The Bonfire of the Vanities Study Guide

The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Bonfire of the Vanities is a sweeping saga set in 1980's New York, a decade that was popularly known as a greedy, materialistic era. Author Tom Wolfe's satirical treatment of this avarice ranges from the mean streets of Harlem to the privileged isolation of Park Avenue. Wolfe's darkly humorous drama invokes the tension of race and socio-economic relations in New York City during a decade when the *haves* and the *have-nots* were separated by a chasm too wide to be bridged. The novel's events center on a hit-and-run accident that takes place in a run-down area of the Bronx. Rich socialite, Sherman McCoy, and his mistress, Maria Ruskin, take a wrong turn on their way home from the airport one night and find themselves the victims of an apparent car-jacking attempt on a highway entrance ramp. They manage to escape, but wind up mowing down Henry Lamb, an African-American teenager, and one of two men involved in the carjacking.

Lamb makes it to the hospital, barely alive, and before he lapses into a fatal coma, he gives his mother the plate number and make of Sherman's flashy Mercedes, and tells her that the car was driven by a rich, white couple. Lamb makes no mention of the robbery attempt. Meanwhile, Sherman and Maria decide not to report the robbery attempt. Initially, Sherman wants to report the accident and seek medical treatment for the boy he thinks they hit, but Maria talks him out of it. She argues successfully that they had been in a fight for survival, and furthermore, since she was driving when they hit Henry Lamb, it is her decision to make. Sherman and Maria do not want their respective spouses to catch them in an affair, and Maria warns that they will lose their reputations and, quite possibly, their freedom, if they call the police. Thus, they end the evening making love in their rent-controlled love nest and congratulating each other for their narrow escape. Thus, Henry Lamb's life is sacrificed.

Reverend Bacon, a black activist from Harlem, is a personal friend of Lamb's mother, and he uses his influence to pressure the DA's office into discovering the identity of the rich, white driver. Eventually, the trail brings them to Sherman. He is a Wall Street bond trader during the height of the 1980's market bubble, in which vast fortunes were made and lost. Sherman is going broke on a salary of $3,000,000 a year. His acquisitiveness is typical of the 1980's Wall Street mind-set, when more was never enough, and any time not spent making money was a waste of time.

Underneath this Park Avenue fazade, Sherman hides many decent qualities. Most of the other characters are satirical caricatures of corrupt politicians, journalists, and social activists; thus, despite Sherman's flaws, the reader roots for him as he seeks to evade the jaws of justice. The Assistant District Attorney who prosecutes Sherman, Larry Kramer, manipulates the evidence to indict Sherman so that Kramer and his media-hungry boss, Abe Weiss, can look like darlings in the media. Reverend Bacon is a corrupt leader who plays up the racism angle in the press to win support for a lawsuit against the hospital that treated Lamb. When he learns Sherman's identity, Bacon makes it his goal to strip Sherman of his fortune through the courts. Bacon has reporter Peter Fallow of *The City Light* in his pocket, and he deploys the paper's tabloid-style

yellow journalism to try the Sherman McCoy case in the media. As Bacon stirs up rage on the streets of Harlem, he warns that the final battle between the races is coming. The oppressed minorities, he promises, will rise up and fight for the lives of innocent young men like honor student Henry Lamb.

Caught in the middle of this high-profile, politically charged criminal case, Sherman is sacrificed to the mob. His money, marriage, job, mistress, and reputation are stripped away, and he is forced out of his safe, insulated Park Avenue world. Cast among the unwashed masses, people whom Sherman has always feared and looked down on, he gradually realizes that he is no better than anyone else. The man who once thought of himself as the Master of the Universe winds up leaving Park Avenue behind and rejoining the human race. Sherman and his tough Irish lawyer, Tommy Killian, win several legal battles, and Sherman rediscovers who he is. In the end, Sherman's youthful ideals begin to resurface. Nonetheless, the prosecution continues unabated. DA Weiss is re-elected by a landslide because of his popular stance against Sherman McCoy. The case remains unresolved at the end of the novel, but the author leaves Sherman on a hopeful note. Although Sherman's life is a shambles, his integrity is intact. Whatever happens to Sherman, it appears he will rebuild his life on a more meaningful foundation.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

An angry mob heckles the Mayor of New York City at a town meeting in Harlem. The lead heckler is a tall, black man sporting a large, gold earring in one ear. The racist taunts he hurls at the white, Jewish mayor bring cackles of approval from the crowd. The Mayor sweats under the hot spotlights of television cameras, regretting his decision to come to Harlem. His people have assured him of a friendly crowd, but now the Mayor realizes that Reverend Bacon has stacked the audience with troublemakers. He thinks the protesters are making only themselves and Harlem look bad, but as his efforts to regain control of the meeting are met with increasing derision, the Mayor considers what the rest of New York will think of this televised debacle. He wonders whether "White New York" (pg. 7) realizes that the city now belongs to the third-world immigrants who run the streets. As the crowd begins to rush the stage, the Mayor's bodyguard beckons him to retreat behind a curtain of plainclothes cops. Giving into his fear, the Mayor abandons the stage with his guards. The crowd lets him go. In that moment, the Mayor realizes he has made the wrong decision by retreating. He's allowed the mob to win. He has, he thinks, lost it all.

Prologue Analysis

With this singular scene, the author has established the vast landscape of ethnic diversity and racism that defines New York as author Tom Wolfe sees it. Several key plot elements and characters, first mentioned here, will echo throughout the pages of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. In Wolfe's New York, characters are self-defined by their racial and ethnic background, and each race is pitted in a winner-take-all battle against every other ethnic or racial group. An us-vs.-them mentality permeates the Mayor's stream-of-consciousness thought process as he looks out upon the people of his city. He realizes that he is only the mayor of White New York, and that the third-world hooligans will one day overthrow the current powers that be. Notably absent from the Mayor's thoughts, as well as from the dialogue of the mob, is any thought of integration, power sharing, due representation of various interest groups, or harmonious cohabitation with one's New York City neighbors. The various inhabitants of New York City square off against one another to grab for power in this satirical novel. Greed and lack of respect for one's fellow human beings make up the very foundation of the city as the Mayor sees it, and his point of view represents the perspective of each and every character in the novel, as the reader will shortly learn.

The Reverend Bacon is first introduced in this brief Prologue as the man responsible for stacking Harlem City Hall against the Mayor. Bacon represents the interests of the African-American community in New York. Bacon's ability to manipulate the media using only a handful of thugs will come into play later in the book as the key events unfold. The presence of Bacon's people will be indicated in later chapters each time the tall,

black man with the large, golden earring is spotted in a crowd. Having connected this nameless character to Bacon in the Prologue, the author will later bring this character back repeatedly, each time to indicate that Bacon has a behind-the-scenes interest in the unfolding events.

The media is introduced in the Prologue as well and will later come to function as one of the novel's main protagonists. The media is depicted as a human animal with a personality and drive all its own. The events in the Prologue are rigged by Reverend Bacon and broadcast by the media to create the appearance of mass unrest. The author speaks to false images created by Bacon and the media and how such images alter public perception to make them appear true, yet the central irony that Wolfe hopes to make apparent to the reader is that there actually is great truth to these falsehoods. The microcosm of events is indeed representative of the macrocosm, and thus the very fact that Bacon and the media are intent on creating a particular image proves that the image is true. After all, Bacon would not have ascended to such power within the community if his community were not behind him. Although he manipulates the facts, his point of view is still representative of the people's will.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In a Park Avenue co-op in the Mayor's White New York, Sherman McCoy struggles to put a leash on his dachshund, Marshall. Sherman is a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant (a WASP) with an aristocratic chin that he has inherited from his father, the Lion of Dunning Sponget. The dog avoids Sherman's attempts to leash him, sliding on the slippery marble of the apartment's imposing entryway. The dog riles Sherman into a state of resentment, resentment against the dog and against his wife, who decorated the apartment with such an ostentatious display of marble flooring in the first place. Just then, Sherman's wife, Judy, appears in the entryway and offers to walk the dog herself, so that Sherman can read a bedtime story to his daughter, Campbell, before she goes to sleep. Sherman is incensed by his wife's thoughtful consideration. She has no idea that he is only walking the dog as an excuse to get out of the apartment.

Sherman privately thinks of himself as a Master of the Universe. His position as a bond salesman on Wall Street pays for the expensive home and all the trappings. Sherman believes that as a Master of the Universe, he is entitled to take what he wants, and he resents the fact that he is crouched on the floor with an uncooperative dog, forced to lie to his wife. Why not simply explain to her that although Judy is still a good-looking woman, she will soon begin to visibly age, and Sherman is entitled to more. His thoughts transform Judy's sweet, smiling face into the visage of a *social X-ray*. *Social X-ray* is Sherman's term for the high-society women whose company Judy prizes, women who keep themselves so fit that they look fashionably emaciated. Sherman notices for the first time that Judy's face and neck are beginning to look scrawny. She is turning into a *social X-ray* herself. The unfairness of it all sparks Sherman's temper and he angrily informs his wife that he is going out to walk the dog. Sherman fights back his guilt as she turns away, hurt.

In the elevator, he encounters Pollard Browning, president of the apartment co-op board. Browning looks down his nose at Sherman, as he has done ever since they were schoolboys together at the Buckley School. Sherman, intending only to sound sarcastic, allows anger to seep into his conversation with Browning. Browning shrugs him off and exits the building. Sherman follows him out, irritated that the doorman has the gall to comment on the dog's hesitance to go out into the rainy night. Under the watchful eye of the doorman, Sherman struggles to force his dog down the sidewalk. Finally, he picks up the squirming dog and walks around the corner to a payphone. Sherman picks up the phone and dials his mistress, Maria. The woman who answers the phone is not Maria, and Sherman assumes he is speaking with Germaine, the woman from whom Maria sublets her apartment. He asks to speak to Maria, and to his shock, his wife says, "'Sherman? Is that you?'" (pg. 17) He has called his own home by mistake!

Sherman hangs up the phone. Under the rainy sky, he considers his options. He wonders if he can lie his way out of this, and wonders about the pain he's caused his

wife. Deciding he needs time to think before confronting Judy, he dials the phone again, carefully this time, and hears the tell-tale Southern accent of his mistress, Maria. He tells Maria he is a few blocks away and is on his way over. He arrives at a seedy townhouse with the dog in tow. Normally, Sherman thinks of the townhouse as bohemian, a fun descent into an earthier realm. Tonight, after the gaffe with his wife, Sherman can only see it as squalid. Maria, however, is a vision, as always. Dressed in tasteful, expensive, and artfully provocative clothing, she poses sexily in the doorway. He pushes his way past her and attempts to tell her about the phone incident. Maria is not interested in what he has to say. She points with pride to a new painting hung above the bed of the desolate room. Maria informs him that celebrated artist, Filippo Chirazzi, has given her the painting as a gift. Jealousy invades Sherman's mind, but Maria assures him that Filippo is just showing his gratitude for all the paintings her rich husband has bought.

Sherman changes the subject back to the incident of the telephone. To his surprise, Maria considers it of no importance. She tells him she never bothers to lie to her husband, Arthur; she merely avoids telling him certain details. She suggests Sherman should have simply explained to Judy that he'd been trying to call his friend, Maria Ruskin, and left it at that. She changes the subject again, showing him a letter addressed to Germaine Boll. Germaine is the tenant of record for Maria's squalid little love nest. The apartment is rent-controlled so long as Germaine lives there, but Germaine, like many people in New York, secretly sub-lets her apartment. This arrangement provides Maria with reasonable rent well below market-value, which still represents a good profit to Germaine. Maria can see that Sherman is still worried about his wife. Seductively, she tells him that since he's already in trouble with Judy, he might as well do something to earn it. They make love on the bed as the dachshund looks on.

Back at home, Sherman lets himself into the apartment with studied casualness. He finds his wife in the library and cheerily announces his return, pretending nothing has happened. Judy asks him about Maria, her face a study in sheer agony. Sherman lies and insists he didn't call the house this evening, since he's been out walking the dog the whole time. Sherman swears to God repeatedly that he doesn't know what she's talking about. Judy, obviously unconvinced, retires to the bedroom. Sherman tries to work himself up into a state of righteous anger against Judy. How dare she judge him? She spends his money and treats him as if he's sold out to Wall Street. But her tears get under his skin. Sherman is suddenly swept away by the memory of the two of them, years ago, in their own love nest in the Village. He remembers how he had sworn to her that their love would transcend everything. Absently, he flicks on the television. Images of the Mayor being shouted down by angry black faces in Harlem flicker on the screen. Sherman hardly notices. He thinks that his wife is right. The Master of the Universe is indeed a cheap, rotten, liar.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In this chapter, the author introduces the reader to protagonist, Sherman McCoy. Sherman is characterized by the sense of entitlement that permeates the New York

upper classes as they are depicted in the novel. He has convinced himself that because he earns a great deal of money, he is entitled to take anything he wants from life, irrespective of who gets hurt in the process. This sense of entitlement is distinct from a simple willingness to break the rules of his marriage. He not only breaks the rules, he actually believes that he is above the rules. Sherman is irritated by the need to maintain a pretense of fidelity, because as far as he is concerned, the rules no longer apply to him. Sherman feels that he has the unilateral right to revise his wedding vows; a right he has earned by sheer virtue of the money and power he has accumulated. He believes that he buys his wife's loyalty with the money he brings home, and that if she wishes to continue to receive his financial support, then she must be willing to sacrifice all rights within the marriage. His purchasing power co-opts her needs and her feelings regarding their marriage. In other words, he believes he can use his money and power to bully her into submission.

This objectification of women is self-serving, and certainly not restricted to the Wall Street set; however, it is an apt metaphor for the sense of entitlement felt by the greedy and corrupt elite. Such greed and corruption are central themes in the novel, and thus the author's choice to introduce the reader to this corrupt mindset through the vehicle of Sherman's marriage allows Tom Wolfe to lay the groundwork for the central events of the novel. This sense of entitlement is the fatal flaw that will ultimately lead to Sherman's fall from grace. Sherman's approach to his marriage mirrors the approach he will take later in the novel when he breaks another set of society's rules. Throughout the novel, the course of Sherman's marriage will follow the same path as his upcoming legal troubles, and thus, the disintegrating marriage is an ever-present reminder of Sherman's fatal flaw.

Sherman's character, though, is torn by an internal conflict. Part of him buys into the outrageous Wall Street concept that females are purchasable commodities, but a spark of human decency remains alive within him. His crude, self-serving logic deserts him in the face of his wife's pain. Unlike his mistress, Maria, Sherman is still capable of feeling remorse. However, he reacts angrily to the pangs of conscience that torment him. He resents his inability to justify fully his selfish desires. Judy serves as a touchstone for his conscience, a reminder of his former integrity. In many ways, she represents his saving grace, yet Sherman, intent on fully transforming into a heartless, egotistical, Master of the Universe, sees Judy as an obstacle to this desired state of selfishness. As with many literary characters, what he wants and what he actually needs are two very different things. In this first chapter, Sherman is struggling with this internal conflict. This struggle gives the reader hope for Sherman's humanity, for he has not yet allowed moral corruption to take over his soul. His internal struggle is the foundation upon which all subsequent events are based.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Lawrence Kramer lies in bed, dreaming of the girl with the brown lipstick. He wants to kiss those seductively painted lips, but the thought of his wife stops him. Just then, his wife, Rhoda, wakes up, and her movement on the bed pulls Kramer out of his dream. He stares with disgust at his tiny bedroom and his wife's flabby belly. Forcibly, Kramer reminds himself that Rhoda's belly is flabby only from having given birth to their first child, a 3-week-old boy. His warm sentiment toward the mother of his child is short-lived, however. Critically, he thinks that Rhoda has begun to look just like her mother. He feigns sleep until his wife exits the bedroom. He hears her speaking to the baby nurse in the next room. He thinks gloomily about the tiny size of their three-and-a-half room apartment. It is rent stabilized at $888 a month, and many New Yorkers would be thrilled to have three and a half rooms on the Upper West Side.

However, the three and a half rooms are actually carved out of what was once a single bedroom on the upper level of a townhouse. To make matters worse, Rhoda is no longer bringing in an income. Rhoda's mother is paying for 4 weeks' worth of services from the baby nurse, and after that the Kramers' plan had been to hire a live-in *au pair* so that Rhoda could return to work. But the Kramers can't find an *au pair* willing to live permanently in the tiny living room where the baby nurse currently sleeps. Thus, they are going to have to survive on Kramer's income alone. The $888 monthly rent adds up to nearly half of Kramer's post-tax earnings.

Somehow, the presence of the English baby nurse makes Kramer feel his lack of money and status more acutely. He and his wife feel judged by her presence, and they feel certain the baby nurse is accustomed to working for more well-to-do employers. With the baby nurse around, Kramer is more conscious of his wife's New York accent. Rhoda, an editor and someone Kramer once considered an intellectual, nowadays embarrasses Kramer when she speaks. In the tiny bathroom, Kramer surveys his reflection. Since the arrival of the baby nurse, he has not been able to lift weights in the living room as was his custom. Kramer is extremely proud of his physique, and he fears his muscles are atrophying from non-use. This discourages him more than anything. Kramer's muscular physique symbolizes, to him, an exciting, youthful lifestyle. Now he feels he must resign himself to being a working father and to give up dreams of happiness.

In the living room, Kramer finds his wife and the baby nurse watching footage of a riot on TV. The riot in Harlem is being broadcast, not by the local news, but by a national news program. Kramer is mesmerized by the man who was once the mayor of New York City, but who now is only the mayor of white New York. When the program ends, the baby nurse proclaims her indignation at the uppity colored people who don't know how good they have it. Kramer and Rhoda exchange looks of relief. Now that they've

discovered that their English baby nurse is a bigot, and they can feel superior to her. To their relief, they can now judge her instead of allowing her to judge them.

Kramer wears Nike running shoes with his suit coat and tie for the commute to work. On the walk to the subway, he thinks again of the girl with the brown lipstick. Tired of watching other people lead the glamorous life, Kramer decides he is going to call her and set up a dinner date in one of those trendy, faux-casual restaurants. He envisions the scene in his mind, determined to make the call as soon as the trial is over. Just then, he spots Andy Heller, a former classmate of his from Columbia Law School.

Unlike Kramer, Heller had chosen to go into practice Downtown, in one of the lucrative law firms dealing with greedy financiers of the merger and acquisition crowd. Back in his law-school days, Kramer had felt superior to Heller. Kramer's choice to work for the public District Attorney's office was, to Kramer's way of thinking, far more noble than Heller's choice to sell out. Now, however, as he sees Andy Heller wearing an expensive suit, Kramer feels ashamed. He turns away as Heller climbs into an Audi sedan. Kramer doesn't want Heller to see his cheap suit; he doesn't want Heller to know that he earns $36,000 a year, before taxes, as an assistant district attorney in the Bronx.

On the subway, Kramer sees all the poor people of New York, dressed similarly in cheap, Nike commuting shoes. Kramer avoids thinking about why he chooses to wear cheap sneakers. He feels momentarily threatened as three young hoods walk past him with the characteristic gait Kramer thinks of as the Pimp Roll. As the young men pass him by without incident, Kramer feels grateful for the large, muscular physique, which makes him a less likely target for such hoodlums. At 161st Street, he exits the subway. His uphill walk provides him with a grand view of the Bronx. He reminisces about the days when this area was considered tony, occupied by well-to-do Jewish families like his father's. His dad had grown up 17 blocks away, in an area that has since become a slum. Kramer recalls his dream to have a better life than his father. Kramer's father is a comptroller for a company in the West Twenties in Manhattan. Kramer had thought that by becoming a lawyer, he would have a better lifestyle. And yet, now, Kramer can only dream of having a home as large as his dad's three-bedroom in Oceanside, a home which Kramer once considered beneath him.

After several years in the District Attorney's Office, Kramer is experiencing doubt and burnout. Some 150 cases pass through his office every week, each representing the horrible and pathetic crimes of the Bronx criminal element. This criminal element, from Kramer's perspective, is invariably ethnic, usually black or Puerto Rican. As he approaches the District Attorney's Office, part of a complex of judicial buildings Kramer privately refers to as Gibraltar, he notices the park across the street. Ruefully, Kramer thinks how none of the white employees of Gibraltar would ever dare leave their safe fortress to risk having lunch in the park, where crime reigns. Kramer is further depressed by the sight of Judge Myron Kovitsky arriving for work in his 10-year-old Pontiac Bonneville. Kovitsky is at the top of the food chain in the DA's office. He earns top dollar, approximately double Kramer's salary. Kramer is depressed to think that if he continues to work hard and do a good job, someday he, too, can earn $45,000 a year after taxes and drive a beat up 10-year-old car like Kovitsky.

The sound of someone calling Kramer's name pulls him back from his reverie. Insults, many of them having to do with Kramer's Jewish heritage, rain down on him from the prisoners inside a blue and orange department of corrections van parked alongside the complex of legal buildings. Frightened by the rage being directed at him, Kramer considers retreating and entering the building from another direction. Before he can slip away, however, he notices Judge Kovitsky staring right at him. Suddenly, the prisoners begin hurling their invective at Kovitsky as well. Kramer walks towards his office building, pretending not to hear the insults hurled by the prisoners, but Kovitsky, to Kramer's shock, heads straight for the van.

First, Kovitsky chews out the driver for allowing his passengers to behave in this manner, and then Kovitsky takes on the prisoners directly. His verbalized anger and sheer force of will shuts them up for a moment, and when they renew their taunting, the heart has gone out of it. Kramer hurries to enter the building with Kovitsky. Kramer is terrified that Kovitsky will think less of him for not standing up to the prisoners, but Kovitsky's anger is aimed at the van's driver, to Kramer's relief. Kovitsky is also furious about the anti-Semitic remarks spouted by the prisoners. Kovitsky does, however, notice Kramer's running shoes, and makes fun of them. An alarm goes off in the building, which both men ignore; they are too jaded to worry about whatever escape attempt or violent act is occurring somewhere in the bowels of the building. In that moment, Kramer decides he must do something to pull himself out of the muck. He thinks again of the girl with the brown lipstick.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Kramer's character helps the author establish the satirical tone of his novel. Lawrence Kramer is more of a caricature than a character, with his obsession with his status and physical appearance. This balding, vain man represents justice in the Bronx. Unfortunately for the people of the Bronx, Kramer has become so jaded he is convinced that every Bronx citizen of color is a dangerous criminal, and he is not alone in this belief. His white co-workers dare not venture out onto the streets of the Bronx, not even on their lunch hour. Kramer had once envisioned himself as a strong warrior, fighting crime to keep the streets safe. Now he sees his job as the process of "stirring the muck." (pg. 41) The muck, of course, refers to the people of the Bronx, the people he once hoped to protect. Prejudice and cynicism have overtaken him completely, and despite his muscular physique, he is a craven coward.

Unlike Sherman McCoy, Kramer does not even attempt to struggle with his baser impulses. Whatever idealism Kramer may have had in law school, it has evaporated completely. In fact, it is doubtful that Kramer ever had ideals at all. His decision to work for the DA's office had caused him to feel morally superior to his classmates, and it seems that superiority and status are now and have always been Kramer's only goals. At this stage in his life, Kramer is beginning to see that his job will not provide him the superior status he seeks, and that, more than anything, is what leads to his disillusionment.

Just like Sherman, Kramer also views women as representational objects rather than people. The girl in the brown lipstick represents Kramer's vision of a better lifestyle. He is attracted to her, and yet what he envisions has nothing to do with her personality or even her sex appeal. Kramer is attracted by the thought that she will look good sitting at a high-priced restaurant table with him. It is the classy restaurant and the upper-class lifestyle the restaurant represents to which Kramer is truly attracted. He could just as easily take his wife to such a restaurant, but his wife does not look the part. Kramer wants to look like a man of power, and to do so he needs the kind of rich, attractive, young girlfriend the powerful men of 1980's New York use to accessorize their power suits. Kramer does not seem to know or care what type of man he is, what he stands for, or what he believes in. What matters to Kramer is the image he projects to others. His character is both realistic for the materialistic 1980's, and it is over the top as well, lending a piercing accuracy to Tom Wolfe's biting satire.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

As he does every morning, Sherman McCoy walks his daughter, Campbell, down Park Avenue to the bus stop. She attends first grade at the prestigious Taliaferro School, properly pronounced "Toliver" by those in the know. This simple act of fatherhood confers a state of grace on Sherman each morning, and since the bus stop is only across the street, he doesn't even have time to become irritated at being slowed down by his little daughter's tiny steps. Sherman imagines the terrific picture they make; he, in his understated $1,800 suit, and she in her innocent, burgundy jumper. Unlike last night with the dog, he doesn't mind the doorman observing this scene. This morning, Campbell surprises him by asking if there is a God. Sherman and Judy send her to Sunday school each week to avoid having to address the subject of God directly, but Sherman is pleased by what he considers to be a precocious question. He briefly entertains thoughts of Campbell's transcendent brilliance; it has become socially acceptable in the past decade for girls to demonstrate high intelligence. Sherman thinks how terrific they look walking together, and he imagines that every passer-by is staring at them enviously.

At the bus stop, Sherman greets the parents and nannies who have assembled to drop off their own children. Mrs. Lueger, one of the mothers, must have rushed out of the house at the last minute because she is dressed casually in a man's button-down shirt and tight, faded blue jeans. Sherman is surprised to realize what a sexy woman she is. It has never occurred to him that the women he has always thought of as mere moms might be capable of sex appeal, too. After the bus picks up Campbell, Sherman walks further down the street toward a taxi stand. He is depressed by the sight of the ordinary-looking brownstones in the neighborhood. It is trash day, and he recoils at the appearance of plastic garbage bags on the curb. Sherman shakes his head at the idea that people can actually live this way. He thinks of his divorced friend and co-worker, Rawlie, who moved out of the Fifth Avenue 16-room apartment he formerly shared with his wife to a brownstone in this area. Sherman shudders to think that his actions of the previous night might lead him to divorce court. Guilt overwhelms him at the thought of what divorce might do to Campbell. He is momentarily tempted to return home, confess all, and beg his wife's forgiveness. He decides against it because that would cause him to be late for work, something much frowned upon at Pierce & Pierce, where Sherman works as a bond trader.

He ogles a pretty girl on the sidewalk, and when he stops to buy his morning newspaper, he pauses to stare at the pornographic magazines on display. Sherman tells himself that with so much sexiness in the world, a young man such as himself has no chance of remaining faithful. By the time he reaches the taxi stand, Sherman has convinced himself again that Masters of the Universe deserve to take what they want, and that the only thing he has done wrong is to get caught. In the taxi, he recalls how his father, former CEO at Dunning Sponget & Leach, used to take the subway to work

every day. For Sherman's generation of nouveau riche, however, it is considered most acceptable to insulate oneself from the teeming hordes of everyday humanity. Sherman thinks how much nicer his home is than even the gorgeous home owned by his parents. He thinks his father would be ashamed to learn that Sherman had wastefully borrowed $1.8 million to purchase his co-op apartment. He tries to picture his father cheating on his mother, but try as he might, he can't imagine the old man ever doing such a thing.

The offices of Pierce & Pierce are decorated with a British flair, in deference to the tastes of the CEO, Eugene Lopwitz. The roar of the bond-trading room calls to Sherman. The 60- by 80-foot room is filled with young men under 40, all roaring their trade orders into telephones. Sherman loves the adrenaline rush of the trading milieu. He is the number-one bond salesman at Pierce & Pierce, and laughingly recalls the days, about 10 years ago, when the bond salesmen had been called the Bond Bores. The bond market made a huge upturn over the last decade, and now the former Bond Bores are the hottest players on the financial scene. Sherman is top dog among these new Masters of the Universe. He thinks about Judy, and how she still considers his work boring. All Judy cares about is why Sherman never comes home in time for dinner. He resents her interior-decorating business and the embarrassment of having his home featured in *Architectural Digest*. He convinces himself that she takes his hard work and money for granted. Once he's built up a head of angry steam about his wife's ingratitude, he is ready to go to work.

Sherman picks up the telephone, intent on closing the Giscard deal. Before he can make a call, he notices a co-worker glancing through the racing pages of a newspaper. The young man is doubtlessly checking on the status of some of the racehorses that his family owns. Sherman is incensed. The bond salesmen work as a group and split the profits; therefore, he considers this moment of non-productivity to be a threat to his personal fortune. As the number-one bond salesman, Sherman commands a great deal of moral authority within the department. He now uses this authority to viciously chastise the young man and force him to put his newspaper away. Sherman takes out all his anger about Judy, Pollard Browning, and his nosy doorman on the young bond trader. As Sherman turns to head back to his desk, he is greeted by his friend, Rawlie Thorpe. Rawlie makes light of the young man's transgression to Sherman's disgust. Sherman thinks Rawlie has lost it since the divorce; his priorities are all out of line. Rawlie doesn't notice Sherman's discomfort. He continues to chat with his old friend, jokingly referring to their clients as electric doughnuts because the bond traders never see any more of the clients than the round receiving end of the telephone through which they speak. Sherman hides his disgust for Rawlie's cynicism.

At his desk, he gets to work on his Giscard scheme. The Giscard is a little known French governmental bond backed by gold. Sherman has discovered that because of fluctuations in gold market prices, it is possible to reap a huge profit off the Giscard if they are traded in a sizeable-enough volume. The only downside to the deal is its complexity. Very few of Sherman's clients are sophisticated enough to comprehend the scheme, yet Sherman is convinced that a Master of the Universe is capable of getting investors on board. He is so confident that he's convinced Gene Lopwitz to shell out $600 million of Pierce & Pierce money to purchase Giscards for resale. Sherman stands

to make $1.75 million if he sells the entire lot, and with that money he plans to pay off his $1.8 million home loan. Toward the end of the day, after helping Pierce & Pierce decide how to spend another $6 billion of company money, Sherman is on a high. He thinks of his wife, Judy, again, and can't believe she actually had the gall to make him feel guilty about a mere telephone call.

Chapter 3 Analysis

With the benefit of 20 years of hindsight, the roaring Wall Street of 1980's New York that Tom Wolfe depicts in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* was clearly an over-inflated balloon destined to burst. And burst it did, indeed--at least to a degree, at least for a while. Tom Wolfe was ahead of his time with this satirical novel about the risks of high stakes gambling on Wall Street, yet the moral lessons underlined by Wolfe's novel are still topical today. Sherman McCoy represents the men who earned millions, even billions, in the fevered trading of the 1980's. Sherman's conceit of thinking of himself as a Master of the Universe shows the overblown ego of a man who considers himself not merely lucky, but also untouchable. Sherman's success has gone to his head. In this chapter he is busily convincing himself that his success is a product of his moral superiority, even while he convinces himself that, as a Master of the Universe, he is no longer subject to such pedestrian restraints as human morality.

The irony that Wolfe intends to show in this chapter is encapsulated by the idea that Sherman's success transcends human morality, even as Sherman believes himself to be the moral authority on the bond floor and in his home. If, as Sherman believes, the pursuit of money is the highest attainable ideal, then men like Sherman who sell out their morality in the pursuit of money are the arbiters of the new morality. It is deeply ironic to see the ancient practice of human greed being touted by Sherman as the trendy, new way to live. Sherman and his ilk, in discovering greed for themselves, believe they have discovered something new.

Wolfe's biting satire is inherently comedic, and yet the comedic aspect stems from the fact that Sherman is blind to the paradox inherent in his thinking. Sherman plays a classic comedic "straight man" by believing his own hype. His concept of morality is laughable and made more so because he takes it perfectly seriously. He truly believes that any moment not spent making money is a moment wasted. His co-worker's momentary lack of productivity is the equivalent of a sin against the god of money, and Sherman feels morally righteous in correcting him. Sadly, it was men like Sherman who devalued every single technological and financial advance made by society in the twentieth century. As the century opened, idealistic Americans were intent on producing sufficient technological and financial resources to allow themselves and their families a better quality of life. High finance and technology initially evolved in service of mankind, with the ultimate goal of producing more leisure time for more aesthetic pursuits, like the arts, spirituality, personal development, and quality time with loved ones. Yet thanks to men like Sherman, the end-goal has long since been forgotten by society. Corporations have lengthened the typical workday, changed paid lunch hours to unpaid half-hours, and reduced salaries and benefits to such an extent that it is no longer possible for the

average worker to support a family on a single income. Although the greedy bubble of the '80s has long-since burst, it continues to have a negative impact on society to this day. The ongoing, detrimental ramifications of the greed exemplified by Sherman McCoy's character cause this amusing satire of a novel to lose much of its comedic impact. When satire is too closely aligned with reality, it simply stops being funny.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Sherman parks his $48,000 Mercedes in the parking garage at Kennedy Airport. He spares a thought for what his wife might think if the car were stolen from this location. Sherman tells himself he wouldn't owe her any explanation if that were to happen. After all, he has managed to behave like a good husband for a whole week now, even coming home for dinner every night for the first time since he joined Pierce & Pierce. He actually spent a whole 45 minutes with Campbell one evening as well. Thanks to this amazing change in behavior, Judy has given up the daybed in her dressing room in favor of their shared bed in the master bedroom. Judy is still icing him out in the bedroom, but at least she is civil to him whenever Campbell is around. So Sherman feels he deserves a night with Maria. Having called his wife and informed her he is working late, Sherman has arrived at the airport to pick up his mistress.

Maria appears at the gate dressed in her characteristically expensive and fashionable clothes. The way she moves is designed to appear sexy and confident and to arouse envy in everyone around her. Reminding himself that he is a Master of the Universe, Sherman greets this vision with a casual, "Hello, babe." (pg. 76) She is irritated; he has never dared to call her babe before. For his part, the mound of luggage Maria has brought with her irritates Sherman. In the parking garage, he struggles to fit it all into his sporty Mercedes, which has mercifully not been stolen. On the ride home, their mutual irritation dissolves as Maria tells him about a rude, snobby intellectual who had made a play for her on the plane. Feeling more comfortable, Sherman calls her babe again, and the awkwardness between them resurfaces as Maria makes it clear she is not the babe type. Distracted by this chilly conversation, Sherman misses his exit. The Mercedes is now trapped on the expressway leading into the Bronx.

Sherman and Maria stare in horrified fascination at the burnt out shells of cars and other junk strewn along the highway. This is not the New York Sherman knows. The expressway splits, and splits again. Somehow, Sherman winds up on an exit ramp at 138th Street. He becomes completely disoriented. The Mercedes is now traveling through the heart of the Bronx. They pass rundown tenement buildings, a meat warehouse, and a crowd of dark-skinned people Sherman thinks may be Puerto Ricans. At a red light, their way is blocked by a scene of domestic violence that unfolds right in front of their car. To Sherman and Maria's shock, no one seems to notice them. They feel like they must stand out, as the only two white people in sight, driving a Mercedes and wearing expensive clothes. Unable to find his way back to the expressway, Sherman begins to panic although he tries to act brave for Maria's sake. Finally, Maria spots an entrance ramp and insists that Sherman take it, although it's headed in the wrong direction. She just wants to get out of the Bronx as soon as possible. Sherman crosses over several lanes and turns onto the ramp. He spots something in the road on the entrance ramp. He brakes suddenly, and Maria's luggage hits him in the back of the head.

The obstacle turns out to be several trash cans and a large tire. Sherman gets out of the car to remove the obstacle. He can hear the gritty roar of the expressway running right above them. Maria is panicked that another car might come along and hit them. Just as Sherman picks up the tire, Maria calls his name. Two young black men approach Sherman on foot. The look in the eyes of the larger man is the look of a predator, from Sherman's perspective. The man calls out, asking if Sherman needs help, but he has one hand inside his Boston Celtics jacket, and Sherman is sure it's a setup. Sherman tosses the tire at the big guy and turns quickly back to his car. Maria has jumped into the driver's seat; she calls out for Sherman to hurry as she revs the engine. Sherman knocks aside the smaller young man, who stands between him and the car, and then jumps into the vehicle.

The big black man has rebounded from being hit by the thrown tire and is now trying to open the driver's door where Maria sits. Sherman locks the door, and Maria urges the car forward. The Mercedes heads right toward the trash cans, and Maria is forced to stop and back the car up. The large man is holding the tire aloft and advancing towards the Mercedes. Maria cuts the wheel left to avoid the trashcans and guns the engine forward. In the process the rear of the car fishtails. Sherman hears a *thok!* sound from behind the car where the skinny boy had been standing. As the car peals away, Sherman can see that the skinny boy is no longer standing.

On the expressway, Maria fights to keep control of the vehicle with her shaky arms. Fearfully, they follow the exit signs until they locate one that they believe will take them back to Manhattan. Maria hyperventilates as she drives; they are both terrified of taking the wrong exit and winding up back in the Bronx. As they successfully negotiate their way back toward civilization, Sherman begins to feel the joy of victory. He saved Maria from those two hoodlums. The feeling dissipates as he remembers the *thok!* sound which came just before the skinny boy disappeared from view. Hesitantly, Sherman asks Maria if she thinks they hit the kid. She is too upset to discuss the matter, telling him right now the only thing she cares about is getting away. Sherman backs off, allowing her to concentrate on her driving, until they reach the safer environs of FDR Drive in white Manhattan. Now that Maria seems calmer, Sherman suggests they report the incident to the police. Maria tells him to shut up and let her drive.

When they park in front of Maria's townhouse hideaway, Sherman is relieved to discover that there is no tell-tale dent in the rear fender. He carries Maria's luggage up to the apartment since she intends to spend the night there, having told her husband she wouldn't return from Italy until the following day. Inside, she fixes them drinks, and they collapse on the bed. Sherman wants to discuss what they should do next. He suggests they must call the police, since he is pretty sure they hit the boy with the car. Maria responds that she certainly hopes she did hit the boy, and could not care less about whether he's hurt. Sherman tries to make her see the importance of reporting the incident, in case the boy needs medical treatment. Maria explains to him that "two niggers" tried to kill them "in the jungle" and they managed to get away (pg. 96). From her perspective, all that matters is that they got away alive. Sherman deduces from her attitude that she is afraid their affair will come to light if they go to the police. Sherman's

instinct is that it is better to report the robbery attempt and potential injury to the boy even if it will get him in deep trouble with Judy.

Suddenly a horrible thought enters Sherman's mind. What if it was not a robbery attempt at all? As he goes over the details, he realizes that the only thing the large black man had actually said to them was, "*Yo! You need some help?*" (pg. 96) Neither of them had produced a weapon, and neither of them had made any threatening gestures until after Sherman threw the tire, but then Sherman reminds himself that there is no other reasonable explanation for the blockade and the fact that they were on foot on the highway ramp. With a sinking feeling, Sherman realizes that the whole thing is subject to interpretation and that he may have trouble proving what he believes to be the truth. He also realizes in this moment that he does not really know Maria very well at all. Maria is talking to him about how the police and the press would love to get their hands on two rich socialites such as themselves. She tells him the police will never be able to find those two boys, and that Sherman and Maria will get stuck holding the bag. Finally, Maria tells him that since *she* was the one driving, it is her decision whether or not to report the hit and run--if indeed, they did hit the boy, which, she says, they cannot know for sure.

This final statement convinces Sherman. She was the one who was driving, he thinks; therefore, the responsibility and the burden is hers, not his. He feels a great weight slip off his shoulders. The thought that she was driving causes him to feel a burst of elation. Feeling easy now, he compliments her on her dramatic getaway, and fishes for compliments about his own performance. Sherman again feels like a great protector. He saved her. Excitedly, they rehash the details together. Their adrenaline rises along with their spirits, and before they know it, they are making passionate love on the rug.

Later that night, the Master of the Universe is annoyed by the impudence of the attendant at the garage where Sherman keeps the Mercedes. The man is a commoner, to Sherman's way of thinking and has the insolence to call him Sherm. Sherman feels the man has violated the unwritten rules of status conduct by greeting his superior in this fashion. Sherman speaks icily to him, and is further dismayed when the attendant notices the rip in Sherman's coat. Realizing he has something to hide, Sherman quickly turns away to hide his disarrayed state. On the sidewalk, back in his comfortable element of rich, white New York, Sherman dismisses the whole incident as being of no consequence. He is a Master of the Universe, and he protected his girl; that's all that matters.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Sherman's pangs of conscience in this chapter mirror his earlier pangs of conscience with regard to his wife, Judy. The voice of his conscience serves to foreshadow the consequences he will soon face regarding the incident in the Bronx and his marriage. At this point, Sherman's world is still untouched. He believes that he, the Master of the Universe, is untouchable. He convinces himself he has gotten away with it. His base affair with Maria is inextricably linked to the events surrounding the hit and run. His

relationship with Maria symbolizes the moral debauchery that will soon land him in deep trouble. Her utter lack of respect for human life highlights the fact that Sherman has made a wrong turn in life, both literally and figuratively. Maria embodies the shallow ideals of Sherman's overblown ego, but Sherman has yet to realize that she lacks integrity. She is like the devil on his shoulder, whispering in his ear the things he prefers to hear: everything is all right; Sherman is entitled to flout conventional morality; he is entitled to a woman like Maria and everything she represents. Thus, the author sets her up as the temptress, and Sherman is all too eager to be tempted. The events in this chapter are the pivotal events that will drive the course of the rest of the novel. The seeds of Sherman's destruction have been sewn, and the more he tries to convince himself otherwise, the more the reader realizes that he has already sealed his own fate.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Larry Kramer walks down the hallway of the inner offices of the district attorney, still wearing his tennis shoes from the morning commute. On the way to the office that he shares with two other assistant DA's, Larry passes District Attorney Weiss' office. Weiss commands a large, showy office in contrast to Kramer's drably efficient work space. In his office, the other two ADA's tease Kramer about his tennis shoes while Kramer changes into the dress shoes he carries to work in a cheap A&P shopping bag. The other two ADA's make wisecracks about his Jewish heritage, and in return, Kramer makes fun of their Irish and Italian backgrounds. He feels superior to them because he went to a better law school and because he is Jewish. "Very early in life he had picked up the knowledge that the Italians and the Irish were animals. The Italians were pigs, and the Irish were mules or goats. He couldn't remember if his parents had actually used any such terms or not, but they got the idea across very clearly." (pp. 108-109) Nevertheless, Kramer deeply admires the Irish. Animals they may be, but they are highly courageous animals and well suited to running the Homicide Bureau. Kramer is proud to work among such animals in Homicide. They discuss their current caseload, which is a bunch of garbage in their minds. Abe Weiss, the publicity-minded District Attorney, is forever hoping for a Great White Defendant to present to the media, but for the most part they prosecute minorities only.

The phone rings. A detective is calling from Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx where a young kid may or may not have been hit by a Mercedes Benz. The facts are unclear, and the ADA's quickly label the potential case another "piece of shit," a term they use to refer to the vast majority of the dismal cases they prosecute. (pg. 110) Kramer excuses himself and heads to the courtroom where he is scheduled to present a case against a defendant by the name of Herbert 92X. Judge Kovitsky is on the bench. The proceedings for the day consist mostly of pleadings and motions rather than trials. Each year some 7,000 felony-indictments are handed down in the Bronx, yet the courts have the capacity to hear only approximately 650 trials. Therefore, the remaining 6,350 cases must be disposed of in other ways. The cases might be dismissed or pled down to a misdemeanor charge. Judges are graded by how many cases they successfully dispose of through plea agreements. This morning, Judge Kovitsky is not having much luck convincing the felony defendants to accept plea deals. Kramer watches the proceedings with a jaded eye, waiting for his case to be called, and noticing the characteristic Pimp Roll of the felony defendants.

Finally, Judge Kovitsky calls the case of Herbert 92X. He graciously allows Herbert 92X to read aloud briefly from the Koran. 92X is the Muslim name the supposedly religious Herbert has taken. Kramer doesn't believe Herbert is a real Muslim because Herbert drives a truck for a liquor distributor. The case is a murder trial. Herbert's liquor truck was hijacked by Italian mobsters from Brooklyn. To their chagrin, the Italians soon learn that Herbert and his truck are also on the mafia payroll, and that they've just hijacked

their own stolen liquor supply. Attempting to right this wrong, the mobsters drive the truck back to the area where they held up Herbert; they find him in a bar, trying to steady his nerves with a drink. The Italians enter the bar intending to apologize and return Herbert's truck, but before they can do so, Herbert 92X draws an illegal, concealed .38-caliber revolver and shoots. He misses both of the Italian mobsters, but accidentally kills an upstanding citizen named Nestor Cabrillo, who had entered the bar only to make a phone call. This is precisely the type of "piece of shit" case that has led to Kramer's disillusionment.

The judge calls in the jury so the trial can begin. Kramer stares in fascination as the girl with the brown lipstick takes her place in the jury box. Miss Shelly Thomas is a rarity on a Bronx jury. She is from the white, well-to-do neighborhood of Riverside; most Riverside residents use their connections to avoid jury duty. It is unusual, in Kramer's experience, to have a white juror, especially one from such an upscale neighborhood. She is gorgeous, and nearly every man in the courtroom stares at her as she enters. Several of the men, Kramer knows, will use one pretext or another to ask the clerk for her contact information. There are many legitimate reasons why court officials might need to contact a juror, but everyone knows that generally, the men ask for phone numbers only when they want to ask a juror out on a date. Kramer sizes up the competition, intending to get her number for himself. It will have to wait until after the trial, however, if he is to avoid a legal conflict of interest. For the moment, he contents himself with making eyes at her and tearing up Herbert's defense victims. The courtroom is stunned at the zeal with which the young ADA approaches this piece of shit manslaughter case. Kramer doesn't care; he is playing for an audience of one: the girl with the brown lipstick.

At lunchtime, Kramer returns to his shared office to take advantage of the free lunch that everyone involved in an active trial enjoys, courtesy of the taxpayer. As usual, everyone orders in. Kramer admits to himself that the real reason no one leaves Gibraltar for lunch is because he and his white colleagues are afraid to set foot in the Bronx. Gibraltar belongs to the whites, but the streets belong to *them*. While they eat, the phone rings again; it is the same detective who called earlier from the hospital about the potential hit and run. Detective Martin is his name. He speaks to Kramer and gives him the details on the case. The injured boy is Henry Lamb. Lamb had arrived in the emergency room the previous night with a broken wrist. Lamb hadn't mentioned anything at that time about being hit by a car, so the staff had merely patched up his broken wrist and sent him home. Overnight, however, Lamb took a turn for the worse. Lamb's mother brought him back to the emergency room; this time the doctors had realized that Lamb was suffering from a concussion. Lamb is now in a coma, classified as likely to die. The nurse at the hospital told Detective Martin that Lamb had told his mother, prior to slipping into his coma, that he had been hit by a Mercedes Benz. Henry was able to give his mother a partial license plate number. Kramer hangs up the phone, thinking there is very little his office can do about a case in which the victim forgets to mention being hit by a car. He writes it off as a typical piece of shit.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the author provides the reader a behind-the-scenes peek into the racist New York justice system. The portrait Wolfe paints is darkly comedic. The Italians, the Irish, and the Jews all barricade themselves inside their fortress of justice, too afraid to confront the darker-skinned Latinos and African-Americans who live in the Bronx, except from the relative safety of the courtroom. Racism prevails on the streets as the criminal element hurls its anti-Semitic invective at Kramer and Kovitsky, and racism prevails inside the walls of Gibraltar as well. Kramer thinks of the other Assistant District Attorneys as animals, for so he was taught by his parents. The satirical element that Wolfe laces into Kramer's character stems from the basic contradiction that Kramer thinks of himself as a warrior for justice when actually, he is a complete coward, afraid to leave his safe fortress.

From the safety of Gibraltar, Kramer displays his supposed moral superiority. He looks down on everybody, especially the people he prosecutes. Kramer has absolutely no concept of justice. His only interest is in attaining and flaunting his personal superiority. His position as ADA gives him license to think of himself as better than the people he encounters each day, which is the only reason he took the job in the first place. Kramer could not care less about the crime victims for whom he supposedly speaks, and yet he uses his position as victim-advocate to gain the favor of the girl with the brown lipstick. Ironically, she is the only person he admires. He knows absolutely nothing about her upon which to base that admiration other than that she is white and from a wealthy neighborhood.

Into this mix, the Henry Lamb case enters. Kramer's first thoughts upon hearing of the case involving Sherman's hit and run is that it is a typical "piece of shit." The irony of his position is that there is truth to it. There is not much justice to be found by prosecuting the Lamb case, as the facts will eventually reveal. At this point, the reader is so confused by the various racist perspectives in the book, as the author intends, that there is no telling where the truth actually lies.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The next morning at Pierce & Pierce, Sherman finds himself, for the first time ever, unable to concentrate on work. He agonizes over the *thok* sound, trying to convince himself that it was not a person that the car had hit. But Sherman is certain the car had struck the skinny boy. He considers calling the police, but he realizes that after so much time has passed, it would sound like confessing a crime rather than reporting an accident. He reminds himself that he is a Master of the Universe and that he does not cave under pressure. Sherman has already searched the early morning papers and found no mention of the incident. Now he wants nothing more than to scour the headlines in *The City Light*, the afternoon paper, to see whether they've picked up the story.

However, after the tongue-lashing Sherman had given his co-worker the other day for daring to read a newspaper on the job, Sherman can't possibly be seen reading *The City Light*. He gives Felix, the shoeshine man, $5 to go downstairs and buy the paper for him. Felix slips it to him in an inter-office envelope, which Sherman now takes into the men's room. The tell-tale rustling of the newspaper makes Sherman feel guilty, so he crouches on the toilet with his feet pulled up above the floor. If anyone hears him reading the paper, at least they won't know it's him. Sherman feels minimally relieved not to find anything about the incident in *The City Light*. He worries how such a scandal might affect his life. Sherman is financially overextended because of his $1.8-million home loan. If the scandal were to affect the Giscard deal, Sherman would have no way of paying off the loan.

Meanwhile, in Harlem, Edward Fiske III and a young lawyer named Moody fidget uncomfortably in Reverend Bacon's office. Fiske has been sent by the diocese of an Episcopal Church to retrieve the $350,000 which the church had previously entrusted to Reverend Bacon. The money was to fund a day-care center in Harlem, a project proposed by Bacon, but the church has recently learned that the day-care center license was refused over 2 months ago because of the fact that Bacon has listed several known felons on the day-care center's board of directors. The licensing authority for day-care centers prohibits known felons from serving on a board and therefore turned down the application. From where Fiske and his church members sit, it appears that Bacon has absconded with $350,000. Fiske, however, is very careful not to say this. Reverend Bacon is a well-respected man in Harlem, and Fiske would rather consider the whole thing an honest misunderstanding. Bacon, for his part, seems completely uninterested in what Fiske and his attorney have to say. When Bacon finally does respond, it is only to accuse Fiske of racism. The day-care center is supposed to represent the people of Harlem, says Bacon, but if felons can't be on the board, then Harlem will not be duly represented.

Their conversation is continually interrupted by the ringing telephone. Each time Bacon takes the call and has a lengthy conversation. Bacon's phone conversations, primarily with media figures, center on the racism directed at blacks and the inevitable race war that is brewing in New York. When Fiske finally manages to regain Bacon's attention, Bacon gives him a long speech about "the *steam*." (pg. 157) Bacon explains to Fiske, as if Fiske were a small child, that the $350,000 was never about a day-care center; it was about steam control. Bacon discusses the righteous anger felt by the oppressed minorities in Harlem and how this anger represents steam. By investing $350,000 in the people of Harlem, Fiske and his church are helping to release some steam pressure. When the final battle goes down, says Bacon, Fiske and his church will be glad they invested. Bacon refers to Urban Guaranty Investments, his securities firm, doing business with Pierce & Pierce. Fiske and his attorney, Moody, exchange alarmed glances. Has Bacon funneled their day care funds into his own investment firm? Bacon tells them not to worry about Urban Guaranty Investments.

Just then, Bacon's phone rings again. It is Annie Lamb, Henry Lamb's mother. She informs Bacon that her son is in critical condition in the ICU after being mowed down by a Mercedes Benz. Annie is afraid to go to the police because she has an outstanding arrest warrant for parking tickets. Bacon promises Annie he'll take care of her warrant and obtain justice for Henry. After he hangs up the phone, Bacon assures Fiske that the $350,000 has been a terrific investment, tells him not to worry about the money anymore, and indicates that the interview is over. Bacon has to deal with the Lamb emergency. In the car on their way back to white New York, Fiske and Moody discuss Bacon's position. Fiske can't help but agree with Bacon that the $350,000 had been an investment in controlling the angry soul of Harlem.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Reverend Bacon's character is a caricature of a black activist. Even as Bacon is stealing money from the Episcopal Church, he makes a convincing case that the church owes that money to Harlem and never had a right to say how the funds should be invested in the first place. Bacon gives Fiske a lot of double-talk and gibberish designed to convince Fiske that there are larger moral issues at stake than the $350,000. Bacon's position is convincing because Fiske recognizes how disadvantaged the people of Harlem are financially, and he also recognizes that Bacon has a better understanding of the people of Harlem than he does. It is also clear, however, that Bacon is no more interested in the people of Harlem than Kramer is interested in the people of the Bronx. Bacon is the flip side to the racism coin. He uses his ethnicity as a mask behind which he robs his own people blind, for he is not only swindling the Episcopal Church, he is also stealing from the very people he pretends to support. Unfortunately for Sherman, Bacon sees the potential for personal gain in the Henry Lamb story. In this chapter, Bacon decides to trumpet Lamb's cause for his own gain. It becomes increasingly clear to the reader that justice cannot prevail in the Lamb case.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Peter Fallow awakens in his Manhattan dive to the sound of the telephone ringing. He has a hangover so immense he can barely lift his head from the pillow. Still, thinking it might be *The City Light* calling, Fallow feels compelled to answer. Mercifully, it is his co-worker Tony on the line, not his boss, whom Fallow refers to privately as the Dead Mouse. As memories of last night's debauchery invade his brain, he attempts to sound coherent for Tony's sake. It is after 1 p.m., and Tony warns him he better put in an appearance at *The City Light* right away. The Dead Mouse has been looking for him, and Tony, covering for Fallow, told the boss that Fallow was at the Surrogate's Court pursuing the Lacey Putney story. Tony begs Fallow to remember these details in case the Dead Mouse questions him. Fallow thanks Tony and hangs up the phone, overwhelmed with embarrassing snippets of memory from the previous evening. As always, Fallow had gone to Leicester's, where many of his fellow Brits hang out. The English men and women are in the habit of running up a huge tab every night, and then snaring a Yank at the last minute to foot the bill. Fallow halfheartedly tries to recall the previous night, but he's pretty sure he's done something embarrassing again.

Staggering from the pain of his hangover, Fallow enters the offices of *The City Light*, a British-style tabloid run by the Dead Mouse. As usual, Fallow swears off drinking forever. At his desk he picks up the phone just to look busy. A co-worker to whom he owes money approaches, and Fallow begins a fake dialogue with the dial tone. When the co-worker walks away, Fallow ducks his head into the raincoat hanging in his cubicle and has a nip of vodka. When his head emerges from the raincoat, he sees the Dead Mouse staring right at him. Fallow remembers the days when the Dead Mouse, Sir Gerald Steiner, a British financier, had used to invite Fallow over to his palatial estate along with the other higher-ups on *The City Light* staff. Fallow has done little to earn his salary since the story that got him the job in the first place, a piece into which he stumbled only because Fallow was sleeping with one of the main players. Now, Steiner crosses the room to confront Fallow. Fallow pretends he is working on a hot story to appease the boss temporarily.

Back in the Bronx courtroom, Herbert 92X's defense attorney attempts to convince the jury that Herbert is a family man, not a criminal. When the defense has completed its summation, court is recessed to allow the employees of Gibraltar to form their daily wagon train. Each day, all the white employees go out en masse to move their cars closer to the building before darkness falls. None of them dare walk even a few blocks to their cars after dark. Kramer cannot afford a car and has to take the subway each evening. For this reason he wears the Nikes and carries his A&P shopping bag. Kramer wishes to blend in with the impoverished crowd on the subway to avoid being targeted by thieves or worse.

Meanwhile, at Pierce & Pierce, Sherman is called into his supervisor's office for an official warning. Sherman's inattention at work has cost one of his prize clients, Oscar Suder, $60,000. Sherman is doubly chagrined because he is counting on Suder to participate in his Giscard scheme.

In the Bronx, court is back in session, and it is Kramer's turn to summarize his case. With the eyes of the girl in the brown lipstick upon him, Kramer pulls out all the stops to convince the courtroom that the man Herbert 92X shot to death was a family man as well, an innocent bystander caught up in Herbert's criminal lifestyle. He detects admiration in the face of Miss Shelly Thomas.

After work, Peter Fallow trudges home on foot. He has sworn off liquor, but decides to walk past Leicester's, just to get a look inside. At the door, he is drawn in by the warmth of his fellow Brits. He joins their table and orders his first drink of the night. As the hours pass and the bills climb higher, the Brits begin to look around for a Yank to pay the bill. Fallow has only $75 to last him another week until payday, and has no intention of spending it here. Finally, the group spots Ed Fiske. They flatter him into joining the table by feigning interest in his stories about Harlem. He tells them of today's meeting with Reverend Bacon. The Brits hang on his every word for a time and then gradually slip away from the table to leave Fiske with the bill. On the sidewalk, Fallow stops at a payphone, intent on finding another American to invite to dinner. With any luck, Fallow will shortly be back inside Leicester's, eating dinner this time, with an American guest in tow to foot the bill.

Chapter 7 Analysis

With the entry of Peter Fallow into the story, Sherman's life is about to take a turn for the worse. Although Sherman is tormented daily by his conscience, he is beginning to feel safe because the media has not tumbled to (?) his story. Unbeknownst to him, Fallow will shortly become the man who breaks the story in *The City Light*. This will make Fallow the main representative of the media in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. The author's choice to introduce Fallow as a desperate, down-and-out alcoholic with no work ethic and very little reporting ability shows the author's contempt for the media in general. The fight for justice in the Henry Lamb case will be championed by ADA Kramer, the Reverend Bacon, and the press, as represented by Peter Fallow. Given the detailed background stories that the author presents for each of these three characters, the reader must realize that none of these three individuals is at all interested in justice. Each has his own personal agenda, revealed to the reader by the author and ultimately, the Lamb case is pursued only because it serves as a vehicle for Kramer, Bacon, and Lamb to pursue these personal agendas. What we know of these men is that their agendas are driven by their massive egos, as well as their greed. Reverend Bacon's metaphor about "the steam" aptly foreshadows the combustion that must surely result from the combination of these three desperate, greedy characters.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The Irish detective, Martin, drives while his Jewish partner, Detective Goldberg, occupies the passenger seat. Kramer sits in the back as they head for Harlem, still high from his victory in the Herbert 92X case. Kramer explains the politics of the Henry Lamb situation to the two detectives, careful to use appropriately crude words to impress them. Reverend Bacon has put political pressure on District Attorney Weiss to quash Annie Lamb's arrest warrant in exchange for whatever information she can offer about her son's case. Weiss is up for re-election soon and feels it is in his best interests to support Bacon's people on this issue. In Harlem, Bacon receives the three men in his office. Bacon tells them what a model citizen young Henry Lamb had been, and how he will probably never wake up from his coma. Bacon warns them not to mention that fact to Annie Lamb, who will be joining them momentarily. Goldberg and Martin move to look out the window to avoid having to stand and show respect when Annie Lamb enters the room. Kramer, concerned with making a good impression on the two tough detectives, minimizes the respect he shows to Annie. Bacon pressures Kramer into forgiving the parking tickets, as well as the warrant, and then Annie tells her story.

Prior to slipping into his coma, Henry told his mother that he'd been hit by a Mercedes Benz on Bruckner Boulevard. Ms. Lamb presumes that Henry had been on his way to the Texas Fried Chicken restaurant when it happened. Henry said the plate number of the vehicle started with an R, and the second letter was E, F, P, or B. Kramer attempts to explain the potential problems with the case, starting with the fact that Henry didn't bother to mention being hit by a car the first time he went to the emergency room. Additionally, there are no witnesses, and short of the driver's coming forward, there is little Kramer can do with such vague evidence. Bacon accuses the ADA of loafing on the job because of the color of Henry's skin. Kramer protests that there are too many cars fitting the vague description, and not enough manpower to check them all out, assuming the car in question is even registered in New York. Bacon assures Kramer that his office has not heard the end of this. On the drive back, Detective Goldberg laments the fact that in Harlem, it is considered a high accomplishment simply not to have a criminal record, as Henry Lamb does not. Martin remembers Annie Lamb's husband, who was killed several years ago in a robbery attempt. They all agree that the Lambs are a decent family.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Tom Wolfe addresses the social politics of cynicism in this sarcasm-laden chapter through the use of Kramer's character. Kramer's desire to be liked and accepted by "the guys" prevents him from taking Annie Lamb seriously because he perceives that the jaded police detectives do not. Ironically, his assumption turns out to be wrong, as both Detective Martin and Goldberg remember her as the sympathetic widow from one of

their previous cases. The detectives are willing to put in the effort to pursue the Lamb case; thus Kramer's assumption that the case is too much trouble proves spurious. Kramer's character makes all his decisions based on how others may perceive him, which ironically often causes others to perceive him negatively. Kramer thinks of himself as a warrior for justice and resents the fact that others do not share this false, idealized view of him.

Presenting this false front is Kramer's main aim throughout the novel and is the sole genesis of his hard work on the Herbert 92X case. His response to Herbert's case gives the reader a clear indication of how he will eventually respond to the Lamb case. Kramer perceives both cases as *pieces of shit* until he finds he is playing for a viewing audience. Kramer began working hard to prosecute Herbert 92X only because he hoped to impress the beautiful juror, Miss Shelly Thomas. Kramer's desire to impress the Bronx detectives causes him to initially reject the Henry Lamb case, but once he belatedly realizes that the detectives do care about Henry Lamb and his family, the reader can be assured that Kramer will step up his efforts to prosecute the Lamb case.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Awakened again by the ringing telephone, Peter Fallow's hangover is even worse this morning. He recalls pieces of his evening at Leicester's. Caroline Heftshank had been there, as usual, and this time had brought her artist friend, Filippo Chirazzi. Fallow had said something to offend Chirazzi, and a fight had ensued right in the middle of Leicester's. Fallow puts his memories aside and picks up the ringing telephone. An American defense attorney named Al Vogel is on the line, offering Fallow an exclusive story and a free lunch. Despite his hangover, Fallow can't turn down a free meal. He meets Vogel at the Regent's Park restaurant and hears the story of Henry and Annie Lamb.

Vogel mentions Bacon's involvement, and paints it as a human-interest story; he includes background details about Annie's late husband, an honest workingman who was killed tragically some years before on the streets of Harlem. Vogel explains how the hospital treated Henry only for a broken wrist and sent him away, suggesting that if Henry had been white, the doctors would have checked him out more thoroughly. Vogel laments the fact that the police don't want to bother checking out the license plate number of the car because it's too much work. Fallow is skeptical, but when he reaches into his pocket for a notepad, he finds only a final warning notice from the power company. Fallow calls his editor, who agrees he should pursue the story. For the first time in a long time, Fallow feels the satisfaction of a man who actually earns his pay.

Back in the Bronx, Kramer is working on call. He reports to the precinct to interview some witnesses but is interrupted by a page from DA Weiss's press secretary, Milt Lubell. Lubell has just received a call from Peter Fallow at *The City Light*, and wants Kramer's take on the Lamb case. Bacon, via Fallow, is accusing Kramer of dragging his feet on the case. Kramer defends himself and explains that there are some 2,500 Mercedes-Benzes registered in New York with license plates beginning with Rs. Narrowing this down with the possible second letters of E, F, P, B or R, they are left with at least 500. Kramer advises Lubell to state that the investigation is continuing but privately warns Lubell that unless a witness comes forth, their chances of finding the driver are miniscule. He hangs up with Lubell and turns to interview the three witnesses, who are all in chains, although the criminal suspect is not chained. The cops explain that the suspect is not going anywhere, but if the witnesses weren't in chains they would've disappeared long before Kramer arrived.

At *The City Light*, Fallow pursues his story feverishly. He tracks down one of Henry Lamb's high school teachers and asks him to say nice things about Henry. The teacher indicates that given the quality of the inner city schools, the closest thing they have to an honor student is someone who shows up most days and makes an effort to pay attention. Based on those qualifications, Fallow intends to write that Lamb is an honor student.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The wheels of "justice" have begun to turn in this chapter. The Reverend Bacon provides the impetus for the prosecution by involving the media. Peter Fallow is offered a lifeline by Bacon's defense attorney, Al Vogel, in the form of the Lamb case. It is made clear in this chapter that neither Al Vogel nor Peter Fallow is interested in divulging the actual facts of the situation. They simply wish to present a slanted version of events. Vogel's motivation is obvious since he is Bacon's mouthpiece. Fallow's motivation is made equally clear by his down-and-out condition. Fallow needs a really good story to redeem him, and he does not mind coloring the facts of the Lamb case to increase reader interest. Bacon and Fallow intend to use the power of the press to shame the District Attorney's office into prosecuting the Lamb case.

The wheels of justice are, unfortunately, so rusted with corruption that Bacon must apply considerable pressure to grease the wheels. Thus, Kramer's initial lukewarm response to Annie Lamb is used against him. Rather than backing off his initial response, however, Kramer reacts to the pressure in this chapter by digging in his heels and attempting to justify his position of taking no action. It is precisely this moral lassitude that confers such power on Bacon. The DA's refusal to lift a finger to prosecute a case that Kramer has pre-judged because of his own prejudices lends credence to Bacon's accusations. Were it not for Bacon's own prejudice and corruption, he might serve as a true and powerful advocate for the citizens of Harlem. Unfortunately for the people of Tom Wolfe's New York, it would appear that no one actually has their best interests at heart.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

On Long Island, Sherman McCoy sits with his wife and parents at a table in the fashionable Beach Club. Sherman has been coming to the club since he was a boy, and had often played on the private stretch of beach where young Campbell now plays with her friends. At another table, Sherman notices Pollard Browning, president of his apartment's co-op board, and also president of the Beach Club. Sherman listens idly as his father regales Judy about the perfect martini. Sherman is pleased that he and Judy have gotten out of the house, where the atmosphere is still poisoned by his foolish telephone blunder. Sherman hopes that all of the recent ugly business will fade away since he has not seen anything about the car accident in the papers. Campbell runs up from the beach with a question for Sherman. Her friend's dad makes books, says Campbell, and she wants to know what Sherman does. Sherman struggles to explain the concept of bond trading to his daughter.

Venomously, Judy explains trading as the process of handing out slices of cake. Sherman didn't make the cake, explains Judy, but every time he hands out a slice, little golden crumbs break off, and Sherman gets to keep them. After a while, Sherman has enough crumbs to make a giant cake of his own. Sherman responds to this crumby analogy by mocking Judy's interior design business. She tells him at least she creates something tangible in the world. Campbell starts crying and Sherman's father excuses himself to the bar.

In SoHo, Larry Kramer and his wife meet up with some friends at the Haiphong Harbor restaurant. Rather than enjoying this rare outing with his wife, Kramer finds himself judging and envying his friend Greg, who is a writer for *The Village Voice*, and has his pulse on the art scene. To compensate for his envy, Kramer begins making eyes at Greg's good-looking girlfriend and talking about his job. "He has their attention now. He was playing his one strong suit, Macho Insider from the Bronx." (pg. 245) But Kramer goes too far; he allows his cynicism and revulsion for the criminal element to show. His wife and friends all come to Herbert 92X's defense as Kramer tells his story, ignoring Kramer's accomplishment in putting Herbert 92X away. His liberal friends could not possibly understand the things Kramer has seen over the past 6 years in his job, and why he believes people like Herbert 92X all deserve to be locked away. There's one person who understands, thinks Kramer, his mind on the girl with the brown lipstick.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The fashionable Beach Club presented in this chapter is more than a setting. It represents the sheltered lifestyle into which Sherman was born and which he has never managed or even desired to escape. His fond recollection of his daring childhood venture beyond the velvet ropes to the public beach is the author's wickedly humorous

way of conveying Sherman's utterly protected lifestyle. It also shows the reader the root of Sherman's fears, the fears that bubbled to the surface that fateful night in the Bronx. Sherman has been raised to believe that life beyond the velvet ropes is dangerous. He has been taught that the vast majority of people who are not from his social class are dangerous thugs and criminals.

This fear played a major role in Sherman's overreaction to the events in the Bronx. Had he and Maria not panicked to find themselves among the thieving, low-class hordes, they might have calmly driven their way out of the situation. Sherman wound up on the on-ramp in the first place only because he was desperately seeking an exit from the unprotected streets of the Bronx. After spending all of his years in a sheltered environment, to find himself suddenly in the least-sheltered place imaginable was a rude awakening for Sherman. Here in Chapter 10, Sherman sits safe in his Beach Club, hoping the worst is behind him. The negativity that tinges this scene communicates to the reader that Sherman has not found safety at all; he is only in the eye of the storm. Try as he might to avoid the harsh realities of life by hiding behind his money, his status, and his velvet ropes, Sherman is on a collision course with the people of the mean streets.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Monday morning, Sherman arrives at Pierce & Pierce to find Arguello celebrating an overnight triumph in the Tokyo stock market. Arguello is the man whom Sherman had previously lambasted for reading the sports page. Sherman is pleased to find him producing. Today, Sherman feels relaxed and in control, having seen nothing in the tabloids about the dreadful incident. He allows himself the simple pleasure of having his shoes shined and feeling superior to the shoeshine man, Felix. Sherman talks to Bernard Levy via telephone as Felix works away; Levy represents the company that Sherman is counting on to invest $300 million in his Giscard scheme. Felix reads *The City Light* as he works. When he folds over the page, Sherman recoils at the sight of the headline: "HONOR STUDENT'S MOM: COPS SIT ON HIT 'N' RUN". (pg. 251) Even as Bernard Levy continues to talk in his ear, Sherman reads the long article in its entirety, growing more and more upset as the details are revealed. When Bernard hesitates to commit the funds, instead of calmly addressing the situation, Sherman grows desperate. Thinking he'll lose the Giscard deal altogether if he doesn't close it before his involvement in the Bronx scandal becomes public, Sherman yells at Bernard that he has to have the money right now.

Back in the Bronx, Kramer anticipates his first date with Miss Shelly Thomas. Kramer knows he should wait until Herbert 92X's sentence has been formally handed down before dating her, but he fears that the judicial high she's received from watching his tough brand of justice may evaporate if he doesn't move fast. His reverie is interrupted by a call from Bernie Fitzgibbon, one of the higher ups from the DA's office. Bernie tells him about *The City Light* article. The article accuses Kramer of dragging his feet, and telling Annie Lamb that the information she gave him was useless. Bernie says that DA Weiss is very upset by the negative press. Bernie arranges to free Kramer from his court obligations and summons Kramer back to the office to work on the Lamb case.

Back at *The City Light*, Fallow is a star. He tells humorous stories about the Bronx tenement where Mrs. Lamb lives, freely embroidering the facts for maximum entertainment value. His boss, Steiner, eats up every word. Steiner has a romantic concept of the art of yellow journalism. He doesn't think twice about running outrageous stories and admires the men who are willing to do anything it takes to get the story, including invasion of privacy and exceeding the bounds of good taste. A phone call from Al Vogel interrupts Fallow's story. While Steiner looks on, Fallow pretends he is talking to an informant in the DMV's office. Actually, Al Vogel is feeding him information from Vogel's own informant in the DMV, and Fallow is merely taking the credit for Al's detective work. The DMV informant has voluntarily searched the database and narrowed down the list of possible Mercedes-Benzes to 124. Al promises Fallow the exclusive on the DMV angle. He wants Fallow to write it up to pressure the cops into allocating the manpower to investigate the 124 cars.

That night at dinner, Kramer can hardly believe his good luck. He sits across the table from Miss Shelly Thomas, carefully wooing her with stories of his courtroom triumphs. Kramer's plan is to play upon the idealism of his job, so that she will become enamored of her strong warrior for justice. She thrills to his every word, and Kramer finds her a much more rapt audience than his wife. Even so, he is slightly disappointed to find out she is Greek, and he worries about how he's going to pay the dinner bill. Kramer hesitates to take the next step; he is afraid of making a wrong move. By the time the waitress comes to take their order, he has advanced to the point of calling Shelly by her first name.

In their love nest, Sherman and Maria confer about *The City Light* article. Sherman again suggests they go to the police, but Maria tells him he should trust her instinct to stay silent. Given her tough upbringing versus his sheltered upbringing, Maria feels she is in a better position to make the decision. Just then, a large man, a Hasidic Jew, pounds on the door. He is the landlord, and demands to know if Maria is Germaine Boll. Sherman tries to intervene, and asks him to leave, but the man insists that only Germaine Boll has a right to be here. Germaine rents the apartment at a rent-controlled $331 a month, he says, and demands to know how much Maria pays Germaine. He hopes to catch Germaine subleasing to Maria so he can kick Germaine out and rent the apartment at the going rate. The man insists on waiting until Germaine arrives. He sits down on a chair and the chair breaks. This embarrassment drives him from the apartment. After he leaves, Sherman is concerned that Maria and Germaine are in trouble with the landlord, but Maria just laughs. Sherman realizes that she is a fighter; she *enjoys* the fight. She is indeed more suited to life in the asphalt jungle than he. Sherman prefers his insular, safe little world. She insists they make love, but Sherman is too afraid to enjoy it much.

Chapter 11 Analysis

With the publication of *The City Light* article, Sherman's cozy world is finally touched by the harsher reality of the outside world. Here at last, the author arrives at the heart of his racism theme. Almost every character in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* sees life in terms of a race war. Tom Wolfe laid the groundwork for this in earlier chapters with Reverend Bacon's recurring references to "the steam" and to the impending racial war, in which he expects all the people of Harlem to rise up against their oppressors. Conversely, people like Kramer and Sherman feel threatened by the financially impoverished underclasses. Kramer sees himself as a warrior for justice. His references to fighting *mano a mano* for justice betray his need to impose his own brand of White Justice on the oppressed minorities. Interestingly, Gerald Steiner, owner of *The City Light*, views his brand of yellow journalism in similar terms, as if it were a street fight. It is as if these privileged, upper-class New Yorkers need to prove their manhood by fighting against *the enemy*. The impoverished ethnic minorities of New York are thus forced into the role of the enemy.

For Kramer to maintain his Us-vs.-Them mentality, he requires the existence of *them*. Who they are is never made clear, not even in Kramer's own mind. Virtually any black,

Latino, or other typically oppressed minority can fill that role for Kramer. Reverend Bacon's stance is similar to Kramer's. He, too, needs a *them* to fight. Since Bacon represents the poor, black people of Harlem, Bacon needs a rich, white person to fill the role of enemy. Sherman McCoy fits that role perfectly; he is what Kramer refers to as the Great White Defendant. Putting someone like Sherman in the cross hairs of Bronx Justice allows men like Kramer to convince themselves that their fight for justice is color-blind, when in fact it is anything but.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The next morning, Sherman again has trouble concentrating on work. He dials Bernard Levy's number half-heartedly, his mind still focused on *The City Light* story. Levy, having sensed Sherman's desperation, now offers to buy the Giscard bonds for 6 million dollars less than Sherman paid for them. Sherman hangs up and sends Felix downstairs to buy *The City Light* again. In the bathroom, Sherman reads Fallow's latest article, terrified to learn they've narrowed the list of suspect vehicles down to 124. Sherman calls his attorney Freddy Button's office and makes an immediate appointment. He lies to the receptionist about where he's going. On the way, he wonders whether Freddy's a good attorney. His father, the Lion of Dunning Sponget, had turned Sherman over to Freddy when Sherman turned 21. Freddy has handled Sherman's wills and home-buying contracts, but never anything of a serious nature. Sherman is terrified that his father will hear about this visit to Freddy.

When he arrives, Freddy chats pleasantly with him about Judy and Campbell. Sherman cuts short the pleasantries and hands Freddy *The City Light* article. Sherman confesses all to Freddy, who attempts to reassure Sherman. Based on the facts Sherman's given him, Freddy believes his liability extends no further than leaving the scene of an accident and failing to report it. However, he is concerned that the newspaper story differs so markedly from Sherman's version. Freddy raises the ugly possibility that Maria might not corroborate Sherman's story, which Sherman refuses to believe. Freddy refers Sherman to a criminal law firm called Dershkin, Bellavita, Fishbein & Schlossel, to see an Irish attorney named Tommy Killian. Sherman thinks the ethnic makeup of the firm sounds sleazy and is hesitant to go there. Freddy convinces him that he'll do better with a criminal lawyer because the criminal justice system works best for those with insider connections like Killian has. By the time Sherman returns to his office, the receptionist has discovered he lied about where he was going. He missed some important transactions while he was out.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The introduction of the ethnic law firm, Dershkin, Bellavita, Fishbein & Schlossel, represents Sherman's entry into the very world he's always avoided. Sherman thinks the firm sounds sleazy because its ethnic name smacks of the common touch. The McCoy family has always insisted their attorneys, doctors, and other representatives be Protestants. However, this is not a religious choice, but a racist one. By Protestant, Sherman actually means other white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) such as himself. At this point, Sherman is only beginning to realize that his protective cocoon won't hold him forever. He still thinks he is in a position to turn his nose up at an ethnic law firm and Irish criminal lawyer. He hasn't decided yet to call Tommy Killian, because

that phone call represents Sherman's entry into this lower-class world or so he perceives it.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Kramer arrives in the Bronx with detectives Martin and Goldberg to witness a demonstration against White Justice scheduled for that evening by Bacon's people. DA Weiss has insisted they attend in the hopes of finding witnesses to the Lamb incident, since it is Henry's case the demonstrators are pleading tonight with their public demonstration. Bacon's people consist of a handful of half-hearted African-American protesters, including the tall, black man with the large gold earring. About 20 other white people show up from the gay and lesbian faction to support their fellow protesters.

Peter Fallow, hung over again, wonders where all the other protesters are. He had expected a large crowd of people up in arms about the Lamb case. There are fewer than 30 people, and most of them have nothing to do with Henry Lamb or Reverend Bacon. A man from the *Daily News* arrives, as do the television cameras of Channel 1. The Channel 1 journalist informs Fallow that Vogel has offered Channel 1 the television exclusive to bring out a media presence for the demonstration. Once the cameras show up, curious on-lookers from the nearby tenement buildings come outside to mug for the cameras. Channel 1 waits until Reverend Bacon and Annie Lamb arrive before filming. The camera closes up on the small group of demonstrators, angling the shot to appear as if all the curious on-lookers are part of the demonstration.

Sherman surprises Judy by coming home at 6 o'clock, in time for dinner. Sherman sits in the room with her and watches television to keep up appearances for Campbell. He thinks that if Judy would just show him one ounce of warmth he would tell her everything. Campbell runs in and hugs him, insisting he come into the kitchen to see the rabbit she's just made with clay. Sherman is truly impressed by her skill in rendering the rabbit and insists they show it to Judy together although Judy has already seen it. In the library, Judy watches the Henry Lamb demonstration on television. Sherman listens to Reverend Bacon and Annie Lamb talk about the hit and run. Placards reading "Weiss Justice is White Justice" grace the screen (pg. 316). The reporter announces they're looking for a Mercedes with license plates beginning with RE, RF, RB, or RP. Campbell tugs on her daddy's hand, insisting they go into the kitchen to bake the rabbit. Judy comments that their Mercedes begins with an RF. Sherman struggles with the thought of telling her everything. In the end, he goes off to the kitchen with Campbell.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Reverend Bacon's manipulation of the facts in the Henry Lamb case has now spurred the media to manipulate the facts further to aggrandize their story. The Henry Lamb case is beginning to take on a life of its own. By contrast, Sherman's life is dying. He enjoys this last, innocent night in the company of his family, unwilling, even at this late date, to pull himself voluntarily out of his protective cocoon by warning his wife of the

impending events. Sherman's insularity and denial are portrayed in sharp relief against the growing socio-political protest evolving from the Lamb case. Sherman still hopes to keep the lid on the pressure cooker, but meanwhile, in Harlem, Reverend Bacon is allowing the steam to escape in full view of the TV cameras.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Sherman sleeps poorly that night. In the morning, he gets up early and buys several newspapers to read during the cab ride to work. The editorials in the morning paper turn the story into a crusade for justice for the less affluent people in the inner city. He calls Freddy Button, who strongly urges him to call Tommy Killian. Sherman doesn't call Killian. At 5 o'clock, he leaves work. He wonders whether the receptionist is judging him for shirking his duties; no one leaves Pierce & Pierce in the early evening to spend time with the wife and kids. He arrives home at 5:30 and is greeted only by the servants; Judy and Campbell are at a birthday party. The maid wakes him up half--an-hour later to inform him that there are two policemen downstairs to see him. Panicked, Sherman tells her to ask them to wait.

Unable to reach Freddy Button, Sherman agonizes over what to wear to greet the cops. He puts his work suit back on and heads downstairs. He greets Detectives Martin and Goldberg in the library. The interview proceeds routinely until Sherman is asked to show the detectives his Mercedes. He is terrified they'll find some tell-tale trace that he missed on the back bumper, or worse, that they'll speak to the garage attendant who had seen him come home in a disheveled state the night of the accident. Sherman mumbles nonsensical gibberish to the detectives, who instantly become suspicious. Detective Martin presses his advantage; he sits imperiously on top of Sherman's desk and casually reads him his rights. He point blank asks Sherman if there's anything he'd like to confess. Sherman denies that there is, but insists on speaking to a lawyer before they look at the car or talk any more. The detectives leave at his request.

He wants to call Maria, but Judy and Campbell return just then. Sherman mentions some policemen stopped by to follow up on the news story about the Mercedes with the RF license plate. He tells Judy he has to run out to Freddy Button's, but Judy reminds him that tonight is the big party at the Bavardages. This party is the high-society event of the season, and very important to Judy. Sherman relents, but he slips out for just a moment first. At the pay phone, he dials Maria's number at the hideaway. She is not there, and neither is she at the Fifth-Avenue home she shares with her husband, Arthur. Sherman waits a few minutes before returning home, so it will seem he really did go to Freddy Button's.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Sherman's attempt to hide from his predicament has failed. The Park Avenue apartment that has always been his inviolable refuge cannot keep him safe from the police. Nonetheless, Sherman persists in his belief that he can keep the world at bay and that his money will protect him from the consequences of his actions. It has been Sherman's experience that money can indeed protect him from such consequences. What

Sherman, in his vanity, has forgotten, however, is that fortunes can be lost as quickly as they can be won. He is beginning to learn that his money does not make him a better person; it only makes others treat him as if he were better. If he loses his fortune, Sherman will be no better than the people he's looked down on all his life. Sherman's foolhardy delay in calling Tommy Killian signifies his unwillingness to accept this new reality. The author does a tremendous job of babying Sherman along in this realization. It would not be realistic for Sherman to realize the errors of his ways instantly. Instead, the author presents his character growth as both gradual and, at this point at least, involuntary.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The McCoys arrive at the Bavardages in a rented sedan. Sherman laments the cost of the car, but it is necessary because it would be social death for the fashionable McCoys to be seen standing outside the Bavardages after the party trying to hail a cab for the six-block ride home. In Judy's fashionable, *tout le monde* cocktail dress, she could never make the walk. They arrive just behind Baron Hochswald, the German financier. Sherman feels that the presence of this financial giant brings his impending failure into sharp relief. Inside the Bavardage's luxurious apartment, he is momentarily cheered by the friendly greeting of Inez Bavardage, who shares her warm memories of Sherman's father. Inez is stylishly emaciated, and falls into the category of women Sherman refers to as *Social X-rays*. Inez leaves Sherman with a cluster of fashionable people and takes Judy off to meet a different group. Everyone ignores Sherman's attempts at conversation, and he resents being snubbed, even by these people whom he cannot stand. He has always hated Judy's superficial, snobby friends.

To Sherman's dismay, he spots Maria Ruskin in the crowd. Intent on keeping Judy away from his mistress, Sherman joins Judy, who stands listening to one of Arthur Ruskin's stories. Horrified, Sherman pulls her away from the crowd. Judy is equally horrified, because to be reduced to speaking to one's spouse at one of these affairs is to admit social incompetence; she is further humiliated when Inez swoops down to break up their *tete-a-tete*. As dinner commences, Sherman is seated next to Maria. With a party grin on his face, he attempts to discuss the latest developments in the hit-and-run case. Maria refuses to discuss it but tells Sherman to call her the following night. Dinner is marred by a somber speech given by Lord Buffing. Sherman is one of the few guests who knows that Lord Buffing is dying of AIDS. When Buffing refers to Edgar Allan Poe's story, *The Masque of the Red Death*, he offends nearly all the guests who do not enjoy having their lifestyle compared to a denial of death. Sherman, however, understands.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The irony of Sherman's hatred for Judy's superficial friends is not lost on the reader. Sherman has proven himself to be utterly superficial, and it is probably his own self-disgust that he projects on Judy and her friends. Sherman thinks of himself as a man of substance and refuses to see such superficiality in himself. His resentful reaction to the effete snobbery of the Bavardage party guests, however, betrays his own conscience; somewhere deep inside, Sherman knows what a shallow man he's become. Thus, his reaction to the Bavardage party betrays his own self-loathing.

Lord Buffing's sentimental toast makes him a laughing stock at the party, but Sherman can see that Buffing is merely displaying some humanity. Buffing's allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's story speaks to Sherman and helps Sherman see the level of denial at

which he's been living. At the beginning of this chapter, there is nothing more important to Sherman than making the right impression by showing up in a hired car. By the end of the party, however, Sherman is starting to realize that there are more important things in life. This party represents Sherman's inner struggle; he begins to comprehend his need to replace the frivolity of his life with something worthwhile.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Kramer and the two detectives, Martin and Goldberg, sit in Bernie Fitzgibbon's office at the District Attorney's Office. As the Homicide chief, Bernie has gathered them to confront the Henry Lamb case. Martin and Goldberg relate their suspicious interview with Sherman McCoy. Martin explains how he had been sure he was wasting his time until the moment when he asked to see the Mercedes. Had McCoy said his wife had the car or it was in the shop or any plausible excuse, Martin would have accepted it. However, McCoy is not a good liar; the look on McCoy's face had convinced Martin of his involvement. Following the interview, the detectives had located McCoy's Mercedes in the nearest garage. The car didn't have a scratch on it, but the garage attendant had told them that Sherman had indeed taken the Mercedes out on the night in question, and had returned to the garage in a disheveled state. Fitzgibbon tells them it's not enough to move forward with at this time.

Meanwhile, Sherman visits the offices of Dershkin, Bellavita, Fishbein, & Schlossel to see Tommy Killian. He eyes the other people in the waiting room, feeling superior to the criminal element. Sherman relates the details to Tommy and says he wishes to come forward to the police. Killian stares at him in astonishment. He assures Sherman that the DA will eat him for breakfast if he is foolish enough to come forward. Killian explains the political realities of the case, as well as the potential charges faced by Sherman. However, Killian doesn't believe the DA has enough evidence with which to move forward and advises Sherman to keep his mouth shut. Keeping Maria away from the cops is their next priority. Killian asks whether Sherman thinks she'd be willing to make a sworn statement to the effect that she was driving. Sherman is no longer sure, but promises to speak with her.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Sherman finally takes the plunge and contacts Tommy Killian. This symbolizes Sherman's entrye into the real world. His sheltered existence is now officially endangered, yet Sherman has not mentally turned the corner toward understanding that he is not inherently better than the masses. His snobby attitude toward his fellow criminal defendants in the waiting room at Killian's shows the reader that Sherman still holds himself above other people, even people in a situation similar to his own. Sherman's hesitance to accept his situation is mirrored by the DA's hesitance to move forward with the prosecution. At this point, there is still reason to hope that Sherman's cozy world will be left untouched. The reference to Maria at the end of this chapter, however, belies that hope. She is the wild card who has the power to damage Sherman. Sherman's vanity and conceit are such that he cannot believe she would ever betray him. This denial mimics his earlier denial about the hit-and-run incident, and his confident words about Maria present little comfort to either Killian or the reader.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Kramer joins the big boys in Abe Weiss' office. Weiss takes a call from Channel 1 without so much as excusing himself to Kramer, Bernie Fitzgibbon, or Milt Lubell. Weiss is irritated because the press is ignoring his office's drug indictments in favor of covering the Lamb case. Kramer is thrilled to be privy to a meeting in Weiss' office, although, for the most part, Weiss doesn't address Kramer directly. All questions are referred to Kramer's direct boss, Bernie Fitzgibbon. Weiss asks what they have on Sherman McCoy. Given Sherman's social status, Weiss knows that prosecuting Sherman would put to rest all the protests about White Justice. Unfortunately, they have no solid evidence on McCoy. Bernie has spoken to Tommy Killian about the case, so he knows McCoy has retained a lawyer. Weiss suggests they take a picture of Sherman from the society pages and show it to Henry Lamb at the hospital. He thinks that would make great press, but Bernie reminds him Lamb is comatose.

The McCoy family follows its customary Friday routine. Judy and Campbell drive out in the afternoon to Long Island, and Sherman typically joins them either later that night or the following morning, if he's had to work very late at Pierce & Pierce. This arrangement has allowed Sherman to spend Friday nights with Maria regularly over the past several months. However, today, Maria is nowhere to be found. Sherman has attempted to reach her all day from his desk at Pierce & Pierce as she had instructed him to do during dinner at the Bavardages. Finally, Sherman is actually desperate enough to leave his name and number with the maid at the Ruskin home. At lunchtime, Sherman leaves work to meet Tommy Killian at the Criminal Courts Building.

Sherman explains that he can't reach Maria. Killian assures him he is good at getting people to talk who don't want to, but Sherman refuses to believe that Maria is intentionally avoiding him. Sherman tells Killian that he believes Maria loves him and that she wouldn't just take off, leaving him holding the bag. Killian tells Sherman that he's spoken to Bernie Fitzgibbon in the DA's office and assures Sherman that at this point the DA doesn't have any solid evidence with which to go forward. Sherman is shocked that Killian would discuss his case with the DA's office, but Killian explains that the criminal justice system works on a system of favors, loosely called the Favor Bank. Killian further explains that there are everyday favors, such as his asking information from Bernie, and then there are favor contracts. Contracts are more serious favors, and contracts are never violated.

Peter Fallow meets with Al Vogel in a trendy Chinese restaurant. Fallow is partially grateful to Vogel for feeding him the Henry Lamb story and is partly resentful , preferring to think he broke open the story all on his own. Vogel reminds him about Bacon's proprietary interest in this news story and asks Fallow to hit the hospital angle harder. Bacon wants the hospital taken to task for its poor initial treatment of Henry Lamb in hopes of laying the groundwork for a lucrative civil suit.

Meanwhile, back at the DA's office, Kramer gets a call from a Legal Aid defense attorney. The Legal Aid guy offers to make a deal with Kramer. His client, Roland Auburn, says he was present when Henry Lamb got hit by the car and is offering to trade his testimony for a reduction in the drug charges that Auburn is currently facing.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Egos are on display in this chapter. DA Abe Weiss sets the tone as the chapter opens by aggrandizing himself for the media's benefit. Kramer's ego is growing as well now that he's finally been called in for a meeting with the big boys in Weiss's office. This is a bad sign for Sherman because both the DA and the ADA's egos are becoming enmeshed with his case. Weiss and Kramer now believe that prosecuting Sherman will make them both look good in the press. Bernie Fitzgibbon's lack of ego serves to highlight the overblown monstrosities that Weiss and Kramer carry around. Sherman's ego rears its ugly head as well and threatens to hurt his case. Because of his ego, Sherman refuses even to entertain the idea that Maria is not his loving, faithful companion. The idea that she might put her own interests ahead of his seems ludicrous to the ever-vain Sherman. Killian tries to get him to look at the situation realistically, but Sherman's character has not yet progressed to this stage of maturity. Meanwhile, Fallow's ego is also at war with his self-interest. Rather than being grateful to Al Vogel for feeding him the Lamb story, Fallow finds Vogel's presence to be an annoying reminder that Fallow is not the intrepid reporter he pretends to be. No one at *The City Light* knows that Fallow was spoon-fed the Lamb story by Reverend Bacon's lawyer, and Fallow intends to keep it that way.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

On Saturday morning, Kramer waits in his office for Roland Auburn. He learns that Auburn has previously been labeled in the press as "the Crack King of Evergreen Avenue" by Abe Weiss himself. Fortunately, no one paid much attention to that particular press release. Detectives Martin and Goldberg arrive with the prisoner, Auburn, and Auburn's Legal Aid attorney, a black man named Cecil Hayden. Hayden is known to have a very sharp mind but being black is a drawback to finding work, and thus, many African-American lawyers like Hayden wind up in low-paying Legal Aid jobs. Auburn's story is as follows: He and Henry Lamb were walking toward the Texas Fried Chicken takeout stand off Bruckner Boulevard.

Auburn admits he and Henry don't normally hang out together. As they waited to cross the street, a Mercedes attempted to pass the slower-moving traffic by driving along the right-hand side of the shoulder, where Auburn and Lamb were standing. Auburn saw the Mercedes and jumped back just in time. Henry was hit, and fell to the pavement. Henry said he thought his arm was broken. The Mercedes screeched to a stop a hundred feet up the road, and Auburn had started walking toward the car, hoping the driver would give Henry a lift to the hospital. A white couple got out of the car, and Auburn called to them that his friend was hurt. The white woman looked frightened, and screamed, "'Shuhmun, look out!'" (pg. 419) She jumped back into the car, in the driver's seat this time, and called for her male friend to get in the car. According to Roland, the white couple watched as Henry Lamb staggered towards them, holding his arm in obvious pain. The female driver gunned the engine and sped away.

Kramer is ecstatic at this testimony. He asks for a description of the couple, and then shows Roland a set of pictures, including a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Sherman McCoy. Roland picks out Sherman, but says the woman in the photo is older and not as good looking as the woman in the Mercedes. Roland further identifies the taxi driver, an associate of his, who drove him and Henry Lamb to the hospital. Roland had dropped off Henry and then returned home. Roland explains that he didn't want to come forward previously because the police had an outstanding warrant for his arrest. Victoriously, Kramer tells Roland's lawyer they have a deal. Kramer can already picture the courtroom drawing of his muscular physique splashed across the TV news.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Chapter 18 is the critical turning point in the novel. Up until this point, the DA's office has had insufficient evidence to prosecute the Lamb case, regardless of how loudly the media's been calling for action. Now, however, Roland Auburn has provided Kramer with the figurative smoking gun. This chapter displays the author's gift for understated satire, as shown by Kramer's reaction to Roland's statement. Not once does Kramer consider

whether Roland is telling the truth, despite the fact that Kramer knows Roland is the "Crack King of Evergreen Avenue." Roland tells Kramer what he wants to hear, and all Kramer can think about is how good he's going to look on TV.

Kramer and Weiss are interested in the Lamb case only for its publicity value. By prosecuting a rich, white man like Sherman McCoy, the DA's office can show the people that it values justice over the color of a man's skin. Ironically, as is so often the case when people like Bacon, Weiss, and Kramer decry racism, the *only* thing which matters to these men is the color of Sherman's skin. Bacon's argument that the DA would've prosecuted sooner had Sherman been a black man is spurious because in truth, the DA is bothering to prosecute Sherman only because he is white. Kramer makes absolutely no effort to discover the true facts of the case and actually turns a blind eye to Roland Auburn's reputation.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Monday morning finds Kramer and Bernie Fitzgibbon once more in Weiss' office. Weiss is now addressing Kramer directly and even calling him by his first name. Weiss wants to know whether Roland's positive identification gives them enough to arrest Sherman McCoy. Fitzgibbon says they have Roland's ID, and they have the garage attendant's testimony, which is indeed enough. Bernie advocates, however, that they hold off a bit until they can talk to the taxi driver who drove Roland and Henry to the hospital. Bernie doesn't trust the Crack King of Evergreen Avenue's testimony, and doesn't want their office's arrest of Sherman McCoy to blow up in their faces. Kramer defends his star witness, stating that Roland knows details that he could know only if he had been present.

Bernie agrees that Roland was present, but, he reminds them, Roland shouldn't be trusted. Kramer defends Roland's integrity passionately. Bernie smiles patronizingly at Kramer. It is not uncommon for DA's to light up the witness, a phrase that refers to the process of sanitizing the witness' reputation, not only for the jury's benefit, but for the prosecuting attorney to make himself feel better about using one criminal to send another criminal to jail. Meanwhile, Weiss is staring at a photographic layout of the McCoy apartment in *Architectural Digest*. Weiss decides to make a big media splash by arresting McCoy in his Park Avenue home. Bernie Fitzgibbon vetoes his boss's plan. Bernie has already made a contract favor with Tommy Killian; he has promised Tommy that Sherman will be allowed to turn himself in for arrest. Weiss tells him he's overruled, but Bernie stubbornly clings to the contract. Well aware of the importance of the Favor Bank, Weiss relents.

Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter builds on the satirical elements introduced in the previous chapter. At this point, Kramer is beyond merely turning a blind eye to Roland Auburn's reputation. Kramer has gone so far as to defend Roland's virtuosity. Discovering the truth has never been further from Kramer's mind. He is interested only in making Henry Lamb and Roland Auburn into choirboys for the press's benefit. Kramer's goal is to cast himself in the role of warrior for justice for the benefit of the TV cameras. He wishes to make himself look like a paragon of integrity and is willing to sacrifice his integrity to achieve this effect.

Weiss, for his part, is above such earthly considerations as truth and justice. His only goal is to gain favorable coverage in the hopes of helping his own re-election campaign. Once again, in this chapter, Bernie Fitzgibbon plays the voice of reason. Bernie stands up for his integrity when Weiss wants to make a circus arrest. Bernie has already given Tommy Killian his commitment that Sherman will be allowed to turn himself in quietly. In

the court milieu, these promises are considered verbal contracts and are not taken lightly, even by Abe Weiss. The fact that Weiss entertains the idea of breaking Bernie's commitment shows the reader that Weiss, too, is willing to sacrifice the integrity of his office for some good press.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Sherman is summoned into the grand offices of Gene Lopwitz, himself, head of Pierce & Pierce. Lopwitz demands an explanation for Sherman's recent string of costly mistakes. Sherman has trouble concentrating on Lopwitz' words despite the gravity of the meeting. Lopwitz interrupts the meeting to take a call from a celebrity. Lopwitz demonstrates far more interest in chatting with a celebrity than with his number-one bond salesman. After taking another call regarding a decorating matter, Lopwitz asks Sherman if he's having problems at home. Sherman is tempted to be forthcoming about his infidelity, which might gain him Lopwitz' sympathy and mercy, but Sherman is too leery of Lopwitz' greed for gossip.

Another call comes through Lopwitz' line, but this time it's for Sherman. Killian's voice greets Sherman, impressing upon Sherman the need to talk right now. To Lopwitz' shock, Sherman walks out of his office and returns to his own desk, where he calls Killian back. Killian advises him he's being placed under arrest in the morning and tells Sherman that a witness has come forward. Killian tries to ease the blow by assuring Sherman that the arrest will be a voluntary surrender. Killian has called in a contract with Bernie Fitzgibbon to ensure that Sherman can quietly turn himself in, and the media will be held off until after Sherman has already posted bail and returned home. Killian asks Sherman to meet him at 1 so they can arrange the details for the following morning.

Sherman hangs up the phone and realizes he no longer has the luxury of keeping this matter private from his dad, from Judy, or even from his boss. He marches back into Lopwitz' office and calmly informs Lopwitz he is going to be arrested in the morning. Lopwitz' interested reaction frightens Sherman. Sherman realizes that Lopwitz doesn't care what happens to Sherman; Pierce & Pierce will go on despite his travails. Lopwitz is interested only in the story for its gossip value.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Even before Sherman learns of his impending arrest, the reader has been tipped off to the fact that the quiet arrest Killian has arranged is not the most likely outcome. Killian's assurances to Sherman pale in the light of Weiss' conversation with Bernie Fitzgibbon in Chapter 19. The reader already knows that Weiss is determined to make this arrest a media spectacle. Thus, as Sherman's lawyer reassures him that it will be a quiet, procedural arrest and that Sherman will be afforded every legal courtesy, the author has managed to create additional tension over and above the impending arrest because the reader already suspects that Sherman has a media circus in store for him.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Sherman withdraws $10,000 in cash from his bank, feeling like a criminal. Today, he is addressed respectfully by the tellers, but all that will change with his arrest, he thinks. Next, Sherman pays a visit to his father's office. The Lion of Sponget & Leach is an old man now, relegated to a small office with nominal duties. Sherman is somewhat surprised to realize this because his father has always represented, to Sherman, an all-powerful, invincible man. Sherman plunges right in, informing his dad of the impending arrest. Sherman lists the charges against him: reckless endangerment (a felony), leaving the scene of an accident, and failure to report an accident. At his father's prompting, Sherman reveals the whole sordid story. He refers to his affair with Maria as a flirtation. His dad wants to know who Maria is, and then asks who Sherman's lawyer is.

When Sherman tells him about Thomas Killian from Dershkin, Bellavita, Fishbein & Schlossel, his father is disgusted. He tells Sherman that he should never have accepted Freddy Button's recommendation; Freddy is fine for wills and such, but he is not the man to see in a real emergency. The Lion rattles off a half-dozen names and tells Sherman he'll discuss the matter with them, and he'll pull some strings. The names his father mentions are all elderly, retired men who once ran things but no longer do. Sherman is overcome with pity for his father's loss of status, brought about by old age. When the Lion instructs the office secretary to put in a call to one of these men, the secretary takes her sweet time. Embarrassed, the Lion promises Sherman that at least he'll have both of his parents' full support. When the Lion asks how Judy has taken the news, Sherman has to admit that she doesn't yet know. His father's face drains of all expression.

At home, Sherman takes Judy into the library and sits her down. She assumes he wants to discuss his affair, and freezes him out. Sherman drops the news of his impending arrest, and all the fight goes out of Judy. He reminds her of the news item about the Mercedes with the RF plates and admits it was he in the car with Maria. Sherman lies about the extent of his involvement with Maria, explaining to Judy that he'd only known Maria 3 weeks and that it had never reached the point of an actual affair. He swears he has never so much as kissed Maria. Getting no reaction from Judy, Sherman plunges ahead with the details of the newspaper stories, his problems at work, and his defense attorneys. To Sherman's surprise, Judy begins to laugh. She tells him she'd like to be able to be there for him to offer him her love and her sympathy. Unfortunately, says Judy, Sherman has deceived her. He has lied to her about everything, never once letting her in on what was going on; that is what hurts her the most. Because of that, she tells him, she cannot give him the love and tenderness he needs right now. She tells him, however, that she will do her best to help him and Campbell through this. Sherman heads upstairs to talk to Campbell. He explains to his daughter that the papers will be printing a bunch of lies about him and making him look like a bad guy. He

asks her to remember that he is really a good guy and that she should not believe what she hears about him from the kids at school. Campbell tells him not to worry because she loves him.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Even at this late date, Sherman's denial is still very much in force. The author's brand of dark humor is used to mock Sherman's lack of integrity in this chapter. First, Sherman demonstrates this lack of integrity by lying to both his father and Judy about the extent of his relationship with Maria. At this stage, Sherman does not stand to benefit by these lies. His father and Judy have already lost some respect for him, and lying about the affair after it has been discovered merely makes Sherman look too weak to face the consequences of his actions. His subsequent conversation with Campbellreveals why Sherman feels the need to lie. Sherman is lying to himself. His conscience will not allow him to be the kind of guy who cheats on his wife and endangers his family's well-being, yet that is precisely the kind of guy he's become. Sherman cannot face who he is and most especially cannot face having his false vision of himself unmasked. Consequently, he tells Campbell that the papers will be printing lies about him, trying to make him look like a bad guy but that she should remember he is really a good guy. Sherman doesn't want his daughter, his wife, or his father to see him for who he really is. His main goal at this point is to maintain as much of his fazade as possible. This idealized version of himself, who never existed in reality, is what Sherman considers to be true.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Sleep eludes Sherman that night. He wishes his wife were beside him instead of in the guest bedroom. He worries about Campbell and how this will affect her. He fears the very thought of going to jail. Getting hold of himself, Sherman tells himself he fought to survive that night in the Bronx, and he will fight again. He thinks over the procedure again, as Killian had explained it to him the night before. Detectives Martin and Goldberg will arrive to pick him up at 7:30 a.m., on their way to work. Killian will be present, and he plans to ride up to the Bronx with Sherman. Killian has advised him that, thanks to Bernie Fitzgibbon, Sherman will be processed through Central Booking first thing, before all the other cases. The DA's office has already agreed to a $10,000 bond, so Sherman will be released as soon as he's posted it. All in all, the process will take several hours. Sherman wonders what he should wear. By 5:30 a.m., he has given up on sleep.

Judy joins him in the kitchen although neither one of them knows what to say to the other. Sherman is dressed and waiting when Killian arrives at 7:15. Detectives Martin and Goldberg arrive to pick them up in Martin's car. Martin apologizes for the Styrofoam peanuts that his kid has spilled all over the back seat. The peanuts cling to Sherman's suit as the detectives put cuffs on Sherman. Killian is stunned, having expected a voluntary arrest. The detectives inform him that his contract with Bernie Fitzgibbon has been overruled by Abe Weiss, and that the press has also been called to witness the arrest. Killian is furious; he helps Sherman cover the handcuffs by draping his suit jacket over them. When they arrive at the Criminal Courts Building, a mob of reporters and cameras waits to greet them. To make matters worse, it is raining outside, and Sherman is forced to wait in line to be processed, behind a group of prostitutes. Killian makes an angry statement to the press about a circus arrest and false charges. Sherman, in a wet suit, handcuffs, and covered with soggy Styrofoam peanuts, stands in the rain and endures the verbal abuse being heaped on him by the press and other bystanders.

Inside, Sherman gets the full treatment. His belt buckle and shoelaces are removed; he is fingerprinted and has his mug shots taken. All the while Sherman stares incredulously at his surroundings. His insulated lifestyle has been designed to keep him away from people like his fellow prisoners. One man vomits on himself repeatedly, and the stench is overwhelming. When Sherman's fillings set off the metal detector, the policeman in charge has a little fun with Sherman by making him crawl through it several times. In the holding pens, Sherman stares nervously at his fellow inmates.

The inmates spot a mouse and brutally kick it around. Sherman picks up the mouse, intending to drop it safely outside the bars. The mouse bites his hand, and Sherman tosses it through the bars, where a policeman steps on it, angry that Sherman threw a mouse at him. Drinks and sandwiches filled with rotten meat are served. A tough-looking black man takes his drink and is about to steal Sherman's coat when Sherman's name

is finally called. Sherman is moved to another cage upstairs until finally, the judge calls him into the courtroom. Killian is there, but Sherman's attorney is stunned by ADA Kramer's request to raise the bail amount to $250,000. Killian successfully argues for the originally agreed-upon ten grand, and Sherman is released. Outside on the sidewalk, Sherman considers putting a gun to his mouth.

Chapter 22 Analysis

In this chapter, Sherman is finally forced to face his greatest fear. Every chapter up to this point has foreshadowed this moment, making it inevitable that Sherman would be dragged into the world outside his cozy Fifth Avenue apartment. Ironically, Sherman has long considered everyone who doesn't own an expensive house and several expensive cars to be a thief and a criminal. He lives the way he lives because he's afraid of the common man. Now he gets to face actual thieves and criminals, and in the eyes of the community, he has become just like them.

The author writes this fear satirically but with historical hindsight, once again the satire loses its comedic effect. In the years since this novel was written, there have been many reported and recorded incidents of innocent black men being shot to death or beaten by police officers in New York City because the cops were afraid; they made assumptions based on that fear that the innocent civilians they attacked were actually dangerous criminals, and they treated them as such. Thus it is fear, more than racism, which is at the heart of this novel. Racism is often engendered by a fear of the unknown. The more Sherman has kept himself closeted away from people of color, the more afraid he's become. Now he's so afraid of being locked up with blacks and Hispanics that he is contemplating suicide to avoid it.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

In Weiss' office, the DA congratulates Kramer on the arrest. Together, they watch the press coverage. Kramer is thrilled that the court artist has drawn him with large, manly muscles. He noticed the artist had been a sexy Italian girl, with what Kramer considers Italian Dirty Girl lips. He has always looked down on Italian women, but he thinks they are sexy in a slutty kind of way. Weiss, the publicity hound, has been generous in sharing the spotlight with Kramer. In *The City Light*, spread out on Weiss' desk, is the story of a mystery brunette who was in the car with Sherman McCoy when McCoy heartlessly ran down Henry Lamb. A witness for the prosecution has called the mystery woman "foxy" and a "hotter ticket" than Judy McCoy. (pg. 505) Weiss is feeling triumphant. His willingness to prosecute a man like Sherman McCoy has silenced all the critics who'd accused him of practicing White Justice. Weiss' only complaint is that McCoy looked too downtrodden in the courtroom. Kramer explains that McCoy had stood in the pouring rain for half an hour while waiting to be processed. Kramer reassures Weiss that he did the right thing by overruling Bernie's contract with Tommy Killian. Weiss waxes poetic about the hope his office has provided for the ethnic voters by arresting a Park Avenue socialite. Kramer accepts Weiss' ideals with fervent agreement.

Sherman McCoy feels as if he has died. The press and the public have invaded every corner of his life. Their attention is like a constant hum in his brain. The mind and sense of self he once thought he possessed now belong to the ravenous dogs of the media. Everyone who looks at him knows about the case, and they all stare into his eyes to steal his private thoughts. The doorman at his building, the television crews, the neighbors, everyone wants a piece of Sherman, but the only people who care enough to call his house and check on him are his parents and his old friend from Pierce & Pierce, Rawlie Thorpe. Campbell is bewildered but not yet in tears. Judy roams the apartment in shock. All the sadness Sherman previously felt about his wife, his daughter, and the loss of his reputation has disappeared. The only emotion left in Sherman is fear of returning to prison. Still, determined not to give into the scandal, Sherman walks his daughter to the bus stop the next morning as usual. The media converges on him at the bus stop, frightening the other parents and children. Campbell boards the bus in tears.

Meanwhile at *The City Light*, Peter Fallow soaks up his success. He spots the co-worker to whom he owes money, and considers what a marvelously superior gesture it would be to march right over and pay him back. He decides to think about it first. Fallow has parlayed his Henry Lamb story into a raise. Once again, Fallow has the respect of his boss, Sir Gerald Steiner. Steiner shows Fallow a photograph taken by Fallow's photographer. It is a shot of Sherman pushing a microphone out of his face with a backhanded swat with one hand, while holding Campbell's hand with the other. The media woman who had been holding the microphone is accusing Sherman of assault and considering a lawsuit. After Steiner leaves, Al Vogel calls Fallow. Bacon wants a

favor, Sherman's home telephone number. Against his better judgment, Fallow gives it to him.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Kramer, Weiss, and Fallow are all experiencing success. This success virtually guarantees that their characters will demonstrate no growth. At this point, the reader begins to suspect that Sherman is better off than the other main characters. At least by being brought low, Sherman is given the opportunity to change and become a better man. Certainly Kramer, Weiss, and Fallow could do the same, but without being forced into change, as Sherman has been, it appears unlikely that they will. Fallow, for example, chooses to lord his success over others instead of being grateful for his second chance in life. In no time, he has forgotten how desperate and downtrodden he was before the Lamb story broke. His thoughts regarding the co-worker to whom he owes money show Fallow's lack of integrity. Many people in Fallow's position would be grateful for the ability to pay off their debts. Were Fallow a better man, he would repay his co-worker and thank him not only for the loan, which the co-worker could ill afford in the first place, but also for his patience regarding its repayment as well. Instead, Fallow can think only of shoving the money indignantly in the man's face. Just as Sherman has done in previous chapters, Fallow resents the people around him who remind him of his own weaknesses. Of all the characters in this melodrama, Sherman is the only one for whom the reader has hope and only because Sherman is being forced to face his flaws.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Sherman stews angrily in Killian's waiting room. The fact that Killian is making him wait seals Sherman's resolve to fire his lawyer. In Killian's office, Sherman tells him how upset he is about the way the arrest went down. Killian receives several calls from the press, including one from Peter Fallow, and asks his secretary to hold them all. He tells Sherman that he has a right to feel betrayed. They were both betrayed by the DA's office, and Killian finds it unconscionable. Killian senses Sherman's doubt and laughs confidently. Tomorrow, he says, they begin to turn things around. Killian summons a man named Quigley into the office. Quigley, Killian's investigator, shows Sherman a mug shot of Roland Auburn. Sherman identifies him as the larger of the two black men on the highway ramp. Killian advises Sherman of Auburn's record, and Sherman, for the first time, feels some absolution. It had been a robbery attempt, after all! Next, Quigley informs him that Maria is in Italy with Filippo Chirazzi. Despite this news, Sherman still believes there is an innocent explanation for Maria's sudden absence. Killian assures Sherman they've got a handle on all the major players now, and that Sherman is in good hands. Killian asks for and receives a $75,000 retainer.

Kramer is on his second date with Miss Shelly Thomas. He agonizes over what the restaurant bill will come to, but he tries not to let his concern show. Bravely, he orders coffee and desert for them and then returns to the subject of Roland Auburn. He explains to Shelly what a decent guy Roland is underneath his rough exterior. Shelly tells him how impressed she had been last night to see him on television. When Shelly asks whether she can attend the trial, Kramer knows the moment has come. He slips his fingertips on top of hers and then tells her what it means to him to be able to talk to her about these things. His coworkers are too hard-hearted to understand his idealism, and his wife just doesn't understand him. His wife thinks his work is pathetic, but Kramer explains to Shelly that the Sherman McCoy case is about sending a message to society that injustice will not be tolerated, even among the rich. Out on the sidewalk after dinner, he boldly takes her hand as he continues to discuss the McCoy case.

To his irritation, Shelly asks whether it's possible McCoy was evading a robbery attempt. She doesn't find Roland a credible witness. Noticing Kramer's annoyance with these questions, Shelly backs off and tells him she admires all the work he's put into this case. Sensing that he's finally won Shelly over with his prowess as a lawyer, Kramer leans in for a kiss. He thinks his newfound stardom with the Lamb case has won him Shelly's attentions. "In fact, she was thinking about the way men are in New York. Every time you go out with one, you have to sit there and listen to two or three hours of My Career first." (pg. 535)

Triumphantly, Peter Fallow enters Leicester's that night for dinner. All the Brits at the table know it was Fallow who broke open the McCoy case. They send drinks to Fallow's table, and to Fallow's delight, the lovely Caroline Heftshank smiles at him approvingly.

When Caroline asks him to follow her upstairs, he thinks she is at last going to sleep with him. Instead, Caroline gives him a gift. She tells him the identity of the mystery brunette in the Mercedes. Caroline's artist friend, Filippo Chirazzi, has identified Maria Ruskin as the woman in the car that night. She tells him Filippo and Maria are having a fling, but when Fallow asks how to find Filippo, Caroline admits that he ducked out on her, implying the two of them had a sexual relationship as well.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Sherman's character growth is a painfully slow process. Despite the fact that he's faced his worst fear, he still believes he is better than everyone else. This continuing sense of entitlement causes him to be angry about the way he was treated during his arrest. Sherman is furious to have been locked away with common criminals, and he blames his lawyer for the poor treatment. If only Sherman had hired a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant lawyer, he thinks, he would have been treated with the respect he deserves. Sherman continues to demonstrate his sense of entitlement through his irritation at being kept waiting in Killian's lobby. How dare this common, Irish attorney keep a man like Sherman waiting? Tom Wolfe uses Sherman's reactions to such situations to poke fun at the sense of entitlement demonstrated by wealthy people like Sherman.

The author pulls off another comic coup in the scene between Kramer and Shelly. Kramer, concerned only with his image, has based his views about Shelly on the image he has created in his mind about her. She is like a blank screen upon which he projects his fantasies. She looks the part of the trophy girlfriend, and thus Kramer assumes he must woo her through his power and status as an attorney. The author has the last laugh by revealing Shelly's thoughts to the reader. Ironically, Shelly is bored with Kramer's career talk and ego and wishes he would just make a pass at her.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Edward Fiske III has made a second trip to Reverend Bacon's office to recover the church's $350,000. Bacon is on the phone with the Channel 1 anchorman, speaking angrily of the *Daily News* story which has just come out in support of Sherman's version of events. Bacon implies that McCoy has many powerful people on his side and that McCoy is smearing Henry Lamb's reputation by claiming he is a robber. Bacon hangs up and stares at Fiske; he reminds Fiske of the concept of the steam. Bacon tells Fiske that it is only a matter of time until the rage of the oppressed explodes. Fiske brings up the $350,000, and tells Bacon that he's researched Bacon's financial company, Urban Guaranty Investments. Fiske believes Bacon has funneled the church's $350,000 into Urban Guaranty Investments and now delicately asks Bacon to repay the church from the Urban Guaranty Investments capital reserves. Bacon berates him for making an illegal request. He tells Fiske that shifting funds in that way is shady, and he reassures Fiske that the church's $350,000 has been well spent.

Outside Sherman's Park Avenue apartment, a demonstration rages. A mob of angry protesters screams for Sherman's blood. The bodyguard suggested by Killian fields threatening phone calls. Sherman wonders how they got his private number. The phone rings, but this time the bodyguard hands Sherman the phone. It is Sally Rawthrote, a woman Sherman met at the Bavardages. Sally had snubbed him that night, but is now calling to offer her services in case Sherman plans to sell his apartment. Her opportunism makes him smile, the first smile Killian's seen on Sherman's face in days.

Killian attempts to cheer Sherman up further, but Sherman's list of woes is too long. The other parents at school won't let Campbell come over to play anymore. Pierce & Pierce won't lift a finger to help Sherman, and his unpaid leave of absence means he can't make his apartment payments anymore. He can't sell the apartment either, because Al Vogel has filed two civil suits against Sherman and has arranged to freeze his assets. Just then, Pollard Browning, president of the apartment co-op, arrives to see Sherman. Pollard tells Sherman he'll have to move for the sake of the other residents. To Killian's delight, Sherman sends him packing. He comments that Sherman is turning Irish with his newfound desire for revenge. Killian assures him if Pollard tries to evict him, they'll tie him up in court for 10 years.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Despite Sherman's strong sense of self-pity in this chapter, he displays some marked character growth. Sherman's treatment of Pollard Browning is unprecedented. Pollard represents all the people Sherman has ever tried to impress. Thus, it is surprising that, for once, Sherman is not embarrassed by the trouble he's caused Pollard and the other

apartment building residents. Avoiding scandal and keeping up a good appearance have been Sherman's main priorities to date.

Now, perforce, his priorities have shifted. Sherman is beginning to show a little fight. In the past, Sherman has been too weak to address his needs directly. He has resorted to deception to get what he wants. This deception has gone hand in hand with his sense of entitlement. On some level, Sherman always knew that he was not entitled to take whatever he wanted from life, and so he has typically resorted to deception to get it, anyway. Now he is beginning to fight for his needs and desires, which augers well for his future. If Sherman can develop the integrity and courage to fight for his needs, he may no longer have to resort to deception and lies to fill his needs in the future.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Gerald Steiner meets with his staff to determine how best to proceed with Fallow's hot tip about Maria Ruskin. Four reporters have been assigned to do legwork for Fallow, but even so they've not been able to corroborate that she is the mystery brunette. Steiner comes up with an idea. He'll send Fallow to do a high-society profile story on Arthur Ruskin. If Fallow can get close enough to Ruskin, he may be able to learn more about Maria's whereabouts on the evening in question. Ruskin is flattered by Fallow's offer to write a story about him and invites Fallow to dine with him at the La Boue d'Argent, an extremely fashionable restaurant frequented by the likes of Reverend Bacon. When they arrive, Ruskin is accorded the royal treatment by the restaurant staff. To Ruskin's obvious irritation, however, he must share the limelight with Madame Tacaya, the wife of the Indonesian dictator, who is also expected at La Boue d'Argent for dinner.

Over the meal, Ruskin drones on about his life. Fallow's boredom vanishes, however, when Arthur Ruskin keels over, apparently dying. Fallow calls desperately for help. The waiters are horrified that Ruskin's body may be seen by Madame Tacaya. The restaurant staff calls an ambulance but then returns to the task of preparing Madame Tacaya's table. The staff is annoyed by the arrival of the paramedics, and as Fallow prepares to leave with the ambulance, they hand him the bill. The next day *The City Light* prints Fallow's eyewitness account of Arthur Ruskin's death, in which he lambastes the restaurant for their unfeeling attitude.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Arthur Ruskin's death is a stroke of luck for both Peter Fallow and Maria Ruskin. It provides Fallow the opportunity to get another hot story published under his byline, and Fallow makes the most of it by taking the restaurant to task for its shabby treatment of the dying Ruskin. Interestingly, the contempt with which the restaurant staff treats Ruskin's body is akin to the contempt with which Sherman has been treated since his reputation and career took a death blow. This satirically amusing restaurant scene is a metaphor for Sherman's experience. The money, power, and respect that Sherman believes makes him who he is, is instead shown to be a transitory thing. Ruskin had not been admired by the restaurant staff for his integrity or character; he had been admired for his ability to pay the check, no matter how large, and to tip well. Once that power deserts him--for a dead man has no use for money--the staff's respect for Ruskin vanishes as well. Similarly, Sherman's friends and admirers have deserted him now that his status as Master of the Universe has been revoked.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Sherman is doing everything he can to cut expenses. As she promised, Judy is doing what she can to help Sherman through his ordeal although this does not include affection. They plan their re-entry into society, thinking Sherman looks guilty by staying away from social engagements. Judy ensures that their invitation to the di Duccis, issued months before Sherman's disgrace became public, is still good. The high society di Duccis' assure Judy that she and Sherman are welcome. To Sherman's shock, he finds himself the most popular man at their party. The same people who snubbed him at the Bavardages are now eager to share his limelight. Getting arrested has made him a hit with the crowd, and Sherman entertains them all evening with stories about his prison time. The papers have painted Sherman as a financial genius, and suddenly his job at Pierce & Pierce is glamorous to this crowd, instead of boring as they'd earlier deemed him. However, in the cab on the way home, Sherman realizes that his popularity does not extend to his wife.

In the Mayor's office, the Mayor asks his assistant what's next on the day's agenda. His assistant answers cynically: "plaques for blacks," which is his term for black special interest group requests or awards. (pg. 585) More specifically, there are a half dozen requests for the Mayor to comment on the McCoy case, and there is a Bishop Bottomley here to see the Mayor. The assistant knows the Mayor hates it when he uses the "plaques for blacks" phrase, which is precisely why he continues to use it. The assistant advises the Mayor to call for a full investigation into the Sherman McCoy case. He should pressure the DA's office to prosecute McCoy to the full extent of the law. The Mayor feels uneasy with this, thinking it's too hard on Sherman McCoy, but he feels his assistant is right. Given the political tone of this case, the Mayor better get on board with Reverend Bacon's cause or risk losing the black vote come election time.

With this matter dispatched, Bishop Bottomley enters the room. Bottomley is a well-educated African-American man who cuts a fine figure. He prevails upon the Mayor to speak to the city Landmark Commission about one of his churches. The Bishop wishes to sell the church because attendance has fallen extremely low, and the church cannot afford to maintain the property. However, some neighbors have petitioned to make the church an official landmark, which will preclude the Bishop from selling it. The Mayor gets an idea. He picks up the phone and orders the Landmark Commission to back off the church. Then he asks the Bishop to join a high-profile commission on crime that it has just now occurred to the Mayor to form. Having a strong black leader like the Bishop on the Mayor's commission should earn him bonus points in the press. When the Bishop declines, the Mayor assures him the landmark deal stands. The moment the Bishop leaves, the Mayor calls the Landmark Commission and tells them to declare the church a landmark.

Chapter 27 Analysis

The Mayor, who has not been seen since the Prologue, resurfaces in Chapter 27. This chapter is thickly layered with irony. The Mayor's character was used by the author at the outset of the story to establish the explosive racial tension in New York City. Ironically, in the Prologue, Reverend Bacon uses his small band of loyal, rabble-rousing protesters to upstage the Mayor in front of the television cameras. Bacon's goals have not changed since the Prologue. More than ever, he wishes to disrupt the balance of White Power in New York. What makes this chapter so ironic is that the Mayor now uses Bacon's vehicle for disruption, the Henry Lamb case, to re-establish the credibility that Bacon made him lose in the Prologue. The Mayor decides that the politically correct thing to do is to jump on board with the prosecution of Sherman McCoy and win back the black vote. Thus, the political situation has come full circle.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Killian tries to make Sherman come to his senses about Maria. Killian and Quigley intend to send Sherman into Arthur Ruskin's funeral wearing a wire. Sherman needs to get Maria to confess, on tape, that she was driving the car when it struck Henry Lamb. He doesn't want to do this to her at her husband's funeral; Sherman feels it's ungentlemanly. Killian reminds him that Maria skipped town, leaving Sherman to take all the heat; Arthur's funeral is the only time they can be sure of seeing Maria.

At Harold A. Burns's, on Madison Avenue, Peter Fallow watches the *tout le monde* enter the fashionable funeral parlor. When the service ends, Fallow slips down the aisle toward the widow Ruskin. He notices another man doing the same thing; it is Sherman McCoy! Fallow follows Sherman, and the two men unobtrusively join the small procession of family members in the back room for a private reception. Fallow eavesdrops as Sherman approaches Maria. He overhears them talking about a ramp, and a car. He hears Sherman tell Maria she's his only witness. Maria tells Sherman, or Shuhmun, as she pronounces it, that they'll talk later. Sherman leaves. Thrilled at his luck, Fallow approaches the widow and explains he was with her husband the night he died. Fallow offers her the comfort of knowing that Arthur died quickly; he didn't suffer. She thanks him, but when Fallow starts asking pointed questions about Sherman McCoy, the widow Ruskin kicks him out of the funeral parlor.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Arthur Ruskin's funeral is the jackpot for reporter Peter Fallow. Just as Tommy Killian advised Sherman, it is the ideal place to corner Maria. The funeral brings all the key players together in a climactic turning point. Maria, who has successfully eluded responsibility for her role in Henry Lamb's fate up to this point, once again manages to shake off Sherman's low-key attempts to enlist her cooperation. Sherman's vanity still leads him to believe that his mistress is an honorable woman who truly cares about him. To admit otherwise is to admit to himself that he has risked his marriage, his daughter's well-being, his job, and his very freedom for a cheap lay in an expensive dress.

Sherman has never been able to look beyond the expensive dress before. He has judged Maria as being a superior human being simply by virtue of the fact that she is rich. In reality, Maria is an opportunist who married the 70-year-old Arthur Ruskin for his fortune. She has had affairs with every rich man on the block, biding her time until she inherits Arthur's money. His death has made her a multi-billionaire, and what Sherman doesn't understand is that now the widow Ruskin has even more to lose. Whatever hopes he had that her conscience and kind heart would lead her to cooperate with him are even more feeble now that she is backed into a corner. The reader can only be amused at Sherman's hapless concern that he is being ungentlemanly by approaching

her at the funeral. By exposing her identity at the funeral, Fallow has antagonized the feisty widow. Although Sherman doesn't know it yet, the gloves are off, and his subsequent encounters with Maria are bound to be disastrous.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Kramer, Bernie Fitzgibbon, Detective Martin, and Detective Goldberg all convene in Abe Weiss's office. Weiss is furious because two of the crack dealers whom Detective Martin has picked up on a routine drug sweep have provided unsettling information about Roland Auburn. Word on the street is that Auburn has always enjoyed giving Henry Lamb a hard time because Lamb doesn't hang out on the street or get involved with street crimes like Auburn does. On the night of the incident, Auburn had spotted Lamb walking to the Texas Fried Chicken and had pressured Lamb into accompanying him up the ramp. Auburn had intended to show Lamb how to rob someone. Auburn had thrown a tire in front of a Mercedes, which turned out to contain Sherman McCoy and his girlfriend. Apparently, Henry Lamb had been too afraid to participate in the robbery attempt, and was too afraid to run away. Something had gone wrong, and Henry winds up getting hit by the escaping vehicle. Bernie Fitzgibbon comments that this would explain why Lamb had neglected to tell anyone at the hospital he'd been hit by a car. Weiss is quick to downplay this version of events, and Kramer jumps in to defend his witness, Roland Auburn.

Bernie stares accusingly at Kramer, but before further words can be exchanged, Milt Lubell enters with a copy of *The City Light*. Peter Fallow's article reports that the mystery brunette has been identified as Arthur Ruskin's widow, Maria. Electrified, Abe Weiss orders Detectives Martin and Goldberg to interview her immediately. They are authorized to offer her immunity for testifying against McCoy and to threaten her with felony prosecution if she refuses. By the time the two detectives and Kramer reach the Ruskins' Fifth-Avenue apartment, camera crews are already camped out on the sidewalk. Kramer is thrilled to be recognized by the media as he walks by, though he feigns annoyance. Inside, Kramer and the detectives are thoroughly impressed by the luxurious surroundings. Maria's defense attorneys, both WASPs, are dressed far better than Kramer and make him feel clumsy by comparison.

Kramer is equally impressed with Maria Ruskin's overt beauty. He wonders how 71-year-old Arthur Ruskin could have kept up with her. Kramer informs Maria that she has been positively identified as the person who drove the Mercedes away from the scene of the crime. Although Maria maintains a calm demeanor, Kramer notices a barely perceptible tremor of fear in her gorgeous neck as she swallows.

"In that instant, the instant of that little swallow, his scuffed attachy case meant nothing, nor did his clodhopper shoes nor his cheap suit nor his measly salary nor his New York accent nor his barbarisms and solecisms of speech. For in that moment he had something these Wasp counselors, these immaculate Wall Street partners from the universe of the Currys & Goads & Peteralls & Dunnings & Spongets & Leaches would never know and never feel the inexpressible pleasure of possessing. And they would remain silent and polite in the face of it, as they were right now, and they would swallow

with fear when and if their time came. And he now understood what it was that gave him a momentary lift each morning as he saw the island fortress rise at the crest of the Grand Concourse from the gloom of the Bronx. For it was nothing less than the Power, the same Power to which Abe Weiss himself was totally given over. It was the power of the government over the freedom of its subjects." (pp. 615-616)

At Tommy Killian's office, Sherman laments that he never even noticed reporter Peter Fallow tailing him at Arthur Ruskin's funeral. Killian tells him not to worry; he has good news for Sherman. Maria Ruskin wants to meet with Sherman. Sherman smiles, insisting to Killian that he knew all along Maria would never betray him. Nonetheless, Killian insists that Sherman wear a wire to their meeting. At 4:30 that afternoon, Sherman arrives at their former love nest, nervous about the recording device he has strapped on underneath his clothes. Sherman's job is to get Maria to admit to driving the car and hitting Henry Lamb; to succeed, he must act normally with Maria. She insists on a hug, and he responds with a quick, awkward embrace, hoping she won't feel the wire. She fixes them drinks and swears to Sherman that she hadn't known he was in trouble when she left for Italy. Sherman reminds her that she had known, because he had shown her the first *City Light* article just before she left the country with Filippo Chirazzi. Maria changes the subject, telling Sherman about the visit she received earlier today from ADA Larry Kramer. She calls Kramer a weird creep and a jerk, and tells Sherman that Kramer has threatened her with jail time if she doesn't corroborate the story Kramer wishes her to tell.

Sensing an opening, Sherman reminds her that the facts of the case are clear cut. He reminds her about the ramp and the road block, trying to get her to discuss what happened. Maria hears the desperation in his voice and holds her arms out, insisting Sherman come to her for another embrace. Unable to refuse, Sherman lets her touch him, and she quickly discovers the wire. She lunges at him and rips at the wire; it dangles down from Sherman's back like a tail. Maria tries to grab the recording device away from Sherman, but he manages to escape her clutches. He runs out of the apartment with the wire still dangling from his back. Her screams and vicious insults accompany him all the way down the hall.

Chapter 29 Analysis

In Chapter 29, the characters finally reveal their true faces. Much to Weiss's annoyance, Detectives Martin and Goldberg have uncovered some uncomfortable truths about Roland Auburn and Henry Lamb. Not only was Auburn attempting to rob the Mercedes, but Lamb, albeit reluctantly, was in on it, too. At this point the reader is finally forced to question Henry Lamb's character. Until this point, Lamb has seemed to be a hapless victim of circumstance. Now that it is revealed he was involved in the robbery attempt, it becomes clear that Henry Lamb's poor judgment has been driving the case against Sherman all along. It was Henry who instigated the investigation by giving his mother the license plate of the Mercedes. Henry, in his final moments before lapsing into the coma, demonstrated an unwillingness to take responsibility for the fact that he had attempted to commit a robbery.

Henry now appears to be as lacking in personal responsibility as any of the other characters in the book. Lamb's response to his robbery attempt gone bad is to prosecute his would-be victim. Why else would he have given his mother Sherman's license plate? Henry wants someone to pay for the situation he put himself in. Bacon, if he knew of these facts, would defend Henry, insisting that it was the first time in Henry's life he'd been involved in a crime and that he'd been pressured into it.

This is Henry's only possible defense, and if Henry were being prosecuted for the robbery attempt, as he should be, this defense would probably land him an easier sentence than the more hardened Roland would receive. It still makes no ethical sense, however, for Henry to have given up Sherman's plate number. Blaming his robbery victim for his injuries because it was his first robbery and he was pressured into it is akin to a teenager's refusal to believe she could become pregnant because it was her first time and she was pressured into it. Were the consequences to Henry Lamb unjustly harsh? It would seem so, and yet, ultimately, he has only himself to blame. Shouldn't Maria and Sherman shoulder the responsibility for injuring Henry? Morally, they certainly do share the blame, yet, ultimately, the blame rests on Henry and Roland's shoulders unless, perhaps, the reader believes that Henry and Roland should have chosen more helpless victims to rob to avoid injury to themselves.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Defense attorneys are not allowed inside the grand jury room, and Kramer uses this fact to his best advantage. He has dressed up Roland Auburn to look like a presentable young man, and has even taught Roland how to walk and how to sit up properly in his chair to impress the grand jury. Roland presents his version of events, relating how Sherman McCoy plowed into poor Henry Lamb. Roland tells the jury that the Mercedes came to a stop further up the street, and Roland had heard the female passenger call out the name "Shuhmun." Kramer asks him to repeat this distinctive pronunciation several times before calling Maria Ruskin to the witness stand. Maria's stunning good looks captivate the grand jury. Maria repeats Roland's story verbatim, claiming the accident took place on Bruckner Boulevard. She makes no mention of the highway on-ramp, and she attributes several of her own racist comments to Sherman. Most damagingly, she claims that he was driving the car when it hit Henry Lamb. Maria's distinctive pronunciation of "Shuhmun" matches Roland's testimony exactly. The grand jury is convinced.

Meanwhile, at Tommy Killian's office, Sherman reads the latest article in *The City Light*. Peter Fallow has somehow learned about the rent-controlled love nest that Maria sublets from Germaine Boll. Fallow knows the exact amount of rent paid by Germaine to the landlord, and he knows how much Maria pays Germaine. Killian, Sherman, and the investigator, Quigley, wonder how Fallow could have learned this information. Sherman knows how much she pays only because Maria told him. With a sudden grin, Quigley asks Sherman where he was when Maria told him about the rent. Sherman admits they were in the apartment at the time, and Quigley disappears on a mysterious errand. Killian's phone rings. It is Bernie Fitzgibbon from the DA's office, calling to inform Killian that the grand jury has returned an indictment against Sherman. Killian hangs up and informs Sherman that Maria has ratted him out; in the morning the DA will ask for higher bail. Unless Sherman can meet the increased bail, he will be back in jail tomorrow. Sherman cannot bear the thought of being incarcerated ever again. Killian responds that he plans to fight the bail increase, assuring Sherman they have a good case.

At home that night, Sherman wanders the apartment alone, considering possible ways to kill himself rather than face more jail time. Judy and Campbell are staying in the family's second house in Southampton. Sherman calls and lets the phone ring a dozen times before Judy finally picks up. She has seen *The City Light* article about Sherman's rent-controlled love nest. Judy is once more stunned by Sherman's lies. She cannot give him the emotional support he needs at this time. Sherman talks to her anyway, reminding her of their early days together. Sherman asks whether she remembers how he used to give her the raised fist Black Power salute every morning when he first began working for Pierce & Pierce. He reminds her why he used to do this; it had been Sherman's way of saying that although he worked for Wall Street, he would never sell out his soul to become just another greedy broker. Sherman is depressed that he forgot

his youthful idealism; he's become everything he never wanted to be. Judy is unmoved by this trip down memory lane. After he hangs up, Killian calls him and asks him to come downtown right away.

At Killian's office, Quigley beams warmly at Sherman. Killian sits Sherman down and plays a recording for him that Quigley has managed to obtain. Sherman hears his own voice and quickly realizes that he is listening to a taped conversation of the night he and Maria discussed the very first article to appear in *The City Light*. The landlord had barged in and interrupted their conversation, and that's when Maria had told Sherman how much she paid in rent. Quigley admits that many landlords illegally tape their tenants to gather evidence against illegal subletting. This is fortunate for Sherman, because the conversation on the landlord's tape records Maria's admission that she was the driver. It also contains details about the on-ramp, barricade, and the robbery attempt, as well as some racist statements that Maria makes, the same statements she'd attributed to Sherman when testifying before the grand jury. Apparently, the landlord records over previous conversations to save tape; thus, the conversation from the night of the accident has been erased. Quigley does mention, however, that Maria entertains other men at her love nest besides Sherman. Even at this juncture, Sherman still believes in Maria's loyalty to him. Unfortunately, the tape is illegal, and can't be introduced in court. Sherman asks whether it would have been legal if he had recorded it himself. Quigley and Killian agree that would be legal, and Quigley explains to Sherman what equipment Sherman would have had to use to make the recording. Sherman smiles and announces that he made the recording himself.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Sherman's character growth takes a dramatic leap in this chapter. Until recently, Sherman had been too demoralized to fight back against the DA's case. As far as Sherman was concerned, life without his five-star reputation and the money to go with it was simply not worth living. Sherman has been rudely awakened, however. He has begun to remember that there are other things in life besides impressing snobby people whom he never liked in the first place, and who don't care about him, either. For the first time, Sherman's real personality is revealed to the reader. His recollection of giving his wife the Black Power salute shows that Sherman's character has more depth than heretofore seen. It has taken the loss of everything for Sherman to find value in his life. Now that he has remembered who he truly is, he becomes committed to fighting for his freedom. The author manages to manipulate the reader's emotions to great effect in this chapter by finally making Sherman likeable. The reader begins to develop hope for Sherman as a human being, and even hope for the future of his marriage, but the ticking clock raises the tension level. It is the eleventh hour, and Sherman's fate will be decided in the morning.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

On the drive to the courthouse with Killian and Quigley, Sherman laments the beauty of the day, expecting to be incarcerated before the day is through. They must sneak past a mob of reporters and demonstrators to enter the courthouse. Inside, Judge Myron Kovitsky presides. Kovitsky has long thought of himself as the people's judge, but the dynamics in this case are unusual. ADA Kramer represents the interests of the unruly mob of people crowding the courthouse, calling for Sherman's blood. To restore order in the courtroom, Kovitsky is forced to oppose and quiet the mob. This puts him on Killian and Sherman's side almost from the beginning, yet the mob's power is strong. When Kramer calls for a bail increase, the mob roars its approval. Killian requests a sidebar and informs the judge he has tape-recorded evidence that bears directly on the case. The judge orders Killian and Kramer to accompany him to his chambers. At the last moment, he takes mercy on Sherman and asks him to come as well, rather than leave him unprotected in the courtroom with the mob.

In chambers, Killian plays the tape of Sherman's wired conversation with Maria in which she insults Kramer and tells Sherman that the DA's office is threatening her with incarceration unless she agrees to tell the story the DA wants to hear. Next, the judge swears in Sherman, who fights back his guilt about committing perjury as he swears that he made both the first and the second recordings himself.

The second recording is played for Judge Kovitsky. It is the conversation Quigley obtained in which Maria admits that she was driving, that the incident had taken place on a highway on-ramp, and that it had been an apparent robbery attempt. Kramer calls the recordings a cheap trick, but Kovitsky is convinced. He returns to the mobbed courtroom and dismisses the indictment against Sherman, although he does give the DA's office leave to represent the case in the future. The mob erupts. Too late, Kovitsky realizes he should have explained about the tape-recorded evidence to the people before dismissing the case. Now the crowd is out of control. They take over the courthouse, and Sherman, Kovitsky, and the attorneys are forced to escape through the back hallways. Bravely, Kovitsky decides to address the people, and fights his way to the top of the courthouse steps where the mob is assembled, so that he can belatedly explain the situation, but the crowd is too out of control, and Kovitsky is forced to flee with the others.

Chapter 31 Analysis

The Reverend Bacon's fabled mob uprising finally comes to pass in this final, climactic chapter. Sherman proves his case and wins his freedom, but the masses are enraged beyond reason. The antipathy stirred up by irresponsible men seeking to exercise their power is vented against Sherman and Judge Kovitsky. As the author has foreshadowed

from the start, Sherman stands no chance against the mob justice inspired by the likes of Bacon, Fallow, and DA Weiss. The author's cynical stance betrays a dark view of justice and the impossibility of finding it even in a fictional novel. From the very beginning, the dubious nature of the prosecution against Sherman McCoy has made it seem like the epitome of what the disillusioned Kramer would call a "piece of shit" case. Yet because of Sherman's character growth, the reader is given hope that in the end, cooler heads will prevail. Unfortunately, the author sticks to his views that justice cannot prevail in a proceeding that was unjust by its very nature. Thus, the reader's emotions are toyed with just as Sherman is toyed with by the circus trial he is forced to endure. In the end, the reader cannot help but feel that the treatment of both racism and justice in the novel is ultimately pointless. The pointlessness of it all is, in fact, the author's point.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

A year later, *The New York Times* prints an update to the Sherman McCoy story. Henry Lamb has recently died from the injuries he sustained the previous year, and Sherman is now being arraigned on a charge of manslaughter. Demonstrators had appeared at the courthouse for the arraignment calling Sherman a "Wall Street murderer." (pg. 686) Sherman responds by telling reporters that he is no longer affiliated with Wall Street or Park Avenue. His current profession, as he states it, is being a defendant. He has undergone a year of legal harassment and now faces a sentence of 8 1/3-to-25 years in prison.

Meanwhile, DA Weiss's persistent prosecution of Sherman McCoy has helped him win his re-election campaign, and Weiss is totally committed to prosecuting Sherman. Sherman's fortune has been bled dry; he can no longer afford a lawyer, although Tommy Killian still speaks passionately to the press in Sherman's defense. A civil suit against Sherman has awarded $12 million to Henry Lamb's family, but Sherman is currently appealing that verdict. He has sold his $3.2-million Park Avenue apartment and is further being sued by his real estate agent because Al Vogel is suing her to recover her commission from the sale, insisting that the money belongs to Henry Lamb. Meanwhile, Sherman and his wife, Judy, are estranged, but Judy did appear in court to witness Sherman's arraignment. At one point in the proceedings, Sherman looked at his wife and raised his fist in a Black Power salute.

Epilogue Analysis

The author plays this disillusioning Epilogue for comedic value. Tom Wolfe ends the novel on, unsurprisingly, a cynical note. The characters who least deserve their success reap the most. Maria marries her boytoy, Filippo Chirazzi, and lives happily on her billion-dollar fortune, untouched by prosecution attempts. Peter Fallow has married the Dead Mouse's daughter, thus ensuring his job security regardless of how little he may accomplish in the future. The corrupt District Attorney, Abe Weiss, wins his re-election by a landslide, because, in large part, of his persistence in prosecuting Sherman. In short, the bad guys win. Whether the good guy loses remains to be seen. Sherman has not officially lost his case, but the constant litigation has drained him of his fortune. He's lost his home and his job, but not his spirit. In the only positive note to come out of this lengthy melodrama, Sherman has recovered his soul, and quite possibly, the love and support of his wife.

Characters

Sherman McCoy

Sherman McCoy is a testament to author Tom Wolfe's ability to draw warm, complex human characters. If judged by his actions, Sherman is easy to hate. In fact, most of New York City winds up hating him before the novel has reached the midway point, yet because the reader is privy to Sherman's inner dialogue, the reader cannot help but like him. Sherman's internal logic is frequently driven by a greedy, childish sense of entitlement, yet the voice of his conscience speaks out very strongly on occasion as well.

Thus, his character embodies that all-too-human struggle between selfishness and personal responsibility. It is hard not to relate to Sherman in a small way, and because his character is drawn so oafishly and satirically, the reader feels safe in judging Sherman, at least at first. He judges himself purely by his image. For example, Sherman is convinced that he is a great father despite the fact that he spends virtually no time with his daughter; he thinks he's a great dad because each morning when he walks his daughter across the street to the bus stop, he projects a public image of graceful fatherhood. He believes that image above the facts and would be offended if anyone pointed out that he spends no time with little Campbell. As with many of the characters in the novel, Sherman becomes offended by any evidence that his personal attributes are less stellar than he believes them to be. However, along the way Sherman slowly, painfully, and often unwillingly begins to acquire a greater sense of self. The voice of his conscience grows stronger, as does his self-knowledge. The better he comes to know himself, the more capable he is of personal integrity, for the very definition of integrity is being true to oneself.

It is ironic that Sherman's re-evaluation of himself coincides with the public's reappraisal of him as well. Sherman, who laughably calls himself the Master of the Universe in the first half of the novel, begins to realize that he is but a mortal man. He is dragged through the criminal justice system and reduced to the level of people he once considered his inferiors. This experience reminds him of his youthful ideals. Once, he had sworn to his wife daily, by the use of his Black Power salute, that he would never allow the greedy ideals of Wall Street to become his ideals. That vow, long forgotten but finally remembered, helps return Sherman to reality.

Meanwhile, the press, ironically, begins to paint a picture of him to rival his Master of the Universe concept. At last, the public begins to share Sherman's omnipotent view of himself, but unfortunately, the press creates that illusion only for the pleasure of tearing it down. Defeating Sherman McCoy, the invincible representative of White Power, is a sure crowd pleaser for the ethnic minorities in New York city. Sherman is all but burned in effigy as the enraged people of Harlem direct their hatred at him. Sherman becomes the focal point of a racial and political controversy, and his money, job, reputation, and achievements are stripped away bit by bit.

It is through this loss that Sherman rediscovers his true self, however. Having always lived an isolated life of privilege, Sherman has learned to fear the outside world. Safe in his golden cocoon, he has always assumed that the people of the middle and lower classes are all dangerous criminals, from whom he must keep himself and his family safe, as his parents did for him. By being cast into prison with the actual criminal element of the mean streets of New York, Sherman is forced to face his worst nightmare.

By confronting his fear so dramatically, Sherman learns several things. He learns that not all people who look different from him are animalistic criminals. He learns that not all criminals are bad people, and, most important, he learns that he is capable of standing up for himself against even the insane criminal element he has long feared. Sherman is a fighter, and his legendary McCoy temper reasserts itself at the end of the novel as an instrument of good, rather than pettiness or evil. Sherman, more than ADA Kramer, emerges as the true warrior for justice in the book.

Lawrence N. Kramer

Larry Kramer earns $36,000 a year before taxes as an Assistant District Attorney in the Bronx. Throughout most of the book, he defines himself by this fact. Fundamentally, Kramer's huge ego drives him to define himself by his ability to impress others. Throughout the book he casts around for some means of feeling superior, which is his character's driving need. His basic dissatisfaction stems from the fact that he feels others judge him by how much he makes, and his public servant's salary does not allow him to feel superior. Years ago in law school, he saw things a little differently. Kramer convinced himself early on that his desire to be a warrior for justice, to bring hope to the average Joe on the street, was based entirely on his idealism and desire to serve society. He decided to become a public servant by joining the DA's office. He told himself then that this choice was based on his desire to fight for justice, but in truth, Kramer was merely enamored of the impressive vision he would make in the courtroom with his powerful muscles and sonorous voice. In school, he had judged his classmates who chose the more lucrative private practice as sell-outs with no integrity, but it is he himself who has no integrity. He chose public service only to make himself look good.

Now as the years go by and his former classmates are earning higher starting salaries than he stands to earn at the height of his career, Kramer is beginning to regret his choice. He has not gotten the media acclaim he so deeply desires, and, in fact, no one admires him. His need to feel superior is unfulfilled. He casts desperately about for some means of making himself feel superior, and his eyes light on the beautiful visage of juror Shelly Thomas. Shelly represents Kramer's ideal. She is, he thinks, a Caucasian woman from the richest part of the Bronx. If he can convince her to admire him, he will have achieved some part of the feeling of superiority he seeks. Thus, Kramer is disillusioned to learn that she is not rich and that she is of Greek extraction. Nonetheless, she looks the part, and it is appearances that interest Kramer. By eating at expensive restaurants which he can ill-afford with Shelly on his arm, Kramer believes he is projecting the image of success he so deeply desires. The image he projects to the

reader is quite different. The reader sees a man who betrays his wife and new baby for a quick superiority fix. Kramer's attempts to woo Shelly by prosecuting Herbert 92X fail to impress the reader as well because it is clear that Kramer doesn't care about achieving justice in the case; he cares only about achieving the appearance of justice to win Shelly over.

Entering this mix at the right time is the Sherman McCoy case. Here, Kramer at last finds his reason for being. Kramer responds to the case with his usual callous approach to justice. He does not care to learn the true facts of the case. What Kramer cares about is the media coverage he enjoys as the prosecuting attorney of record. Kramer ignores any facts that seem to support Sherman's innocence because Kramer, like his powerful boss, Abe Weiss, is interested only in putting on a good show for the media. Sherman has been convicted by the press long before his identity is discovered, and Kramer's only goal is to offer up a rich, white defendant as a sacrificial lamb for public consumption. Kramer's self-interest prevents him from ascertaining the true facts of the case; he needs Sherman to be guilty, and therefore, in his eyes, Sherman is guilty as charged. Between winning the attentions of Shelly Thomas and glorification from the media, Kramer's need to feel superior is at last being fulfilled. When Kramer offers Maria Ruskin a deal to save her from the consequences of her involvement in the hit and run, Kramer discovers his ultimate high: power. Maria's fear is a panacea for his soul. The thought that a wealthy, gorgeous socialite is afraid of his power finally gives Kramer the sense of superiority he's sought all along.

Peter Fallow

As with many of the characters in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Peter Fallow's chief preoccupation is making himself feel superior to his fellow human beings. He comes from an aristocratic family in England; however, his family was also poor. Thus, Fallow was born into a society of nobility and privilege, yet lacked the money to compete with the people he viewed as his peers. Fallow compensated for this in his youth by developing a sharp sense of humor and becoming a carousing rake. His penchant for carousing has followed him from England to the United States, where he now demonstrates the noble art of mooching off his friends and acquaintances. Very likely, he first developed this habit in England, where his friends were all far richer than he. However, in New York City, Fallow has raised this habit of mooching to an art form. He preys on gullible Americans, or "Yanks" as he prefers to call them, by using flattery to compel them to pay the large tabs Fallow likes to run up at Leicester's. Fallow's enjoyment of the high life has degenerated into a serious case of alcoholism and denial. He typically wakes up with a hangover so profound he cannot stand without staggering. Fallow keeps bottles of vodka squirreled away in his office, on the odd chance he actually has to put in an appearance at work.

When the reader first meets Fallow, he is experiencing a hangover of colossal proportions and valiantly trying to keep the memories of his debauched behavior at bay. Humiliating memories frequently creep up on Fallow, fragments of his frequent alcoholic hazes. Though vague and incomplete, these memories give away enough for the reader

to realize that his so-called friends at Leicester's, particularly the lovely Caroline Heftshank, enjoy taking advantage of him when he's drunk. Fallow thinks every woman wants him, and Caroline apparently enjoys using his cockiness against him. In one notable memory fragment, Caroline tricks him into coming upstairs with her, taking off his pants, and sitting on a piece of office equipment. Something about a blue light and a flash is all Fallow remembers at first. Later in the day the memory of some rather embarrassing xeroxes being circulated around Leicester's threatens to raise its ugly head, but Fallow, expert in denial, quickly quashes it. Fortunately for Fallow, it doesn't take much for him to forget about his poor behavior.

Once he has broken the Henry Lamb story, Fallow quickly forgets that he was ever in disgrace at work. He doesn't care to remember that the story was a gift from the manipulative Reverend Bacon. Ironically, it is this same gift for denial that allows him to follow Caroline Heftshank upstairs once again at Leicester's, and obtains from her the identity of the mystery brunette who was seen in Sherman's Mercedes. Religion, as Sherman says, is what one sends one's kid to Sunday school to learn, so that one need not speak of it further. Thus, although religion is conspicuously absent in much of the book, Fallow's character provides an apt illustration of the saying, "God protects drunkards and fools." Fallow is both. Yet somehow, in the end, Fallow comes out on top. He receives admiration and accolades for his work and marries the boss's daughter to boot.

Maria Ruskin

Sherman likes to think of his mistress Maria, wife of billionaire Arthur Ruskin, as a woman whose game is men. He certainly does not intend to suggest that Maria is a professional, but it is an apt metaphor. Just as his game is bond-trading, her game is, indeed, men. She is so good at her profession that she's managed to bag the big game, so to speak. Seventy-one-year-old multi-billionaire Arthur Ruskin is the ideal grab; he couldn't care less about his wife's comings and goings, allowing her plenty of free time for her many boyfriends, and his health is not good. He enjoys rich foods and a sedate lifestyle, and this combination ultimately conspires to do him in, leaving the widow Ruskin to count her billions. Somehow for all this, Sherman remains unwavering in his support of Maria's virtue and loyalty. He thinks of her as a frisky, young animal who deserves her romps, but whose heart loyally belongs to the Master of the Universe, as Sherman privately calls himself. He believes that Maria loves him only, and that she would lovingly sacrifice her best interests on his behalf. Sherman must have her confused with his loyal wife, Judy.

Poor Sherman's social and economic status pales by comparison next to Maria's other lovers' though he is unwilling to see this. Sherman feels entitled to Maria; she's a perk of his job. He feels he's earned her fair and square, and ignores his lawyer's admonitions that Maria might endanger Sherman's case by lying to protect herself. Since the narration never reveals Maria's thoughts directly, the reader can gauge them only by her actions and the surrounding circumstances. Her actions reveal as much about Sherman's napvety as they do about her fickle heart. As Sherman congratulates himself

on his gentlemanly interpretation of Maria's motives, Maria sells him out to the District Attorney when her attempts to manipulate him more directly fail. Safe from prosecution, the newly widowed Maria marries her boytoy, hot young artist Filippo Chirazzi, and presumably spends her days in the lap of luxury with her hunky, popular new husband. One hesitates to label this a union of everlasting love, but for the moment at least, Maria is content.

Judy McCoy

Sherman's wife, Judy, plays a relatively minor role in both the novel and in the media accounts of events. Peter Fallow relegates her to a subordinate role in the press coverage, mentioning her plain looks only in comparison to Maria's remarkable attractiveness. Sherman likewise relegates her, along with their daughter Campbell, to a subordinate role in his life. Sherman ignores Judy's frequent pleas to spend more time with the family, and resents the interior decorating business she uses to fill what would otherwise be lonely hours. Despite Sherman's resentment of Judy, the portrait the reader sees is of a kind, gentle, loving wife.

When she first learns of Sherman's indiscretion with Maria, Judy's pained reaction shows the depth of her love for her husband. As the book progresses and his lies pile up, Judy's love is shaken to the core. Nobly, she promises to stand by her husband during his trial but only publicly. Privately, she can offer him no consolation. Judy's character is sad and hurt throughout most of the novel, but her character is not developed much beyond that. The story is largely seen through Sherman's eyes, and the only time Sherman thinks of Judy is when he is struggling between his guilt over hurting her and his resentment of that guilt.

Reverend Bacon

The Reverend Bacon, or Reverend Bacon, which he prefers, is more caricature than character. As an outspoken African-American leader, he supposedly represents the interests of the people of Harlem, yet behind the scenes, he is a greedy caricature of a corrupt leader. Smooth, polished, and a master media manipulator, Reverend Bacon is a continual thorn in the side of the beleaguered white Mayor. Bacon eats in the same expensive restaurant that he's suing for personal profit, a restaurant that the white oppressors in the DA's office, about whom he frequently rants, cannot afford. Bacon uses his moral authority to apply public pressure in support of his frequent lawsuits, which he files seeking large monetary rewards. These lawsuits are purportedly filed to gain justice and equal rights for men and women of color in New York City. As a leader, Reverend Bacon continually lets down his people. In the story, he provides the African-American counterpart to the greedy purveyors of White Justice, like the Mayor and Abe Weiss. Author Tom Wolfe provides a negative view of greedy public officials of every race and creed, and Reverend Bacon is a big part of this multi-cultural exploration of greed.

Abe Weiss

As District Attorney, Abe Weiss is the head honcho in the justice complex in the Bronx where Assistant District Attorney Kramer works. Weiss is portrayed as a publicity-hungry politician whose only goal is to keep getting elected to office. His passion for media coverage is rivaled only by his passion for power. These two passions are what he calls his idealism, and ADA Kramer finds himself inspired by these ideals of Weiss's. Graciously, Weiss shares the press coverage with Kramer when the McCoy case goes to court. Weiss is in a position to feel expansive once the press realizes his intent to prosecute the rich, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, Sherman McCoy. This high-profile indictment of a rich, white man like McCoy for mortally wounding a poor, black teenager like Henry Lamb makes Abe Weiss a hero to the minority lobbyist groups who formerly called him a purveyor of "White Justice." This newfound support provides him with enough votes to win back his office, which is his only true motive for prosecuting Sherman McCoy in the first place. Once hapless Sherman becomes a tool in Weiss's re-election bid, no amount of evidence could possibly suffice to clear Sherman's name.

Bernie Fitzgibbon

Bernie Fitzgibbon is the chief of the Homicide Bureau in the District Attorney's Office. As such, he is higher up the totem pole than ADA Kramer. The author doesn't divulge their exact relationship within the office hierarchy, but Tom Wolfe provides a view of the power dynamics between them to clarify matters. When Kramer is called, for the first time, into DA Abe Weiss's office, Weiss speaks only to Bernie, thus indicating that Bernie is Kramer's superior. As Kramer's status in the office grows, Weiss begins to address him directly in later meetings. Bernie and Abe are on a first-name basis from the start of the book, but Kramer achieves this privilege only when he lands the McCoy case. Another privilege that Bernie's rank grants him is the ability to argue with the boss. When Weiss wants to make a public spectacle out of Sherman's arrest, Bernie vetoes him because he's already promised Sherman's defense attorney that the arrest will be low profile. By making such a kind promise in the first place and by fighting to honor it, Bernie demonstrates his integrity. Bernie's character provides an ethical counterpoint to his greedy, publicity-hungry colleagues, Weiss and Kramer.

Sir Gerald Steiner

Sir Gerald Steiner is a wealthy financier and the owner of *The City Light* where Peter Fallow works. A fellow Englishman, Steiner recruited Fallow to follow him to the United States and work for his tabloid-style newspaper. The reader sees Steiner mainly through Fallow's eyes. When he still lived in England, Fallow had looked down upon Steiner supposedly because Steiner is Jewish, but it was really because Fallow needs to look down on people to compensate for his own feelings of inferiority. Fallow has turned Steiner's corporate nickname, the Dread Brit, into the mocking name of the Dead Mouse. The Dead Mouse is widely believed to run *The City Light* in service of his varied business investments, but really Steiner cares deeply about his tabloid paper. Steiner

admires the art of yellow journalism, as he admires the men who are willing to muck around on the streets digging up dirt about their fellow citizens, all in the name of freedom of the press.

Arthur Ruskin

Arthur is a 71- year-old billionaire who made his great fortune late in life. As reporter Peter Fallow discovers, Arthur wishes to be admired for his economic prowess. For this reason, Arthur takes a trophy wife, Maria Ruskin, and frequents stylish restaurants where the staff treats him like royalty. Arthur's character is not well developed in the novel, and by all accounts, his relationship with his wife is not well developed, either. Maria is a trophy whom he has purchased, and he does not appear to think of her in traditional wifely terms. Ruskin's ignominious death in the fashionable restaurant proves the futility of his belief that his financial success has won him any true friends.

Germaine Boll

Germaine is the tenant of record for Maria Ruskin's rent-controlled love nest. Germaine figures prominently in the plot because the landlord's attempts to unmask her illegal sublease lead him to wire the apartment for sound. The resulting tape-recorded conversations ultimately provide Sherman the evidence he needs to get his case dismissed.

Rhoda Kramer

Rhoda is ADA Kramer's wife and the mother of their new baby boy. She is a minor character, but her existence provides a repugnant moral context for Kramer's illicit relationship with Shelly Thomas.

Objects/Places

The Black Mercedes-Benz

The $48,000, two-door sports car owned by Sherman McCoy is the vehicle that hits Henry Lamb. Subsequently, the car becomes the focus of a law enforcement search and ultimately leads police to Sherman's door.

Bruckner Boulevard

Bruckner Boulevard runs through a seedy, crime-infested area of the Bronx. Sherman's attempt to escape this downtrodden street by taking an on-ramp to the expressway leads to the hit-and-run incident with Henry Lamb. Later, Lamb's partner in crime, Roland Auburn, lies to the police, insisting that Sherman's Mercedes hit Henry while they were walking innocently along Bruckner Boulevard.

The Criminal Courts Building

Sherman is brought downtown to this vast building the day he is arrested. The building contains Central Booking, detention cells, as well as courtrooms for the disposition of criminal cases like Sherman's.

Germaine Boll's Townhouse

This rent-controlled love nest is illegally sublet to Maria Ruskin by Germaine Boll. Germaine pays $331 a month in rent to the landlord, but charges Maria over $900. The landlord becomes suspicious and begins surreptitiously recording conversations in the apartment, hoping to catch Maria and Germaine in their illegal scheme. These recordings prove to be valuable evidence in Sherman's criminal case. In the novel's Epilogue, it is noted that ADA Kramer loses his job when he later tries to rent the love nest for his own use, under the name of his would-be mistress, Shelly Thomas.

Harold A. Burns's

The fashionable funeral parlor on Madison Avenue where New York's high society gathers to bid adieu to fallen members of their social class. Maria Ruskin holds her billionaire husband, Arthur's, funeral here, and it is here that Peter Fallow eavesdrops on her conversation with Sherman McCoy.

Leicester's

Pronounced "Lester's," this restaurant is a home away from home for ex-patriot Brits like Peter Fallow.

Park Avenue

This upscale street in New York, home to the exceedingly wealthy, becomes a target of poor, minority protesters during the Sherman McCoy scandal. Sherman is ultimately forced to sell his $3.2-million Park Avenue apartment to satisfy his mounting legal fees.

Pierce & Pierce

This Wall Street investment firm specializes in trading bonds. Billions of dollars pass through the firm each day. Sherman McCoy, at the outset of the novel, is Pierce & Pierce's number-one bond salesman.

The Ramp

This on-ramp leading from Bruckner Boulevard, in the Bronx, to the highway overhead is where Henry Lamb is hit by Sherman's Mercedes. Sherman's would-be robber, Roland Auburn, claims the incident took place on Bruckner Boulevard. Roland lies to cover up the fact that he barricaded the on-ramp to force passing vehicles like Sherman's to stop so he can rob them.

Talliafero

Sherman's daughter, Campbell, attends this private school, pronounced "Tolliver" by those in the know.

Social Concerns And Themes

T he Bonfire of the Vanities deals with what Wolfe calls the "big, rich slices of contemporary life" that he believes modern authors have too long neglected or completely ignored. These are the details of life in a metropolis — race relations, the mass media, the law, and the class structure — handled in a highly realistic manner.

Sherman McCoy, a prodigiously successful bond trader at a prestigious Wall Street firm, is involved in a car accident in which his mistress, Maria Ruskin, fatally injures a young man, Henry Lamb, in the South Bronx. Seen by some as "the Great White Defendant," Sherman is arrested and arraigned, humiliated by and paraded before the press in a spectacle motivated by the political ambitions of various powerful individuals. Disgraced and ostracized, Sherman quickly loses his wealth, wife, job, home, mistress, friends, all sense of privilege and security, and possibly even his family.

Essential to the telling of these events is the fact that Sherman is a member of the wealthy elite and that Henry Lamb is a poor, black man. Both live in the most powerful, fascinating city of the late twentieth century, but whereas Henry Lamb lives in a public housing project in one of the worst neighborhoods, Sherman has a charmed existence in the most glamorous, expensive, and insulated quarter of the city.

The social worlds within New York are as highly stratified as they are diverse. Wolfe's meticulous attention to details underscores the status of characters ranging from crack dealers to business tycoons. Rarely does Wolfe fail to mention the ceiling height or decor of a room through which his characters move. How much characters earn, their ethnicity, speech, affectations, background, and clothing are all details emblematic of their culture, values, and nature. For example, the district attorney, seeking to establish credibility for "the crack king of Evergreen Avenue," is careful to costume him for an appearance before a jury in a button-down oxford shirt and loafers rather than his habitual windbreaker and sneakers. Even among the very wealthy, status and class remain virtual obsessions. Sherman, for instance, often travels in social circles of the nouveaux riche that he, educated at the finest preparatory schools and universities, occasionally finds contemptible.

Wolfe sets most of the legal action of his novel in the Bronx, which has one of the highest crime rates in the world.

He graphically depicts the process by which criminal cases in the Bronx are handled by an overworked and underpaid staff of assistant district attorneys, judges, and police. The entire judicial system is so entrenched in bureaucracy, legalism, and politics that only the Irish cops and lawyers, who tenaciously adhere to a rigid code governing not only their demeanor but the exchange of favors and "contracts," emerge as less than despicable.

The racial tensions depicted in the novel are, like everything else, orchestrated and controlled by various forces that place greater emphasis on what an individual

represents than on the individual himself. While virtually all of the lawyers, judges, and court personnel in the Bronx Country Building are white, the majority of those involved in the crimes — perpetrators and victims alike — are not. The aggressive prosecution of a white male, especially a rich, well-educated one from Park Avenue, for a crime against a poor black from the Bronx with no criminal record, is a rare opportunity for the Bronx district attorney to show his electorate that he is not a racist, but a servant of the people. In the media circus that follows his accident, Sherman becomes the representative of a society that community activists, led by the sensationalistic Reverend Bacon, blame for the ills of the poor, the minorities, and the oppressed.

Like the district attorney and his assistants, the journalists and television reporters allow themselves to be manipulated in their presentation of "news." Peter Fallow, a reporter for The City Light newspaper, for example, is fed stories by a lawyer, Al Vogel, who is anything but disinterested in the case of Henry Lamb. Television reporters usually follow the stories that first appear in newspapers with little regard for truth or accuracy. In accepting exclusives on stories in exchange for featured coverage, television reporters simply broadcast events staged for broadcast and are often more willingly and shamelessly manipulated than Fallow.

Techniques/Literary Precedents

Wolfe tells his story in the same style that characterizes his new journalism. Just as he appropriated fictional techniques for nonfiction, he freely uses nonfictional techniques in fiction. The latter, however, is nothing new. Wolfe laments the disappearance of novels, such as those by Dickens, Thackerey, Balzac, and Zola, alive with convincing precision that revealed how people in great cities lived during a particular age. Infused with immensely realistic detail, The Bonfire of the Vanities is as credible in describing the holding pens in the Bronx as it is in chronicling a glamorous dinner party on the Upper East Side. In addition, Wolfe effectively uses language to express not only a character's status but personality as well.

Unlike most of his nonfictional work, Wolfe employs omniscient narration that allows him to develop a variety of characters and freely comment on their motivations, inner thoughts, and backgrounds.

Themes

Justice

Justice is much discussed but never makes an actual appearance in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Assistant District Attorney Larry Kramer is the author's representation of the sad state of justice in New York City. As far as ADA Kramer is concerned, 98% of criminal defendants are guilty. This statistical "fact" is one he claims to have learned within 2 weeks of joining the DA's office, although it flies in the face of American justice, which states that all defendants are innocent unless and until proven guilty. Thus, for Kramer to assume the guilt of 98% of indicted defendants demonstrates his utter contempt for the democratic ideals of justice. Kramer's contempt for justice is shown in other ways, as well. He refers to the busloads of defendants who are brought into the criminal courts complex each week as "the chow." (Chapter 2, pg. 41) Having already assumed their guilt, their sole purpose, from Kramer's point of view, is to provide grist for the justice mill. Without the chow, "Fifty judges, thirty-five law clerks, 245 assistant district attorneys, one D.A....and Christ knew how many criminal lawyers, Legal Aid lawyers, court reporters, court clerks, court officers, correction officers, probation officers, social workers, bail bondsmen, special investigators, case clerks, [and] court psychiatrists" would be out of work. (Chapter 2, pg. 42) Justice is big business in New York City, and possibly the number one employer in the Bronx.

Kramer's attitude reflects what he has learned from his colleagues. Much of the cynicism prevalent in the District Attorney's Office is the result of negative peer pressure. Throughout the novel, on the rare occasion when Kramer feels inclined to take a case seriously, he quickly quashes that instinct because he would not want his jaded co-workers to consider him soft on crime. For example, when he meets Annie Lamb to depose her on her son's hit-and-run case, Kramer hesitates to treat her with respect for fear of being laughed at by the two street-wise police detectives who accompany him to the meeting.

Ironically, both detectives are inclined to think well of Mrs. Lamb, and Kramer's rude treatment of her wins him no friends. Later, when the press criticizes him for not taking Mrs. Lamb seriously, Kramer does a complete about-face. Publicly, he becomes her champion, and his initial cynicism is forgotten. In fact, Kramer convinces himself that he is a warrior for justice, willing to fight *mano a mano* against street crime to protect the likes of Annie Lamb. Of course, the narrator reveals Kramer's true inner thoughts, which center on such concerns as whether the cameras have captured his good side and whether the courtroom artist will draw him with a full head of hair.

When evidence comes to light that raises serious questions about the validity of prosecuting Sherman McCoy for the hit and run, Kramer refuses to investigate the evidence. ADA Kramer, like his powerful boss, District Attorney Abe Weiss, cares only about the positive media image to be garnered for imprisoning a rich, white, Park Avenue resident like Sherman. The actual perpetrators of crimes, like Roland Auburn

and Maria Ruskin, are freed by Kramer's office in exchange for their testimony against Sherman. Thus, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, it is the appearance of justice for which Kramer fights. No one, least of all Kramer, cares about the true facts of the hit-and-run case; what matters is that the public is tricked into believing that justice has been served.

Oppression

Oppression is discussed often in the novel as a product of racism. Reverend Bacon believes racism causes oppression. In fact, ADA Kramer embodies that racism with his belief that oppression is caused by race. To Kramer's way of thinking, the people of the Bronx--whom he refers to in general as *they*--are inherently criminal because of their ethnic makeup. If this is the thinking of the Assistant District Attorney for the Bronx, then the charges of "Weiss justice" being "White Justice" are all too true, but these charges of racism are often used as a subterfuge for Reverend Bacon's own brand of oppression. He rallies popular support based on the portrait he paints of racial injustice, but then uses that support to oppress further the African-American people of Harlem. He stirs up anger about racial prejudice to rally his troops, but the battle he fights is not for the good of the people. He fights for the financial improvement of Reverend Bacon.

Bacon diverts all the money and the passionate energy of his people to his own pockets. The author makes it clear that racism is not the sole cause of oppression.

Greed is the most popular reason to oppress the powerless, as evidenced repeatedly throughout the novel. Reverend Bacon's character is not the only one who waves the banner of idealism as a cover for his greed. ADA Kramer has created an idealistic, people's-warrior-for-justice image of himself that masks his greed and lust for power. Kramer pretends to be idealistic to win the favor of Shelly Thomas and the television viewing audience. His actions demonstrate an almost Hitlerian willingness to sacrifice a man's (or woman's) freedom and reputation to acquire personal power.

This oppressive use of power is made even more frightening by Kramer's level of self-denial. He believes in his image as an idealistic warrior for justice and works hard to convince his friends and his mistress that his remarkable idealism separates him from the company of mere mortals. He also convinces himself and others that while Sherman is a criminal, Kramer's star witness, the Crack King of Evergreen Avenue, is an upstanding young man. Sherman finds himself among the oppressed minorities as he is ground under the wheels of justice. The rich white oppressor, as Sherman has been portrayed in the media, joins the ranks of the oppressed to the great glee of oppressed people everywhere. The irony central to Sherman's case is that White Justice oppresses one of its own to appease the oppressed minority masses. It is not freedom from oppression that passes for justice in New York City, but equality of oppression for all.

Admiration

All human beings crave admiration. In *The Bonfire of the Vanities* this is construed negatively. The need for admiration is the genesis for most of the characters' flaws. Peter Fallow milks his fame in hopes of winning the admiration of his peers. Sherman McCoy seeks admiration for his ability to manipulate billions of dollars. ADA Kramer seeks the admiration of Miss Shelly Thomas when he feels embarrassed by his inability to care for his wife and young family. In the novel, the characters reach out for admiration in immature, lewd, and even dangerous ways. The 1980's were frequently depicted in the media as the decade of greed and materialism. Popular American culture saluted this greed with iconic songs like Madonna's *Material Girl*.

The author suggests that the genesis of this materialistic culture is a greed for admiration that rises to the level of a superiority complex. Thus, the author portrays the greed of the 1980's as a perversion of the otherwise healthy psychological need for admiration. By using money as the arbiter of self-worth, men like Sherman McCoy and Arthur Ruskin feel that they deserve to be admired far beyond mere mortal human beings. Conversely, in the society depicted by the novel, men like Kramer must find other ways to enjoy feelings of superiority. This need for superiority and excessive admiration is how Tom Wolfe characterizes the quicksand foundation of the materialistic 1980's in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

To look beyond the genesis of the problem is to study the healthy version of the human need for admiration. The reason the reader finds Sherman likeable despite his illusionary sense of entitlement is because the author depicts him as unappreciated. No one seems to notice that it takes sheer guts for Sherman to risk billions of dollars of other people's money every day. Every transaction is critical, and the courageous fearlessness it takes to juggle such vast sums goes totally unappreciated by most people. In many ways, Sherman's profession shares the stress load of an equally under-appreciated profession, airline traffic controllers. To juggle multiple items of great value, whether they are bonds or airplanes full of human beings, requires nerves of steel, intense focus, and many other admirable qualities. However, bond traders like Sherman, until the early 1980's, were called the Bond Bores. Judy scathingly refers to his profession as the process of picking up golden crumbs. Such lack of appreciation is unfortunately rampant in society, and its consequences can be seen throughout 1980's New York, as depicted in the novel. When money serves as the measure of admiration in a society, self-interested greed is the likely result. Ultimately, it is by changing the yardstick with which he measures himself that Sherman comes to believes he is truly worthy of admiration.

Style

Point of View

The Bonfire of the Vanities is told through a third-person, omniscient narrator, primarily from the points of view of Sherman McCoy, ADA Kramer, and Peter Fallow. Notably absent from the characters whose thoughts are shared with the reader are Maria Ruskin, Judy McCoy, the Reverend Bacon, and Judge Myron Kovitsky. Thus, neither of Sherman's women shares her thoughts with the reader. This choice by the author promotes dramatic tension because the reader must wait and worry along with Sherman to find out how the women will respond to the dramatic events surrounding the hit and run in the Bronx.

The author additionally promotes his satirical flavor by withholding the women's thoughts, because the reader, Sherman's lawyer, Sherman's father--in fact, everybody but Sherman--can tell which way the wind's blowing. Maria's loyalties have obviously never lain with Sherman, and it is only his giant-sized ego that convinces him her heart is true. The narration often shows Sherman too preoccupied with his own petty problems to notice the shallow insincerity of Maria's affection. Similarly, the third-person narrative shows Reverend Bacon's theft of the Episcopal Church funds through the eyes of the napve Edward Fiske. Fiske is later shown being suckered into paying the bill at Leicester's. It would have been less fun for the author to delve directly into Bacon's thoughts to reveal the deception than to make a subtle mockery of the hapless Fiske. Thus, the selectively omniscient narration lends comedic value to Tom Wolfe's satire. The author's choice to exclude Judge Kovitsky from the narrator's purview is done not for comedic effect, but to maximize the novel's emotional impact. The reader must wait nervously, along with Sherman, to learn which side of the case the judge favors.

As the protagonist, Sherman's thoughts are vital to the novel. He is the bug under the microscope, and the reader is treated to a first-hand view as he is poked and prodded by the media and the DA's office. Sherman's thoughts are written in a stream-of-consciousness style, which greatly enhances the satire. By contrasting the pettiness of Sherman's thoughts with the weightiness of a given event--such as cheating on his wife or running over a teenager--the author makes fun of the human ego in all its petty vanity. ADA Kramer's character takes vanity to a new height when the story is told from his point of view. Human lives are on the line, but Kramer can worry only about how deflated his muscles have become and whether the courtroom artist will draw him with a full head of hair. Peter Fallow's viewpoint is laced with dark satire as well, full of flattering self-appraisals, such as calling his appearance Byronic, despite the vast evidence of his debauched state. Consequently, with his careful selection of narrative viewpoints, the author adds to both the dramatic and satirical aspects of the novel.

Setting

The Bonfire of the Vanities is dedicated to an exploration of New York City. This inimitable city lives and breathes and rages across the pages of this 690-page novel. The city is not merely transformed into a character in the novel; it is actually several distinct characters. Author Tom Wolfe brings the seedy streets of the Bronx alive. Through the character of Lawrence Kramer, Assistant District Attorney for the Bronx, the reader learns the history of this once lovely area. Over the years, property values have fallen, and the once predominantly Jewish, middle-to-upper-class neighborhood has become a hard, crime-infested place to live.

The mostly Caucasian employees of the District Attorney's office blame the high crime rate not on economic factors but on the ethnic minority races who inhabit the once all-white area. Kramer and his cohorts see only those members of the populace who break the law and find their way into the court system; however, the Irish, Jewish, and Italian justice employees judge the entire population of the Bronx based on this criminal element. It is an *Us-vs.-Them* mentality, and *they* are represented by the poor and working-class ethnic minorities living in the Bronx. *They* are the enemy in Larry Kramer's mind, his perceived antagonist. The Bronx plays the part of antagonist for Sherman McCoy as well. In his fateful descent to the mean streets, Sherman perceives everyone he sees as a potential threat. This fear-based perception contributes to the situation he finds himself in on the ramp.

Harlem plays another character in the story, similar to the Bronx, but meaner. Harlem represents the anger of the oppressed. The predominantly African-American, meager-to-low-income residents of Harlem have been given a raw deal by the purveyors of White Justice. To make matters worse, their own leaders, like Reverend Bacon, do not seek to uplift the people, but rather to enrage. Bacon specializes in promoting civil unrest. He sees them as his personal army and hopes to inspire them to rise up against their white oppressors. Unfortunately for the people of Harlem, Bacon does this purely for personal gain. His motivations are no different than the white oppressors. Bacon encourages his followers to slash and burn their own homes and businesses to strike fear into the hearts of the white purveyors of justice, but should the people of Harlem win their great race war, all the profits will be funneled directly into the hands of Bacon and his cohorts. Thus, Harlem symbolizes potent, but futile, rage.

Park Avenue is the third character played by the city of New York. Park Avenue represents *la crime de la crime* of New York high society. Here on the avenue, people have every advantage, yet what do they do with these advantages? Nothing of substance, according to author Tom Wolfe. The denizens of Park Avenue spend much of the billions at their disposal on impressing the other residents of Park Avenue. It is a shallow and competitive world, brought to life primarily through the character of Sherman McCoy. Sherman is blessed with a fundamental human decency, which he has managed to nearly suppress at the outset of the novel. However, as the plot unfolds, his decency begins to assert itself, and provides an excellent contrast to the shallowness of his neighbors. Park Avenue is depicted as a character wholly lacking in

human respect. Ultimately, for Sherman to reclaim his humanity, he is forced to leave Park Avenue, where he no longer belongs.

Language and Meaning

The language in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* is very much the language of the streets. The tough-talking Irish police detective, Detective Martin, epitomizes the foul-mouthed, wise-cracking, no-nonsense dialect necessary to communicate with the criminals and punks he deals with each day. Ironically, this language transcends the streets and finds a home in the office of the Bronx District Attorney as well. The college-educated lawyers in the DA's office all take care to replace their "doesn't"s with "don't"s and their "isn't"s with "ain't"s, in the hopes of sounding tough and street-wise. Meanwhile, the upper-class denizens of Park Avenue speak with a formality designed to demonstrate their superiority to, and lack of affiliation with, the lower classes.

Consequently, the author's use of language ranges adeptly from one extreme to another, depending on which character is speaking. Accents are another important aspect of the book's language. Both Sherman and his primary antagonist, Larry Kramer, focus heavily on the accents of everyone with whom they interact. Sherman's mistress, Maria, has a distinct Southern-belle accent which charms Sherman, but ultimately helps Kramer place Sherman at the scene of the crime. Kramer is intimidated by the British accent of his baby nurse; both he and his wife initially assume that the nurse is their social superior because of this crisp, English accent. Reporter Peter Fallow makes the exact same assumption about English accents. An Englishman himself, Fallow is always relieved to pick up the telephone and find a soothing British tone on the other end, rather than the harsh accent of a Yank. The recurring focus on English accents help the author evoke the British social class system, which has traditionally been marked by variations in accent. Similarly, in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, the way in which the characters speak distinguishes their socio-economic class.

Structure

The Bonfire of the Vanities is divided into 31 chapters, plus a Prologue and an Epilogue. A hardback edition of the novel additionally contains a lengthy Author's Foreword, in which author Tom Wolfe presents a detailed history of the modern novel, and additional background on New York City as well. The Prologue sets the stage for the colorful dramatic pageant that follows, but the events of the Prologue are set apart from the events of the rest of the novel. The Mayor's character, introduced in the Prologue, does not personally cross paths with any of the characters featured in the regular storyline. However, the televised coverage of the Prologue events is viewed by both Sherman McCoy and Larry Kramer in their homes, and this television coverage serves as the initial bridge between the two characters. This Prologue bridge sets the tone for the role of the media in subsequent events; the author uses the press to combine and entwine further the lives of Sherman, ADA Kramer, and Reverend Bacon.

The story is told in a linear fashion. First Sherman and Kramer's lives are introduced and firmly established. Very early in the novel, the fateful hit-and-run incident in the Bronx occurs. Peter Fallow's character is brought in shortly before the midpoint, and his introduction marks the media's entry into both Sherman and Kramer's lives. Fallow's newspaper articles generate the public support for the prosecution of Sherman McCoy that Reverend Bacon desires. Bacon, having been introduced earlier, is the manipulative mastermind who sets reporter Fallow on Sherman's trail. The resulting press coverage places Sherman and Kramer on a collision course that finally plays out in the final chapter. Shortly before Sherman and Kramer's showdown in court, the author reintroduces the Mayor--not seen since the Prologue--to add political weight to Kramer's prosecution of Sherman. The courtroom showdown ends the linear storyline. The Epilogue then flashes forward 1 year in time, and its text consists of a newspaper story following up on the Sherman McCoy case. This Epilogue thus provides closure, a bit of hope, and most of all, provides the author with one final opportunity to brandish his satirically sarcastic pen.

Quotes

"But the smile on her face was obviously genuine, altogether pleasant...a lovely smile, in fact...*Still a very good-looking woman, my wife*...with her fine thin features, her big clear blue eyes, her rich brown hair...*But she's forty years old!*...No getting around it...Today *good-looking*...Tomorrow they'll be talking about what a handsome woman she is...Not her fault...*But not mine, either!*" Chapter 1, pp. 11-12

"She was a young and frisky animal. Lopwitz had taken what he wanted. He had wanted a young and frisky animal with lips as red as blood and skin as white as snow, and that was what he had taken. What had ever happened to the other three Mrs. Eugene Lopwitzes was a question Sherman had never heard brought up. When you had reached Lopwitz's level, it didn't even matter." Chapter 3, pg. 70

"And, Christ, he didn't want much, compared to what he, a Master of the Universe, should rightfully have. All he wanted was to be able to kick the gong around when he pleased, to have the simple pleasures due all mighty warriors.

Where did she get off, giving him such a hard time?

If Middle Age wishes the continued support and escort of a Master of the Universe, then she must allow him the precious currency he has earned, which is youth and beauty and juicy jugs and loamy loins - " Chapter 3, pg. 72

"Andriutti could afford to work out at the Athletic Club, instead of on a carpet between a *Dracaena fragrans* tub and a convertible couch, because he didn't have a wife and a child to support in an $888-a-month ant colony in the West Seventies." Chapter 5, pg. 105

"There was no turning back! Once you had lived in a $2.6 million apartment on Park Avenue - it was impossible to live in a $1 million apartment! Naturally, there was no way to explain this to a living soul. Unless you were a complete fool, you couldn't even make the words come out of your mouth. Nevertheless - *it was so!* It was...an *impossibility!*" Chapter 6, pg. 143

"His memory had drowned in the night, and he could feel only the icy despair. He had to look for the monster deductively, fathom by fathom. Sometimes he knew that whatever it had been, he couldn't face it, and he would decide to turn away from it forever, and just then something, some stray detail, would send out a signal, and the beast would come popping to the surface on its own and show him its filthy snout." Chapter 7, pg. 165

"Once, when Sherman was Campbell's age, his father and mother had taken him for a picnic out on the sand beyond the ropes. There was a spirit of adventure about this excursion. They were roughing it. The strangers out there on the sand, the handful who remained in the late afternoon, turned out to be harmless." Chapter 10, pg. 233

"All at once he was alone in this noisy hive with no place to roost. Alone! He became acutely aware that the entire party was now composed of these bouquets and that not to be in one of them was to be an abject, incompetent social failure." Chapter 15, pg. 353

"Judy's face was a mask of mirth. She was so enthralled by the conversation of the barrel-chested man she didn't notice Sherman at first. *Then* she saw him. Startled! But of course! - it was a sign of social failure for one spouse to be reduced to joining another in a conversational cluster. *But so what! Keep her away from Maria!* That was the main thing. Judy didn't look at him. Once again she beamed her grinning rapture at the old man." Chapter 15, pg. 356

"'Well - you two! What are *you* trying to cook up!' *Hack hack hack hack hack hack hack.* Inez Bavardage took them both by their arms. For a moment, before she could get her fireproof grin back onto her face, Judy looked stricken. Not only had she ended up in a minimal cluster with her husband, but New York's reigning hostess, this month's ringmistress of the century, had spotted them and felt compelled to make this ambulance run to save them from social ignominy." Chapter 15, pg. 358

"He could see it as if the TV screen were already right in front of him...Assistant District Attorney Lawrence N. Kramer...on his feet...his forefinger raised...his massive sternocleidomastoid muscles welling out...But how would the artist deal with his skull, where he had lost so much hair? Well, if the drawing did justice to his powerful frame, no one would notice. The courage and the eloquence...that's what they would see." Chapter 18, pg. 424

"Sherman stared at Lopwitz's smiling face and grew frightened. Lopwitz wasn't angry at him. He wasn't perturbed. He wasn't even particularly put out. No, *the fate of Sherman McCoy didn't make all that much difference.* Lopwitz's English Reproduction life would endure Sherman McCoy's problems, and Pierce & Pierce would endure them. Everybody would enjoy the juicy story for a while, and bonds would go on being sold in vast quantities, and the new chief bond salesman - who? - Rawlie? - or somebody else? - would show up in Lopwitz's Tea-at-the-Connaught conference room to discuss raking Pierce & Pierce's billions to this part of the market or that." Chapter 20, pg. 443

"In the drawing, the top of his head was absolutely bald, which was unrealistic and unfair, because he was not bald, he was only balding. Nevertheless, *there he was*. It was not one of Those People We See on TV. It was himself, and if there was ever a powerful warrior for Justice, it was himself on that screen." Chapter 23, pg. 502

"'It's perverse, isn't it? Two weeks ago, when we were at the Bavardages', these same people froze me out. Now I'm smeared - *smeared!* - across every newspaper and they can't get enough of me.'" Chapter 27, pg. 584

"'So here we are, Sherman, the couple all New York is talking about. There's a lotta people'd like to hear *this* conversation.'" Chapter 29, pg. 620

"'He kept throwing his head back and doing something weird with his neck, like this, and looking at me through these little slits for eyes. What a creep.'

His face was now scarlet, aflame, boiling with anger and, worse than anger, dismay. Someone in the room made a sound that might be a cough and might be a laugh. He didn't have enough heart to investigate. *Bitch!* said his mind, consciously. But his nervous system said, *Wanton destroyer of my fondest hopes!* In this little room full of people he was suffering the pangs of men whose egos lose their virginity - as happens when they overhear for the first time a beautiful woman's undiluted, full-strength opinion of their masculine selves." Chapter 31, pg. 669

"Sources close to Mr. McCoy, whose worth was once estimated as more than $8,000,000, said that a year of extraordinary legal expenses and entanglements has left him 'barely able to pay the rent.' Formerly the owner of a $3,200,000 cooperative apartment at 816 Park Avenue, he now rents two modest rooms in a postwar high-rise building on East 34th Street near First Avenue." Epilogue, pg. 688

Adaptations

The Bonfire of the Vanities was adapted for a film, released in the winter of 1990, directed by Brian DePalma, best known for his Hitchcock homages (such as Obsession) and violent crime epics like Scarface and The Untouchables.

Tom Hanks plays Sherman McCoy, with a supporting cast that includes Bruce Willis as Larry Kramer, Melanie Griffith as Maria Ruskin, Morgan Freeman, F. Murray Abraham, Kim Cattrall, and Saul Rubinek. The playwright Michael Cristofer wrote the screenplay from Wolfe's novel.

The filming itself aroused considerable controversy. Under pressure from community groups that vehemently objected to the negative way in which the Bronx is depicted in Wolfe's novel, filmmakers agreed to photograph footage showing more positive features of the Bronx: its zoo and botanical gardens, for example.

Yet another controversy arose when Wolfe appeared with Spike Lee, the author and director of Do the Right Thing, on a panel sponsored by the CORO Foundation in New York City in May 1990. Lee charged that the screenplay of The Bonfire of the Vanities drastically altered the end of Wolfe's novel so that Henry Lamb did not die, but instead simply walked out of the hospital one day. Wolfe responded by emphasizing that since he had not authored the screenplay, he had no knowledge of or control over such a change. There are also considerable differences between Wolfe's story and the film, such as Sherman's acquittal, the judge's moralistic speech, and Maria's character. The film also loses the important ambiguity of whether Sherman's car actually hurt Henry Lamb.

Topics for Discussion

What is your definition of justice in the Henry Lamb case? Who, if anyone, should be punished? Why?

Give three specific examples from the story that demonstrate Sherman's sense of entitlement.

In what way does Sherman's character grow by the end of the story? Discuss how his personal philosophy changes in response to his character's growth.

What is Maria's motivation for betraying Sherman? Cite examples of her actions from the story to support your position.

Write a character profile of the Lion of Dunning Sponget, as seen through Sherman's eyes.

If you were on the jury at Sherman's upcoming manslaughter trial, would the contents of the two tape recordings be sufficient for you to decide Sherman's guilt? Review the original conversations in Chapters 11 and 29 and analyze the weight of the recorded evidence. If the evidence is sufficient to decide the case, cite the specific portions which prove Sherman's guilt or innocence. If, however, you feel the evidence on the tapes is insufficient to decide the case, explain where the holes are that allow for reasonable doubt.

Using examples from the story, discuss at least three instances in which justice is blocked by corruption.

Related Titles

The Bonfire of the Vanities was originally serialized in Rolling Stone magazine in 1984-1985, but the final novel varies dramatically from the serialization. In the earlier version, Sherman, a largely sympathetic character often referred to as "the Great Observer," was a writer rather than an ego-maniacal bond trader. That transformation of Sherman's character is the crucial difference between the serialization and the published novel: many of the de tails of the serialized Sherman presented him as a victim, but most of his good intentions are subdued if not altogether lost in the published novel.

Written to meet deadlines, the serialization lacks the balance, fluidity, and polish of the published novel.

The Bonfire of the Vanities is perhaps most closely related to Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers (1970) as both are concerned with social status and racial tensions. Freed from the constraints of factual accounts, Wolfe's novel relentlessly pursues the hypocrisy, irony, and self-absorption that exists in every strata of society.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994