his father hung for sleeping with a white woman.

Dangerous Talk (717-727) — Word had spread around Chokoloskee that Watson returned to his home on Chatham Bend. Fearing that a posse would come and lynch him, Watson returned to Fort White and Ichetucknee. When Watson returned to Fort White, a rumor had spread that he had killed a Tolen harvest hand, John Russ. Tabitha called upon Watson to visit her; she scolded him for again defaming their family. Watson pleaded his innocence, but it was no use - no one in town believed him. Tabitha told Watson that she cut him out of the will, and then accused him of killing his wife, Jane. Although Tabitha was furious at Watson, she expressed sever distaste in Sam Tolen, who was selling large chunks of the plantation and ruining the land.

Watson visited Sam and confronted him about selling the Ichetucknee plantation and spreading rumors about Watson's involvement in John Russ's death. Sam and his

brother Mike doubled-down on their accusation that Watson killed John Russ. Watson told them that if they continued to spread these rumors, they would not “survive it” (723).

Watson interacted with a young Leslie Cox, who he offers description of. Watson says Leslie had temperament issues and showed psychopathic tendencies. Still, Watson was fond of him. Leslie was fascinated by the murderous Watson rumors, and feverishly asked Watson about his past as a “desperado” and outlaw (725). More frighteningly however, Watson observes, was Leslie’s enchantment with violence. During one of Watson and Leslie’s conversation, Leslie told Watson that Sam Tolen had murdered a black man for “sassing him” (726). This senseless killing upset Watson, but Leslie was enthralled by it. Leslie also reported that Sam was hiring people to kill Watson.

1903 (727-729) — Back at Chatham Bend, Watson made a man named Fred Dyer his foreman. Fred’s wife, Sybil, had befriended Watson almost a decade earlier. Although Fred was a good carpenter, he drank a lot and constantly left the Bend to run alleged errands. Although Watson detested Fred’s behavior, he let Fred run amok so Watson could spend alone time with Sybil.

The Death of Bradley (729-733) — Rumor passed through Chokoloskee that a man Watson knew named Guy Bradley had been shot and killed. Watson was quickly pegged as the murderer, despite his friendship with Guy. Gene Roberts informed Watson of these rumors, and proclaimed: “There’s been plenty killins blamed on E.J Watson that he never done” (733).

Chapter 6 (735-766)

Young Kate Edna (734-741) — Back in Fort White, Watson heard that the preacher William Bethea’s daughter had been recently widowed and was looking for a partner. When Watson arrived at Burdett’s house to court his daughter, he instead saw Bethea other younger daughter, Edna Kate. Watson had fallen in love with Kate before he saw Bethea’s widowed daughter. Kate agreed to marry him; she was the same age as his son Lucius, and turned 16 when Watson neared 50. Leslie Cox had also had his eye on Kate for some time, and teased Watson about his young wife’s age difference. Watson reprimanded Leslie more than once for talking grossly about Kate.

Sybil and Nell (741-742) — Meanwhile, Fred Dyer had heard the Tucker murder rumors. When Watson returned to the Bend, Dyer demanded his pay or else he would quit. Watson kindly told him he would not pay him, and if he quit he would lose all of his earnings. Sybil was pregnant at the time, but when she give birth the child arrived stillborn. The Dyer’s stayed at the Bend for another year, but left one day when Watson was back in Fort White.

We Parted (742-743) — Tabitha Watson was dying and had left all of her belongings and inheritance to Sam Tolen.

Deep Lake (744-746) — Kate gave birth to her and Watson’s first child, Ruth Ellen. They travelled back to Chokoloskee to visit Carrie. Once they arrived, Walt and Cole asked for Watson’s advice on a business proposition, an agriculture project on a

undeveloped track near Deep Lake. Watson offered the two men sound business and planting advice, which Walt and Cole gladly accept. Talking business with Walt and Cole made Watson realized how much progress he sacrificed during all his years on the run. When horses-drawn buggies were replaced with automobiles, and lamps replaces with light bulbs, Watson was still in the backcountry, hiding.

Julian and Laura (747-750) — Watson's nephew Julian married Laura Hawkins. Kate was thrilled for their marriage, because Laura and her were childhood best friends. Kate was already getting lonely in her husband's tense company. Watson then relates a story where Julian, Laura, Kate, Lucius, Watson, and their little girl Ruth, got caught in a bad storm while sailing back to Chatham Bend. Lucius and Julian got separated from the others and did not return to Chatham Bend for days. In all of the madness, Laura somehow lost her early pregnancy. Julian never forgave Watson for this episode.

Off Cape Sable (750-754) — Green Waller told Watson that Henry was sailing a mixed cargo of Watson's hogs, cows, cane syrup, and other produce to Key West. Erskine Thompson was initially supposed to do this, but he pawned the job off to Henry Short. However, Short was gone several days longer than he should have been, and people were beginning to get worried. When Henry did return, he went right to Watson and took full accountability for sinking his cargo. Watson, Lucius, and Henry sailed out to salvage Watson's boat. When they arrived, however, an Island pirate was rigging it onto his ship. Watson eventually talked the pirates down because, as Watson said, "There wasn't one man on that other boat who wanted trouble" (753).

Shooting (754-759) — Lucius departed at the Hardens, and Watson and Henry found themselves alone. They were to camp somewhere for the night and sail back to Chatham Bend in the morning. That night, Watson was drinking and instigating Henry, teasing him about Jane Straughter. But soon Watson and Henry began talking more casually, and Watson noted that Henry was "very complicated" (756). This complication primarily referred to his ambiguous race—he looked like a white man but had a black social identity. When Watson asked Henry his ancestry, Henry responded: "Nigger to the bone" (757).

Watson then challenged Henry to a shooting competition. Watson knew Henry had a wicked shot, but had not seen it himself. Henry did not want to shoot with Watson, probably scared that Watson would shoot him. The two men aimed at a bottle floating in the water. They both missed several times. Watson noted that Henry had missed in the same spot every time, proving that Henry was intentionally trying to miss the target. When Watson yelled at Henry to finish it, Henry shot the bottle square in the neck. Watson then warned Henry: "Next time I tell you, finish it! You damn well finish it" (759).

Governor Broward (759-762) — Napoleon Broward, the man Watson met many years ago, was now Florida's governor. Broward had plans to "conquer the Everglades" and enhance Florida's development and agriculture. Broward promised Watson a role in his political decision-making, which Watson happily accepted. Meanwhile, Lucius had moved into the Bend with Watson and his young family. Watson became very proud of his young son, who had become a naturalist and an outdoorsman.

Stillborn Baby (762-764) — Julian initially planned to work a year for Watson, but after the bad experience at sea, he no longer trusted Watson. His wife Laura miscarried their child.

Addison Tilghman Watson (764-766) —In Fort White Kate and Watson birthed their second child, Addison. Kate did not want to return to Chatham Bend yet, so Watson went back alone. When Kate finally joined Watson in the winter, she said she heated the Bend, and felt incredibly lonely all the time. Watson agreed to temporarily return to Fort White with Kate in the spring.

Analysis

In a society that uses race as its primary identity marker, Watson considers the role of half-breeds and ambiguous ethnicities. Watson is interested in these defining identity markers mainly because of his convoluted identity history—his dioptric split between good and evil and acceptance of his so-called shadow ego, Jack. Watson notes that the "Everglades was a frontier . . . with plenty of half-breeds in the mix: if the Hardens wanted to be white, they had as much claim to that label as the next bunch" (714). Yet in a reality colored by binaries, many half-breeds are pre-assigned their racial category. Henry Short is Watson's primary example, "whose color was in the eye of the beholder, according to how you turned him to the light" (716). Henry is "a lot lighter in his shade than many of them so-called whites" who discriminate against him in Chokoloskee (716). Watson is curious as to why Henry revels in his blackness if his race is so ambiguous. Watson inquires this question with D.D House, who tells Watson that Henry's black father had the same "light-skinned, blue eyes and brown hair" as Henry does (716). Henry's father owned his blackness, going as far as to shout to his lynch mob that he was "Nigger to the bone!" (716). Watson is confused by Henry's father's admission of inferiority, unable to see the direct correlation between his own personal identity crisis and Henry's father.

Henry solidifies his racial identification in a private and tense conversation with Watson on Lost Man's Key. Watson asked Henry about his ancestry and what his mother looked like. Henry's only response was a whisper: "Nigger. Nigger to the bone" (757). Despite receiving an ascribed social identity and being ambiguously colored, Henry has opted to claim ownership over his blackness in the same way his father did. This runs in conflict with Watson's own ambiguous set of identities. Although not racial, Watson does not know what part of him to embrace and what part to let go of. Thus, Henry teaches Watson that inner-peace with outward suffering is more sustainable than inner-turmoil with outward success.

Because of Watson's misfortune with the law, he is left behind "in this rush of [American] progress" (746). Watson considers his primary contributions to American progress to be "an adaptive strain of sugarcane and a few good ideas that other men would profit by" (746). But like the destructive morals that made American progress possible, the land in which developers have built on is "smelly . . . and rotting," As is Watson's personal life, which has become "painful and humiliating" (746). Watson sought deeper meaning and

fulfillment in capitalism and still does—“I had to keep my courage up until I could join the flow of progress and make my mark” (746). The dramatic irony of Watson’s narrative, though, is that we know he does not rejoin the flow of progress; he falls off and dies in despair.

As Watson struggles to regain his footing in the modern economic landscape, he considers his degrading reputation as a possible reason. Watson acknowledges the dichotomy of his public persona, and is unsure which identity he believes to be his true self: “By reputation, I was two men in this district, the jovial hardworking brother-in-law of Billy Collins and the cold-blooded desperado—the Man Who Killed Belle Starr” (736). Watson reiterates what we already know about him: that he is a conflicted man with contradictory ideals that frequently collide with one another. Unlike Henry, Watson does not attach himself to either one of these counter identities, but, rather, occupies both when necessary. This was apparent when Sybil Dyer confronted Watson about the “darkeness” she saw in his eyes at night: “I’m frightened of a man who wears a gun under his coat . . . who are you waiting for?” (763). Watson admitted he “had no idea who I was waiting for . . . Jack Watson, maybe” (763). Here Watson reveals a substantial truth: that he is scared of himself, and that he remains in constant conflict with his divided identities and values.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Henry not stand up to Watson when Watson orders Henry off of Chatham Bend for falling in love with Jane Straughter?

Discussion Question 2

What is Watson hoping to gain from American progress? Notoriety? Success? Fulfillment? What void might his obsession with progress be attempting to fill?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Watson not discourage the murder rumors about him? Is he using these rumors to his advantage?

Vocabulary

terrapin, tattle, restrain, gawky, scrawl, threadbare, nocturnal, varmint, retribution, bountiful

Book III, Section 4

Summary

Chapter 7 (767-784)

Code of the Frontier (767-771) — In the months following Tabitha's death, Sam Tolen's drinking increased and his ability to maintain the Ichetucknee plantation lessened. Sam lost all of his harvest hands because he accused everyone of trying to steal from him. One day, a drunken Sam rode up to Will Cox's house and nonsensically began threatening him. Leslie came out of the house and pointed a gun at Sam, instructing Sam to apologize to his father. From that point forward, "Sam was spoiling for a showdown" with Leslie (768). Leslie sought Watson's advice on what to do about Sam Tolen: "I better shoot him first," said Leslie (769). Watson simply told Leslie that "every man had his own idea of justice" and that Leslie had to do what he had to do. Watson admitted he had a bias against Sam Tolen, but Leslie took Watson's advice as permission to kill Sam.

Watson then gave Leslie winded instructions on how and why to kill, like defending one's rights by dealing forcefully with enemies or upholding one's honor against a threat. But Watson noted that Leslie was not interested in these "noble lessons"; Leslie just wanted to kill (771). During these talks, Watson admitted to taking part in the Belle Starr murder.

The Big Red House (772-775) — Watson aimed to help Leslie kill Sam. Watson brought Frank along with him, and they hid in the bushes and waited for Sam to ride by. As he trotted by, Frank fired his gun in the air. The plan was then for Leslie to shoot Sam, but Leslie's finger froze on the trigger. Frank yelled at Leslie to shoot, which Watson said Leslie never forgave Frank for, a black man telling him what to do. Leslie did eventually shoot. Watson noted that after Leslie killed Sam, Leslie "had taken a sharp turn and perhaps not for the better" (774).

Sheriff Dick Will Purvis (775-780) — At Sam's burial, Watson offered his hand and condolences to Sam's brothers, Jim and Mike. It was then that Mike accused Watson of killing Sam. Mike then formally accused Watson of murder to Sheriff Purvis, though he did not have evidence; Mike's claim was that Watson was jealous of Sam and wanted his plantation back. Finding no evidence, Purvis gave up on the Watson accusation. But Leslie mentioned to Purvis that Watson's black help, Frank, was seen wearing Sam's old boots. Frank was arrested the next day. When Watson confronted Leslie on Frank's arrest, Leslie denied accusing Frank of anything. Leslie was still elated after killing Sam. He was bragging about it to his friends, and recalling the murder every time he spoke with Watson. One day when Leslie was bragging, several listeners reported his boasts to the sheriff. He was shortly arrested. Leslie claimed that Watson had put him up to the murder. Watson visited Leslie in jail and threatened him to back off his accusation of Frank and himself. Leslie did so, and Frank was released. Meanwhile, Kate had heard

rumors that Watson killed Sam Tolen. Although Watson denied his wife's inquiry, she seemed to not believe him.

Commissioner D. M. Tolen (780-784) — Leslie was eventually released on lack of evidence. He and Watson decided to kill Mike Tolen; Mike would not stop accusing them, and one day he could stumble across the truth. Frank refused to involve himself in Mike's death; he had married Jane Straughter and wanted to lead a peaceful life.

High in the trees, Watson and Leslie waited for Mike Tolen to check his mailbox. Watson was intending to be the shooter, but when Mike came into view, Leslie shot him first. Watson and Leslie fled the murder scene. As Watson was running away, he realized he left his revolver behind at the crime scene. He knew he could not go back, as people had probably heard the shot and were swarming to the scene. Watson had another gun with him, and when he ran across Frank's land, he instructed Frank to bury his gun for him. Watson ran to his sister's house, where he instructed his nephews, Julian and Willie, to develop an alibi for him: "I was right here in this yard since early morning," Watson told them to say (784).

Chapter 8 (785-811)

The Trials (785-797) — Law enforcement found Watson's revolver 200 yards from the crime scene. After being accused for Sam's murder, officers went to Frank and Watson's homes. The law found Watson's other gun buried shallow in Frank's field. Watson and Frank were both arrested and brought to the county jail. Watson felt guilty that Frank was now in the middle of a murder accusation when he did nothing wrong. In the jail cell, Watson wondered why Frank had not buried his gun deeper; he left it in the shallow dirt where Watson initially put it. Frank told Watson that he wanted nothing to do with the gun.

The next morning, a huge mob formed outside the jail, jeering to lynch Watson and "the nigger" (790). To secure his detainees' safety, Sheriff Purvis escorted Frank and Watson to a different county's jailhouse. By the time they arrived at the new jail, Watson had learned that his Collins nephews presented his alibi so poorly that law enforcement was convinced that Watson was guilty. Because the nephews were caught lying, they were charged with accessory to murder. Sure enough, the young men caved and recanted their initial testimony. Within the week, Frank and Watson were indicted for Mike Tolen's murder.

Leslie joined Watson and Frank in jail after the Collins nephews accused Leslie, too. Leslie lashed out at Frank, but Frank fearlessly responded, telling Leslie he would kill him if he continued to slander his skin color.

Thanks to Walt Langford and Jim Cole, Watson and Frank were assigned the top defense attorney in Florida, Fred Cone. In the first day of trial the defendants pleaded not guilty. In court, Cone primarily argued that the Fort White townsmen and law enforcement had a known bias against Edgar Watson, and would have lynched him if he did not transfer jails.

Next, Watson recalls the numerous testimonies for and against him. His sister, Min, lied under oath and said that Watson was at her house the morning of the murder; Kate and Eddie testified on Watson's character. No one spoke for Frank Resse—he was known simply as "Watson's nigger," and his fate rested squarely with Watson's.

Two Figures on the Road (797-800) — Calvin Banks testified against Watson. He lived near Mike Tolen and claimed he saw Watson run through the woods after the gun had sounded. Calvin said he did not see a "cullud man" at the crime scene, a statement disregarded by the court. After Leslie Cox was again acquitted for murdering Sam Tolen, he testified for Watson and Frank. The jury was very impressed by Leslie's sincere praise for Watson's innocence.

Call Me Cory (800-806) — Cole visited Watson in jail and suggested he plead guilty. If not, Walter said, Watson would assuredly be sentenced to life in prison. After Cole left, prosecutor Cory Larabee met with Watson. Cory offered Watson an ultimatum: plead guilty or hang. Instead, Watson snapped at Cory to leave him or alone or Watson would have him disbarred. Next, Jim Tolen visited Watson. Jim was full of threats and empty insults. Jim antagonized Watson so greatly that Watson yelled, "You and you brothers stole our plantation and you will pay for that the same way we did" (805). Prosecutor Cory overheard this, as did the prison guard, and Jim Tolen left the jail confident that this was the closest Watson would get to confession.

The Knife (806-811) — Alone, Watson considered why he was always in trouble—"a lot of it was of my own manufacture," he thought (806). Watson's trial stretched until mid-December, and the result did not look promising. The lawyer fees Watson was amassing would put him in crippling debt whether he was found guilty or not. Meanwhile, Jim Cole was utilizing his connections in the state capital to try and give Watson leniency. Cole eventually handpicked a new jury, after there were some complications in an earlier trial. Watson and Frank were ultimately acquitted. As he left the courtroom, Watson noted that the trial was less judiciary and more "amateur theatre" (810). Watson shook Calvin Banks's hand, the black man who testified against him. Watson told him there were no hard feelings and warned Calvin to watch out for Leslie Cox.

Analysis

Watson lays out his curated honor code when telling Leslie how to kill an enemy. Watson proclaimed that a man must defend "one's rights by dealing forcefully with insult or injustice, threat or humiliation, no matter the consequence to life or limb . . . No matter what moralists might preach, bending one's neck in defeat was sole dishonor" (770). Up until now, Watson's post-Civil War honor code had been inferred by his actions and occasional ethical musings, but never explicitly laid out in direct language. But here, an experienced and mature Watson considers the moral implications of when "lying, craftiness, so called betrayal" and murder become justified—"when they were the sole means to defend the family honor" (771). Watson then admitted that these "noble lessons, faithfully learned at the knee of Ring-Eye Lige," still guided his life (771). The

contradiction between Watson's detachment from his father's brand of Confederacy and embrace of his father's southern honor code is at one puzzling and fitting. Watson exists in two America's: pre-Civil War, where ethical and legal decisions are predicated on archaic honor systems, and a slowly progressive America, where tolerance and empathy are slowly weaning into dominant consciousness.

Although not explicitly stated, Leslie Cox exhibits many signs of severe mental illness and psychopathic tendencies. Watson describes him as not a "normal feller," who experienced head trauma as a boy when a horse kicked him in the head, an experience that "might have shifted his brain, too, to judge from his behavior" (724). After Watson explains his specific code for committing ethically thorny acts to Leslie, Watson notes that his instructions "were lost on Leslie—or rather this was too much thought for him to handle at once" (771). Leslie's behavior on the baseball diamond further reflects his mental instability: he uses his "fastball to scare and humiliate opposing batters . . . and he took what he wanted whether it belonged to him or not" (724). Most pertinently, however, is Leslie's romantic obsession with violence. Leslie idolizes the murderous Watson rumors, and wants to be a desperado "just like Watson" (725). Given the era, mental illness did not have sufficient diagnoses. But granted Leslie's disturbing character description and impending murders, he appears to exhibit traditional psychopathic traits.

Despite Frank Reese's non-involvement in the Tolen murders, he is still put on trial for murdering Mike Tolen with Watson. To Watson's surprise, Frank "remained quiet. As a black man, he'd never expected anything from life and knew that no protest would save him. So far as Frank Reese was concerned, life was right on schedule" (790). Because of Frank's stoic demeanor, Watson deems Frank "a more complicated man" than he initially thought, a strong-minded man with a high tolerance to suffering. It is in this moment that Watson realizes: "I had seen this black man without ever seeing him" (798). Frank feels that a murder accusation is "right on schedule" in his life because as a black man he knows he is the scapegoat for the white man's trepidations. Furthermore, Frank does not feel entitled to anything other than suffering; on the contrary, when Frank experiences anything other than suffering, he is skeptical of the eventual outcome. So when Watson finds Frank weeping in his jail cell, he knows "he was not weeping because he was afraid but because, facing death, he was free at last" (791). Frank shows little emotion during the trial because his personal imprisonment extends far beyond the confines of the courtroom or jail cell; a black man in America is imprisoned everywhere he goes at that time.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Watson tell Leslie the ethics of killing and self-defense instead of denouncing murder? Is Watson to blame for the violent turn Leslie's life takes?

Discussion Question 2

What does this trial scenes say about early twentieth century justice? Was it a fair system or were there systemic biases?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Frank so stolid and calm throughout his trial and imprisonment? What does this say about both his character and the black American spirit?

Vocabulary

obliterate, bramble, flitter, commissary, exploit, buckboard, exhume, turmoil, bushel, hull

Book III, Section 5

Summary

Chapter 9 (812-848)

Modern Times (812-815) — Watson returned to Chokoloskee with his family. Development had vamped up in the area, and Watson felt like he was far behind the times. The first thing Watson did when he got into to town was visit Carrie. When Watson, Kate, and the children appeared at her door, however, Carrie did not invite them in. Watson dejectedly turned and left his first daughter, assuming they "would never meet again" (814). On the boat to the Bend, Kate told Watson of her "dismal year" (814). She had been alone raising the children, and her Fort White neighbors had grown cold and hostile. At the Bend, Lucius was waiting for them. Watson felt a great wave of affection for his son.

Shark River Mikasuki (815-818) — Back at Chatham Bend, Watson put everyone to work. The family had very little money, and all Watson could do was try and start over. Carrie wrote a letter explaining that her husband Walt could not afford Watson's scandal, because he was considering a future in politics.

The First Auto in the Islands (818-820) — One day Watson ran into Walt and Cole in Fort Myers. Cole had a car, which Watson was very jealous of. Spontaneously, Watson offered to buy the automobile from Cole. Watson was incredibly excited as he drove the Model T car back to Chatham Bend. Other than his young kids, Lucius, Kate, and the other farm hands were not excited. "'What you swap for her? Our pay?'" asked Frank (819).

Wildlife (820-822) — Lucius and Watson had done a lot of exploring since returning to Chatham Bend. Both hoped that because the Everglades were ripe with poisonous snakes and trees and unflinching mosquitos, development would not seek to build on such treacherous lands.

The Stowaway (822-827) — The Fort Myers sheriff told Watson that a notorious fugitive, Dutchy Melville, was on the loose. One night in a bar, Watson had a shootoff with a young kid. That kid turned out to be Dutchy Melville. That night, when Watson boarded his boat, he saw a gun pointing up at him; Dutchy was crouched in his boat and told Watson not to move. Watson noticed that Dutchy was uncomfortable in the water, and slyly teetered his boat so that Dutchy lost grip on his gun. Watson grabbed Dutchy and threw him in the water. Dutchy hung onto the boat and admitted he could not swim. Watson then dragged him back onto the boat, and the two men got talking. They developed a good report and Dutchy ended up working for Watson at the Bend. After working on the Bend for a few months, and not receiving pay, Dutchy spoiled thousands of gallons of cane syrup. He ran off and left a cruel note for Watson.

Linch Law (828-832) — Desperate for financial support, Watson wrote to his old friend Governor Broward. Broward responded harshly, and did not offer assistance. Watson and Lucius then discussed the concept of progress, and Watson continued to struggle making money.

Speck (832-836) — A young man named Crockett Daniels thought Watson was his dad. Watson understood the young man's confusion; no one knew who Crockett's father was, and only that the Daniels's heritage was "half-injun" (832). Because Crockett followed Watson everywhere "like a hard speck in my eye," Watson nicknamed him Speck (833). Speck wanted to work on Chatham Bend but Watson refused. Speck rebuffed by saying he would not leave Watson alone until he gave him work. Watson then shot a bullet past Speck's ear as warning to leave him alone. Speck went back to Chokoloskee and told everyone who would listen that Edgar Watson tried to kill him.

That winter, Watson had no money to buy anyone Christmas presents, and Kate was completely depressed on Chatham Bend.

Big Hannah (836-839) — Green Waller introduced Watson to Big Hannah Smith. Hannah was well known in the south Florida as an ox-herder and hard worker, and although she was strong and masculine, was also very pretty. Watson invited Hannah to work on Chatham Bend and she happily accepted. By the time she began working on the Bend, Green Waller was deeply in love with her.

The Stranger (839-844) — One day in Chokoloskee, Ted Smallwood warned Watson that a stranger was awaiting him at Chatham Bend. Watson rushed home, and Kate and the kids were waiting for Watson on the deck. The stranger was Leslie Cox, and ever since he turned up at Chatham, he had been bragging about how he killed Calvin Banks. Leslie explained to Watson that he murdered Cox to steal his money; Leslie then aimed to split such money with Watson. Leslie was caught at the murder scene and sentenced to life in prison. But Leslie had escaped rather easily and fled to Chokoloskee.

Watson somehow made Leslie his foreman, replacing Lucius. Lucius was confused by this decision, but Watson said for everyone's safety it would be best.

Old Fighter (844-848) — Leslie was scaring the harvest crew, and Big Hannah and Green told Watson they were aiming to move on from Chatham Bend. Even Lucius gave his father an ultimatum—his son or Leslie. It is unclear why Watson defends Leslie as much as he did, but he did chose Cox over Lucius. Lucius left the Bend, and everyone other than Cox was devastated that Lucius was leaving; "everyone loved him," remarked Watson (847). Kate and Hannah accused Watson of not listening to his son, and Watson continued his irrational defense of Leslie. Kate and the kids left the Bend and stayed with friends in Chokoloskee.

Chapter 10 (849-892)

The Feud (849-855) — A Mikasuki Native American girl had been thrown out of her tribe and was wandering around the wildnerness near Chatham Bend. Big Hannah took her in and tended to her. Leslie raped the girl consistently.

Dutchy returned to the Bend and was sad to see his foreman position filled. Watson's anger toward Dutchy had greatly wained, but it was still present—one wrong move and Watson could kill Dutchy. Dutchy and Leslie formed an immediate rivalry. Watson knew right away that one would kill the other, likely whoever got the first chance to shoot. Watson noted differences between Dutchy and Leslie—although they were both outlaws who had taken lives, Dutchy did not kill for fun; Leslie did. Watson claimed that Leslie had developed "a sick taste for taking life" (853).

Family Visit (855-860) — Watson was so broke that he sold his Fort White farmland. He was susceptible to easy outrage and was deeply unhappy. Meanwhile, Leslie and Dutchy continued to fight. Green and Big Hannah, who agreed to stay on at the Bend for a little while longer, were fed up and scared of the two fugitives. One day, Leslie and Dutchy got in a knife fight and Dutchy could have killed him—Watson noted that Dutchy "lacked the philosophy or hard heart to kill an undefended man" (858). Watson knew that Leslie would now kill Dutchy as soon as he could.

Black October (860-866) — When Kate returned to Chatham Bend, she informed Watson that people in Chokoloskee had grown cold toward her. Their neighbors were well aware that Watson was harboring fugitives on Chatham Bend, and felt unsafe. When Watson brought Kate back to Chokoloskee, Dutchy asked to join them. Dutchy's feud with Leslie was taking a toll on his psyche, as he was nervous and shaking and constantly on-edge. Once in town, Ted Smallwood confronted Watson about endangering their town by bringing fugitive Dutchy Melville ashore.

On the trip back to the Bend, Watson dropped Dutchy off on the Chatham Bend dock. Watson did not get out with him. Dutchy got scared, pleading to Watson to join him on his dark walk up to the house. Watson told Dutchy he was going to sleep on Lost Man's Key tonight, and turned the boat away from Dutchy and left. Moments later Watson heard two shots ring out. As Watson sped his boat away from Dutchy's murder, he cried for the first time in years.

The next morning Watson went south to Key West to clear his head. Three days later he returned to Chatham Bend but no one was there. Confused, Watson rode into Chokoloskee.

The Great Hurricane (866-875) — Watson got word from the Storters that Leslie Cox committed a series of murders at Chatham Bend. The Storters informed Watson that Frank ran into downtown Chokoloskee and broke the news to the townsmen. Watson knew he had to find Tippins so he could kill Leslie legally. Meanwhile, the great hurricane approached, and everyone prepared for the inevitable damage.

Before seeking Tippins, Watson went to find Frank in the county jail. Eddie Watson was working at the jailhouse and denied his father permission to see Frank. Watson entered

the jail courtyard, where he could not see Frank, but he was sure Frank could hear him. He yelled out to Frank, but Frank did not respond.

Tippins refused to deputize Watson, so Watson went back to Chokoloskee, where he visited Kate. She was scared and terrified of her husband; she had heard the rumors and figured Watson might have contributed to the three murders at Chatham Bend. Watson assured her of his innocence, and told her he would celebrate her twenty-first birthday with her in a few days time.

The next day, Watson walked into town. He bought waterlogged shotgun shells from Ted Smallwood and told the Chokloskee townsmen that he would go to Chatham Bend and return with Leslie Cox dead or alive.

The Killer (875-885) — Watson returned to Chatham Bend, which had been devastated by the hurricane. He called for Leslie but did not receive any response. Finally, in the upstairs of the house, Leslie sat still in a rocking chair, holding a gun in his lap. There was blood all over the house, bits of human remains on the surfaces. Leslie appeared mentally unwell, screaming at Watson for abandoning him during the hurricane. Leslie then admitted to the murders; he asked Watson if he was proud of him. Watson told Leslie that he was not proud of him, that Green and Hannah were his friends. Watson then inquired into the four black harvest hands. Leslie admitted he killed them a couple days after he killed Green and Hannah. In a rage, Watson disarmed Leslie and pointed the gun at his frail body. As Watson escorted Leslie out of the house, Leslie told him that Kate had been “having fun” behind Watson’s back, but then rebukes and said he was kidding (880).

When Watson and Leslie got to the boat, Watson debated what to do with Leslie—hogtying him in his boat would be too challenging, and despite everything, Watson still did not have the nerve to kill Leslie. As Watson led Leslie down the dock and toward his boat, both men saw the Mikasuki tribe watching from the woods. Using this as a distraction, Leslie jumped off the deck and into the water. Watson shot at Leslie in this moment, but was unsure if he hit him. Knowing he needed to preserve Leslie’s body for the Chokoloskee townsmen, Watson searched the shallow waters for Leslie. But Leslie was still alive; he plopped up onto the dock breathing heavy. Watson noted that he could not shoot Leslie a second time. But just then, the Mikasuki Native Americans ran onto the deck and grabbed Leslie. They banded his wrists together and dragged him away.

Watson knew that his neighbors would never take this bizarre turn of events as truth. The only evidence remaining was a bullet-hole through the hat Leslie wore. Exhausted from the recent events, Watson slept the night on his boat. The next morning, Watson dug gravesites for the four dead black field hands. Doing so, he thought about Rob and his cruelties toward him as a boy. Watson spent of the day reckoning with himself, unable to “escape his mind” (884).

Goodbye to Chatham Bend (885-888) — At dawn, Watson left Chokoloskee, knowing the probable fate that waited for him. He would offer Leslie’s weapons and hat, but he

knew it would not be enough to convince his neighbors of his innocence and Leslie's death.

In Watson's last moments of life, he mused on impermanence, mortality, and memories. He was acutely aware of everything—his surroundings, thought streams, and movements. As Watson approached the shores of Chokoloskee, he realized that this was the most despair-ridden he had ever felt.

Darkness (889-892) — Watson saw the men armed on the shore, guns pointing at his boat. He docked his boat close to shore so that the men knew he would not make a quick getaway. Watson calmed himself and asked his armed neighbors if his wife and kids were around. The men gruffly instructed Watson to put his gun down. D.D. House demanded Leslie's body. Watson told them that he shot Leslie and his body fell into the river; it was evident no one believed him. The men, particularly D.D. and Bill House, instructed Watson to give up his gun and submit himself for arrest. Watson pleaded with the men to just let him see his wife and to let him move along peacefully. In this moment, Watson saw Henry. Bill warned Watson once more to put his gun down. Watson whispered to Henry to "finish it" (891). Watson then swung his gun up "as if to fire," knowing that Henry Short would follow his instructions and kill him (892).

Analysis

Watson's novel-long obsession with progress comes to a disappointing close—he realizes that the land he loves is dying and the environment depleting. The unconquered virgin land Watson was once enamored with has eroded, and many rural developers, hunters, and farmers are left wondering what role they had in the process. Sailing to Chatham Bend, Watson notes that "the land was dying, and the red man, too . . ." (816). By comparing the environment's destruction with Native America suffrage, Watson illustrates an important point—that American progress has gravely and unnaturally harmed the earth, its animals, and its humans, too. Watson does not draw these exact conclusions, but his emotional reaction to this environmental devastation speaks volumes. Watson's values are challenged when he is forced to recognize the egregious impact American progress has committed to earth and its specimen. Still, Watson is a lifelong capitalist, who dies with a developer's ambitions.

Despite Watson's desperate "ache for involvement" in American progress, he is finally discerning the hypocrisy his fellow frontiersman. After Watson was acquitted from the Mike Tolen murder trial, many of his former business associates distanced themselves from him. Watson finds his entrepreneurial friends' hypocrisy interesting—"Nobody wanted to investigate all the dying" during railroad construction, but when Watson was investigated for murder, these same businessmen cry fowl (829). Watson himself claims that he does not oppose "strong measure to support progress in this brave new century," but he is "enraged that a small cane planted on a remote frontier river should be reviled for 'Watson Payday' while more powerful men supported by the government were writing off human life as overhead as an everyday matter" (829). The greater concept Watson is griping with here is the inconsistency with American justice—murder

and war are waged in the name of political progress, but when a lowly farmer like Watson uses these guiding principals in his own life, he is damned and condemned as unethical.

Leslie's psychology is further detailed during a hefty reflection period for Watson. Watson observes that Leslie "was never easy around anyone" and was never "sympathetic" (854). Leslie "never listened and had nothing to tell except on the subject of himself. His concern with people all came down to how much deference they paid him even if he had to scare and bully them to get it" (854). Although Watson is a killer in many regards, he cannot connect to Leslie's indifference toward life. Watson notes that Leslie "had to strike something to feel in touch with life, to make sure that he himself was really there" (854). And while Watson still is incapable of identifying Leslie as mentally ill, he does recognize Leslie's insalubrious murder neurosis: "maybe that random mule hoof had splayed a nerve" (854). Watson's musings on Leslie's psychological well being find footing in the notion that Leslie had a fervor to kill, that he takes life in order to feel life himself.

Watson determines that his twisted moral doctrine has enabled men like Leslie Cox and Eddie Reed to find solace in killing: "I had willed that curse to boys like Eddie Reed, who could cross my fence and move forward in the echo of his shot" (881). Watson remarks that, "Taking a human life, one paid with one's own soul. To extinguish the light in another's eyes was the death of self" (881). Watson is inferring that the murders he committed and assisted with—Leslie and Eddie's murders—depleted his own soul and hardened him. Watson feels the guilt and pain of several men, calling his own life "a curse" (881). This reflective period concludes with Watson's admission that he and "Jack Watson . . . had become one. Probably we were never different. Now I know that" (882). Jack Watson embodies Watson's inner-darkness, the self who justifies a murderous honor code, and Watson now realizes that his inner-darkness has consumed and deteriorated his other, virtuous qualities.

In the hours before Watson is to be murdered, he has a lucid period of self-reckoning in which he seeks and uncovers salvation on Chatham Bend. Watson buries the slain black field hands, "the four corpses lay in a loose row," and "mumbled Amen" (884). Watson's lifelong humanization of black people is crystalized in this brief but moving sequence. Later, "in this vast river silence," Watson "was overtaken by feelings about Rob I could outrun no longer" (884). Watson's past rejection and hatred of Rob symbolizes Watson's worst and most problematic qualities—his repressive, reactive, and violent temperaments. But now, Watson's love for his damaged son shines through, and as he runs "in hopeless flight" away from his demons, Watson is still "unable to escape my brain, my heart, my filthied and misbegotten life" (884). Watson's ability to identify and categorize his past decision making and actions as "filthied and misbegotten" are evidence of his earthly salvation; he intuits his lynching in Chokoloskee and undergoes his spiritual and personal reformations only when he can no longer run, flee, or escape his inner-darkness (884).

In the novel's final scene, which is the same scene as the prologue and Bill House's narrative subsection in Book I, the Chokoloskee townsmen murder Watson. Watson's

narrative of these events, however, complicates an already complicated account, raising questions as to why Watson substantiated his own murder rather than submit his weapons and go to jail. Watson largely accepts his fate on the enduring principal that "bending one's neck in defeat was the sole dishonor," but also because Watson's aforementioned salvation and reckoning at Chatham Bend is the only justice and judgment he has ever needed or sought—the court system nor his neighbors opinions can determine his destiny. Upon accepting his assured death, Watson whispers to Henry Short to "Finish it" (891). Now, if you recall a scene from earlier in Book III, when Watson tells Henry, the "next time I tell you, finish it! You damn well finish it," Henry then presently understands that Watson is instructing him to shoot (759). It is possible Watson trusts Henry's aim better than the other men and hopes for a quick and easy death; it is also possible, however, because Watson knows he wronged Henry by taking his true love, Jane Straughter, away from him. Whatever the reason, Watson instructing Henry to kill him is an ultimate sign of respect and honor from a man who compassed his life on such principals.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Leslie a different type of killer than Watson? Is there such a thing as a humane killers?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Watson bury the four black field hands? What does this say about his racial attitudes, and more broadly, his innate human character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Watson instruct Henry to kill him? Is Watson expediting his inevitable death, or is there another motive behind him telling Henry to "finish it"?

Vocabulary

rumple, ordinance, guffawed, betroth, careen, anchorage, moored, cryptic, inshore, apparition, deference

Characters

Edgar Watson

Edgar Watson is born in 1856 in Clouds Creek, South Carolina. He grows up on a plantation and befriends many slaves. His father, Lige Watson, fights in the Civil War and is dishonorably discharged. When Lige returns to Clouds Creek, he physically abuses Watson, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness. In order to defend himself against his father, Watson creates an alter-ego for himself, Jack Watson, who is tough and able to stand up to his father's abuses. Watson is a teenager the first time he fights back against his father. After beating up his father, Watson leaves his family and begins his independent life as a traveller and farmer. Watson works for his cousin Robert Briggs Watson, a former Confederate Captain turned successful farmer. Watson learns a lot about work ethic, loyalty, and kindness from Robert.

After Watson accidentally kills his Cousin Selden Tilghman, he flees South Carolina and moves to Fort White, Florida where he meets up with his mother and sister. In Watson's early twenties, he falls in love with Charlie Collins. Charlie dies giving childbirth to their first son, Rob, an experience that forever traumatizes the widowed Watson. After spending several years in drunken disarray, Watson gets his act together and marries Jane "Mandy" Dyal. Together they have three children: Carrie, Eddie, and Lucius. After eight years of living with Charlie's parents, Watson grudgingly accepts a young Rob into his home.

Watson flees Fort White for Oklahoma, where he meets Belle Starr. Watson is accused of murdering Belle and has to leave town in order to avoid lynching. Watson then ventures to the Ten Thousand Islands. Once settled in Chatham Bend, an Indian shell mound in Chokoloskee country, Watson builds a sugarcane farm and becomes very successful. Watson is obsessed with American progress and longs to be a celebrated capitalist.

Several years into his time in Chatham Bend, Watson is rumored to have killed two black harvest hands, as well as a young family called the Tuckers. Watson flees Chokoloskee once the rumors permeate town, just as his wife, Jane, is dying. Seven years later, Watson returns to Chokoloskee with a new wife and kids. In his seven years away, Watson is involved in two murders, and is nearly convicted of one of them. With all of these disturbing rumors circulating, attitudes in Chokoloskee grow cold toward Watson. One day, three of Watson's employees are reported dead, and Watson is unable to prove his innocence. His neighbors kill him on the shore of the Chokoloskee Bay.

Lucius Watson

Lucius Watson is Watson and Jane's youngest son, and the main character of Book II. Lucius is deeply traumatized by his father's death, and unlike his siblings Carrie and Eddie, Lucius seeks to discover truth about his father's life. Lucius enlists in the Army, but then abruptly leaves his service to attended university. He attains a Ph.D in history and writes a book on the natural history of Southern Florida. Lucius is obsessed with discovering the truth about his father, and is contracted by the university to write an objective biography on the controversial Edgar Watson. Lucius sacrifices his relationships, family, and personal happiness in order to pursue his quest for truth.

Henry Short

Henry Short grows up with the House family and is one of the only black people in Chokoloskee. He is very quiet, responsive, and compliant toward white people. Henry looks very white himself—his skin is lighter than some whites, and he has blonde hair and blue eyes. Henry's mother is white and his father a light-skinned black man; his father was lynched after he slept with Henry's white mother. Many characters throughout the novel remark on the almost impossibility of distinguishing Henry's ambiguous race.

After Watson's death, Henry is rumored to have been the first person to shoot at Watson. For the rest of Henry's life he is taunted and threatened by angry white men who think it criminal for a black man to point a gun at a white man. Henry's character offers pungent racial analysis in the post-Reconstruction South, and demonstrates the ambiguity and irrationality behind American racial prejudices.

Rob "Sonborn" Watson

Rob Watson is Edgar Watson's first son, and the only child he has with Charlie Collins. Watson resents Rob's existence because he blames him for Charlie's death. Watson is cruel and mean to Rob throughout his childhood, despite being a kind and generous parent to his other children.

Rob accompanies Watson during the Tucker fiasco and is ordered by his father to kill Bet Tucker and her unborn baby. After Rob does so, his life changes forever—he flees Chatham Bend and never sees his father again. He bounces in and out of prison until he meets up with Lucius in Book II, disguising himself because he is on the run from law enforcement.

Leslie Cox

Leslie Cox is the son of Watson's friend Will Cox, who Watson meets in Fort White. Leslie is known for his temper and wild attitude, which is attributed to the time a donkey

kicked him in the head, presumably causing brain damage. Leslie is fascinated with killing and idolizes “Desperado” Watson. Watson counsels Leslie on how to handle Sam Tolen, an enemy of Will Cox. Together, Leslie and Watson kill Sam and Mike Tolen, and Watson notes the dark permanent change these murders incite in young Leslie. Leslie goes on to murder many more people, but somehow Watson can never condemn him; Watson has developed a soft spot for him.

After Leslie escapes prison and flees to Chatham Bend, Watson hires him as his foreman. Leslie scares away most of Watson’s harvest helps, including his son, Lucius. Leslie ultimately murders seven people on Chatham Bend. These murders are, naturally, blamed on Watson, and are the reason that his neighbors shoot him dead.

Frank Reese

Watson meets black Frank Reese in an Arkansas prison. Frank is a hardened criminal who Watson greatly admires and respects. Together, he and Frank escape prison and are forever bonded by this experience. After their escape, Frank works for Watson in Fort White and eventually buys his own house and land. But Frank gets tied into the Tolen murders and is put on trial with Watson despite his non-involvement in the crime. When Watson and Frank are acquitted, Frank works for Watson on Chatham Bend.

Frank narrowly avoids death during Leslie’s murder spree on the Bend. Frank escapes one night and reports to the Chokoloskee townsmen that three murders had been committed on Watson’s property. Frank initially blames Watson for the murders, but then recants and blames Leslie. Sherriff Tippins unjustly arrestes Frank after his admission and ships him off on a prison ship. Frank jumps off the boat and kills himself.

Bill House

Bill House is the son of D.D. House and brother of Mamie Smallwood. The House family is a highly respected family on the Ten Thousand Islands. Bill is prominently featured in Book I, offering thoughtful and engaging insights into the dynamics and histories of Chokoloskee County. Bill is at the forefront of the Watson murder trial, as Tippins identifies him as the posse’s leader. In Bill’s Book I narrative, he states that he is the first person to shoot Watson, although that information is contradicted later in the novel when Henry discloses that he is the first person that shot at Watson.

Jane "Mandy" Watson

Jane is Watson’s second and longest-held wife. She is the mother of Carrie, Eddie, and Lucius. Jane is a well-educated, respected, and progressive woman, who is one of the few characters who regularly challenges Watson’s ideologies and actions. Jane is empathetic toward people of color and fascinated with female liberation. She understands Edgar Watson unlike any other character in the novel; Jane reposes her

husband’s sins and accepts his many flaws. For much of the novel Jane is sick, and she dies in her mid-40s.

Richard Harden

The Harden family are Watson’s closest neighbors on Chatham Bend. Richard is the father of Webster, Owen, and Earl. The Harden’s are Native American, but consider themselves mixed-breeds, as they have European blood in their lineage. Because of their ethnicity, the Hardens are neither welcomed nor accepted by their Chokoloskee neighbors. Richard Harden, however, is widely respected and considered to be one of the true frontiersmen in the Everglades region.

Edna "Kate" Watson

Kate is 16 when she marries a 48-year-old Watson. While the marriage is consensual, their age gap and inability to connect forms a major divide between them. Kate views Watson as a father-figure, and is intimidated and afraid of him. She is submissive, plain, and uncultured, attributes noted by both Watson and Carrie. Yet Kate is also described as a compassionate and kind wife and mother.

Watt Dyer

Watson Dyer is the son of Sybil and Fred Dyer, though it is later revealed that he is likely Edgar Watson’s son; he and Sybil had an affair prior to her marriage with Fred. As a boy Watt spent several years on Chatham Bend with his family. Watt is reintroduced into the novel when he offers Lucius legal assistance to preserve Watson’s Chatham Bend property. Watt is a corporate lawyer bought out by the sugar industry; he has political aspirations and epitomizes the underside of American progress. His interests for protecting Watson’s property turn out to be development and profit related.

Symbols and Symbolism

Jack Watson

Watson's so-called "shadow brother," Jack, symbolizes his ever present inner-darkness and demons. Initially created to defend himself against his abusive father, Watson utilizes his violent alter ego when he is upset and threatened. Watson's constant conflict with his inner-darkness also symbolizes a greater human struggle: one's ability, or inability, to cope with psychological trauma.

Alcohol

Alcohol represents an ineffective and destructive coping mechanism used to deal with grief and trauma. Alcoholism runs in Watson's lineage, and Watson's cousin, Robert Briggs, warns Watson to avoid his father's troubled life and steer clear from spirits. Nonetheless, Watson becomes a heavy drinker, as does his son, Lucius. In both Watson and Lucius's case, alcohol is a toxic and dangerous substance consumed to mask unexamined suffering.

Mangroves

Mangroves—a small shrubby tree—border the waterways of Chokoloskee Bay and symbolize the wild and untamed nature of the Ten Thousand Islands. Watson frequently uses mangroves to describe the messy tangle of the Ten Thousand Islands, the mysterious and dangerous flora and fauna that surround him and his neighbor's property.

Bears

Watson is commonly compared to a bear or a panther, which are the two most revered and feared mammals in the Florida Everglades. This animal analogy is used to symbolize Watson's enigmatic public persona: like a bear, Watson is big, strong, and unknown; his neighbors stay away from him at all costs.

Hurricanes

The destruction caused by the Great Hurricane of 1909 serves as a symbolic counterpart to Leslie Cox's destruction on Chatham Bend. Many of Book I's narrators allude to the hurricane's dark energy as a contributing factor to the devastating Chatham Bend murders. Thus, the hurricane's symbolic "murder" of the land represents the human murders committed by Leslie Cox.

Water

The author implements water as a symbol of mobility and mortality. Since most of the novel takes place in Florida, nearly all transport and mobility occurs on shallow bay water. Water is also used to symbolize life and death: bodies are commonly found floating dead in water, and Watson expresses discontent with his children playing close to the water's edge on Chatham Bay—sharks and alligators pose a constant threat to human continuance.

Watson's Ancient Greek Textbook

Watson's Ancient Greek history book helps mature his character's mythological stature. The Greek history book is one of the only objects Watson retains from his childhood, and its enduring presence in Watson's life aids in his positioning as an epic figure.

Jim Cole

Jim Cole symbolizes the quintessential late nineteenth century American businessman. Cole is depicted as spineless and unlikeable, yet no one speaks out against him because of his immense power and influence. Watson does not like Cole, but plays nice with him in order to better position himself in the crowded field of growing American entrepreneurs. Cole's willingness to engage in unethical business practices in the guise of fair capitalism is commonly connected to American progress's greater immorality.

Mosquitos

Mosquitoes enduring presence in the Ten Thousand Islands represents the nagging and ignored stress of solidarity. Mosquitos descriptions are implemented when used in contrast to a character's isolation, angst, or loneliness. Watson considers mosquitos the most subtly dangerous creature in the Everglades, and similarly considers solidarity the most dangerous psychological stressor one can experience in the remote islands. Although mutually exclusive, the author employs these parallels to expand the continuous suffering of its minor characters.

The Warrior

Watson's schooner, the Warrior, has a distinct and deafening motor, and it signifies the fear that Watson instills in others. Throughout Book I and III, townspeople fearfully remark on Watson's boat motor and prepare for his presence accordingly; the boat can be heard from 20 minutes away. The motor is an emblem for Watson's surprising and stark presence in the islands.

Settings

Chatham Bend, Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century

Chatham Bend, tucked away in south Florida's Ten Thousand Islands, is a difficult place to reach by boat. Edgar Watson buys a claim on the Chatham Bend River, where he begins farming and growing his cane syrup operation. Chatham Bend is Watson's favorite home he has ever owned and occupied, and his acquisition of this beautiful and proud property is one of his greatest life achievements.

Chokoloskee, Florida, Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century

Chokoloskee Island is a small township in which many of Watson's closest neighbors reside. The town is primarily operated by Ted Smallwood, who is postmaster and operator of a goods shop. Chokoloskee does not have a school or church and many of its residents are hunters or farmers. In the novel, Chokoloskee's rural values and populous embodies the division between old American and progressive, industrial America. Throughout the course of Shadow Country, Chokoloskee sees massive development and environmental degradation take over its quiet and simple way of living.

The Ten Thousand Islands, Florida, Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century

The Ten Thousand Islands encapsulates much of the Everglade area, and is the central location for much of the novel. The Ten Thousand Island is described as wild and untamed, home to big alligators, bears, panthers, and relentless mosquitoes. Watson commonly suggested that the Ten Thousand Islands is the last wild and unexplored area in the United States.

Clouds Creek, South Carolina, Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century

Watson's early ancestors migrated to South Carolina as famous plantation owners. In the early development of Clouds Creek township, the Watsons owned and built on much of the available land. Some of the land is sold and lost while being passed along the Watson line. Lige Watson, Edgar Watson's father, sells much of his family's share of the land. Watson always holds a romantic affinity for Clouds Creek, which in part symbolizes the South's post-Civil War longing for former southern values and honor.

Fort White and Ichetucknee, Florida, Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century

Watson arrives at his aunt's Ichetucknee plantation in Fort White after he flees Clouds Creek as a teenager. After losing his opportunity to operate his family's Carolina property, he longs to oversee his family's Fort White plantation. But because of the complicated and tense politics between the Tolen family's, as well as Watson's dangerous relationship with the Cox family, Watson is never able to settle in Fort White.

Themes and Motifs

Natural Law versus Judicial Law

Shadow Country's contrast between natural law and judicial law presents a unique platform to consider complex concepts such as justice, morality, and ethics. This division between natural law and government-enforced law is primarily explored in the confrontation between rural citizens and law enforcement.

The Harden family commonly reflects upon this division of justice because the American government's interests is in opposition to their family's lifestyle. While neglecting to file a land claim for their property, Owen Harden posits distrust in government run systems: "We was dodging the whole damn government, county, state, and federal, don't make no difference . . . we never cared if the whole world passed us by" (97). Owen is content to live life according to his own code of conduct rather than register with, and abide by, a government that actively works against his personal and ancestral value system.

These conflicting systems also contrast one another when they directly impact daily livelihoods. Bill House, who hunts and fishes for a living, is incensed when the Florida government creates a new law that makes plume and egret hunting illegal: "Any local judge knows better than to mess with an old-time clan that is only taking the wild creatures that is their by God-given right" (120). Bill argues that he is spiritually permitted to interact with the earth as he pleases, suggesting that God gives him an inexhaustible right to consume and utilize natural resources. Furthermore, characters like Bill undermine artificially enforced laws because, for the most part, the majority of their life is directed by their own sense of justice and judgment.

Natural law and judicial law most commonly combat each other in the novel when rural townsmen seek justice on their own accord. When Tippins confronts Watson's killers in court regarding their murder, one of the townsmen stands up and protests, "Justice was done, you bastard!" (226). Tippins later informs Carrie Watson that while a judicial version of justice was not attained in Watson's murder trial, a rural justice was accomplished. But even when formal justice mingles with rural justice, there is an unwelcome reception: "These people complain that they have no law so they have to make their own, but when the law shows up, there's not much of a welcome" (188). This division between entitled natural law and systematic law does not find resolution in the novel, but the contradictions and irrationalities demonstrated on both sides are apparent.

Dual Identities

The exploration of characters with multiple identities - namely between Edgar and Jack Watso -, pursues the connection between concepts like nature versus nurture and

mental health. Watson's so-called "shadow brother" is an ever-present and central motif that dictates Watson's most dangerous decisions.

Watson describes his alternate identity as a separate entity that consumes him whenever he is mortally threatened. After Watson is beaten unconscious, he warns his father that he will kill him the next time his father beats him. Watson's mother sees the change in her son's eyes when he says this, and cries: "I don't know who you are!" (525). In this moment, "Jack was gone and time and space and sound and colors rushed back in" (525). Watson's definitive and deep personality division between Jack and Edgar symbolizes a subconscious coping mechanism, further exhibiting Watson's internal darkness as manufactured in response to his abusive nurturing.

Watson infers that his abusive and turbulent childhood is the cause for developing his dual identity; he argues that his true nature is kind, hard working, and honorable. But because Jack and Edgar Watson have become "one" conjoined identity, Watson feels burdened and undone by his violent and erratic shadow brother (884). At the end of the novel, reflecting upon the terrible decisions he has made in his life, Watson remarks, "the judge I feared most [in hell] would be Edgar Watson" (857). Watson believes that his better self, Edgar, will judge his evil self, Jack, harshly in the after-life. This differential between good Edgar and evil Jack further demonstrates the mental instability and manufactured darkness Watson created in his difficult childhood.

Ambiguous Racial Identity

Through the depiction of mixed-race characters, the author explores racial identity as a social construction. Oppressed characters categorized as inferior experience quiet and severe psychological distress due to their ascribed racial roles.

Henry Short is one of the only black characters in a predominantly white town, and suffers greatly because of this inequality. But Henry's blackness is less predicated on his skin color then it is on his supposed lineage. Henry has light skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes, and Watson observes that Henry's skin "color was in the eye of the beholder, according to how you turned him to the light" (716). But instead of grappling with his mixed identity and fighting against his assigned racial role, Henry owns his blackness; Henry tells Watson that he is "Nigger to the bone" and "never raised a hand" to a white man (757). Instead of expunging upon his struggles as a black man in the post-Civil-War south, Henry finds a sort of serenity by accepting his racial identity, no matter how indeterminate or ambiguous it is.

Earl Harden, on the other hand, denies his Native American heritage in a helpless desire to be white. Earl is the only Harden who does not accept his Native American blood, and instead demands the respect and treatment of a white man. He also compensates for his racial insecurity by demonizing brown-skinned people, notably Henry Short, who Earl refuses to eat at the same dinner table with and constantly scolds him for his "Niggerish" ways (24). Earl's father, Richard, remarks that Earl's racial prejudices stem from his own self-hatred, and that he was darker-skinned than "Nigger

Henry Short" (24). Thus, Earl has the opposite dilemma as Henry: in Earl's desperation to see and be seen as white, he rejects his authentic ethnicity and vies for a superior ascribed social identity.

Decaying Southern Values

Unethical southern values are continuously confronted and questioned in the aftermath of the Confederacy's Civil War defeat, which exposes the challenging and thorny task of asking a culture to abandon their preconceived sense of livelihood and morality in exchange for expanded tolerance.

Post Civil War tensions are an undercurrent throughout the entire novel, although they are not formally addressed until the beginning of Book III, when Selden Tilghman denounces a group of vigilante southerners called the Regulators, whose mission is to preserve and defend conventional Confederate tenants such as "southern honor" (510). After the death of three innocent black men, Selden gathers a crowd of his neighbors and offers the following rebukes to southern honor: "We lost the War not because we were beaten by a great force of arms . . . but because in their hearts they knew that human bondage could never have the blessing of Him who created man in his different colors" (514). Selden is subsequently beaten and banned from town, brandished as a weak-willed "traitor" (515).

As morally apparent as Selden's argument may seem, his Confederate neighbors considered his position incomprehensible. The white southern psyche was bred to believe that "honor" demanded them to maintain the traditions set forth by their ancestors; to question such traditions was traitorous. Although Watson is intelligently keener than many of his southern counterparts, he similarly struggles between upholding southern ancestral honor and questioning the ethics and compassion behind such "honorable" traditions. This motif between ancestral honor and modern sensibilities persists in Book II, nearly fifty years after Selden's speech, and finds minor resolution when Lucius and Bill House acknowledge their guilt in not defending against discrimination toward black people.

Property

Property accumulation and ownership is a central theme in the novel, symbolizing the acquisition of American popularity and power. Watson's self-proclaimed life mantra was spoken by a former South Carolina governor and stated: "What is it that constitutes character, popularity and power in the United Stares? Sir, it is property, and that only!" (543). But this excerpt was more than Watson's mantra; it was his guiding principal in life.

Since a young boy, Edgar clambered to acquire his own property. Devastated that his father sold much of family plantation, Watson sought to develop cabins and vegetables on a small farm plot, with the ambition to one day run his own plantation. After he moves to Fort Myers, Watson fantasizes about taking over his Aunt Tabitha's plantation, and

develops an attainable plan to do so. After trouble permits him from taking over Tabitha's land, Watson heads south to the Everglades, where he falls in love with a massive and isolated Indian shell mound on the Chatham Bend River. It is at the Bend that Watson finally makes his fantasy into a thriving reality—he pours his life into Chatham Bend's sugarcane empire, so much so that his neighbors nickname him "Emperor Watson." Throughout the novel, Watson seeks to expand his property reach, and he murders several people in the process.

Watson's obsession with property is formed by the novel's characterization of American exceptionalism. One of the primary pillars of American exceptionalism is the sanctity of private property as it relates to authority, superiority, and power. The freedom to acquire and own private property is tied to the notion that America is inextricably connected with freedom and equality, which is why southern value systems that flaunt American exceptionalism while promoting slavery are wildly hypocritical. Furthermore, the theme of property is woven throughout the novel as a symbol for success and freedom, just as the absence of property is marked with the feeling of despair and loneliness.

Styles

Point of View

Book I in Shadow Country is told by 12 first-person narrators, many of whom narrate more than one section. The collection of first-person narratives results in a community folklore style, creating a mythic quality around the primary subject, Edgar Watson. The narrators include: Erskine Thompson, Richard Harden, Henry Short, Bill House, Carrie Watson, Sheriff Tippins, Owen Harden, Sarah Harden, Mamie Smallwood, Tant Jenkins, Hoad Storter, and Nell Dyer. Notably, Edgar Watson is absent from the list of first-person narrators. By omitting Watson's first-person perspective in Book I, the author forces the reader to construct a character's identity all through hearsay. This omission makes Watson a dynamic and contradictory character, and mimics the way in which his neighbors learned about him: through word of mouth, rumor, and tall-tales.

Book II features a third-person narrator limited to Lucius Watson’s consciousness. The reader is never brought outside Lucius’s observations or thought streams. After a confusing and contradictory Book I, the reader welcomes Lucius's limited and stubborn search for answers.

Book III is a first-person narration by Edgar Watson, and is told in the past tense. Up until his eventual death, Watson recaps and reflects upon his life. Watson's first-person perspective is tremendously effective because for the entire novel he has been an enigma, described and depicted by other characters. But in Book III, Watson's perspective ties up many loose ends, and answers many lingering questions.

Language and Meaning

In Book I, the various speakers form a sequential account of Watson’s rise and fall. These multiple narrators create contradictions and ambiguities, less so about Watson’s life and death and more so about the poor “crackers” and mixed-blood blacks and Native Americans who are given voices to critique and praise Edgar Watson. Ted and Mamie Smallwood regard Watson’s true nature as generous and family-oriented; the House family has Watson pegged as a cold-hearted criminal; the Harden Family trusts Watson but still fears him. This collection of colloquial voices, many of whom frequently contradict and doubt the other, offers a conflicting vision of race, class, and honor in post Civil War America.

Book II, on the other hand, is written in a scholarly and astute tone; Lucius holds a Ph.D, and is both academically and emotionally intelligent. Matthiessen’s writing in Book II masterfully reflects the subject matter—in a quest for truth, the language is often studious and precise, all while accompanying Lucius’s conversational and casual thoughts.

Despite Edgar Watson's lack of formal education, Book III is written in a high-register. Often Matthiessen offers history lessons, using Watson as a conduit to showcase his knowledge of Floridian geography and the early American frontier. But the formal and educated dialect in which Watson's first-person native is written works in many ways despite the probability that Watson would not speak or write as formality Matthiessen insists he does. Watson's narrative works because while he may not have been as educated as the language indicates, his sophisticated and intelligent world view requires language capable of translating his thoughts.

Structure

Shadow Country's most noteworthy structural element is its separation into three books, two of which are relatively equal length (Book's I and II) and a third that is longer. Each Book is prefaced with a quote from either a poet or historian. These quotes metaphorically introduce the sections dominant themes. Book I is split between its 12 different narrators and a narrator change often resembles a chapter change. Book II contains subsections parsed frequently throughout the text in order to capture short bursts of narrative. Book III also contains these subsections, but also contains ten Chapters.

Another structural consideration is the way in which the Books are formatted. Book I is told from 12 different first person narrators in the aftermath of Watson's death. Book II is told in the years after Watson's death, which chronologically correlates with Book I's narrative. Book III, however, acts as a complete reset—the section commences almost 40 years prior to the other two sections, beginning when Watson was a young boy. Book III then offers a wildly comprehensive recanting of Watson's life, stretching from his boyhood to his middle-aged death. Through the variety of narrators and the time periods that they inhabit, the novel as a whole gathers a mythic quality; a collection of stories and reimagining's emerging from many voices.

Lastly, Shadow Country contains brief but important structural elements such as letter writing, journal entries, and vivid flashbacks to render higher quality emotion. For example, in Book I, Carrie's narratives are structured as diary entries. Carrie's diary entries embody the feminine tradition of the early American frontier, and also, allow her to confide her deepest and unfiltered thoughts to the reader. In other areas throughout the book, for instance, Rob writes Lucius a long, detailed, and moving letter abut his involvement in the Tucker death. These structural elements are scarcely implemented, but when they are used their effects are wide-ranging and powerful.

Quotes

First time in my life I ever felt like the outsider—ever try that? I didn't care for it?
-- Bill House (Book I / Bill House)

Importance: Chokoloskee is effectively an all white town; the only integrated black person is Henry Short and the only civilized Native American family is the Hardens. When Bill and Henry visit the Hardens for dinner one night, Bill is the only white person present. For the first time in his young life, Bill gets a taste of being an outsider. This is an imperative scene, as it confronts the white man's entitlement and privilege as the majority and dominant voice in early American culture. This privilege is easily mistaken for innate superiority, as demonstrated by the racist and hostile attitudes white settlers' express toward people of color throughout the novel. But as Bill notes here, being an outsider in not an inherent personal attribute—it is circumstantial and socially designed.

He looked and acted . . . like our idea of a hero.
-- Mamie Smallwood (Book I / Mamie Smallwood)

Importance: Mamie Smallwood highlights the divided perspective her Chokoloskee neighbors have toward Watson by labeling him both as hero and villain. Watson's neighbors admire his gentlemanly manners and good looks, but are terrified by his quick pistol and violent temperament. By classifying Watson as a "hero," as Mamie does here, she helps illustrate the complex and dynamic vision the novel demands of a hero—an ethically ambiguous vigilante who artfully toes the line between good and evil.

These people complain that they have no law so they have to make their own, but when the law shows up, there's not much of a welcome.
-- Sherriff Tippins (Book I / Frank B. Tippins)

Importance: A major theme in Shadow Country is the division between systemic law and natural law. Many southerners claim that they are adequate representatives of the law, and can determine what is right and wrong and pursue the appropriate punishment. However, Sheriff Tippins sees this slippery understanding of justice as hypocritical and dangerous. The posse who killed Watson argued that they were protecting their town from a dangerous murderer. But Tippins is unsure if their perspective is accurate, and is in constant conflict between his belief in due process and the unspoken code of ethics that permits white southerners to act justly on intuition.

All I wanted was some place I could hide out from life til I was safe again. In them days, his safety was all a black man could ask for.
-- Henry Short (Book I / Henry Short)

Importance: Henry Short offers a powerful glimpse into the damaged and fragile psyche of an oppressed black male in the early twentieth century. In this scene, Henry is unable to defy his white master, who beckons Henry to grab his gun and join D.D. and Bill House as they aim their guns at Watson. Henry knows that by being present at the

shooting he will be blamed and potentially lynched for raising a gun against a white man. Feeling an inextricable despair in this moment, Henry gracefully describes the black man's impossibility of finding peace and serenity. Henry is always at the mercy of white people, a company in which he is neither safe nor comfortable.

But Ed's boy is actually quite harmless, I've discovered, having neither papa's hardihood nor his Celtic code of honor, if these are what's required for Bloody revenge.
-- Lucius Watson (Book II / Nell Summerlin)

Importance: Lucius spends much of Book II pondering his capabilities to avenge his father's death, but soon realizes that he has a different psychological makeup than his father, whose life was predicated on perpetually seeking revenge. The important identification Lucius makes in this quote is his lack of "Celtic code of honor." This is an important recognition in several ways. First, since Watson did not pass on his family's archaic code of honor to his children, Lucius has evolved his family's behavior further from Confederacy values. Secondly, Lucius understands that revenge is not a marker of strength or weakness, but, rather, a convention determined by one's predetermined value system. Lucius's detection that he has evolved further from his father's southern roots is a powerful testament to his positive generational growth.

Nigras is supposed to be free men, that what you're thinkin? Well, they ain't free and they never was, not in this backcountry, they was claimed by whoever gave 'em work.
-- Bill House (Book II / Lonelihood)

Importance: Bill remarks on a deeply important subject in post-Reconstruction America. Despite Abolition and the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment, life for black citizens was harder than ever. With no organization, assistance, or education, freed slaves were put in an impossible situation—to establish self-sufficiency in a system that was working to further oppress them. Naturally, black Americans found low-wage work in the only way they knew how: farming and field labor. Bill's acknowledgment of this reality reflects the brutal circumstances southern blacks endured during Reconstruction.

I never did commit a crime against a black man and darn glad of it but I never done nothing for 'em neither, not even when I had the chance. You reckon that's why I feel so bad about Henry? Because I knew better?
-- Bill House (Book II / Heinous Murder)

Importance: Bill House identifies his complicit behavior in racial discrimination as a primary source of guilt and pain in his life. Southern attitudes toward black Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were irrevocably bigoted, and although Bill may have not been discriminatory himself, his inability to speak out or defend oppressed peoples weighs heavy on his conscious. This guilt arose from, as Bill notes, his notion of knowing better. But what does Bill "know better"? In this scene, Bill concedes his belief in black people's humanity, an understated recognition granted his racist upbringing.

Shadows on the sand. I lay suspended, praying that this dream of bright water might not end. It was too late."
-- Rob Watson (Book II / Night Rivers)

Importance: Rob speaks these words after murdering Bet Tucker and her unborn child. Rob stunningly captures the traumatic and lucid state he is in after committing such a heinous act—his actions are so serious and grave that he cannot fathom the consequences, imagining that he is dreaming or existing outside of his body. The lucidity in Rob's words prefaces his eventual demise; faced with the blunt and cold reality of his murder, he spirals into depression and despair and never fully recovers.

One day, Edgar, you will care . . . You are still an ignorant boy but you are not stupid."
-- Watson's Mother (Book III / The Traitor)

Importance: In this scene, a young Watson denounces the ancient Greek history book his cousin Selden gave him. Watson, who has no formal education and spends his entire life working off of the land, regards reading as sensitive and unmanly. But his mother understands that her son is simply mimicking the behavior of his father, not authentically speaking from his heart. Thus, Watson's mother identifies her son's insensitivity as ignorance, not stupidity, which is indicative of Watson's larger struggles throughout the novel—he is incredibly bright, sympathetic, and hardworking, but allows exterior forces and motives to deter and cloud his positive attributes.

I had seen this black man without ever seeing him."
-- Edgar Watson (Book III / Two Figures on the Road)

Importance: Although Watson prides himself on his racial tolerance, he realizes late in the novel that he has never truly seen people beyond their skin color. While admiring his friend Frank's tremendous willpower and calm demeanor, Watson acknowledges that he has not fully humanized his friend in the past, and, rather, gave into social misconceptions about his race. This is a major moment of awakening for the novel's central protagonist, whose character embodies a divide between former Confederate values and modern American ideals. Watson's insight into race signifies a larger cultural movement that humanizes people of color.

For taking a human life, one paid with one's own soul."
-- Edgar Watson (Book III / The Killer)

Importance: Reflecting upon his misguided and troubled life, Watson finally understands that all the lives he has taken have not been justified murders. While Watson often committed murder in order to protect himself or his family, he realizes here that taking life only deteriorates one's soul and spirit. This is a profound acknowledgment from a character who, throughout the entire novel, grapples with the ethics of killing. By ultimately acknowledging the irrefutable damage that his crimes have done to himself and the people around him, Watson personally repents for his immoralities on the eve of his eventual death.

In the days past, I had imagined I'd experience the innermost despair, the utmost loneliness. I was mistaken.
-- Edgar Watson (Book III / Goodbye to Chatham Bend)

Importance: Throughout the novel, Watson deals with hardship and struggle by attempting to rid or banish the negative forces that have caused him pain. For instance, while coping with his first wife's death, Watson dismisses his son Rob from his mind, expunging his immense hatred and blame toward his innocent son. When the two harvest hands, Zachariah and Ted, confronts Watson's unethical farming practices, Watson murders them to prevent further problems. But as Watson waltzes to his death, reflecting upon his former values and decisions, he understands that by unloading his pain onto others he only gave himself more suffering.