

Book Tour: by Ginny Wheeler
***Cutting For Stone* by Abraham Verghese**



Introduction: On our Cutting for Stone book tour, we will

- travel to the places the characters inhabit,
- listen to Verghese’s words, and
- explore the themes he introduces.

QUOTE: “Life, too, is like that. You live it forward, but understand it backward. It is only when you stop and look to the rear that you see the corpse caught under your wheel.” This book begs us to do a postmortem on the book.

Like the book, we will begin our journey in India.

In an NPR interview, Verghese said that writing is an act of discovery about himself. In writing this book he had a chance to relive the excitement of going into medicine and the magic of medicine. He drew on his knowledge of geography and medicine when he wrote the book, but the story is fiction about “truth.” Fiction is very liberating but much more difficult to make realistic enough to capture the imagination of the reader.

Objects & Topics:

- Shiva Lord of the Dance (Dr. Shiva Stone’s character)
- Caduceus (Medicine)
- Ife Shrine Head (Genet/Scarification)
- Ethiopian icon (Ethiopia as a character)
- Twins and maternal figure (ShivaMarion)
- Coptic crosses (St Bridget's Cross/Circle of Life)
- Anne Klein by Willie Cole (Assimilation/Self-Discovery)
- Ethiopian diptych (Ethiopian St. George legend and church)
- * Up Target wing elevator or stairs
- Hirst (Life & Death/Missing)
- Armajani (Exile/Home)
- The Annunciation (Ear quote/Compassion)
- Ponsonelli (St. Teresa prop/Forgiveness)

Shiva Nataraja: Lord of the Dance (29.2)



QUESTION: As I tell you about this sculpture, think the ways Shiva Stone lives up to his namesake.

QUOTE: After Sister Mary Joseph Praise had died and Dr. Stone had left Theater 3:

“Hemlatha shut out the sobbing around her as she rocked the babies, and then she began to croon, her anklets jingling faintly like castanets as she shifted weight from one foot to the other. . . How beautiful and horrible life is, Hema thought; too horrible to simply call tragic. Life is worse than tragic. Sister Mary, bride of Christ, now gone from the world into which she just bought two children.

“Hema thought of Shiva, her personal deity, and how the only sensible response to the madness of life in this her thirtieth year was to cultivate a kind of madness within, to perform the mad dance of Shiva, to mimic the rigid making smile of Shiva, to rock and sway and flap six arms and six legs to an inner tune, a tabla beat. Thim-thaga-thaga, thim-thaga-thim, thim-thaga...”

QUOTE: At the end of the book, Marion reflects on his life: “...now by a brilliant and daring rearrangement of organs, ShivaMarion had readjusted. Four legs, four arms, four kidneys, and so on, but instead of two livers, we had downsized to one. . . but we were still ShivaMarion. *Shiva lives in me. . . One being at birth, rudely separated, we are one again.*” p. 642

QUESTION: There are a number of dramatic scenes on operating tables in *Cutting for Stone* that occur after this scene of the twins' births. Which ones do you recall that left an impression on you?

Key Ideas:

- Hema calls her personal god Shiva. Hindu religion is personal in nature.
- Shiva is the creator, preserver, destroyer, remover of illusion, and dispenser of grace all in one. Shiva Stone, like his namesake, embodies all these traits in his work at Missing Hospital
- Four arms: reminiscent of Shiva and Marion as conjoined twins.
- Passionate: the flaming headress and the dance
- Stepping on “ignorance and vice”
- He wears the earrings, necklaces, and bracelets of an Indian prince. The “sacred thread,” a cord worn by upper class Hindus, crosses his chest.
- The purity of gods and spiritual figures can be seen in their bodies. Unlike humans, the bodies of the divine do not contain muscle and bone. They are instead filled with prana, or the “breath of life,” which makes their skin appear somewhat puffy.
- Hinduism passed down thru epic poems and came before Buddhism. Reincarnation: optimism that there is rebirth, a circle - transformative. You should practice the rituals to guarantee that when you are reborn you are in a higher state.

In an interview with NPR, **Vergheese** said he began this novel with the vision of a beautiful south Indian nun giving birth and that is all he knew about her at the time.

Caduceus



According to myth, Mercury threw down his staff at two snakes fighting on the ground, and they became affixed to it. The caduceus is also a symbol of healing. Winged staff becomes the symbol for medicine. **What do you make of the leaf?**

QUOTE: "I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art. There were itinerant stone cutters--lithologists--who could cut into either the bladder or the perineum and get the stone out, but because they cleaned the knife by wiping their blood-stiffened surgical aprons, patients usually died of infection the next day." The Hippocratic Oath differentiates between surgeons and physicians. (Stone and Ghosh) Ghosh ends up "cutting for Stone" at Missing Hospital. Multiple layers of meaning. This may even have foreshadowed the infection that Marion got from Genet.

QUESTION: What do you think 'cutting for stone' means in light of this story? Which doctor did you admire the most, the least?

"I spent as much time as I could with **Ghosh**. I wanted every bit of wisdom he could impart to me. All sons should write down every word of what their fathers have to say to them. I tried. Why did it take an illness for me to recognize the value of time with him? It seems we humans never learn. And so we relearn the lesson every generation and then want to write epistles. We proselytize to our friends and shake them by the shoulders and tell them, "Seize the day! What matters is THIS moment!" Most of us can't go back and make restitution. We can't do a thing about our should haves and our could haves. But a few lucky men like Ghosh never have such worries; there was no restitution he needed to make, no moment he failed to seize.

Now and then Ghosh would grin and wink at me across the room. He was teaching me how to die, just as he'd taught me how to live."

"I chose the specialty of surgery because of **Matron**, that steady presence during my boyhood and adolescence. 'What is the hardest thing you can possibly do?' she said when I went to her for advice on the darkest day of the first half of my life.

I squirmed. How easily Matron probed the gap between ambition and expediency. 'Why must I do what is hardest?'

'Because, Marion, you are an instrument of God. Don't leave the instrument sitting in its case my son. Play! Leave no part of your instrument unexplored. Why settle for '**Three Blind Mice**' when you can play the 'Gloria'?

'But, Matron, I can't dream of playing Bach...I couldn't read music.

'No, Marion,' she said her gaze soft...'No, not Bach's 'Gloria'. Yours! Your 'Gloria' lives within you. The greatest sin is not finding it, ignoring what God made possible in you."

Listen to interview from NPR: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101416445>

Ife Shrine Head



The scarification, the rings around her neck, and the hair rows were symbols of beauty. Important figure. Head could have been used in a ritual or ceremony judging by the hole in the back - it may have been placed on something. It would be in this person's shrine.

QUOTE: Genet says: "This is a sign of my people, my father's tribe."

QUESTION: In what way does Genet fit the pattern of the femme fatale?

QUESTION: This story deals with both physical and emotional scars. What are some deeply emotional scars suffered in this story?

HERE'S A SCAR THAT I RECALL: After the boys witness the death of the pups, Shiva asks Hema, "Will you forget if someone kills me or Marion?" and then later Marion asks Matron "if she thought that the death of her pups left scars on Koochooloo's insides."

Question: What does this book teach us about healing?

Ethiopian Diptych



Mary and Joseph

Disciples

Cross - John's arms in position of mourning

Daniel with lions

Ethiopian burial custom (middle left panel)

St. Theodore on brown horse known for austerity

St. George

Stylized; Primary Colors

Religion introduced in Africa in 4thC through artifacts.

Ethiopia became the oldest country to adopt Christianity as its religion.

Show **PROP** of Roman Icon in the Santa Maria Maggiore basicalla in Rome built in 5th C. Point out similarities.



QUOTE: Matron to Mr. Harris expresses an irony: "I always wondered if the good people who send us bibles really think that hookworm and hunger are healed by scripture? Our patients are illiterate."

QUESTION: Ethiopia becomes a character in the book. What did you learn about Ethiopia from reading this book? How would you describe her?



Yoruba, Pair of Ere Ibeji



Yoruba have the highest incidence of twin births in the whole world. Statistically, twins are a rare birth in Europe and America – 5% out of 1,000. In Yoruba, western part of Africa, twins are born 41.6% out of 1,000.

Twins are more connected to the gods, more spiritually powerful. Because of the high incidence of infant mortality, when a twin dies the parent commission a statue of the twin. She would place it in her wrapper and dance with it back to her home while the other sing songs. The mother would care for this statue of her deceased child for the rest of her life.

QUOTE:

“I was connected to Shiva for better or worse. The tube was still there.

“What would it have been like if ShivaMarion walked around with heads fused, or - imagine this - sharing one trunk with two neck? Would I have wanted to make my way-our way-through the world in that fashion? Or would I have wanted doctors to try and separate us at all costs?

“But no one had given us that choice. They’d separated us, sliced through the stalk that made us one. Who’s to say that Shiva’s being so different, his circumscribed, self-contained inner world that asked nothing of others, didn’t come from the separation, or that my restlessness, my sense of being incomplete, didn’t originate at that moment? And in the end, we were still one, bound to each other whether we liked it or not.”

QUESTION: Just curious: How many of you are twins?

Marion concentrates so much on how he feels connected to his brother Shiva, yet how different he thinks the two of them are. However, in many ways they are very much alike. How is Marion SIMILAR to his brother?

Maternity Figure



Female figures like this ivory one show a universal need to express a reverence for life by recognizing the importance of motherhood as it insured the continuity of life. These small female figures can even be found in Europe, like our Venus figure that is over 20,000 years old.

The idea that LIFE comes from DEATH is an archetypal pattern exemplified in maternal figures in all cultures. We saw it in Shiva, the snakes on the caduceus. We see it in the reverence for life in the mission of Mission Hospital.

QUESTION: How do you think this figure shows reverence for motherhood?

QUOTE: Hema reflecting on her own life and the life after death beliefs in both the Hindu and Christian religions: "Having a child was about cheating death."

QUOTE: "As she bent over the child she realized that the tragedy of death had to do entirely with what was left unfulfilled. She was ashamed that such a simple insight should have eluded her all these years. Make something beautiful of your life. Wasn't that the adage of Sister Mary Joseph Praise lived by? Hema's second thought was that she, deliverer of countless babies, she who'd rejected the kind of marriage her parents wanted for her, she who felt there were too many children in the world and felt no pressure to add to that number, understood for the first time that having a child was about cheating death. Children were the foot wedged in the closing door, the glimmer of hope that in reincarnation there would be some house to go to, even if one came back as a dog, or a mouse, or a flea that lived on the bodies of men. If, as Matron and Sister Mary Joseph Praise believed, there was a raising of the dead, then a child would be sure to see that its parents were awakened. Provided, of course, the child didn't die with you in a plane crash."

Question: Can you think of any other examples of cheating death in this story? Where something dies but in doing so gives life?

Show **PROPS** of Ethiopian Coptic crosses like the one worn by Genet. As we walk into the next room, take a close look at the **Coptic Crosses** in the case. They include two powerful symbols: the cross and the circle. St. Bridget's Cross given to Genet by her father Zemui is similar to the Ethiopian Coptic cross. Later Genet gives it to Marion. The **circle** represents the eternal and everlasting love of God as shown through Christ's crucifixion. It also symbolizes the life-death-life cycle through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Stop in Globalization of Religions room and look at personal diptych of Virgin Mary & St. George.

Anne Klein with a Baby in Transit Willie Cole



Willie Cole believes that in the 60s people found “Africaness” in their “Americanness.” Like Marion, he, too, is expressing what it is like to be African in America.

Damien Hirst (1965–2012): In Memoriam by Christian Viveros-Faune on Jan. 18, 2012

Gagosian Gallery hosts a display of the late artist's spot paintings

“Damien Steven Hirst, the world's richest artist (\$332 million according to Britain's *Sunday Times*), full-time businessman, part time art-collector, sometime restaurateur, PTBarnum imitator, and most famous member of the Young British Artists (or YBAs), a creative covey who came to prominence in the 1990s, died last Thursday, January 12, in New York following complications from acute diverticulitis brought on by a swinishly speculative, grossly cynical, intellectually constipated effort to pinch out 11 concurrent exhibitions of rehashed expensive crap. He was 46.”

His son was playing with Transformers and that inspired him to transform things into something else like these shoes become a maternal figure from Africa. He'd start by photographing the object and then do word associations as part of the creative process.

He collected high heeled shoes - this came about because his son had saved all his sneakers. That brought him to heels because of their shapes and energy. Black, white, red. So he named his first group of sculptures after great women like Rosa Parks.

Talk about the longing for Ethiopian food and describe Injera and Wot. This sculpture shows the contradictions of being an African in America.

QUOTE: As Marion is trying to find his way in America, he reflects about Deepak as one such contradiction: “That's the funny thing about America - the blessed thing. As many people as there are to hold you back, there are angels whose humanity makes up for all the others.”

Two of Marion's angels talked about the key to happiness by using SLIPPERS as symbols:

QUOTE: Ghosh to Marion: “The key to your happiness is to own your slippers, own who you are, own how you look, own your family, own the talents you have, and own the ones you don't. If you keep saying your slippers aren't yours, then you'll die searching, you'll die bitter, always feeling you were promised more. Not only our actions, but also our omissions, become our **destiny**.”

QUOTE: After leaving **Tsige**, Marion thinks: “This is my life, I thought...I have excised the cancer from my past, cut it out; I have crossed the high plains, descended into the desert, traversed oceans, and planted my feet in new soil; I have been the apprentice, paid my dues, and have just become master of my ship. But when I look down, why do I see the ancient, tarred, mud-stained slippers that I buried at the start of the journey still stuck to my feet?” p 589

Question: The slippers become a symbol in the story. What do you think Verghese is communicating with the image of slippers in his story?

Ethiopian Diptych

Describe St. George's church.

Videos to watch to prepare:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-10978151>

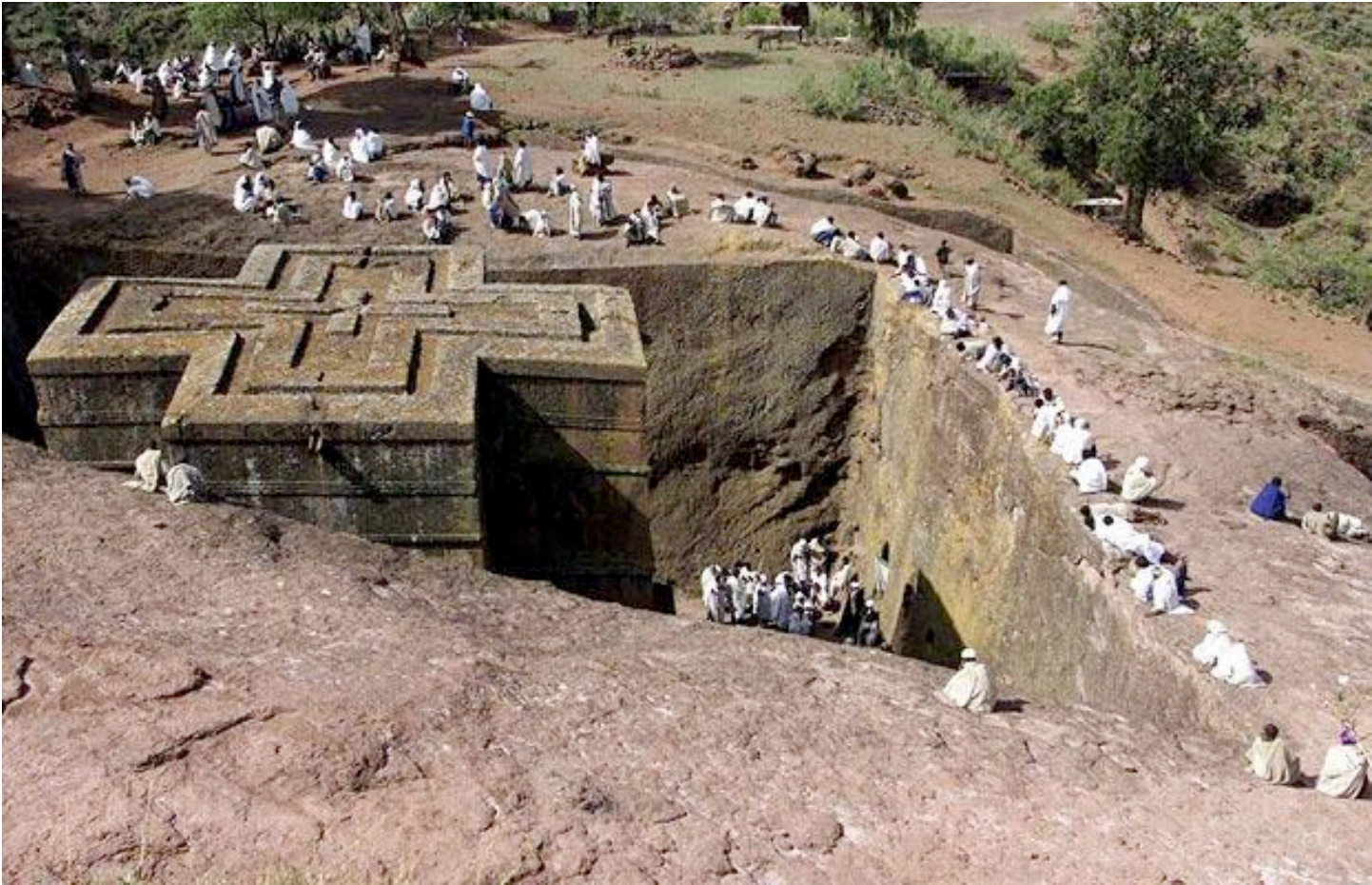
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xlaa2y_visit-st-george-s-church-in-lalibela-ethiopia_travel



The rooftop of the church with in the shape of the cross.







Death of St. John
Damien Hirst



Hirst was infatuated with death. In fact, one review of his NY show last January was written like an obituary:

Another Reviewer says about the Tate exhibition that included this piece: Hirst's controversial pieces have outraged some and delighted others. They say he offers morality art. This reviewer thinks he's a shrewd business man and that contemporary artists like Hirst create their own reality rather than trying to depict reality, which had become hopelessly boring.

Hirst put a shark in formaldehyde and asked the question: can a living person understand death?
Chambers hotel has a cow head in formaldehyde. Show **PROP.**

QUOTE: Matron to Mr. Harris: "Mr Harris, I take what I am given in God's name to serve these people. And if my donors insist on giving me another operating theater for the famous Thomas Stone, when what I need are catheters, syringes, penicillin and money for oxygen tanks so I can keep a single theater going, then I give them their operating theater in name."

Question: What in this cabinet might we have found in Missing hospital? What's missing at Missing?
Is this shock for shock's sake or does it make us think?



A Damien Hirst cow head in formaldehyde in the Chamber's Hotel lobby in Minneapolis. This is one the contemporary pieces in Ralph Burnet's collection.

An Exile Dreaming of Saint Adorno (Alternate - if time permits)



Some of these quotes could also be used earlier with previous works.

QUOTE: “Geography is destiny.”

QUOTE: Marion thinks: “But when [Thomas Stone] said ‘Ethiopian restaurant,’ it conjured up the sour taste of injera and a fiery wot and my mouth began watering and my tongue stopped working.”

QUOTE: As Hema flies home to Missing Hospital on the day the twins were born, she thinks: “Wasn’t that the definition of **home**? Not where you are from, but where you are wanted?”

QUOTE: “As a child I’d longed for Thomas Stone or at least the idea of him. So many mornings I waited for him at the gates of Missing. I saw that vigil now as necessary, a prerequisite for my insides to harden and cure just like the willow of a cricket bat must cure to be ready for a lifetime of knocks. That was the lesson at Missing’s gates: the world does not owe you and neither does your father.”

QUESTION: Once living in New York, Marion re-discovers Ethiopia through food. What are some of the most powerful images of Ethiopia in this book? ...about your own “home”?

QUESTION: How does the story inform us about the immigrant experience?

The Annunciation



During the Renaissance period, Virgin is kneeling obediently to divine will with tilted head because belief at the time was that conception occurred through the ear! This is Full Renaissance. Notice perspective, interior setting, daily life. Gabriel, Angels, Cherubim.

Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14

Quote: Stone asks, “What treatment in an emergency is administered by ear?” The answer is “Words of comfort.”

“[Ghosh] had a theory that bedroom Amharic and bedside Amharic were really the same thing: *Please lie down. Take off your shirt. Open your mouth. Take a deep breath...* The language of love was the same as the language of medicine.”

Question: How does this capture Verghese’s take on the practice of medicine? Has this been your personal experience?

QUOTE: At the end of the book we learn about Thomas Stone’s early life. Marion thinks: “Work was [Thomas Stone’s] meat, his drink, his wife, his child, his politics, his religion. He thought work was his salvation, until the day he found himself seated in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, in the room of a child he had abandoned; only then did he admit to his son how completely work had failed him.”

Question: Does Stone’s story in any way change your opinion of his actions on the day the twins were born? Why or why not?

Immaculate Madonna

Ponsonelli



In the end of the book, Marion and Hema find themselves in a small church in Rome, looking at this sculpture. It's in Rome that we arrive where we began: looking at St. Theresa.

QUOTE: "I knelt too. I addressed God and Sister Mary Joseph Praise and Shiva and Ghosh--all the things I carried with me in flesh and in spirit. I felt a great peace, a sense that coming to this spot had completed the circuit, and now I could rest. If "ecstasy" meant the sudden intrusion of the sacred into the ordinary then it had just happened to me."

QUOTE: "The figure of St Theresa lies limp, as if in a faint, her lips parted in ecstasy, her eyes unfocused, lids half closed. ...a boy angel stands over the saintly voluptuous sister. In his right hand he holds an arrow. Years later, I learned that St. Theresa's recurrent vision of the angel was called the transverberation, which means the soul inflamed by the love of God and the heart pierced by divine love; the metaphors of her faith were also the metaphors of medicine."

QUESTION: This story is all about passion: the passion for God, for romantic love, for medicine. By the end of Marion's tale, he had been inflamed with all three passions. In your opinion, is there anything still "missing" in his life or has his life been completely fulfilled? What do you think?

Use **PROPS** of St. Teresa of Avila by Bernini.

Vergheese was asked in an NPR interview: What's the distinction between curing and healing? All illness has a physical component but also a spiritual component, a sense of violation. Quote from Yeats sets up the duality/dichotomy in his story:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

QUESTION: Who in this story came closest to "perfection of the life"? to work? to both?

QUESTION: *Cutting for Stone* was also a book about forgiveness. In the end, Marion forgave his brother, his father and his mother. The hardest person for me to forgive in this tale was Dr. Thomas Stone. By the end of the story, had YOU forgiven Thomas Stone? Why or why not?



Ecstasy - both spiritual and physical. Note the arrow pointing at her pelvis, not her heart.



Sculpture is placed between heaven (light) and death (her toe is pointed to the crypt below.)

