Body and Soul Study Guide

Body and Soul by Frank Conroy

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Body and Soul is the exploration of the life of a child prodigy, raised in poverty and neglect but achieving fame and fortune through his incredible musical gift. The saga chronicles his struggles with himself, his environment, his family, his ambition, and ultimately with the talent that has given him everything. It is, as Conroy himself put it, "a real old-fashioned novel□a big fat book with a lot of people and a lot of plot." *Body and Soul* encompasses not only the hopes and dreams of its protagonist, but of Frank Conroy fans as well.

Author Biography

While *Stop-Time* was Frank Conroy's autobiography, it is apparent that he continues to draw from his own childhood experiences to create the world in which his characters live. Born on January 15, 1936, in New York City, Conroy was the son of an absent, mentally ill father and a cold, unloving mother. He spent much of his childhood escaping from his loneliness by reading books and teaching himself to play jazz on the piano. Yet from this miserable childhood came the inspiration for the writing that would later make him famous.

Conroy attended Haverford College in Pennsylvania. While there he met Patty Monro Ferguson, whom he married in 1958, the same year he graduated. Patty introduced him to the world of New York's social elite. Then in 1967, at the age of thirty-one, Conroy published his first book, the uniquely styled autobiography *Stop-Time.* This story of his childhood in New York City was greeted with intense critical acclaim. The book was hailed as an extraordinary first work, and readers were eager to see what Conroy would produce next. However, the fans and critics would have to wait.

Conroy did not publish another work until 1985. During the interim, he divorced Patty and had to leave his two sons, Daniel and Will, and he left Manhattan for Nantucket, Rhode Island. In 1975, he married his second wife, Margaret Davidson Lee, and worked as a freelance journalist and a jazz musician. At the age of forty he began teaching and eventually served as the director of the literature program at the National Endowment for the Arts (1981-87). In 1985, Conroy published his second book, *Midair.* This collection of just eight short stories received mixed reviews. In 1993, Conroy became director of the renowned Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. That same year he published his third book and first novel, *Body and Soul.*

Today, Conroy, his wife, and his son Tim divide their time between their homes in Iowa City and Nantucket. He continues to work as an administrator and teacher.

Plot Summary

Part One

The novel begins when Claude Rawlings is six years old, living in a basement apartment on

Third Avenue in New York City. While his mother, Emma, drives a cab, Claude amuses himself on an old, out-of-tune piano in his dark, little room. He occasionally attends school, but sits in the back of class and goes virtually unnoticed. Fascinated by Weisfeld's Music Store, he ventures in one day. Aaron Weisfeld shows him how to read sheet music and gives him a beginner's piano book to learn. Claude devours the book in record time, mastering the lessons with very little difficulty. Weisfeld is astonished by the boy's talent and agrees to be his teacher.

Claude also chances to meet Al Johnson, a maintenance worker in an apartment building. Through Al, Claude earns the money to pay for his piano lessons. In the meantime, his mother becomes involved in the Communist Party, using her cab to chauffeur leaders of the movement. Detected by the FBI, she is pressured into testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Traumatized by the experience, she slowly begins to lose her grip on reality.

Weisfeld arranges for Claude to practice on a concert grand piano in the home of the aged Maestro Kimmel. There the servants introduce him to gourmet dining, table manners, and strengthening exercises. When the Maestro passes away, he leaves Claude the Bechstein piano in his will and enough money in trust to pay for his music lessons. The piano is moved to the basement of Weisfeld's music store where Claude sets up a work studio. In the little time that Claude spends away from music, he goes to the movies and is enthralled with the glitzy, romantic adventures that he believes represent the world outside his narrow existence.

Claude then begins to study with a variety of music teachers, each one instructing him about a different technique or school of music. One of these teachers is the world-renowned Mozart expert Fredericks, who becomes a lifelong friend and mentor to Claude. As Claude moves into his teen years, he is hired to play at parties for the Fisks, a prominent, wealthy couple with two children, Catherine and Peter. Claude is immediately enraptured by Catherine, but she treats him with derision.

At the movie theater, Claude happens to find the notebook of Ivan Andrews, who attends The Bentley, a very exclusive private high school. Claude inquires about admission, and when they learn of his musical genius, he is admitted to the school with a full scholarship. Claude and Ivan become fast friends and spend much of their spare time together discussing music, physics, and life.

By this time Emma's emotional instability has reached its peak. Instead of driving her cab, she sits at home all day gathering evidence of what she believes to be a massive government conspiracy. Afraid they will be evicted from their apartment for nonpayment of rent, Claude tells Al of his dilemma. Al's understanding and support eventually bring Emma back to sanity. Then Al and Emma's relationship develops beyond friendship, and they begin living and working together on a permanent basis.

At school, Claude studies Schonberg's twelve-tone system of composition with his music professor Mr. Satterthwaite, and even manages to get invited to a social mixer by Catherine. When Catherine soon after elopes to Australia, Claude is confused and devastated, but does not have much time to dwell on it after he receives the opportunity to perform a Mozart Double Concerto with Fredericks at a music festival. It is Claude's debut, and he is a smashing success. Fredericks' manager, Otto Levits, signs on to manage Claude. By agreement among Levits, Mr. Larkin (the lawyer who handles Claude's trust), Weisfeld, and Claude, a scholarship is arranged for Claude to go to Pennsylvania to attend Cadbury College.

Part Two

Claude is in his senior year of college when he meets Lady Powers. They fall in love, and Claude discovers that Lady is Catherine's cousin. Lady's parents do not approve of Claude because he is a musician.

Professionally, Claude's career is growing. He performs a concert tour with the famous violinist Frescobaldi, playing to enthusiastic audiences in several cities and even at Carnegie Hall. None of this, however, impresses Lady's parents, and her father hires a private investigator to look into Claude's past.

There is no record of Claude's father, and Claude confronts his mother for the truth. Emma tells him that she does not know who his father is, and that Henry Rawlings was just a soldier she met two days before he was shipped out. Claude is not happy with this explanation, but there is nothing he can do but accept it. Lady is furious with her parents and refuses to go back to their house. Fortunately, she has a five-million-dollar trust fund, so Lady and Claude get married.

Part Three

Five years later, Lady and Claude are living the life of a normal married couple. Claude continues to build his music career while Lady flits from one project to another. Their world is shaken by the discovery that Claude is sterile. Lady desperately wants to have a baby, so they decide to adopt. The adoption falls through, however, and Lady is so traumatized by the bad experience that she closes the subject on adopting.

Claude comes into the music store one day to find Weisfeld in bed, very ill. He knows he is near death, so Weisfeld finally tells Claude the story of how he lost his family in the war. When Weisfeld passes away, Claude is absolutely devastated. He cancels all his

engagements and goes into such a deep depression that he spends months lost in his own grief and completely out of touch with others. His marriage to Lady is falling apart, and she leaves to pursue a business venture with a friend in Florida. But when Claude learns that Weisfeld has left the music store to him and is reminded of Weisfeld's love for him, he is rejuvenated. He decides to move into Weisfeld's old apartment above the store and to begin to work again.

A big real estate development corporation wants to buy up the entire block, including the music store, and turn it into new apartment buildings. Claude refuses to sell, and finds himself the victim of corporate intimidation. He is harassed and even has his arm broken by hired corporate thugs. The intimidation comes to an end, however, when Senator Barnes, Lady and Catherine's grandfather, comes to Claude's aid.

Claude composes a concerto that wins the London Symphony competition. He leaves the store in the care of Emma and Al and goes to England. While there, Catherine, now a divorced single mother working on her doctoral degree, comes to see him. They become romantically involved, and Catherine confesses that during the time that Claude had known her in New York, she had been sleeping with her stepfather, Dewman Fisk. Claude asks her to marry him, but she does not want to marry again, and she knows that there is not room in Claude's life for anything but music.

While in a rehearsal, Claude meets a bassist named Reggie Phillips, who informs him of a nearby jazz club. Claude attends one evening and plays alongside Reggie's companion and bandleader, a black man named Lord Lightning. What Claude does not know is that Lord Lightning is his father. It is a secret that his parents, Al, and Reggie will take to their graves.

Claude's concerto, his debut as a major composer, creates a great demand for his performances, and Claude Rawlings leaves England for a whirlwind existence in the music world that will consume his life.

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Body and Soul is Frank Conroy's novel about music prodigy, Claude Rawlings, and his rise to celebrity status as a musical artist from extremely humble beginnings in post-World War II New York City.

The novel begins with a description of the everyday life of six-year-old Claude Rawlings. Claude spends his days locked in a basement apartment in New York City while his mother, Emma, works as a cab driver during the day. Claude spends each day watching the parade of legs pass by the small window in the apartment and understands a vicarious rush that there is motion outside and that people are headed somewhere all the time.

Emma works fourteen-hour days and collapses in a chair when she comes home each night and orders little Claude to bring her quart of beer which she normally drinks in one sitting before getting a second one. Dinner for Claude is something warmed out of a can and the boy is scrawny and quiet. Emma goes to bed early and leaves Claude to himself once more.

This is the order of Claude's life until he goes to school where he is a quiet but bright student who likes to keep a low profile because he is embarrassed about his thin body and his poverty. It is 1945 and Emma tells Claude that his father went to the war before Claude was born but tells Claude not to ask her about his father anymore. Soon, Claude discovers the delights of an old piano stored in the corner of his room and his world changes completely.

Claude enters the music store owned by Aaron Weisfeld who learns of Claude's propensity for the piano and sells Claude a starter book for piano lessons. Claude's completion of the lessons in two weeks prompts Mr. Weisfeld to learn more about this unusual child and decides to teach Claude whom he thinks is gifted.

Claude is left to his own devices most of the time and searches for ways to make some spending money. When Claude tires of looking for spare coins dropped in his neighborhood, he ventures a little further and ends up in the lower level of a high-rise apartment building where he gets lost in a maze of hallways and pipes. The building's maintenance man, Al Johnson, takes a liking to Claude and the pair enters into a business arrangement and split the money earned from the soda bottles collected in the building's garbage.

The money earned from the bottle deposits allows Claude to pay for piano lessons without his mother's knowledge. Claude and Mr. Weisfeld see each other regularly for lessons and when Claude misses an entire week due to illness, Mr. Weisfeld surprises Claude by arriving at the apartment one Saturday evening. Mr. Weisfeld takes Claude

out for a meal and waits until Emma returns home to ask her permission to provide accelerated lessons for Claude because he is so talented.

Emma is not aware that Claude has been taking lessons, but agrees to the additional lessons, and prides herself on the fact that Claude probably got his musical talent from her because she used to perform in a vaudeville act.

Soon after, Emma has a phone installed but does not use it except for occasional calls which come in at odd hours in the night. When the calls come, Emma rouses Claude and takes him with her on secret rides to pick up elusive customers. Claude begins to enjoy these rides because he feels as if he is part of a grand secret being in the midst of these clandestine rendezvous.

One night, Emma and Claude pick up one of their regular secret customers. Before leaving to go to the shipyard, the customer tells Emma to break off her contact with the secret organization because they will give up her identity and will not provide protection for her in any way.

Not long after, Emma and Claude see an article in the newspaper about their secret customer who is actually one of the leaders of the Communist Party.

Mr. Weisfeld makes arrangements for Claude to practice on a grand piano at the home of a famous maestro who has retired. Claude is surprised to find that the maestro's home is in the same apartment building in which Al is the maintenance man. Claude is introduced to Franz, the butler, who looks after Claude when he comes for lessons three times each week.

Gradually, Franz provides lessons in etiquette and also informs Claude that the maestro would like Claude to gain some weight and that Claude is to eat meals at the maestro's home after his lessons. Franz' wife, Helga, fixes all types of German food which Claude revels in. Soon after, Mr. Weisfeld informs Claude that the maestro has died but promises to find a way to proceed with Claude's lessons.

The maestro had set up a trust for Claude which entitles him to the Bechstein piano and funds for piano lesson until the age of eighteen. The attorney for the maestro's estate also indicates that Mr. Weisfeld will administrate Claude's trust. There is further mystery about Claude's life because Emma cannot provide the attorney with Claude's birth certificate or any other documentation about Claude.

Soon after, Claude waits anxiously for the arrival of the piano which is found to be too large to fit through the doorway of the apartment. The piano is taken back to the building where the maestro lived and is kept in the basement where Claude sometimes performs for Al. Eventually, the piano is moved into the basement of Mr. Weisfeld's store where Claude can practice to his heart's content.

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

The story begins in New York City in the early 1940's. Claude's mother, Emma, is a single mother who drives a cab for a living, and although her choice of work is unusual, during World War II it was quite common for women to work in predominantly male professions. Emma does not disclose any substantive information about Claude's father and the boy is told that his father is in the war but that he had left long before Claude was born. The reader is left to believe that Claude's conception was unplanned and Emma is left to raise a child, a role foreign to this woman who has no nurturing instincts. Consequently, Claude is raised without much emotional support. Eventually, he finds that emotional support in music and in the environment in Mr. Weisfeld's store.

The Bechstein piano, which is the finest thing Claude has ever owned, will not fit through the doorway of the dingy basement apartment, symbolizing that Claude's life will no longer focus on the apartment because the scope of his life is beginning to change and there is no room for the person he used to be.

Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8

Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 Summary

Emma is suspected of Communist activities and is visited by FBI agents who eventually take her to FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. for questioning. Emma tires of the process and leaves, without permission, to return to New York, where she receives a two-month suspension of her cab driver's license. Emma then learns that the FBI had shut her down and cooperates fully after this event.

Claude begins to go to the movies as a diversion from his life and completely immerses in the stories unfolding on the big screen. Claude is only ten years old, but is annoyed that he is forced to sit in the children's section of the theater and maintains the greatest distance possible from the other children.

Mr. Weisfeld offers Claude a job in his store so that Claude becomes almost completely self sufficient, buying his own meals and clothes. One day, a wealthy woman named Mrs. Fisk enters the store with her haughty daughter, Catherine. Mrs. Fisk buys the most expensive flute in the store and Mr. Weisfeld tells Claude later that Mrs. Fisk bought the instrument with the hopes that her daughter may like it.

Mr. Weisfeld believes that Claude has mastered the fundamentals of piano and sends Claude to a succession of different piano instructors so that Claude may experience various disciplines of the art. One of his teachers is the debonair Mr. Fredericks who lives in a mansion on the Hudson River and Claude is literally, and emotionally, transported to another world.

Emma is finally released from FBI surveillance and she never completely returns to her old self. She now has a passion for exposing crime in politics and government and sends letters of complaint to every official agency possible. The nights in the apartment are punctuated by the sounds of Claude playing on the old piano in his room while Emma types endless letters on her new typewriter.

Mrs. Fisk hires Claude to accompany her son, Peter, as he plays violin. Mr. Weisfeld informs Claude that Mrs. Fisk's husband, Dewman, is a very influential man in New York politics so Claude dresses in suit and tie for his first session at the Fisk home. Peter plays perfunctorily but Claude is pleased to be in the same house with Catherine, whom he thinks is the most beautiful girl he has ever seen. Catherine is disdainful of Claude whose social skills are minimal at best.

Claude continues to escape through the movies and one day finds a notebook belonging to a boy named Ivan Andrews under his theater seat. The notebook is from a private school called The Bentley and Claude meets Ivan when he returns the notebook.. Claude inquires about scholarships at the school and Ivan introduces Claude

to the appropriate people and Claude receives a full scholarship based on his exceptional musical talent.

Soon after, Claude receives an invitation to a piano performance at Carnegie Hall by Mr. Fredericks. Claude is picked up in a limousine carrying Mr. Frederick and his companion, Anson Roeg, a writer. Claude is mesmerized by the performance of Victor Wolff, but is even more intrigued when Anson demands that she and Claude switch clothing during intermission, clearly leaving Claude with the better end of the deal with a very expensive French tuxedo.

Emma's behavior becomes increasingly more erratic and she no longer goes to work, preferring to clip articles from the daily newspaper and write inflammatory letters to government officials. One day Claude enlists Al's help in starting Emma's cab so that it will not be towed. Claude also shares with Al that Emma has not paid the rent for three months so Al visits with Claude one day and speaks to Emma about her private pain.

Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 Analysis

The author uses the literary devices of metaphors and similes to add dimension to the novel. For example, when Claude first enters the music room of Mr. Frederick's mansion, the stillness and the quality of the furnishings affect Claude as if "he felt the silence of the room pressing gently upon him. There were no background sounds of any kind - no humming machines, no hissing radiators, no creaking wood. It was as if the entire room were frozen under a spell." Obviously, silence cannot press on a person and a room cannot be frozen, but the author uses these metaphors to describe Claude's experiences and make it more authentic.

In another example, Claude rides the train back to the city from Mr. Frederick's home, and looking out the window, he notices that the "telephone poles whipped by with metronomic precision..." The author uses the pace of the metronome to mark the passing of the trees to show that everything in Claude's world is somehow related to music.

The author also uses irony in the story in the scene where Claude and Mr. Weisfeld are eating dinner in a German restaurant. Mr. Weisfeld tells Claude that he never could have imagined himself eating in a German restaurant and drinking German beer. Claude does not recognize the significance of Mr. Weisfeld's statement as a Polish Jew who suffered at the hands of the Nazis during the war.

Part 1: Chapters 9, 10, and 11

Part 1: Chapters 9, 10, and 11 Summary

Claude continues to spend time at the Fisk residence as Peter's accompanist but Claude is more interested in Catherine who continues to treat him with disdain. One evening Claude accompanies Peter and Catherine in a performance given to a large group of influential people at a dinner party at the Fisk home. Although Catherine is not appreciative of his efforts, Claude meets George Balanchine, the famous ballet dancer and choreographer, making the evening a success for Claude.

Claude is still enthralled with going to the movies and falls in love with the movie, A *Place in the Sun,* featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift. Claude is spellbound by Taylor's beauty but is particularly impressed with the story line of a poor boy with no social standing who falls in love with a socialite whose father also embraces the young man.

Al spends more time with Emma, and Claude can tell that both the atmosphere of the apartment and his mother mood are calmer due to his influence. Early one morning before Claude leaves for practice, he encounters Al leaving Emma's bedroom. Though Claude is startled to find out about the intimate relationship between his mother and his old friend, he is supportive because they both seem happier.

Claude settles into life at the Bentley School where he studies Schonberg's famous twelvetone system of music composition and even creates his own piece from what he has learned. All his instructors, both in music and in the regular classroom, are in awe of Claude's talent.

One night, Claude is composing and playing in the studio in the basement of Weisfeld's store and he rushes upstairs to Mr. Weisfeld's apartment to share his new composition. Mr. Weisfeld is visibly shaken to have been awakened at four o'clock in the morning and speaks about hiding to avoid someone who is coming after him. It is several minutes before Claude can convince Mr. Weisfeld that he was having a nightmare and that he is safe with Claude in his own apartment.

Claude and Ivan Andrews have become good friends in spite of the fact that Ivan is five years older than Claude. Claude is drawn to his friend's enthusiasm for learning and different perspective on life.

Claude is surprised to receive an invitation from Catherine Fisk for the next Bentley School mixer. Claude arrives at the Fisk household on the appointed night and the housekeeper, Isidra, gives him a small wooden cross for a good luck piece. Claude does not know what to make of this unusual gesture and proceeds into the living room where Peter meets him.

Peter shows Claude a room that used to house his electric trains bur is now used as an oversized war room complete with Nazi uniforms and weapons. Apparently, Peter and Mrs. Fisk enact World War II scenarios upon their own personal world stage. Claude questions Peter about his knowledge of gas chambers but the boy is ignorant and Claude decides to drop the topic.

Catherine descends from her room and escorts Claude out to the Packard so that the family driver, Charles, may drive the two young people to the dance. At the dance, Catherine abandons Claude almost immediately and dances with many other boys. Claude meets a young woman named Brigett McMann who teaches him how to dance and he is grateful that the night is not a complete disaster.

On the ride home from the dance, Claude asks Catherine why she asked him to the mixer and she replies that it is because Claude is so different, just like she is different and does not fit in with the other students. Claude had hoped Catherine's reason would be a more romantic reply but he thanks her for the invitation and the driver lets him out on a street corner so that Catherine cannot see where Claude lives.

Part 1: Chapters 9, 10, and 11 Analysis

The author presents the theme of social classes in this section as Claude begins his entrye into high society. Claude is ill equipped to navigate these waters in spite of his attraction to Catherine, who uses Claude for a plaything instead of valuing him as a person. Fortunately, Claude has had the steady influence of Mr. Weisfeld as a mentor from whom he has garnered much of his self-esteem, but the music teacher is not equipped to teach Claude about the perils of high society.

The specter of Nazi atrocities in World War II still haunts Mr. Weisfeld as illustrated by his reaction to Claude's knock on his door in the middle of the night. It is clear that Mr. Weisfeld thinks he is still in Germany and the Nazis have discovered his hiding place and have come to arrest him. Claude may not even be aware of Mr. Weisfeld's secret terror because Mr. Weisfeld never speaks about his past or his personal life but the fear is always with Mr. Weisfeld.

It is interesting to note that in the Fisk household, the electric trains have been put away in favor of a World War II room where Peter learns war strategies and tactics with his mother. To the Fisk family, each new topic, despite its gravity, becomes a game or diversion like each new musical instrument purchased on a whim in Mr. Weisfeld's store.

Part 1: Chapters 12 and 13

Part 1: Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Mr. Fredericks is visiting with Mr. Weisfeld when Claude arrives one afternoon. It is obvious that the two men have been in discussion for quite a while and Claude soon discovers that Mr. Fredericks would like Claude to play a Mozart Double Concerto with him at a music festival. The festival is an annual event held in the mountains in Massachusetts and this is not only a great honor but also great exposure for Claude's debut of playing in front of an audience.

Claude and Mr. Weisfeld accelerate Claude's practice schedule in the time leading up to the event and Claude begins to show some physical signs of excessive stress but pushes past the discomfort to reach his goal of playing flawlessly beside Mr. Fredericks.

Claude writes a letter to Catherine asking her to be his guest at the music festival but the letter comes back unopened. Crestfallen, Claude tells Ivan his sad news and Ivan reveals to Claude that Catherine has eloped with the son of a South American businessman and she left by ship without telling anyone. Claude feels as if the floor has dropped out from under his feet but Ivan tries to console Claude that they are both young men and that there are plenty of women for them to meet.

Finally, the day arrives for Claude to take the train from New York to Massachusetts and he is driven from the train station to the country inn where Mr. Fredericks will join him in two days. Claude has come a little early to make sure that the orchestra has been alerted to Mr. Frederick's requests and Claude can have the opportunity to practice with the orchestra a few days before the actual performance.

Claude becomes acquainted with some of the students attending the festival and fills in for a pianist who has become completely disabled by stage fright. Claude's impromptu performance is a smash and becomes the talk of the festival attendees.

One of the musicians Claude meets is a beautiful green-eyed violinist named Eva and the pair spends as much time as possible together this weekend. Claude is grateful that he has finally lost his virginity.

On the day of the performance, Claude receives a telegram stating that Mr. Weisfeld has the flu and cannot attend. Claude is sorely disappointed that Mr. Weisfeld will miss his debut performance, but the show is a huge success and Mr. Fredericks introduces Claude to Mr. Levits, a talent manager.

Soon after, Mr. Weisfeld, Mr. Levits, Claude, and Emma meet in the law office of Mr. Larkin to discuss the management of Claude's musical career. Claude states that he wants to attend a regular university and not only a musical conservatory so that he may get a well-rounded education.

It is agreed that Claude will begin to perform regularly on dates that do not conflict with school commitments. Mr. Larkin announces that he is on the scholarship committee for a small college in Pennsylvania called Cadbury and that he will do everything possible to make sure Claude is admitted with a full scholarship.

Part 1: Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

This is a pivotal time in every aspect of Claude's life. Professionally, Claude is ready to make his audience debut with an acclaimed artist, Mr. Fredericks; Mr. Levits agrees to represent Claude professionally; Claude has his first intimate encounter with a young woman; and Claude will be going to college with a full scholarship thanks to the efforts of Mr. Larkin.

Claude's relationship with Ivan is an important one because Ivan is Claude's first real friend. The fact that Ivan is quite a few years older than Claude is significant because Claude has spent his entire life with adults and has shunned people his own age but feels comfortable with Ivan who is more mature than the others in his school.

Part 2: Chapters 14 and 15

Part 2: Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

The story now skips ahead four years and Claude is in his senior year at Cadbury College. Sitting in the library one day, he meets a beautiful young woman named Priscilla Powers, whom everyone calls Lady. Lady attends the local girls' college, Hollifield, where she is extremely active in social activities and organizations. Lady comes from a privileged background and Claude eventually learns that her grandfather, Senator Barnes, is also Catherine Fisk's grandfather, making Lady and Catherine first cousins.

Claude and Lady spend all their free time together and soon begin an intimate relationship. Claude meets Lady's parents at her graduation a few months later and Mr. and Mrs. Powers barely acknowledge his presence because he does not come from a socially prominent family.

After college, Claude returns to Mr. Weisfeld's store to spend time with his old mentor. Mr. Weisfeld counsels Claude on some etiquette issues when the young man receives an invitation to spend the weekend at the Powers home on Long Island. Lady meets Claude at the train station and drives him to her home in a sports car. Lady shows Claude to his quarters in the guest cottage and the pair makes love in the hopes that no one will see them.

Lady and Claude swim in the pool on the estate and relax a little before cocktails and dinner which is very awkward because Lady's parents act as if Claude is invisible in the rooms. Mr. Powers pulls Claude aside during the evening to ask about Claude's career as a musician and makes it very clear that he is not impressed with Claude's life ambitions noting that artistic pursuits are for "women and pansies."

Claude makes a better impression on Lady's friends when he plays boogie-woogie on the piano at a party held at the mansion of one of Lady's friends. Afterwards, Claude is distressed because he is not supposed to abuse his talent with this style of music but Lady consoles him in the fact that his performance saved a dying party.

Back in the city after the weekend, Claude shares the events of his visit with the Powells with Mr. Weisfeld, who counsels Claude to be wary of people like the Powells who are snobs and will not approve of Claude as a son-in-law as evidenced by Mr. Powell's treatment of Claude.

Part 2: Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

Although Claude is a gifted artist, he is immature and napve in the ways of the world and does not understand why Mr. and Mrs. Powell treat him as if he were invisible. Claude's encounter with Mr. Powell is the first time that anyone has ever positioned

Claude's musical talent as a negative factor and Claude does not know how to respond. It takes the sage advice of Mr. Weisfeld to put the experience in perspective for Claude, who openly accepts people from all walks of life.

Lady is representative of the young people from this class of people who receive fine educations but are unfocused and restless, possibly from the dilemma of having too many choices too soon in life. Lady envies Claude's purposeful life and cannot name the elusive qualities that allow Claude to stay focused. Lady cannot even begin to imagine the life Claude has lived in becoming self-sufficient at the age of ten and becoming a musical prodigy as well.

Part 2: Chapter 16

Part 2: Chapter 16 Summary

Claude visits Otto Levit's office one day to be informed that the famous violinist Aldo Frescobaldi needs a pianist to accompany him on a short tour. Frescobaldi's regular accompanist has broken his arm and there are a few concert dates to complete. Levit does not need to tell Claude the impact that performing with this maestro could have on Claude's career. Levit advises Claude on what to expect from the flamboyant Frescobaldi and Claude commits to doing his best.

Frescobaldi meets Claude in the studio at Mr. Weisfeld's store where the maestro puts Claude through some grueling exercises on pieces which Claude has not played for a long time. After a few hours, the two musicians eat lunch at an Italian restaurant to fuel the maestro's huge body and energy level. After lunch, Frescobaldi and Claude return to the music store, Frescobaldi naps for a short while, and then he and Claude play a few more pieces, one of which is Claude's original composition.

Claude is awarded the temporary pianist job and he practices relentlessly with Mr. Weisfeld's coaching. Lady does not understand Claude's obsession and why he cannot make time for her right now but Claude is completely focused on the work with Frescobaldi.

The first concert date is in Philadelphia and Claude is not pleased because the piano is slightly out of tune and he had asked for the adjustments to be made. No one but he and Frescobaldi notice the flaw and the concert receives rave reviews. Claude joins the maestro in meeting the press after the show and returns to the hotel to have a late supper.

Just as Claude is finishing his supper in the bar, Frescobaldi appears with two women and they join Claude for a while. One of the women makes intimate overtures toward Claude and he is surprised when both women join Frescobaldi in his room for the night.

The next performance is set for Carnegie Hall in New York City and Claude provides tickets for Emma, Al, and Lady. Mr. Weisfeld joins Claude in the dressing room before the show to help calm the young man's nerves but Claude is completely in control. Claude follows Frescobaldi out onto the stage at the appointed time and follows the maestro's lead and they finish the concert with one of Claude's original compositions.

The evening at Carnegie Hall is a huge success and Claude finds Mr. Weisfeld weeping with joy in the dressing room afterwards. Lady joins Claude backstage but Al motions to Claude to come out front because Emma does not feel comfortable with all the people backstage. This is the first time Emma has seen Claude perform and she is proud of him although her praise is short and clipped.

The last concert in Boston is also a success and Claude sits with Frescobaldi as he waits to board a plane to London. There is a new intimacy now between the two men and Claude has won the appreciation of Frescobaldi who gives Claude a little advice about his music, vows that they will play together again, and leaves to board his plane.

Returning to his apartment that night, Claude is surprised to find Lady waiting for him outside. Lady is distraught because her parents have fought about her relationship with Claude and Lady has left the house for good. Lady's mother had been clipping all of Claude's reviews from the papers but Mr. Powell has hired a private investigator to look into Claude's past. The report reveals that Emma is living with a Negro, that she has ties to the Communist Party, and that there is no record of Claude's father or any marriage for Emma at any time.

Claude is not surprised at the findings but wants information from Emma and the next day he asks Emma about his father. Al tries to get Claude to calm down but Claude demands to know the truth. Emma tells Claude that she had been married to a Canadian man named Rawlings but that it lasted only a few days because the war started. Emma tells Claude that she had been a showgirl in those days and cannot honestly tell Claude who his father is. Claude leaves Emma's apartment without saying a word.

Claude and Lady spend the next several days in Claude's apartment where they talk about their future and decide to get married. Lady reveals that she has a five million dollar trust fund so a lack of money will not be an impediment to their plans. Claude and Lady get married the next week in a civil ceremony with no guests.

Part 2: Chapter 16 Analysis

Ironically, Claude is forced to face the anonymity of his real father during the same time that Mr. Weisfeld, who has been a father figure all Claude's life, supports Claude in his finest moment at Carnegie Hall. Claude had been content with his personal history and having the guidance and counsel of Mr. Weisfeld until Lady's father initiates the investigation. Suddenly, Claude is forced to face his past and is made to feel inferior by Lady's father, a petty man with no real integrity. It is interesting to note that Al seems to know the details of Claude's life before Claude does and his friendship with Al seems to be in jeopardy as well.

The experience with Frescobaldi is important because this is when Claude makes his professional concert debut. It is also when he learns that even great artists are merely men with flaws and appetites like all others. This is important for Claude, who struggles with how his talent fits into the world of people who see him as a prodigy and not as a person.

Part 3: Chapters 17, 18, and 19

Part 3: Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Summary

Five years have passed and Claude and Lady now live in a fashionable townhouse in Manhattan where Lady brings Claude breakfast in bed every morning. Today Lady is already dressed to leave for her latest job of teaching art appreciation at a private school. Lady has had a string of jobs and volunteer activities over the past few years but she does not stay longer than a few months at any of them.

Lady reminds Claude of his doctor's appointment this morning and she leaves for work. Claude spends the morning leisurely and is struck by some chords which come into his head and he works in his music room too long making him late for his appointment. The doctor tells Claude that he does not produce living sperm which accounts for the couple's infertility all these years. Claude is struck dumb by the news and Lady is devastated when Claude shares the information with her later in the day.

Claude and Lady continue with their lives as before but soon Lady broaches the topic of adoption and Claude agrees to consider it. One day Claude arrives home and finds Lady and her grandfather, Senator Barnes, waiting for him to discuss adoption. The senator has been a major contributor to an adoption facility in upstate New York and is willing to intervene so that Lady and Claude can bypass all the normal red tape and paperwork.

The senator also advises Lady to reconcile with her parents whom she has not seen for over five years. Lady agrees to consider visiting on Christmas and the senator is pleased.

Christmas morning arrives and Claude and Lady attend a function at her parent's home. The event passes without disruption but without any real joy either. After they leave, Claude and Lady stop at Mr. Weisfeld's store but the old man is not there so they continue home to wait until it is time to go to the home of Lady's aunt and uncle, the Fisks, for Christmas dinner.

Claude is surprised to find Al driving the cab he hails this afternoon. Al tells Claude that Emma is driving their other cab because the tips are good on holidays. Claude asks about Emma and Al informs him that she is doing well. Claude would like to talk with Al a little longer but Lady is anxious to get inside to dinner and Al has to keep working.

At the Fisk household, Claude finds the same impassive mood and polite avoidance he had experienced at Lady's parents' home earlier today. Claude is surprised to learn that Mrs. Fisk has gone blind, apparently a case of hysterical blindness brought on by the news that Catherine had eloped over five years ago. Peter's thin appearance and extremely reserved demeanor also shock Claude.

Soon after the holidays, Claude and Lady receive word that a baby is available for them at the adoption facility. The transfer of the child is to take place four days after his birth, and Claude and Lady arrive at the appointed time. The administrator informs the couple that the procedure is for the birth mother to hand the child to Lady and then Claude and Lady must leave immediately. This is normally the best procedure for all involved.

When Lady enters the mother's room, the girl turns around and Lady recognizes her as a former student. Both women collapse in tears, the girl because her secret is now revealed, and Lady because she knows she cannot take the child because of the institution's strict rules about anonymity.

Lady gives away all the baby clothes and furnishings she had purchased and gives up on her dreams of becoming a mother.

Claude still visits Mr. Weisfeld and on one cold February afternoon, Claude finds the music store closed and the old man upstairs in bed. Claude has never been inside Mr. Weisfeld's apartment and is surprised to find all the old photographs of people whom Mr. Weisfeld describes as members of his family.

Mr. Weisfeld tells Claude the story of his life in Poland in 1939 when he was a renowned musical composer and artist, married with a little girl. The Germans had begun their sporadic bombings of Poland and soon Weisfeld decided to move his wife, child, and parents to their country home where they will be safer. On the way out of town, Mr. Weisfeld stopped the car to buy cigars for his father and exiting the store, witnessed a bomb drop on his car with all his family members inside.

Mr. Weisfeld left Poland soon after on his bicycle and ended up in Sweden where he stayed before immigrating to the United States. Claude is shocked to hear the story and irritated with himself for not asking about Mr. Weisfeld's life sooner.

Mr. Bergman from next door tells Claude that Mr. Weisfeld has tuberculosis of the heart and kidneys and is dying. Claude stays the night at Mr. Weisfeld's apartment and the old man dies the next morning while Claude holds his hands.

Claude is devastated by Mr. Weisfeld's death and sinks into a deep depression, not answering mail or phone calls or leaving the house for over three months. Lady cannot bear Claude's morose demeanor and moves to Palm Beach, and shortly obtains a legal separation.

Mr. Larkin arrives at Claude's house one day with news that Mr. Weisfeld has left his estate to Claude. Claude is particularly struck by Mr. Weisfeld's claim in the legal documents that he had loved Claude as if he had been his own son. It is this statement which finally brings Claude back to life and he begins to play the piano again.

Claude now owns the building housing the music store, and he moves in in order to preserve the integrity of the building and his own past. Claude fights the city government, which wants to buy the building just as it has purchased the other buildings around it, in order to tear them down to make way for new developments. Claude's

resistance ends in broken windows, threats, and finally an attack which leaves Claude with a broken arm.

Claude engages the help of Senator Barnes who threatens the owner of the construction company which has been threatening Claude. Claude moves into Mr. Weisfeld's old apartment and begins to restore the interior of the music store after modernizing the wiring and plumbing.

Claude begins to compose a piece of music which has come to him out of the cacophony of the destruction going on around him. Claude also phones Otto to tell him he is recovering and will soon be able to work again.

Part 3: Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Analysis

The story of Mr. Weisfeld's past has been revealed, making sense of his behavior earlier in the novel. Claude had been too young to understand the irony of Mr. Weisfeld, a Jewish man whose family was killed by Germans, making jokes about enjoying German food and beer. Neither did Claude understand Mr. Weisfeld's panicked state when Claude woke him once in the middle of the night. Clearly, Mr. Weisfeld still lived in terror of his past but never passed his fears on to Claude.

It is ironic that Claude does not learn about Mr. Weisfeld's life until the day before he dies, and Claude's depression is exacerbated by this fact. Finally, though, Claude is able to understand the tremendous love Mr. Weisfeld had for him and that love is what brings Claude back to life, just as Mr. Weisfeld had given Claude a life twenty years ago when taking him on as a piano student.

Although finally understanding Mr. Weisfeld too late, Claude knows he is fortunate to have had the steady influence of his mentor. No one else in his life has been capable of such unconditional love. Emma is too troubled herself to be of any real benefit to Claude. Even his wife, Lady, is too restless and selfish to provide Claude with true love. It makes perfect sense, then, that Claude works to protect the building which houses Mr. Weisfeld's music store, not only as a shrine to the work that was created there but also as a monument to pure love.

Fortunately, Claude also has the gift of his celebrity and connections through Fredericks and Lady so that he can move in higher social circles too. It is his marriage to Lady which cements his relationship with Senator Barnes, who helps Claude fight the city government and construction officials so that he may stay in Weisfeld's building without further harassment. Fredericks' statement to Claude once that Claude should appreciate the gifts he has received has come full circle and Claude has the best of all worlds.

Part 3: Chapters 20, 21, and 22

Part 3: Chapters 20, 21, and 22 Summary

Claude finishes packing his suitcase and heads downstairs to the store where Emma sits behind the counter. Claude has lived in Mr. Weisfeld's apartment for over a year and Emma and Al both work in the store helping Claude with the business. Al still drives a cab periodically but Emma has given it up to work in the music store.

Claude catches a cab to the airport where he boards a plane bound for London where he will perform with the London Symphony Orchestra in concert. Claude had submitted his latest piece, *Weisfeld Concerto,* which won first place in a competition and this opportunity to play in London.

During afternoon tea one day, Claude is surprised to see Catherine walk into the tearoom of his hotel. Apparently, Catherine had seen Claude's name in the paper in association with the concert and she made some calls in order to locate him. Catherine reveals that she now lives in London with her six-year-old daughter, Jennie. Catherine divorced her husband because of his infidelity and is now studying for her doctorate degree in Medieval Studies at London University.

When Jennie leaves for a month in the French countryside with her father, Claude and Catherine begin an intense intimate relationship. Catherine reveals to Claude that she had been sexually abused by her stepfather, Mr. Fisk, from the time she was twelve-years-old and the abuse had been the impetus for her elopement nine years ago.

Claude cannot understand why Catherine is not angry and bitter, but Catherine chooses to concentrate on Jennie and her studies and lives a happy life, although it is radically different from the privileged lifestyle she used to enjoy. Before long, Claude proposes to Catherine but she does not want to marry again and she feels that Claude can truly belong to nothing or no one but his music.

Claude enjoys exploring London and asks a man named Reggie Phillips, one of the musicians at the orchestra hall, where he could find a good jazz club. Reggie tells Claude about a couple of places and Claude senses that Reggie would like to say something more but he merely congratulates Claude on his composition and leaves.

Later that night, at the Castle jazz club, the pianist, Lord Lightning, reacts strongly to the news that Reggie has met Claude. Lord Lightning questions Reggie about Claude's talent and Reggie confirms that Claude is definitely a gifted pianist. Lord Lightning voices his concerns about whether he and Emma had done the right thing by keeping quiet about Lord Lightning being Claude's father.

Lord Lightning recalls the fling he had had with Emma, the one and only time he had ever had sex with a woman, and the relief he felt when she agreed to raise the child without implicating him. Lord Lightning had taken up with a soldier he met in a movie

theater and told Emma he had been drafted so she never knew that he was homosexual and never went into military service.

Back at his hotel, Claude receives a telegram from his old friend, Ivan, promising to attend Claude's concert. There is also a telegram from Lady confirming that she has signed the divorce papers and will be staying in Palm Beach. Lady's good wishes elicit sadness in Claude and he hopes that she finds direction for her life.

That night Claude takes Catherine out to dinner at the exclusive Savoy Grille, a rare treat in her student lifestyle and budget. Afterwards, Claude and Catherine head for the Castle club where Lord Lightning and Reggie are performing. After the set, Reggie acknowledges Claude, who asks to meet Lord Lightning. Lord Lightning is hesitant to meet Claude knowing that Claude does not know that he is Claude's father.

Claude enjoys meeting Lord Lightning and they talk about music and Claude never suspects a thing. A few nights later, Lord Lightning attends Claude's concert with the symphony and sits in the last-row aisle seat, the equivalent seat to the one in which Emma had sat during Claude's performance at Carnegie Hall.

Claude returns a phone call from Otto who informs Claude about several concert bookings as well as a request from Frescobaldi to play with Claude again. Claude is torn between returning to America to work and staying with Catherine in London; but he knows that the music is his life and he will follow where it leads.

Part 3: Chapters 20, 21, and 22 Analysis

In a surprising revelation, the reader learns that Claude's father is a part-Negro, homosexual, jazz pianist who had a one-night stand with Emma during a vaudeville stint twenty-five years ago. This fact will never be known by anyone other than Emma, Al, Lord Lightning, and Reggie. In hindsight, it has worked out to Claude's advantage because he would never have had the kind mentoring of Mr. Weisfeld had he been brought up in a vaudeville environment with his real parents.

In an ironic twist, Lord Lightning sits in the comparable seat in London to the one Emma occupied at Carnegie Hall. There has been no contact between Claude's parents all these years, yet they choose the same place to sit to watch him, although in different concert halls. It is also symbolic that they each choose the last-row aisle seat because neither Emma nor Lord Lightning feels a real claim on Claude since he essentially raised himself. The act of watching Claude's performance from the fringe mirrors their involvement in his life.

The book's title, *Body and Soul,* is finally revealed when Claude experiences his first soulful experience with Catherine and the first time he hears his composition played by an orchestra. With Catherine, Claude feels as if "passion was a force to be fed, eagerly and gratefully fed like some hungry angel with them in the room possessed of the power to lift them out of themselves. Out of the body, out of the world to some deep blue

otherness where their souls would join, in and with the blue. Sailing along together in the blue, the blue insupportable to a soul alone."

When Claude first hears his composition coming from the orchestra, he "bathed in it, simply drank it in through the pores of his skin, a huge, unconscious smile on his face. It worked on him like some euphoric drug..." Claude's journey is both complete, and just beginning, as his life transforms him spiritually and physically with satisfaction for both his body and his soul.

Characters

Ivan Andrews

Ivan is Claude's close friend from The Bentley School. He is an older student who has come from Britain to finish his war-interrupted schooling and teach Greek. He later moves back to England and teaches physics at Cambridge University. Years later, Ivan comes to the London opening of Claude's piano concerto.

Senator Barnes

Senator Barnes is Lady and Catherine's grandfather and a respected former U.S.senator. As a pillar of New York society, he is highly regarded and commands a great deal of power. Senator Barnes uses this power to push through the adoption of a baby for Claude and Lady. Unfortunately, ignoring some rules to rush the process causes disastrous results. The senator also helps Claude during a struggle with ruthless land developers, thereby allowing Claude to keep Weisfeld's store intact.

Dewman Fisk

Dewman Fisk is Catherine's stepfather and a prominent figure in New York government and the arts. He wrote a law that required a children's section in each movie theater to protect children from molesters. Ironically, he himself is a child molester who started an affair with Catherine when she was only thirteen years old.

Mildred Fisk

Mildred Fisk is Catherine's mother. Wealthy and shallow, she periodically becomes very ill, retreating to her room for weeks at a time. When she hears the news about Catherine's elopement, she is stricken with hysterical blindness and never recovers her sight.

Peter Fisk

Peter Fisk is Catherine's half-brother. He plays the violin very well, but has no real love for music. Sheltered and suppressed by his "delicate" mother, he becomes a shell without a soul and eventually takes his own life.

Mr. Fredericks

Mr. Fredericks is the best Mozart pianist in the world and a very expensive piano teacher who normally has students from only the wealthiest families. But he accepts Claude as a student on Weisfeld's recommendation, then befriends Claude and acts as his mentor.Fredericks gives Claude the opportunity to debut by playing with him at a music festival, and he helps to shape Claude into a world-class musician.

Mr. Frescobaldi

Mr. Frescobaldi is a world-famous violin player who invites Claude to perform with him. It is Claude's introduction into the world of professional music. They play Carnegie Hall together and go on to tour together at various times.

Al Johnson

Al Johnson is the black custodian who befriends Claude. They meet when he discovers the young boy digging around for bottles in the basement of the apartment building where Al works. A poor man just getting by, Al occasionally steals from the wealthy tenants. But he turns from trying to involve Claude in theft to becoming Claude's advisor on life. He even steps in to help Claude's mother out of her emotional upheaval. Al's kind heart and great patience cause a sudden and radical difference in Emma's mental state. Al soon moves in with her, and together they drive taxis to make a living until Claude invites them to run Weisfeld's store.

Maestro Kimmel

Maestro Kimmel is an elderly piano master who allows Claude to practice on a very special and magnificent Bechstein in his home. The maestro has his staff give Claude lessons in etiquette and sees that he exercises and eats well. When the maestro passes away, he bequeaths the Bechstein to Claude, as well as a trust fund to pay for all of Claude's future piano lessons.

Mr. Larkin

Mr. Larkin is the executor of Maestro Kimmel 's will and is in charge of the trust left to Claude by the maestro. He is also on the scholarship committee at Cadbury College, and he is the reason Claude is accepted to that college with a full academic scholarship.

Otto Levits

Otto Levits is Fredericks' manager, and becomes Claude's manager as well, after the debut performance at the music festival.

Lord Lightning

Lord Lightning is a gay jazz pianist in London and Claude Rawlings's biological father. His one sexual relationship with a woman had produced Claude, but Emma wanted to handle the situation by herself. One-quarter black, he arranged for Emma to marry a gay white soldier who was shipping out to war, and Lightning purposely kept himself out of Claude's life after that to allow Claude the opportunity to grow up as a white American boy. Yet his absence is a major source of doubt and turmoil in Claude's life, and one of the major reasons behind Claude's paternal love for Weisfeld and his pursuit of music.

Catherine Marsh

Catherine Marsh is the unrequited love of Claude's youth and a modern-day version of Dickens's Estella. She is, on the surface, a rich, spoiled, precocious girl who enjoys tormenting the love-struck Claude and flaunting her privilege and beauty. She treats Claude with disdain and a sort of superior bemusement, as if he were there merely for her entertainment. Even when she allows Claude to enter her world by letting him escort her to a school dance, it is not due to any great interest in Claude as a person, but rather because she knows she can. She knows the effect she has on him and she uses that to her advantage. When Catherine elopes with another boy without explanation, it is a slap in the face to Claude's unquestioning devotion. Yet such obliviousness is not unexpected from this self-involved girl.

However, when Catherine is reintroduced into the novel as an adult, it becomes obvious that there is more to her than was first revealed. She is a complicated woman, driven by her passion for academic pursuits, a fiercely independent, struggling single mother, but scarred from the molestation of her teenage years. The once superior, indifferent young girl is now a woman who cries when she thinks of how her daughter suffers on their meager income. Despite the hardships, however, Catherine has come to terms with her life and the path it has taken. She knows what she wants and where she is going, and she knows that ultimately her path will not be the same as Claude's. Catherine, for better or for worse, achieves her peace and in her own way shows Claude how to find his as well.

Reggie Phillips

Reggie Phillips is a bassist in Lord Lightning's jazz band and his ten-year companion. Reggie is the reason that Claude unknowingly meets and plays piano with his father, something he has been unconsciously yearning to do his entire life.

Lady Powers

Lady Powers is Claude's wife. Her real name is Priscilla, but Lady has been her nickname since she was a child. She and Catherine are cousins, but Lady has none of

Catherine's pretentiousness. Instead, she is blase about her wealth and, in most respects, very normal. Her major problem is that she has no direction. Lady has lots of ambition, and a driving need to do something "real" with her life, but she doesn't know what that something is. So she dabbles in a little bit of everything, from teaching to publishing to photography. She comes to believe that having a baby will bring meaning into her life, but when she finds out that Claude can never father her children, she is once again floundering for some sort of purpose. Lady carries a great deal of promise and integrity, but she is unable to bring her capabilities to fruition.

Claude Rawlings

Claude Rawlings, the protagonist of the novel, is a gifted and complicated young man. Without a father and neglected by his mother, he spends his childhood in the back room of his basement apartment slowly discovering the secrets of an old white piano. From this lonely and destitute beginning, he manages to take his life in all new directions including a wealthy marriage and concerts at Carnegie Hall. Yet through all this good fortune, he still has to struggle with finding himself.

Claude keeps a part of himself hidden from others, even those he loves dearly, and he allows

them to keep things hidden from him as well. He tries to connect with people, to sustain meaningful relationships, but he fails because he puts too much distance between himself and others. The only thing he can rely on is his music. It has brought him everything he has ever hoped for, and it is only while playing the piano that he feels control and peace. Yet even his music can be difficult. He tries for years to compose and has some success, but it isn't until he emerges from the catharsis of his grief over Weisfeld's death that he finally writes something truly notable. His empty childhood has made the rest of his life sterile, so Claude finally resigns himself to living solely for and in his music. It is the only way for him to touch his soul and feel complete. Claude's gift saves him and ultimately becomes everything he has.

Emma Rawlings

Emma Rawlings is Claude's mother. Anything but the typical mother figure, she is a six-foot-tall, 300-pound cab driver by day and a withdrawn alcoholic by night. Emma cares for her son, but she does not have the ability or the strength to be the mother that he needs. As a young child, Claude is fascinated by this enormous figure who enters his sequestered world at the end of every day, orders him to get her a beer, and then goes off to bed, "not to emerge until morning." As he gets older and witnesses Emma's downward slide into controversy and emotional instability, he becomes ashamed of her behavior and lifestyle, afraid of what outsiders may think of her and, by proxy, him. Despite her flaws, however, she remains a constant part of his life, eventually gaining enough of Claude's trust to be able to look after his music store while he is away. Theirs

is an unusual pairing, one that requires a great deal of patience, understanding and compassion.

Emma's life is not easy. She was a talented vaudeville singer, but had to give up performing when she got pregnant with Claude. Her greatest struggle, however, comes during the McCarthy era. In an effort to find friendship, importance, and a place to belong, she joins the Communist Party and becomes involved in smuggling one of the party's leaders out of the country. Her actions come under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and she nearly loses her hack license, her apartment, and her mind when she is pressured to cooperate. In an effort to compensate for the total lack of control she has over her life and the events affecting it, she begins to maniacally hoard newspapers and documentation in an effort to catch the government in the gargantuan conspiracy that only she can see and understand. Her obsession nearly destroys her, but she is finally able to regain control of her life with the help and support of Al. It is through him that she is ultimately able to bring some normalcy into her world and develop a viable relationship with her son.

Anson Roeg

Anson Roeg is a writer and Mr. Fredericks' eccentric, constant companion. She is an unconventional woman, scandalizing the society ladies with her unorthodox attire and cigar smoking.

Mr. Satterthwaite

Mr. Satterthwaite is the music teacher at The Bentley School. He teaches Claude about Schon-berg's twelve-tone system of composition.

Aaron Weisfeld

Aaron Weisfeld is Claude's first and most important piano teacher. Having discovered Claude's prodigious talent, he takes the young boy under his wing, arranges lessons from the best piano teachers, and launches Claude's remarkable career as a pianist and composer. Yet to Claude, Weisfeld is more than just a teacher. He is the father Claude never had. He takes Claude in from the streets and virtually raises him, not only teaching him the fundamentals of music, but of life as well. Weisfeld has a profound effect on Claude's life, and Claude loves him for it.

Weisfeld came to New York from Warsaw after his family was killed in a bombing in 1939. As a Polish Jew, he needed to escape Nazi Europe, so he established a new life with his music store on

Third Avenue. But at night, the dreams still haunt him, the memory of his beloved family waking him up in a cold sweat. In Claude, he finds a new family, a son who makes him proud. Having been a promising composer himself as a young man in Poland, Weisfeld

uses his connections to further Claude's education and career. But it is not until he is dying that Weisfeld tells Claude about his past. All the years that they know each other, Weisfeld's apartment, filled with photographs from his past, remains a no-entry zone. He keeps the pain of his past separate, just as Claude tries to hide the pain of his impoverished life with his neglectful mother. Claude and Weisfeld have a deep love and respect for each other, for they both fulfill what the other needs.

Themes

Appearances and Reality

The illusion of the public image versus the reality of private life is a prominent theme that appears throughout the novel. Weisfeld appears to be an ordinary, unassuming music store owner. Beneath the surface, however, he is an extremely talented composer whose career was cut short by the traumatic events of World War II in Poland. He is a man who has achieved much, suffered much, and experienced more than most people ever will.

The Fisks are another example of the power of appearances. To the outside world, they seem to live a charmed life: wealthy, happy pillars of the community. Inside, however, they are torn apart by incest, mental illness, and deceit. Their admirers do not see the darkness that lurks just behind the facade.

Claude himself is not all that he seems to be. His African heritage is a secret kept from him so that he can compete in the music world without the burden of racial stereotypes. He is also sterile, even though in every other way he is a healthy young man. In another sense, the depth of Claude's feeling for music belies the fact that he is emotionally shallow in all other aspects.

Fathers and Sons

The epigram before *Body and Soul* reads: "That which thy fathers have bequeathed to thee, earn it anew if thou wouldst possess it." Taken from Goethe's *Faust,* this quote is Conroy's way of telling the reader what the book is about. Claude's musical gift comes from his father, and he pursues the mysteries of music as fiercely as he would pursue the real man. Whether he realizes it or not, Claude spends much of his life searching for his father - perhaps not the actual man, but someone to replace him, someone to fill the hole in Claude's life. He finds others in his life to replace his father, namely Weisfeld, Al, and Fredericks. His father represents to him everything he does not have: a normal childhood, a past, the thing he cannot be himself. It is this one relationship, or the lack thereof, that keeps him from having a successful relationship with anyone else.

Salvation through Meaningful Life's Work

All of the characters in *Body and Soul* have some sort of obstacle to overcome. Most find the strength and the means to persevere through their life's work. For Claude it is his music that sustains him, for he can lose himself and his problems for hours in the midst of playing the piano. Catherine rebuilds her life through her passion for medieval history, finding meaning and contentment in her studies. Weisfeld also rebuilds his life after the Holocaust through music, owning the music store and teaching Claude. They find a path that makes them happy.

For those without a path, however, the prospects are dismal. Lady has loads of ambition, but no way to channel it into anything useful. So she meanders from project to project, desperately looking for something "real." Peter Fisk is also a victim of a passionless life. He has the skills to play the violin, but there is no love for the beauty of the music. There is an emptiness in him that consumes him to the point that he cannot live with it anymore. Emma also tries to find some meaning in her life, but by joining the Communist Party she only manages to create more upheaval. All the characters are searching for salvation, and the key in this novel is finding one's life's work.

Loneliness and Isolation

At the end of the first chapter, Claude is watching the crowd celebrate V-E day in the streets near his home. "Claude realized that all these strangers were caught up in something together, that an unseen force had wiped out all differences between them and made them one. They were joined, and as he clung tighter to the lamppost he felt his own tears starting because he felt entirely alone, entirely apart, and knew that nothing could happen to change it."

Through twenty-one more chapters, the reader waits to see if maybe there is something that could happen to change this poor little boy's loneliness and isolation. But Claude's talent continues to isolate him from ordinary people who can never know what it is to be so gifted. Although Claude does develop friendships and a comfortable relationship with the mother whose neglect started his life in loneliness and isolation, he does not ever really stretch beyond his self-centered world. That is why his marriage to Lady fails, and why Catherine will not marry him. Claude does not become one with others because he is one with music. Music is the soul he finds when he learns how to go beyond the "wall," and so with music he is complete.

The theme of loneliness and isolation carries over to many others in the novel. Mr. Weisfeld remains alone after he loses his family in the war, and he isolates his past from the rest of his life by never inviting anyone into his apartment. Peter Fisk is kept apart from a normal life by the needs of his mother and the shame of his family's sins. Lady keeps Claude at a distance and does not include him in any of her decisions, not even to discuss starting a family. Catherine chooses to isolate herself from her family by living abroad, alone with her child. Emma is set apart by her size, by being a single mother, and by being a female taxi driver in a time when all of these features make her unusual. Until Al comes along, she uses beer, communism, and obsessive behavior to fill her life. It is sad that she cannot find fulfillment in mothering Claude, but instead continues the pattern of loneliness and isolation in his life.

Style

Bildungsroman

As several critics have noted, *Body and Soul* is a *bildungsroman,* a novel of formation. According to M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* the subject of a *bildungsroman* "is the development of the protagonist's mind and character as he passes from childhood through varied experiences - and usually through a spiritual crisis - into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world. ... An important subtype of the *Bildungsroman* is the *Kunstlerroman* ("artist-novel"), which represents the development of a novelist or other artist into the stage of maturity in which he recognizes his artistic destiny and achieves mastery of his artistic craft."

The subject of *Body and Soul* is the formation of Claude Rawlings as he passes from a six-year-old child through twenty years of varied experiences, including the crisis of the death of his teacher and father-figure, Aaron Weisfeld. Revived from his crippling grief by the strength of Weisfeld's love, Claude emerges with a new direction. Although Weisfeld could not find the heart to return to his life as a composer after all his work was lost in his flight from Nazi Poland, Claude begins anew and wins the London Symphony competition. Through Claude, Weisfeld passed on his dreams, and Claude fulfills them by becoming a masterful composer. In the process, Claude realizes that his destiny lies solely in his music.

Setting

The setting in *Body and Soul* is notable because the time and place in which the main character grows up are the same as that of the author. Both Frank Conroy and Claude Rawlings grow up fatherless and lonely in New York City in a time period beginning in the late 1930s. Those who knew New York City in the World War II and postwar era have said that this book captures the essence of a city that no longer exists and is a nostalgic reminder of a life that once was. Conroy heralds the change to modern times by including in the story the tearing down of the old buildings on Weisfeld's block to make way for a new development.

Symbolism

Tied into the setting is the most important symbol in *Body and Soul.* Weisfeld's music store is Claude Rawlings' safe haven. In his basement apartment, he is alone and full of questions about music. At Weisfeld's store, he finds a teacher, a father, and answers about the wonders of music. It is not by accident that the Bechstein will not fit into Claude's apartment. Conroy needs the concert grand piano to go into Weisfeld's store so that Claude's whole life stems from that place. The process is completed when even Claude's mother and Al work at the store.

At the end of the novel, Weisfeld's store stands completely surrounded by the new building development. In his grief, Claude thinks perhaps that he cannot exist as a musician without Weisfeld. He finally realizes that he can continue because he still has Weisfeld with him as long as he has Weisfeld's store. His fight to save the store is a fight for his very heart and soul and is a symbol of his devotion to Weisfeld. More powerfully, the store, standing alone among the modern changes, is a symbol of Claude's separation from the rest of the world, a symbol that his life is consecrated to music and none of the other events in his life will ever change that.

Historical Context

In Body and Soul, Frank Conroy, born in 1936, tells the story of Claude Rawlings, a boy who enters grade school during World War II. The novel progresses for twenty years until the mid-1960s. Thus, the author and his character grow up and enter adulthood in the same time period. Postwar America, full of confidence after victory, entered a time of enormous prosperity when anything seemed possible. The veterans of the war wanted to forget everything ugly they had just experienced and concentrate on building the family and country for which they had fought.

But the terms of the Allied agreement allowed Russiato build the Soviet Union through its occupation and subsequent rule of Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. The Iron Curtain came down and the Cold War began. Communism spread around the world into China, Africa, and Central and South America. The fear of communism resulted in American participation in the Korean War and in the maniacal hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Senator Joe McCarthy wielded great power as he searched for "a Commie under every bush" and ruined the careers of many in the arts and entertainment world who were suspected of being communist sympathizers. Conroy brings this element of the times into the novel through the involvement of Claude's mother in Communist Party meetings and her participation in the effort to get a well-known agent out of the country. Emma almost has a nervous breakdown after testifying in Washington, a reflection of the tremendous pressure put on people to implicate their friends and acquaintances.

The late 1940s and the 1950s are generally considered a time when America celebrated itself and pretended that it had no problems. On television, "I Love Lucy," "Father Knows Best," and "Ozzie and Harriet" portrayed perfect families in a blissful and moral society. The contrast between the ideal family life portrayed on the television and the dysfunctional home life that Claude had growing up further sets him apart from society and adds to his sense of isolation.

Women had left their wartime jobs in the factories to make way for the veterans who needed jobs and to resume their traditional roles solely in the home. But women's independence during the war was not forgotten, and after the pressure to return to domestic life in the 1950s, the women's movement demanding equal rights at work and at home began to develop in the 1960s. Emma Rawlings, as a single working mother, was an oddity for her time, particularly in a "man's" job like cab-driving. By the mid-1950s, the Civil Rights Movement was also coming into existence with the first attempts at desegregation of the schools and public facilities. This equal rights movement for blacks would climax in the 1960s with the signing of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. Thus, the relationship between Claude's white mother and his black friend was highly unusual for the times and would normally bring scandal and violent repercussions.

The early 1960s also saw the election of John F. Kennedy as president, his assassination, and the subsequent presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson. The Camelot days of the Kennedy administration, when everyone felt young and most believed that

the "best and the brightest" led our government, died with Kennedy and were replaced by a loss of innocence that led to an era of questioning everything and believing in little. Even as the country united behind the early ventures of the space program, the turbulence of the 1960s left Americans shaken and unsure of their values. This loss of stability is reflected in Claude's life when Weisfeld dies and Claude loses his way. It is the only time that Claude expresses deep personal suffering, and he emerges from the experience with a new direction just as America did after the 1960s.

Critical Overview

The critics seem to be evenly divided into good, bad, and indifferent opinions of *Body and Soul.* The phenomenal success of Frank Conroy's first book, *Stop-Time,* raised great expectations in the literary world. This autobiography of his youth demonstrated originality of style and masterful writing, so readers waited eagerly for a first novel. Conroy was only thirty-one years old in 1967 when he published *Stop-Time,* but he did not publish again until 1985 when he produced a somewhat disappointing collection of eight short stories. Finally, in 1993, at the age of fifty-seven, his first novel appeared to mixed reviews.

The main complaint of the critics who panned *Body and Soul* is that it is so similar to *Stop-Time.* Claude Rawlings is only a fictional version of Frank Conroy. Both grow up lonely and fatherless in poverty in New York City in exactly the same time period. Both pull themselves out of these circumstances through talent: Conroy is a gifted writer, Rawlings is a musical prodigy. However, according to critics, *Stop-Time* was innovative while *Body and Soul* seems to be a fill-in-the-blanks parade of stock characters, predictable outcomes, and hard-to-believe coincidences.

Perhaps the critics who complained that *Body and Soul* was too much like *Stop-Time* were actually disappointed that it wasn't exactly like *Stop-Time.* But it was never Conroy's intent to repeat the style and innovations *of Stop-Time* in his novel. Rather, as Conroy told Sylvia Steinberg in an interview for *Publishers Weekly, "Body and Soul* is a real old-fashioned novel - a big fat book with a lot of people and a lot of plot." Explaining Claude's "incredible string of good luck," Conroy concedes that he has made the novel "in many respects a fairy tale."

Joseph Olshan writes in his review for *Harper's Bazaar* that it is tempting to compare Conroy with Rawlings because of the similarities. But the important difference is that Conroy admits to being a merely competent pianist. Olshan reports, "Rawlings, to use one of the novel's central metaphors, attempts to get 'beyond the Wall,' to overcome his physical limitations to find his soul in his music," and he has the talent to be able to do so. Conroy described to Olshan the moment of his final breakthrough in writing *Body and Soul:* "Driving east from Iowa City, I suddenly came up with Fredericks, who tells Claude the secret of the Wall. That development affected the entire novel. If you listen carefully to the text, the way you listen to music, it reveals the answer to each problem it creates."

Perhaps the negative critics did not listen carefully enough to understand the story even though it was written in a "supple and elegant prose" according to a review in *Publishers Weekly.* This review calls Conroy's depiction of Claude "brilliant" and the explanations of musical theory "lucid." Nonetheless, *Publishers Weekly* found the second half of the book less successful because Claude's obsession with music that "makes him fascinating as a youth makes him hollow as a man." The review admits that Conroy is purposely trying to make Claude's life devoid of emotion, but feels that he fails to maintain an interesting character in the process.

Other critics agree that Claude is a flat character, although they often remark on the skill with which Conroy conveys the passionate feelings of an artist. But none of the critics seem to complain about the technical detail supplied when Conroy describes the music that Claude works on. One odd feature, however, is denounced by Stanley Kauffmann in his review for the*New Republic:* overarching comments.

"This device not only jars our focus, not only makes us inappropriately aware of Conroy rather than Claude, it suggests a nervousness in the author, a worry that he isn't getting enough in, that he must enrich his book." By overarching comments, Kauffmann means the parenthetical glimpses into the future that Conroy inserts. For example, Catherine predicts that when Claude is forty-five he will be famous and have some fabulous young woman on his arm, and Conroy interrupts with a confirmation that that is exactly what happens. The reader is also told in a parenthetical note that Peter commits suicide in later years. If the author cannot think of a way to blend such character elements into the story, it is a crutch to use an intrusive author's comment.

Despite its faults, *Body and Soul* is a readable story, the kind that is hard to put down. Maybe it is only soap opera quality, but then soap operas are very popular, and there is occasionally some very good acting in the daytime dramas. So it is with *Body and Soul.* Critics and readers were expecting one thing and got another, and some could not adjust to the change. Others were open-minded enough to try to see what Conroy was attempting to do. Whether or not he succeeded is, as always, left up to the opinion of the individual reader and the connection made between reader and author.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
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Critical Essay #1

Lois Kerschen is a grants coordinator for the Houston Independent School District, the author of American Proverbs about Women, *and a freelance writer. In the following essay, she discusses the themes of emotional distance and spirituality in* Body & Soul.

Distance is the ever-present element in Frank Conroy's *Body & Soul.* There is a distance between Claude Rawling's world and the world around him. While some critics have complained that Claude is a lifeless character with whom the reader cannot establish an emotional bond, it seems likely Conroy intended for there to be no link between reader and main character. Through the reader's own difficulty in getting a window into Claude's soul, it becomes apparent that Claude himself has never looked into his soul. Claude is totally self-absorbed, but there is no self-introspection. Separated from the outside world and human interaction, he lives on the surface of himself and expects no more than superficiality from others.

Claude's distance from the world around him begins with his childhood. His mother's almost total neglect leaves Claude locked in a basement apartment where his only knowledge of the outside world is his view through the basement window. When he finally is allowed to venture out, he feels as if he is in a dream because the sights and sounds are all so unreal to him. Fifty years ago there were no agencies like Child Protective Services to investigate Claude's home life, but today there are safeguards for children in our society because it is now known that such neglect and isolation can seriously and permanently damage a child emotionally. Is it any wonder then that Claude is an emotional cripple who cannot relate to others? He was kept at a distance from people until he was six years old. He had no playmates or extended family.

There was no day-care, no play school, no pre-school, no Mother's Day Out to socialize Claude. Consequently, when he does go to school, he makes no friends, he remains a loner, and he doesn't even raise his hand and speak in class until the third grade.

Claude's brief encounters with the real world leave him with a distorted view of reality. He gets a glimpse of the lives of the wealthy tenants in Al's apartment building when he and Al attempt a few heists. He has glimpses into the life of the Fisk family and does not see the reality of the situation there at all. For years, he ventures outside his world only briefly to go to the homes of his various music teachers for weekly lessons. His first contact with sex is with girls he doesn't know in the dark balcony of the movie theater and with a girl he never sees again after the music festival. To Claude, the world is what he vicariously experiences in the movies. From that distance, he imagines a world that doesn't actually exist, so it is small wonder that he has trouble finding a connection.

Only through music is Claude able to reach outside himself to another person. The sole passion in Claude's life, his love of music, propels him into Weisfeld's store to ask about the piano and the sheet music he has found. Claude does develop an emotional attachment to Weisfeld, always feeling more comfortable with Weisfeld than others, always seeking his advice, but that relationship stemmed from Claude's need for a

father and for the musical knowledge that Weisfeld could share with him. When Weisfeld dies, Claude enters a frighteningly deep depression whose intensity is perhaps the result of having used so few other outlets for emotion. It is as if he is using his life's quota of emotion in the grief he feels from the loss of Weisfeld. Nonetheless, Claude's devotion to Weisfeld never led to a curiosity about his mentor's life.

Respecting Weisfeld's request for privacy in his quarters is one thing, but never inquiring about his past, his home country, his family, is quite another. Claude surely loves Weisfeld, but in many ways Weisfeld's importance to Claude lies only in what Weisfeld gives to Claude. It is a happy accident that in return Claude fills a void for Weisfeld after the loss of his family.

From Claude's perspective, virtually all the characters in the book are just vehicles that bring something into his world. He accepts everything that comes his way without question or interaction. Indeed, he is grateful, but he is never required to show gratitude or repay any debts. As a result, he expects good things to happen to him and never bothers to think about what it all means. For example, the maestro who allows Claude to play the Bechstein is another person who gives generously to Claude, but from a distance. The maestro listens to Claude's playing through partly opened doors. The only time that Claude sees the maestro, he is a shadow in the darkness.

Catherine kept Claude at a distance when they first met. Her aloofness appears to be a trait of snobbery, and then she puts actual physical distance between herself and Claude by eloping to Australia. It isn't until years later that Claude discovers the real reason for the distance Catherine kept from others: her illicit relationship with her stepfather. Catherine had to build a wall behind which she could hide the shame and horror of her situation. Her determination never to return to America is a manifestation of her need to distance herself from her family and the terrible memories of her early teens.

Although marriage is supposed to be an intimate relationship, Lady is just as distant as Claude when it comes to sharing her feelings. She does not include Claude in the decision to have a child, and he comes to realize that she tends to build elaborate defenses for herself. "Silence, privacy, and occasionally secrecy were second nature to her. She could not share her sense of what was happening to her with him, could not reveal her sense of herself to him, and as a result he felt she didn't trust him." She makes so few demands on him that he feels almost lonely. When Claude sits by Weisfeld's deathbed, Weisfeld has to remind Claude to call his wife. It is something, one suspects, that Claude would not have thought to do because he and Lady did not truly share their lives. Ultimately, Claude and Lady permanently distance themselves from each other through divorce.

When Conroy writes about complex aspects of music that most readers will not understand, he is not just showing his own music education. He is distancing the reader from Claude by putting him on a different level of knowledge and understanding from the average person. The complexities of the music, the technical perfection that Claude can reach but others cannot puts Claude into a different realm from the rest of the

world. A common problem of geniuses is that they often cannot relate well to others because there is just too much distance between the wavelengths on which they and others function. So, Claude's problem is somewhat understandable since being a genius in one aspect of life sometimes diminishes other abilities.

Claude's emotional life, then, is just as sterile as his body. The only connection between body and soul for Claude is through music. Here he virtually transcends his own body as the music carries him into an almost "out-of-body" experience. Fredericks taught him that going beyond the "wall" meant going beyond the body into the imagination. Children live in a world of imagination. If imagination takes one beyond the wall to spirituality, why would one want to leave a child's world to face the realities of adulthood? Perhaps that is why Claude is so slow to mature. Fredericks remarks to Claude one day, when Claude is already out of college and married, that he seems to be slow to grow up. He asks Claude why that is, and Claude does not know. He admits that he does not know himself very well. Possibly, Claude subconsciously refuses to grow up for fear of changing his relationship with Weisfeld. Considering Claude's deep depression following Weisfeld's death, it seems likely that Claude's emotional balance was dependent on the only stable thing in his life: Weisfeld. His mother was never there for him and his other teachers came and went.

The only person who was a constant for him was Weisfeld. Without him, Claude lost his center and had to find himself again through another avenue of music. Fredericks has warned Claude that his talent would take him only so far. After that, he would have to depend on himself. Weisfeld's death brought him to that point.

In all of his writings, Frank Conroy expresses the belief that one can be redeemed through art. With enough self-determination, the pursuit of perfection in one' s field of talent will be rewarded with a state of grace. Claude may not appear to be soul-searching, does not realize it himself, but his disciplined practice, his enjoyment of practice, is actually a determined effort to find his soul. Once beyond the wall, one finds spirituality. Once Claude determines that he can stand on his own feet after Weisfeld's death, and that he should follow his heart by becoming a composer, he is on the path to finding true satisfaction and fulfillment. Even though he makes an attempt to connect with Catherine, she senses what Claude will learn with time. He may never have a full relationship with another person, but he has connected his own body and soul through music.

Source: Lois Kerschen, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following review, Kauffman expresses disappointment with Body and Soul, *stating that is "affords almost no pleasure, " and that Conroy fails to live up to his earlier promise.*

In 1967, at the age of 31, Frank Conroy published *Stop-Time.* It was his first book, yet it was an autobiography - so prismatically conceived in sharp facets, so intense in its view of experience and of words themselves, that it marked the appearance of an arresting writer. Admirers (like myself) then kept watching down the road for the next Conroy book. It didn't arrive until 1985: *Midair,* a slim collection of eight stories, most of which supported prior opinions of his talent without much advancing his career.

Where was the novel that, intentionally or not, he had promised? In *Stop-Time,* speaking of his seventeenth birthday, he said:

It was around this time that I first thought of becoming a writer. In a cheap novel [that I had read] the hero was asked his profession at a cocktail party. "I'm a novelist," he said, and I remember putting the book down and thinking, my God, what a beautiful thing to be able to say.

He is now 57; at last the novel arrives, and, bitterly to report, it leaves this admirer bruised with disappointment. It's almost as if the publisher had made a mistake - sent out the wrong book with Conroy's name on it.

Body and Soul begins with a twinge of disappointment at its flat title. (The previous two books had acute titles.) The first few pages aggravate the twinge, not because they are poorly written, though some of the subsequent book is, but because they don't read like Conroy or what might have grown out of the Conroy we knew. It may be unjust to expect that he further the style of 1967, but some of the stories in *Midair,* done in a subtle refinement of that earlier style, fueled the expectation. And if Conroy deliberately decided to abandon the artist's pointillist brush, why did he pick up, of all things, something closer to the house painter's roller?

He was to walk

Third Avenue for many years, until it became so much a part of him that he didn't see it anymore. But at first it was a feast. People moving on the sidewalks, automobiles threading through the columns of the El, trucks rumbling through the striated shadows - he drank it in, his eye leaping from image to image.

There's nothing grossly wrong with that writing, but there's nothing distinguished about it either. Would the author of *Stop-Time* - of even the first two pages of *Stop-Time* - have written "drank it in" and "leaping from image to image"?

I begin with the prose because Conroy's change of style almost predicates the choice of materials and the general approach. The story that he tells is long, complex and quintessentially familiar; the saga of an artist from childhood to manhood. Conroy has stepped into the line of the broad, full orchestral *Entwicklungsroman,* which today is not so much a choice of form as of generations.

Sometimes such a choice by an artist can be beautiful, amplifying, as for instance when the avant-garde R. W. Fassbinder decided to film Fontane's nineteenth-century novel. *Effi Briest.* But Fassbinder's old-style film showed us how much more there was to him, in sympathy and vision and technique, than we had thought. Conroy's retrospective choice, on the other hand, has diminished him: he seems murkier in perception, feebler in his language and almost devoid of the crackling electricity that made his work so welcome.

His protagonist, Claude Rawlings, is 6 when we meet him around 1944. (Rawlings was the name of a friend in *Stop-Time.)* He lives in a dingy basement apartment on

Third Avenue in Manhattan with his mother, a six-foot, 300-pound woman who drives a taxi most of the day and hardly speaks to him when she is at home swilling beer. In their apartment is an old nightclub-size piano. After investigating it, Claude makes his way to a nearby music store run by Mr. Weisfeld, a Polish-Jewish refugee from Hitler. Weisfeld knows absolutely everything about music and a good deal besides.

Through his tutelage and care, Claude's life unfolds. Weisfeld knows an old, Hungarian composer, wealthy, and he gets permission for Claude to practice regularly on a fine piano in the old man's luxurious apartment. Claude never meets the old man; nevertheless, when the composer dies, he leaves Claude a trust fund that opens further education and opportunity to him. Directly if lengthily, this beginning leads to the conclusion - when Claude steps out on the stage or Festival Hall in London some twenty years later to play the solo part in the world premiere of his piano concerto.

Along the way, much else. His mother, an ex-show girl, turns out to be a Communist sympathizer whose taxi is used by Gerhardt Eisler, at the time a well-known Communist, to get himself aboard ship for Europe in an attempt to escape prosecution. (Conroy tells us in an afterword that he has juggled some dates. Eisler's escape is one of them.) In the basement of the composer's building Claude becomes acquainted with the black super, Al, who comes to figure in his mother's life in a way that prefigures later developments in London.

Along the way, too, of course, Claude meets girls. The first one of importance is Catherine, the attractive daughter of a very rich family, who dallies with him before she elopes at 17 with someone else. Claude meets the only other girl of importance in his final college year; nicknamed Lady, this Social Register belle turns out to be Catherine's cousin. Along the way Claude also encounters a very great deal of information, mostly but not only about music. These gobs of data are sometimes so thick that the narrative seems an armature on which hang explanations of, say, the valves of brass instruments and Schonberg's twelve-tone system.

When it's not delayed by data, the story moves on wheels lubricated with coincidence. The Catherine-Lady link is only one. Al has a black friend who teaches Claude a lot about the jazz that fascinates him throughout. Al happens to have been a taxi driver in the past so that he can help Claude's mother when needed. In the last pages Claude chances to go to a London jazz club that has connections with his past. And in the neatest of all the book's many arrangements, when Lady and Claude decide to marry, she tells him that she has a trust fund of $5 million. (Sometimes the book is close to a satire on classical serendipity.)

This sense of the author as guardian angel is heightened by Claude's excellence at virtually everything he tries. Musical theory, composition, piano playing - whatever it is, he excels at it. Balanchine compliments him on his playing, Copland on his composing. He's also good at basketball and gin rummy; he can even turn "a spontaneous cartwheel." The only bad things that happen to him occur near the end. He sinks into despondency because of an incompetence that isn't his fault. Five years after his marriage to Lady, a doctor tells him that his sperm are lifeless. Eventually this leads to the breakup of the marriage and to some bleak weeks in London while his concerto is in rehearsal. But just then he meets Catherine, divorced, who is now able to respond to him. The tidiness with which he goes into and out of his slough of despond makes this penultimate episode seem like the dip-before-the-upward-finish that is a Hollywood staple.

Hollywood is otherwise manifest as well. Claude is passionate for films, and his fever seems to have infected his author. All the characters seem drawn from Movieland experience rather than from life. Claude himself is a dolled-up artifice. (We don't even really know what he looks like until late in the book.) The kindly, sagacious Weisfeld, the ignorant but deep Al, the elegant Fredericks who is Claude's principal piano teacher, the obese virtuoso violinist whom Claude accompanies on a tour, all of them seem remembered from Loew's balconies. The character whom Conroy works hardest to color, Claude's mother - gigantic, politically obsessed, once an errant show girl - is, after all the huffing and puffing, much less vivid than the father in the brief title story of *Midair.* The breath of life is not in the novel's people: Conroy merely gives them attributes that are like the springs in wind-up toys.

The author intrudes otherwise than as guardian angel. Most of the story is told from Claude's point of view, but Conroy breaks infrequently with overarching comments. For one example among many, Claude looks at a friend and thinks that he looks "like a dying man." Conroy then adds:

(Which, in a sense, he was. Years later he was to leave home and go to the University of Chicago as a graduate student in history. In his small, luxurious off-campus apartment he would explode his brain with a German Luger pistol. . . . His body was not to be discovered for some time.)

This device not only jars our focus, not only makes us inappropriately aware of Conroy rather than Claude, it suggests a nervousness in the author, a worry that he isn't getting

enough *in,* that he must enrich his book. This is quite the reverse of the earlier Conroy who exulted, quite rightly, in what he could leave out.

After all this, it can't surprise us that the dialogue is, to put it gently, not vibrant. Generally, the talk has a counterpoint of typewriter clatter or computer-screen blinking: it sounds written. Cliches float in. "You look like the cat that swallowed the canary," says Weisfeld at one point, and Conroy so likes the line that he uses it for someone else later in the book.

But the most painful dialogue, and it's plentiful, comes when Conroy tries to make the didactic material breezy. A discussion of physics:

I mean, you go down and down, and there's the atom, protons, electrons and it doesn't matter if they're little bails or wave phenomena or whatever. Heisenberg comes in and you can't look at anything smaller because the beam of your fancy flashlight is going to knock the little thing away or change or something.

Leaden banter of this kind, applied to music and Marx and Gandhi and other topics, makes for almost physical discomfort in the reader.

Well, enough. It's a gray occasion, the arrival of this novel after such a long wait - a book that manifests no theme or point or purpose. What does Claude s story signify of character or the art he is engaged in or the epoch that he lives through? Virtually nothing. Worse, and more important whatever the aestheticians may think, the book affords almost no pleasure. It is possible to read it; but that's a dreadful thing to have to say about the Conroy we have been waiting on. His enthusiasts will have to wait still longer for the fulfillment of his career.

Source: Stanley Kauffman, "Wrong Notes," in *New Republic,* Vol. 209, No. 4109, October 18, 1993, pp. 47^9.

Critical Essay #3

In the following Publishers Weekly *interview-essay, Conroy gives background on the creation of* Body & Soul.

Legions of authors have produced a shelf-full of books without coming close to the literary reputation that Frank Conroy earned with his first effort, his now-classic memoir of a miserable youth, *Stop-Time,* published when he was 37. Seventeen years elapsed before the appearance of a highly praised short story collection, *Midair,* Conroy is 57 now, and he seems surprised that his first novel, *Body & Soul* has been so eagerly awaited. He's somewhat stunned that it has thrust him into the limelight. In fact, commercial success, in the form of celebrity status, sales and a perch on the bestseller ladder, appears imminent for this book, out from Houghton Lawrence early next month.

Mifflin/Seymour

A second major career is surely one reason why Conroy's literary output has been limited. He has a distinguished reputation as teacher and administrator, notably as the director of the renowned Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa. Another reason is that he is a slow writer and a careful one. "I have pretty high standards for myself," he tells *PW,* a statement borne out by his precise and resonant prose.

This time out, however, his ingrained caution may be blown away by fair-weather winds. Word of mouth preceded *Body & Soul* to the ABA and escalated there. With a 125,000-copy first printing, foreign rights sold in 10 countries, film rights picked up by Spring Creek Productions, and a tap by the BOMC, the novel is making beautiful music for its author, much as its protagonist finds transcendent joy in the music he plays and creates.

Body & Soul is a novel about a musical prodigy, a story that carries its young hero from his first exposure to music - fiddling with keys on an out-of-tune piano - through stages of increasing mastery of technique, concert performance and composition.

The boy, Claude Rawlings, is to some extent Conroy's alter ego, a fantasy of what his life might have been had he been rescued from his neglected childhood by a loving father figure. Conroy acknowledges that the key to the book is Claude's mentor, Aaron Weisfeld. The owner of a music store in Claude's 1940s Upper East Side New York neighborhood (a time and place evoked with fidelity and affection), Weisfeld makes himself responsible for Claude's welfare and his musical education. "He is the father I did not have," Conroy says simply.

More than wish-fulfillment, the novel satisfied another need. "The plot emerged from the two great preoccupations of my life, books and music," Conroy says. The idea came to him about five years ago as he was driving from Iowa to his summer home on Nantucket. Conroy confesses that he felt "a little leery - because music is very difficult to

write about." Besides, he had given himself a difficult task, namely, "to recapitulate the history of piano pedagogy in Claude's teachers." Cognoscenti may recognize that Claude's professors represent Clementi, Beethoven and Chopin. But musical knowledge is hardly a requisite for appreciating the book.

For as Conroy himself says, " *Body & Soul* is a real old-fashioned novel - a big fat book with a lot of people and a lot of plot." He was inspired by the romantic writers he read as a boy: Dickens, Tolstoy, Stendhal. "Those books kept me from going crazy. I *like* that old stuff." He gives a deep, chesty laugh. "I'm sorry, but I just *do."*

The laugh is genuine, and frequent, but not simply mirthful. The effects of the childhood he described in *Stop-Time* could not have rendered Conroy carefree. He is the son of an emotionally unbalanced man who spent most of his life in institutions, and a cold and irresponsible woman who withheld tenderness and love. The world of books was his solace and salvation, jazz improvisation his emotional therapy. His first wife, whom he met at Haverford College, took him into the milieu of New York's social register.

At 35, divorced after 12 years of marriage and "in bad shape emotionally," Conroy reluctantly left his two sons and Manhattan, and came to Nantucket. He supported himself (none too successfully) with freelance journalism and, during the summer months, by playing with jazz combos at island clubs. For a small price, he bought the five acres on which his house now stands, acquired the genuine barn beams from a farmer in Pennsylvania, and rounded up "eight hippies" to build it. Today, the gray-shingled house is weathered and snug, virtually one large open, high-ceilinged room with a view of woods and a pond. Comfortable and unpretentious, it is dominated by a beat-up piano that also serves as a haphazard bookshelf. Toys belonging to Tim, Conroy's six-year-old son from his second marriage, are scattered on the Oriental carpet.

Conroy and *PW* sit in canvas chairs looking into a well-used kitchen. His lanky six-foot frame is clad in a brightly hued sweater and jeans. A long lock of his once-blond hair, now faded to the color of coffee cream, falls across his forehead, and he brushes it back with an absentminded gesture. In a nearly two-hour conversation he uses a mild profanity twice, both times prefacing the vernacular expression with a courtly "excuse my French."

Though his name brings instant recognition in literary circles, Conroy considers himself primarily a teacher. He entered the profession when he was 40, a "late age" he regards as an advantage in preserving his enthusiasm. Even during the years (1981-1987) when he served as Director of the Literature Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, he insisted on teaching at least one class. And he finds working with students the most gratifying part of his job as head of the Writers Workshop. Houghton Mifflin has arranged his tour for *Body & Soul* so that he'll be back in Iowa for his classes each week.

To Conroy himself, it's quite logical that he has written only three books to date. "I really never thought of writing as a career. Although *Stop-Time* was a critical success (and

has never been out of print in paperback), I never got any signals that I could make a living as a writer. So I had to look elsewhere to figure out how I was going to support myself."

Stop-Time sold only 7000 copies when it first appeared from Viking in 1967, despite a "terrific editor," Aaron Asher, who "did what he could," but could not surmount the '60s atmosphere. "Everybody was taking drugs and making love, and here was this sort of neoclassical memoir. It was just the wrong time for it to come out." In the wake of the excitement attending *Body & Soul,* Viking Penguin is now issuing new editions of *Stop-Time* and *Midair,* New foreign translations are in the works, too.

Much credit for the upsurge in his fortunes, Conroy claims, should go to his agent, Candida Donadio, and to Seymour Lawrence, his editor for *Midair* (published under his imprint at Dutton) and *Body & Soul.* Donadio "found" Conroy more than three decades ago, when a few chapters of *Stop-Time* appeared in the *New Yorker.* "She's the smartest person I know, both as a reader and as an agent," Conroy says. "What's nice is that now, finally, she will make a lot of money. She deserves it; she hung in with me for 30 years, when other people probably thought I was dead."

Sam Lawrence, whom Conroy calls "an impresario, the Sol Hurok of the publishing world," has been the guiding angel of *Body & Soul.* "Bob Stone and I were speaking at a conference in Key West," Conroy recalls, "and during lunch at Sam's house there, he gave me a tip about buying some stock. I told him I didn't have stock, or money to buy any, either."

"Sam is loyal to his writers. It's his hallmark virtue," Conroy continues. Determined to improve Conroy's fortunes, Lawrence and Donadio decided to show the first 200 pages of *Body & Soul* to a few people in Hollywood. "Then everything went crazy. It leaked from those four people to all the studios, from Hollywood to Europe. At Frankfurt, everyone came to Sam about it. He wasn't even planning to offer it; it was a long way from finished." After the feedback at ABA, Houghton Mifflin raised the initial printing of the book. Conroy still seems stunned by the hubbub. "I'm very heartened," he says.

Perhaps his cautious elation comes from his sense that he has pulled off a risky undertaking: into the form of a bildungsroman he has managed to pack a great deal of musical background. This entailed night courses at Juilliard and "a tremendous amount of reading and research. I wanted to go back and learn everything over again - and learn it right," he says.

As indicated in the Author's Note, he is "deeply indebted" to Peter Serkin, who served as the book's unofficial vetter. The two met a decade ago when Conroy did a profile of the pianist for *Esquire.* "Once I was launched on the book, I thought of him," he says. "He's a very generous man, and very cultured. He looked at the manuscript, 100-150 pages at a time over the course of five years, made marginalia and sent it back to me. That allowed me to take chances that I otherwise would have been afraid to do."

Because of Serkin's enthusiasm, Conroy feels sanguine about readers' responses to the explanations of musical theory and descriptions of concertos, symphonies and jazz arrangements. "I think readers are interested in process," he says, "if it is *conveyed* as a process: the natural development of a child who's being taught by people who really care about music. As the child learns it, so can the reader."

While the title may suggest the familiar song, Conroy had other reasons for choosing it. "The concept of the body and the concept of the soul seemed to me to be what the book was really about. I knew that most people would immediately think of that song, but I also hoped that they would examine the phrase both in terms of the novel's musical component and in terms of the love story," he says.

What remains mysterious to Conroy is the manner in which the characters became so vividly alive to him. "Maggie [his wife] talks about last summer as the summer I wasn't here. I was so involved with the characters I walked around in a daze. That's every writer's dream, a situation when you don't have to push the story or flog it: you just have to follow it."

Another mystery is his choice of his protagonist's surname. Tobey Rawlings was the name Conroy gave to his boyhood friend in *Stop-Time.* He had originally used the boy's real name, Conroy recalls, "but the lawyers made me change every name in the book except my own." He says he has no idea why he elected to bestow it again on Claude in *Body & Soul.*

Though the resemblance between Conroy's youth and that of Claude Rawlings is hardly coincidental, Conroy's use of his boyhood memories was a far different emotional experience this time. The memoir resulted from an "almost therapeutic" need to exorcise his childhood. "Ted Solotaroff said the engine behind *Stop-Time* was anger. If *Stop Time* was anger, *Body & Soul* is love, largely because of the relationship between Claude and Weisfeld."

In granting Claude an incredible string of good luck, Conroy concedes that he has made the novel "in many respects a fairy tale." That was part of his pleasure. "The material was exhilarating. It was like being in a sailboat on a perfect day. The wind is going, the sun is shining, the ropes are tight. The boat is just *tearing* through the water."

Describing the serendipity of discovering the book's epigram - "That which thy fathers have bequeathed to thee, earn it anew if thou wouldst possess it" - Conroy bolts from his chair into the kitchen and takes down a well-worn copy of *The Joy of Cooking.* "I get sort of manic at the end of the day when I'm writing," he says, in what at first seems like a non sequitur. "My head is bouncing all over the place. I have a couple of beers, then I cook dinner. It helps me reenter." One day he happened to flip to the front of the cookbook and the epigram from Goethe's *Faust* leaped out at him.

"I felt a thrill go through me. I said: 'That's it, that's what I'm writing about!'" The loving protection of fathers, the ineluctable blessing of love, the empowerment of knowledge, the joy of music, that indeed is what *Body & Soul* is all about.

Source: Sybil S. Steinberg, "Frank Conroy," in *Publishers Weekly,* Vol. 240, No. 34, August 23, 1993, pp. 44, 46.

Critical Essay #4

In the following negative review, Cooper identifies cliched characters and bad writing as two reasons why Body and Soul *is a "disappointment."*

Younger writers who've pulled off that rare feat, a wonderful first book, work on under a hefty burden of expectations. Frank Conroy was thirty in 1967 when he published *Stop-Time,* his memoirs of a childhood marked by the absence of a disturbed and alcoholic father. A collection of sharp images retrieved "from the very edge of memory," *Stop-Time* anatomized experience rather than judged it, setting forth episodes of boyhood - the thrill of scavenging an abandoned building with a best friend, the brutal beating of a helpless fat boy at boarding school - from a detached, almost amoral perspective that held out to readers the persistent illusion of breaking through adult sentimentality to see life as it "really" was.

Praised lavishly for its intelligent candor by such authorities as Norman Mailer and William Styron, *Stop-Time* went on to become that writer's dream, a true word-of-mouth book, remaining continuously in print decade after decade, winning new generation of readers and setting a standard for childhood narratives against which other talented practitioners - from Annie Dillard to Theodore Weesner to Alice McDermott to E. L. Doctorow - could be measured. Meanwhile, however, Conroy himself (who currently is director of the famed Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa) managed but a single slim volume of stories in a quarter-century *(Midair,* 1984), invoking anxieties - shared, according to interview, by the author himself - of that nightmare of literary nightmares, a one-book career.

Now, at last, along comes *Body & Soul,* a sprawling *bildungsroman* taking up the youthful adventures of a musical prodigy named Claude Rawl-ings. Weighing in at 450 pages, the book clearly means to put all doubts to rest: "a big novel ..." Conroy has called it, "a book [not] about me but about the world."

Such comments notwithstanding, it's hard not to read *Body & Soul* as an updated *Stop-Time.* Both books have as heroes a musically precocious boy growing up fatherless in postwar New York, and both explore, to a greater or lesser degree, the same terrain: isolation, imagination, and the redemptive power of art. Alas, however - I might as well say it right off - lovers of *Stop-Time* are in for a big disappointment. Slack where *Stop-Time* was startlingly fresh, *Body & Soul* rarely approaches the brilliance of its shimmering progenitor.

The novel begins promisingly enough. Following Claude Rawlings around from the dingy apartment he shares with his taxi-driver mother to the music store where his mentor, Weisfeld, teaches him piano, Conroy takes us on a guided tour through a long-lost New York. Food automats dispense franks and beans for a quarter, neighborhood saloons on V-E Day offer free beer for anyone in uniform, and in the background Rosemary Clooney sings "Come On-a My House." In the shadow of the

Third Avenue el, Claude shines shoes, collect bottles, and indulges in a little petty larceny. He's like Doctorow's enterprising New York City boys, growing up clever and tough; but Conroy's version of the street urchin is softened by a quiet, baffled wonder:

In the general torpor specific noises stood out in high relief - the wheezing of a bus, the clacking, rattling rush of the el, angry voices from inside a tenement, the crash of a storefront gate - thick sounds rising with an eerie clarity against the unnatural silence. On an empty street he might watch his own feet, as if to reassure himself that he was not dreaming. He might wipe the sweat from his face with the back of his hand and then look at the back of his hand. He was often dizzy.

This is the quiet intensity that made *Stop-Time* so terrific, and it's what Conroy does best: carefully detailing the texture of consciousness, with its dizzying intimations of self and the formidable, sometimes terrifying otherness of the world. Conroy's boy protagonists, while pre-conscious, are nevertheless children; ideas come to them not abstractly, but with a taste, a shape, a sound. Their world is incorrigibly sensual, and in *Body & Soul,* as in his earlier memoirs, the author renders this sensuality superbly.

As soon as *Body & Soul* busies itself with the action of Claude's budding career, however, things start to go bad. Conroy knows a lot about music, and uses it in fashioning a successful career out of the dubious and scattered materials of Claude's circumstances. The problem lies in the characters with whom he surrounds his *wunderkind.* Dividing the boy's world neatly between mentors and antagonists, Conroy paints these figures with very broad strokes. There's the eccentric but kindly artist; the cold and shallow Upper East Side socialite, impervious to art; the shabby, soulful Eastern European Jew, tormented by Holocaust nightmares; the jovial black janitor with a heart of gold and a bottomless fund of folk wisdom ("You gotta decide if the mad runs you, or you run the mad"). These are not living character but types; worse, they're secondhand types, inherited from other New York writers, like Tom Wolfe or Bernard Malamud, who've done them far more compellingly.

Similarly, Conroy seems to have lost his ear for original language. The novel offers a full menu of bad writing, from bland straightforwardness ("A quiet idealism glowed on both of these small, protected campus worlds - islands of optimism within the larger security of calm, prosperous Postwar America") to Mushy Love Writing ("As her soul welcomed him, his own was cleansed. As they ascended together in to the blue beyond blue, all else was trivial"). One searches *Body & Soul* in vain for the kind of pin-point-accurate insight into what makes people tick that made *Stop-Time* sing. But the new novel's characters remain stubbornly fuzzy and shallow. The are functional; less like real people than props furnishing the stage of Claude Rawlings's moral education.

The problem goes right to the heart of the differences between the two books. *Stop-Time* was both a reflection upon, and a recreation of, the extreme limitedness of a child's perspective. Its protagonist's deeply adolescent assumption was that life will never change, that it goes nowhere. "An adult [Conroy wrote] recognizes petty problems for what they are and transcends them through this higher preoccupations, his goals -

he moves on, as it were. A child has no choice but to accept the immediate experiences of his life at face value. He isn't moving on, he simply is."

The lack of a redemptive *telos,* the refusal to discern or impose a "story" upon often painful and difficult events, gave *Stop-Time* its pessimistic cast - the narrative structure is framed by an account of the grown-up Conroy driving wildly through the night, drunk, heading for a crash - but also its vivid and penetrating honesty. The various people who pass through young Frank's life have no function, no part in a larger story, because from Frank's point of view there is no larger story. People aren't there to teach Frank anything he wants to learn; they're simply there to be seen in all their mysterious and sometimes tedious particularity. As its title implies, *Stop-Time* relies for its success upon stuckness. The mode of the book is the trenchant skepticism of an exceedingly intelligent young person convinced he isn't going anywhere.

Body & Soul, on the other hand, exudes progress and higher preoccupation. Life, it insists, is indeed a story, a series of peaks and valleys along a gradually rising curve toward enlightenment. Surprisingly, Conroy seems to have grown up into an optimist; but it's an optimism that strains and creaks in its dogged insistence on making everything fit together, on delivering every last lesson and missing piece. Nowhere does it creak more loudly than in the novel's climactic scene, when the author maneuvers his hero, by now an internationally known concert pianist in his mid-twenties, into an unwitting and coincidental reunion with his long-lost father - who turns out (surprise!) to be a jazz pianist in a London nightclub. The two musicians play together four-handed, setting the house on fire with their shared passion for jazz, Claude unaware of the true identity of the man next to him, yet inexplicably drawn to him .... And so on. The scene has the sweetness of Hollywood product: "perfect" to the last detail.

Behind such sentimental manipulations lies a deep romanticism about creative genius and the nobility of art. *Body & Soul* is suffused by a longing for the purity of artistic devotion. It deals Claude (and the reader) chastening life lessons, ultimately offering salvation in a deep commitment to "the work." The tone of the novel is warm but powerfully earnest. "You're not a kid anymore," Weisfeld counseled Claude when the boy confesses bewilderment at the twelve-tone system of modern music. "You're on your way to becoming a well-educated young man, and we're getting into deep stuff here." The substitution of Schoenbergian atonality for the birds and the bees in a standard coming-of-age moment might be hilarious, were there any irony to it; as is, we are asked to accept it, and other such moments, straightforwardly. With its hopeful messagizing, its sprawling all-inclusiveness, its earnest profundity, *Body & Soul* reads like, well, a first novel: which, after all, it is. It's a good enough book, given what tends to get published, it just isn't a wonderful book. Harsh judgments are the reward for having once upon a time written a book a lot of people love.

Source: Rand Richard Cooper, "A Long-Awaited Encore," in *Commonweal,* November 5, 1993, pp. 44, 46.

Adaptations

Film rights for *Body and Soul* have been sold to Spring Creek Productions.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the composer Schonberg and his twelve-tone system of composition. Discuss his impact on the history of music and future styles of composing.

Research the Nazi concentration camps of World War II and their impact on European Jews. Discuss the aftermath of the Holocaust on those who survived□where they went afterwards, how they rebuilt their lives, and how they coped with the tragedy.

Research the history of jazz and discuss its impact on American music. Who have been the most influential jazz musicians of the twentieth century? Who are the best jazz musicians playing today?

Investigate the McCarthy era of the 1950s and the House Un-American Activities Committee. What were the committee's fears and goals? What was the impact on American society as a whole? How did it change our view of government and the political system?

Research the psychological impact of the relationship between mother and child. What happens to the child's development when the mother is neglectful? How does it affect the child's future behavior and ability to interact normally in social situations?

Research the Greek myth of Apollo, the god of music, then write and perform your own short play based on Apollo's life and adventures.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: This is the Big Band Era and swing music is all the rage.

1950s: The mellow sound of the crooners gives way to the rise of rock 'n' roll with Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley.

1960s: Pop and rock rule the music scene. Folk songs played at "hootenannies," psychedelic rock, and the Motown sound have a phenomenal impact.

Today: Swing music makes a big comeback while America's broadened, eclectic tastes make room for rap, country, rhythm and blues, jazz, and classical music all at the same time. Many stars of the 1950s and 1960s still perform in "classic" tours.

1940s: Segregation is practiced in most of the country. Except for the Tuskegee Airmen, blacks may work only in menial jobs in the armed services.

1950s: Desegregation begins in the schools, but any attempt at mixing the races is met with violent rejection.

1960s: The Civil Rights Bill passes in 1964, but racial intermarriage is still banned in nineteen states until a 1967 Supreme Court ruling declares miscegenation laws unconstitutional.

Today: All races have equal rights under the law, but only four percent of marriages are interracial.

1940s: Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union forces Stalin to join the Allies during WWII, which leads to the postwar takeover of Eastern Europe.

1950s: The Cold War ensues and communism spreads throughout the world. America joins in the Korean War against the communist Chinese in the North, and lives in the grip of fear of communist attack and espionage.

1960s: The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 brings the Soviet Union and the United States to the brink of war.

Today: The Soviet Union has broken up and communist governments exist in only a few places in the world.

1940s: The Holocaust takes six million Jewish lives. Many survivors come to America and other countries, but the state of Israelis created in 1948 to provide a homeland for Jewish people.

Today: After several wars over fifty years with its Arab neighbors,Israelis still working on peace agreements.

What Do I Read Next?

Frank Conroy has written only three books. *Midair* (1985) is a collection of eight short stories dealing with the same themes of growing up and appearances that *Stop-Time* and *Body and Soul* explore.

Claude Rawlings bears a striking resemblance to Pip in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-61). Both rise from abject, lonely beginnings to positions of prominence. The objects of their desire, Estella and Catherine, are both aloof, almost cruel, patricians.

The Great Gatsby (1925), by F. Scott Fitzgerald, portrays an outsider who pursues and achieves great wealth to insinuate himself into society and get close to his obsession, Daisy Buchanan. This cautionary tale about the price of success is a good portrait of the 1920s Jazz Age.

Billy Bathgate (1989), by E. L. Doctorow, made into a feature film, tells of another New York

City boy's passage into manhood, but his mentor is a notorious mobster who teaches Billy about crime, love, life, and death in a 1930s decadent world that Billy comes to question.

Amadeus (1981), the play that became a musical and an Academy Award-winning movie, is Peter Shaffer's interpretation of the life of a musical genius.

Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward (1867) is a story about a kind and helpful New York City boy who lived on the streets until he followed his dreams to success. This is the first of the many famous rags-to-riches stories by Horatio Alger that chronicle the American Dream.

Solo Variations (1997), by Cassandra Garbus, is a well-received first novel that examines not only the difficulties of a musician's life, but the personal relationships that are entangled and affected by a performer's career.

Further Study

Conroy, Frank, *Stop-Time,* Viking Press, 1967.

The critics have noted that this stellar autobiography about Conroy's youth and the storyline in *Body and Soul* are very similar.

Decker, Jeffrey Louis, *Made in America: Self-Styled Success from Horatio Alger to Oprah Winfrey,* University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

The achievements of a number of entrepreneurs from a variety of fields are examined in terms of how race, gender, and ethnicity fit into the American Dream.

Kenneson, Claude, and Van Cliburn, *Musical Prodigies: Perilous Journeys, Remarkable Lives,* Amadeus Press, 1999. The journeys from early youth to fame of forty-four musical prodigies from the eighteenth century to the present are chronicled in this book by a noted cello teacher and one of the world's most famous pianists.

Schoenberg, Arnold, ed., *Fundamentals of Musical Composition,* translated by Leonard Stein and Gerald Strang, Faber, 1982. This book provides basic information about composition terminology and forms.

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Abrams, M. H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* 3d ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 112-13. Kauffmann,Stanley, Review of *Body and Soul,* in *The New Republic,* Vol. 209, No. 16, October 18, 1993, p. 47.

Olshan, Joseph, Review, *in Harper's Bazaar,* October 1993, p. 130.

Review, *Publisher's Weekly,* Vol. 240, No. 25, June 21, 1993, p. 82.

Steinberg, Sybil, Interview in *Publishers Weekly,* Vol. 240, No. 34, August 23, 1993, p. 44.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

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A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

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