The Devil All the Time Study Guide

The Devil All the Time by Donald Ray Pollock

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This novel interweaves several narrative lines in a story that travels through some of the darkest tunnels of the human experience but at the end offers a glimpse of light. Pollock questions the validity of God and faith and portrays the corruptive power of sex and desire. The work also explores the nature and power of evil, the true nature and meaning of justice, and the nature of redemption.

In a brief prologue, protagonist Arvin learns some valuable lessons in how to confront adversity from his obsessively prayerful father Willard. These are lessons that Arvin applies throughout his life.

Following the prologue, the narrative focuses on Willard, newly returned from World War II and traumatized by his experiences on the battlefront. On his way home, he sees a beautiful waitress named Charlotte and falls in love, eventually marrying her and fathering Arvin. Over the years of his marriage and as Arvin grows up, Willard becomes increasingly devoted to prayer and when Charlotte contracts cancer, he becomes convinced that only prayer will cure her. His acts of devotion become more and more extreme, to the point that he practices animal and human sacrifices. All his efforts are in vain however as Charlotte ultimately dies and in despair, Willard kills himself. The traumatized Arvin is sent to live with his grandmother. At his grandmother's house, as he grows to maturity, Arvin becomes protectively close to Lenora, another orphan whose mother was murdered by a traveling preacher and who also lives with his grandmother. For her part, Lenora grows up quiet and shy, eventually falling under the charismatic spell of a corrupt preacher, becoming pregnant by him, and ending her life when he refuses to take responsibility for his child. Arvin, acting on one of the lessons taught to him by Willard, shoots the preacher and takes off.

Meanwhile, the narrative also explores the relationship of Carl and Sandy Henderson, husband and wife serial killers who prey on anonymous hitchhikers. The narrative explores the troubled psychology of both characters, whose lives are entwined with Sandy's brother, the corrupt Sheriff Bodecker who had investigated the death of Arvin's father. Yet another narrative thread follows the experiences of Roy, the traveling preacher who fathered Lenora and fled to Florida after the killing of Lenora's mother and who ends up appearing in a sideshow in a traveling circus with his partner, Theodore. Eventually Theodore dies and the repentant Roy decides to go in search of Lenora who has been dead for several years.

All three narrative lines - Arvin's fleeing the killing of the preacher, Carl and Sandy's killing sprees, and Roy's journey to find his daughter - converge in the novel's final section. Carl and Sandy, at the end of their latest "hunt," pick up Roy and kill him. Shortly afterwards they pick up Arvin who shoots them both in self-defense. He flees the scene of that crime as well, more determined than ever to revisit the scenes of his traumatic childhood, apparently hoping for some release from his memories and his guilt. He is pursued by Sheriff Bodecker who eventually corners him in the clearing where Willard performed his sacrifices. Arvin shoots Bodecker and after conducting his

own act of devotion, walks away from his old life, experiencing a surge of hope and possibility as he makes his way out of the woods, into a clearing, and onto a stretch of highway.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

This novel interweaves several narrative lines in a story that travels through some of the darkest tunnels of the human experience but at the end, offers a glimpse of light. As questions the validity of God and faith and portrays the corruptive power of sex and desire, the work also explores the nature and power of evil, the true nature and meaning of justice, and the nature of redemption.

Young Arvin joins his father Willard at his regular evening prayer, both seated on an oak log in a clearing in the woods. As Willard prays, Arvin reflects on how being viewed as an outsider has led leads to him being repeatedly bullied, and on how his father told him to stand up for himself. Meanwhile, two hunters happen by, and one of them makes crude remarks about Arvin's attractive mother Charlotte who, Arvin thinks, is "the prettiest woman he'd ever seen." Arvin waits for his father to respond, but Willard is too deep in prayer. Arvin is disappointed by his lack of reaction, but later, Willard takes Arvin to the local bar, finds the hunter who passed the remarks, and savagely beats him into unconsciousness. Afterwards, Willard tells Arvin that sometimes, it's necessary to choose the time and place to fight back. Later in life, Arvin considered that event as the best time that he had ever spent with his father and decided that he was going to be as tough as his dad.

Prologue Analysis

The prologue introduces several elements that play important roles later in the narrative such as Willard's habit of prayer, the location in which he practices that habit, the prayer clearing, and the object that helps him focus his thoughts, the prayer log. Several important scenes in Part 1 take place here, including the novel's climax in Part 7. The prayer clearing is a kind of church and a place of spiritual significance, giving the events that take place there a similar sense of significance and of ritual meaning.

Other important elements introduced here include Willard's lessons to his son that he has to stand up for himself and that he has to choose his time. Both these lessons figure prominently in Arvin's later choices, particularly his shooting of Pastor Teagardin (Part 6, Chapter 38) and his shooting of Bodecker (Part 7, Chapter 55). Finally, there are the hunter's comments about Charlotte, at first glance merely a casual sexist stupidity with serious consequences, but which, upon further consideration, can be seen as the introduction of a motif or repeated image that recurs throughout the narrative of coarse, abusive sexuality.

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

Chapter 1 (1945) - Recently discharged from combat duty during World War II, young Willard rides a bus home to Coal Creek Virginia, his mind haunted by memories of things he saw overseas, including the skinned and crucified soldier whom Willard shot to end his pain. When the bus makes a rest stop at The Wooden Spoon Diner in Meade, Ohio, Willard is served dinner by a beautiful waitress whose name is Charlotte Willoughby. When Willard finally gets home, he is welcomed by his emotional mother Emma and his uncle Earskell. Later that night, Willard's drunken confession to Emma that he fell in love on his way home causes Emma concern, as she had promised God she would marry Willard off to troubled Helen Hatton if God allowed him to live. Willard, meanwhile, contemplates both his gun, a German Luger, and the picture of Jesus hanging on the kitchen wall. The two images trigger thoughts of the crucified soldier. Meanwhile, Emma urges Willard to pray about whether he should go back to the diner and talk to the waitress. Willard agrees, commenting that praying never hurt anyone.

Chapter 2 - Willard and Emma attend a church revival meeting led by greedy Reverend Sykes, who calls forward a couple of guest preachers, Roy and his crippled cousin Theodore. Theodore tunes up his guitar, narration describing his love for Roy and his belief that his survival of deliberate self-poisoning is a sign that God thinks his love is just fine. Meanwhile, Roy starts preaching, and at one point, empties a jar of spiders over his head, saying that once he was deathly afraid of spiders but God took that fear away. As the crowd runs and screams, as Theodore continues to pray and Roy continues to preach, Helen finds herself drawn to Roy. At home after the revival meeting, Emma hints that Willard should think of Helen as a good potential wife. He tells her he's going back to Ohio. Narration then describes Emma, some time later, receiving a letter from Willard saying he's married and has a job in Ohio. She also receives a visit from Helen, who reveals she's going to marry Roy, and that the two of them are going to share a house with Theodore. Emma, relieved that God is not going to hold her to their bargain, congratulates her. Helen hurries off, having to go hunt spiders for Roy. "Don't worry," she says, "they ain't too bad once you get used to them."

Chapter 3 - Emma receives word that Willard and his wife had just had a baby son, Arvin, and comes to believe that God had truly forgiven her for breaking her. Meanwhile, she is visited by Helen, who reveals that she is pregnant, and that Roy has been troubled by his not hearing from God for a while. Theodore, meanwhile, has become drunken and bitter as a result of Roy spending more time with Helen than with him, his bitterness increasing when Helen's baby, Lenora is born. One day Roy becomes convinced that God has given him the power to resurrect the dead. Theodore talks/manipulates him into giving himself a real challenge of killing and resurrecting Helen. Roy eventually agrees and, after Helen leaves Lenora with Emma, takes her into the woods and kills her, but is unable to bring her back to life. Theodore then convinces Roy that after Roy buries Helen's body, the two of them should flee to Florida and start a

new ministry, leaving Lenora with Emma. Roy agrees. That night, Emma frets about what has happened to Helen, saying the situation just doesn't feel right.

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

One of the most intriguing and engaging aspects of the narrative is the depth and texture to the writing - specifically, its use of imagery and motif to illustrate its thematic and narrative points. One repeated motif of dark and destructive sexuality has already been discussed. Another appears for the first time here in Helen's decision to marry Roy, that motif or image being that of a lonely woman giving herself to an unworthy, destructive man. The motif repeats later in the relationship between Carl and Sandy, which first appears in Part 2, Chapter 10 and in the relationship between the grown up Lenora and Pastor Teagardin in Part 5, Chapter 35. The implications of this motif are summed up in Helen's comment about the spiders at the end of Chapter 2, which can be seen as also metaphorically commenting on the bad husbands of these sad women. A third important motif is that of suffering and death by crucifixion, the ultimate expression, at least in western culture and Christian theology, of suffering and sacrifice.

Another way in which the style and content of the writing is particularly engaging is how the author explores even relatively unimportant characters with a sense of vivid detail. Names and identities are frequently given to townspeople that, while sketching them in only one or two sentences of stark detail, manage to suggest an entire life of experience and beliefs. It could be argued that much of this writing is unnecessary and distracts readers from the story. On the other hand, almost all these extra descriptions can be seen as evoking even in glimpses, the author's thematic contention that the fundamental state of human existence is suffering.

Other important elements in this section include Willard's comment on the power of prayer at the end of Chapter 1, which foreshadows the desperate, increasingly insane prayers he makes in an effort to save his wife's life, starting in Part 1 Chapter 6 and Roy's failed attempt at resurrecting Helen, which in a significant way ties in with Willard's comments. Both acts of faith are ultimately fruitless, as in fact are many acts of faith chosen by many of the characters. The implication of all these failures and of the repeated portrayal of preachers and the church as ultimately being corrupt and essentially evil, is that religion and faith are both worthless and that human need and innate monstrousness cannot be either controlled or redeemed.

Finally, there is the reference to the Luger which, as the narrative eventually reveals, plays an important role in the resolutions of several narrative lines - Carl and Sandy's, Bodecker's, and Arvin's.

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 4, 5 and 6

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 4 - Arvin is about four years old when Willard decides it would be best to get him out of urban life. Charlotte says she likes the idea of moving, narration revealing how she longs for stability in her life after a troubled childhood. The house they eventually rent, in an area called Mitchell Flats, is owned by Henry Dunlap, a fat lawyer who, once he learns that Willard wants to buy the place, takes sadistic pleasure in taunting him about Henry's higher income. For his part Willard, who by this point has started visiting the prayer clearing regularly, asks God for strength to not kill Henry who, narration reveals, has a wife (Edith) who is having an affair with the town's black handyman. Meanwhile, Henry is also hinting among his friends that he would like to have sex with Charlotte, but receives warnings about Willard's temper, referring to the incident described in the prologue.

Chapter 5 - The summer Arvin turns ten, Charlotte develops cancer. Willard becomes obsessed with the idea of saving her life through prayer, and he and Arvin pray for hours every day, the sound of their voices reaching from the prayer clearing into town. As Charlotte deteriorates, Willard becomes convinced that blood sacrifice will cure his wife, slaughtering a lamb and bringing home so many dead animals that the clearing (which is where he hangs them) becomes unbearably smelly, bloody, and invested with maggots and flies.

Chapter 6 - When Willard goes to pay his rent, Henry Dunlap hints that there may be a way for Willard to earn the house free and clear, but doesn't say what that might be. Willard realizes that Dunlap probably wants him to kill the wife, the handyman, or both of them, but thinks Willard is too good a Christian to do it. Meanwhile, Charlotte has a good day, and her improvement gives both Willard and Arvin hope, but then in the night she has a bad relapse. Willard then realizes that the animal sacrifices aren't really working, and that he has another option. While waiting to meet Dunlap late at night, he notices a young girl leaving the Wooden Spoon with its cook, the same cook who worked there when Willard visited it on his way home from the war. Later, Willard kills Dunlap, narration describing how, the next morning, Arvin comments on the large amount of fresh blood in the prayer clearing. Willard lets him believe that he killed a "big fat" groundhog.

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

The motif exploring the dark, corruptive power of sexuality reappears here in the story of Henry Dunlap whose character and experiences clearly foreshadow those of Carl Henderson, who first appears in Part 2, Chapter 10. One other important foreshadowing relates to Carl. It is the description of the young girl glimpsed coming out of the Wooden Spoon who is Sandy Bodecker, who becomes Carl Henderson's wife and his

murderous, troubled partner in crime. This same description also foreshadows moments in the narrative when Sandy's sister Joe, a policeman and eventually sheriff, recalls this same moment as one of the earliest times in his life he became aware that Sandy was a whore. This is the appearance of the "corrupt sexuality" motif.

Willard's killing of Dunlap and the apparent spilling of his blood, is a grotesque reiteration of the narrative's emphasis on violence - another motif. It can also be seen as tying in with the two lessons Willard gave Arvin in the prologue of what Willard sees as standing up for himself and how he clearly chooses his time to do so quite carefully. Meanwhile, the sacrifices of both Dunlap and all the animals foreshadow the sacrifice of Jack the dog in the following section which has the most traumatizing effect on young Arvin of all the sacrifices.

Meanwhile, the narrative continues its thematic consideration of the futility of prayer with its dramatic representation of the futility of Willard's prayers in the face of the disease raving his wife's body.

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 7, 8 and 9

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Summary

Chapter 7 - In spite of the sacrifice of the lawyer, Charlotte's condition worsens and Willard continues the animal sacrifices. At one point, a gentle dog that Arvin immediately names Jack comes to the door. Arvin feeds it, but then Willard comes home, shoots it, and nails it to one of the crosses he has built in the prayer clearing, deeply upsetting Arvin. A few nights later, Willard wakes Arvin who had been secretly wishing his mother would just die and sends him to the prayer clearing, with orders to keep praying until Willard comes for him. Arvin shouts his prayers for hours, aware that Jack's decaying body is above him, until Willard finally comes with news that Charlotte has died. A few days later, she is buried at a sparsely attended funeral. After taking Arvin home, Willard disappears, leaving Arvin asleep. Several hours later, Arvin wakes and searches for his father, and finds him in the prayer clearing, having slit his own throat. Arvin is still for a moment, then heads for town.

Chapter 8 - As he closes up Maude's Store, the only grocery store in Knockemstiff, for the night, young Hank Bell reflects on the goings on in town. He also fantasizes about going to Cincinnati for a baseball game. His reverie is interrupted by Arvin, who asks for help calling the police. Hank takes pity on him, gives him a free soda, and helps him make the call, the two of them sitting outside and waiting for the police.

Chapter 9 - Sheriff's deputy Lee Bodecker, contemplates his future of marriage to a pretty girl, manipulating the current sheriff out of his position and taking his job, and moving into a big house and his family such as his sister Sandy. He makes his way to Maude's store. Hank Bell is there and explains why he called and introduces Arvin. Lee asks outright whether Arvin is making up stories. Arvin says he isn't and he and Bodecker go up to the house on the hill, making their way to the prayer clearing where Bodecker discovers all the dead animal bodies and also Willard, crouched over his prayer log, which Arvin tells Bodecker "doesn't work."

Part 1 - Sacrifice, Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Analysis

This section contains two of the work's clearest statements of its thematic contention that prayer, faith and religion are futile - the death of Charlotte and Arvin's comment about the prayer log not working. That pretty much sums up this particular thematic conceit right there that prayer as a whole, just doesn't work.

The sacrifice of the dog Jack could, in all likelihood, be as shocking to the reader as it is to Arvin, so brutal and callous is Willard's action. The traumatizing effect the experience has on Arvin becomes plain later on two occasions later in the narrative - when he vows to never forget Jack and when at the novel's conclusion, he finally gives Jack's bones a decent burial. Given the connection between Jack and Arvin, just about the only

character who comes out of the narrative with anything like a sense of hope or possibility, it may be that Jack can be seen as a metaphoric representation of Jesus. Not only was Jesus was sacrificed in what amounts to an act of gratuitous violence just like Jack is, but more importantly, Jack becomes, for Arvin, a symbol of hope and redemption, as Jesus has become for Christians all over the world. This idea is supported by Arvin's actions in the previously discussed Chapter 53, in which he replaces Jack's body on the cross with a picture of Jesus being crucified.

Other important elements in this section include the introduction of Hank Bell, an example of what might best be summed up as a "texture character," one without any real influence on the narrative or the plot but who is explored in brief but vivid depth. The narrative's description of Hank's dreams of Cincinnati foreshadow a moment several years later (Chapter 51) in which the older Hank asks the equally more mature Arvin whether he has actually BEEN to Cincinnati. The sense and image here is of abandoned dreams, another repeated motif in the characters of Emma, Sandy, Carl, Roy, and Theodore. One other piece of foreshadowing appears in the character of Joe Bodecker, his appearance here foreshadowing the important role he plays in the narrative. In fact, his experiences with Arvin and Hank here have a defining effect on the events of Chapter 52, in which Bodecker's memories of the encounter here put him on Arvin's trail and ultimately lead to his death.

Part 2 - On the Hunt, Chapters 10 through 16

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Chapter 10 - Narration describes how Sandy Henderson (skinny, pale, and, as narration reveals, Lee Bodecker's sister has been driving across the Midwest with her husband Carl (fat, with decayed teeth and a faith in omens) picking up hitchhikers. As narration describes the circumstances of their picking up a young, attractive soldier, narration also indicates (through hints scattered throughout the chapter) that Sandy initiated sex with the hitchhiker, that Carl killed him, and that Carl took pictures of the whole process, storing rolls of film in the glove compartment of the car. Narration also describes Sandy's confusion about how she got to where she is and Carl's belief that he is on some kind of religious mission.

Chapter 11 - Back in Meade, Lee Bodecker, now sheriff and worried about the upcoming election, gets a phone call from a woman accusing Sandy of being a whore and Bodecker of doing nothing about it. As he goes out to investigate the complaint, he figures the woman was put up to it by his political rival. Bodecker also recalls a night when he passed out drunk at the bar where Sandy worked, narration revealing that she drove him home in the car she and Carl drove in Chapter 10.

Chapter 12 - As she bathes in a motel room, Sandy remembers her and Carl's encounter with an Iowa farm boy that Sandy thinks resulted in her catching a venereal disease. Meanwhile, narration offers more hints of how Sandy and Carl do what they do - Carl hinting to the hitchhikers that he's impotent and likes to watch Sandy having sex, taking pictures of the bodies after the boys are dead (sticking things like branches and beer cans in the holes left by bullets), and then burying the bodies in shallow graves. Later, after Sandy has fallen into a troubled sleep Carl indulges his habit of masturbating over the pictures he takes, narration describing how his habit of taking pictures began with his taking shots of his dying mother.

Chapter 13 - Bodecker visits the bar where Sandy works, learning from a waitress that Sandy had said she and Carl were going on vacation for a couple of weeks, who comments that she doesn't know how they manage to pay for it. Bodecker, thinking that Sandy prostituting herself could make them that money, leaves.

Chapter 14 - Carl wakes up drenched in sweat. While he's waiting for Sandy to wake up, he remembers filling up at a gas station in Minnesota and, while their car was being serviced, reading an old magazine that featured an article on an apparently unsolved pair of murders that were, in fact, the result of one and his and Sandy's earliest trips.

Chapter 15 - Bodecker goes to Carl and Sandy's apartment, worried that public knowledge of Sandy's whoring might bring out revelations of the darker sides of his

career and life, including taking bribes. Standing on the apartment's trash-covered balcony, he sees an overweight woman next door sunbathing, and wonders if photography-crazy Carl had any pictures of her, thinking that taking pictures without their knowing should be against the law.

Chapter 16 - While eating breakfast in a diner that reminds Sandy of The Wooden Spoon, Carl sees a very attractive young man and hints to Sandy that he might be their next "model". At first Sandy refuses, saying there's something she needs to talk about, but then later agrees. Carl is relieved, as he had calculated that there were signs they should continue with this particular subject for his photos.

Part 2 - On the Hunt, Chapters 10 through 16 Analysis

On first glance, the narrative appears to take a starkly different direction in this section, the story of the murderous Sandy and Carl clearly echoing that of a real life husband-and-wife team of serial murderers which also inspired the film "Natural Born Killers." Upon deeper consideration, though, it becomes clear that the work is still exploring its essential themes, just in a different way. In Carl's twisted sense of mission, faith in Christianity is still corrupt. In Carl and Sandy's torturous killings of their "models," as Carl calls them, suffering is pervasive and eternally present, as it is in the preserved photographic images of the encounters. Finally, sexuality is once again a manifestation of inner darkness and corruption. In short, while the context is different, the basic story is the same - giving in to darkness and corruption leads to death.

Other interesting aspects of this section include the reference to the car at the end of Chapter 11 and the revelation of how Bodecker himself has gone up in the world, at least in terms of public status. The reference to his taking bribes, on the other hand, reveals how low he has sunk in terms of personal moral status. The reference to bribes also foreshadows events later in the narrative in which his hard-won status becomes increasingly endangered by his corrupt activities and attitudes. Meanwhile, it's interesting to note how his, Sandy's and Carl's varied states of corruption are juxtaposed one to the other to the other, parallel situations that lead to parallel justice - death at the hands of the avenging Arvin in Part 7.

Part 3 - Orphans and Ghosts, Chapters 17 through 24

Part 3 - Orphans and Ghosts, Chapters 17 through 24 Summary

Chapter 17 - Almost immediately after his father's death Arvin goes to live with Emma, developing a close friendship with Lenora who seems determined to recreate herself in the image of her mother Helen - thin, pale, in an unbecoming bonnet. Also like her mother, she fantasizes about Roy taking her into a new and better life. Meanwhile Arvin, aware that she is being bullied at school, has taken to defending her with his fists, recalling his father's lessons. He tells Emma, who is nervous about his fighting, that he sees no sense in praying for guidance, partly because there are a "lot of no good sonsofbitches out there", and partly because he believes the constantly praying Lenora prays enough for both of them.

Chapter 18 - Roy and Theodore are now set up in a traveling carnival as a sideshow act named "The Prophet and The Picker," having traveled throughout the Southern United States for four years, having settled in Florida, and finding it hard to believe that the law could ever catch up with them for what happened to Helen. Each is carrying on an affair with another act, Roy with The Flamingo Lady and Theodore with a clown named Flapjack. They each accuse the other of being the worse abomination unto God, both realizing that they're pretty far gone.

Chapter 19 - When Arvin turns fifteen, Earskell gives him Willard's Luger. As Arvin blows out the candle on his birthday cake, Lenora wishes that he would come to Jesus, while Earskell is remembering his happy times with a local girl who had died young. His brief reminiscences are interrupted by Arvin who asks about the girl, but then immediately regrets asking, recalling how, in his early childhood, his house was full of secrets.

Chapter 20 - Arvin catches three older boys (Gene, Tommy and Orville) taunting Lenora about her looks, saying they'd have to put a sack over her head before they got a hard-on. Arvin tries to fight them off, but is himself beaten. Remembering what his father taught him about choosing the right time, he gets his revenge on the boys one by one, placing paper bags over each of their heads. As the result of his attacks, Gene ends up in hospital.

Chapter 21 - The next day, Earskill asks what happened with Gene, saying the boy's father who was not too happy about having to pay his hospital bill. Arvin tells him the whole story, refusing to agree when Earskill suggests it might have been wise to take it easy. His refusal leads Earskill to suggest that Arvin put away the Luger for a while, which Arvin reluctantly does.

Chapter 22 - Now sixteen, Arvin sits on Emma's porch, feeling pride in his new car and remembering his conversation with Lenora earlier that afternoon. While they were visiting her mother's grave, as she had done several times before, Lenora hinted that the fate that brought them together also meant for them to spend their lives together. This triggers unhappy memories in Arvin - of his parents and of Jack the dog (see Chapter 6). These memories lead him to promise himself that one day, he will give the dog's bones a proper burial. He also becomes unhappy with Lenora's conversation, more so when she repeated her dream that her father would come and take her away. Narration returns to the porch, where Arvin remembers the horrors of the last few days of his parents' lives.

Chapter 23 - Pastor Sykes announces, much to the dismay of several members of his congregation, that he is leaving temporarily to take care of his health, knowing full well that he is dying. He announces that a replacement is coming, a young man and his wife, and that the congregation should make them feel welcome.

Chapter 24 - Down in Florida, Roy and Theodore rest on the beach, narration revealing that Roy has been pushing Theodore in his wheelchair across the south for weeks, ever since Theodore's assault on a young boy resulted in their being fired from the carnival. As they muse about the possibility of getting some good food in prison, and as Roy berates Theodore for getting them kicked out of a good life, Theodore comments that it "just makes you wonder."

Part 3 - Orphans and Ghosts, Chapters 17 through 24 Analysis

The book's consideration of its central theme, the futility and emptiness of faith and religion, continues in this section, which also lays the groundwork for further statements of this theme later in the work. Here the consideration of the theme takes place on two fronts. There is the clear definition of differences between Arvin, for whom prayer and faith have no meaning but who, at the end of the novel, survives with both his morality and his life intact, and Lenora, for whom prayer and faith are everything but who, as the narrative progresses, becomes both corrupted and dead. Also in relation to Lenora, it's important to note that not only does she resemble her mother physically and in faith, she also resembles Helen in terms of her relationship with a preacher - both women end up essentially corrupted and dead, another manifestation of the novel's thematic contentions about the futility and essentially corruptive nature of faith. The second front of consideration of this primary theme is the narrative's brief detours to the lives of Roy and Theodore, whose false profession of faith and their exploitive attempt to make their living from it have resulted in their sinking to lows of moral depravity and situational bankruptcy.

Other recurring motifs in this section include manifestations of Arvin's tendency towards violence which, even though it's anchored in moral outrage and good will protection of those for whom he cares, is still seen as wrong. Then there is the reference to Jack the dog who, as previously discussed, can be seen as the metaphoric equivalent of Jesus.

If the reader takes this symbolic parallel into account, Arvin's reference to Jack here can be seen as a recollection of, perhaps even a call to, purity and redemption, a call he answers in the book's final chapters. In other words, the reference to Jack here foreshadows his appearance at the novel's moral and thematic climax.

Finally, there is the brief vignette involving Pastor Sykes, which foreshadows the arrival of his replacement in Part 5 and the corruption that the replacement brings into the lives of the characters, yet another example of the book's thematic contention that faith and religion are corrupt and meaningless.

Part 4 - Winter, Chapters 25 through 30

Part 4 - Winter, Chapters 25 through 30 Summary

Chapter 25 - On a cold winter day early in the New Year, after Sandy goes to her job as a bartender, Carl gets out a shoebox full of photos taken the previous summer, and relives every moment of every encounter. When Sandy gets home, he waits as she counts her tips, listens as she describes her reluctant involvement in the corruption of her brother, Sheriff Lee Bodecker, then helps puts her money into their savings jar.

Chapter 26 - After dropping Sandy off at work, Carl cruises through downtown Meade, catching a glimpse of Joe Bodecker and reflecting on what Sandy told him. He ends up at the White Cow Diner. There, a conversation with the waitress leads him to remember his and Sandy's time in California - how his efforts to start a career as a photographer went nowhere, how an agreement for Sandy to work in a film turned out to involve pornography, and how that encounter changed him. On the way home from that trip, he and Sandy made their first murderous pickup, which resulted in Sandy having her first ever orgasm.

Chapter 27 - Carl starts hanging out regularly at the White Cow Diner. One night, he overhears a conversation between a pair of older, right wing Republicans in which they complain about "long hairs" and softies, referring to Carl as one of the latter. Carl thinks of the people he's killed, fantasizing about killing and torturing the old men.

Chapter 28 - Joe visits the silent, sullen Sandy at the bar where she works, telling her that he's seen Carl hanging out at the White Cow and talking with the waitress, narration describes the lies Carl has been telling. Sandy seems unconcerned, reminding Joe of the shady business he's involved in and the resulting lies HE tells. He leaves angrily, reflecting on his crooked dealings and wondering when someone is going to take a shot at HIM.

Chapter 29 - Carl gets Sandy a small gun from a lonely man at the White Cow, thinking it might help her protect herself if anything ever went wrong while they were hunting. Sandy rejects his gift, however, and he considers taking violent steps to make sure she did as she was told.

Chapter 30 - As spring begins, Sandy asks Carl if he'll teach her how to shoot the gun, narration revealing that she has visited the White Cow, has been wondering whether Carl is thinking of replacing her with the waitress, and thinks knowing how to use the gun might convince him to keep her around. He takes her out to a field where the shooting lessons go fairly well, but are interrupted by the land's owner. For a moment Carl is tempted to get into it with him, but then realizes that he and Sandy have a summer of hunting to look forward to, and backs down

Part 4 - Winter, Chapters 25 through 30 Analysis

In this section, perhaps more so than any other, the feel of human corruption - inevitable, inescapable, irreversible - is darkly pervasive. Not one character or situation comes across as even a little compassionate, sensitive, or troubled by the situations in which they find themselves - the only reason Bodecker is concerned about the corrupt life he leads, for example, is what's going to happen when/if he gets caught. In short he, like all the other characters in this section and many of the other dominant characters in the book, is completely without conscience. Sandy comes closest to having one, in that she seems to have a glimmer of concern about the life she's found herself living, but that glimmer is quickly doused by whatever need she has that drives and defines her relationship with Carl. Even the brief narrative detour or flashback into Carl and Sandy's California past portrays them both as essentially willing to be used, to sell themselves for money. Their desperation is almost sympathetic, but their actions to address that desperation, and their reactions to the reactions of others TO that desperation, render them pathetic, yes, but not SYM-pathetic.

Meanwhile, two important objects are introduced for the first time in this section. The first is the shoebox of photographs, an important, if repulsive, representation of Carl's psychotic dissociation from reality which plays an important role in Bodecker's realization of just how corrupt his sister and her husband have become. The second is Sandy's gun, which ultimately becomes a powerful symbol of the futility of Sandy's struggle to somehow improve her life. In short, the appearance of these two objects is not only evocative of immediate, present circumstances of the characters, but evocative of their futures. In other words, they are both key elements of foreshadowing.

Part 5 - Preacher, Chapters 31 through 39

Part 5 - Preacher, Chapters 31 through 39 Summary

Chapter 31 - Theodore and Roy have moved inland so Roy can get some work picking fruit in an orchard. Theodore's health is deteriorating rapidly, although his dreams of Flapjack the Clown of being near water are still lively.

Chapter 32 - That night, as the new preacher, Pastor Teagardin, and his much younger wife, Cynthia greet all their new parishioners at a potluck dinner, Arvin becomes very aware that Teagardin is excited by the arrival of two young pretty girls. Later, the porky Teagardin uses the chicken livers as the subject of a spontaneous sermon on honoring the poor. While Emma is humiliated, Lenora comments on how holy Teagardin seems. Arvin doesn't buy it.

Chapter 33 - In his new shabby home furnished with second hand furniture, Teagardin contemplates his success in turning Cynthia into his sex slave, his ambitions for turning Lenora into a similar sex slave, and his struggles to reconcile his faith in Jesus with his lust for women.

Chapter 34 - Lenora visits Teagardin at the church, narration revealing he has been waiting there for her for days. She confesses that she's being bullied at school, and he empathizes with her, offering to take her for a drive so they can talk privately. He successfully seduces her, assuring her that once she's had some "breaking in," the boys won't be able to take their eyes off her.

Chapter 35 - After graduation from high school, Arvin gets a job on a road crew. With his first paycheck he buys treats for everyone at home, including a nice new dress for Lenora who, Emma comments, is "filling out nicely". Lenora realizes she's changing, and credits her time with Teagardin. One night, Emma and Arvin watch as Lenora comes out of the woods, Emma commenting that even though Lenora has been spending a lot of time out there, she still spends time reading her Bible. Emma also reflects on how, when he's preaching, Teagardin often seems to have his mind on something else.

Chapter 36 - Lenora realizes she's pregnant and tells Teagardin. At first he says she must be imagining things, but when she insists, he tells her to get rid of it. That night, Lenora ties some rope into a noose and prepares to kill herself. At the last moment, she has the idea that maybe Teagardin needs time to get over his initial upset, but then her foot slips off the bucket she's standing on. She falls, the noose tightens, and she dies, her last thoughts of a desire to raise the baby on her own.

Chapter 37 - About a week after Lenora's funeral, the sheriff tells Arvin that the coroner had discovered Lenora's pregnancy. Arvin realizes that the only likely person Lenora would have been with was Teagardin. Meanwhile, he and the sheriff agree to keep the news secret from Emma and the town. Later, he recalls seeing Teagardin's reaction to the pretty girls at his welcome party, and that night, watches Teagardin's house from up a tree.

Chapter 38 - Arvin pulls the Luger out of hiding, retrains himself to shoot, and keeps watching Teagardin, eventually discovering where he's been taking the two girls he first saw at the potluck. Later, after packing a gym bag and hiding it in the trunk of his car, he shares a last night with Earskell and with Emma, wishing he could say goodbye to them. The next morning he lies in wait for Teagardin, listening as he is confronted by another girl he had seduced. After the girl runs off, Arvin steps out of his hiding place, confronting the cocky Teagardin with what he suspects about his relationship with Lenora. At first Teagardin tries to deny it, but then confesses, crying like a child when he realizes that Arvin is going to kill him. Arvin shoots Teagardin through the head, does his best to conceal any indications he was there, and hurries off, taking the gym bag and the Luger and heading for Meade, Ohio but not getting there - the transmission of his car breaks down. He sells it to the reluctant owner of a nearby garage, and then asks him whether he's ever hitch-hiked ...

Chapter 39 - Roy comes back from a good, productive day picking fruit full of plans for the future. His good mood disappears when he realizes that Theodore has died. Roy prays over his body and plans to leave, hoping to see Lenora one last time. The next day he wakes and starts on his journey, leaving the body of his friend behind and almost immediately hitching a ride.

Part 5 - Preacher, Chapters 31 through 39 Analysis

The book's seemingly bottomless portrayals of the dark side of human nature goes even deeper in this section with the introduction of the immoral, hypocritical Pastor Teagardin, whose very existence reinforces the narrative's central thematic contention that religion and faith are at best corrupt, at worst downright evil. There are clear echoes in the relationship between Teagarden, Carl Henderson and Roy, as there are between Lenora, Sandy and Helen. All three women are abused and manipulated by corrupt men, all three end up physically and morally destroyed, and all three do so as the result of a profound and damaged vulnerability. In other words, the story of Lenora is a repetition and/or reiteration of one of the work's dominant motifs - the corruption of women by male desire and manipulated female need.

Another motif repeated here has to do with Arvin's vengeful attack on Teagardin. Here again, he follows the rules for revenge established by Willard in the prologue - make sure it happens, but do it when the time is right. Here Arvin's planning, and his execution of that plan, echo the planning and execution of his vengeance on the three boys who bullied Lenora in many ways a similar action taken for a similar reason. Again, though,

the question is whether Arvin's actions qualify as justice or as revenge, which are not necessarily the same thing.

Then there are the two scenes with Theodore and Roy, bookending the principle narrative action of the section. The narrative comes dangerously close to portraying Roy in a positive light in this section, offering glimpses into his lonely soul and his potential for compassion. Ultimately, though, his actions are as self-serving as always, his determination to protect his own skin once again outweighing any real sense of right and wrong. He almost deserves the ending foreshadowed for him at the end of Chapter 39 - in the reference to his hitching a ride, an ominous reference to the hunting trips undertaken by Carl and Sandy. It's important to note, meanwhile, that Chapter 38 ends with a similar ominous reference, a situation which raises this question for the reader.

Part Six - Serpents, Chapters 40 through 46

Part Six - Serpents, Chapters 40 through 46 Summary

Chapter 40 - With some excitement, Carl prepares for his and Sandy's next hunt. There is also apprehension - he suspects that Sandy is starting to wonder about him and the waitress from the White Cow. As a precaution, he replaces the bullets in Sandy's gun with blanks. Finally, he makes a fresh print of his favorite photograph, one of the earliest he ever took with Sandy, in which she's cradling the head of the model in her arms, putting it in his wallet.

Chapter 41 - As Carl and Sandy are gassing up the car prior to leaving, Joe stops by and asks about their plans, responding doubtfully when they say they're just going on vacation.

Chapter 42 - This chapter is narrated from the point of view of the latest of Carl and Sandy's models, a so-called "longhair" named Jamie, who plans to steal their car even as he's reflecting on how unattractive Sandy is. As Sandy pulls the car over near the edge of a field, Jamie jokes about taking them both on.

Chapter 43 - A few days later, after killing Jamie and another boy, Sandy insists on doing laundry - Carl, she says, stinks. He muses on how they did the second boy a favor, but while watching a couple of young boys ride by on their bikes, wishes for a moment "that he was somebody else."

Chapter 44 - Another killing later, their fourth "model" gets away, running swiftly from Carl when he sees Carl's gun. Carl tries to chase him down but can't, then returns to the car. At first, he pretends to have killed the model, but Sandy quickly sees that he's lying. As they hurry to get out of the area, she warns him that if she ever hears anything more about him and the waitress from the White Cow, he'll be sorry.

Chapter 45 - The next day, after eating breakfast, Carl and Sandy pick up an older man, frail and dressed all in black and who, Carl thinks, has the air of a preacher. Conversation reveals that he is Roy, and that he is determined to see his daughter. When Carl and Sandy stop the car and Sandy starts to undress, Roy realizes that Carl and Sandy want him to have sex with her, and says he promised Theodore that he was going to live right from then on. Carl and Sandy realize their usual plan isn't going to go through, and Sandy puts her clothes back on. Carl pulls a gun on Roy, who looks into the sky and imagines that dying will feel like a cloud feels, floating through the sky.

Chapter 46 - After killing Roy and finding a hundred dollars in his pocket, Carl and Sandy treat themselves to a good dinner and a night in a nice hotel. The next morning, Carl broods about how bad his pictures have all been on this trip, and begs Sandy to let

him take one more roll of film. She agrees, but insists that they be back at home that night. As they drive into Ohio, where Carl said he would never take any pictures, Carl becomes increasingly desperate. His mood instantly changes, however, when he and Sandy see a "handsome, dark-haired boy with a gym bag" standing by the side of the road.

Part Six - Serpents, Chapters 40 through 46 Analysis

Narrative momentum begins to accelerate in this section, with the reader's anticipation for the now-inevitable encounter between Arvin and Carl/Sandy building almost as unbearably as Carl's anticipation for the next kill. That sense of momentum is triggered, at least in part, by the speed and somewhat disturbing casualness with which the narrative deals with Carl and Sandy's first four kills - bing, bang, boom, bop. Four dead bodies, and the reader gets perhaps the clearest picture yet of just how little those lives mean to Carl. Here it's important to remember the comment earlier in the narrative that Carl feels he's on a mission from God, that killing brings him closer to God. This sense is reiterated by the quote on p. 206 at the beginning of this section, with all these elements combining with other elements to reinforce the narrative's thematic contention. This is the idea that faith and religion are futile.

Meanwhile, the photograph referred to in the quote on p. 206 is important for another reason, in that the reference here foreshadows Arvin's taking it in Chapter 47 and his use of it to bring down Bodecker in Chapter 55. Other important notes include yet another flash of potential humanity in Carl and a similar glimpse of humanity in Roy. However, there is also the sense that both these references are too little too late, and that both Carl and Ray, as painful as their endings are, deserve what they get. Then there is the somewhat surprising shift in narrative focus in Chapter 42. Nowhere else in the narrative is the experience of one of Carl and Sandy's "models" that is so thoroughly explored.

Finally there is the sections conclusion, the detail of the gym bag clearly indicating that the boy on the road is Arvin. There are several points to note here such as the irony of the reader knowing, while Sandy and Carl do not, that Arvin is a killer, and the reference to Arvin's physical attractiveness. This is a suggestion that Arvin, like his beautiful mother, still has at least some spiritual integrity left, in spite of his having killed two people. He did it all for the right reasons or so the narrative would have the reader believe.

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 47 - 50

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 47 - 50 Summary

Chapter 47 - Arvin quickly takes note of the lack of hygiene about both Carl and Sandy. Sandy fantasizes about shooting Carl and taking off with Arvin. Carl becomes increasingly excited about the possibility of breaking his rules. The three of them drive down a side road, Carl having said he needs to take a piss. When they stop near an abandoned farmhouse, Arvin senses there's something not good going down and readies the Luger. Carl steps out of the car and points his rifle at Arvin, demanding that he too get out. Arvin gets out, firing the Luger twice, killing Carl. Sandy fires her own gun and, because it's loaded with blanks, Arvin is unhurt and is able to kill Sandy in the neck. After getting over his shock, Arvin searches Carl's body, discovering the photo in his wallet which he takes and then searches the car, aware that he has to get out of there quickly. He takes a couple of canisters of film from the car's glove compartment, cleans off "everything that he might have touched," and hurries off.

Chapter 48 - Arvin spends the night in a cheap hotel, turning a picture of Jesus' Crucifixion to the wall and drinking himself into unconsciousness. The next day, he visits the Wooden Spoon and then returns to the hotel. He spends the rest of the day pacing and thinking, realizing that while he needs to get out of Ohio pronto, he can't leave just yet. He needs to visit both the house where he grew up and the prayer clearing.

Chapter 49 - Bodecker arrives at the scene of Carl and Sandy's deaths. Alone with his sister, he sheds a few tears then studies the scene, working out the chain of events pretty much as they happened. He also discovers the rolls of film left behind in the glove compartment and takes them, along with keys to Carl and Sandy's apartment. When the coroner arrives, Bodecker describes what he thinks happened, and the coroner offers the opinion that the deaths occurred the evening before. Bodecker leaves, telling the coroner to take good care of Sandy but that no matter what, Carl gets a pauper's grave. "No marker, no name, no nothing."

Chapter 50 - Back at his office, Bodecker gets a phone call telling him about the death of Teagardin and asking him to be on the lookout for Arvin, who after all used to live in Bodecker's area. After a few moments of thinking, Bodecker remembers where he knows Arvin's name from. He also starts to wonder if Arvin who, according to the phone call, was packing a gun, was also responsible for the deaths of Carl and Sandy. Later, when he searches their apartment, he finds Carl's shoebox of photographs and looks through them and when he's finished, he remembers Sandy's happiness when she announced she was getting married and returns to his office where he has a drink for the first time in a year.

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 47 - 50 Analysis

Narrative momentum continues to build in this section as Arvin confronts Carl and Sandy and survives. In any case, it could be argued that of all the deaths in the book, the killing of Carl Henderson is probably the most deserved. The metaphoric message offered by both deaths is that someday, somehow, consequences for bad, corrupt deeds will come home to roost, as the saying goes, a message reiterated in the following section when Bodecker is killed. In short, the deaths of Sandy and Carl, and indeed of Bodecker, feel like justice - even though the person who hands out that "justice", Arvin, becomes a killer five times over. Meanwhile, the idea that Arvin is an agent of justice becomes particularly interesting when juxtaposed with his actions in the hotel room - specifically, his turning over of the crucifixion picture, a clear rejection of faith and religion. The layers of meaning here go deeper, though, in that Arvin's actions and the context in which they take place suggest there is a GREATER justice, a GREATER hope than that offered by Christianity and the example of Jesus - natural justice, human justice, as opposed to religious and legal justice. It's possible, in fact, to see Bodecker's orders to the coroner about how to deal with Carl's body are a manifestation of a similar sort of justice.

Arvin's taking Carl's picture and the rolls of film foreshadows the role that all three play in his final confrontation with Bodecker in the following section. On first glance, it may seem strange that Arvin takes the pictures with him, but later events suggest that here, he is planning ahead. He probably has a good idea that Bodecker will come after him, and he takes the pictures as insurance, or at least at this point an attempt at insurance, that he hopes will convince the election-eager Bodecker to let him go.

Finally, there are a few occasions in this section in which Bodecker, like Carl before him, has a moment or two of near humanity. But as both his earlier and his subsequent actions indicate, he is ultimately a monster through and through and again like Carl, seems to get from Arvin exactly what he deserves.

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 51 through 55

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 51 through 55 Summary

Chapter 51 - Arvin sees an article in a newspaper about the deaths of Carl and Sandy, and recognizes Bodecker as the man who helped him the night his father died. Taking the picture of the crucifixion with him, he gets out of the hotel and out of Meade quickly, hitching a ride to Knockemstiff. At Maude's store, he finds a slightly older Hank Bell, who recognizes him and tells him the place where Arvin lived burned down. He also says that Henry Dunlap's wife and her lover went to jail for his death, and recalls the night of Willard's death. Arvin thanks him for being so good to him that night, and prepares to go up to the house. Hank asks if he's ever been to Cincinnati. Arvin says he has not but he's heard a lot about it.

Chapter 52 - The next morning, Bodecker's deputy tells him that a search has turned up no fingerprints in Carl and Sandy's car. After sending the deputy home, Bodecker remembers going up with Arvin to the prayer clearing and seeing all the dead animals. As a result, he realizes he needs to get to Arvin before anybody else, heading out of town towards Knockemstiff, stopping only to burn the photos and the last canisters of film. When he arrives at Knockemstiff, he bullies Hank into telling him about Arvin's visit the night before and sets off in pursuit.

Chapter 53 - When Arvin arrives at the house, he makes his way through its burnt out shell, hoping to find some remnant of his childhood but finding nothing. After eating lunch outside the barn, he makes his way to the prayer clearing, where several of his father's crosses are still standing, one of which still has Jack's bones hanging off it. As he realizes the truth of what his father's actions were about, he pulls the bones down, finds any other remnants, buries them, and then hangs the crucifixion picture from the hotel on the cross instead. He sets the Luger on the prayer log in front of him, kneels, and tries to pray, but has trouble picturing God. He has more success when he pictures his parents instead, asking guidance for what he should do next.

Chapter 54 - Bodecker arrives at the old Russell House, hungover, nervous and excited. He considers how good it will look at re-election time if he is seen as the cop who captured the psycho who killed the preacher, also realizing that he can't stand the thought of anyone knowing the truth about Sandy. He gets out of his car and tracks Arvin to the prayer clearing.

Chapter 55 - As the breeze quiets, Arvin hears footsteps approaching. He grabs the gun and ducks into the bush. Bodecker calls out to him, nervously firing at a grouse that suddenly breaks cover. He tries to talk Arvin into coming out and speaking with him, but Arvin doesn't move - that is, until he steps out onto the path behind Bodecker, points the gun at him, and tells him to drop his weapon. Bodecker tells him he can't do that, adding that he knows Arvin killed Sandy and Carl. Arvin says he has a picture of Sandy with a dead body, and offers to show it to Bodecker. Bodecker turns and fires his gun but

misses. Arvin fires and doesn't miss, shooting Bodecker twice. As Bodecker lies dying, Arvin shows him the photograph, and says he had no choice. After Bodecker breathes his last, Arvin buries the Luger with Jack, covering the entire grave with leaves and brush. He takes the crucifixion picture down off the cross and puts it in his gym bag, hoping he'll one day find a place to hang it. He then puts the photograph of Sandy and the two rolls of film with Bodecker's body, takes one last look around, realizes how much of his past he's leaving behind, and heads for the road. "The cloudless sky was the deepest blue he'd ever seen, and the field seemed to be blazing with light. It looked as if it went on forever". He heads for the highway, wondering if he'll be lucky enough to get a ride.

Part 7 - Ohio, Chapters 51 through 55 Analysis

As narrative tension and momentum build to the book's climactic confrontation between Arvin and Bodecker and Arvin's subsequent confrontation with faith, it takes a couple of engaging diversions. One is into the character of Hank Bell, his barely glimpsed longing for Cincinnati raising the specter of unfulfilled dreams, yet another motif that manifests throughout the narrative. Also in Chapter 51, the narrative drops in an interesting little piece of information - that Henry Dunlap's wife and her lover were imprisoned for his murder. Here again, the book plays with ideas of justice since they were innocent of killing him, but guilty of betraying him. Is what they experienced justice?

Meanwhile, as Bodecker and Arvin each take physical steps towards their physical confrontation, each also takes inner steps towards confrontation with their essential selves - Arvin, towards what he hopes is redemption and freedom. Bodecker towards the consequences of giving in to the drives and desires of an essentially corrupt soul. It's interesting to note, and thematically relevant, that both confrontations take place within the context of the prayer clearing with the prayer log nearby within a context of corrupt spirituality. It's also interesting to note that prior to this climactic confrontation, the corruption of the setting is essentially redeemed, and the clearing sanctified, by Arvin's burial of Jack and the hanging of the crucifixion picture. This is an action which, it seems, he knows he's going to take when he takes the picture from the hotel room. In other words, he knows he is on a mission to redeem himself and free himself from suffering. He is on a quest for redemption.

In his actions, in these circumstances, Arvin finds that redemption, he finds peace, an experience helped by his discovery of the physical ruins of his childhood which, in turn, are a metaphor for the spiritual destruction of that childhood and that sense of suffering that the sanctification of the clearing gives him. This sense of redemption is reinforced by the image of his taking the crucifixion picture with him and by another image. This is the openness and beauty of the field and sky he emerges into at the conclusion of both the chapter and the narrative, the new journey of hope and possibility implied in his stepping out onto the road. There is no irony in this image any more, no danger. The sense of hope and possibility surrounding it suggests that rather than potentially encountering another Carl and Sandy, he might encounter someone who can, and will, actually help him and care for him.

Meanwhile, the contrast between Arvin's actions and those of Bodecker couldn't be clearer. The circumstances of the narrative to this point leave no doubt in the reader's mind that Bodecker is not at all interested in justice. If he was, he wouldn't have burned the pictures and allowed them to be read into evidence in support of what would presumably be Arvin's claim, if his case went to trial, of self defense. Bodecker is much more self-interested, much more determined to save his own skin than that. He burns the pictures solely from an interest in self preservation, perhaps tinged faintly with respect for Sandy's memory, but not a lot.

Ultimately, Arvin's experiences and actions, as well as the images associated with them and the contrast of all of it to Bodecker, make a key thematic suggestion. This is the idea that an essentially good soul, one driven by justice and fairness, as Arvin's has always clearly been can and will, no matter what actions the body housing that soul has taken, find redemption and spiritual truth.

Characters

Arvin Russell

Arvin is the book's central character and protagonist. In the prologue, which takes place when he is a child, the narrative portrays key formative experiences that define his actions, choices, and journey of transformation over the course of several years, during which time he has a number of encounters with corruption and the destructive impulses of humanity. He is a complex character, at heart an essentially good and compassionate human being, loyal, loving, sensitive, and generous. He is also, as the result of those aforementioned formative experiences, not at all afraid to use physical violence to take revenge on those who have performed, or are about to perform violence (emotional and/or physical) on him or on someone he cares about (i.e. Lenora). Ultimately, at the core of both those sides of his personality is a profound spiritual and emotional trauma, associated with and defined by an experience that closely relates to the narrative's central thematic contention of the idea that faith and religion are essentially valueless. In other words, Arvin's experience and values embody and are defined by the theme that faith in the form of prayer, fails him, while religion, in the form of preachers, repeatedly proves to be corrupt. All Arvin has to rely on for survival and ultimately for redemption is his own innate sense of justice and responsibility which is ultimately a more valid and more responsible source of perspective and personal integrity.

Carl and Sandy Henderson

As the narrative portrays Arvin's efforts to discover, connect with, and enact an essential goodness and integrity, it simultaneously portrays two characters who have discovered, connect with, and enact an essential evil and corruption - Carl and Sandy Henderson. In their own ways, each has been traumatized in a manner similar to Arvin and each has a fundamental emptiness associated with that trauma that they are trying to fill. Unlike Arvin, who clearly resorts to destruction only when he or a loved one is threatened, Carl and Sandy destroy for the sake of destruction. They fill their emptiness with what they believe is excitement, which in Carl's case, is a twisted creative and sexual fulfillment and in some cases even justice. Ultimately, they fill their emptiness with a self-perpetuating and self-feeding hunger for the suffering of others as compensation for the suffering THEY have suffered. Their deaths at the hands of the humanity-aligned Arvin make one of the work's more powerful statements on the theme of justice that justice isn't necessarily defined by what is lawful.

Lee Bodecker

Bodecker is Sandy Henderson's brother. Initially an ambitious police officer, he becomes a corrupt sheriff who is more interested in defining and protecting his status within both the community at large and the criminal community than he is in actual justice. This

essential characteristic and intention defines him as a clear contrast to Arvin and also as a key player in the narrative's consideration of the nature of justice. For Bodecker, justice is defined as what's right for him and for the retention of his status, whereas for Arvin, justice is defined simply by what is morally right. Bodecker's death at the hands of Arvin, who knows that Bodecker is corrupt, is the book's climactic statement of its thematic contention that justice isn't always what is lawful.

Roy and Theodore

Roy and Theodore are two traveling preachers, Roy the speaker and the crippled Theodore the musician. When they are first introduced, they are portrayed as traveling from town to town manipulating congregations and local preachers into acts of generosity that they say they don't want, but in fact desperately need. Theodore, who apparently deliberately crippled himself in with the idea of gaining more sympathy from churchgoers and therefore more income, is in love with Roy, convincing himself that his feelings are approved of by God simply because God let him survive the poisoning. Roy is more genuinely spiritual, but only slightly so. He is so desperate to have some kind of connection with God that he deludes himself and takes action based on those delusions that results in murder. Roy is eventually redeemed, at least to some degree, by his belated desire to do right by his abandoned daughter, but the narrative suggests, through his death at the hands of Carl and Sandy, that his deliberate killing of his daughter's mother, Helen, is too great a transgression for redemption to be possible. Theodore's pathetic death, meanwhile, can be seen as retribution for his bitterness and jealousy defined role in causing Helen's death. In other words, and in the novel's apparent thematic perspective, moral justice is ultimately enacted in the deaths of both Roy and Theodore.

Willard and Charlotte Russell

Willard is Arvin's father and Charlotte is his mother. Willard is portrayed as a man traumatized by his experiences in World War II that he seeks redemption for in increasingly obsessive prayer. Charlotte is relatively undefined as a character, but comes across as compassionate and sensitive, perhaps as beautiful inside as she is portrayed to be outside. When Charlotte contracts cancer and dies, Willard's psychotic hope that prayer will heal her is an essential component of the trauma that turns Arvin against religion. This, in turn, is an equally essential component of the book's overall thematic statement on the emptiness and futility of spirituality. It's also important to note that Willard's rules for revenge, as portrayed in the prologue, further define the character of his son Arvin, setting him on a course of action and belief that defines Arvin's journey through the entire narrative.

Emma Russell

Emma is Willard's mother and Arvin's grandmother, a believer whose faith in God is slowly eaten away by the actions and circumstances of her life and those of her child and grandchild.

Earskell

Earskell is Emma's brother, a simple, compassionate, and sensitive soul who serves as a touchstone of integrity for the maturing Arvin.

Helen Hatton

Helen Hatton is a vulnerable young woman who suffers a traumatic experience in childhood; whom Emma is determined to marry to Willard; and who falls under the charismatic spell of preacher Roy. She marries him, becomes pregnant by him, trusts him, and shortly after she gives birth to their daughter, Lenora, is murdered by him. Helen's story, victimized as she is by Roy's deluded faith, is a key component in the narrative's thematically central contention of the futility and even the destructive power of faith.

Lenora

Lenora is the daughter of Helen and traveling preacher Roy who is essentially orphaned when her mother is killed by her father and her father disappears. As she grows up in the home of Emma and Earskell, in the company of Arvin, she recreates herself in her mother's physical image and when she reaches her teens, unwittingly also recreates her LIFE in the image of her mother's. Lenora too falls in love with a preacher, she also becomes impregnated by him, and she ends up losing her life as the result of his rejection.

Pastor Teagardin

Teagardin is the corrupt pastor who manipulates and takes advantage of Lenora, manipulating her into surrendering her virginity and refusing to take responsibility for the life of the child that he fathers by her. His death at the hands of Arvin, who is enacting what he sees as appropriate justice for Teagardin's actions, is another manifestation of the novel's thematic contention that, as previously discussed, genuine justice has little to do with the law.

Henry Dunlap

Lawyer Henry Dunlap is the owner of the home rented by Willard and Charlotte. Mildly sadistic, greedy, and emotionally traumatized by the discovery of his wife's frequent infidelities, he is murdered by Willard as part of Willard's attempt to win health for his beloved wife from God.

Hank Bell

The well meaning Hank is one of the few genuinely compassionate characters in the work, responding with compassion on the two occasions when he encounters the troubled Arvin. Like many of the other characters, Hank is portrayed as having unfulfilled dreams and longing for opportunities for a more fulfilled life he never had the chance to realize.

Jack

Description

Objects/Places

Knockemstiff, Ohio

This is the small village where Willard, Charlotte, and Arvin make their home in the early part of the narrative, and to which Arvin returns in search of redemption and release in the novel's final chapters.

The House on Mitchell Flats

This is the house just outside of Knockemstiff where Willard, Charlotte and Arvin live in the few years between Willard and Charlotte's marriage and their deaths. In the years between those deaths and Arvin's return, the house burns down. When Arvin revisits the ruins at the end of the narrative, those ruins metaphorically represent the "ruins" of the faith practiced by Willard, and how that faith has no more place in Arvin's life. He is finally able to move on.

The Prayer Clearing and the Prayer Log

A short walk through the woods from the house on Mitchell Flats there is clearing in which there is a large fallen tree or log. This is where Willard goes to pray, seated on the log, his head bowed. This is where he brings Arvin, hoping that he will develop the same kind of faith, and this is where he brings his animal and human sacrifices, draining them of their blood in the hopes that their deaths will enable Charlotte's life. He brings the dog Jack here. Arvin discovers the futility of prayer and religion in this location and it is here that Arvin, at the end of the narrative and several years after his loss of faith, redeems himself by burying Jack and ending the corrupt life of Joe Bodecker.

Crosses

Willard rings the prayer clearing with several crosses, representative of the cross on which Jesus died and therefore of the life sacrifice Jesus made. He hangs the sacrificial animals, including Jack, on these crosses. When Arvin returns to the clearing at the end of the book, the fact that several of the crosses have fallen can be seen as a metaphoric representation of how faith, Arvin's faith in religion in particular, have also fallen, failed in their purpose.

Meade, Ohio

Carl and Sandy Henderson make their home in nearby Meade, Ohio, itself a slightly larger town. Joe Bodecker also lives here and it is also the town where Willard met Charlotte at the Wooden Spoon diner.

The Wooden Spoon Restaurant

Early in the narrative, this diner is where Willard meets Charlotte, the beautiful waitress whom he eventually makes his wife. At the end of the narrative, Arvin returns to the diner, wondering it was like for his parents to meet there and about the love and need for connection they both discovered there.

The White Cow Diner

This is another diner in Meade. Carl spends increasing amounts of time here, finding a kind of friendship with the waitress there or at the very least an escape from his troubling thoughts. The amount of time he spends there triggers Joe Bodecker who comes to believe that Carl is corrupting the waitress in the same way that he corrupted Sandy. Bodecker's communication of those suspicions to Sandy leads to tension between her and her husband.

Coal Creek, Ohio

This is the community where Emma and Earskell live, where Arvin and Lenora make their home after the deaths and disappearances of their parents and where they both encounter the corrupt Pastor Teagardin.

Willard's Luger

Willard returns home from the war with a souvenir gun, a German Luger that he was told was the gun with which Adolf Hitler killed himself. The gun is, for him, inextricably linked with the trauma he suffered while overseas. He eventually gives it to Arvin, who becomes skilful with it, leaves it hidden away for several years, but then pulls it out when Arvin decides to take revenge on Teagardin for what he did for Lenora.

Carl and Sandy's Car, the Rolls of Film

Carl and Sandy's car is essentially a weapon they use on their hunt for victims on their killing spree. They lure hitchhikers into the car, drive them to a secluded location, enact their seduction and killing scenario, and drive away. Using the car makes them essentially untraceable. Meanwhile, Carl keeps the rolls of film he uses to take the pictures of his murder victims in the car's glove compartment, where they are eventually discovered first by Arvin and then by Bodecker. Carl and Sandy's attempts at seducing and killing Arvin are foiled when Arvin instead kills them near their car.

Carl's Shoebox of Photographs

Carl keeps a shoebox of the photographs he takes of his murder victims in a closet at home. Between what he and Sandy call their hunting expeditions, Carl takes the photographs out of the closet and masturbates over them. Bodecker's discovery of the photos clues him into what Carl and Sandy are doing when they say they're on vacation. He burns the photographs and the rolls of film kept in the car in an effort to eliminate the potential effect of their discovery on his career and reputation.

Carl's Favorite Photograph

As described in narration, Carl's favorite photograph of an underwear-clad Sandy cradling the head of one of their first murder victims resembles pictures of the Virgin Mary cradling her son Jesus after his death also known as a pieta. This linking of a religious image with murderous insanity can be seen as another of the work's many thematic statements of the corruption and therefore the ultimate futility of religion.

Sandy's Gun

Carl gives Sandy a gun ostensibly to protect herself in case one of their victims gets out of hand. Later, however, he realizes that to give her such a potential expression of independence puts him and his murderous hobby in danger, so he loads the gun with blanks. These blanks save Arvin's life and end Sandy's. The blanks and the gun can be seen as a metaphoric representation of the ultimate emptiness and spiritual futility of Carl and Sandy's practice of evil, destruction, and corruption. This emptiness is even more apparent when contrasted with Arvin's instincts towards and enaction of natural justice.

The Crucifixion Picture

This is the picture that Arvin takes with him to the prayer clearing and keeps after he leaves the area.

Themes

The Presence of Evil (

Nowhere in the narrative is the phrase "the devil all the time" actually used. There are, in fact, few if any actual uses of the term "devil." There are, however, plenty of instances (physical, verbal) which could easily be described by the reader (and sometimes are by the characters), as being purely evil, corrupt and destructive. These manifestations of the devil occur "all the time" and manifest in ways that almost always end in some form of death. Willard clearly believes that Charlotte, suffering in cancer, is inhabited by a form of evil, and takes psychotically desperate measures to end that evil's influence, but ultimately fails. Carl, Sandy, Bodecker, Teagardin, Roy, Theodore, and so many other characters (principal, secondary, glimpsed) are thoroughly absorbed by and in acts of soul and body destroying evil, all of which end in the deaths of those whom they influence, their own deaths, or both. The "good" characters (Arvin, Emma, Earskell, Helen, and Lenora) are surrounded by evil, by "the devil all the time," and as previously discussed, sometimes end up destroyed but in some cases end up triumphant. This is particularly true of Arvin who, it could be argued, has more encounters with more forms of evil than just about anyone else in the book, but who faces them down with an inner faith in himself and in natural justice, since God's justice, at least as portrayed in the narrative, will ultimately fail him. In short, the narrative's perspective on evil is a thematically essential component for its contemplation of the other two primary themes in the narrative - the futility of faith and religion and the nature of justice.

The Failings of Faith and Religion

Prayer constantly fails in this narrative. Willard's and Arvin's prayers fail to keep Charlotte alive, Lenora's prayers for a closer relationship with God fail to keep her from succumbing to the manipulations of the corrupt Pastor Teagardin, and Teagardin's own prayers for freedom from his lust fail to keep him from molesting young teenagers (not that he really WANTS to be kept from that). Religion, meanwhile, is invariably portrayed as corrupt or to be completely accurate, the ministers who preach religion are invariably corrupt. Pastor Sykes, who introduces Roy and Theodore into the Coal Creek church, is motivated solely by money and ego. Roy and Theodore themselves are motivated by power and greed. Pastor Teagardin is motivated by power and lust. Virtue, faith, need, humility - all the traditional values associated with religion - are things to be exploited, mined, and ultimately destroyed. In all these portrayals, the religion and faith of Christianity is portrayed as a complete failure, to both the people who believe in them and the people who love the seekers. Evil, in any of its forms, always wins against religion. Put evil up against what might best be described as natural justice, particularly as embodied by Arvin, and that's a different story. This is the book's primary thematic statement that true justice is served not by religion and its rules, but by simple human respect and integrity.

The Nature of Justice

There is the very clear sense that at the end of the novel, when Carl and Sandy kill Roy and when Arvin kills first Carl and Sandy and then Bodecker, that all four deaths are intended to be seen as a form of justice. The narrative seems to be making the statement that all four characters get what they deserve, given their corrupt, destructive, seemingly soul-less actions throughout the story - in other words, in their deaths, justice is served, and that the end of their lives, and the manner of those ends, is appropriate, given how they've manipulated and destroyed others. This idea is further reinforced by the narrative's portrayal of the most powerful police officer in the book, Joe Bodecker, as self-interested and corrupt, the law as self-interested perpetuator, and self-protector. He is not interested in justice (although it could be argued that his orders for disposing of Carl's body are at least a form of justice). Bodecker, as previously discussed, is solely interested in status, which he has and is determined to maintain. On the other hand, the character clearly viewed by the narrative as the ultimate dispenser of justice, Arvin, has no status whatsoever. All he has on his side, justifying his actions, is what the narrative seems to contend is that which is morally right - the defense of the vulnerable, including defense of his own life. Would the people killed at the end of the story have been caught and punished? However, given that the narrative portrays the law as corrupt and foolish, it is unlikely.

Here, it's interesting to note that the character who represents and embodies the narrative's apparent view on the inevitability of natural justice also represents and embodies the book's apparent view on the futility and emptiness of faith. The only exception occurs when it comes to the book's final moments and Arvin's interaction with the picture of the crucifixion. In the narrative's portrayal of both the picture and of Arvin's interaction with it can be seen an exploration of the fourth of the book's themes - the nature of redemption.

The Nature of Redemption

As the narrative draws to its conclusion, Arvin encounters a picture of Jesus' crucifixion in a hotel room, a visual evocation of an act which is the ultimate statement of both faith and redemption. When he turns the face of the photo to the wall, it represents his lack of valuing both faith AND redemption. Something however changes between the time he visits the diner and returns to the hotel room, which makes him take down the picture and take it with him when he visits the clearing. That same something makes him first place the picture on the cross that once held the body of Jack the dog (arguably as much a random victim of violence turned into a sacrifice as Jesus) and then takes it back down and walks away with it. That something is not Christian faith, as the narrative of that section makes clear (Chapter 53). Rather, that something is tied more closely to the burial he gives Jack's bones. That something is his sense of natural justice, the justice with which he answers his father's faith-based LACK of justice in executing Jack in the first place. In other words, Willard's act of faith is unjust. Arvin's act of simple respect is just and right, natural justice. He imbues the picture with THAT sensibility, a

natural faith rather than a religious faith, the sort of faith that Jesus' teachings truly represented of justice and respect for the reviled, the poor, and the humble. THAT'S why Arvin takes the picture with him when he leaves, his steps taking him out into a symbolic experience of openness and freedom. He is free from injustice, free from faith, free from suffering, and free of guilt.

Style

Point of View

Coming from the third person and omniscient point of view, the narrative exploring the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perspectives of several characters. In the case of "The Devil all the Time," the omniscient point of view enables the reader to gain insight into the complex motivations and circumstances of a wide variety of characters. That range includes those glimpsed only once or twice such as Hank Bell, those who might be called strong supporting characters such as Joe Bodecker and Pastor Teagardin, or those who might be called central characters such as protagonist Arvin and antagonists Carl and Sandy. The main benefit of this stylistic technique is to create a wide tapestry of experience, a complex interweaving of event and meaning that suggests the book's subject matter and themes can be applied to a broad range of individuals and circumstances. It could be argued that because the characters and situations of "The Devil all the Time" are limited to a particular socio-economic class (i.e. lower and/or working class, uneducated, and poor) and location (rural America) that the broad based meaning of its themes are less likely to be seen as universal. It could also be argued that issues explored and raised by these characters such as faith, corruption, need, loneliness, despair, justice, and revenge are ultimately human issues where the setting essentially amplifies and/or intensifies them. Will readers outside the circumstances of the characters be prepared to see themselves in these products of their environment and time?

Setting

The narrative is set primarily within a limited set of geographical boundaries - specifically, rural Ohio, an area portrayed as being troubled by poverty, lack of education, and lack of broad perspective. This last is particularly interesting to note because at the novel's conclusion, narration describes Arvin emerging from a place of limited perspective (i.e. the woods) into a place where he has a much more open perspective (i.e. access to a wide sky, an open field, and a beckoning road). This could be a metaphorical representation of his movement from a limited personal and spiritual point of view into one that has more possibilities, more hope, and the possibility of greater spiritual and personal freedom. In any case, the exceptions to the narrative's overall setting are Carl and Sandy's murderous road trips, which take place on highways and by-ways further mid west and further south. Here it is interesting to consider how they take their narrowness of perspective with them. In spite of venturing outside the physical boundaries that metaphorically also define their psychological and spiritual boundaries, they pay very little attention to what is happening around them, other than what suits and fills their inner needs and desires.

It's also important to note the narrative's setting in time from the end of World War II in 1945 (when Willard emerges from the traumas associated with combat overseas) to

1966 (when Arvin emerges from the traumas associated with his combat with his past and with the corrupt morality of religion). Willard's emergence can be seen as parallel to the emergence of the world as a whole from the trauma of war, while Arvin's emergence can be seen as parallel with America's emergence from the conservative moral and social traditions that came to dominated the 50's and early 60's.

Language and Meaning

Language and Meaning

In general, the language of the work is reflective of the socio-cultural environment (i.e. lower/working class, uneducated, and poor) in which its characters live and struggle to survive. There is a lot of cursing, a lot of raw expressions of feeling, and a lot of stark emotion, all of which manifest in both dialogue and narration. For the most part, the characters inhabit a physical, economic, geographical, and emotional state of being in which manners, politeness, and tact are simply not a priority. There is no time and no energy, and such niceties earn little or no respect. There are exceptions as the language used by and about characters who might be described as essentially good (Emma, Charlotte, Helen, Lenora, Earskell, Hank, and at times Arvin) is softer, for lack of a better term. There is less cursing, a seemingly more sensitive feeling of vulnerability in both the way these characters talk and in how their described. It's interesting to note, however, that by and large these characters are in the significant minority, surrounded as they are by corruption and vice, immorality and downright evil, all of which are evoked by curse-filled language that seems to reflect an inner, spiritual reality as well as the characters' outward regard for the world and other characters. In other words, language of description and dialogue is an evocation of theme or the struggle for so-called "good" people against the "all the time" presence of the devil.

Structure

The novel's use of structure is one of its most interesting stylistic elements, as it moves back and forth to events taking place across two decades of time from Willard in the 1940's to Carl and Sandy in the 1960's, back to Arvin and Lenora in 1950's, back to Carl and Sandy, and so on. This moving back and forth functions on several levels. First, and most relevant thematically, it indicates parallels in experience and situation between the various time lines. Specifically, the repeated narrative/structural returns to Carl and Sandy suggests that their murderous destructiveness is emotionally and/or spiritually parallel to the destructiveness of people like Pastor Teagardin and Roy.

A second level of value to the moving back and forth through time is that it structurally explores an idea hinted at by Theodore, of all people, at the end of Chapter 24 when he says "you just never know." This is the idea that characters, like everyone, live their lives taking step after step down a road that they don't know the ending of, heading for a destination that may or may not turn out to be the one they intended to reach. Along that road, intersections with others on their own roads, their own journeys, can send people

on different directions they never imagined were possible. The narrative's structural following of protagonist Arvin and antagonists Carl and Sandy down their separate and different roads (the former motivated by a desire for life-affirming justice and the latter motivated by a desire for life-destroying power) sets up the inevitable thematic and physical collision between these two philosophies. The result is a thematic statement on the nature and value of justice. On yet a third level, the setting up and defining of two such clear narrative lines triggers curiosity about how these themes are going to intersect, which intensifies somewhere around Chapter 38 when the two structural and thematic lines begin to converge and the realization dawns that there will be blood.

Quotes

"Unless he had whiskey running through his veins, Willard came to the clearing every morning and evening to talk to God. Arvin didn't know which was worse, the drinking or the praying. As far back as he could remember, it seemed that his father had fought the Devil all the time." (Prologue, p. 1).

"The picture had been there as long as he could remember, spotty with age in a cheap wooden frame. It seemed almost alive in the flickering light from the lantern. He could almost hear the cracks of the whips, the taunts of Pilate's soldiers. He glanced down at the German Luger lying on the table by Earskell's plate." (Chapter 1, p. 18).

"Still strumming his guitar, Theodore watched his cousin nonchalantly brush a spider off his ear, them smile at the frail, plain-looking girl. He didn't stop playing until he saw Roy beckon the bitch forward with his hands." (Chapter 2, p. 25).

"Though he hadn't talked to God in years, not a single petition or word of praise since he'd come a cross the crucified marine during the war, he could feeling it welling up inside him now, the urge to get right with his Maker before something bad happened to his family." (Chapter 4, p. 36).

"Someone was always dying somewhere, and in the summer of 1958, the year that Arvin Eugene Russell counted himself ten years old, it was his mother's turn." (Chapter 5, p. 41).

"It seemed like a thousand years had passed since the morning the two hunters had come up behind Willard and him here. He felt guilty and ashamed he wasn't crying, but there were no tears left. His mother's long dying had left him dry." (Chapter 7, p. 56).

"She didn't know why she had followed Carl into this life, wouldn't even try to put such a thing into mere words" (Chapter 10, p. 74).

"To his way of thinking, it was the one true religion, the thing he'd been searching for all his life. Only in the presence of death could he feel the presence of something like God." (Ibid, p. 76).

"From living with his father, Arvin had learned that you didn't pry too much into other people's affairs. Everyone had things they didn't want to talk about, including himself." (Chapter 19, p. 115).

"He remembered everything. It was as if he resurrected them every time he brought out the box, stirred them awake and allowed them to do their own kind of singing." (Chapter 25, p. 139).

"Something broke in him that day. For the first time, he could see that his whole life added up to absolutely nothing. The only thing he knew how to do was work a camera, but who needed another fat guy with thin hair taking boring pictures of whiny, red-faced

babies and sluts in their prom dresses and grim-faced married couples celebrating twenty five years of misery" (Chapter 26, p. 146).

"It was electric, the sensation that went through him just then, the awareness he had of his own short time on this earth and what he had done with it ... it was the same sort of feeling he got with the models. They had chosen one ride or one direction over another, and they had ended up in his and Sandy's car. Could he explain it? No, he couldn't explain it, but he sure as hell could feel it. THE MYSTERY, that's all Carl could ever say." (Chapter 27, p. 150).

"It was hard for Arvin to believe that this pussy-sniffing fat boy was any relation to Albert Sykes" (Chapter 32, p. 171).

"How could he get turned on by someone who didn't understand the desperate battle raging between good and evil, purity and lust? Every time he fucked some young girl, Preston felt guilty, felt as if he was drowning in it, at least for a long minute or two. To him, such emotion proved that he still had a chance of going to heaven...that is, if he repented his wretched, whoring ways before he took his last breath." (Chapter 33, p. 176).

"He wished that she had resisted a little bit more, but she was easy, just like he had predicted. Even so, as many times as he'd done this, all the time he was peeling her clothes off, he could hear every bird, every insect, every animal that moved in the woods for what seemed like miles. It was always like that the first time with a new one." (Chapter 34, p. 179).

"It was the first time she had ever realized just how powerful sin could be. No wonder it was so hard for people to get into heaven." (Chapter 35, p. 181).

"She could still see the church, the one she had gone to all her life. She had felt the presence of God there many times, but not once, it occurred to her now, since the new preacher had arrived." (Chapter 36, p. 186).

"They had done a lot of bad things over the years, and he spent the next several hours praying for the cripple's soul. He hoped someone would do the same for him when it came his time." (Chapter 39, p. 201).

"It reminded Carl of one of those paintings of Mary with the baby Jesus, the way Sandy was looking down at the model with a sweet, innocent look on her face, a look that he'd been able to catch a couple of times that first year or two, but then was gone forever." (Chapter 40, p. 206).

"Something cold began to crawl over him. He felt his body start to sink into a hole that seemed to be opening up beneath him in the ground, and it scared him, that feeling, the way it sucked the breath right out of him...then something with huge black wings settled on top of him, pushing him down again..." (Chapter 47, 231-2).

"No matter what else happened, he told himself, he had to try to set right those things about his father that still ate at his heart. Until then, he'd never be free anyway." (Chapter 48, p. 236).

"And suddenly he realized, as he stood once again in his father's church, that Willard had needed to go wherever Charlotte went, so that he could keep on looking after her." (Chapter 53, p. 254).

"It seemed as if his entire life, everything he'd ever seen or sad or done, had led up to this moment: alone at last with the ghosts of his childhood. He began to pray, the first time since his mother had died." (Ibid, p. 255).

"[Arvin] imagined the door to a sad, empty room closing with a faint click, never to be opened again, and that calmed him a little." (Chapter 55, p. 260).

Topics for Discussion

Note and summarize the occurrences of coarse and abusive sexuality throughout the narrative. What does the frequent use of this motif suggest about the author's intent? Contrast this aspect of the book with what appears to be its primary theme relating to the necessity and value of redemption. How does the one affect the other?

Discuss the metaphoric implications of the various motifs/images of crucifixion and suffering. Consider the implications of such suffering in Christian philosophy and teaching. How does the meaning of the image in that context interact with the various images of crucifixion and their meanings in the context of this narrative?

Discuss whether Arvin's murderous actions throughout the narrative and his acts of violence could be considered a form of raw, appropriate justice.

Chapters 38 and 39 both end with ominous references to hitchhiking, which foreshadow future encounters with the murderous Carl and Sandy Henderson. Which ending triggered fear in you? Which ending to which chapter triggered a sense of "he'll get what he deserves?" What other reactions did those chapter endings trigger?

On what occasions does the motif of broken and/or abandoned dreams appear in the narrative? What is the effect of those appearances on your opinions about the characters experiencing such a breakdown in possibility? Discuss what you think is the relationship between this motif and the narrative's three central themes.

Debate the novel's apparent perspective on prayer and religion. Are religion and faith valid resources for defining morality and/or for enacting hope? Are they merely exercises in futility?

How do you define evil? Do you agree with the novel's apparent contention that evil is all around - that the "devil" is present and active "all the time?" What do think is the best response to evil? How should it be fought?

How do you define justice? Do you agree with the narrative's apparent contention, stated through the character, actions, and experience of Arvin, that true justice is based on what is morally right, rather than what is legally mandated? Do you agree or disagree with the novel's apparent contention that Arvin's actions are a form of justice? Why?