

Boomerang Short Guide

Boomerang by Barry Hannah

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Boomerang Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Literary Precedents.....	6
Related Titles.....	7
Copyright Information.....	8

Characters

Scores of characters—some famous, some fictional, and most real—populate Hannah's short novel. Many are childhood friends, relatives, or Hollywood acquaintances.

Narrating his novel in the first person, Hannah starkly presents his characters as good or bad—as a "great villain" or "a golden man"—but does virtually nothing to explain why they merit such labels.

Beside Hannah himself, the central character is Barton Benton Yelvertson, a sixty-two-year-old man, whom Hannah had imagined from the time he was fifteen, but did not meet until some thirty years later. For Hannah, Yelvertson communicates the wisdom and truth of one generation to another.

Tall, handsome, rich, and manly, Yelvertson almost seems a projection of what Hannah would like to imagine himself in fifteen or twenty years.

When drug dealers kill Yelvertson's son and badly wound his daughter-in-law, Yelvertson's life is changed.

His ex-wife leaves her husband and rejoins him; together they seek out their son's murderers and see them jailed. Yelvertson and his wife then renew their marriage and have another son. Hannah visits the Yelvertsons in Memphis, meets their baby boy, and discovers that the older son's murderers, now rehabilitated and forgiven, number among Yelvertson's employees and friends. At the end of the novel, Yelvertson's wife dies, but he goes on to raise his son. Forgiving, virile, and tolerant, Yelvertson incarnates the completion and complexity Hannah sees as ideal. While Hannah keenly senses his own failures and weaknesses, in Yelvertson he creates a hero who stands as a paragon of virtue.

Yelvertson manages to live in the world, but to maintain his convictions and vitality.



Social Concerns/Themes

Boomerang Hannah most often focuses on a turning point, outrageous exploit, or bizarre escapade from his past. Scarcely prefaced with any exposition, most of these events are linked only by Hannah's memory. Hannah focuses on ends and actions rather than means or motives. His prose is lean, sparse, colloquial, and sometimes exasperatingly terse. Many of the episodes revolve around music, fishing, animals, or firearms. Most of them stand as parables of the confrontation of meanness and generosity, tolerance and intolerance, humanity and inhumanity.

One of Hannah's principal satirical targets is organized religion. His hatred of southern fundamentalism, Catholicism, and Moslem zealotry grows out of his conviction that organized religion thwarts and diminishes the individual. Although Hannah mentions that he "prays," his God is a pantheistic or at least non-sectarian deity; he dreads and fears the "Christers" for their hypocrisy, priggishness, and sanctimony.

More than even his previous novels, Boomerang focuses on men of action.

Women appear almost exclusively as real or potential sexual partners. Not surprisingly, feminism is one of the modern phenomena Hannah distrusts most.

Hannah deals extensively with families in this novel. He speaks often of his three marriages, his own children, his wife's son, other families. With surprising frequency, these families suffer because of the random and violent death of a family member. A young father dies of a heart attack on a golf course; a four-year old is killed by a shotgun blast while sitting in the family car; a beloved son and husband is murdered by "drug pirates." The randomness of these deaths deeply troubles Hannah, but only intensifies his reverence for life itself. Other families are often divided by divorce or by rancorous discord. Yet the family provides some measure of stability in a world filled with capricious disasters.

In Boomerang Hannah's memories become parables intended to pass on whatever wisdom or virtue is embodied in the deeds of his characters. The title itself suggests the truisms: what goes around, comes around; or as you sow, so shall you reap.

Hannah's political and social views often appear self-contradictory; he emerges as a liberal reactionary: an animal rights activist who is also given to the occasional racial epithet; a man who despises Republicans but who teems with patriotic pride; a womanizer who dwells on the importance of families. But although he makes no apologies for his often outrageous opinions, he admits his own fallibility by remarking: "I am full of error myself," "I am a terrible man," or "I move through life without a conscience."



Techniques

Boomerang is an autobiographical novel, loosely structured around what might be notebook or diary headings such as "Thinking," "Delta is Thirty Miles West," or "Dogs." Like journal entries, Hannah's chapters freely range through his childhood, youth, college days, and adult life. As a literary work, it is only marginally fictional. Many of its characters are identifiable personalities (such as the movie star, Jack Nicholson; the film director, Robert Altman; or the rock singer, Jimmy Buffett) or Hannah's relatives and friends. Yelvertson, however, appears to be a fictional creation. Once when fishing on a hot July day, a seven-year-old boy reports a huge snake coiled on his fishing pole. Hannah picks up the .25 automatic pistol from his tackle box and blows away the snake's head.

When the boy asks if Hannah is with the army or the police, Hannah replies that he's "with the army of myself."

That episode is emblematic of Hannah's narrative stance in Boomerang:

when he recognizes a menace he takes aim and blasts away on the authority of his own convictions. Often, as on that hot July day, Hannah gets off what he calls "a lucky shot." As he ranges through time and space, he creates the impression that in every age and place, life's truths are about the same.

Literary Precedents

Boomerang is strongly autobiographical, with male narration in a disjointed, flashback narrative style. It features small town Southern settings and eccentric characters leading lives of despair and hope. Hannah is a student of literature, well read as well as a good reader and critic. It is not surprising that there are strong presences of other writers in his craft. He learned flashback techniques from William Faulkner; ironic comedy from Flannery O'Connor; eccentricity from Eudora Welty; men without women from Ernest Hemingway; narration from Jack Kerouac. But Hannah's style and much of his subject matter are original, which justifies his critical reputation.



Related Titles

As in Hannah's earlier works, the relationships between men and women more often resemble hate than love, or perhaps the love and hate are so inextricably linked (especially within marriage) that they are indistinguishable.

For instance, of his third wife, to whom the novel is dedicated, Hannah writes, "I hate my wife, but she still keeps coming back." (His recollections of his first two marriages are far less happy than those of his third.) And as in much of Hannah's fiction, friendship between men offers spiritual possibilities that love, marriage, or sex with women do not. Boomerang mixes humor and horror, the comic and the tragic, the grotesque and the beautiful as freely as life itself does. Age and the past in general weigh heavily upon Hannah who comments "the old guys are me now."



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 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

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