One Man's Meat Study Guide

One Man's Meat by E. B. White

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This book is a series of monthly columns written by E.B. White for Harper's magazine and The New Yorker magazine. The columns are intended to provide readers with information about White's experiences living on a saltwater farm in Maine.

White had worked for several years for The New Yorker magazine and makes the decision to move his wife and son from Manhattan to North Brooklin, Maine, in 1938, to experience a rural lifestyle on a working farm. White continues to write through the columns, and his wife, Katherine, also works in publishing, working at their farmhouse and using the U.S. mail for correspondence instead of going into an office.

In the opening columns of the book, White's transition from city life to a rural life is evident as he tries to decide which pieces of the household to sell and how to divest himself of the trappings of city life. Getting established in the Maine farmhouse is relatively easy as White determines the best way to write for a sophisticated magazine while also needing to tend to chickens and other farm work. White does not struggle long with the transition, however, and his delight in simple, rural pleasures and the satisfaction of manual labor soon become evident in his more relaxed style.

The book has a variety of content ranging from the activities demanded of a farmer in his everyday work to the musings about world powers during the period preceding the outbreak of World War II. Throughout the book White also draws parallels and differences between his peaceful farm life with the growing discontent in Europe in the years leading up to and including the first months of World War II. Prior to the war, White's columns are tinged with thoughts of dictators and occupied countries but as the war progresses, White admits to feeling ashamed that his thoughts are no longer consumed with the plight of the people in the war-torn countries.

White's writing shows him to be a sentimental man with a love for nostalgia and things of the earth. In fact, White is glad when his manual labor takes him away from his obligations of writing even if for a little while. White tries to pass on his love of the land and for the country to his son and there are mentions of conversations and purchased baseball gloves all dedicated to bonding with his only child. White makes brief mentions of his wife, Katherine, but neither she nor their son is a main topic in the columns.

White is very educated with a sophisticated wit but also very down to earth and humble. While his metropolitan friends warn him not to get too provincial in the country he silently wonders if he can save them from becoming too citified. White, however, moves about in both city and country life with ease and rubs elbows with intellectuals in New York City as well as men who fish for lobster to make a living. White's natural inquisitiveness makes him a great writer and excellent storyteller about a relatively uncomplicated life in a very complicated period in world history.

Removal, The Summer Catarrh, Incoming Basket, Security and Clear Days

Removal, The Summer Catarrh, Incoming Basket, Security and Clear Days Summary and Analysis

This book is a series of monthly columns written by E.B. White for Harper's magazine and The New Yorker magazine. The columns are intended to provide readers with information about White's experiences living on a saltwater farm in Maine.

In 1938, E.B. White sells half his household possessions and moves his wife and son to their farm in Maine. White has mixed feelings as the items are sold off and remnants of his life are scattered. This is especially trying for White who loves order and is constantly straightening rugs and pictures hanging on walls in the new house.

In the next article, it is July of 1938 and White tells of the severity of the hay fever which he has in common with Daniel Webster, one of America's most eloquent politicians of the nineteenth century. White sympathizes with Webster in their shared misery of the complications of nasal allergy problems and notes that the obstructions of an allergic system are powerful enough to prevent men's dreams from being fulfilled.

White attempts to set up an office in the Maine house so that he may still write his columns with some sort of professionalism and is perplexed when the usual IN and OUT basket procedure on which he thrived in New York City is superfluous in his quiet space. White settles for one basket which he will consider to be IN items because only ten percent of items are ever considered for the OUT basket.

In another column White tells about going to the county fair and watching the people who brave the Ferris wheel ride for a few minutes of windswept freedom. Back at home, White calculates that it costs him $402.85 to maintain one turkey on his farm, a fact he investigates when learning that farm income for the country in 1938 will amount to about seven and a half billion dollars.

In "Clear Days" White is conflicted by the pervasive activity of local deer hunting with the news that Walt Disney is working on an animated film about a cute little deer named Bambi. White also ponders the state of the world with the rising prominence of Fascism and Nazism as he works on putting new shingles on his barn roof. He feels that this is as good a perspective as any from which a person can have clarity on all sorts of issues. Overall, White is pleased with his new agricultural life and finds himself becoming more of a farmer each day.

This book is a series of monthly columns written by E.B. White for Harper's magazine and The New Yorker magazine. White had been a writer for The New Yorker magazine and moved his wife and son from Manhattan to North Brooklin, Maine, in 1938, to experience a rural lifestyle on a working farm. In the opening columns of the book, White's transition from city life to a rural life is evident as he tries to decide which pieces of the household to sell and then how to write for a sophisticated magazine while also needing to tend to chickens and other farm work. White does not struggle long with the transition, however, and his delight in simple, rural pleasures and the satisfaction of manual labor soon become evident in his more relaxed style. Throughout the book White also draws parallels and differences between his peaceful farm life with the growing discontent in Europe in the years leading up to World War II.

Children's Books, Progress and Change, Salt Water Farm, Sabbath Morn and Education

Children's Books, Progress and Change, Salt Water Farm, Sabbath Morn and Education Summary and Analysis

White's wife, Katherine, also works in publishing and she receives hundreds of children's books by publishers seeking her review. The books are overrunning the White household and White is amused by some of the titles and topics ranging from the boyhood adventures of U.S. presidents to the chronicles of a bumblebee. White comes to the conclusion that it would probably be a lot of fun to write for children.

In Progress and Change, White learns that the Sixth Avenue El in New York City is being demolished. This leads White to ponder all the days he spent riding the train complete with its unmistakable sounds and the myriad of people as fellow passengers. White also thinks about other so-called improvements in life such as railroad cars, new plumbing and croquet sets and is not at all convinced that improvements to these objects is any better or enhances the experience of the users.

Salt Water Farm describes White's farm located on the seacoast of Maine. White is amazed at the breadth of his expansive farm which begins with the rhubarb patch planted close to the house and extends past the blueberry and cranberry bogs out into the shoreline to find clams, flounder and lobster. White believes his personality is perfectly suited for being a maritime agriculturalist that is stifled by the confinements of a typical farm with neatly squared-off plots of land.

In Sabbath Morn, White compares his Sunday morning rituals with those carried out in Sunday morning church services. A church service on the radio punctuates White's morning routine and he interjects passages into the narrative. The Whites do not attend church regularly but have gone when their son was interested. White feels that the church is "painfully unimaginative in its attempt to perpetuate a faith that has been gutted by so many fires."

In Education, White praises the merits of the teacher in the country school whose scope of work is dramatically different from city counterparts. The country teacher not only must teach but also cook lunch on the same wood stove that heats the room, cleans the room and become confidantes to each of her pupils. White and his wife had worried about their son's transition from a New York City school to this one-roomed school but he makes the adjustment quickly and is anxious to return each day.

This section holds some foreshadowing for White when he talks about his interest in children's books and the satisfaction that must come with publishing for children. White will go on to write two very famous children's books, Charlotte's Web and Stuart Little which are still popular today.

A Week in April, Movies, A Boston Terrier, The World of Tomorrow and Walden

A Week in April, Movies, A Boston Terrier, The World of Tomorrow and Walden Summary and Analysis

White notes some of the occurrences that take place during one week in April 1939. The activities range from the death of a neighbor to the visit of Austrian friends to the slow creeping in of spring to a winter weary landscape.

In Movies, White states that there are no movie theaters in his Maine village but he keeps abreast of films by reading Motion Picture magazine. He wonders why Hollywood filmmakers insist on portraying ordinary life in circumstances that are far better than those experienced by regular people. This is especially evident in the movie called "Dark Victory" in which Bette Davis plays a woman who relinquishes her wealth to move to the country to be with her physician husband. The home portrayed as downsized to the movie character is considered by White to be quite comfortable and well above what most people would consider sumptuous.

In A Boston Terrier, White notes that a Camel cigarette ad says, "A dog's nervous system resembles our own." This statement is accompanied by an image of a relaxed Boston Terrier. White once had a Boston Terrier who acted in complete opposition to this image in spite of all his attempts at calming the dog. White is complimentary about a dog's loyalty and steadfast focus on its life purpose but the dogs he has known never behave like the ones promoted in advertising.

White visits the World's Fair in The World of Tomorrow and enthusiastically views the exhibits and displays purporting the future of daily life. White feels he is too practical to expect all the inventions to ever come true and he views his experience as a lovely dream just like any day at a carnival or fair.

White writes an imaginary letter to Henry David Thoreau in Walden. It is June 1939 and White has taken a trip to Concord, Massachusetts, where he stops by to visit Walden Pond, the historic site of Thoreau's elemental living experience in the nineteenth century. White feels himself in communion with Thoreau in spite of markers of present day life including some broken beer bottles and a "No Bathing" sign. At the end of the day, White totals his expenses at $7.70 which he notes as almost the total amount Thoreau had spent for food during his eight-month experience in the woods.

In spite of his now rural lifestyle, White is intent on staying current on world events and takes pleasure in reading about new films and visiting the World's Fair. White is an extremely curious man and it seems as if no topic is too menial for his interest, even for

just a short while. These are typically characteristics of a good writer who longs to know about many things to store in his personal database of information which may come into use for future projects or to help him view the world from a different perspective from others.

Hot Weather, Camp Meeting, Second World War, First World War and Poetry

Hot Weather, Camp Meeting, Second World War, First World War and Poetry Summary and Analysis

It is July 1939 and the hot weather gives White the feeling of languid sadness when people disappear from their usual environments to find more comfortable surroundings. One bright spot during the sweltering heat is the gift of a baby seagull given to White by Mr. Dameron. The gull adopts White enthusiastically as his parent and White dotes on the small creature and hopes he can see it fly majestically one day.

In Camp Meeting White attends a Methodist revival in the woods to hear the speaker, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, talk about his financial plan for taking care of the elderly in the United States. White is somewhat interested in the topic but finds it interesting that Townsend delivers his material without hesitation but falters under the scrutiny of the rugged Maine residents in the audience. In the end, White knows that Townsend's plan sounds intriguing but will not hold water among these stalwart residents known for their practicality.

In Second World War, it is September 1939 and White accompanies Mr. Dameron on a day of lobster fishing. White marvels at the rigors of Dameron's work but also at the fact that Dameron is a completely free individual, a fact of which he is mildly envious. White also receives a letter from a reader who attempted the transition from city life to country life and finds it very difficult. White retains the letter to remind himself of the fallacy of a simple country life because he is busier now than at any other time in his life and he is also happier.

In First World War, White provides some excerpts of his diary as a young man and his angst over whether or not to join the army during World War I. White opts for attending college and registers for the draft in September 1918 when he is eligible. The end of the war in November of that year precludes White from seeing any military action and White is conflicted by his feelings of wanting to serve but not having been able to do so.

In Poetry, Katherine struggles with the obscurity of poetry and White provides the reader with his own thoughts on the topic. White thinks that some poets intentionally like to confuse the reader because most people are impressed by what they do not understand, but there are those who simply cannot communicate simply. Both White and his wife agree that poets could be clearer which would probably improve their readership.

In his columns, White does more than simply report the activities of his farm life; he also writes with humor and with literary mechanisms such as metaphors and similes. For example, when White writes, "...on beaches where the bathhouses smelled of sour

towels and yesterday's levity," (Page 71), he provides a figurative way to tell the reader about the lingering odors and sounds of laughter that remain long after the swimmers have gone. In another instance he writes, "Dameron's whole boat smelled of independence—a rich blend of independence and herring bait" (Page 82). Obviously, independence does not have an aroma but White wants the reader to imagine the freedom experienced by Dameron which mingles with the smells of the boat and the ocean.

The Flocks We Watch by Night, Report, Fro-Joy, Farm Paper and Town Meeting

The Flocks We Watch by Night, Report, Fro-Joy, Farm Paper and Town Meeting Summary and Analysis

White and his neighbor, Charles, share their pastures for their sheep so that the animals can get the best feeding available. One day Charles comes for one of his ewes because she has a cough. It takes both Charles and White, accompanied by the frantic pacing of White's dachshund, to corner the sheep and wrestle her into submission. In between the grunts of the struggling men, they discuss the day's events and eventually end up at Charles' house smoking cigarettes.

In Report it is December 1939 and White is taking stock of his cultural and agricultural state of affairs for the year. Among the farm animals are sheep, pullets, geese, roosters, a dog, a tomcat, a pig and a captive mouse. Produce includes apples, pumpkins, squash, potatoes, beets, jams, jellies and preserves. During the year White estimates catches of 200 pounds of cod and haddock, 150 pounds of mackerel and 200 pounds of cunner and Pollack. White also attends the town hall meeting in the village and is happy to report that all is well managed in town as it is on his farm.

In Fro-Joy, White and his wife set out in their car on a snowy morning to find a neighbor willing to lend a horse and sleigh for a ride but no one is available and the waning hours of the day put an end to their romantic notion. White wonders if the nostalgia associated with things like sleigh rides is just sentimental drivel or whether progress is really progress at all. Automation and so-called improvements in everyday business and homes has certainly changed the landscape of lifestyles, but White is not so sure it is a view worth seeing.

In Farm Paper White faithfully reads the agricultural bulletins that come to the house because he constantly finds nuggets of valuable information in them. White especially enjoys reading The Rural New Yorker even though geographically he knows he should probably subscribe to the New England Homestead. White himself is amused by his interest in the articles of obscure farming hints and help.

White addresses the topic of privacy in Town Meeting where he talks about the considerable opposition to a new upcoming government census. White feels that people have a right to be stirred up about surrendering their private information. White is particularly annoyed by automobile license plates that are one part identification and another part promotion such as Wisconsin's plates which say "America's Dairyland" and Maine's plates bearing the word "Vacationland." Living in Maine, White finds this especially irritating because people who live in Maine work very hard and do not find their lives to be vacations at all.

White is a man who has a vast curiosity about many topics and a contradiction sometimes. He is at times adventurous and willing to explore new concepts and perspectives and then at other times he does not feel as if some of the progress made in America is progress worth having. Perhaps this is because White is an intellectual whose pursuits are more internally gratifying instead of a businessman whose eye is always on the bottom line profits. In any case, White does like his world to be orderly and likes to stay current on topics which will make his everyday life more efficient.

A Shepherd's Life, Compost, Freedom, The Practical Farmer and Sanitation

A Shepherd's Life, Compost, Freedom, The Practical Farmer and Sanitation Summary and Analysis

White reveals the unexpected emotional investment he has in his small herd of sheep. This comes as a surprise to White who had expected that he would provide for the sheep and they would self manage. However, White finds himself nervous when new lambs are about to be born and is drawn into both the physical and emotional aspects of the birthing process.

In Compost, it is June 1940 and White is distracted by the news from the Battle of France and he apologizes to the reader for his choppy thoughts and writing style. In that vein, White writes that nothing can be worked out to the advantage of the human race as long as men's minds are restricted by current boundaries. Hitler has been able to succeed because he is able to see the world as a whole and is not hampered by any limiting thoughts. According to White, Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, has been so successful because it is so forthright without restrictions.

In Freedom, White declares his love for freedom and berates those who are inclined to think positively about the results brought about by fascism and dictators. White states that he has always had a wonderful relationship with freedom which emanates both from spiritual and natural sources for him. White admits that he is not anxious to change the world as that is happening rapidly already but he wants the reader to understand that the true free spirit of man can never be eradicated.

In The Practical Farmer, White is given a book entitled Practical Farming for Beginners by his publishers and he shares what he thinks are their thoughts that White may not fully comprehend his situation of being a city dweller now living in a rural area. White is perfectly happy to postpone his editorial duties in favor of farm work and is grateful for the book even though he suspects that the publishers view him as more of an intellectual than a laborer.

In Sanitation, White shares his thoughts that children are taught many things he does not believe in but are not taught many things in which he does believe. For example, parents teach cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene to the point that a child believes that every scratch needs the serious attention of iodine and bandages, leading the child to react to every minor crisis in his life in a similar overreacting manner.

Although White is writing newspaper columns, he incorporates some literary techniques such as figurative language. For example, when White writes about people's changing attitudes during the war he says, "...it seemed to me that people had remodeled their ideas too—taken in their convictions a little at the waist, shortened the sleeves of their

resolve, and fitted themselves out in a new intellectual ensemble copied from a smart design out of the very latest page of history" (Freedom, Page 133). Obviously, convictions cannot be adjusted like a waistband and resolve cannot be shortened like sleeves but White uses these metaphors so that the reader can easily grasp his meaning by comparing them to actions familiar to all readers.

Motor Cars, Maine Speech, Lime, Dog Training and The Wave of the Future

Motor Cars, Maine Speech, Lime, Dog Training and The Wave of the Future Summary and Analysis

White bemoans the decline of automobiles whose designers seem more intent on aesthetic improvements than mechanical ones. White likens the public's passivity to these unnecessary changes to the inevitable union of democracies in the world only after millions have died for the design of nationalism.

In Maine Speech, White tells the reader that his speech patterns and the sounds of his words are evolving to sound like a native Maine resident. In spite of his adaptations, White says, "Persons who are not native to this locality are 'from away.' We are from away ourselves, and always will be, even if we live here the rest of our lives. You've got to be born here—otherwise you're from away" (Maine Speech, Page 155).

In Lime, White is conflicted by his acceptance of three tons of lime to spread on his fields. The lime delivery is part of President Roosevelt's New Deal program to help farmers alkalize their fields, and in turn, keep providing for the country. White is grateful for the lime but also resents it because he does not like being obligated to anyone and he knows that not all the citizens of the U.S. approve of the lime distribution, a fact which does not ease White's mind.

In Dog Training, White receives a book entitled Dog Training Made Easy which he thinks is hysterical in context of training his high energy dachshunds. White thinks he should write a book about his dogs; especially his dachshund named Fred who both completely understands White's words and also holds them in complete contempt.

It is December 1940 in The Wave of the Future White comments on Anne Morrow Lindbergh's book The Wave of the Future. White is outraged at Lindbergh's isolationist position in the book regarding world events during World War II and resolutely determines that he will fight with whatever powers he has to preserve democracy over dictatorship.

White's writing style is quite engaging in his columns both because he writes about the extraordinary in ordinary circumstances and also because his common touch through humor is universal to all readers. One example of his humor pertains to his interactions with Fred, a willful dachshund well aware of his own worth. "When I address Fred I never have to raise either my voice or my hopes. He even disobeys me when I instruct him in something that he wants to do. And when I answer his peremptory scratch at the door and hold the door open for him to walk through, he stops in the middle and lights a cigarette, just to hold me up" (Dog Training, Page 160). Instead of anger, White realizes Fred's personality and humors him and also provides humor for the reader.

A Winter Diary, On a Florida Key, The Trailer Park, Spring and My Day

A Winter Diary, On a Florida Key, The Trailer Park, Spring and My Day Summary and Analysis

White provides details on a week's activities during January 1941. These activities range from plowing out his driveway with a new homemade plow to taking his son to the doctor in a faraway town. The family cannot return home due to a big snowfall and seeks shelter at Mrs. Wilson's rooming house in the village of China. The Whites return home the next day and find their land covered in a picturesque snow setting.

In On a Florida Key, White writes his column from a beach cottage painted tropical colors and on whose floor sand settles in under a straw mat. White ponders the irony of an orange which is stamped "Color Added" and thinks it impudent of man to even consider dying the fruit to be what is considered to be the proper color of an orange. Overall, though, White enjoys his Florida visit and finds it a pleasant respite from the news of the turmoil in the world.

In The Trailer Park, White considers the impact of a world federation of democracies and conducts an impromptu survey of residents of a Florida trailer park. White briefly interviews seven people and the results are: four people in favor of uniting the world's democracies and three people against the proposition. White begins a preamble to his mock Constitutional amendment and writes, "We, the people of this small world," I began, "in order to form a more perfect union and before things get too tough..." (Page 185).

In Spring, it is now April 1941, and White notes several indicators of the coming Spring season including the breeding of one of his hogs to the eating of homemade syrup on his pancakes thanks to the running of the sap in the maple trees. White also spends considerable time tending the brooder stove in the chicken house; almost as if he mimics the mother hen tending her new chicks.

In My Day White provides the details of a typical June day on his farm from awakening at six o'clock A.M. to tending to a wounded sheep and then transporting his son's classmates to a school picnic. White returns home where he delights in stewed rhubarb for lunch and then reads the mail. The afternoon is finished by dropping off laundry in town and then heading to the doctor's office for an allergy injection.

Even when doing his mundane farm work, White is able to see the literary value in his situations and communicate them in a way that is interesting to the reader. For example, in the column entitled Spring, White compares the brooder stove to the mother hen and finds the hen superior in all ways but one—the stove stays in one place so its location is always identifiable. According to White the hen is superior because "A hen's thermostat

is always in perfect order... A hen has a larger vocabulary than a stove... She doesn't have to be shaken down, and red-hot coals never roll out of her on to the dry floor" (Page 189). By comparing the hen to the stove, White uses figurative language that is both easily understood by the reader and appreciated for its inventiveness.

Once More to the Lake, Fall, Memorandum, Coon Hunt and Intimations

Once More to the Lake, Fall, Memorandum, Coon Hunt and Intimations Summary and Analysis

White recalls summer trips with his family to a lake in Maine where they would spend every month of August. White attempts to recreate the same scenario for his own son as a time for bonding and White finds himself responding and acting like his own father must have done many years ago. White is both perplexed and pleased that on a trip where he hopes to discover more about his son, he finds his in his own actions.

In Fall, it is now September of 1941 and White recounts events that have happened this year in his small town in Maine. It was a good year for potatoes and White's crop produces thirty-eight bushels. White also fondly recalls the county fair where he exhibited some animals and enjoyed walking around the grounds at different hours of the day and night to take in the varying sights.

Memorandum is half to-do list, half wishful thinking. White fills this column with tasks he should accomplish, or at least begin, on this day in October of 1941. Each event seems important for the smooth running of the farm but it is impossible to do all of them so White postpones doing any of them and relates his day with humor with which the reader can understand his predicament.

In Coon Hunt, White attends his first nocturnal coon hunt with his buddies. Accompanying them on the jaunt is an old, experienced coon dog and a pup with more enthusiasm than instinct. White relates the events of the night comparing his own inexperience to that of the rambunctious pup.

In Intimations, it is now December of 1941 and White writes this column three days after the bombing of the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. White treasures the sight of a light snowfall outside his New England home, is filled with love and patriotism, and wonders if there will ever be any people who are capable of loving the whole world in this way in order to prevent any more wars.

Up until this point, the war has been a distant threat for White and other Americans but the bombing of Pearl Harbor clearly brings the devastation closer to home. White sees the irony in the untouched snow scene outside his window with what is going on in other parts of the world on the same day and he feels both patriotism and melancholy. The intimations of which he speaks are the thoughts of world speakers and politicians who feel that great good must follow such horrible evil and White is conflicted about wanting the war to continue.

Songbirds, Questionnaire, Aunt Poo, Book Learning and Morningtime and Eveningtime

Songbirds, Questionnaire, Aunt Poo, Book Learning and Morningtime and Eveningtime Summary and Analysis

It is now April 1942 and White tells his readers that he registered for the draft in February and that sugar rationing starts next week. Despite the pall of the war, White delights in the rush of springtime whose arrival is announced by various songbirds. White tries to identify the different species of birds but finds that he cannot keep up with his necessary farm work while also trying to watch the birds. White also gets involved in the emergency drills in the village and serves as one of the men who would announce the necessity to turn out lights and blacken windows in the event of an air raid.

In Questionnaire, White receives an occupational questionnaire from the Selective Service headquarters regarding the type of work to which he may be best suited in military duty. Because there is no category allowed for "writing" or "professional" work, White signs up as a farmer and hopes that his limited skills might be put to good use if necessary.

In Aunt Poo, White writes about his wife's aunt given the affectionate nickname "Aunt Poo." With America at war with Japan, White cannot help but think about this now elderly woman who married a Japanese man at mid-life and adopted Japan as her new country of residence. Aunt Poo also loves her New England heritage but her love for her husband and the Japanese culture have superseded everything else in her life.

In Book Learning, White compares the good intentions of those who write books on modern farming methods to the men and women who actually make their living working their farms. White is not the only one who sees the disparity in the two sources of information as even his neighbors have found fault and folly with ideas they have tried to execute on their farms which were less than successful.

In Morningtime and Eveningtime, White tells about the expanse of a day's events from the peaceful, routine morning to the anxiety of a nighttime air raid drill in which he must participate. White thinks about the irony in the colors of yellow and red which signify the stages of the alert and how they can instill such panic when they are also the colors of such beautiful things as buttercups and roses.

It is clear by this point that the war has infiltrated the daily lives of regular Americans such as White who register for the draft, ration their sugar and conduct emergency air

raid drills. It is interesting to note the intensity with which these events are conducted. Because White is writing a real-time column, the sense of anxiety and urgency he feels is communicated better than it would have been if he had written a memoir of these days at a later time. The reader gets a real sense of what it was like to have lived during this era.

Getting Ready for a Cow, Bond Rally, A Week in November, Control and Cold Weather

Getting Ready for a Cow, Bond Rally, A Week in November, Control and Cold Weather Summary and Analysis

It is now September 1942, and after four years of preparation, White is about to take delivery of a cow. White delayed getting a cow because of the extra time and accommodations involved in milking and keeping a cow. White provides an extensive list of tasks and preparations made in advance for the cow's arrival including the construction of new stalls and whitewashed walls and rafters in the barn.

In Bond Rally, White gets caught up in the excitement of movie star Dorothy Lamour's October 1942 visit to Maine to support the war effort. White feels just like one of the school boys in the crowd at a bond rally who are swept up in the glamour of Miss Lamour's presence and the overwhelming patriotism flowing through the crowd.

In A Week in November, White provides some of the details of events and activities chronicled in a week of his life in November 1942. White notes that his beloved dachshund, Fred, is aging quite visibly and he has a difficult time imagining life without him. White also ponders the disparity between the actual war being fought overseas with the war portrayed in magazine and newspaper advertising which shows gleaming products all in the context of a victorious America.

In Control, White presents ideas on the elements of control which are permeating his life. Beginning with a surprise agricultural inspection, White quiets his outrage to think of larger attempts at controlling humans through elements like rules and the free enterprise system.

In Cold Weather, it is now January 1943 and White describes life during a frigid weather spell complete with spreading extra hay for the animals to providing a ride for the mailman whose car will not start. White finds temporary respite from the cold by reading stories about Tahiti but knows that even if he were to find a warmer locale, he could not stay away long from the New England seasons.

In this last section of columns, White's temperament has calmed down about the war and he reverts to his old patterns of reporting about the daily activities of running his farm. It is evident that White is a patriotic American and he feels close to his country by taking care of his little plot of it near a village in Maine.

Characters

E.B. White

E.B. White is the author and narrator of this nonfiction book of newspaper columns. White had worked for several years for The New Yorker magazine and makes the decision to move his wife and son from Manhattan to North Brooklin, Maine, in 1938 to experience a rural lifestyle on a working farm. It is clear that White is an educated intellectual but he is also adept at farm work and sometimes relishes the chance to do manual labor over completing editorial obligations. White's writing shows him to be a sentimental man with a love for nostalgia and things of the earth. White is very educated with a sophisticated wit but also very down to earth and humble. While his metropolitan friends warn him not to get too provincial in the country he silently wonders if he can save them from becoming too citified. White, however, moves about in both city and country life with ease and rubs elbows with intellectuals in New York City as well as men who fish for lobster to make a living. White's natural inquisitiveness makes him a great writer and excellent storyteller about a relatively uncomplicated life in a very complicated period in world history.

Mrs. White

White does not divulge much about his wife in his columns other than a few mentions of her activities around the house. It is known that Mrs. White also works in publishing and works in the Maine farmhouse and sends manuscripts back to New York via the U.S. mail. It is not clear whether Mrs. White engages in any tasks at the farmhouse or whether she has domestic help. White does say that Mrs. White is an avid birdwatcher and she enjoys springtime in Maine when the variety of species appears in the woods around their house once more. Mrs. White must have a sense of adventure because she is a good sport about trying to take a spontaneous sleigh ride one winter morning. Fundamentally, Mrs. White must be self-confident, assured, adventurous and in love with her husband in order to leave her home and professional life in New York City to follow her husband to a life in rural New England.

The Boy

The boy is E.B. and Katherine White's son whose name is never revealed in the columns. There is no real activity of the boy's described in the columns but White reveals some elements to let the reader know that he has a young son. For example, when White visits Walden Pond, he stops at a store to buy a baseball glove to take home to his son. At other times, White will say that the boy is in the barn watching or helping with some task but there is little else mentioned of the child.

Daniel Webster

Daniel Webster was an eloquent statesman in U.S. government in the nineteenth century and was afflicted with hay fever just as E.B. White is.

Dameron

Dameron is the lobster fisherman, a friend of White's, and the only one whom White fully trusts to borrow his books.

Dr. Francis E. Townsend

Dr. Francis E. Townsend is the author of the Townsend Plan which is one of the precursors to the adoption of the Social Security Act to provide for U.S. citizens.

Publishers

Both White and his wife work in publishing and their publishers are always sending books and magazines for review and education.

Fred

Fred is White's oldest dachshund whose personality is both intelligent and wary.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Anne Morrow Lindbergh is the wife of famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, and the author of the book entitled The Wave of the Future.

Mrs. Wilson

Mrs. Wilson runs the boardinghouse in the village of China, Maine, where the Whites stay while stranded during a snowstorm.

Objects/Places

E.B. White's farm

White's farm is located in the village of North Brooklin in Maine.

Maine

The state of Maine is located in New England and is the most northeastern point of the United States bordering on the Atlantic Ocean.

Children's Books

White reads some of the many children's books sent by publishers to his wife, Katherine, for review.

Chickens

White raises chickens on his farm and dotes on the chicks just as if he were the mother hen.

Motion Picture magazine

White is isolated in his Maine village but keeps abreast of the film industry by reading Motion Picture magazine.

Sheep

White raises sheep on his farm and becomes emotionally and physically involved with their grazing and birthing routines.

The Rural New Yorker

White looks forward to reading The Rural New Yorker each month even though he knows he should probably subscribe to the New England Homestead.

Mein Kampf

Mein Kampf is the book by Adolf Hitler which is part autobiography and part political ideologies.

The Wave of the Future

The Wave of the Future is written by Anne Morrow Lindbergh and takes an isolationist position during World War II.

China, Maine

The White family takes shelter at a boarding house in China, Maine, while stranded during a snowstorm.

Brooder Stove

A Brooder Stove is a coal stove White uses in the hen house to keep the baby chicks warm.

Themes

Undercurrents of War

White and his family move to Maine in the summer of 1938, and by autumn of that year his columns begin to speak of the unrest and increasing activities of Adolf Hitler and his attempts to gain control over European countries. At first White notes the world events quietly but as time goes on he becomes more vocal in his opinions about the despotic behavior that is terrorizing Europeans. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, White does not hold back his comments as the war has most definitely come home to America. White takes an active role in organizing and executing emergency air raid drills in his rural village area and also interviews people on their opinions of the war and its possible outcomes and aftermath. White is also very outspoken about what other writers are saying about the war, for example, he quite openly disagrees with Anne Morrow Lindbergh's book promoting isolationism. It is clear that White is a person who is truly moved by man's inhumanity to man and although he tries to keep a lid on his protests, they seep into his columns because it is the only way he can stay true to himself which is one of the primary reasons for his moving to Maine.

A Sense of Community

One of the things that is evident in White's experience in Maine is the sense of community and neighborliness exhibited by the people in the rural area where the Whites live. With the exception of the people residing in the village, the people in the area are in remote areas and do not see each other regularly. However, if a person needs help, whether it be to move a large farm implement or to share pasture space, someone is always available and willing. White finds this a gratifying and pleasant change from life in the city and finds himself drawn to people like Dameron, the lobster fisherman, and the men who share the air raid alert phone line with him. Survival through the winters in this remote area of Maine can be a critical thing and the people have learned to help each other and ask for help when needed. White enjoys being part of a group of people who understand the elemental nature of life and live by the golden rule especially in a time when so much hatred and evil exists in other parts of the world.

The Circle of Life

White is a man who enjoys an orderly existence as exhibited by his constant straightening of rugs and pictures in the house. He also likes his thoughts to be orderly and it helps him to write better. But most of all, White enjoys the order and passage of time that he witnesses on his farm. This includes not only the birthing of animals and baby chicks, but also the pastures covered with snow and the return of songbirds each spring. This Circle of Life is very gratifying to White and brings him comfort as he learns the things that remain constant in a dramatically changing world. This sense of order

and passing on life's lessons is also important in White's relationship with his son. White makes note of purchasing new baseball gloves, including his son in farm chores and taking his son to the same Maine lake where his own father had taken him for vacations many years ago. It seems as if White has a solid grasp on what is important in his life and in his part in the continuing cycle that will continue long after he is gone.

Style

Perspective

This nonfiction book is written in the first person narrative perspective. This means that the person relating the events is the author himself and he delivers his views and relates events according to his own perception of them. The author does not supply any insight into the motives, feelings or actions of any other people and can only relate instances about these people from his own point of view. When there are conversations detailed, the author can simply relate what the other person says, and although the author may guess at the other person's thoughts, he cannot share them with the reader. Because the nature of the book is a nonfiction account of a person's life, there is little room for any other points of view. This relaying of personal thoughts is punctuated at times by the retelling of events or incidents to add some dimension to the book, and everything is still from the author's own experiences and perspective. While this technique can be viewed as limiting, the author is able to provide much detail on his own thoughts and emotions which would not otherwise be available to the reader and is in complete alignment with the nature of the work.

Tone

The tone of the book is extremely casual as if the reader is listening to White talk in a personal conversation. This means that there are many incomplete sentences and many fragments which is indicative of conversational style. This informality makes for a quick read and the book is very engaging. White also exhibits a wry, sophisticated wit which makes the columns even more enjoyable. White can see the irony in his exhaustive efforts to take care of his animals and imagines that they are secretly in control, which he communicates as his arrogant dachshund stops to light a cigarette when White holds open the door or when White feels his new cow should carry him over the threshold when she arrives because White has prepared such a beautiful location for her in the barn. Because of the informal style, White's emotions are easily understood. For example, White is extremely sensitive and his sorrow at the outbreak of war in Europe is almost palpable. Overall, White is honest and direct and the reader understands perfectly his views on events whether they occur in his barnyard or in war-torn Europe.

Structure

The book is 279 pages and is structured into 55 editorial columns. The first column presented is dated July 1938 and the last one is dated January 1943. The book is a chronicle of nearly five years spent on a farm in rural Maine. Some of the columns are written in standard paragraph form but some are presented as random thoughts that occur to White as he sits down to write. Because the work is of a chronological nature,

the columns relate stories of the White family's transition to rural life as well as the escalation of World War II. Because of the nature of the work being editorial columns, the stories are relatively short but White usually introduces at least two or three different topics in each column.

Quotes

"The news of television, however, is what I particularly go for when I get a chance at the paper, for I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace or a saving radiance in the sky. We shall stand or fall by television—of that I am quite sure." Removal, Page 2

"I got a letter from a lightning rod company this morning trying to put the fear of God in me, but with small success. Lightning seems to have lost its menace. Compared to what is going on on earth today, heaven's firebrands are penny fireworks with wet fuses." Removal, Page 4

"While the old wars rage and new ones hang like hawks above the world, we, the unholy innocents, study the bulb catalogue and order one dozen paper-white Grandiflora Narcissus (60 cents) to be grown in a bowl of pebbles. To the list that my wife made out I have added one large root of bleeding heart, to remind us daily of wounded soldiers and tortured Jews." Security, Page 14

"I have heard it said that rats collect trinkets, that if you expose a rat's nest, you may find bright bits of glass and other small desirable objects. A child's mind is such a repository—full of gems of questionable merit, paste and real, held in storage. What shining jewels shall we contribute this morning, sir, to this amazing collection?" Children's Books, Page 22

"Last night my neighbor C. died. He was here at the house in the forenoon, driving his truck. He mentioned that he wasn't feeling just good. Later, in the afternoon, he took a chill. Before midnight he was dead. C.'s death came just a few months after he had got his life fixed up to suit him—a common enough sequel to endeavor. After years of planning it, he built a new workshop last fall, his proper dream. I think the extra effort it took to get his life arranged to his liking was too much for his strength and brought on his death—a coincidence that, in milder form, happens to everyone." A Week in April, Page 47

"'How are you going to keep from getting provincial?' asked one of our friends quite solemnly. It was such a sudden question, I couldn't think of any answer, so I just let it go. But afterward I wondered how my friend, on his part, was going to keep from getting metropolitan." Hot Weather, Page 72

"Some day, if I ever get around to it, I would like to write the definitive review of America's most fascinating book, the Sears Roebuck catalogue. It is a monumental volume, and in many households is a more powerful document than the Bible. It makes

living in the country not only practical but a sort of perpetual night-before-Christmas." Second World War, Page 84

"I was thinking as I prepared to pay my tax how lucky I am about figures. Figures mean little to me, and for that reason use up very little of my time. To some people figures are the most vivid signs there are. Some people can look at the notation 5/23/29 and it means something to them, calls up some sort of image. I can't do that. I can see lust in a pig's eye, but I can't see a day in a number. I remember days, if at all, by the dent they made on me, not by the dent they made on the calendar." Fro-Joy, Page 107

"Now, anyone can see from that report that the so-called simple life of the country is a myth. The poet's dream of cattle winding slowly o'er the lea is a pleasant idyll, but the bald fact is that you suddenly find yourself with a heifer who shuns the bull, lavishes kisses on a horse, and eats cardboard." Farm Paper, Page 114

"To me 'Vacationland' is a particularly annoying device to be emblazoned on the bow and stern of my small overworked sedan. 'Vacationland' is a loathsome word, assembled by a person of drab, untrustworthy mind. Furthermore, the residents of the State of Maine do not regard their state as a vacation land: they know from bitter experience that it is a place of hard work and long hours and tough weather. It is true that residents of other states come here in certain mild seasons to spend their vacation, but that is true of any state in the Union and is not peculiar to Maine." Town Meeting, Page 120

"Diplomacy is the lowest form of politeness because it misquotes the greatest number of people. A nation, like an individual, if it has anything to say, should simply say it. This will be hard on editorial writers and news commentators, who are always glad to have diplomatic notes to interpret; but it will be better for the people." Compost, Page 132

"I confess to a disturbed stomach. I feel sick when I find anyone adjusting his mind to the new tyranny that is succeeding abroad. Because of its fundamental strictures, fascism does not seem to me to admit of any compromise or any rationalization, and I resent the patronizing air of persons who find in my plain belief in freedom a sign of immaturity. If it is boyish to believe that a human being should live free, then I'll gladly arrest my development and let the rest of the world grow up." Freedom, Page 135

"The most difficult sound is the 'a.' I've been in Maine, off and on, all my life, but I still have to pause sometimes when somebody asks me something with an 'a' in it. The other day a friend met me in front of the store, and asked, 'How's the famine comin' along?' I had to think fast before I got the word 'farming' out of his famine." Maine Speech, Page 156

"One of the phenomena of the war is the news coverage. In a sense the American people are a bit overtrained on this strange concentrated diet. Body and mind adjust to

almost any sort of stimulus; we compensate physically for the news, just as we do for the speed of a motor car in which we are riding, until at last it seems as though the car is not in motion at all, and as though there is no news, not really." A Winter Diary, Page 173

"I have to laugh when I think about the sheer inconsistency of the Southern attitude about color: the Negro barred from the movie house because of color, the orange with "color added' for its ultimate triumph. Some of the cities in this part of the State have fete days to commemorate the past and advertise the future, and in my mind I have been designing a float that I would like to enter in the parades. It would contain a beautiful Negro woman riding with other bathing beauties and stamped with the magical words, Color Added. On a Florida Key, Page 178

"The hardest thing about the war, for many of us, is to maintain a decent pitch of indignation. I become frightened, sometimes, when I realize how accustomed I have become to the phrase "Occupied France"—as though there could be such a place." Fall, Page 205

"There would never be a moment, in war or in peace, when I wouldn't trade all the patriots in the county for one tolerant man. Or when I wouldn't swap the vitamins in a child's lunchbox for a jelly glass of compassion." Coon Hunt, Page 215

"When we first came here to live, the road in front of our house was a dirt road. But after a while they tarred it. Now, in war, with the automobile on the wane and the horse returning, I think probably they will have to throw some dirt back on the road, the surface being too hard on the feet of animals. Moral: men should settle their differences before they improve their roads." Songbirds, Page 230

Topics for Discussion

White completely uproots his wife and son from a metropolitan lifestyle to a rural life in Maine. How would you react if you had to make such a dramatic lifestyle change? What would you anticipate? What would you miss?

Why do you think a man who is a writer like White would want to do manual labor and care for animals on a farm every day?

Do you think the experience of living on the farm has been a good one for White? For his family?

What is it about the Maine experience that White thinks will help him become a better writer? Do you think he was right in his choice to make the move?

At the time of the White family's experience in Maine, communication is very limited to telephone and mail. Describe how the family's situation would be very different today given the technological advances and electronic devices available.

Why do you think White rarely even mentions his wife and son although their lives have been seriously impacted by this living situation?

Imagine that you are White and you face a working farm on your first day in Maine. What is the first thing you would do? What would be most important to you?