I Am the Cheese Study Guide

I Am the Cheese by Robert Cormier

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Introduction

I Am the Cheese, published in 1977, was Robert Cormier's second young adult novel. It tells the story of a teenaged boy who discovers that his family is part of a witness protection program and that his parents have been keeping secrets from him all his life. As he tries to determine who and what he is, he is threatened and finally overcome by the terrifying forces of a government that is more interested in preserving its own power than in protecting one small boy. The idea for the book grew out of Cormier's reading a magazine article about the then-new federal witness protection program and his fascination with the idea of individuals struggling against an unjust society.

The book has sold consistently well since its publication, but it has also attracted controversy. Some have felt that the book's complicated structure and pessimistic ending are inappropriate for young people, and the novel has occasionally been challenged and banned in school libraries. Nonetheless, it has been recognized for excellence by several influential organizations, including the American Library Association and the Children's Literature Association. It was named an Outstanding Book of the Year by the *New York Times* and a Best Book of the Year by *School Library Journal*, among other recognitions.

Author Biography

the model for Cormier's fictional Monument, Massachusetts, the setting for several of his novels. He was one of eight children of Lucien Cormier, a factory worker, and his wife Irma. Growing up in the Great Depression, Cormier enjoyed the inexpensive means of recreation available to him, especially going to the movies and reading books from the public library. When he was about thirteen, he read Thomas Wolfe's novel *The Web and the Rock*, about a boy who wants to be a writer. As an adult, Cormier remembered this novel as the most important influence on his own decision to become a writer.

After graduating from high school in 1942, Cormier tried to join the military and help fight World War II, but his poor eyesight kept him out. Instead, he took a factory job and enrolled in college classes. When one of his professors submitted a story of his to a magazine without Cormier's knowledge, he became a published author for the first time. Newly confident in his writing skills, he left college and took a job writing radio commercials. Soon after, he met, courted, and married Constance Senay. They had four children.

Cormier's next job was as a newspaper reporter, a job he sought because it would enable him to both write and support a family. He worked as a journalist for more than thirty years and won several awards for his work. Meanwhile, in his spare time he turned again to fiction in the late 1950s and published his first novel, *Now and at the Hour*, in 1960. He established a routine of writing fiction late at night, when the rest of the family had gone to bed.

Cormier's fourth novel, based on the experience of one of his teenaged sons at school, was *The Chocolate War* (1974). His first novel for and about young adults, the book has been both popular and controversial; it has sold nearly a million copies, and has occasionally been banned or challenged in schools and libraries because of its gloomy realism. In 1977, Cormier published his second young adult novel, *I Am the Cheese*, which was also popular with young readers but criticized by some adults because of its pessimistic ending. This was followed by nine more novels, a collection of short stories, and a collection of newspaper columns.

Some critics have speculated that Cormier might have become more famous if he had traveled more or moved to a big city, but he liked staying near his family in his hometown. His marriage to Constance lasted until his death—more than fifty years—and he worked with the same literary agent for more than forty years. Cormier was still living in Leominster, the town where he was born, when he suffered his last illness. He died of lung cancer in a Boston hospital on November 2, 2000.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1

I Am the Cheese opens with the words "I am riding the bicycle and I am on Route 31." These words are important for several reasons: they introduce the novel's protagonist, they establish the first-person point of view and present tense that will characterize one strand of the novel, and they begin a paragraph that will be repeated later in the novel. In this first chapter, one of fifteen in the present tense, the narrator is a teenage boy riding an old bicycle from Monument, Massachusetts, to Rutterburg, Vermont, to bring a securely wrapped gift to his father.

The boy, Adam, appears to have decided on this trip rather abruptly: he did not tell anyone at home or at school that he was leaving, he did not call "Amy," and he did not take his pills. He quietly wrapped up his father's gift, grabbed an old cap to keep his ears warm in the October wind, and took his savings of thirty-five dollars and ninety-three cents. Now, as he bikes along, he looks over his shoulder to see whether he is being followed. Only four or five miles into the seventy-mile trip he is getting tired, but a long downhill lets him coast for a while.

Chapter 2

The second chapter begins with code letters ("TAPE OZK001"), followed by a transcript of an interview between "T" and "A." T identifies himself as Brint, and asks questions to help A remember "that night." It seems that A is unable to remember anything clearly, although he has been given some sort of medication to relax him or to help him remember. After a few exchanges on the interview tape, the writing shifts to a prose narrative in the past tense, told by a third-person limited narrator with insight into the mind of one character, who appears to be Adam at an earlier time. A young boy, lying in bed with his Pokey the Pig stuffed animal, overhears an urgent whispered conversation between his parents. He realizes they are trying to keep him from hearing. This past-tense narrative is interrupted by another transcription from the tape, as Brint urges Adam to remember exactly what he heard.

These three strands—the present-tense sections narrated in the first person by Adam, the present-tense transcripts of interview tapes, and the past-tense memories of Adam presented in the third person—are interwoven throughout the remaining thirty-one chapters of the novel. No strand contains direct references to the others, but characters and plot elements overlap to create a mysterious but unified story in the reader's mind. Perhaps the easiest way to understand how the plot unfolds is to trace each strand separately to the end of the novel.

The Tapes

The sixteen transcriptions of Brint's interrogation of Adam form a plot of their own, as Brint tries to see what Adam can remember of his past. In the first few tapes, Brint appears kind and sympathetic as he gently encourages Adam to see just one more thing. He occasionally suggests topics for discussion (for example, the person Paul Delmonte), but he quickly and calmly backs off whenever Adam resists.

In the fourth tape, Adam asks whether Brint is a doctor and if they are in a hospital. The reader will notice, though Adam does not appear to, that Brint does not answer these questions but deftly turns the conversation in another direction. From this point on, Brint takes a more active role in the interviews, steering the interviews toward topics of his choosing. His tone becomes edgier as he presses Adam to remember every detail of a phone call between his mother and aunt, a conversation between his father and Grey, or the contents of his father's desk drawer. It becomes clear that Brint is not interested in Adam's well-being; rather, Brint's goal is to determine whether Adam remembers any information about the corruption his father uncovered.

The last tape, TAPE OZK016, contains Brint's summary report of his third annual series of interrogations of Adam. He reports that Adam shows no memory of any information his father uncovered and speaks coldly of the earlier "termination of Witness #599-6 and affiliate (spouse)"—Adam's parents. He recommends that Grey (Personnel #2222) be reinstated since it cannot be proven that he aided in their murders. Finally, he recommends that Adam remain in confinement until "termination procedures are approved" or until he "obliterates."

Adam's Memories

Under Brint's interrogation, Adam remembers several key incidents from his past. He remembers walking to the library with his father one day when he was nine years old and his father's suddenly taking a detour through the woods. Adam was not sure why his father abruptly changed course but felt his father had seen or sensed danger.

At other times, Adam remembers Amy Hertz, his only friend. The two met at the library when they collided and dropped their books, and Amy soon became the person who drew Adam out of his isolation. She enjoyed pulling elaborate practical jokes that she called "Numbers," tricks like filling and abandoning grocery carts, or setting car radios in a parking lot on high volume. Amy inadvertently added to Adam's growing suspicions when she told him that she had met a man from Adam's home-town and that this man had never heard of Adam's family. As Adam's suspicions grew, however, something kept him from sharing his questions and his discoveries with Amy.

When Adam was fourteen, he became curious enough to look in his father's locked desk drawer. There he found two different birth certificates in his own name, listing two different dates of birth. Soon he discovered that, contrary to what his parents had always told him, he had a living relative, his mother's sister, whom his mother phoned

once a week. Finally, this told him everything: The family's real name was not Farmer but Delmonte; Adam's birth name was Paul. David Delmonte, Adam's father, had been a newspaper reporter who had uncovered evidence of a link between organized crime and the government. After he testified before Congress, the family was given a new identity and moved to Monument, Massachusetts, where the mysterious Mr. Grey had kept an eye on them ever since.

Shortly after Adam/Paul learned the truth about his family, Mr. Farmer received instructions from Mr. Grey to take the family on a vacation. Adam and his parents headed for Vermont, singing and enjoying being together. When they stopped at a scenic overlook, another car deliberately ran into them, killing David's mother instantly. Adam's last memories were of his father running away and of Mr. Grey looking at his mother's body.

Adam's Bike Ride

In the present-tense sections of the novel, Adam continues his bike ride toward Rutterburg, Vermont, to bring his father a gift. He is lonely and frightened as he bikes along, but he bolsters his courage by singing "The Farmer in the Dell," the song his father used to sing on family outings, and by thinking about phoning Amy when she is home from school. Along the way, Adam encounters various hazards: a cold rain, two young men who chase and threaten him, another boy who steals his bike. At a pay phone he calls Amy's number, but a strange man answers. Puzzled, Adam keeps going. When he gets to a motel where he plans to spend the night, he is told that the motel has been closed for years—another mystery, since he recently stayed there with his parents.

Finally, Adam reaches Rutterburg, where he comes to a hospital and a doctor who calls him "Paul" and escorts him to his room. Apparently, Adam's bike trip has been mostly in his imagination—he has only been circling the hospital grounds. The package turns out to be Pokey the Pig, Adam's only source of comfort, and he is grateful to have it back in his arms. Lying in bed, Adam sings the last verse of "The Farmer in the Dell," in which "The cheese stands alone" and concludes, "I am the cheese." Chillingly, the last chapter of the novel occurs after Brint's last tape. It is just a paragraph, and it begins where the first chapter began: "I am riding the bicycle and I am on Route 31."

Introduction

Introduction Summary

Author Robert Cormier discusses his second young adult novel, *I Am The Cheese*, and how he came to write it. His idea began with a Sunday morning writing exercise to spark his creative output again. He began writing about a boy on a bicycle, riding through a town, his encounters with people, dogs and thoughts running through his head.

Weeks later he ran across an article about a new government program involving identity and with this new information, his earlier story evolved into *I Am The Cheese*, a complex book using flashbacks, interrogations and the thoughts of his teenaged character on a journey to discovery his own identity.

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

A young man is riding his old-fashioned one-speed bike on a journey from Monument, Massachusetts to Rutterburg, Vermont. He is going to visit his father in Rutterburg and thinks of him as he rides out of town. The bike is the kind his father rode as a kid years ago - no speed, no fenders, warped tires, cracked handlebars, and brakes that don't always work. It is 10:00 on a cold October morning and the young man is determined to make the long trip on his bike. He has thirty-five dollars and ninety-three cents which is enough for a bus ticket, but he doesn't want to be confined in the bus, preferring the open road. He is riding by his own strength and power and for the sake of his father. As he rides through town, he thinks of his father, who reads Thomas Wolfe. He has a package he is bringing him He is wearing a wool cap that covers his ears, pants, shoes, and an old jacket that were his father's, dug out of an old box in the cellar.

The young man is reminded of his friend, Amy Hertz, and he longs to call her on the phone. He is nervous about the trip and thinks of Amy to soothe himself. He loves her and recalls the Numbers pranks they played, and all the times she let him kiss and hold her. He remembers it is still too early to call; she is still in school and he decides to call her later when he is on the road and away from town. Next in his preparation for his trip, the young man contemplates whether to take one of his pills before the trip, and decides not to. He wants to make the trip without pills, without crutches. He empties the bottle of pills into the garbage disposal, feeling strong and resolute. Finally, he takes the bike from the garage and pedals away from Monument. "Take it easy," he tells himself, mindful of all the miles ahead of him just as he crests the top of a hill. He coasts effortlessly down the road into the next town, Aswell.

Section 1 Analysis

Section 1 introduces the reader to the inner thoughts of a young teenager. It doesn't specifically tell us his age, but his thoughts reveal a level of maturity possibly found in a teenager trying to exercise his independence. This section sets the scene for the book and introduces us to a couple of the characters we will encounter later. It also starts the reader on a discovery of the mystery surrounding the young man, his journey, and his discoveries.

It is a cold October morning and the trip to Rutterburg, Vermont, on an old bike, is many challenging miles away. The reader does not know why he is making such a seemingly crazy trip other than he is focused on bringing his father a package. There is no reason given why he is acting so nervous and clandestine about the trip, as if he is sneaking out of town, not wanting his parents or school authorities to know. His name or his parents' names have not been revealed at this point either. We know there is a father, but there is no mention of his mother's whereabouts.

There is also the question of the pills he feels he should be taking but decides to forego for the trip. The description of them indicates they are prescription and that he feels dependent on them, as if weighed down by them. He says he feels strong and resolute without them. However, his decision not to take them leaves us wondering if this is a wise choice and if this will create problems for him later on his trip. He holds the same fears but doesn't speak them out loud.

The pills mentioned this early in the story are a foreshadowing of the controls placed on him by outside forces he will discover through his journey. They hint of their control over his mind and the young man is seeking to break away from them.

The reader is introduced to Amy Hertz as his friend and the girl he loves. She is a calming influence on him but also leads him to do the types of daring things teenagers get into when striking out for their independence, like her "Numbers" and hugging and kissing. The reader wonders what "Numbers" are - maybe some game they play. The reader wonders if their relationship is approved of by her parents or by his. The reader is led to imagine that there is much they share that is not revealed to others.

Amy Hertz is a calming and soothing influence throughout the story. She comes to represent his only link to his past and the only person who knew him before he discovers his true identity. Her personality is explored later throughout the book and the reader finds she represents his alter ego, someone who helps him live in ways he lacks the courage to do on his own. He has not told her of his trip before he leaves. The reader wonders why he has chosen to keep this trip secret from her.

The young man's father is introduced as a major symbol - but of what we don't know yet. This is another mystery yet to unfold. The young man has equipped himself as if to put on his father for the journey. He dresses in his father's old pants, shoes, coat and wool hat that he unearths from a box in the cellar. He rides an old-fashioned bike, as his father did when he was a kid. He is determined to go see his father and bring him the package.

The package is another symbol that foreshadows the conclusion of the story. It is intended to be a present for his father and comes to represent the young man's identity, which changes as the story evolves. At this point in his journey he is resolved and single minded in his approach to the journey. He is wrapped up in the security of his father's clothes. He courageously dumps his medication for a clear head as he sets out on his journey of self-discovery.

The young man is taking this long, tenuous journey alone, exposed, weak, and afraid. The bike represents a symbol of exposure and vulnerability. It is a child's vehicle. Riding a bike along the side of a highway exposes the rider to extreme danger from vehicles rushing by. It is a cold October day, threatening winter weather. There is no protection from the elements on a bike. He is extremely visible and conspicuous riding a bike on a highway and it is certainly not the mode of transportation to take if a person is trying to move secretly. There is no protection from any hazard, whether by nature or by people

bent on bringing you harm. Finally, his bike can only go so fast, limited by his own power and energy, and by the bike's old age and bad condition itself.

The young man doesn't want to take a bus on this trip, shying away at some vague fear. The bike is the vehicle that takes the young man, and us, through the experiences he goes through as he works to uncover the memories which are hidden deep in his mind. The bike, a child's vehicle of independence, is a symbol of his childhood which he can never quite leave behind.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

Interrogation Tape OZK001. The interrogator is Brint and he is guiding the young man back in time to his earliest memories.

The young man recalls his mother's lilac perfume and then memories about "that night." He is lying awake in his bed and hears the muffled sounds of his mother and father talking in the other room. He recalls his father teasing him about keeping a stuffed animal, Pokey the Pig, at the age of three and a half and recalls his mother's tender voice.

That night the voices are not soft and murmuring as they usually are; they are louder and harsher, scratching at the night, as he hears his mother worried they will wake him up. He pretends to be asleep as his father checks in on him. His parents' voices continue, discussing what to do about him, as if they are deciding his fate. He becomes afraid they are going to send him away and begins to cry. "It doesn't matter, he's too young to realize what's happening," his mother says.

The young man recalls a trip on a bus, smelly with exhaust and the match sulfur from his father's cigarettes. Strange, because after that trip he doesn't associate his father with cigarettes; his father doesn't smoke. The mood of the bus trip is scary, as if they are running away. His mother looks sad and tired. They never go back home.

Now they have a different house. It is still winter but different. The doctor is trying to help him understand that the move might have been because of a job transfer. However, the boy knows that isn't the reason. He thinks about the clues emerging from his memory but the "medicine" the doctor gives him has been playing tricks on him and he panics and shuts down. The doctor ends the interrogation.

Section 2 Analysis

This next section is the first time the reader realizes there is a different time frame to the story taking place. The young man is being interrogated in a hospital-like setting by a "doctor." The reader doesn't know why or if it is voluntary. This is the format in which the past is revealed and where the reader gets clues unraveling the mystery of who the young man is.

The reader finds out that the young man's family left their home town in a hurry, on a bus, as if running away. The reader is reminded of his earlier vague fear of the bus while preparing for his bike trip to Rutterburg and starts to understand where that fear came from.

The young man as a three-year-old picks up on the tension and fear of his mother. He recalls the sweet comfort of his mother's lilac perfume which disappears as fear and anxiety take over his mother and father. The scent of lilac is the last comforting scent he can recall as his life changes forever. His memories are coming back in small bits with themes of fear, hiding and paranoia developing and replacing memories of happier times and comfort. He is starting to remember more - to be revealed at a later time.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

The reader is back at the young man's bike trip. He has arrived at Aswell and is talking with an old man at a service station stop while he is resting. They look at a map and trace the route his bike trip will take him. It is seventy miles to his stop in Vermont. He recalls he stayed at a motel in Belton Falls with his parents once, and figures he can make it that far the first day. He plans to spend the night at this motel and make an easy ride the next morning to Rutterburg and his father.

The old man is calling him "Skipper" and questioning him about where he is from, about how long it took him to make the trip to Aswell from Monument. They figure he is making about five miles per hour.

The old man warns him about the world out there being a dangerous place: there are murders and assassinations; you can't trust anybody; you don't know who the bad guys are. He tells him not to trust anyone and to be careful. The old man compliments him on his old wool hat - he calls it a *took*. It was the boy's father's hat and so was the jacket. This sparks the old man's memory of his own son who got killed in Iwo Jima during World War II.

The young man is uncomfortable and wants to get on his bike and ride, but the old man keeps talking to him. The young man keeps focusing on the large blue and red veins on the old man's nose, like the roads marked on the map they were just looking at. He is afraid soon the man will start asking about his mother and father - but he doesn't. The young man gets back on his bike and rides off. The old man is already in the past as his bike takes him into the wind and the sun. "I am the bike and the bike is me."

Section 3 Analysis

The young man's memories are slowly being pulled from him and so the characters we meet are somehow significant, and/or the encounters "clues." The reader find out that the journey will take another seventy miles, and about fourteen more hours on the rickety bike. The young man is already tired and still has a very long way to go.

The long miles and discussion of the map and the route he will take, the cities he will pass through, represent his personal journey. He still has a long way to go before his mystery is solved. The route he takes and the cities he passes through are memories from his past, that he is re-creating through his bike trip. These evolving memories will contribute to bringing his story finally to present time.

The young man has met his first person on his journey, an old man from the service station in Aswell, the first city on his journey. This man gives him a nickname - Skipper. The reader doesn't know the young man's name yet and so this nickname becomes a

grounding point for us and the young man. At this point even he doesn't really know who he is himself. He is not really sure of his own name - as the reader will discover.

The old man warns him about the hazards and dangers of the world, murder and assassination. "Don't trust anybody, Skipper." This is a theme that begins from the very first of the story. The reader gets the distinct impression that the young man is distrustful, nervous and fearful of his situation. The mystery begins with a sense of this unnamed fear and the following interrogations bear this out. The old man's admonitions to beware of the world and not trust anybody is a theme that permeates the young boy's psyche and is a major block to unlocking his past.

The warning to beware of murder and assassination is a foreshadowing of what faces his family. It is a deep subconscious warning, coming out as a warning from the old man.

Just exactly whom this man represents is not very clear at this point in the story. However, if his father were with him, the young man knows he would be warning him about the dangers of being so exposed and vulnerable. The old man expresses the young man's fears, his parents' fears for him, and also the reader's fears. These are encouraged by the young man's thoughts, actions and what seems the unreasonable choice to take to the road on a broken down bicycle trying to cover over seventy-five dangerous and unknown miles.

The young man wants to escape his encounter with the old man; he doesn't like looking at his own fear and distrust; it sparks a memory he cannot quite grasp. The young man is afraid he will have to talk about his mother and father. This is a recurring theme in the story. When the images from his memory get too scary for him to face he retreats into himself. At this point facing memories about his mother and father evoke fear and send the young man hiding back in his mind.

Eventually his bike takes him once again to the freedom of the road and back on track to discover his identity. The bike is the vehicle which brings him out of his subconscious hiding place and on the road to discovering new memories.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

Interrogation tape OZK002. The interrogator asks the young man about "Paul Delmonte." He also asks about Amy Hertz. The mention of both names brings on a headache and the young man withdraws from the session.

Section 4 Analysis

There are more clues and the reader is asking the questions as well. The reader wants to know who Paul Delmonte is, and why the young man doesn't want to talk about his friend Amy. Paul Delmonte becomes another clue to the mystery. The reader knows that the young man retreats when faced with questions about his parents. What connection does Paul Delmonte have with his parents?

He hasn't retreated from thinking about Amy before. It's possible that the young man doesn't want to involve Amy in his problems; that he wants to keep his relationship with her private. The reader also sees how easily he sidesteps facing these difficult questions by developing a headache, his own personal roadblock and a way to end the interrogation.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary

The road is long, level and straight and the young man is relieved there are no dogs in sight. He begins singing a familiar childhood song: "The Farmer in the Dell." The young man recalls that his father used to sing this song with the family, eliciting laughter and mirth from his mother and himself. The young man is now five or six. His father tells them this is a theme song for their family as he asks his son what his name is. "Adam Farmer" is the reply and his father says that "The Farmer in the Dell" was made for their family, and they laugh with delight.

Adam Farmer is glad he didn't take his pills as he sings the song while pedaling. He tries to sing it like his father used to but the wind catches in his throat and he starts to struggle with an uphill climb. Adam gets off the bike and pushes it up the hill, not liking the vulnerable feeling he has off the bike. He has to use the bathroom now, and wishes he had done so back in Aswell. The woods are nearby but who knows what lurks in them - especially dogs.

Reaching the top of the hill, he sees a town below him and starts down the hill, gathering speed. He begins to sing at the top of his lungs, "Heigh-ho, the merry-o, The farmer in the dell."

Section 5 Analysis

The reader discovers here that the young man's name is Adam Farmer. The family song he sings as he pedals - "The Farmer in the Dell" - reminds him of happier times with his mother and father. It also grounds his identity in a very childlike manner. The farmer in the Dell is a childhood song with many verses starting with the farmer, then the wife, then the child, then the cat, then the rat, then the cheese; eventually the cheese stands alone.

The silly pathos of the ending of the song goes unspoken, unsung, by the young man, and instead he is fixated with the comfort the song brings, and the memories of his parents and a happier, more carefree time. The song is a foreshadowing of the condition or situation of the young man and is a theme that pervades the entire tone of the story. The young man is alone from the beginning of the story; no matter whom he meets or brings to mind through his slowly evolving memories, he remains alone. This is starkly clear to the reader and haunts the reader through the use of the childhood song running through Adam's head.

The song is also a clue and foreshadowing image to his past. His father tells him his name is Adam Farmer and the song is his family's song. The reader will find that the theme of being alone, as suggested by the song, is a constant condition of existence for Adam and his family.

Adam reminds himself he did not take his pills and at the same time encounters a steep hill to climb. Symbolically, this hill, and other obstacles, crop up as Adam's memories start coming back. Every time he starts to recall a detail, something in his psyche puts up a distracting obstacle - like this hill, his sudden need to use the bathroom, or like his earlier headache. These are all distractions to keep him from facing the emerging details of his life - details the pills might have been masking.

The reader also is introduced to Adam's fear of meeting dogs on his journey. Just a thought or two in this section, but clearly a fear he doesn't want to meet.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary

Tape OZK003

The doctor is trying to get Adam to begin the session but Adam has "stepped outside himself" and is watching himself with the doctor. Adam is pleased that he can detach himself so easily and thinks that maybe he can go to other places as well. He hopes it will make him forget-just what he wants to forget, he doesn't quite recall. Adam looks at the doctor, avoiding looking at himself.

Section 6 Analysis

Adam has shown that he is capable of removing himself from reality. This is a clue to help place the shifting time and story elements. The fact that he uses his detachment abilities to avoid that which he doesn't want to face is another clue to what he is hiding. He tells the reader he is curious about himself but doesn't want to look too closely. Adam is using this as another way to avoid facing himself. The reader begins to wonder how his bike journey led him to this hospital and just when he lost himself.

Section 7

Section 7 Summary

The reader is back to the bike journey and Adam sees a ferocious dog and is terrified. The dog, a German Shepherd, is waiting to attack him at the bottom of a long hill. The dog places himself in the path of the bike and looks like a killer. Adam realizes the dog's intention is "to topple the bike, send it askew and have me crashing to the roadway, his victim." Adam swerves to keep out of the way of the dog and finds himself moving to the center of the roadway. An oncoming Volkswagen blows its horn distracting the dog's attention to chase after it instead of Adam. Adam pedals away, fatigue replaced by fear and panic. He is approaching the town of Fairfield but doesn't stop. He pedals through town and continues on his journey.

Section 7 Analysis

Adam's encounter with the German Shepherd creates fear and panic in him much more than just being fearful he will fall off his bike. At the beginning of his trip, he feared he would run into a dog and now this premonition has come true. The reader doesn't know at this point where his fear of dogs originated, but this is a clue into Adam's past.

Adam has a fear that the dog's goal is to topple the bike, representing Adam's identity, his freedom and his connection with his father; send it askew, suggesting his life is ordered and calm but could be thrown into chaos; and have him crash to the roadway, ending his hopes at discovering his identity, reaching his father, and completing his journey. This is full of foreshadowing images. Adam wants to discover who he is but is afraid of what he will find. His mental blocks keep his life calm and ordered; he fears the possible chaos that facing his identity may bring. Somehow, the dog is the catalyst that sparks the next round of memories.

That Adam equates himself with the word "victim" is an interesting clue into how Adam thinks of himself. He could be a victim of a dog bite but somehow there is more to Adam's image of himself as a victim. It is clear his subconscious is tied to his image of himself as a victim.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary

Tape OZK004. Adam is asking questions about his surroundings. Is he in a hospital; is Brint a doctor? He doesn't think the place smells like a hospital. In addition, no one wears white coats like doctors or nurses. He thinks it is more like a private home - maybe a private sanitarium.

Adam is feeling better and more in control. He decides to tell Brint some of the clues, planning to be clever and cunning in the process. Adam tells Brint the dog is a clue - that he was reminded when he saw a dog on the grass this morning. Brint tells him the dog's name is Silver; he is a German Shepherd. Adam hates most dogs and tells him the story about the other dog.

Adam is nine years old and is with his father heading for the library to check out a Louis Armstrong record. They are discussing books and authors and Adam reminisces on how interesting his father could make a book sound, how he would spark his curiosity. Suddenly his father stops dead in his tracks for a few moments, then grabs Adam by the arm and drags him quickly through an alley and into the woods. His father is covering over his own fear by pretending to be W.C. Fields but Adam feels like something is wrong - like they are running away from something. They encounter a vicious dog in the woods. His father convinces Adam to back away while he distracts the dog with a stick. The dog attacks his father but his father fights him off and they both escape.

Adam tells Brint this is the clue. He has started telling Brint from the beginning of his memory. He and his father did not tell his mother about what happened - it was their shared secret. He didn't think about why they went into the woods because the dog was such a terrifying experience that it overshadowed everything else.

Adam doesn't know what his father saw on the street that made him panic and run into the woods. Brint presses him to try to remember but Adam stops the session.

Section 8 Analysis

It is not a coincidence that the dog that chased Adam on his bike trip is the same type of dog as at the hospital where the interrogations take place. However, as he retells the story about the "other dog" incident the reader sees that the dog is both a catalyst for his memories and a vehicle of avoidance. He is so afraid of the dog in his encounter at age nine with his father that he forgets a critical piece of information - what it was that scared his father into running away. In addition, it makes for a good diversion story from the bigger questions from which he is hiding.. Once again, the reader sees the dog emerging as a scary memory from his past, violently jerking memories free.

Adam's story also paints his father as a loving, brave and protective man. It doesn't seem possible that Adam is afraid of memories of his father, just surrounding episodes that happen with his father. It is curious that they don't tell Adam's mother about the dog attack, and the reader wonders why they are keeping this from her. Most likely Adam's father was scared by something he doesn't want his wife to know about.

Section 9

Section 9 Summary

Adam is at a Howard Johnson's along the highway, taking a break from his bike journey. He needs to talk to Amy Hertz to calm his nerves. He wishes he had taken his medicine, and he wishes he had used the bathroom in Fairfield instead of racing through the town. Now he is hungry and discouraged. Amy helps him not be so discouraged. She refreshes his spirit and makes him laugh. He loves her.

It's too early still to call Amy; she is still in school. Adam focuses on finding a bathroom to use. The one at the Howard Johnson's doesn't have a window in it and he can't stand places without windows. He uses a bathroom at the gas station then tries calling Amy anyway. No one answers. Rutterburg seems far away and impossible to reach. The hamburger he ate at Howard Johnson's is giving him a stomachache and he has a headache. If only he could talk to Amy, he would feel better.

Carver is the next stop on his trip and Adam plans to buy aspirin there. He checks his father's package and tightens it in the basket. The cap covers his ears, warming him and shutting out the lonesome sounds of the highway. He looks around but no one is following him. Adam begins to sing The Farmer in the Dell.

Section 9 Analysis

Adam is tired and discouraged. He wishes he had taken his medicine earlier in the day. He is not feeling so in control now. He needs to talk with Amy to comfort him and give him encouragement but she is out of reach. At this point in his story she has not emerged as anything but a distant image of comfort. Just the image of her phone ringing gives Adam a feeling of connection and comfort. It is interesting that he hasn't thought much about his mother. She only appears as distant memories from when he was younger, before they ran away. .

The sky is clouding over and Adam is feeling claustrophobic. Adam is starting to fall apart physically and emotionally and he still has a long way to go on his trip. He retreats to his family song, The Farmer in the Dell, but only sings it a little to keep up his spirits until he reaches the next city. The next city seems to always be the next step in solving the mystery of his identity. Little by little, his bike journey is breaking him down and bringing him closer to the truth.

Section 10

Section 10 Summary

Tape OZK005. Brint asks Adam to talk about Amy Hertz. She is his best friend, and more. They have huddled together under the football stands, kissing. He loves her. Amy is always on the prowl for mischief. Adam is too serious and she tries to make him laugh by talking like a "wise guy." She calls him "Ace." They met outside the library. Amy loves to read too and he shares his dreams of becoming a famous writer with her. She doesn't laugh at that.

Amy invites Adam to play a risky and mischievous game she invented - the "Numbers." Adam is a shy and Amy's friendliness brings him out of his shell. He goes home feeling good. Adam's mother is waiting for him at home as usual. She gets nervous and upset if he is even a few minutes late coming home. Adam wonders what happened to change his mother from a laughing, tender woman into the recluse who lurks behind window curtains. He doesn't want to tell Amy about his mother; he doesn't want to feel like a traitor to her.

Adam decides his own terrible shyness has nothing to do with his mother but rather is part of his basic character. It has been his own choice to sit on the sidelines, to be a witness and record the events within himself "on some personal film in some secret compartment no one knew about." Adam wonders how to tell Amy all this without sounding like a nut.

Adam goes to Amy's house to wait while she changes clothes. He told a lie to his mother that he was at a Literary Club meeting and would be home later than usual. Amy teases Adam with her brand of "shock therapy" by talking crudely.

This day Amy teaches Adam how to play her Numbers game. The game is played in a grocery store, preferably during a busy time. The object is to fill up as many grocery carts as possible, then leave them in the store and walk out.

Adam admires Amy's style while doing a Number. She perfected her acting to include serious preparation such as bringing a shopping list or a young neighbor to lend an aura of legitimacy to their shopping family. She prompts him to act natural. Brint asks Adam if Amy is one of the clues. He says he thinks so, but that he wants to keep her separate from the rest.

Adam continues. Amy called him one day while visiting her father at the newspaper. A visiting editor was in town from Rawlings, Pennsylvania. She remembered that Rawlings is where Adam said his family is from and she wonders if they might know each other. The editor has lived in Rawlings his entire life but has never known a family by the name of "Farmer." Amy presses for his mother's maiden name but the editor doesn't know that name either. Adam is puzzled and somewhat confused, and alarmed.

The memory of the earlier flight warns him and he makes up a different story - he wasn't born in Rawlings; his family only lived there for a few months then moved to Monument to buy the insurance agency. Amy backs off the questioning and never brings it up again.

Brint touches on Adam's confusion over finding out his family may not have lived in Rawlings as he had been told by his parents. He might not have been born there. His mother's family might not have lived there. Then again, the editor could have been mistaken.

Brint summarizes the clues for Adam. The first is the day in the woods with the dog; Adam is nine. The missing clue is what drove his father into the woods that day. Secondly, the phone call from Amy revealing the discrepancies in his family history at Rawlings. Adam is fourteen at this time.

Adam is starting to retreat again and doesn't want to keep talking. The memories are starting to come back and Brint offers the medicine to help. Adam recounts that it is up to him whether he wins or loses. Brint tells him to think about winning. Adam asks what happens if he loses.

Section 10 Analysis

Amy is clearly representing Adam's alter ego. He is shy and reclusive; she is daring, adventuresome. She encourages him to do things he would never do on his own. Adam's memories to this point are of his own fears and shyness, his mother's overprotective and fearful manner, and his father's scary actions of racing into the woods to escape something Adam never knows what. This is not a family that draws attention to itself; his father sells insurance in a quiet little town, his mother rarely goes out, and Adam sits on the sidelines at school, too shy to participate in activities. Adam senses and reacts to his parents' fears and only takes chances when he is with Amy.

Adam's need to be with Amy causes him to lie to his mother for the time so he can hang out with Amy. He feels guilty about it and his loyalty to his mother is evident in that he doesn't want to tell Amy about his mother's behavior either. In essence, he hides something from both of them, protecting his shy, reclusive life and also his alter ego's desires to be mischievous and wild.

It is also interesting that Amy's father works at a newspaper and her encounter with the editor from Rawlings exposes the lies Adam's parents have told him about his family history. Adam is confused still not wanting to face that he parents have lied to him. Adam is not quite sure at this point of the exact lies but he now becomes suspicious and needs to find out more.

Section 11

Section 11 Summary

Adam is back on his bike journey and it begins to rain heavily. The rain ruins his road map, dissolving it as he watches. His father's package has gotten wet but this doesn't bother Adam. The rain continues and Adam becomes ravenously hungry. The rain drenches Adam and he yells out that he is going back; then he answers no he's not. He finally decides to continue on to Rutterburg and starts singing his family song.

Section 11 Analysis

The trip is starting to wash away some of Adam's fear and as it does his instinct for survival takes hold in the form of his ravenous hunger. The rain begins to clear his head and he is on the verge of coming to his senses and abandoning this foolish bike trip. However, he is not quite ready to give up the journey and he continues on.

Section 12

Section 12 Summary

Tape OZK006. Brint reminds Adam that his suspicions have been aroused by Amy's questions on his family history in Rawlings. He suggests Adam's father has been lying to him about his family. Adam admits he did not confront his father over his suspicions but decided to find out on his own. He thought he would look in old picture albums, old papers or letters to prove they lived in Rawlings.

Adam admits it bothered him but that he was busy with school and with Amy and her Numbers games. He eventually admits to Brint what action he did take on his own to investigate his suspicions.

Adam stole the key to the drawer of his father's desk where important papers were kept. His mother was upstairs, as usual, in her room. In this drawer, Adam discovers two different birth certificates for himself. They both state he was born in Rawlings, Pennsylvania, same name, Adam David Farmer but each with a different birth date; same day and year but a different month. He had two birth certificates and two birthdays. Adam's hands begin to shake as he replaces the papers and the key before his father gets back. Then he goes to the cellar to hide until the trembling stops.

Brint wants to know if Adam did anything with the new knowledge but Adam was still trying to find answers to explain away the mystery and make it less sinister. There had to be a simple explanation. He does not know why they would keep a birth certificate if it is incorrect, and why they would keep it locked up.

Section 12 Analysis

Adam should have gone to his parents long before this to ask his questions. Normally a child would do this when the first questions arose. However, Adam was three when the fear came into the family. He picked up on his mother's and father's fear and anxiety and though he couldn't understand it, and was too young to get an explanation, he nevertheless lived among the fearful energy in their home. Though he was only age three, he remembered fleeing their home on the bus.

He remembers his father's panicked escape into the woods when he was nine. At fourteen, he was acutely aware of how his mother had changed from a happy woman to a fearful, reclusive woman. He subtly knows this has taken a toll on his own psyche. He, too, is shy and fearful. He is too afraid to face these shadowy fears and find out the answers he needs to explain all that has gone on in his life so far. He makes up excuses why he avoided facing the obvious questions. In his life, he also has a pattern of retreating from facing his problems. This double birth certificate is a puzzling clue in the mystery.

Section 13

Section 13 Summary

Adam becomes a spy in his own home. He is listening at doors, eavesdropping on telephone conversations, studying his mother's actions, wondering what has gone before to make her so sad. He wonders about his father too. He has seemed such a perfect father, everything a father should be. Adam wonders if he himself is manufacturing mysteries to satisfy his literary longings.

Although Amy is the most important person in his life, he still can't bring himself to tell her about all his fears and suspicions. He is afraid she will laugh and see him differently in her eyes. He doesn't want to risk losing it all. That's why he makes himself go with her on her Numbers pranks. Therefore, he keeps a tortured silence and continues to spy.

Brint prompts him to talk more about what he found out from his spying. Adam is discovering that talking is good and can release the memories that are locked in his head. It helps fills the blankness he faces in the night.

Adam's mother is happiest on Thursdays. She bakes cakes for Adam for after school, smiles, and hums or sings as she works around the house. Early in the evenings, she goes into her bedroom and closes the door behind her; it is her "special telephone hour." Eavesdropping on one of these phone calls Adam finds out that his mother is talking to her sister, Martha. Adam is shocked because he has been told there is no living family on either his mother's or father's side. Brint confirms that this is the first real hard evidence Adam has had that something in his life is not right.

Section 13 Analysis

The reader sees in this section that Adam has very real lapses of memory and also that slowly they are coming back. His sessions are helping reconstruct his past in spite of his protective roadblocks. Adam uses Amy to escape from his fears and self-doubts. She gives him another life to enjoy that is of his own making. He tries to protect this relationship from falling apart by not involving Amy in his mystery.

Therefore, Adam is alone in his search. He is so alone that deep parts of his psyche can't even face it. His fears started at a very early age (three), were left to his childish imagination to develop, were strongly suppressed by his parents' hiding and secretive ways and so they have been solidly suppressed from his consciousness. His search for answers at home which lead to his spying on his parents finally turn up a solid clue and confirmation that he has been lied to by his parents about his family background and history.

Section 14

Section 14 Summary

Adam is in a small restaurant in Carver eating clam chowder. The only other customers are three guys eating popcorn. The clam chowder soothes Adam's upset stomach: as he thinks, he reflects on leaving his bike at the police station for safekeeping. Suddenly his arm is hit with something and he looks to the floor to see that it is popcorn. He hears the popcorn guys laughing and realizes they are the same troublemakers you find everywhere.

One of them, about sixteen or seventeen, comes over to Adam and starts a conversation. "Never seen you here before . . . where you from?" Adam tells him he's just passing through on his way to Rutterburg, on his bike. He tells the boy his bike is at the police station for safekeeping. He realizes too late that it is a mistake talking to these guys, as this boy gets pushier with his questioning. The boy, whose name is Whipper, challenges him on what's in his package and pushes him almost to a fight. However, Adam doesn't back down and protects the package for his father. The man behind the counter interrupts and Adam has a chance to leave the restaurant with his package. "I am the package." Adam tells himself.

Section 14 Analysis

"I am the package," Adam says, and now the reader knows what's in the package meant for Adam's father. Adam is bringing himself, the package, through this long and challenging journey. The package, representing who Adam really is, is wrapped up and protected by Adam throughout the journey. During this encounter, he is challenged to give it up to the bully, but he stands his ground. The package is valuable and worth protecting, even if he has to fight. Adam is evolving with more of a sense of worth and identity. Adam is getting braver and with this step closer to facing the truth.

Section 15

Section 15 Summary

Tape OZK007. Adam awakes from sleep in his hospital room in a panic. He feels he is in an unknown land, an unknown world and he himself is an unidentified person. The name Adam Farmer means nothing; it is a void. The panic increases and he tries to calm himself without needing to ask for a pill or a shot. However, the panic is too deep. He is surrounded by nothingness - in the bed - in his life.

Brint comes to his room at 2:00 in the morning, a response to Adam's panic attack. Adam insists he wants to remember the blanks. Brint suggests that maybe part of him does and a part doesn't. Adam wants Brint to tell him the answers, fill in the blanks for him but Brint tells him he is already helping him in the best way he can. Adam wants to know how long he has been at the hospital; why he is there. There are no answers this night.

Section 15 Analysis

Adam is spending more time in the present in the hospital. He is facing the blank spaces in his mind more directly and courageously. Brint is there to help guide him out of the blackness and into the full knowledge of who Adam really is - knowledge that is lodged in his mind.

Section 16

Section 16 Summary

Adam is still in Carver outside the restaurant. He enters a phone booth and places a call to Amy. The phone rings a long time and finally is answered by a man. Adam thinks it is Amy's father. The man tells him he has a wrong number and that he is home in bed sick. Adam is distressed feeling as if he can't even get a phone number correct. Adam thinks of Amy - "I don't deserve you."

Section 16 Analysis

Adam quickly hangs up because the troublemakers are drifting closer to the phone booth. Adam bolts from the phone booth and reaches his bike, jumps on and pumps the pedals hard in his escape through town. Adam leaves the troublemakers behind but he doesn't feel brave any more and now he is crying.

Section 17

Section 17 Summary

Adam reaches out to his alter ego, Amy, for comfort and reassurance. He is alone and seeks a connection with his past, the only person he considers calling on his journey. He has said she is the most important person in his life. However, Adam reaches a wrong number.

Section 17 Analysis

Adam's response is despondent. He feels he doesn't deserve happiness, courage and independence. Amy represents all this and he can't reach her. The wrong number is another block to keep him from discovering another truth. Subtly he knows this and so another distraction looms before him - the troublemakers threaten him and he has to focus on escaping them and not looking further into the hidden truth around Amy.

Section 18

Section 18 Summary

Tape OZK008. Adam starts this session speaking excitedly of "the gray man." He is important to his story - a real clue. He feels that in all the blankness the gray man is the only real clue he has to the mystery. However, he can't quite see why he is so important or exactly who he is. Adam declines a pill or shot. Brint tells him to relax and let the thoughts come but the effort causes the knowledge to slip away and Adam loses it for now.

Brint asks him if he wants to talk about Paul Delmonte. Adam asks if this is the name of the gray man but Brint skirts the question. Adam recalls Brint asked him about Paul Delmonte at the beginning. Adam admits he didn't know who he was at the beginning and when Brint asks him if he knows who he is now, Adam retreats and ends the session.

Section 18 Analysis

Adam is closer still to unraveling his story. The grey man is a key; Adam feels it in his bones. However, he resists letting the knowledge come to the surface. He doesn't really know who this man is yet.

However, on the contrary the reader gets the distinct impression that he does know who Paul Delmonte is. He has enough of a hint as to who he is to want to avoid looking closer or identifying him to Brint - or admitting to himself. The reader has seen Adam retreat, citing tiredness or headache to Brint, when he is becoming uncomfortable with a piece of knowledge that is coming to the surface. Paul Delmonte and the grey man are intriguing pieces to the puzzle that Adam leave hanging unanswered.

Section 19

Section 19 Summary

Adam is back on his bike journey, only now the road is no longer smooth but full of ruts and holes. He is glad to be leaving Carver and getting away from the wise guys, the troublemakers. He is sad about Amy and resolves to call her again at the next phone booth he finds, before he eats even. He thinks she is more important to him than either food or the bike.

Suddenly Adam hears the approach of a car speeding up the road behind him. It is the troublemakers with Whipper at the wheel. They make two passes at Adam, trying to knock him over. Adam is still pedaling fast trying to keep from falling off the bike, but on one of the passes, one of the boys hits him on the arm but doesn't knock him over. Adam tries to think of a place to hide but doesn't want to abandon his bike. He hopes the wise guys will tire of the game and won't come back, realizing they have turned the car into a weapon. However, the car returns and hands reach out and topple him from the bike.

Section 19 Analysis

The road has symbolized Adam's journey of self-realization, a discovery of his identity. This is never an easy journey and at the beginning of the story, the road was smooth with just a few hills to climb but smooth sailing down. Adam started his journey with all his defenses in place and so the road was smooth. Now, he is uncovering pieces of the hidden truth and his defenses are breaking down - the ruts and holes in the road.

The image of "wise guys" comes up again. This usually refers to mobsters, members of organized crime. Adam refers to Amy as like a wise guy, and he now calls the teenaged troublemakers from Carver wise guys. The image of wise guys is on his brain and he keeps associating this with some of the people he encounters in his life - especially the ones that cause him trouble. Amy encourages him to play her dangerous game, Numbers, and this could get him into trouble. The wise guys are trouble and try to harm or even kill him. Adam's subconscious teases the memory up closer to the surface as evidenced by Adam's preoccupation with mobster images. This is another image foreshadowing what faces Adam and his family.

Adam feels Amy is more important to him than eating or even his bike. The image that she is more important to him than food cuts to the most basic of survival needs. He needs food to live and he needs it for strength and energy to continue pedaling his bike on this journey. Therefore, the reader gets the clue that Amy's importance goes even deeper. He associates her with his own very essence, a part of his soul. This is a surprising revelation. Perhaps Adam has turned his back so completely on who he

thought he was, now that he knows it was all lies. Perhaps he is adopting Amy's persona as a replacement for his own.

The bike has represented many things to Adam - images of his father and his own freedom. In one way, the bike kept him connected to his father's memory. Now the bike has slipped in importance to Adam. Perhaps he doesn't need his father's memory for courage and comfort, as he gets closer to discovering his own identity.

Adam's encounter with the wise guys in their car, knocking him over, is a foreshadowing of what will be seen later as a major piece in the puzzle. The dark image is of wise guys running him over with their car. At this point Adam's bike trip encounters all relate in some way to his past. They all seem to be images from real life, remade from his childlike memories.

Section 20

Section 20 Summary

Tape OZK009. Adam has been refusing to get out of bed, refusing food and has not slept. Brint asks him if it is because he is thinking, remembering, and that it might be unpleasant. He tells him he has to face the gray man or else everything will come to a halt. "I am here always to help you. Remember that."

Section 20 Analysis

Adam is remembering more and verging on retreating completely from the task. Brint knows who the gray man is and encourages Adam to keep looking for the truth. It is interesting that Brint has never been identified as a doctor. In fact, Adam doesn't know exactly who he is. In this section, Brint speaks to him as a father would: "I am here always to help you." Adam has struggled whether to trust Brint through the whole ordeal. Brint knows Adam is clutching at father images and perhaps attempts to gain Adam's confidence by this pseudo-fatherly kindness. It is also evident that Brint already knows many of the missing pieces in Adam's life. Brint uses his knowledge as a subtle control method to work on Adam's psyche, together with the use of mind drugs. This is a very sinister development and the reader comes to understand Adam's feelings of distrust of Brint.

Section 21

Section 21 Summary

Tape OZK010. Brint attempts to start a session with Adam but Adam is not responsive. Brint notes, however, that Adam is alert, eyes bright, flesh tones normal and that he has eaten. He mildly suggests to Adam that the day may come when he will not be here for him to talk to.

Section 21 Analysis

Adam has decided not to withdraw completely by the fact that he is rested and he has eaten. He seems not to trust Brint by his refusal to engage in a session with him. Brint retracts his earlier "fatherly-like" reassurances that he will always be there to help him when he tells Adam there may be a time Adam will wish to speak to him but he may not be there for him. Brint uses this threat to try to prompt Adam to talk with him again.

This is a reminder to Adam of what has happened to his own father. Adam doesn't really know what happened to his father, or at least has not revealed it yet through his story. If he does know, the absence of more concrete references to his father tell us what he knows about his father is unpleasant.

Section 22

Section 22 Summary

Adam is back to his bike journey. He is lying on the side of the road and a car has stopped to help him. In it are an elderly man and his wife on the way to his wife's doctor's appointment after her stroke. The man tells Adam he saw one of the wheels of his bike sticking out of the ditch. He thought Adam looked like he was asleep.

It is now four o'clock in the afternoon. Adam tells the man he lost his balance and fell in the ditch. He doesn't mention the wise guys' attack. The old man offers Adam a ride to the next town, which is close to Belton Falls, his destination for the night. Adam accepts the offer, realizing the important thing is to reach Rutterburg as soon as possible and not the manner of traveling.

The car travels slowly down the road but Adam is becoming sick to his stomach and is afraid he will vomit in the car. He begins to sing to himself, "The farmer in the Dell," and thinks of the motel in Belton Falls where he recalls staying with his parents once long ago. Thinking of seeing his father tomorrow in Rutterburg soothes him and the stomach pangs go away. The car reaches Hookset and Adam gets out of the car intending to buy some Alka-Seltzer for his stomach.

Section 22 Analysis

A grandfatherly person stops to help Adam. Adam has no knowledge of his grandparents but must guess that they usually are safe people you can count on to help you in times of trouble. Therefore,, here they are, complete with a station wagon to haul his bike and him further on down the road.

Up until now, Adam placed extreme importance on the bike as a necessary component of his journey. It represented many aspects of his father and also Adam's fragile psyche. However, a change is taking place in Adam and he is not feeling the need to rely so literally on the bike to help him complete his journey. He is willing for the first time to place himself in the hands of others.

The images Adam conjures up at this point are safe images used to help him retreat from reality for a while. The attack by the wise guys has come very close to revealing the truth he is seeking. His subconscious knows this. In addition, he knows he is getting closer to seeing his father, closer to the end of the journey and the answers he has been seeking. His nausea is his stomach is reacting to the anxiety.

Adam begins to sing again for the first time in quite awhile on the trip. However, the reader knows that Adam's song and the image of the grandparents is a way for him to retreat to a very early image of himself as a young child with his parents during happier times. In fact, he is withdrawing again back beyond the progress he has made so far.

Adam has just been attacked by wise guys trying to run him over on his journey toward the adult truth. Adam is safe as a young child. Adam prefers the safety of his childhood and so he sings.

Section 23

Section 23 Summary

Tape OZK011. Adam's arm hurts from all the needles used on him at the hospital during his withdrawal period. Brint tells him he retreated completely and they had to take drastic measures. He suggests that Adam retreated so far back because he was getting so close to remembering. He suggests that the gray man represents the key to his memories and he is afraid of what is lurking beyond the door.

Adam tells Brint he knows now who the gray man is; he thinks he knows everything. He was someone who was part of their lives that Adam took for granted. The man's name was Grey. He came to their house about twice a month. Immediately his mother would retreat to her bedroom and his father would take the gray man to the paneled room in the cellar. He would stay for about an hour then leave. Adam was never suspicious of Mr. Grey because his father told him he was a supervisor from the insurance company. He became a presence in their lives, like the scenery or the furniture.

Adam became suspicious after eavesdropping on the phone call between his mother and his aunt. The two birth certificates could have been a mistake, but not existence of this woman. He didn't confront his parents about the aunt and the other questions because he was in a panic trying to pretend it never happened. He kept telling himself his parents loved him and he had to trust them. Then he started feeling guilty for doubting them and spying on them.

Then one day Mr. Grey appeared at the house and the usual began; his mother went to her bedroom and Mr. Grey and his father went to the cellar. Adam was restless in the house. He had been waiting for Amy to call and he realized how much he relied on her to fill the hours of his life. Though so different from him, she was the only person he could share his dreams and he kept few secrets from her. Thinking more of her, he started thinking that he, too, was capable of mischief and he went to the cellar door to listen.

Adam started eavesdropping at the cellar door and eventually his father came out, pretended he didn't see Adam in the shadows and Mr. Grey left. Adam tells his father he is going to Amy's house but hides in the garage until he can sneak back to the house to continue spying. He overhears his father talking with Adam's mother, and his father tells her Adam was trying to listen at the door. Adam's mother is angry at the position they are in and comments that they have been surviving all these years, not living. They decide they must tell Adam because he has become so suspicious. Adam ends this tape, encouraged to continue with the revelation. Tape Change.

Tape OZK012. Adam goes down to the cellar room and waits for his father to find him there. The phone rings; it's Amy, and his father tells her Adam is on the way over to her house. Eventually his father comes to find him in the cellar.

Adam's father begins to tell Adam the story. First, Adam's real name is Paul Delmonte; there is no Adam Farmer

Section 23 Analysis

Adam is very close to remembering the details of his past-so close, that he almost withdraws in a way that creates a panic at the hospital. After extensive medication, he comes out of it and is ready to talk.

Adam tells Brint he knows the identity of the gray man and the rest of the story too, and begins to tell him. Eventually, he reveals that his own name is Paul Delmonte, not Adam Farmer. The reader knows that Adam had suppressed details from his past and this was a journey to regain knowledge of who is really is. However, it is a surprise to learn that his personal identity was kept a secret from him by his parents; that they lied to him for 13 years about every detail of his life. The gray man's identity is the key and Adam's parents realize they can't keep their secret any longer from Adam. It would be more dangerous to do so.

In this section the reader realizes that he is about to learn where the bike ride journey, the flashback memories, and the hospital sessions converge.

Section 24

Section 24 Summary

The pieces unfold from Adam's memory. At his first memory, the bus ride, Adam and his parents were running away and going to a new place to live. The time they fled to the woods his father thought he saw one of "Them," but he does not quite recall who "Them" are yet.

His father's name was Anthony Delmonte and he had been a reporter in Blount, New York. His father's family had lived there since the grandfather of Adam's father. His father got a law degree, then attended Columbia University and then Missouri Graduate School of Journalism. He came back to Blount and became an excellent reporter exposing government corruption.

Adam's father and mother met and married in Blount, NY. She grew up a devout Catholic and by the time they were married both her parents were deceased. Eventually Adam was born.

Brint is getting impatient with the early family details. Adam asks him which is more important, what Adam finds out about himself, or what Brint finds out about him. Brint jumps him to memories of the night they ran away.

Adam doesn't know exactly what information his father uncovered but it involved corruption between state and federal government entities and organized syndicates. His father testified in Washington D.C. before a Senate Committee, in secret, behind closed doors. His father told him secrecy was necessary or his life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. He spent a year during the testimony, hiding in hotel rooms and with guards around the family home. As guilty as his father felt about what he was putting his family through, he was old-fashioned and believed in doing the right thing for his country.

His father told Adam he wouldn't tell him every detail so as to protect him from dangerous information should he ever be questioned or interrogated; that way he could never betray anything.

Brint asks what he could betray and Adam feels like Brint is trying to make him betray something by the question. Brint suggests Adam is being defensive because he is afraid of facing his past.

Adam returns to the story and comes to the part about the bomb which was planted in the family car intending to blow up his father. The bodyguards noticed suspicious activity and notified the police, who alerted his father in time. However, three nights later a hit man posing as a police officer tried to shoot his father coming out from work. Once again, the bodyguards protected him and killed the assassin before he shot.

That was the night Mr. Grey entered their lives. The government put his father and his family into a witness protection program. Adam and his father talked for days as his father revealed a thousand details and answered most of his questions. It was clear that the attempts on his father's life would not stop and that his wife and son were also going to be targets in the future. The final attack came by way of a phone call to Adam's mother informing her that two funeral masses were reserved in the next week at their church for her husband and her son. Her punishment was that she would be allowed to live. That night Adam's father called Mr. Grey and agreed to go into the program.

He explained how Mr. Grey set up their new lives through the program. Their entire family would be relocated with new identities, new family histories, all documented. They set up a trust fund for Adam's college. However, the program was somewhat new and they still made some mistakes - like his birth certificate. They changed Adam's birth date by mistake so they had to arrange for another one. Adam's father kept the one with the mistake just in case some time down the line, another mistake surfaced and they needed the prior birth certificate.

They changed their names to Farmer and then arranged documents showing his mother as a convert to Catholicism so she could still practice her faith. They were like puppets in Mr. Grey's hands.

They moved the family to Monument, Mass. because his mother insisted on staying in the Northeast. They also arranged for her to have weekly telephone calls with her sister who was a nun in a cloistered convent.

They even arranged "insurance" that no one would track them down. They faked a report that a Blount reporter, wife and child were killed in a highway crash. Adam realized he was a dead person.

Section 24 Analysis

Adam is freely retelling the story from his father. Almost all the mysteries are being solved; the two birth certificates, the weekly phone calls, the memories of running away, the questions surrounding his father's dash into the woods that day, his mother's fearful, reclusive behavior, and the mysterious Mr. Grey.

Other facts are surfacing that Adam didn't know were missing facts: why his own personality so mimicked that of his mother's reclusiveness. Adam's personality was affected by the dramatic events of running away, relocating his home, losing all contact with what little family he had, changing names and lifestyles, and the very real fear his parents lived with every day. It all subtly affected the three-year-old and continued to influence his development as he grew.

Other memories from his past show that Adam's subconscious took in more than he was aware of. For instance, the "Farmer in the Dell" song was more than just a cute family song. Adam's parents used this song to soothe their own discomfort with making a name change, seeking to make it more comfortable for all of them. It was a ruse and

the child knew something wasn't quite right about it. Later when hiding from his own memories, this song crept up as a way to try to soothe his fears and hide what the song really represented to the family - that they were on the run and had lost their entire past identities..

Another example is Adam's reaction to the episode when Amy called him from her father's newspaper and tried to get him to reveal more family information that would enable the visiting editor to identify the family. Adam's subconscious alarms went off and he instinctively went into defense mode, making up a lie to protect his family. At that point, he didn't have conscious facts of the need to hide but reacted from the inner memories he was trying to suppress.

Section 25

Section 25 Summary

The reader is back at the bike trip and Adam has discovered his bike has been stolen. Guessing where the thief might have gone to get out of sight fast, Adam runs into an alley and through to the other end into a deserted area behind the Main Street buildings. "Lose something, honey?" Adam is startled by a voice from up on a fire escape. He sees a huge, mountainous man, with moist, plump cheeks, his forehead soaked. It is cold outside but the man is in a white shirt open at the chest. Adam tells him somebody stole his bike. The man taunts Adam implying he might know who stole his bike. The man is behind iron railings on the fire escape, his extreme weight keeping him a prisoner, but he tells Adam he sees things out his front windows and then, too, out the back. He tells Adam, suggestively, that if he wants to get something he has to give a reward. Adam offers him twenty-five dollars but the man suggests there are different types of rewards, as he scratches his chest with both hands and then moves down to this stomach. Adam is nervous, his migraine headache is coming back and the nausea returns.

"All I want is my bike," he says, feeling like a small boy again, and a coward, as he begins to cry. Another voice from inside the room tells the fat man to tell him who stole his bike. Pouting, and complaining he never gets what he wants, the fat man tells Adam the name of the boy who stole his bike, and where he lives.

Section 25 Analysis

Once again, Adam sets roadblocks to keep himself from reaching the end of his journey. The stolen bike takes him on another detour into his subconscious. Other fears are surfacing. He feels alone and abandoned, no longer in control and at the mercy of all types of dangers. He wants to continue but his fear takes on the persona of a huge, lecherous man trying to trap Adam. However, this encounter is only symbolically threatening. It is really just a transparent delay. The man is no real threat. He is stuck up on the fire escape, penned in by the iron bars, self-admitting that he cannot leave his rooms. Adam indulges his fear of the man as if visiting a circus freak show. Quickly it makes him feel like a coward and crumbles his resolve into tears. He hurries away from the area.

Section 26

Section 26 Summary

Tape OZK013. Adam admits to Brint he is making good progress; it's giving him the chills but that's better than the blanks. Brint asks Adam again for details about his father's testimony and this disturbs Adam. There is something lurking in the dark again. Brint tells Adam the sessions and the medicine will help him progress more.

Adam continues. Adam and his father grew very close, spending a lot of time together. His father was very sorry for placing Adam and his mother in this situation. Adam was proud of him for doing the right thing even though it meant giving up his career.

His father told him the hardest part was causing his mother to leave her home. It was also hard for him to give up the career he loved so much - newspaper work. The government bought the insurance business for him to start a new career. However, as hard as it has been, they were grateful to be kept safe. Even still, there is always fear.

Mr. Grey came to Monument frequently to keep in touch, bring a money bonus twice a year, to keep his father up to date on any developments, bring assurances they are still safe, and occasionally to probe his memory for more details.

His father also thought Mr. Grey was keeping an eye on them to make sure they haven't been reached by the other side. Adam asked his father once if the Mafia was involved. His father wouldn't name who or what organization was involved to protect Adam from future interrogations. He also suggested that he didn't tell the government everything he knew and that is another reason Mr. Grey keeps in touch. Brint asks more questions about what his father might have known, and whether his father ever told him if told Grey the truth or was just being clever.

Adam is chilled by the question and the look on Brint's face. He said it reminded him of the way his father described the look on Mr. Grey's face - as if they were enemies. Brint twists Adam's words around a bit and suggests he is getting angry as they approach an important area - the information his father had but Adam says he didn't tell him.

Adam thinks to himself about Brint. He is convinced now he is not a doctor. Perhaps he is the enemy or one of the men after his father. However, whether he was the enemy or not Brint had helped him discover his identity and he felt dependent on Brint.

Adam continues. The conversations with his father went on for weeks. Adam was amazed at the extent of the deceptions - his father's glasses, plain window glass; Mr. Grey bringing new styles every few years to keep up with the styles of the times. More examples: his father's moustache which he never wore before; his father had given up smoking; the trip to Rawlings to acquaint them with the town in case anyone ever asked them about it; the phone calls to Aunt Martha the cloistered nun, his mother's only living

relative. Adam indicates he wants to talk about his mother next and try to discover more about her.

Section 26 Analysis

Adam voices our own suspicions that Brint might be working just to pry information for either the enemy or the government. He hasn't really pushed but he has used "medicine" and injections to sedate and prompt memories from Adam. He has become impatient over mundane details and prompted Adam to discover all he can recall about Mr. Grey and his father's knowledge about the corruption testimony. He also is interested in the inner workings of the witness protection program, but this may not be as sinister as it is checking up to make sure things were done correctly with his father's case. Brint is extremely interested to find out if Adam's father told him whether he was truthful in all he told Mr. Grey and in his testimony. It appears he is patient about the other emerging information in order to see how much Adam knows about his father's secret information. Adam tells us Brint has the look of the enemy during some of these sessions.

In addition, the reader is given more details about the extent of the identity switch. These are interesting details that bring truth to Adam's earlier memories and will fit together with more of the story as it draws to a close

Section 27

Section 27 Summary

Adam begins talking about his mother. He recalls her as always sad. He used to think she wasn't strong but now that the details have come out, he sees how strong she really was. He also sees that it was not sadness but fear. She was afraid of the things that could happen - the Never Knows - not knowing what was going to happen. She and Adam talked, and she told him how proud she was of his father. She told him how she and his father tried to make the best of the situation, drilling the new identity until they had it routine. Mr. Grey made all the rules but what mattered was they were still together as a family. She was afraid because she knew there were no guarantees. She would see a car come down the street and wonder if it was the enemy casing the situation. A woman looked at her in the supermarket and she wondered if she'd been discovered. She became paranoid and suspicious of everyone. She told Adam that Mr. Grey's government identification is No. 2222 and that was their only way to contact him in case of an emergency. They had to trust him; he created their new lives.

The woman would try to defy Mr. Grey on occasion by talking near the windows instead of the soundproof room in the cellar. Mr. Grey even controlled where they took vacations. She would speak against him frequently, complaining that his father shouldn't have had to give up his newspaper work. She showed him the box in the cellar of old clothes and items from their other life that she kept as sentimental mementos of their other life. In the box were an old hat and an Army jacket of his father's. Adam was glad to see his mother wasn't the compliant person he thought she was.

Adam became suspicious and paranoid too, with his own Never Knows, looking out for strangers. However, he also became closer to his parents and appreciated how much he loved them and wanted to be with them. "He was part of them. Somehow fear had forged love."

Adam had been a stranger to Amy during this period. He was relieved not to be involved in her Numbers games. He wanted to share his predicament with Amy but he was sworn to secrecy by his father - it was life and death.

Brint notices panic in Adam when he spoke about life and death. Adam is looking at the dark shadows that come when he looks at the blanks. He does not know where his mother and father are now or what happened back then. They medicate Adam and the session ends.

Section 27 Analysis

The reader gets a good description of Adam's mother which helps us understand her fears and paranoia. The reader also sees that Adam was accurately emulating his mother's anxiety, which he lived with his whole life. His retreating behind fantasy stories

to escape reality was like his mother hiding in her bedroom peering out behind curtains to protect her from her fears of the Never Knows.

In many ways, it must have been a relief to Adam to finally feel a part of his family and to be able to look at his mother with respect for her strength. Adam finds that his relief opens him up to increased love and sense of family with them. He respects and admires both his mother and his father. Adam goes through a terrible period of realizing they have lied to him his whole life. Their honesty at this point in finally telling him all they went through and why demonstrates, more than words could, that his parents love him and want to protect him.

Adam has gone from living in a strange world with tense and fearful parents to being drawn into their world of mystery and suspense. It adds a new dimension of fear into his life - transforms it into reality. Yet it also brings him as close to his parents as he could ever be and makes him feel truly a part of their lives.

Amy is retreating from his life. He doesn't need her strength any more. He is finding it with the new bond with his mother and father. He still longs for her as a confidant but believes the life and death danger to their lives and vows to keep the secret.

Section 28

Section 28 Summary

Adam is acting like a spy - lurking around the boy's house planning to get his bike back. He sees his bike on the front porch but is afraid to go over to get it just yet. His headache is gone after taking the aspirins and he thinks of the medicine he flushed this morning. He has faced many difficult moments today without it and he is happy he has had a clear and alert head.

The boy comes out of his house and goes to the bike. The boy's mother comes out and begins to talk to the boy. The boy turns his back on his mom in anger and Adam is reminded of his own mother. He gets angry that the boy has a mother yet turns his back on her in rejection. Adam wants to beat the boy up.

The boy takes the bike towards the back of the house and Adam makes his move, challenging him for his bike. Adam fights the boy for his bike and gets it away from him when the boy falls to the ground. Adam jumps on the bike and races off towards Rutterburg.

Section 28 Analysis

Adam is getting stronger and braver. He is proud of himself for the strength he has without his medication. It seems like most of the memory breakthroughs come when his medication is light. This time is no different.

Seeing the boy's mother sparks a memory of his mother. Only this time the memory reaches to a deeper subconscious level. This time it is a feeling and a sense of her absence - as if she were dead. He is jealous the boy has a mother to put her hand on his shoulder and Adam wishes his mother could do the same. The feeling is more than a feeling of separation but that his subconscious knows she is dead. It is the longing one has for a deceased loved one. Adam reacts by wanting to cry and to beat up the boy for not appreciating what he has that Adam doesn't - a living mother. Adam grabs his bike and package and jumps back into his journey of self-discovery.

Section 29

Section 29 Summary

Tape OZK014. Adam calls Brint to his room to talk. Adam does not trust Brint and wants to know who he is. He tells Brint there is a doctor there who gives him shots and is kind. Brint challenges that just because he wears a business suit instead of a white coat doesn't mean he's not a doctor.

Adam replies it is more than that. He first thought Brint was a psychiatrist helping him recover his past. Instead, Brint is always pushing him to discover certain facts. Adam is feeling confused and disheartened he still has blanks he can't figure out. Brint asks him if he ever told Amy about his life. Adam says no, and goes back to thinking about her. Sometimes she is so clear to him, but sometimes the thoughts get lost.

Adam recalls that during the first days discovering the truth he wanted to tell her about it but he was sworn to secrecy. He wanted to tell her that his life had been the biggest Number game of all. He avoided her because he was afraid he would tell her everything. He is afraid his secret will keep him from being intimate with anyone ever again in his life.

Adam recalls the last Number game Amy planned was to take place during a wedding. They would sneak into as many cars as possible in the church parking lot and turn on the radio, lights, wipers, all up full volume, then watch for when the people get in their cars to drive away and the chaos that would begin. However, the church janitor saw them and ran them off before they could complete the prank. Adam was relieved. He wondered if the events of his own life had helped him outgrow the need for the excitement of the Numbers.

When Adam got home, his mother was waiting for him, frantic. Grey had called with an emergency. Brint tells Adam his memories are all ready to come out. Adam begins to talk about Amy and the rest of the story starts to emerge. Brint tells him he can't stifle the memories any longer. It's not a matter of not trusting Brint any more; it is inevitable the memories will come forth.

Adam knows Brint is right about the memories ready to all come forth but he is worried, certain that Brint is the enemy, a predator, but Adam is too afraid to do it alone. Adam wants to find the knowledge without betraying - someone - he's not sure whom.

His mother is upset but in control. His father is at the office taking care of a few details before they leave for a few days. She tells him that they have had these emergencies before but they turn out to be false alarms. This time, Grey called to tell them he thinks their identities have been discovered. An unrelated wiretap overheard a conversation where Monument was mentioned, along with tomorrow's date. Grey insisted they leave town for a few days and his men will watch the house to see if anything occurs. She

tries to downplay the danger by telling Adam this type of emergency happened twice before, they left town and it was a false alarm. This will turn out that way too, no doubt.

Adam's father arrives home and goes into a false story about deciding to take them away for the weekend - to make it sound casual and throw off anyone monitoring them. He says they will go north into New England for dinner. His father whispers to Adam and for the first time, Adam really realizes the horror of their predicament.

Section 29 Analysis

Amy's "Numbers" has carried a subtle symbolism through the story. Just as Amy is Adam's alter ego, so her Number game is a daring test of courage representing the double life he and his family have had to live. That Amy calls it "Numbers" is an interesting play on words of the organized crime betting game, "playing the numbers." It is organized crime that is the threat to his family's safety and lives. If Adam and Amy lose at their Number game, they get in trouble with the store, police and/or parents. However, the "numbers" game organized crime is playing with Adam's family are the odds that eventually they will find and kill his father. Adam's family will lose their lives if they lose their gamble.

Brint is emerging as the enemy but Adam needs the security he has built with Brint to continue to the end of the story. The reader still doesn't know whom he is trying to protect by delaying the concluding parts of the story.

The emergency announced by Grey is Adam's first real taste of the life-threatening game they are playing. Mr. Grey has represented the foreshadowing doom threatening Adam's family and the reminder they would die if not for him. Every time Grey visits the family, he foreshadows their potential death. Grey is the factor keeping the odds in the favor of Adam's family. The family distrusts Grey and thinks of him as the enemy, yet they need him to continue the charade for the sake of their lives.

Symbolically Grey and Brint are interchangeable. They hold the same type of control over lives. Adam needs Brint emotionally - this dependence brought on by drugs and psychological manipulation by Brint - and he has come to rely on him for the ability to discover his lost memories. Adam's family was dependent on Grey to protect the identity of their lost life and keep the new one safe and secure - a dependence brought on by the threat of the organized crime contract on their lives.

Section 30

Section 30 Summary

Adam is on his bike trip again and approaching Belton Falls, where he plans to spend the night. He remembers this as where he stayed with his parents last year and looks forward to feeling safe again in the motel, thinking of them and looking forward to arriving in Rutterburg, just across the river, tomorrow.

It is dark now and the motel lights are dark; the office is deserted as he parks his bike outside. The office is deserted and so are the cabins. Adam plans to sleep there anyway, possibly in one of the deserted cabins; there is still a mattress in the first one he looks at.

Across the street is a gas station and Adam finds a phone. He dials Amy's number planning to tell her about his adventure. The voice of an impatient man answers the phone and it is the same man he spoke to last time he tried to call Amy. He tells Adam there is no person named Amy living there. Adam repeats the phone number to him, thinking there must be a mistake. It is the same number; the man has been home sick with the flu. He tells the man this number should be the home of the Hertz family and that he's been calling it for the past six months. The man tells him he has had this same phone number for three years and doesn't know a family by the name of Hertz.

Adam is trembling now as he calls directory assistance for Amy Hertz's number. There is no listing in Monument for a Hertz family. Adam is stunned; three years! He asks the gas station attendant how long the motel across the street has been vacant and he tells him two or three years at least. The cabins weren't open last summer. Adam wishes he had taken his pills that morning. Adam is stunned and stumbles across the street screaming. He can't believe the sound is coming from his mouth. A car brushes past him as he finally reaches the other side. He thinks he has stopped screaming but the attendant and lady from the car at the station are still standing there watching him. He beats on the cabin door begging them to let him in as darkness gathers him in.

Section 30 Analysis

Adam has discovered that he has lost three years of his memory. He recalls the cabins were open last year when he and his parents went there. Three years ago, Amy lived at the phone number he just called. Where has he been all these years? The realization has stunned him into unconsciousness.

Section 31

Section 31 Summary

Tape OZK015. Adam is talking about the day they left because of the emergency. "It was like an adventure in the beginning." His father had them all three sit together in the front seat of the car. Adam reminded them of when they used to sing "The farmer in the Dell," and his father begins to sing.

Adam asked what if this time the emergency is real - does it mean they can't go back to Monument? He was thinking of Amy and was saddened that he might not see her again. His parents didn't want to think of the possibility.

They stopped for hamburgers at McDonalds and then looked for a motel. They found a string of cabins called the Rest-A-While Motel and they all stayed in one cabin together. Adam was happy they are together. Later at dinner, his mother was not so sad. Adam felt a strong affection for his parents and he was glad he was part of the family. They made an adventure of arranging the cots in the cabin and watched an old movie together.

The next morning they set out on the road again, heading north. His mother commented it would be lonely if they weren't together. Suddenly, Adam's father said there was a car following them. It was across from the motel that morning and still behind them. It could be nothing or it could be Grey's men. His father slowly pulled to the side of the road, pretending to look at the countryside, as the men in the car drove by. His father pronounced them Grey's men as he got back onto the road.

Farther down the road they pulled over again to look at a breathtaking vista and got out to stretch their legs. That was when they heard the car hurtling toward them. Adam or his mother screamed as the car crashed into them. He watched his mother spinning in the air like he himself was and saw her die. Adam saw her land with her head at an odd angle and saw the sightless, vacant eyes. He didn't know how he was doing; only that he had stopped moving and he felt wet and oozy as if he were lying in a swamp.

Adam heard voices say, "He got away - he's not here," "I saw him run. He's hurt," and "They'll get him - they never miss." The voices were talking about his father. Adam clung to the idea his father must have gotten away. Adam struggled to barely move his head just enough to stop looking as his dead mother and sees a man walking toward him and his mother.

The man is tall, taller than ever because of the angle from the pavement. Brint coaxes Adam for the name of who the man is. Adam sees the man look at his mother and hears him say, "She's terminated. Remove her. The boy - check him. He may be useful..." Brint urges, "Who did you see?" Gray pants - Him. Adam is lifted but he has no pain. He doesn't answer Brint's question and withdraws into unconsciousness.

Section 31 Analysis

Adam has finally recalled the death of his mother which has shadowed his memories through the whole journey. At first, it was as if she didn't exist. His bike journey was to see his father; no mention of where his mother was. He left on the trip without a mention of what his mother will think of him taking a long journey on the bike. Slowly images of her come forward as the events unfolded. Then, eventually, he works through his image of her from a fearful, withdrawn, weak woman, to understand her actions were motivated by fear and desire to protect him and the family from life threatening danger. He comes to know her as a very strong woman and admires her for what she has given up for their safety. He has reestablished his bond with her and finally found happiness with her. His family is complete again and he is whole with them again.

Seeing his mother murdered before him caused him to retreat deeply into his subconscious. The specter of his mother's death was foreshadowed back with the boy who stole his bike and his mother interacting and the loneliness of Adam's pain and grief comes to the surface as an emotional reaction - not yet a conscious acknowledgment of her death. Full realization of the events surrounding her death shocks him back into withdrawal again.

After witnessing his mother's murder and the attempted murder of all three of them, Adam hopes his father has gotten away. This is the thread of hope that the reader now knows has been woven through the entire story. Adam has hope of seeing his father alive, as he brings him his package.

The reader faces the fact that Adam is probably in the hands of the enemy now, and has been recovering for three years. The tall man with the gray pants is Mr. Grey directing the removal of his dead mother and Adam. Perhaps Mr. Gray was bribed by the enemy to betray his family; if so, Adam wonders why he is still alive.

Section 32

Section 32 Summary

Adam has reached Rutterburg, refreshed and at ease on his bike. The town is deserted as if a holocaust has struck. He looks for a phone booth but is not sure what he would do with it and the thought makes him sad. It's a hole so he tries not to think about it.

Adam turns the corner, sees the hospital and pedals towards the gates, glad to be back. Dr. Dupont is waiting for him, as always; he is soft and gentle. Adam looks outside through the gates and vows to ride his bike out there someday. He announces he didn't take the medicine. "Welcome back, Skipper," says the old maintenance man. He is always planning trips and reading maps; the veins on his face resemble the road maps he is always reading.

"Well, what do you know - the traveler's back," Whipper says sarcastically, sitting with his two wise guy friends. Once, when Adam was riding his bike around the place, something allowed by Dr. Dupont, Whipper and his friends knocked him off his bike and into a ditch. Whipper is always trying to steal Adam's box and he grips it tighter in reflex.

Inside the halls smell like lilacs, as usual. Dr. Dupont tells him it is not an institution but a home for troubled people. Farther down the hall Adam hears the growl of Silver, a German Shepherd. Adam is afraid and Dr. Dupont scolds the dog out of the way. Silver likes to chase Adam on his bike and try to knock him over.

As Adam and Dr. Dupont climb the stairs, Arthur Haynes watches them. He is big, fat and always perspiring. He is always scratching himself and he gives Adam the creeps. He always stays on the second floor and watches everyone through the rails of the banister.

They head for Adam's room; Adam is tired and glad his room is waiting. Dr. Dupont gives him two pills to take as he sits in the chair looking out the window. Adam asks Dr. Dupont if his father is dead. He doesn't get an answer, but instead a sad promise to talk about it later.

Adam knows his mother is dead, but he wonders if his father is dead too, or out there waiting for Adam to find him. Adam asks Dr. Dupont if his father got away, who gives him a sad look in response. Adam recalls Dr. Dupont always looks sad when they talk about his father and he finds out again he is dead.

Dr. Dupont is a good man. He opens Adam's box and takes out Pokey the Pig for Adam. Dr. Dupont found Pokey, as well as the old army jacket and hat. Adam starts singing The Farmer in the Dell. He is wearing his father's old jacket and hat and knows his mother and father are dead.

Dr. Dupont tells Adam to rest a while. "Everything's going to be all right, Paul." Adam wonders who this person "Paul" is. Adam knows of another name but can't quite think of it. Adam smiles as he sings; he knows who he is, who he will always be. "I am the cheese."

Section 32 Analysis

Adam's parents are dead, murdered while in a witness protection program. Adam has been at the sanitarium for over three years in therapy to help him recall who he is and whatever facts he can recall about his father's secret. He is also being interrogated by a government man trying to get more information from him.

The reader finds that Adam withdraws into his fantasy each day as he rides his bike around the grounds of the sanitarium, building the people he meets into characters he meets on his make-believe journey. All of his fears and hopes are tied up in his bike and the package he carries in hopes one day to find his father alive. He occasionally faces the facts his parents are dead but still retreats into his hope of finding his father alive.

The sessions with the drugs to elicit information are real and take place in a room with bars on the window in Adam's hospital. These sessions, conducted by Brint, make Adam feel afraid.

Finally, the reader finds the connections from Adam's past life, his current existence, and the fantasy bike ride he takes each day. Symbols from his current life at the sanitarium mix into details on his bike journey:

The lilac smell from the sanitarium becomes the lilac perfume his mother wore when he was a young child. Adam still has Pokey the Pig, his baby toy, which Dr. Dupont brought from his house and this keeps him connected with his childhood and a happier time. Dr. Dupont has also brought him his father's old hat and jacket, which he wears each day. The old man at the first town is the same caretaker as at the sanitarium who always calls him Skipper. He looks the same, with veins like roads on a map, and warns him of murder and assassination, which is how his parents are killed. The German Shepherd dog has chased Adam around the sanitarium but he also sparks his memories of the fear his father subjected his family to. Whipper, the wise guy who chases him at the sanitarium, becomes Whipper, the leader of the wise guys in his fantasy. They merge into the gangsters who ran his family down and killed his mother and father. The fat, creepy guy from the sanitarium makes a cameo appearance as the fat man on the fire escape, a diversion in his bike journey fantasy. Memories of his mother's death surface briefly through an image of another boy's mother during his fantasy bike trip.

Other facts are more concrete. His father attempted to protect Adam from revealing dangerous information in case he was ever interrogated and this is just what happens at the sanitarium. A government man is trying to pump information from Adam, luckily information he doesn't have.

The family song is a thread keeping Adam grounded in his childhood, the only place he is really psychologically safe. The lilac scent and Pokey the Pig keep him in his childhood, as does only recalling his name is Adam, not Paul. His early childhood is what keeps him sane in the face of the horrors he has experienced.

As a final explanation, Adam has revealed that it has been his own choice to sit on the sidelines, to be a witness and record the events within him "on some personal film in some secret compartment no one knew about."

The reader comes to realize that throughout the story Adam was protecting his own psyche by delaying the ending and confirmation of the knowledge his mother and father are dead. The reader finds that each day he rediscovers his father and mother are dead, and each next day he begins his own search again. Adam is forever a child searching for his identity.

Section 33

Section 33 Summary

Tape OZK016 - Annual Report. This is the transcript of an annual report made by Brint. It references the subjects as Subject A and Personnel #2222. The report states that it was "impossible to get the sought after information from Adam. Inducement medication and pre-knowledge interrogatory techniques failed. All of Adam's earlier tapes are consistent with the current interrogation. He goes into deep withdrawal when topics of concern to the department are approached.

This is the third annual questioning of Subject A which is identical to the earlier two sessions. There is no apparent knowledge by Subject A of the information provided to the department by Witness #599-6. "Complete withdrawal accompanies recapitulation of termination of Witness #599-6 and affiliate (spouse)." Report advises: #1: Modify Agency procedures to eliminate the policy which does not allow for termination procedures by the department. #2: Fully reinstate personnel #2222 because it has not been determined he allowed the termination of the witness and spouse by the adversaries. There was only circumstantial evidence #2222 contacted the adversaries. #2222 directed post-termination activity with efficiency: confirmed witness #599-6 and spouse termination by adversaries; removal of remains; and transfer of Subject A to confinement facilities. #2222 acted within Agency Basic Procedures. #3: Subject A continue confined until Agency Basic Procedures revised to allow termination, or until Subject A obliterates."

Section 33 Analysis

The government agency for the witness protection program has been holding Adam for observation for three years. Mr. Grey, Personnel #2222, has been on suspension pending investigation of the circumstantial evidence that he contacted the "adversaries" from whom Adam's family was hiding. Adam's father, Witness #599-6, and his mother, the affiliate, were confirmed killed by the adversaries but there is no direct link to Mr. Grey. They have been holding and interrogating Adam to gain more information about what his father knew and whether Mr. Grey was the man seen at the scene of the murder. In the absence of this information, Adam is no longer useful and, if the Agency at some future point in time alters its Policies to allow termination, Adam will be terminated - if he doesn't die first.

Section 34 and Analysis

Section 34 Summary and Analysis

Adam begins another day riding his bicycle, planning a trip from Monument, Massachusetts to Ruttersburg, Vermont. His trip starts out like every other trip . . .

Characters

Brint

The man known only as Brint interrogates Adam on the interview tapes. At first he appears to be a psychiatrist, helping Adam remember his past. His tone is gentle and kind, and he encourages Adam to take his time. Gradually, it becomes clear that he has his own agenda and that discovering what Adam can remember is perhaps more important to Brint than it is to the boy. As the reader begins to distrust Brint, so does Adam, and he resists answering Brint's questions. When Adam voices his mistrust or asks Brint a direct question about his intentions, Brint cleverly changes the subject, and Adam, in his drugged state, does not notice the deception. In the end, it appears that Brint is not a psychiatrist at all but a government investigator attempting to determine whether Adam ("Subject A") remembers anything incriminating.

Adam Farmer

Adam Farmer is the main character of the novel; he narrates one strand of the story in the first person and is the center of the action in the other two strands. Adam is a pleasant but shy and nervous boy who has few friends and little confidence. He is often afraid—of dogs, open spaces, closed spaces, "a thousand things." He wants to be a writer, like Thomas Wolfe. As he enters his teen years, he falls in love with Amy, who draws him out of his shell, and he begins to notice that his parents seem to have a secret. Slowly, he discovers that he was born with a different name (Paul Delmonte) and that he and his parents were relocated and given new identities by the government. In the "present" strands of the novel, Adam is riding his bike to visit his father in Rutterburg, Vermont, a town seventy miles away. In another strand of the novel, he is interrogated by a man named Brint, who wants to know what Adam remembers of his past. Gradually, it becomes clear that Adam/Paul is being held in some sort of mental institution, continually drugged. His bike trip, as is revealed at the end of the novel, occurs mostly in Adam's imagination. In fact, his father and his mother are dead. Remembering "The Farmer in the Dell," the song his father used to sing, Adam is the one who says to himself near the end of the novel, "I am the cheese"—the cheese that stands alone.

David Farmer

David Farmer, Adam's father, was born Anthony Delmonte, and until Adam/Paul was a toddler he was a newspaper reporter. When he discovered a connection between organized crime and government officials, he testified before Congress, was threatened, and had his wife and son relocated and renamed, along with himself, by the U.S. Department of Re-Identification. Since then, he has gone by the name Mr. Farmer, worked as an insurance agent, and kept in touch with the mysterious Mr. Grey. The

relationship between Adam and his father is warm and close; they enjoy spending time together, and their love and respect is obvious. Adam's happiest memories are of his father leading the family in an off-key rendition of "The Farmer in the Dell." When Adam begins to unravel the family secret, Mr. Farmer tells him about the relocation but assures his son that the government is keeping them safe. Shortly afterward, however, the family is lured out of town and deliberately hit by a car. Adam's last memory is of his father running away from the scene of the accident, but Brint's final tape reveals that Mr. Farmer is dead.

Louise Farmer

Louise Farmer, Adam's mother, is a reclusive and frightened woman who keeps to the house most of the time. Until Adam begins to learn about the family's secret, he does not understand his mother's condition, but he is protective and loyal toward her. Mrs. Farmer, previously Louise Nolan Delmonte, has entered the witness protection program with her husband and son, but, unlike her husband, she has never trusted Mr. Grey or the government's promise to keep them safe. The product of an unhappy childhood and a life of struggle, she does not trust easily. She clings to her Catholic faith and attends Mass regularly. Occasionally she defies Mr. Grey in small ways, but the thought of putting her family in danger terrifies her. Her only relief from fear comes during the weekly phone call she is allowed to make to her sister, Martha, a cloistered nun. Her fears prove warranted at the end of the novel, when she is murdered in front of Adam.

Mr. Grey

The man Adam thinks of as Mr. Grey at first appears to be Mr. Farmer's boss in the insurance business. He visits Adam's father periodically, and the two men disappear into Mr. Farmer's basement office to talk business. In fact, Grey's name is really Thompson, and he is the government man responsible for keeping the Farmer/Delmonte family safe. It is Mr. Grey who tells them where to live, where and when to take a vacation, and when to be extra cautious. Adam's mother does not trust him, and her suspicions appear to be justified when Adam recognizes Mr. Grey at the scene of his mother's death. Brint also suspects that Grey ("Personnel #2222") may have had a hand in Adam's parents' deaths but concludes that there is no hard evidence to prove it.

Amy Hertz

Amy Hertz, daughter of the local newspaper editor, is confident where Adam is uncertain, cynical where he is trusting. She takes delight in breaking the rules by doing the mostly harmless practical jokes she calls "Numbers." Amy is important to Adam, first as his only real friend and later as his girlfriend. When Adam gets discouraged during his bike trip, the thought that he will be able to phone Amy gives him hope. When he does call her number, however, the man who answers does not know Amy—an early

clue that the bike trip itself may not be what it seems. Amy, however, is above suspicion, the only person in Adam's life who is exactly who and what she appears to be.

Martha Nolan

Martha Nolan is Mrs. Farmer's older sister and only living relative, a cloistered nun living in Portland, Maine. After the family's relocation, Mr. Grey allows Mrs. Farmer to make one phone call per week to Martha, since Martha has no contact with the outside world and could not accidentally give anyone information about the Farmers. These Thursday phone calls are the only joy in Mrs. Farmer's week. When Adam eavesdrops on one of the phone calls, he learns for the first time that he also has a living relative, an aunt.

Themes

The Individual against Society

Like the central character of Cormier's earlier work, *The Chocolate War*, Adam Farmer confronts forces that are stronger than he is, and he ultimately faces them alone and loses. These forces in *I Am the Cheese* are all the more sinister because they are housed where Adam should be able to expect protection—in his own government and his psychiatrist—and because the danger arose only after Mr. Farmer committed a courageous and moral act.

For fourteen years, Adam's parents do their best to keep him safe. Mr. Farmer at first refuses the government's offer of a new identity, accepting only when he realizes that his wife and child are also in danger. In hiding, the Farmers seem in some ways to have a relatively normal life, and the scenes of the family laughing and singing "The Farmer in the Dell" are lighthearted and warm. However, their safety is in isolation. Mrs. Farmer does not join committees and make friends as Mrs. Hertz does; in fact, she almost never leaves the house. Mr. Farmer is cut off from his work as a writer. The family appears to have no living relatives, no friends, no neighbors to chat over the fence with. This isolation becomes a part of Adam's personality. Although he does not share his parents' fear of discovery, he is a frightened and shy child. Amy Hertz seems to be his first close friend, but, even as he comes to love her, he never confides in her. He and his parents are alone, with only Mr. Grey to protect them and connect them to the outside world.

Of course, as Mrs. Farmer suspects all along, Mr. Grey cannot (or will not) protect them. Although it is unclear whether Grey arranged the car accident or was trying to prevent it, he is there at the moment that Adam is finally separated from his parents. Now Adam is on his own, in the hands of a man who may or may not be a doctor, in a building that may or may not be a hospital, being given drugs that may help or harm him. No one is going to rescue Adam from his confinement because no one knows who or where he is. He will stay a prisoner until he either is "terminated" or he "obliterates." The idea of a teenage boy held prisoner by ruthless adults is made even more shocking by the mention of his only companion: Pokey the Pig. When the individual stands alone against a society this cruel, a serious question is raised about whether or not it is possibile for the individual to prevail.

Innocence and Experience

In many ways, *I Am the Cheese* is a typical coming-of-age story. During the course of the story, Adam ages from nine years old to about seventeen, and he begins to understand who and what he is. At nine, Adam walks with his father to the library and sees his father frightened for the first time. He also sees his father act bravely to fight off a dog. Typical for a nine-year-old, Adam accepts his father's explanation for the detour

and does not challenge his father's plan for escaping the dog. At the corner of his mind, however, is the smallest doubt, which he later labels as his first "clue" that all is not as it appears to be. He is beginning to think of his parents as people who might have emotions, who might make mistakes. Adam is growing up.

When he is fourteen, Adam takes new strides toward adulthood. He befriends Amy Hertz and even falls in love with her, enjoying the sensations of kissing her and touching her breasts. For the first time, he feels a bit embarrassed about his mother's isolation. He dares to look in his father's locked drawer and then begins spying on his parents to learn their secrets. These are natural steps toward independence, as his father acknowledges: "It's your right to know. You're not a child anymore."

Style

The most challenging element of *I Am the Cheese* is its three-part structure. Three separate threads, or strands, run side by side through the novel, and there is no omniscient narrator or author's note to explain the connections between them. First-time readers must be patient and allow the separate pieces to sort themselves out.

The book opens with an unnamed boy riding his bicycle toward his father in the hospital. Who is the boy? Why is his father in the hospital? There are no answers in this section, but there are two clues: the boy lives in Monument, Massachusetts, and he loves Amy Hertz. The next section is an interview between "T" and "A." "A" might be a clue to the boy's name, but then again it might not: the man identified as "T" calls himself "Brint," so the letters are not initials. The third section is a memory of a young boy lying in bed and overhearing a conversation between his parents. The young boy seems to be "A" from the interview, but is this the same boy who is riding a bike?

Gradually, the pieces come together. For the first four chapters the boy on the bike in the present tense is known only as "I" and the boy in the past tense is known only as "he." In the fourth chapter, Brint asks "A" if he would like to discuss Paul Delmonte, but "A" does not recognize the name. In the fifth chapter, the boy in the past-tense strand is identified as Adam Farmer, and it soon becomes clear that Adam Farmer is also the boy on the bike. Each chapter now brings new revelations and seems to offer new understanding until a later chapter shows that some of what seemed clear before is untrue. Adam Farmer does know Paul Delmonte. Mr. Grey is really Mr. Thompson. Mr. Farmer is not in a hospital. Adam is not riding his bike from Massachusetts to Vermont.

This complicated structure (which Cormier himself assumed was too complex for young readers to follow) serves at least two functions in the novel. Adam is given three separate voices: the present-tense first-person narrator voice, the voice on the tapes, and his voice in dialogue during the past-tense sections. These three voices are a testament to Adam's insanity: in his own mind, the three voices speak in turn, out of his control. He cannot control his own thoughts, his own memories. He has forgotten his identity. The three narratives also place the reader at a disadvantage. Like the Farmers, the reader is constantly off balance, unsure what to trust. This is Cormier's message, as spoken by the old man with the map: "Don't trust anybody." As the reader picks her way through the three narratives, she gathers clues and tries to interpret them, but she is frequently deceived. The structure of the novel echoes the structure of modern society: disjointed, deceptive, and beyond individual control.

Historical Context

With works including *The Chocolate War and I Am the Cheese*, Cormier became associated with a movement in young adult literature called new realism. Prior to the mid-1960s, most books written for young adults (that is, for readers in approximately grades six through twelve) had several elements in common: they featured protagonists who were white and from the middle class, mostly living with both parents in suburban neighborhoods; they dealt with themes of growing up and feeling alienated, but they ended with the conflicts resolved and young people feeling safe within their families; they avoided issues such as divorce, drug use, sexual exploration and orientation and other issues that teenagers deal with.

Many fine books that are still considered classics were written during the first half of the twentieth century, but in the 1960s a different kind of book began to appear. These books were categorized as a fresh movement called new realism, which dealt with controversial issues that previous books had avoided, spoke in an edgier tone, and maintained the undecorated approach of realism. Often, they did not end happily.

The idea of a literature intended for young adults is a relatively new one; in fact, the arrangement that teens would still live a protected life within their families and devote their energies primarily to education did not exist in the United States until the early twentieth century. As children stayed in school longer, instead of marrying or working in the factories to help support their families, teachers looked for literature that would address their particular concerns. As modern life brought with it new challenges and technologies for young people, including divorce, drugs, and contraception, books geared toward adolescents began exploring ways to confront contemporary life. Finally, as an awareness spread throughout the country that not all Americans are white, or well-off, and heterosexual, a wider range of protagonists and settings began to appear.

I Am the Cheese includes many of the features of new realism: a lonely protagonist with a difficult life, his growing awareness of both his sexuality and his independence, adults who cannot be relied on, language that reflects the way young people really spoke in 1977, a complex structure, and a decidedly dark tone and gloomy ending. Some felt at first that young people would be confused or harmed by these new approaches, but new realism has, according to most critics, brought refreshing changes to young adult literature.

Losing Faith in Government

The stereotypical image of the United States in the 1950s is of a land where all citizens were happy and well fed and patriotic, and for many people this was true. With World War II over, there was an increased prosperity and a heightened sense that Americans had united and won over the enemy. The years just after the Vietnam War, however, created a different feeling in many Americans. That war did not end gloriously for the United States, and as journalists and activists investigated government documents, they revealed that the American people had been deceived in many ways about the conduct

and results of the war. In 1972, when only a small number of U.S. troops remained in Vietnam, the Watergate burglary was discovered; this incident eventually led to President Richard Nixon resigning in disgrace and the imprisonment of several members of his staff. J. Edgar Hoover, the former head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), died, and evidence began to surface that the FBI had for years used its powers illegally to harass and threaten U.S. citizens. A memo was discovered that showed that the Justice Department had traded a lawsuit settlement for campaign contributions. These and other events were at first shocking to the American people, but gradually they became more cynical and distrusting of their government.

Robert Cormier was no exception. A journalist for over three decades, he knew very well that elected officials are not immune from corruption by money and power. He also witnessed small ways that the government has begun to intrude on our lives. In an interview with Geraldine DeLuca and Roni Natov, he describes his own paranoia about government intrusion, and explains "I wanted to portray the kind of fear that I think is in our lives today."

Critical Overview

Although *I Am the Cheese* has sold well and received several awards since its publication over twenty-five years ago, it was initially resisted by a significant number of teachers, librarians, and parents who felt that the book was unsuitable for young readers. Some objected to small elements in the novel, including a reference to Amy Hertz's breasts, which seemed at the time to be out of step with what was generally available for middle- and high-school readers. The biggest controversy, however, was over the tone of the novel and the decidedly unhappy ending. Believing that young readers should be protected from negative messages, many called for the book to be removed from classrooms and school libraries. The controversy over the relatively recent trend toward darker novels for young people is explained in Rebecca Lukens's essay "From Salinger to Cormier: Disillusionment to Despair in Thirty Years." Lukens, comparing three Cormier novels to J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, shows that Salinger's central character "finds that he is his own best hope" and that "Cormier's characters come to no such faith." She concludes that "unlike Salinger who offers discovery, Cormier offers only despair."

Most critics, however, acknowledge the novel's dark vision but find redeeming qualities in it. In a 1977 review for the *Horn Book Magazine*, Paul Heins calls the book "a magnificent accomplishment" and "truly a novel in the tragic mode, cunningly wrought, shattering in its emotional implications." Clearly Heins, like many others, did not believe that young readers needed to be shielded from unpleasantness. Roger Sutton, in a 1982 review for *School Library Journal*, wrote that "under the grim, nowin surface lies a very conventional, respectable morality: wrong may triumph over right, but the reader is certainly shown which is which." Robert Bell, writing in 1978 for the *School Librarian*, admired the book greatly but issued one caveat: "Sixteen is young enough, I feel, for the harrowing experience of encountering this remarkably powerful book. Very strongly recommended, for any age beyond that."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Bily teaches writing and literature at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan. In this essay, Bily examines the motif of the doppelgänger *in Cormier's novel.*

When Robert Cormier published *The Chocolate War* in 1974, and then *I Am the Cheese* in 1977, he was heralded (and scolded) for being part of a new trend in literature. This movement, which came to be known as new realism, was in fact new in many ways: it depicted life the way it really is for many people, with its struggles as well as its joys, and it presented issues and ideas that had not been offered specifically to young readers before.

But like all literature that seems bound to last, *I Am the Cheese* was not entirely new. Literature is a conversation across the centuries and across cultural borders, and many of the ideas and motifs that most resonate with readers recur in new works, echoing the themes of past works. The idea, for example, that as readers of *I Am the Cheese* we feel pity for Adam and his fear and despair was first described more than twenty-three hundred years ago by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who called works that elicit these feelings tragedies. In writing his tragedy, Cormier created a new character in a new setting, but one who follows an ancient path to destruction. Another motif that connects *I Am the Cheese* with literature from the past is the use of the *doppelgänger*, or the double.

The word *doppelgänger* is a German word, meaning "double walker." The experience of meeting one's double is found in folk tales and fairy tales from around the world, but it was German writers of the nineteenth century who gave us the term. The *doppelgänger* as a literary motif was especially fascinating to writers in the nineteenth century, even before modern psychological theories argued that what we think of as the self is really made up of several selves. The most well-known example is Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which a scientist succeeds in separating his own impulses for good and evil into two distinct personalities. Edgar Allan Poe's 1839 short story "William Wilson" features a man who is tormented by his *doppelgänger* in the form of another man, who reappears throughout his life—unless he is only imagining it. Often, meeting one's double is a sign that death will soon follow, but in Charles Dickens's 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Darnay is saved by his double, Sydney Carton. Other examples include Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846) and Joseph Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" (1912). All of these writers used the *doppelgänger* to depict in a concrete way the complex psychological divisions within one character.

In *I Am the Cheese*, nearly every character has a double, and several characters cross paths with multiple versions of themselves. Because of the witness relocation program, every member of the Farmer family has two identities, or two selves: Adam David Farmer is also Paul Delmonte; Louise Holden Farmer is also Louise Nolan Delmonte; David Farmer is also Anthony Delmonte. The Delmonte selves are like and unlike the Farmer selves. Louise Delmonte loved her small town and the people in it. She was

happy and young, and she laughed frequently. Louise Farmer is a very different person. Adam wonders sometimes what has happened "to transform his mother from the laughing, tender woman to whom the scent of lilac clung into the pale and subdued and antiseptic woman who seldom left the house, who lurked behind window curtains." Louise Farmer is a mirror image of Louise Delmonte. She looks just like her other self, but she is her own opposite. David Farmer is similarly a reflection of Anthony Delmonte. Instead of his beloved career as a journalist, he earns his living now as an insurance agent, doing work he does not find satisfying. Whereas he was once brave enough to stand up to the government, he is now afraid of strangers on the street.

Each of Adam's parents also has another double, a person living in Monument who seems to demonstrate what life could have been like. Amy's father works for the town newspaper, doing the work that Mr. Farmer wishes he could return to, and his only mention in the novel is when he entertains another newspaperman from the town where Adam supposedly was born. At the time, Adam does not realize the cruel irony of the situation. Amy's mother has the kind of active life Adam's mother gave up. When Adam first meets her, she is on the phone arranging a committee meeting and then running out the door to another meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Hertz are minor characters whose absence would not have changed the overall plot of the novel. Cormier seems to have included them primarily to serve as *doppelgängers*, to emphasize what might have been, and to heighten our pity at what Adam's parents have lost.

Adam also has an old identity as Paul Delmonte When he first learns about his old name, it casts into doubt his entire sense of self:

. . . a small part of him was isolated and alone, a part that was not Adam Farmer any longer but Paul Delmonte. I am Paul Delmonte, a voice whispered inside of him. . . . Then who is Adam Farmer? Where did he come from?

For a while he is uneasy and has to reassure himself that "I am the same person I have been for fourteen years." At times, however, he finds his secret exciting, something to brag about. He is afraid that he might place Amy in danger by telling her his secret, by announcing, "Look, Amy, I'm not just shy and awkward Adam Farmer, but a fugitive on the run, leading a double life. I am Paul Delmonte."

Like his parents, Adam also has another *doppelgänger* living in Monument: Amy Hertz. Amy is in some ways just like Adam and in some ways his opposite. The first time they meet, it is as though Adam bumps into a mirror: "She was going into the Monument Public Library and he was coming out and they collided at the door. The books they held in their arms spilled all over the place." In a Gothic horror story, we would never be sure whether Amy was a figment of Adam's imagination, but this Amy seems quite real. Still, Adam could not invent a better alter ego: she likes books, as he does, but she is brave where he is timid, full of laughter where he is withdrawn. Only once he meets Amy, his double, does he find the confidence and the brashness to become a spy in his own home.

The first-time reader of *I Am the Cheese* is not aware of it, but nearly every person Adam meets on his bike ride also has a double. When he finally arrives at the "hospital," he encounters people who are strangely reminiscent of people he meets on his trip, and it gradually becomes clear that he has imagined most of what we assumed happened to him during the journey. The nice old man with the map who helps Adam think through his route is really Mr. Harvester, the maintenance man at the hospital. The dog who chases Adam's bicycle, "a German shepherd, sleek and black, a silent sentinel guarding the driveway of a big white house," is Silver, the dog who lives on the hospital grounds and who "delights in chasing people and knocking them down." In a "small restaurant, a lunchroom really," Adam is harassed by three tough boys, Whipper, Dobbie and Lewis, until Luke the counterman puts down the phone and intercedes; in fact, Whipper, Dobbie, and Lewis are also among the "troubled people" who live at the hospital, and Luke is the switchboard operator who sometimes helps serve meals. And so on. Like the Farmers, and like Mr. Grey, none of the people Adam meets is who she or he appears to be.

It seems clear that Adam has created these *doppelgängers*, these dual identities, to serve a psychological need of his own. He has repressed the memories of the car accident that was not an accident, and though he is sure that his mother is dead, he cannot remember how he knows this. He wants to believe that he is riding to see his father and bringing something of value to him. So he gets on his bike with his own most valued possession, Pokey the Pig, and rides around and around the hospital grounds. And he creates another reality and other identities to make his life less painful. In Western literature, the appearance of the *doppelgänger* is never a happy occurrence; it is a sign that calamity, usually death or insanity, is near. As the last chapters of the novel show, Adam is very close to the end, either through termination or obliteration, when his world of *doppelgängers* is revealed.

But answering the question of why Adam imagines or creates doubles for the people around him raises another, fascinating question: What else has he created? If the entire bike trip happened only in his imagination, what reason is there to believe that the events in the novel's other strands actually happened? The doctor at the hospital calls the boy "Paul." Could the boy have created the identity of Adam Farmer out of his imagination? Poe's "William Wilson" is also told by a first-person narrator, and by the end of the story there is great doubt as to whether he has actually met another man who is his double or whether his insanity has only led him to think so. Could the same be true of Adam/Paul?

The fact is, we can never know. Was Adam Farmer created by Mr. Grey or by Paul Delmonte? ("Who is Adam Farmer? Where did he come from?") Are the tapes verifiable documentation that something actually occurred to Subject A, perhaps at the hand of Personnel #2222 (also known as Mr. Grey and as Thompson), or is the sly reference to *The Wizard of Oz* in the "OZK series tapes" a hint that, like Dorothy's experiences, it has all been a dream? Cormier has layered so many levels of duplicity and deceit that it is impossible to tell. Either the government agencies in charge of protecting the Delmonte family are so intrusive and so false that nothing that touches them can be trusted, or the entire novel is the result of the wandering imagination of an insane child.

Neither is a comforting thought. With the motif of the *doppelgänger*, Cormier participates in a long literary tradition, even as he locates his novel in the terrifying double world of modern society.

Source: Cynthia Bily, Critical Essay on *I Am the Cheese*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Mertz discusses how I Am the Cheese *can be used to study literary style and structure.*

I am the Cheese is consistently one of the most difficult novels for my college students, yet also one of their favorite works for analysis. Cormier's novel is particularly appropriate for dealing with two concepts that inexperienced readers seem to find particularly elusive: *style* and *structure*. Because a number of essays have analyzed Cormier's work, and this novel in particular, I will try to avoid repeating what has been stated elsewhere. The most recent study of Cormier is Patricia J. Campbell's

Presenting Robert Cormier (1990), one of the books in the Laurel-Leaf Library of Young Adult Authors. In her chapter on *I am the Cheese*, Camp-bell states that the "triple strands that are braided together to make the story, the three alternating levels on which the narrative progresses, are an intricate but internally consistent device." According to Campbell, these are the three levels of narrative:

The bike ride is told in first-person present tense. The tapes, as dialogue, have neither person nor tense (but we assume they are happening in the present), and the revelation of Adam's past that grows out of these tapes proceeds chronologically and is in third-person past tense.

Structurally, then, there are three levels of story, and three points of view. As Campbell notes, this is extremely confusing when the novel is read for the first time. Only in subsequent readings does it become possible to see the relationships that exist among the various levels of story. Campbell describes the novel as a mosaic. My students compare it to a jigsaw puzzle, a puzzle that is extremely difficult to put together because the pieces are so varied. In fact, one student noted that even when the last piece is in place, the "picture" is still not clear. But good novels, like good puzzles, became easier to "put together" the more we work with them.

Although the internal structure of the novel is complex, the external structure—the juxtaposition of the "tapes" with the bike journey and the past—provides a means to start discussions of structure. After reading the first two chapters, readers can begin to understand how the writer is using the different levels and points of view to move the story forward. What emerges, then, is a structure or form that is integral to the story. In effect, form and content merge. The way the story is told is essential to the content of the story. A clear example of how the structure relates to the story is that the opening lines of the novel are repeated at the end. The story is cyclical. Like Adam's interrogations, it begins anew.

If structure is the overall form of the story, the design that the author has used, *style* constitutes the manner of expression that the writer has chosen to tell the story. Young readers seem to understand the term best when it is simply described as *how* the writer

tells the story. Consistently, Cormier's style captures the pace and intensity of the events in the story. For example, the opening is extremely powerful.

I am riding the bicycle and I am on Route 31 in Monument, Massachusetts, on my way to Rutterburg, Vermont, and I'm pedaling furiously because this is an old-fashioned bike, no speeds, no fenders, only the warped tires and the brakes that don't always work and the handlebars with cracked rubber grips to steer with. A plain bike—the kind my father rode as a kid years ago. It's cold as I pedal along, the wind like a snake slithering up my sleeves and into my jacket and my pants legs, too. But I keep pedaling, I keep pedaling.

The first sentence parallels the "furious" pace of the boy pedaling the bike. There is an urgency in the tone, an urgency that couches something overtly evil—"like a snake slithering up my sleeves." The alliteration of that phrase—when read out loud it sounds ominously like hissing—presents even to the most inexperienced reader a sense of foreboding. Throughout the novel, Cormier is able to capture the mood of a scene by his powerful use of language. For example, he conveys the cold, clinical, almost mechanistic tone of the taped interviews through brief, abrupt dialogue.

A: It's hazy—just a series of impressions. T: Let the impressions come.

(5-second interval)

A: That night—

T: Tell me about that night.

These clinical interviews are juxtaposed against vivid descriptions of Adam in the clinic: "He was in bed and the sheets were twisted around him and his body was hot, his eyes like raw onions, head aching. He cried out once or twice, softly, tentatively." Early in the novel the inhumanity toward Adam becomes apparent.

Throughout the novel, Cormier is able to enhance our knowledge of *what* happens by his vivid descriptions. One of the most memorable is the description of the car accident.

Into them. Into his father, his mother, himself. The car smashing, shattering. A flash of steel, sun glinting, and he felt himself, crazily, moving through the air, no feeling, no pain, no sense of flight, but actually in the air, not flying but moving as if in slow motion, everything slowed down, tumbling now and twisting and in the tumbling and the twisting he saw his mother die. Instantly.

The one-word sentence, "Instantly," punctuates the almost dreamlike slow motion of the accident itself. It is final. As he says at the end of this passage, "He looked at his mother, her head at the wrong angle, a rag doll tossed away." His mother's lifeless body is like a child's toy—limp, with eyes that are "sightless, vacant." The horror of the accident is conveyed by altering the pace of the description and by evoking parallels that all readers can understand. By comparing the dead mother to a rag doll, Cormier assures a strong emotional response from readers.

Although the novel is complex both structurally and thematically, it has some very simple and obvious literary elements that are worthwhile noting. The use of names, for instance, is relatively easy for students to analyze. The name "Grey," for example, embodies the ambiguities of good and evil; he also represents the unknown, the "grey" areas of life. "Adam" is the symbol of innocence because of the biblical allusion and also because children traditionally represent innocence in fiction. "Farmer," the name given Adam's family to replace their real name, Delmonte, also evokes purity. Throughout the American literary tradition, the country, embodied in the farmer, has epitomized innocence because to work with the earth is to be in contact with God.

The analyses that this novel has received since its publication attest to its power and sophistication. Adults as well as adolescents are challenged by its structure, style, and theme. It speaks to readers of all ages about the loss of innocence and the pervasive nature of evil in current society. But only through an analysis of its literary elements is it possible for young readers to understand why it is a powerful work.

Source: Maia Pank Mertz, "Enhancing Literary Understandings through Young Adult Fiction," in *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 23-33.

Critical Essay #3

In the following Contemporary Authors (CA) *interview, Ross presents an interview with Robert Cormier that was conducted by telephone on April 13, 1987.*

CA: After three novels and many short stories for adults, The Chocolate War *was a resounding success and placed you solidly as a writer for young adults. It wasn't a label you'd consciously sought. How do you feel about it now, and how much does it influence the actual writing?*

Cormier: Sometimes I'm of two minds about it. On the one hand, this label has gained me a terrific audience of young people, and I know the success of my career has turned on that audience. I hear from them all the time, letters and phone calls, and I do a lot of speaking at schools and libraries, which I enjoy very much doing. So it has been very good. The only qualm I do have is that I think the label does limit my audience. I really don't feel that I write young adult books, and I think a lot of adults who might read them stay away from them because of the label. But that is the only detrimental effect I can come up with.

In terms of my own writing, the beautiful part of it is that I can still write and have this audience and yet not limit my plots or my subtleties. I don't have to simplify stories. I write as if the audience didn't exist, really. I've aimed for the intelligent reader and have often found that that reader is fourteen years old.

CA: You told Victoria Irwin for the Christian Science Monitor *that you enjoy writing about young people because you feel an affinity for them. Did that come primarily from having your own children?*

Cormier: Yes, I think it definitely did. First of all, it comes from memories of my own teenage years. If I have total recall of anything, it's not facts and figures but the way those years were, and not ever wanting to go through them again. Then when my own children became teenagers, I saw them going through the same things I'd gone through and realized that they were universal and timeless. Seeing my own children renewing those adolescent years did lead me to start writing about them—but not for them. The short stories prior to *The Chocolate War* in which I dealt with young people were inspired by that same combination of my children's experiences and my memories of my own.

CA: Yes. You explained in the introductions to the stories collected in Eight Plus One *how things that happened to your children played a part in your writing, and* The Chocolate War *grew out of an experience your son Peter had. How have your children responded to your books?*

Cormier: They're very supportive. One thing that makes a parent feel good is doing something that makes his children proud of him. They've all been avid readers, so my having achieved a reputation as a writer has made them very proud. And it's always

been a family affair anyway. While they were growing up, I was writing all the time. They shared the bad times, the rejections, as well as the good times when a sale would come along and we'd go out and have a family dinner to celebrate, or go shopping and buy gifts. They've always been very much a part of the writing.

CA: And you've more than once spoken of the support your wife has given.

Cormier: Oh yes. In fact, I've always thought my wife would have made a great editor, because she has a very discerning eye. She reads my work before anyone else sees it. It's terrific to have a built-in editor, and someone that you trust. She does the final manuscript typing, and then I usually circulate it among my children prior to publication.

CA: In what ways have you found your newspaper work helpful in writing fiction?

Cormier: The main thing, I think, is the discipline it establishes. In newspaper work you write to a deadline; you write every day, when you don't feel like writing. You have to write economically, and sometimes to order. You may cover a lengthy story and then be told to cut it down to two pages. I think a lifetime of doing that carries over to my own work. I find that discipline seems to be such a problem, not only with myself, but with other people. I know a lot of talented people who never seem to get around to writing something. I have always been able to do this on weekend and nights. Besides the discipline I've gotten from the newspaper work, there's that direct journalistic style, which I still use to some extent. I use a lot of similes and metaphors, figures of speech, but essentially my style is very direct, and I strive for clarity. I think that comes out of my newspaper work, making the story real to the reader without any embellishment. In fiction, though, you can embellish somewhat and be more creative.

CA: The subconscious plays a great part in your writing, as you've described it. Are there ways you can aid and abet that faculty so that it can keep working at its best for you?

Cormier: I think why I like novel writing in contrast to short story writing is that your characters are developed, and then they're sort of with you all the time, the way friends would be with you. And sometimes the best idea of what a character should do in the plot comes when I'm driving the car downtown or something like that. In terms of a schedule, I don't think of what I have to write on a given day. For instance, when I sat down this morning at the typewriter, I wasn't thinking in terms of having to write five pages or ten pages, but of what the characters were going to do. That's how they become real and stay with you.

I think the subconscious works in another way. I usually look at the writing late at night before I go to bed and begin writing again in the morning. I have a feeling something happens while I sleep. This night-morning habit sets up a continuity and a momentum, and I'm sure the subconscious has a part in that. It's hard to trace it, but I know that if I'm away from the work for a while, like on an extended trip, it's harder getting back in the swing of things, because the characters start fading in my mind.

In an interview with Paul Janeczko for English Journal *you said that you write to communicate the emotions of your characters. How emotionally involved with them do you become in the writing?*

Cormier: Very emotionally involved, really. Often things happen to them that upset me, that I don't want to happen. I was greatly affected by Kate's death in *After the First Death*, and the death of the little boy, Raymond. When I realized that the situation was set up so that a child would have to be murdered in cold blood, I really was aghast that I'd written myself in to that kind of corner. Knowing what had to happen when I saw Kate's fate developing, knowing that she would ultimately and ironically do something that would cause her death, really bothered me. You do get involved with your characters, which is sometimes a hard thing for people who don't write to understand. I've said this at symposiums, and people look at me strangely. It doesn't bother me as much as if real people die, not to that extent. But it does affect me.

CA: Is your own emotion during the writing a measure of how well a story is working?

Cormier: Yes, definitely. In fact, I abandoned a novel a couple of years ago because of that. I thought it was a very clever plot, and I still think it's a very clever plot, with a couple of great psychological twists. My protagonist was a middle-aged man, and frankly I was not emotionally involved with him. So he began to bore me, and I just abandoned the novel. Because I wasn't emotionally involved with the character in that novel, it was more or less hack work, being clever. I think writing is more than that.

CA: I Am The Cheese *is a difficult book not only emotionally, but also in terms of plot. Patricia J. Campbell discussed it quite intelligently in*

Presenting Robert Cormier. *Do readers have a hard time with it?*

Cormier: Yes, they do. I receive an awful lot of mail, and a good deal of it concerns *I Am the Cheese*. A typical letter from a fourteen-year-old might say, "Dear Mr. Cormier: I just read *I Am the Cheese*. I read it twice. Will you please answer the following questions . . ." Then there's a long list of questions. And it's difficult for adults as well. There is a degree of ambiguity in it in the first place; all the questions aren't answered in the story. It's a funny thing about the writing. I wonder sometimes how I might have written a book if I had known the effect it would have on people. Writing is so private; even though you're writing for publication, at the time you're doing it you're not thinking of people reacting in a certain way. So when I see these questions come in, I wonder whether I might have clarified it a bit more. I'm not sure whether I would or not.

CA: What do you hope readers will get from the books?

Cormier: I really try to affect them emotionally, to get some kind of reaction. I hope a book will linger with the reader. I'm not writing to make people feel good, and I think indifference would be the worst of all. I'd rather have a critical review than no review. I'm happy to have people put down the book and say, "Yes, that's the way it could happen. I don't *like* what happened, but that's the way it *could* happen.

CA: There's so much dishonesty between adults and young people, as you've said yourself. Adults like to say, "These are the happiest years of your life," and that's usually not true.

Cormier: Yes. Kids are told that all the time. I was told that. I thought, something's got to be wrong, because these are terrible years. They had their peaks and pits, but there were so many pits! And you're not in control of your life. There's no perspective. They tell you they want you to be responsible people, and then they tell you to be in at eleven o'clock. There are all these dichotomies at work. I think some of the dishonesty comes from adults wanting to protect their children from certain realities, to sugar-coat what's going on. I used to be told, "You won't remember this on your wedding day." It didn't help at the moment, when I was really lacerated by something.

CA: No. And once you begin to get smart, you just think you're being lied to a lot.

Cormier: Yes. I think kids are being lied to so much. In fact, they become accustomed to the lies, like the television lie that the good guy wins at the end of the program, the heroes of "Miami Vice" go on forever. They're even lied to in the commercials. Everybody knows that buying the right deodorant is not going to win you love. There's a continual lying going on, and they're adjusting to that. So when they read a realistic book, they cling to it and think, here's someone telling the truth. This is reflected in the letters I get from young people. So many readers say, "You tell it the way it is." That's very gratifying, because I get so many complaints from adult would-be censors.

CA: Speaking of television, one criticism that's made constantly of young people is that they watch television instead of reading. Do you consider television a competitor with your books?

Cormier: It is such a visual world, it's so hard to avoid it. But somebody's reading out there, because kids are reacting. I know a lot of my books are in the classroom, so kids are getting them from teachers. I'd say yes, obviously the kids are watching television, and they can't be reading a book at the same time. We are creating a visual need. On MTV, they're aiming for an attention span of about three minutes. It is having an effect. But thank goodness there are still young people who love to pick up a good book at the library and rush home with it. And there are a number of them around, according to the mail I get.

CA: Do troubled young people call or write for help?

Cormier: Not very often. When it does happen, it really shakes me up emotionally. I received a phone call last year from a girl in a psychiatric clinic in Connecticut who got a great deal of comfort out of *I Am the Cheese* because she felt that she was without identity, much like Adam, in a world she hadn't made. We spoke for probably a half-hour. Occasionally I'll go into a school and someone will mention a problem. But it's rare. Most of the letters I get are from kids who just want to touch base, and probably want to be writers, so they don't bring up problems. They may say there's a situation in

their school something like one I've written about, but they really don't ask my advice about personal problems.

CA: You were reluctant to do a sequel to The Chocolate War, *but* Beyond the Chocolate War *apparently kept tugging at you. After the second book, do you feel through with the characters and the story?*

Cormier: I thought I was! I wrote *Beyond the Chocolate War* after being badgered by young people for years and years asking what happened to the characters from *The Chocolate War*, and I wanted to find out. I thought I had closed the door on them; by the time I had finished the second book, I was kind of weary of Archie Costello and company. But again they're asking questions. And I'm kind of intrigued with Archie; I sometimes wonder what he would be like a few years into the future—say at twenty-eight. And Jerry Renault still intrigues me. He seemed to develop more for me in the sequel than he did in the original book. It's been on my mind. Who knows? It took me ten years to get around to *Beyond the Chocolate War*. I have no immediate plans for another book on the topic, but I must say those characters are pretty much alive to me. But then some of the characters from the other books are alive to me even now, and I haven't felt any compulsion to write about them.

CA: Maybe that's a sign that they're good characters, they're real.

Cormier: I hope so. There was a very minor character in *The Chocolate War*, Tubs Casper, who appeared for one scene. The kids invariably asked about him and what happened to him, almost to the point of being angry with me for introducing him and not bringing him back. And in a way, even though I felt bad that I hadn't brought him back, it delighted me that the character became so real from that one simple scene. It's great when your characters really have life.

CA: How do you feel about Anne Scott MacLeod's definition, in Children's Literature in Education, *of your novels as "at bottom, political," because you are "far more interested in the systems by which society operates than . . . in individuals"?*

Cormier: First of all, I'm always conscious of being a storyteller, and stories turn on creating real characters. I have themes or issues that I'm interested in as an individual, and if I can bring them into play, fine. Even writing about a chocolate sale in high school, I suddenly realized that I was exploring the abuse of power, intimidation, things like that. But those aren't my primary concerns. I'm always most concerned with the story itself and the people, creating people who really live and affect the reader. A story doesn't work at all unless the character are real. I don't think of myself as a thematic writer or as writing primarily to explore current issues or to expose things going on in the world. This is secondary. And while I hope it's there on a secondary level and can be explored and communicated, I think of myself primarily as a storyteller.

CA: Do you think criticism in the field of young adult literature is generally good?

Cormier: I think there are some very good things being done now. The Twayne series of biographies of young adult writers, of which mine is one, I think is a good step ahead.

The *ALAN Review*, which concentrates on young adult books, has some great articles. *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)* does a fine job. Slowly but surely, I think, the critical writing is becoming much more widespread and better than it was a few years ago. I think the best critical writing is the kind that illuminates the work for the subject. Patricia Campbell did that in her Twayne book; she made some links that surprised me. That kind of criticism is valid, but sometimes I read something I'm very puzzled about, because it wasn't anything that I had in mind. Often critics look for symbolism in things that really don't exist. And yet I think there are some subconscious things that get into the books that I'm probably not even aware of.

CA: Much of the critical writing on your work has dealt with its bleakness, and you have countered the criticism in various ways, depending on the specific circumstances. How would you respond to the charge now, considering the body of your work at this point?

Cormier: I guess my attitude hasn't changed. I've never let the criticism affect my writing. I think there are values in my work that go beyond the bleakness. I'm so used to hearing that criticism, I really don't give it much thought. If I feel I'm doing my job honestly, being faulted for other things doesn't bother me. And I didn't set out to explore a whole bleak landscape in a body of work. When I wrote *The Chocolate War*, I wasn't aware that I was going to write *I Am the Cheese*. I didn't feel the books were that similar when I was writing them. The thing I've always been afraid of is rewriting the same novel; that's why I hesitated to do a sequel to *The Chocolate War*. That's one of the reasons why Jerry was such a problem: I didn't want to bring him back to Trinity, because I thought then I would just be writing *The Chocolate War* all over again. So I've been careful about that, even though people have looked at my writing as a body of work and seen similarities. I try to make each novel as different as possible. But maybe I haven't. It's always how the reader sees it.

The novel that I'm now working on is different from the work that is recent, at least. It's not because I was trying to strike out in any particular direction; it's something that took hold of me emotionally at a particular time in my life. I just go to the typewriter every day, and characters come to life for me to write about.

Source: Jean W. Ross, "Interview with Robert Cormier," in

Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Vol. 23, Gale Research, 1988, pp. 87-94.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Campbell explores how subsequent readings of I Am the Cheese*, while not involving the surprise of a first reading, allow readers to recognize clues and appreciate the literary structure of the novel.*

P: Stop.

R: You mean stop reading?

P: Yes. You, the reader. Right here. First, before you

go on, you must answer one question.

R: What do you want to know?

P: Have you read *I Am the Cheese* yet?

R: No. I thought I'd read this chapter first.

P: That would be a great pity. It would spoil things for you—the suspense, the intriguing perplexities, the myriad shocks of discovery, the false leads—in a word, the fun. I would emphatically advise that you make the journey with Adam before you cover the same ground a second time with me.

R: All right.

P: Excellent. We shall continue afterwards. Let us

suspend now.

END TAPE YAK 001

And so, having finished the book, the reader is irresistibly compelled to turn back to the beginning and, like Adam, begin all over again. The story circles back on itself, revolving like the wheels of a bicycle, like children in a ring playing "The Farmer in the Dell." But for the reader, unlike Adam, each time the experience is different.

The first time through, we know only what Adam knows. Our blank spaces are his, and the truth comes to us—and to him—in a series of disorienting jolts. As the *New York Times* said, "the book is assembled in mosaic fashion: a tiny chip here, a chip there, and suddenly the outline of a face dimly begins to take shape. Everything is related to something else. . . ." But this is far too simple a description. Perry Nodelman, in his incisive article "Robert Cormier Does a Number," has attempted to analyze the complex and unsettling experience of a first reading of *I Am the Cheese*.

A reader's first impulse, Nodelman observes, is to approach the story as a logical, detached detective. The key, it seems, is in understanding the events of the mysterious past. But this leads to anxiety, disorientation, and confusion—"that uncertainty we call suspense"—because the events of the present are not clear. "Since we do not know what effects the mysterious past we are trying to understand led to, we act less with the cool certainty of mystery novel detectives than with the anxiety of confused people asked to think logically about incomplete information. That sounds uncomfortable—and it is. Cormier cleverly makes us accept and enjoy our confusion by providing *one* genuine past . . . and what appear to be *two* different presents that that past led to. . . . With our attention focused on sorting such things out, looking for clues and making guesses, we accept our uncertainty about present circumstances as part of the pleasure of the mystery."

The one possibility that never occurs to us, continues Nodelman, is that both presents are happening at once, that Adam is at the same time on a journey to Rutterburg and being interrogated by Brint. "Cormier cannot allow us to consider it, for it depends on our knowledge that the bike trip is a fantasy, knowledge that is the key to the entire mystery. He deflects our attention from the literal truth of the novel, the impeccably chronological ordering of events that seem to have no chronology, by making them seem to have no chronology. How Cormier manipulates readers into believing the wrong things and ignoring the right ones is fascinating to explore."

A close look at the two opening chapters, first as a novice and then as an experienced reader of *I Am the Cheese*, will illustrate this process. In the beginning we know only that someone is riding a bicycle from Monument to Rutterburg. Who? Why? A young person, evidently, who has been close enough to his father still to want to use an old bike like his, even though it makes him pedal "furiously"—a strangely intense word. The rhythm of the paragraph suggests the steady pumping of his legs. Then the first tiny hint of something sinister: "the wind like a snake slithering up my sleeves." Rutterburg. Is he ill there? Is the journey to visit him? Whatever it is, it must be urgent because the cyclist accelerates his pedaling at the thought. Then another hint of chill—the rotten October. The love of Thomas Wolfe that the cyclist has shared with his father confirms our guess about their relationship, and the elderly phrase used to describe a teacher—"he regarded me with suspicion"—tells us that the person is a student, young but bookish and probably solitary. And he is kind—he waves when he passes a child who looks lonesome. But why does he think someone might be following him? Now he tells us he didn't wave good-bye to anybody when he left on this trip. Why not? Where were they? This is not the kind of person who skips school and goes away without at least telling someone. It doesn't fit. We begin to feel puzzled.

Immediately, Cormier gives us what seems to be an explanation of sorts: the irrational fears, and later, the pills, tell us that the bike rider has emotional problems. But why? Other questions come fast now. What is the gift? Why are his father's clothes in the cellar? If he has money, why doesn't he take the bus?—his reasons ring a bit hollow. Why is it so important that he go on his own power? And why must he do it this way "for his father"? The intensity of his determination seems inappropriate—but perhaps it is a sign of his unbalanced state.

Then another character is introduced: Amy Hertz. She, we know immediately, is a very different kind of person. "What the hell, as Amy says, philosophically." A tough, cocky, self-assured sort of person. The fact that such a girl is the object of the bike rider's love tells us more about his needs (and also confirms that he is a young *man*). But his reasons for not phoning her before he leaves seem logical. When he dumps his pills into the garbage disposal he seems "reckless and courageous" to us as well as to himself, and when a car howls its horn at him "for straying too far into the roadway" we think it is a result of that recklessness. It becomes apparent that the journey is going to be long and grueling, and as the boy struggles through, breaks free, and is off on his way, we are too busy exulting with him to notice that we have been left with a double handful of unanswered questions.

The second chapter clarifies nothing; indeed, it adds a second layer of perplexities. The preceding chapter was in the present tense, and so is this one, at first. Has the boy been in some sort of an accident that has put him here in the hands of a doctor? Or is this even the same boy? Is one of the chapters a flashback to the other? Which? The form is even more puzzling. It seems to be some sort of official record of a tape recording, but for what possible reason can the date have been deleted? Why is the questioner labeled "T" when his name is Brint? Does it stand for "tape"? Or "therapist," perhaps? (Cormier himself has said that he used "T" because it is the *last* letter of Brint's name—but, then, can that statement be part of the Number?) Even for a psychiatrist his speech is strangely stilted and formal: "shall," "I have been advised," and that ominous phrase from the torture chamber, "the better it will be for you." But when the questioning turns to the boy's earliest memories we are on familiar ground again. Isn't that how people always begin with a therapist? Even the sense of menaced flight that pervades the boy's story could be explained by his mental illness, as could his perception of Brint as threatening. Except for two disquieting details: the cigarettes that his father never again smoked, and the way Brint pounces on the word *clues*. When the boy dissolves in panic, almost, but not quite, we believe in Brint's benevolence when he says, " Everything's going to be all right." But there have been no answers to some basic questions, nor will there be any until many, many pages later. As Nodelman says, "novelists usually make us ask such questions at the beginnings of novels, in order to arouse our interest. But they usually quickly answer them, and then focus our attention on new developments . . . In keeping us in the dark . . . Cormier extends throughout most of *I Am the Cheese* the disorientation we usually stop feeling a short way into other novels."

"A second reading . . . is a different experience. Now the novel seems filled with clues, with obvious evidence of what seemed incomprehensible before, and with huge ironies." All of Adam's forgotten past is still available to us, and we can see his buried knowledge at work on the fabric of his fantasy. As he goes about his preparations for the journey to Rutterburg, we also at the same time see him preparing for the ride around the hospital grounds, and we know that the road he will travel in his imagination is the same route he and his parents took on the fatal "vacation" trip, in a different Thomas Wolfe October. This time we know why he doesn't wave good-bye to anyone and why he talks himself out of calling Amy. It is his own loneliness that stands on the sidewalk in the form of a child and his own fear of Them that follows behind invisibly. His fear needs a face, so he

tells himself that he is afraid of elevators, exposed open spaces, rooms without windows, dogs—all animals, in fact, plus snakes and spiders ("they are not rational," he explains later, cryptically). He knows there is good reason for terror, but he dare not give it its true name.

Even though he has money, he must talk himself into pedaling the bike because he is going nowhere there are buses, and he "travels light" because he needs no "provisions or extra clothing" for that trip inside the fence. His father's jacket and cap are, to him, in the basement because that is where he last saw them in his past, even though Dr. Dupont has brought them to him here in the hospital. And Pokey the Pig, who represents the safe comfort of childhood and will be gift-wrapped, is in "the cabinet in the den" where Adam searched for and found the first terrible evidence of his own nonexistence. He dresses in his father's clothes and looks in the mirror as if to bring him back to life. But he must justify it to his conscious mind by remarking how good the cap is for the cold. It is the hospital that has provided him with the mind-clouding green and black capsules that he pours into the sink. And it is the memory of the car that killed his mother that blares past as he leaves the driveway. Only his thoughts of Amy are fresh and clear and not overlaid with anything else.

Now when Adam tells Brint the story of his parents' escape we know why "their voices scratched at the night," why Adam's father never smoked again, why there were purple half-moons under his mother's eyes. The slightly inappropriate word *clues* has, of course, been implanted in his mind by Brint during earlier investigations. When Adam says, "It's as if I was born that night," we appreciate the irony, and when he wants to tell Pokey how brave and clever he has been, we recall with poignance that in the end—and now—there is no one *but* Pokey to listen sympathetically to such confidences. Even the number of the tape—OZK001—is significant. It reminds us of *The Wizard of Oz* and Dorothy's return to Kansas where she, like Adam, is reunited with the real people who appear as fantasy characters in her dream. But Cormier is still not through playing games with us. Adam associates the lilac perfume with his mother—but in the last chapter of the book he has noticed that fragrance in the hallway of the hospital. And we still don't really know why Brint is recorded as "T."

The triple strands that are braided together to make the story, the three alternating levels on which the narrative progresses, are an intricate but internally consistent device. The bike ride is told in first-person present tense. The tapes, as dialogue, have neither person nor tense (but we assume they are happening in the present), and the revelation of Adam's past that grows out of the tapes proceeds chronologically and is in third-person past tense. A slightly confusing factor is that in the early phases of the bike ride Adam enjoys some memories of the warm, safe times of his childhood—and these fit into the chronology of the memories he is sharing with Brint. This is all perfectly clean-cut and clear the second time around, but a first-time reader feels that the events of the story have been scrambled intriguingly.

Of all the sinister characters Cormier has created to embody his ideas about evil, Brint is perhaps the most chilling. Indeed, it is tempting at first to jump to the conclusion, because of his stiffly formal speech, that he is a machine, perhaps some kind of

interrogation computer. Tempting, because the worst thing about Brint, the most appalling realization, is that he *is* (or *was*) a human being, but he has been so corrupted by his immersion in evil that he can sit year after year across from Adam, calmly herding him through lacerating self-discoveries and feeling not one flicker of pity or mercy. Only twice does he seem human, but in both cases it is immediately clear that the pose is a trick. At one point he exclaims about the beauty of the weather—but only to jolly Adam out of a deep withdrawal. Later, when Adam is remembering his father's distrust of Grey, he suddenly sees something in Brint's expression that makes him suspect that he is "one of those men who had been his father's enemy." Brint, realizing that he has almost given himself away, covers quickly. "I am sorry that you were disturbed by the expression on my face. I, too, am human. I have headaches, upset stomach at times. I slept badly last night. Perhaps that's what you saw reflected on my face" But Adam is not entirely convinced. "It's good to find out you're human," he grants uncertainly. "Sometimes I doubt it."

Much of the content of the dialogue portion of the tapes is the progress of Adam's reluctant realization that Brint is his enemy. He wants so much to believe in him as a benevolent father-figure, who has his welfare at heart, that sometimes he even tries to prompt Brint into this role. He wonders aloud why Brint never asks him about his mother, and another time he is a bit hurt when Brint interrupts his reminiscences, and he says plaintively, "You sound impatient. I'm sorry. Am I going into too much detail? I thought you wanted me to discover everything about myself." Later he finally cannot avoid noticing that it is only certain kinds of information that interest his interrogator, although he repeatedly protests that he has only Adam's welfare at heart. But Adam really does know the truth about Brint, and he cannot entirely hide it from himself, even at the beginning. In the second tape he says, "He had a kindly face although sometimes his eyes were strange. The eyes stared at him occasionally as if the doctor—if that's what he was—were looking down the barrel of a gun, taking aim at him. He felt like a target." Adam is completely in Brint's power, both physically and mentally. The windows of the interrogation room are barred; the shots and the pills control his feelings and his mind. To recognize his captor as the enemy is unbearable, and so he pushes away the knowledge as long as he can and tries to find goodness in Brint. And so does the reader. It is this blurring of the distinction between good and evil that gives the tapes their peculiar horror, and that points to the larger theme of the book.

Cormier has had some revealing things to say about Brint. He chose the name, he says, to suggest someone bloodless and cold, to rhyme with *flint* and *glint*. At first he was not sure whether the character was a psychiatrist or not. "But I thought this would be the way it would sound if a character were using a slight knowledge of psychology to take advantage of a situation." Brint's knowledge may be "slight," but he has certainly learned the superficial tricks of the trade, as when he turns Adam's suspicions back on himself by accusing him of attacking his therapist to create a diversion whenever certain buried information is approached. In the Brint/Adam interchange there is a hint of a theme that Cormier was to explore more thoroughly in *After the First Death:*. "Adam comes to him completely innocent in his amnesia, and Brint corrupts that. That's what evil is, the destruction of innocence." Although Cormier emphasizes Brint's machinelike quality by never giving us any description or background, he claims he has a home life

in mind for him. "I picture Brint in a two-car garage, a family, belongs to the Elks. . . . He has this job in an agency where he's got to keep questioning all these people, but at night he leaves the area and goes home and has a regular life. . . ." Somehow the idea of Brint presiding over a suburban household seems like part of the Number. Has Cormier forgotten that Brint is instantly available to Adam in the night? Obviously he sleeps nearby in the hospital, probably in a spartan room where he hangs his impeccable suit neatly in the closet. Then he lies rigidly on a narrow cot all night without rumpling the covers, stretched out on his back with folded arms. He does not allow himself to dream.

At a crucial point in the narrative, Brint lays out some priorities. "Permit me to summarize. The first landmark was that day in the woods with the dog. The second landmark was that call from Amy." The Dog, as both symbol and event, recurs often in Adam's narrative. In the first chapter, the very thought of "all the dogs that would attack me on the way to Rutterburg, Vermont," almost keeps him from setting out on the journey. He keeps an eye out for dogs when he does get on the road, and sure enough, soon he is threatened by one. As soon as we know that the bike trip is unreal, it is clear that this is a dream dog. The breed is German shepherd, a kind of animal associated with official power, police, Nazis. He is black, and, like Brint, he looks at Adam silently "with eyes like marbles." And, contrary to the normal behavior of dogs, he is guarding an empty house where there is no owner to defend. As in a dream, the direct attack is deflected to the tires. The beast tries "to topple the bike, send it askew and have me crashing to the roadway, his victim," just as Brint with his persistent questions tries to topple the delicate structure of defense that allows Adam to delude himself with the imaginary escape of the trip to Rutterburg. Even when Adam has eluded this animal, he has a prophetic feeling "that the dog will pursue me forever."

In the tape immediately following, Adam offers a startling remark. "Maybe the dog is a clue," he says tentatively. It sounds as if he is referring to the dog he has just escaped in the preceding chapter. Is this a link finally between the two separate narrative streams? But the idea is aborted as soon as Adam clarifies his statement: "I thought of the dog when I looked out this morning and saw a dog on the grass." Brint assumes that he is talking about Silver, the dog that experienced readers know is kept on the hospital grounds, and that Adam has been wary of as he returned to reality from the end of his trip. But Silver is the third dog evoked in this conversation, not the second. The dog Adam is recalling is the animal that attacked his father in the woods, a dog that first-time readers have not yet met, except through Adam's fears. Here Cormier achieves an extraordinary effect. The question of which dog is reflection and which dog is real becomes multiplied and confused, and the image is of dogs, single and several, reflected endlessly in a trick mirror. This moment plants a subliminal suggestion that the three strands of narrative are one story, returning to the now double meaning of Adam's casual "Maybe the dog is a clue."

The dog in the woods is, of course, the central dog. This episode has a surreal tone, although it is part of the memories retrieved by Brint's questioning, and therefore true. The battle of the father and the dog is unnecessary to the story line, strictly speaking, but as a metaphor it is a compelling side-trip for Cormier. The key is Adam's description

of the growling dog: "the way it stood there, implacable, blocking their path. There was something threatening about the dog, a sense that the rules didn't apply, like encountering a crazy person and realizing that anything could happen, anything was possible." Implacable, no appeal, like the forces that have trapped Adam—and in memory he savors his father's courage in battle and his victory.

And finally, it is a dog that brings the whole complex narrative structure down to one focus. As Adam returns sadly and quietly from his long trip, he wheels through the grounds of "the hospital" and is met by a kindly doctor. Has he at last broken free and come to a safe place? But as soon as he meets Silver in the hall, the momentary hope is blasted. We have seen Silver before, through the window of Brint's office, and we know now without a doubt that Adam has never left the place of interrogation.

Brint's second landmark is the call from Amy. The reader, like Brint, suspects that there was more to this incident than met Adam's ear. "Was Amy part of the conspiracy?" is a frequent question in Cormier's mail. The letter writers wonder shrewdly if she was prompted by the enemy to probe Adam's past, or if perhaps the name "Hertz" is meant to suggest that she "hurts" him. This Cormier denies emphatically. Amy is innocent and, as Adam wished, quite separate from the structure of intrigue, and the reason she is no longer there after three years is not that the enemy got her, but simply that her family moved away. Actually, Amy is the opposite of hurtful to Adam. She, as he says, "brought brightness and gaiety to his life." Cormier introduced her out of compassion for his protagonist: "I was conscious that Adam was leading a very drab life—his father a shadow, his mother withdrawn, and he was introverted—and I thought, this is getting pretty dull. So I introduced her to liven up the book, to give him a little love and affection, and, of course, instantly I fell in love with her." As Cormier's female characters often do, Amy led her creator pages and pages out of the way into episodes that had to be discarded later.

Amy, with her quick imagination, her antic sense of humor, her tender toughness and her nonchalance, is truly a charming creation. But what lies behind that toughness? Does her mother's preoccupation with committee work have something to do with it? We see her only through Adam's adoring eyes, but actually all is not well with Amy's soul. Amy, like Adam, is an outsider, a loner. Her Numbers have more than a little anger in them; they are not funny to the victims. Sometimes they have a strained quality, like the caper in the church parking lot, or depend for their effect on an enigmatic quirk of thought, like the cartful of baby-food jars left in front of the Kotex display in the supermarket. She really needs Adam to laugh with her. There is nobody else in the audience.

To Adam, the Numbers are "heady and hilarious but somehow terrible." To defy authority is foreign to his nature. But through his participation in the Numbers he gains the courage to investigate the mysteries about his past. "I, too, am capable of mischief," he thinks as he eavesdrops on his father and Mr. Grey. Thoughts of Amy give him courage on the bike ride, too. "What the hell, as Amy would say," he tells himself. Her last real words to Adam are a casual "Call me," and throughout his eternal bike rides he tries. Or thinks he tries. He makes excuses, or he calls at the wrong time, or he hangs up

because the wise guys are approaching. He really knows that after three years Amy Hertz has disappeared from his life, and there is no comfort to be found at 537-3331. When he does finally make the connection with that number the Number is over, and it is the beginning of the end of his illusion.

Adam is to some extent based on Cormier himself as a boy. Not only his fears and phobias and migraines, but his personality and ambitions recall Cormier at fourteen. He is shy and book-loving, and home is a warm, safe retreat from a hostile world where wise guys lie in wait at every corner. Like Jerry in *The Chocolate War*, he knows only too well the scenario that begins "You lookin' for trouble?" Cormier betrayed in the operating room is vividly evoked when Adam says, "I don't like to be confined or held down. My instinct, then, is to get up on my feet, flailing my arms at anything that might try to hold me down, confine me." When Adam explains the writer inherent in his attitude toward life, it is also the young Cormier speaking: "Anyway, his terrible shyness, his inability to feel at ease with people, had nothing to do with his mother. He felt it was his basic character; he preferred reading a book or listening to old jazz records in his bedroom than going to dances or hanging around downtown with the other kids. Even in the fourth or fifth grade, he had stayed on the outskirts of the school-yard watching the other kids playing the games—Kick the Can was a big thing in the fourth grade—anyway, he had never felt left out: it was his choice. To be a witness, to observe, to let the events be recorded within himself on some personal film in some secret compartment no one knew about, except him. It was only later, in the eighth grade, when he knew irrevocably that he wanted to be a writer, that he realized he had stored up all his observations, all his emotions, for that purpose." And there is poignance for Cormier in the closeness and deep affection Adam feels for his parents, especially the warm glow of love at the last supper at the Red Mill—just before his father's death.

Between creator and creation there is an ironic contrast in one respect. "I'm not built for subterfuge and deception," says Adam. It is this quality that makes him a too-perfect subject for interrogation. Because he is so guileless, they—who are so complex in evil that they cannot comprehend simple honesty—persist in thinking he must be hiding something. Again and again he willingly turns the pockets of his mind inside out for them, but they still suspect he has something up his sleeve. It occurs to him to hold back, but he always ends by telling all.

His resistance has been channeled in other directions. The fantasy bike ride is Adam's gesture of defiance in the face of the Implacable. This explains the fierce intensity of his determination to make the journey "for my father," and the inevitability he feels in the beginning about his decision to go—"I knew I would go the way you know a stone will drop to the ground if you release it from your hand." Like Jerry, his gesture is stub born and half-aware, not the grand, controlled action of a hero. "I am a coward, really," he admits, but in the refrain "I keep pedaling" there is persistent courage. Adam must repeatedly overcome obstacles and break through his fears, but each time he does he can soar for a moment and he finds new hope and strength.

As in dreams real emotions are translated into fantasy people and events, so as the bike ride progresses Adam's hidden awareness of the menace all around him begins to

come to the forefront of his mind and take on personification, shape, and form as Whipper and the wise guys, as Fat Arthur and Junior Varney, as snarling dogs and the terrible ferocious vomit-pink car with the grinning grille. Meanwhile in the interrogations he is bringing to consciousness memories that bleed their terror into his secret life of the mind so that he is less and less able to sustain the fantasy. As he approaches the final truth, his newly discovered knowledge of the amount of time that has passed intrudes into the dream in a collision of logics. When he gets to the motel where he and his parents spent a safe night "last summer" he finds it "feels as if it has been neglected for years and years." The effect is eerily disorienting. One last time he tries to call Amy, but the gruff man on the phone and his own mind tell him she is gone; he is no longer able to delude himself with hopes of her comfort or with the defiant illusion of escape. He wants to wake up—"I would give anything to be folded into bed, the pills working their magic, soothing me"—and in a moment he does. The dream begins to smear and waver like the woman's face through the wet wind shield. Everything slows down; sounds are distorted, like a movie in a disintegrating projector. The darkness gathers him. Yet still—on a first reading—still we believe this is reality.

Like Amy, Cormier "always withholds information about the Numbers until the last possible moment, stretching out the drama." Even here at the end, there is one last tiny gleam of false hope. We think Adam has arrived in Rutterburg at last. Then he turns the corner and sees the hospital, and as he greets one by one the people from his fantasy the shattering truth crashes down. For the first time he sings the *last* verse of "The Farmer in the Dell." The cheese stands alone, and he is the cheese.

The final tape, with its cold, bureaucratic verdict, has been the subject of much speculation. With a little study, a key can be puzzled out:

Subject A—Adam

Personnel #2222—Thompson, or Grey

File Data 865-01—the record of Adam's father's testimony and subsequent official events related to it,

OZK Series—the interrogation tapes between Adam and Brint

Department 1-R—the government agency to which Adam's father testified

Tape Series ORT, UDW—the tapes of Adam's two previous interrogations

Witness #559-6—Adam's father

Policy 979—a rule that "does not currently allow termination procedures by Department 1-R"

And Department l-R, notice, is the agency to whom Adam's father gave his witness, presumably the good guys, but it is *they* who have imprisoned Adam, and they who are

being asked to "obliterate" him. Who, then, are the Adversaries? And Grey? Up to now, it has seemed that it was Grey's legs that Adam saw as he lay on the ground after the crash, but was that just because that person wore gray pants? And Grey, remember, did not "necessarily" wear gray clothes.

Even Cormier's own words from the answer sheet he mails to questioners do not completely clear up the ambiguity: "Grey was not part of the syndicate. He was not a double agent in the usual sense, although he double-crossed Adam's father, setting him up for the syndicate and the accident. He was present at the scene to clean up afterward, but hadn't counted on Adam's survival—an embarrassment to the agency." So whose side is he on? In terms of Adam's future, it matters not at all. As Anne MacLeod puts it, "the two systems are equally impersonal, and equally dangerous to the human being caught between them. What matters to the organization—*either* organization—is its own survival, not Adam's." In the third chapter the old man at the gas station has asked Adam, "Do you know who the bad guys are?" He doesn't and neither do we. What is so overwhelming here is not just that evil is powerful, but that the good guys and the bad guys turn out to be—probably—indistinguishable. It is not a matter of good against evil, but of the cheese standing alone against everything, his whole world revealed at last as evil. Where now is Cormier's imperative for collective good? There is nobody left to come to his rescue. This is not a metaphor. MacLeod says, "This stark tale comments directly on the real world of government, organized crime, large-scale bureaucracy, the apparatus of control, secrecy, betrayal, and all the other commonplaces of contemporary political life." We could all be the cheese.

"A magnificent accomplishment," said *Hornbook*. "Beside it, most books for the young seem as insubstantial as candyfloss," said the *Times Literary Supplement*. "The secret, revealed at the end, explodes like an H-bomb," said *Publishers Weekly*. "A masterpiece," said *West Coast Review of Books*. The *New York Times Book Review* and the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association both included it on their respective lists of best books of the year for young people. But Newgate Callendar wondered in the *New York Times* if the book might turn out to be "above the heads of most teen-agers." Cormier, too, was afraid that he was in danger of losing his newfound young adult audience.

The book had begun as a time-filler. "Sometimes when there's nothing that's compelling, I do exercises. So I put a boy on a bike and had him take off on a Wednesday morning with a box on his bike. Then right away I wondered, what's he doing out of school on a Wednesday morning, where's he going, what's in the package? . . . I started to give him a lot of my own fears, phobias . . . And I wrote virtually all of the bike part without knowing where it was going." For a while he searched for a second level among religious themes of pilgrimage, the Stations of the Cross, death and resurrection. Then one day, "across my desk at the newspaper . . . came this thing about the Witness Relocation Program. This was at a time when very little was known about it." He began to wonder about the hardships of giving up a past, and "then it struck me, . . . how much harder for a teen, who doesn't even know who he is yet!" He knew he had found his second level. He went back to the bike ride to make it fit. The creation of *I Am the Cheese* was a very intense experience for him. "During the time I was writing the book,

no one saw any part of it. I felt like the mad doctor in a laboratory, because I didn't think it would ever work, yet I felt compelled to write it. It was coming out at breakneck speed." "I still picture Adam riding that bike around the institution grounds, as real now as the day I discovered him."

To those who wonder if there have been political repercussions Cormier says, "I know it's critical of government, yet I think the strength of our government is that you *can* be critical of it, because there are so many good things about it, like the very fact that I can write this book." "Believe me, if we did not have a good government, I might have been jailed or my book censored before it ever hit the stores." Or perhaps the CIA and the Mafia don't read young adult literature.

Source: Patricia J. Campbell, "*I Am the Cheese*," in *Presenting Robert Cormier*, Dell Publishing, 1985, pp. 80-95.

Adaptations

I Am the Cheese is available as an unabridged audio book from Recorded Books, LLC. It was produced in 1994 and narrated by J. Woodman and J. Randolph Jones.

I Am the Cheese was adapted as a commercial motion picture in 1983. Directed by Robert Jiras, the film stars Robert Wagner as Brint.

Topics for Further Study

If you were making a film version of *I Am the Cheese*, whom would you cast to play the part of Brint and how would you tell him to behave during his interrogations of Adam? Would you have him look menacing, or completely innocent? Would you make him clearly evil or kind, or would you leave room for the audience to wonder about his intentions?

When *I Am the Cheese* was first published in 1977, some parents and teachers worried that the unhappy ending would be frightening and inappropriate for young adult readers. They also felt that the language and violence were inappropriate. Compare the novel to other books you have read or to movies or television shows you have seen. What age group do you think the book is best suited for? Explain your reasoning.

I Am the Cheese is considered a novel specifically for young adults. What parts of the book make it especially appropriate for this audience? How do you think adults would respond to the novel?

Research the psychological concept of repression. Why might Adam have a hard time remembering what happened to his parents? What kinds of medicine and other treatments might he be receiving to help him recover?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: The federal Witness Protection Program is new, and not many citizens have factual information about it. Its workings are mysterious, and the program itself seems more the material of fiction than of real life.

Today: The witness protection program is frequently depicted in novels and films. Although most people still do not have any real knowledge of the program, the fact that it exists does not seem remarkable or frightening.

1970s: Because of the Vietnam War and the Watergate incident with its revelation of deceit at the highest levels of government, the American people are distrustful of their government in a way that they have never been before. Cynicism like that experienced and described by Robert Cormier reaches new levels.

Today: Many people assume that politicians and government leaders are not completely honest, but this dishonesty does not frighten them as it once did. Surveys reveal that this lack of trust creates feelings of disengagement rather than fear.

1970s: The technology of the day makes it easier for the Farmers to keep their secret. Mr. Farmer keeps his secret documents in a locked drawer, not on a computer, and there is no Internet to help Adam look up old records. As he bikes along, Adam knows he must wait for the next town with a pay phone to call Amy.

Today: Computers, cell phones, mini cameras, and other technologies are found in many middle class homes like that of the Farmers.

What Do I Read Next?

The Chocolate War (1974) was Cormier's first novel for young adults. With its disturbing ending in which the lone hero does not win against evil forces, it caused a controversy similar to that caused by *I Am the Cheese*.

In *Fade* (1988), Cormier presents another three-part structure and another story of hidden identity. The first third of the novel is based on Cormier's own life as a small-town New England boy in the 1930s.

Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev* (1972) is a novel about a Hasidic Jewish boy growing up in Brooklyn. A loner who shares Adam Farmer's desire to become a writer, Asher finds that his artistic impulses put him in conflict with his family and his community.

Where the Lilies Bloom (1969), by Vera Cleaver and Bill Cleaver, is a novel about a family of orphan children in Appalachia who keep their father's death a secret so they will not be split up. The second-oldest child, the young teen Mary Call, struggles to keep her family together against challenges posed by the adults in her life.

WITSEC: Inside the Federal Witness Protection Program (2002) is written by Pete Earley and also by Gerald Shur, the federal attorney who created the program. Through the examples of many people who have been relocated through the program, the book reveals some cases gone awry and also many successes, but none of the duplicity hinted at in *I Am the Cheese*.

Further Study

Keeley, Jennifer, *Understanding "I Am the Cheese,"* Lucent Books, 2001.

Part of Lucent's Understanding Great Literature series, this volume is geared toward a younger audience than the Twayne volumes. This book includes an illustrated biography, a plot summary, character sketches, analysis, excerpts from reviews, and an annotated bibliography.

Nodelman, Perry, "Robert Cormier Does a Number," in *Children's Literature in Education*, Summer 1983, pp. 94-103.

Nodelman offers a reader-response analysis of *I Am the Cheese*, tracing his own reactions to unfolding elements in the novel. He shows how Cormier intentionally tricks the reader into misinterpreting what is going on until the horrible truth is revealed at the end.

Silvey, Anita, "An Interview with Robert Cormier," in the *Horn Book Magazine*, March/April 1985, pp. 145-55, and May/June 1985, pp. 289-96.

Spread over two issues, much of this interview focuses on Cormier's fifth young adult novel, which is

Beyond the Chocolate War (1985). Along the way, it offers a detailed look at Cormier's writing process and includes reproductions of several manuscript pages showing Cormier's editing and revising marks.

Sutton, Roger, "Kind of a Funny Dichotomy: A Conversation with Robert Cormier," in *School Library Journal*, June 1991, pp. 28-33.

This interview was conducted soon after Cormier was announced as the winner of the third Margaret A. Edwards Award for young adult authors. Cormier discusses the contrast between the pessimism in his books and the optimism that was a cornerstone of his own life, and he explains how his Catholic faith shaped his world view.

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Lukens, Rebecca, "From Salinger to Cormier: Disillusionment to Despair in Thirty Years," in *Webs and Wardrobes*, edited by Joseph O'Beirne Milner and Lucy Floyd Morcock Milner, University Press of America, 1987, p. 13.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

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

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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