The Prince of Tides Study Guide

The Prince of Tides by Pat Conroy

Contents

Plot Summary

The Prince of Tides is the tale of the destruction wrought upon the lives of a family through denial, abuse and lies. The story begins with the earliest recollections of Tom Wingo about his mother's love of language and the beauty of the natural world around them. It has profound but different effects on each to the three children - Luke, the eldest, and the twins Tom and Savannah. The children also learn a love of nature from their father, Henry Wingo, a man of unrefined behavior and traditional southern male attitudes.

The children grow to resent both father and mother as they grow up in the Wingo household, but they never really cease to love them in their own ways. Only Lila feels that the family is deprived and struggles to rise above the lower class label she has lived under all her life. She tells fabulous lies about her ancestry to delude herself but is never really able to delude either her family or the citizens of Colleton.

Only Lila and the children know a deep family secret, and they have sworn never to reveal it. That secret is the detonator, though not the origin, of Savannah's lifelong struggle with insanity. Savannah tries to escape by moving to New York just as her grandmother, Tolitha, escaped her dull life years before. Tom settles into a life of mediocrity, not living up to the expectations everyone has always had of him.

Tom's marriage is falling apart when Lila comes to tell him of another psychotic episode Savannah is having in New York. Lila has married an archenemy, Reese Newbury, and put yet another strain on the family. Tom, now out of work, is dispatched to go and try to help Savannah. He stays for weeks in the city that Savannah has adopted, and he despises it for its coldness and unfamiliarity. There he meets Dr. Susan Lowenstein, Savannah's psychiatrist, and agrees to help her understand his sister so that she can try and bring Savannah out of the psychosis.

Over a period of time, Tom tells the family history to Dr. Lowenstein. During that process, two things happen to Tom. He coaches Lowenstein's son, Bernard, to become a football player, and he falls in love with the doctor. Tom knows Sallie, his wife, is having an affair in South Carolina, and it leaves him vulnerable to do the same with Susan Lowenstein.

The demolition and relocation of Colleton as well as the loss of Melrose Island, the long time family home, set about the ultimate chain of events that culminate in Tom and Savannah's problems. Tom's final telling of the family "secret" and the tragic death of Luke finally unlocks his own mental problems and Savannah's psychotic episode. The epilogue to the story presents a ray of hope for Tom, now reconciled with his own wife and children, and an uncertain future for the fragile Savannah.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

The prologue paints a picture of a dysfunctional family living on Melrose Island off the coast of South Carolina. The time is the 1950s, and the picture of family conflict is painted in the contrast between the characters and personalities of a mother who is a beautiful dreamer and a father who is a rough-hewn and strict disciplinarian. Tom Wingo, whose tale this story is, describes his mother as a woman who shows her children wonders of nature and makes up stories about the dreams of all living things, plants and animals.

Tom's father, on the other hand, is seen as somewhat cold and not understanding of a child's unenlightened mistakes. Tom recalls a time during his tenth year. He kills a bald eagle. His father who "did not permit crimes against nature," (Page 2) does not sit down and reason with his son. Instead, he makes Tom dress the bird, build a fire and eat it. Then he turns the boy over to the county sheriff, who sits him in a jail cell for an hour.

The disparity between the beautiful and literary mother and the baser man-of-the-land father gives way to inevitable struggle between such contrasting characters. The resentment that Tom and his twin sister Savannah develop against their parents grows out of that struggle. It is a time of struggle in the world, as well, as the U.S. comes out of a World War and rushes headlong into the Atomic Age. The difficult process of coming of age is compounded by parents who enter into combat with the very lives and souls of their children as their ammunition.

Tom and Savannah do not deny that, in their own ways, the parents actually love their children. However, they resent that their parents make the children their battleground without regard to the children's welfare or development.

Tom calls attention to his fluctuations of belief during his formative years - once a South Carolina racist and later a defender of black equality, an ROTC cadet and then an anti-war activist. His childhood is filled with events that go beyond the normal changes that affect most family. This leaves Tom's family scarred but at the same time provides survival strengths, though Savannah maintains that "no Wingo ever survived." (Page 10).

Prologue Analysis

This brief account of early childhood and growing up on Melrose Island sets the stage for the struggles and psychoses that will face Tom and Savannah in the future. There is a hint in the prologue that Tom is inheriting his mother's love of words and beauty along with his father's devotion to nature. He says that he is defined by the sights, smells and tastes of the Wetlands, a geographical link that is both his pain and his stability.

In the prologue, there is an undercurrent implying that Tom and Savannah will resent their mother in later years because, in spite of her love for beauty, she pours ugliness on their early lives. The father, Henry Wingo, is raw and violent. Lila, the mother, is painted as almost ethereal. Thus the scene is set for inevitable conflict.

The imagery of oysters, fish, native flora and spectacular sunsets and moon rises over the Marshlands is in direct opposition to the violence of beached whales, the life ebbing from their bodies. The recollection of the dying whales is an analogy for Tom and Savannah's childhood, part wondrous and part nightmarish.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Tom Wingo, his wife, Sallie, and their three daughters are sitting on their porch overlooking the harbor and the Atlantic Ocean. Into this idyllic scene, the grating ring of the telephone brings a sense of disharmony. Tom knows it is his mother and does not want to speak with her, though his wife insists because it seems to be a matter of importance. When Tom finally agrees to speak with his mother, she tells him she has bad news and wants to come to his house to tell him. Tom threatens, tongue in cheek, to divorce Sallie because she made him talk to his mother over the phone.

Tom and Sallie's three beautiful daughters - Jennifer, Chandler and Lucy - come running up from the dunes and enter into banter with their father, asking him why he hates their grandmother. They also want to know why they have to call her Lila and not grandmother. Tom plays a game with his daughters, asking them to name the most splendid, wonderful person they know. It is a game he used to play with his sister, Savannah, and the girls do the same thing with their father that he used to do with his sister. They name all sorts of people before Chandler squeals out his name.

When Lila arrives, she goes through a ritual of greeting before settling down to deliver her bad news. Savannah, now living in New York, has tried to commit suicide - again. Lila's purpose is transparent. She wants Tom to go to New York to be with his sister, relieving her of any motherly obligations. Since Tom has been out of work for over a year and is being supported by his doctor wife, Lila thinks nothing of putting the burden of going to Savannah on him. Yet, she cannot resist the impulse to chide Tom on his indolence. Sallie becomes quite defensive of Tom, and Lila backs down before driving away.

After the children are in bed, Tom and Sallie go for a walk on the beach, an activity that at one time was special and romantic for them. Now there is nothing but tension. Tom cannot feel romantic, and Sallie cannot arouse any real emotion in him. Sallie challenges him, saying, "You've got something to fight for that's so valuable - something worth the fight. You seem to be giving up, Tom. Your past is hurting us." (Page 25) A reference is made to Tom's brother Luke. It is clear that the as-yet unexplained story of Luke is the turning point in Tom's descent into despair.

When Sallie can get no response from Tom, she blurts out that she is having an affair, and Tom guesses that it is with one of the doctors she works with. Tom reverts to sarcasm and wit to diffuse his hurt and frustration. He even gets Sallie to laugh. When she tries once more to arouse his affection, she is rebuffed and returns to the house. Tom remains on the beach to wallow in self-pity over his ruined life.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Conflict is everywhere in this chapter, and it comes between Tom and his daughters, who have tired of his glib answers to their questions and his embarrassing comments in front of strangers. The conflict between Tom and his mother is felt rather than explained and is used here as a tool to portend the greater conflicts about to be unearthed within Tom.

Tom has a love-hate relationship with Lila, and he is acutely aware of both his personal shortcomings and the strengths he has failed to draw upon. Tom does not come across as a very sympathetic character at all. Sallie, on the other hand, is struggling with her own dichotomy of feelings. She fiercely defends Tom when his mother attacks him, and she reaches out to Tom in an effort to rekindle the passion they once shared. Yet, conversely, she is torn by the feeling of fulfillment she receives from Dr. Cleveland, her lover. The conflict further presents itself in the desire Tom has to run away from South Carolina and Sallie's firm commitment to staying right where she is.

The imagery of Tom kicking at a wave reflects the state of his life. He cannot locate the moment that he began on this path to self-destruction. Then, the contrast of an overweight Tom running on the beach while thinking about his past glory as the fastest high school quarterback in South Carolina compounds the image of fateful degeneration.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter flashes back to the 1970s, when Tom is a football coach and teacher. He and his brother Luke go to New York City to be at their sister's poetry reading. Savannah has become a total New Yorker, loving the city in all its beauty and ugliness. Tom and Luke hold the opposite view and try to urge Savannah to return to the south.

Luke finds that his southern gallantry is not appreciated by the feminists of New York, and when he witnesses a callous robbery of an elderly woman, he is convinced that the city is evil and no place for his beloved sister. In the relationship between the brothers and Savannah, there is an undercurrent of envy on Luke's part. He seems to feel left out of that special bond between twin siblings.

Savannah's poetry reading is a resounding success. Both Tom and Luke are filled with admiration for her, but Luke, especially, really wants her out of New York. The poetry is all about their youth and the south. Her poems are frank about her breakdowns and insanity. Tom appreciates the honesty of her poetry where "even her demons were invested with inordinate beauty. . .no gargoyles in her work, only angels crying for home." (Page 39) The poems awaken a lifelong dream Tom has had about Savannah and him in the womb. He recognizes that the Gemini factor is at work with the two of them.

That night, Luke and Tom are awakened by voices coming from Savannah's room. She is in the throes of one of her psychotic spells, seeing demented figures in her room and dreadful angels hanging on the walls. They are tormenting her, but she knows that only she can fight them. Tom is not able to help her, but she seems to take comfort in the fact that he understands. Her demons, even a Doberman, are laughing at her, telling her that her brother cannot help her.

Later, Luke and Tom discuss Savannah's mental state. Luke wonders why he and Tom do not suffer from psychoses since they went through the same difficult childhood as their sister. They refer to a day on the island without speaking of the details. It seems to be some traumatic experience, and Lila insists it never happened. Tom points out that Lila also insists that they are descendents of the aristocracy, that their father has never beaten them and many other things that are not true. Tom knows that he and Luke both remember every detail of what happened that day, but he honors an agreement they have about never speaking of it.

Unable to sleep any more that night, Tom characterizes his siblings and himself. Luke, the least intelligent, is the eldest and the one with strength, standing as often as he could between the twins and the wrath of their father. Tom designates himself as the normal but mediocre one, while he sees Savannah as the one who battles her black dogs and hanging angels.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The character development of Tom, Luke and Savannah as adults flows easily as the brothers visit Savannah in New York. The contrast of attitudes between southerners and New Yorkers adds to the sense of conflict that is coming.

Savannah's psychotic episode develops the theme of the traumatic nature of the Wingo children's childhood. It is also portentous of what will come out of the tense conflict of the story. Alluded to but not spelled out is some shattering experience the children had on the island that has produced the psychosis in Savannah. Luke, who sees things simplistically, thinks the answer is to get Savannah out of New York and away from her poetry writing. Tom understands that the poetry may be the only thing keeping his twin from going completely over the edge.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Nine years have passed since Tom and Luke went to visit their sister in New York, and Tom, now unemployed and falling apart himself, arrives to help Savannah survive this latest suicide attempt. He goes immediately to the office of Dr. Lowenstein, the psychiatrist in charge of Savannah's case. She is just the latest in a long line of professionals who have never been able to really help Savannah. In the waiting room of the doctor's office, Tom finds a copy of his sister's book of poetry entitled *The Prince of Tides*.

Tom reads the first poem and understands the imagery and its sources. He turns back to the dedication and reads, "*Man wonders but God decides, When to kill the Prince of Tides*." (Page 56) Dr. Lowenstein walks in as he is reading and wants to know who the Prince of Tides is. Tom does not answer her question. They go into the doctor's office, and there is an immediate tension between them.

Tom is defensive. He has little regard for psychiatrists, and he uses both profanity and racism to unsettle Dr. Lowenstein. She manages to control herself. Tom eases up a bit and tells the doctor that because of racism, Savannah and her poetry are what they are in the present. Though Tom cannot stop himself from using jokes and riddles in his conversation with the doctor, he does lighten up a bit. Yet, he projects his own feelings of inadequacy onto her, imagining that she has nothing but contempt for him. Dr. Lowenstein sets him straight on that matter, telling Tom that she needs him to help her help his sister.

That night Tom and Dr. Lowenstein go to the hospital where Savannah is. When they walk into the room, she is huddled on the floor in a corner. She does not respond to either the doctor or Tom, though her brother talks at length with her, giving her the details of the southern gossip that has transpired since their last meeting. Then he sings to her and bids her good-bye until tomorrow.

Tom and Dr. Lowenstein go to dinner, the doctor's treat, and she continues to try and learn more about Tom. He refuses to tell her why he was fired from his job or why he has not gotten another one. When the doctor produces a recording of everything Savannah said during her psychotic seizure, Tom relents. He tells the doctor that the cryptic mutterings are Savannah crying out her autobiography to the world, to anyone who will listen. He promises then to tell the doctor everything she wants to know about Savannah's past.

Later, Tom goes to Savannah's apartment and is threatened by a neighbor wielding a pistol. Tom identifies himself, and he knows the neighbor, Eddie Detreville, an avowed homosexual who Tom has no reservation about embracing. When Eddie turns on the

lights in the apartment, the migraine Tom has felt coming on all day begins to throb. Eddie supplies him with some pain pills and leaves.

After Eddie is gone, Tom takes a letter out of his wallet and reads it. Savannah had written it to him years ago when he first started coaching. He has a sense that he has lost Savannah, allowing her to fall too far from the closeness they had always shared. He knows the migraine is coming on, and right after he lies down in Savannah's bed, the full impact of the headache hits him.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Pain - both Savannah's and Tom's - is thematic in this chapter. Savannah's pain in mental while Tom's is physical, but both may be brought on by mental distress. The conflict between the siblings and their father is restated in the acceptance of Jews, blacks and homosexuals. The father, Henry Wingo, is a metaphor for the south, the embodiment of southern biases. Dr. Lowenstein, on the other hand, represents the urbane and possibly effete north.

Savannah goes to New York to escape from all that the south has come to mean for her. Tom's escape is to turn in on himself. The mention of killing and playing taps for The Prince of Tides foreshadows the revelation of Savannah's demons.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

At the end of the chapter, the reader realizes that the flashback to 1944 is in reality Tom's telling of the story to Dr. Lowenstein. A hurricane is approaching the island as Lila Wingo lays in labor. Henry is a pilot stationed in Europe, and a message comes telling Lila that Henry's plane has been shot down over Germany. He is presumed dead. Only Lila's father-in-law, Amos Wingo, an eighty-five-year-old black midwife, Sarah Jenkins, and the baby Luke are in the small house with her. Amos prepares for the storm. Sarah delivers not one but two babies, as Lila loses a great deal of blood.

When the full fury of the storm strikes, the house begins to flood, and Amos realizes that he must get everyone up to the hayloft in the barn. Sarah takes Savannah and Luke through the driving rain out to the barn. In the process, she is slammed against the wall of an outhouse and seriously injured, but Amos manages to get her up the ladder and into the loft. Soaking wet, Esther snuggles the babies against her bared breast to keep them warm. When Amos returns with Tom, she places him between Savannah and Luke.

Amos then goes for Lila, who begins hemorrhaging badly as he hauls her up the ladder to the loft. She comes near death before the bleeding is stopped. The fury of the hurricane lasts through the night, subsided by daybreak. Lila wakes up and takes the babies. Sarah is dead.

At the same time as the storm, Henry is hiding in a rural church in Germany. The old priest there is guilt-ridden over betraying some Jewish people who sought refuge in his church. They were later executed in Dachau. The old priest is a good man, but he is also terribly afraid. Under duress, he agrees to allow Henry Wingo to stay the night, but eventually he relents and allows Henry to stay until he is strong enough to leave.

Henry and the priest, Father Kraus, become friends, and Henry converts to Catholicism before he sets out to try to reach Switzerland. His trek is arduous, and his only cover in the daytime is the hoe Father Kraus gave him to carry. Even a convoy of German soldiers pays him scarce attention, thinking he is a farm laborer. On the way to Switzerland, Henry kills a German farm woman who surprises him in her barn.

Later, when he returns to Germany, he learns that the old priest was hanged after the German soldiers discovered Henry's bloody uniform in the church. Henry lights a candle at the statue of the Infant of Prague for the old priest, but then he takes the statue with him when he goes.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The imagery of the storm and the violent shooting down of Henry Wingo leaves an aura of tension and foreshadowing in this chapter. Lila's belief that Henry will never see his unexpected twin babies adds to the feeling that all will not be well in the children's lives. Sarah Jenkins' death after her kindness to Lila as well as Amos Wingo's blundering but successful attempt at saving the family illustrate the impending tragedy in store for the children of the storm.

There is irony in the guilt-ridden, weak-willed priest who is instrumental in saving the life of Henry Wingo, a ruthless survivor. Henry's first story about the German farm woman is that he ran away before she could summon her husband. It is not until years later that he admits the truth, that he strangled her brutally in her barn. Both Henry's action and his denial serve to formulate the character of the man and begin to shed some light on the effect he is to have on his children's lives. The statue of the Infant of Prague represents Henry's conversion and his sentimentality toward the priest.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Tom settles into a routine of life in New York and determines to straighten his own life out by telling the entire story of his family's lives to Dr. Lowenstein. He considers it his mission to determine why Savannah is the one who becomes psychotic over the experiences they all have shared growing up. In the psychiatrist's office, he observes a very beautiful woman who is obviously in great mental anguish. He later compares her to a homely girl from an abusive household whom he once taught. He admits to Dr. Lowenstein that he went to the girl's house and beat up her father, breaking his resolve not to be violent like his father, Henry. Yet, he excuses himself by saying that he has also resolved to help children of abusive parents.

Tom continues his tale of how the three children begin their lives in Colleton, South Carolina, after the storm people call *Bathsheba*. As they grow up, the siblings have no idea of how unhappy their mother actually is. He adds, "Nor did we know she would never quite forgive us for growing up. But growing up was a misdemeanor compared to our one unforgivable crime: being born in the first place." (Page 109) The children are aware, however, that Lila becomes a different person when Henry comes home from work. They are aware of their father's physical abuse of their mother as well.

When Henry is recalled to the Air Force to go to Korea, Lila and the children go to live with Henry's mother in Atlanta. Grandma is now Tolitha Stanopolous, married to Papa John Stanopolous, a good man who knows nothing of Tolitha's prior marriage. The children are all admonished not to mention Grandpa Wingo and to call Tolitha their cousin. The year they stay there is a time, Tom says, that he only remembers being a child.

Just before Henry leaves to go to Korea, the family goes on a picnic. It ends badly, with Henry beating Luke, calling Tom a "girl" and violently shaking Lila. Luke gives voice to what all the children think by saying to Henry, "I hope you die in Korea. I'm going to pray that you die." (Page 117)

With Henry gone, peace is now with the children. They start school in Atlanta and Papa John, who is slowly dying, tells the children amazing stories every evening. Though they do not realize it at the time, Lila continues to tell them fabrications about her family history. Lila is a beauty, and Lila is a consummate liar.

The children are given the job of caring for Papa John's collection of black widow spiders as the old man gets too weak to go down into the basement. Next door is the Chandler mansion, estate of the heirs to the Coca-Cola fortune. The woods around the estate are called Callanwolde. "Callanwolde" is one of the words Savannah repeats often on the recording Dr. Lowenstein makes during her psychotic episode.

Callanwolde becomes the buzz-word the children use for any kind of danger. A huge, red-bearded transient appears out of the wood to terrify the family, wanting to have Lila. After several instances where he attacks the house and is finally repelled when Luke throws jars of black widow spiders at him, word comes that Henry is returning from Korea. Lila cautions the children not to mention the man to their father, who believes that women who get raped have asked for it.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the picture finally emerges of a dysfunctional family suffering from physical and mental abuse and the lies of the mother. The image of the storm at the twins' birth reflects the storm of their lives. The man from Callanwolde is a metaphor of all the threatening forces that constantly surround the children as they grow up.

The black widow spiders, described as both beautiful and lethal, are a symbol of Lila. Tom consistently describes his mother as "beautiful" even though his resentment of her is never far from the surface. Her lies and the lies she instructs the children to tell are effectively compared to the webs of the deadly spiders.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Over cocktails, Tom and Dr. Lowenstein continue their conversation. Tom wonders why a beautiful, obviously wealthy woman like the one in the doctor's office should have problems. He had long thought that his former student was miserable because of her plainness. Dr. Lowenstein puts him straight by saying that the beautiful woman's problems are as real to her as the student's problems or Savannah's problems are real to them.

Dr. Lowenstein tells Tom that she has spoken with Lila over the phone. The doctor feels Lila is sincerely concerned for Savannah and Tom. Lila did not, however, mention Luke while talking to the doctor. Tom is not surprised. Luke is in the forbidden world to the family, and Tom tells the doctor to "observe Luke carefully" as he tells the family history. (Page 144)

Tom continues with a long tale of his Grandmother Tolitha after Papa John dies. She travels the world until her money runs out and then returns to Grandpa Wingo. Tolitha is now dying in a nursing home, and Tom feels guilty about leaving her there.

Tom contrasts Tolitha and Grandpa Wingo. Tolitha is a woman who never cared what other people thought of her. Grandpa Wingo is a religious fanatic and the world's greatest red letter Bible salesman. Grandpa Wingo is convinced that God speaks directly to him up until the day he dies. Amos writes long letters to the *Colleton Gazette,* which Savannah carefully keeps. Tom tells the doctor that from the letters it "could be deduced that God spoke without much thought for the codes of spelling and grammar and [had] an uncanny fondness for southern vernacular." (Page 153)

Tom recognizes that Tolitha and Amos never actively participated in the raising of Henry, though he could never find a clue as to why their offspring became the father who beat him so irrationally. Tom says that he can find no evidence in their house as to how that could happen. They were gentle people who had created Tom's dangerous father. Their mother taught them to hide their wounds with lies. Tom knows he cannot mend a damaged childhood, but he hopes to find a way to salvage his and Savannah's lives.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Tom's mention of Luke foreshadows the ultimate piece to the puzzle of his inadequacies and Savannah's psychosis. The contrast of the grandmother's worldliness and the grandfather's religious fanaticism offers a clue to the disruptive elements that produced their dysfunctional family.

Denial and lies define Lila, who has no idea what she is doing to the children. Her life is self-centered. Her greatest lies are those she tells to herself, convincing herself that she

is a good mother. Although Tom insists that he can find no clue as to how Henry sprang from Amos and Tolitha, the time spent on Amos' compulsive religiosity hints at the destructive nature of misguided belief. A complicated web of factors is coming together to paint a picture of the root causes for Tom's failures and Savannah's mental disorder.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Tom settles into living in New York and returns to talk with Dr. Lowenstein. He overhears her telephone conversation with her husband, who is missing another dinner with his wife. On a friendly and non-professional basis, Dr. Lowenstein admits that her famous musician husband is losing interest in her. Tom is able to lift her spirits by suggesting that her husband is misguided if he doesn't find her very attractive.

Tom wants to see Savannah, but the doctor and her team at Bellevue refuse to allow it yet. Tom is upset and banters with the doctor. They get into a heated discussion of Savannah's poetry. Lowenstein sees it as feminist literature, and Tom insists it is not. That discussion evolves into a discussion of Tom's political views. He insists he is a feminist himself. He admits, though, that he hates both women and men, because he was raised by a woman and a man.

Since Dr. Lowenstein's husband has stood her up, Tom and the doctor agree to go to dinner together. The place Tom chooses is the same place he and Luke took Savannah after her successful poetry reading. Tom learns more about Dr. Lowenstein in the restaurant. He learns that she has a son who is being forced to become a musician and cannot share his love for football with his famous father, who hates sports of all kinds. Lowenstein wants Tom to coach her son privately.

Dr. Lowenstein finally gives Tom her first name, Susan. Over dinner, Tom continues telling Susan about the Wingo children's childhood. Four more children are conceived but all are stillborn. They bury them on the island and make crude wooden crosses for them. They all have names. The family, now Catholic, lives out a mixture of Bible reading and abuse.

The last stillborn baby is named Rose Ann. Henry puts the body in the shrimp freezer until Lila is well enough for the funeral. He baptizes the baby himself at the kitchen sink. Savannah, during the night, retrieves the baby's body and takes it to her bed. Tom sees this and carries the baby back to the freezer. Leaning heavily on Luke, Lila comes down for the funeral the next day. Lila goes into hysterics and forces the children to kneel and pray for Rose Ann's soul, even though it begins to storm. During that time, Tom tells of finding the baby in Savannah's bed, which she denies vehemently. Luke sides with Savannah.

Later, after Henry returns home, the children are allowed inside. Lila plants roses on the graves of the children and refers to the babies as their guardian angels. Savannah misunderstands, and they come to know the stillborn children as the "garden angels."

Tom tells of a particularly disturbing evening with Henry in the living room and Lila sobbing in her bed. Lila calls Tom to her and confides in him that he is the only child she

can trust. She says she depends on him to be her support. He remembers being both moved and disturbed by this intimacy with his mother. Young Tom wants to be loyal to his mother, but he cannot really betray the two people he loves most in the world - Luke and Savannah. Later, the children discover that Lila has had the exact same conversation with each of them.

That night, when the children go to bed, Savannah asks Tom if he really found Rose Ann's body in her bed. Tom tells her yes, of course. Savannah confesses that she now believes him because there is a wet place on her bed, and her nightdress is damp. She has no recollection of bringing the dead baby there, though. She tells Tom that there are many things she does not remember, and she begins writing a journal every day so that she won't forget.

Lila instructs the children that their good guardian angel sits on their right shoulders, and a bad angel sits on the left. Savannah names the good angel Aretha and the bad one Norton. When Lila discovers that Savannah has written in her journal about a fight between herself and Henry, she burns the entire journal while Savannah cries and begs her to stop. Later, Tom finds Savannah writing with her finger in the sand before the tide comes to wash it away. The sand is her journal.

Tom then tells of his falling apart. He remembers a night he spends wandering alone on the beach, cold and wet. He has forgotten his team's game that night and missed it completely. He is subsequently fired from his school position.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In bits and pieces, the roots of mental disorder begin to appear. The origins of Savannah's nightmarish angels relate back to their dead siblings, the "garden angels." Lila's manipulation of and lies to her children become clearer. Savannah's bizarre behavior with the frozen body of Rose Ann and her failure to remember many important events in her life foreshadow the extreme psychosis she will suffer in later life.

Misguided religion continues as a metaphor of control. The personification of the "garden angels" plants delusional ideas into the mind of Savannah, who is the most susceptible. These ideas also somewhat take root in the mind of Tom, as his basic rationality forsakes him. He also begins to lose track of the world, when he forgets his team's game. Susan Lowenstein's problems, which she carefully keeps hidden under a veneer of professionalism, illustrate the varying degrees of mental dysfunction. Tom becomes good mental medicine for her, as she hopes to be able to help Savannah.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Tom tells Dr. Lowenstein more about his grandmother Tolitha, who seems to be the most caring person in the children's lives. Tom says he suspects she returns to his Grandpa Wingo more to stand between the children and her son than for any other reason. Yet, Tolitha also has a character flaw. Her religion is superstition, going to gypsies, astrologers, psychics and witch doctors to plan out her every move. One gypsy tells her that she will die shortly after her sixtieth birthday, so she takes the children to the local mortician to purchase a "pine box" for her funeral. Grandpa Wingo will not accept Tolitha's desire to be laid out naked on Stone Mountain to let the vultures devour her body. Luke is especially awed and at the same time repulsed by this idea.

Winthrop Ogletree, the mortician, talks her into a fancier coffin. She lays down in it and has Luke take photos so she can see what she will look like. She wants to go out like a dowager queen, though she is not sure just exactly what that is. In the process of trying out the coffin, Ruby Blankenship comes to the mortuary and discovers Tolitha laid out. She questions the children about the cause of her death and the time and place of the funeral. The children can scarcely keep from laughing out loud. Tom and Savannah walk away, and Luke finally succumbs to torso-shaking silent laughter. He covers his face to hide his expression. Ruby mistakes it for crying and offers the children Juicy Fruit gum. At that point, Tolitha arises from her supine position and snatches a stick of gum out of Ruby's hand. The woman runs screaming out of the room while Tolitha and the children make their getaway.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter seems inserted as comic relief from the heavier aspects of the depressing tale of the Wingo children. Yet the story lends insight into the close relationship of Tom, Savannah and Luke. Tolitha's free spirit serves as a beacon to the children, showing them what they might become if they do not break under the pressures of their dysfunctional family. There is nothing psychotic about Savannah nor neurotic about Tom when they are with Tolitha. Luke's silent laughter both during the coffin episode and afterward when they all fall down on the grass and roll with laughter is a symbol of his steady strength. Of all of them, Tolitha included, Luke is the one with restraint and self-control.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Tom continues telling Dr. Lowenstein about his life. He tells about Lila overhearing two women talking about the flowers in her hair and bad nail polish. Lila stops wearing the flowers after that. Tom says there are two kinds of Wingos - those like his grandfather who spend their lives forgiving people and those who hold grudges for a century or more. He says he is in the latter group. He quotes his father, "If you can't beat up an enemy kid, wait twenty years and beat up his wife and kid." (Page 221)

Tom relates an incident with Todd Newbury. Tom punches him out after hearing Todd disparage Tom's family. Todd is the son of the most powerful man in Colleton, and Tom gets into great trouble. However, the school principal doesn't actually beat Tom, letting Tom know that he is glad Tom punched the Newbury kid. The principal spanks a book and tells Tom to yell.

Tom's mother is horrified and punishes him severely. She takes him to the Newbury house to make him apologize to the Newbury family. Isabel Newbury leaves them standing on the porch and tells them that Todd doesn't want to speak to Tom. Todd's father takes a different approach. Without absolving Tom, he teaches his own son a lesson. Reese Newbury is obviously interested in Lila. During this terrible visit to the Newbury house, Tom first gets an idea that the family home on the island will not stay forever in the family.

Finally, Dr. Lowenstein, somewhat frustrated, challenges Tom for telling her that story. It has nothing to do with Savannah. Tom disagrees. It has everything to do with Savannah. He asks the doctor if she has gotten a letter from Lila. The doctor produces the letter from her files and comments that it is a very nice letter from a concerned mother. Tom tells her to look at the return address, and she is stunned to see the name written there.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Tom reveals more of the latent violence within himself. There is an undercurrent of a shift in the way Tom sees both his father and his mother. Lila's actions in attempting to ingratiate herself with the upper-crust society of Colleton are transparent to the children. Savannah and Luke support Tom after his conflict with Todd Newbury, but Lila sees it as a stumbling block toward her goal. Everything about Lila is calculating and not coincidental to the web of lies she has spun all of her life.

The impact of the chapter lies in the accusation by Dr. Lowenstein that Tom's story has nothing to do with Savannah and that it is a waste of her time to listen to something that is not directly related to her patient. The literary use of implication gives the chapter a sense of power and foreshadows what revelations are to come.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Waiting for Bernard Lowenstein in Central Park, Tom observes the animals in their cages at the zoo. They are not the animals Tom feels should be there - unicorns and dragons. Instead, he sees fallow deer and bored ocelots looking out of place in the city environment.

Bernard Lowenstein appears, looking resentful and angry. He shows Tom a certain amount of contempt and does not respond favorably to Tom's good-will overtures. Tom turns the tables on him, telling him flat out that he does not like him nor is he willing to coach him. He walks away, but Bernard calls him back. The two make a tenuous truce. Tom never lets up on Bernard, however, making him show respect and seriousness about wanting to learn football. Tom guesses correctly that Bernard is unpopular and lonely at Phillips Exeter, where he attends school.

Bernard admits that he showed his parents a photograph that made it appear he was on the football team at Phillips Exeter. In fact, he is only an equipment manager. He admits to Tom that he wants his father to think he is on the team just to make him angry. Bernard finally calls Tom "Coach Wingo," and Tom finally agrees to coach the boy with the ultimate goal of Bernard making the team next year.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This short chapter opens up a subplot that parallels to some degree the dysfunctional relationship Tom has with his mother and father. In character and personality, Bernard has more in common with Todd Newbury than he has with Tom, but Tom recognizes the signs of unhappiness and senses the causes underlying that unhappiness. An interesting comparison and contrast is set up here. Herbert Woodruff (Bernard's father) is more like Lila, and Susan Lowenstein (Bernard's mother) has more in common with Tom's father. She is the one who wants to see her son participate in sports. Her interest, however, is more for Bernard's happiness than Henry Wingo's desire to make "men" out of his sons.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Tom describes his mother as "a work in progress." (Page 249) Her barely nodding relationship with truth makes it possible for her to re-invent herself at the drop of a hat. Tom says it has taken him thirty years to recognize just how formidable a warrior she is. Everyone, he says, underestimates her talents and her cunning.

Lila's real life begins in the mountains of Georgia to an evil-tempered drunk of a father and a nondescript deadpan of a mother. Orphaned at sixteen, Lila goes to Atlanta and redefines herself as the daughter of a genteel banker and a refined socialite mother. Tom relates how his father, Henry Wingo, presents himself to Lila as a large landowner. They are wed, and Lila learns the reality of the Wingo estate. That only makes Lila begin another fiction, which she pawns off as the truth on both her family and the people of Colleton.

Tom tells Dr. Lowenstein three interrelated stories involving Lila and her lust to become a part of polite society. The first is about how she works for weeks on the original recipe she will submit for inclusion in the Colleton League cookbook contest. The children see Lila setting herself up for failure once again, and even Henry tries to dissuade her. As she brings exotic dishes daily to the family dinner table, the children support her cooking though Henry wants only meat and potatoes. In one terrible incident, Lila goes to the kitchen and makes him a casserole of Alpo dog food, which Henry eats, declaring it is real man food. In a letter signed by Isabel Newbury, Lila's recipe is rejected with the implication that she has copied it out of another cookbook.

Shortly after that, uncommonly cold weather in the south brings the economy to a standstill. The shrimp die from the cold, and Henry's only livelihood is wiped out. The Colleton League brings a charity turkey to the Wingos' house just before Thanksgiving, and Lila is once again mortified. When the women leave, Lila shoots the turkey to pieces with a shotgun.

The third incident involves Luke's plan to get revenge on the Newbury family for all the slights to his mother and brother. While the Newburys are out of town on their annual winter vacation, Luke and siblings break into their house and leave a dead loggerhead turtle in Reese and Isabel Newbury's bed. Savannah turns the thermostat up high. The story makes the local newspaper, and the Newburys cannot live in the house for months. The children give a copy of the Colleton League cookbook to their mother that has a hand-written recipe for dead loggerhead turtle on the back page.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter parallels the conflicts between Lila and Isabel Newbury as well as the growing conflict between Lila and her family. There is an ironic edge to the way the

children support their mother but, at the same time, see her heading down the road for yet another disaster. As they grow older, the children are less taken in by her lies, even though Lila never changes. Whatever she says at any given time, to Lila is the absolute truth.

There is more to Lila's shooting the turkey with a shotgun than simple destruction of an unwelcome act of so-called charity. Lila sees it as the insult it is meant to be, and the shotgun blast to the turkey is symbolic of Lila's plans for Isabel Newbury. As Tom points out to Dr. Lowenstein, Lila is heroic in her determination. The imagery of the dinner table and Henry's enjoyment of the dog food casserole is Lila's image of herself versus the uneducated family she has married into.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Coaching Bernard Woodruff makes as many changes in Tom as it does in the boy. Bernard grows both in stature and mien, and Tom becomes a coach again, though by his own admission "a diminished one." As Bernard begins thinking of himself more as an athlete, Tom regains the self-image of being a coach. He starts writing letters to South Carolina schools seeking a position.

In conversation with Dr. Lowenstein, Tom discusses the boy's growth. The conversation tests the honesty between the psychiatrist and the rediscovered professional, the coach. Tom tries to explain the game of football to Lowenstein, but she refuses to understand.

In parting at the end of their session after Tom tells about the recipe contest and Lila's back issues of *The Gourmet*, Dr. Lowenstein says that it struck her as strange that the Wingo family would have a subscription to that magazine. Tom counters that it is no stranger than a grandmother who travels the world and sends Savannah a subscription to *The New Yorker*. Then, briefly, the doctor tells Tom that she knows he has been writing letters to Savannah. She says the letters upset Savannah, and they had to sedate her after she received one from her mother.

In the exchange that follows, Lowenstein refers to Tom condescendingly as "Tom Wingo of South Carolina." (Page 278) Tom ignores the slur and challenges the doctor on her lack of humor. Lowenstein comments that Bernard dislikes being made to smile all the time, which Tom says is a way to get him to learn to be happy most of the time. Then she asks Tom what he really thinks of Bernard, and Tom replies that the boy is unhappy. Football, he suggests to her, is a game where it is impossible to feel lonely.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The developing change in Bernard as he learns the rudiments of football, including the sportsmanship that goes with it, underscores the idea that damage done to the psyche is reparable. Unconsciously, Tom is finding a way back from his morose mood through coaching Bernard.

The physical attraction between Tom and Susan Lowenstein is almost palpable at this point. Just weeks before, Tom was impotent with his wife Sallie and unable to give her what she is now getting from a lover. The irony here is that Tom is in a way re-inventing himself, much like Lila, the eternal work in progress.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Tom confesses that his life did not truly begin until he could forgive his father and begin to understand where he was coming from. As teenagers, Tom and Savannah concur that they actually love their father in spite of his ferocious nature and his unsuccessful get-rich-quick schemes. Henry Wingo lacks the focus and rationality that Lila is so well endowed with. Where he looks for instant gratification with his plots to make money, Lila is both calculating and patient in her drives.

Henry tries farming and fails. He invests in ethnic greeting cards and fails. Then, he announces that he has bought the Esso gasoline station in Colleton. Although Henry is the best shrimper in South Carolina, neither he nor Lila can look upon his profession as something beautiful and something to be proud of. Luke, Tom and Savannah go out on the fifty-eight-foot *Miss Lila,* and the children are not ashamed of their father's profession. One interesting transformation occurs in Henry when they are out on the boat. He never hits any of the children. Henry's plots to get rich are, more than anything, an attempt to please Lila, who can never see his profession as a shrimper as anything but lower class.

Savannah portrays her father as having the Sidam touch (opposite of the Midas touch). Tom tells Lowenstein that somehow he has always felt that the family would have managed to stay together had it not been for the gas station and a trip to the circus.

The gas station opens to great fanfare, and that night the family attends a run-down circus that pitches its tents near Colleton. The night ends when the circus tiger attacks and kills one of the seals from the show. Henry buys the tiger, and Lila goes ballistic. Henry has the idea that the Esso "tiger in your tank" will be reinforced with a real live tiger in its cage on the corner. The marketing ploy works until someone bankrolls the Gulf station owner on the opposite corner so that he can start a vicious price war. When Wingo Esso goes out of business, gasoline in Colleton is down to ten cents a gallon. Henry goes back to being a successful shrimper, and the family is saved from ruin. Reese Newbury tries to buy their island, but Henry refuses to sell. He learns later that Reese was supporting the Gulf station in the gas price war.

Lila is aghast, but the tiger remains on the Wingo property. Luke begins training the tiger surreptitiously. Savannah discovers him and takes Tom to see Luke as he trains the tiger to jump through a fiery hoop.

Chapter 13 Analysis

There is a transition in this chapter as the children grow into teenagers. Their attitudes begin to change toward their father and mother. The children seem to understand that Henry's desperate attempts at getting rich are merely his way of trying to please Lila.

Even though almost predestined to failure, like every scheme of Henry's, the Esso station symbolizes the low-class that Lila so desperately wants to extract herself from. The sexual electricity between them, however, remains in contrast to their opposite goals in life.

The tiger presages great danger to the family. Like Callanwolde, the tiger is one of the images in Savannah's psychotic babblings that Dr. Lowenstein has recorded. Luke's relationship with the tiger symbolizes his strength, but it also intimates a lack of good judgment much like his father's.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Tom relates the story of Grandpa Wingo's annual Good Friday performance in the streets of Colleton. Every year he dresses up in a white choir robe and drags a heavy cross, reenacting the walk of Jesus to Calvary. The family, except for Henry and Luke, are all embarrassed by Grandpa Wingo's walk. Tom and Savannah beg him to do it in Charleston or Savannah where there are many more people to witness his performance. Tolitha buys a bottle of gin each year and retires to her room to get totally drunk while her husband puts on his show. She wakes to him kneeling by her bedside the next morning, praying for the deliverance of her soul.

Henry films the entire thing, and it is clear that he and his father have planned the exact times and places for him to fall under the weight of his cross. Henry puts wheels on the back end of the cross this year, to make it easier for him to carry. When he finally exhausts himself after the wheels fall off, Luke finishes carrying it for him.

After the work of preparing the cross for the Good Friday walk, Grandpa takes the children across the river to collect oysters for their supper. On the way back, they spot Snow, an albino porpoise that is the pride of Colleton. Snow is the symbol of good fortune for the Colleton residents. Whenever she appears, people gather to watch her graceful movements through the water.

Tom tells how he and Savannah get into a terrible argument after he says the word *nigger*. They are discussing a black boy who is going to be integrated into their school in the fall. Luke sides with Savannah and laughs at Tom when their sister soundly defeats all Tom's rationalizations about using that word.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Amos and Tolitha Wingo symbolize the distance between the religiously fanatic and the worldly agnostic. Yet their ability to tolerate each other's idiosyncrasies is a contrast to the inability of the Henry Wingo family to do the same. The heated argument that Tom and Savannah have over the black boy foreshadows the fact that, however close, the twins will not always agree. Savannah has cut Tom off, refusing to see him, at the time when he tells this tale to Lowenstein.

The albino porpoise is white and symbolizes the hopes and dreams of the children and all the people of Colleton. Her dazzling white color is an image of the purity of river life, something the children appreciate even though their mother sees it as degrading.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Tom cooks dinner for Susan Lowenstein and her son, Bernard. Before Susan comes home, Tom gives Bernard a football uniform and has him put it on. Bernard has little sense of humor, which Tom works on while Bernard is putting on the uniform. It is a first for Bernard, who has never put on any kind of sports gear in his life. When Bernard models it for his mother, she is stunned and cautions never to let his father see him in that uniform.

After Susan, Bernard and tom sit down to the meal Tom has prepared, Bernard asks many questions about why Tom knows how to cook, including personal questions regarding Tom's life and his family. The tension mounts as Susan feels uncomfortable about her son being so forward. She tries to interfere in the conversation, only to be rebuffed by both Tom and her son. Again to teach the boy respect and responsibility, Tom has him help with removing the dishes from the table, something only the maid ever does in that house. After Bernard is sent to bed, Tom and Susan go out onto the terrace, and they discuss the mealtime conversation. Susan says that Bernard fears his father, and Bernard never confronts his father the way he challenged both Tom and Susan at the table. Tom points out that he has just gotten some control over Bernard and does not want her to interfere with that.

Tom and Susan discuss Tom's life and Sallie's lover, who Tom says is the kind of man he would be if he had stayed the course. He says that it is probably because he chose the wrong parents. Savannah, he says, was "dealt the royal flush" in the game of life, where a person realizes he or she is doomed because of the memories of childhood. (Page 340) Tom admits that he has not seen Savannah for the past three years because even Tom's presence depresses her.

When Susan returns inside to replenish their drinks, Tom watches her under the portrait of her aristocratic husband. Looking at her face, he sees all the burdens of the things her patients have divulged to her. He cannot get a grip on the character of the husband and father who listens to classical music during dinner instead of holding conversation with the family. He wonders why Susan told him she thought her husband was having an affair with the stunningly beautiful patient he saw in her office. Tom is acutely aware of his sexual attraction to Susan but blames sex as part of his unsuccessful manhood.

Continuing the conversation after the drinks are refilled, Susan and Tom talk about the loneliness that both of them feel. Susan lets her desire for Tom come to the surface, and he bids a hasty farewell. He leaves her standing on the terrace, looking out at the lights of New York.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Bernard is a mirror image of Tom's childhood. Instinctively, Tom realizes that there is hope for Bernard if he can learn discipline and gain a sense of humor. The mysterious musician father parallels the social snobbery of Lila, though Tom gets little insight into the man from the things Susan and Bernard say about him. The portrait looking down on everyone in the room is a metaphor of arrogant disapproval.

Bernard's transformation when he puts on the football uniform is an image of getting out from under the domination of his father. Susan is clearly shaken but does not disapprove of Bernard coming into his own manhood. There is a clear contrast between Bernard's fear of his father and his learned respect for Tom.

The sexual attraction between Tom and Susan and the resulting inevitable tension serves to accentuate the loneliness both are feeling. The lights of New York City represent that loneliness, which is compounded by the impersonal nature of the city.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Tom relates the story of when *The Amberjack* arrives from Miami Seaquarium in search of Snow, the albino porpoise. The entire community reacts negatively to the idea that their symbol of hope and good luck might be captured and moved from the area. Even the state legislature gets into the act, making it a crime to capture a white porpoise in South Carolina waters. The citizenry of Colleton watch the comings and goings of *The Amberjack* and maintain a constant radio location for the hated boat.

Once, when the Seaquarium boat is about to corner Snow, Luke leads a tomato-throwing revolt from the bridge over the wide river. *The Amberjack* retreats and, ostensibly, returns to Florida. That tactic is a ruse, however, and when Henry Wingo radios that he has spotted a "submerged log" in the Zajac Creek, *The Amberjack* arrives swiftly and captures the mammal. Henry's family is disgusted with his part in the capture, even though his cooperation has netted the family one thousand dollars.

The fearless Luke hatches a plan to return the porpoise to its home waters. Tom and Savannah are talked into going along with the plan, and the three teenagers head for Florida. Using sleeping pills pilfered from Tolitha's medicine cabinet, they sedate both the night watchman and Snow at the Seaquarium. In the back of their pickup, they return the porpoise to the river at Colleton. Tom recalls that day to Dr. Lowenstein as the best day of his life.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter teems with metaphors of hope, innocence, despair and reclamation. The color white on Snow is equivalent to the purity of childhood and its innocence. The porpoise represents the hopes and aspirations of all the citizenry of Colleton. The crew of *The Amberjack*, though having good intentions, is comparable to Henry and Lila and the unwitting damage they do to their children. Henry, in fact, is the one who tells the Seaquarium about the white porpoise, which ultimately leads to its capture. Metaphorically, Henry is destroying childhood innocence.

The strength of Luke both physically and in character is further underscored in this episode. Luke, of all the citizens of Colleton, leads the tomato-throwing attack on *The Amberjack* and devises a plan for Snow's return. Luke represents a stabilizing force in the lives of Tom and Savannah. There is an interesting parallel between Tom's euphoria at returning Snow to Colleton and his determination to deliver Bernard from the domination of his parents.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Tom continues with the story of the black boy, Benji Washington, on his first day at Colleton High School. As Tom explains to Dr. Lowenstein, he decides to maintain a low profile amid a student body of southern white teens who openly express their hostility toward the new student. There is an undercurrent of violence, and a football team lineman, Oscar Woodhead, leads the threats against Benji.

To Tom's chagrin, Savannah leads the counter movement to welcome Benji to the school. Tom is unable to keep quiet when Oscar calls her a few choice and bigoted names. The result is a challenge to a fight behind the band hall after school, and Savannah gleefully accepts on Tom's behalf. The whole school is present that afternoon for the fight, including Savannah and the other high school cheerleaders who come out to support Tom.

Luke is there when Tom arrives, but he does not take Tom's place, other than to force Oscar to apologize to Savannah for the names he has called her. Then Luke takes Tom aside and gives him pointers on how to defeat the much larger Oscar in the fight. Luke points out that Tom is the fastest guy on the football team, and he can use his speed to outlast Oscar. Tom admits that he is terrified but listens to Luke and goes ahead with the fight, which he eventually wins.

Later on the football field, Tom is running dashes with the rest of the backfield. Benji wins all ten races, beating Tom, the fastest of the existing running backs. The coach, who had vocally opposed school integration, changes his attitude in direct proportion to the speed Benji demonstrates in the races.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The image of racial bigotry among southerners is clearly defined in the language and postures of the white students of Colleton High School as Benji Washington makes his integrated entrance. There is an interesting contrast between the cowardice of Tom and the forwardness of Savannah in the different approaches each takes toward the new student. Tom fears that, below the surface, he has inherited violence from his father. This manifests itself when Tom tries to blend in with the majority even though he does did not necessarily agree with them.

Oscar Woodhead represents southern bigotry and the violence against blacks after the Earl Warren Supreme Court integration ruling (Brown versus the Board of Education). Tom is the reflection of the majority of citizens who just did not want to get involved. Luke gives Tom the strength to do what he has to do. Yet, so deep is Tom's reaction to years of his father's violence, that after it is all over, he declares that he will never fight again because he hated it. The coach's changing attitude toward black students in the

school represents the slow awareness of southern whites that black people are not inferior to whites - or at least that, when it serves their self-interest, whites will accept blacks.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Tom continues telling about the fall of 1961. He is the quarterback on the Colleton High School football team. Before the game, Luke takes a stand for Benji as a team member not to be left out in the cold. Savannah is there resplendent in her cheerleading uniform, and the tiger, Caesar, is in his cage as the school mascot. Henry gets ten dollars a game to bring Caesar to the contests. The opposing team, North Charleston, humiliated them the year before, and the Colleton High School tigers are anxious to make amends.

On the field, the North Charleston team taunts Benji and calls him a "nigger." Luke's pep talk before the game works its magic on the Colleton team. Tom recalls being a better quarterback with Benji there, and they soundly defeat their opponents. Luke gets Caesar to roar, and the people of Colleton roar back. Only Lila dislikes the tiger, refusing to ride to the games with Henry dragging a tiger behind them. One of the team members who hoists Benji onto his shoulders after the game is Oscar Woodhead. The town has lowered its level of prejudice in diametric proportion to its love of victory.

After the game, the boys are teased by one of the linebackers for the way they dress. They will be the only boys at the dance that night dressed in khakis. They are also the only boys, albeit co-captains of the team, who do not wear sport jackets at the pep rallies. Luke is not bothered by this, but Tom feels ashamed and asks Lila for the money to buy jackets for Luke and him. Lila refuses even though it is the best shrimping year since 1956. Tom asks why Savannah always has nice clothes to wear and the boys only wear khakis and cheap polo shirts. Lila says that a girl has to dress well, that men notice what women wear. She doesn't want Savannah to make the same mistake in marrying that she had made. Lila tells Tom that by not giving him money to buy a sport jacket she is teaching him "to treasure what [he] couldn't possess, what was just beyond [his] reach." (Page 401)

Chapter 18 Analysis

The theme of football as a character-building sport is emphasized in this chapter. Tom reevaluates himself as a quarterback in light of having Benji Washington on his team. The victory changes attitudes toward Benji among both the team and the Colleton public. The seventeen-year-old Savannah gets the first inkling that she may be beautiful.

The tiger reinforces the idea of violence and portends danger by being something of a fearsome attraction at the game. Lila sees the tiger as a wasteful extravagance on Henry's part, whereas he sees it as a future moneymaker. Luke's special love for the tiger implies his love of danger.

The issue of the sport coats and the money Lila refuses to relinquish gives more insight into her cunning thought processes. She will spend money on Savannah to ensure that she marries well, but she sees no need to outfit the boys. She believes her own lie that not buying the jackets builds character for the boys.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Tom has time to spend going through Savannah's apartment. With the help of Eddie Detreville he even does a bit of remodeling. Tom feels he is missing something in Savannah's story. He remembers how she used to hide things, especially gifts that she gave with elaborate instructions on where to find them. She had stopped doing that only after an opal ring she bought for her mother was hidden so well that they never found it. Still, he thinks Savannah may have hidden some clue to her mental state in the apartment.

During these searches, he comes across the photo and information about a girl named Renata Halpern. Then, he finds poetry signed by this girl, but he recognizes it as Savannah's work. He knows he is getting close to something that will tell him more about Savannah, and he keeps searching. He finds a reference to Renata Halpern in a magazine that says she lives in Brooklyn. He calls and talks to Renata's mother, only to discover that Renata is dead. In the magazine, there is a reference to Renata Halpern's children's book, *The Southern Way*. Rushing to a bookstore, he locates and buys the book to take back to the apartment and read. He is not past the first page before he realizes it is Savannah's work. The book, Tom recognizes, is based on events he remembers from Savannah's childhood. It tells of three dangerous men coming to the house and animals that save the children from peril. It is filled with the magic of Savannah's imagination mingled with threads of reality. By the time Tom finishes reading the book, he is angry that no one has told him about Renata Halpern.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Savannah's habit of hiding things is an indication of her compulsive, quirky nature. As a child, this habit falls more into the realm of fun and games, but now in her current mental state, it emphasizes her frequent blackouts. It is not clear if she is hiding things she does not want others to find or if she is hiding things from herself. Savannah's compulsion to hide things reflects her mother's need to hide the truth. Throughout Savannah's childhood, truths were hidden and fallacies were presented in their place. Savannah reflects this by hiding objects and by intermingling fantasy with reality.

The book within the book represents a real turning point for Tom, as he believes this is clue that will help him understand what has happened to his twin. Renata Halpern represents a dual-personality aspect to Savannah's illness. Still, Tom does not understand the need for using an assumed name.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Tom charges into Dr. Lowenstein's office in a rage because she has not told him about Renata Halpern. Susan maintains her cool exterior and refuses to tell Tom anything about the mysterious Renata Halpern until he calms down. She asks Tom who has told him about the children's book, and Tom relates the whole story of his detective work. Again angry, Tom tells her that the book is about his family and that Lila would "rip her pancreas out with her teeth" if she ever found out about it. (Page 435)

Susan accuses Tom of not having told her everything. What he has given her thus far has been helpful, but there is a great deal more. Tom counters that he is trying to tell his story in some kind of order. Susan wants less information about the brothers and more about Savannah herself. She tells Tom that his self-pity might be more harmful to Savannah than anything he might say to her. That phase of the conversation leads into the statement Tom once made about being a feminist. "I am one of those feckless, sad-sack males who learned how to whip up a souffly and make a perfect byarnaise sauce while his wife opened cadavers and comforted cancer patients," he says. (Page 437)

Susan finally tells Tom about Renata. Two years previously, Renata helps see Savannah through one of her psychotic episodes. After Savannah recovers, Renata commits suicide. Subsequently, Savannah decides to become Renata and move away, severing all ties with her family. Tom challenges Susan, saying she is trying to help Savannah become someone else and not bring her back to herself. Susan says that Savannah is convinced that as Renata she has a chance of a reasonable life but as Savannah she would be dead within a year.

Tom has difficulty accepting this. He flashes back to a time when the three of them are children, holding hands and letting themselves sink to the bottom of the river like swimming in embryonic fluid. Then Tom berates Susan all over for trying to help Savannah become another person. He compares what she is doing with his sister to the coaching he is giving Bernard and asks Susan what she would think if he told Bernard he would only be happy by getting away from his parents. Susan throws a dictionary at Tom and injures his nose.

To atone, Susan takes Tom to a very expensive restaurant where they continue discussing Savannah. Susan tells Tom that Savannah has periods in her life that she does not remember. She says those blank periods were her terrible secret when she was growing up. She has heard voices and had nightmares since she was a child. Susan tells Tom that those ghastly dogs and morbid angels were constantly near her, calling for her suicide.

Susan startles Tom by telling him that she once thought of him as being part of Savannah's problem, but no longer thinks so. She tells Tom that he and Luke protected

Savannah, even from her own world, while they were growing up. She says that Savannah remembers far more than Tom does about their early childhood and the brutality of their mother. Tom tells Susan that the story of *The Southern Way* was true except the children had no magic.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Tom's anger brings out repressed anger in Susan Lowenstein and reinforces his distrust of psychoanalysis. There are both similarities and differences between what Dr. Lowenstein is doing for Savannah and what Tom is doing for Bernard. The real contrast is between medical practice and the practical application of sports for rounding out a person's life.

Renata symbolizes escapism and also makes it possible for Savannah to write the allegorical children's book, *The Southern Way*. Reading the book gives Tom new insight into his sister's mental condition, but he rejects her idea of changing her identity and never seeing the family again. Tom still believes in the theory of a bond between twins, not to mention the bond they have shared with Luke. Susan's brief mention of Savannah "remembering the brutality of their mother" contrasts with Tom's recollections of beautiful language and appreciation of nature.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

A result of the lunch with Susan Lowenstein is an understanding Tom begins to formulate about Savannah's condition. He reads case studies of other people's psychotic histories, and that also helps. Then he decides to call Lila in Charleston. He informs Lila that he is going to tell the doctor all about what happened on the island that day that Savannah had written about allegorically.

To counter Tom's intention of telling all, Lila changes the subject. She informs him that his wife is having an indiscreet affair and that everyone knows about it. Tom deflates her by informing her that Sallie has already told him about it, and it is Sallie's business and not Lila's.

Back on the subject of *that* day, Lila does not want Savannah to remember what happened because she knows that once Savannah remembers, she'll write about it. Tom tells Lila that he is not going to tell about *that* day to hurt Lila but rather to help Savannah. Lila responds that she has always feared her children would betray her, and she should have murdered them in their sleep. She insists that what happened *that* day is something that happened over twenty years ago. It does not reflect on the family and is simply an act of God. She says Tom should not think about the past but look to the future like she does. When she tells Tom that she forgets the past and closes the door on it, Tom asks her if that includes Luke.

Then Tom calls Sallie, ostensibly to warn her that Lila may be calling with righteous indignation. His real purpose, however, is to let her know that there are changes in him, that he still loves her and wants her to be his wife. Sallie cannot answer him over the phone. The situation has gotten too complicated, and her doctor lover is planning to tell his wife that he wants a divorce.

Chapter 21 Analysis

A turning point is reached in this chapter that will, at last, lead up to the climax of breaking the silence about *that* day. It is clear that whatever happened on that occasion resulted in the ultimate duplicity of Lila's life. Her tragic flaw of self-centeredness without regard to what it may do to her children is expressed in her fear that Savannah may write about the secret.

The situation between Tom and Sallie is not so clear. Their conversation leaves room for doubt about their cloudy future. Sallie tells Tom the same thing Dr. Lowenstein has been telling him about never being able to say something without making a joke out of it. Tom's jokes are a cover for his insecurity and self-doubt.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Back in Susan Lowenstein's office, Tom relates the events of *that* day. He begins by showing a happy family, when Lila presents gifts to her children - a gold pen for Savannah and sport jackets she has made herself for Luke and Tom. He tells of their graduation, the three of them sitting together with great aspirations for the future. Savannah, the high school valedictorian, is planning to go to New York and become a writer. Tom is off to college to study teaching. Luke plans to be a shrimper like his father. All of the dysfunction of the family seems to have been outgrown, but in a conversation Luke, Savannah and Tom have by the river while drinking Wild Turkey bourbon, Savannah admits she still sees and hears things.

A last tender moment in the family occurs after graduation. It is Lila's birthday, and the three siblings give her a bottle of Chanel No. 5 wrapped in lavender paper. Luke breaks down that night listening to Tom and Savannah talk about going away. Henry concludes that he has raised too sensitive a family.

Then, *that* day occurs. Savannah, Tom and Lila are in the house together. Henry is off fishing, and Luke is outside. There is a knock at the front door, and Tom goes to answer it. When he opens the door, there stands Otis Miller, or Callanwolde as the children call him, along with two other escaped convicts. Miller holds a letter that Tolitha wrote years ago to Grandpa Wingo, a letter he never received.

The details are gruesome. Miller rapes Lila while another convict, Floyd Merlin, ravishes Savannah. The third, Randy Thompson, sodomizes Tom, who is, as he puts it, a southern boy who never realized a boy could be raped. The scene is dreadful and disgusting, with Lila and Savannah both crying out for Tom to help them. All of them beg their attackers not to do what they have in mind. At the height of it all, Tom sees Luke's face appear briefly in the window, and he fears Luke will come charging in unarmed against three men who all have guns. That, however, is not Luke's plan. He wheels Caesar's cage up to the back door of the house and lets the tiger loose on the startled attackers. In the melee that follows, Caesar mauls and kills Otis. Tom gets hold of the marble statue of the Infant of Prague and beats Randy's face to an unrecognizable pulp, and Savannah gets her shotgun out of the closet and blows Floyd's genitals away.

In spite of all the siblings wanting to call the sheriff, Lila takes over and organizes a cover-up of what has happened. She makes them all swear an oath never to speak of it again, not even to their father. The reasoning she explains to her children is that no respectable man would ever marry a girl who has been violated, and Henry will never touch her again if he knows another man has taken her. She makes no mention of what has happened to Tom. She only hands him a Kotex to stem his bleeding. Stunned, Dr. Lowenstein says that it is the worst thing she has ever heard. Tom says it is not the worst thing, because he has not yet told her about Luke.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter with all its gory details seems at first to be the climax of Tom's story until the foreshadowing of something far worse appears at the very end. In the chapter, the anticipation of a new and exciting life for Luke, Tom and Savannah creates a dramatic contrast to the dreadful destruction of their dreams. The horror of the incident is compounded by Lila's denial of what had happened, and even worse, she makes the children go along with her deception. Again, Lila is thinking only of herself as she devises the plan to close the door on unpleasantness and forget it. In a way, only Savannah breaks the silence by slitting her wrists for the first time not long after the attack.

Interestingly, the violence in this chapter is not Luke's. He simply unleashes Caesar against the attackers. Rather, Savannah and Tom react violently to the violation of their bodies. Considering both time (the 1960s) and place (the south), it is not really surprising that Savannah attempts suicide for the first time after this horrible incident.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Tom sees Bernard off to the music camp Herbert Woodruff has banished him to. Bernard expresses his appreciation to Tom as the best teacher he has ever had, a compliment that means a great deal to Tom. Then later, Tom is surprised by a phone call from Herbert inviting him to dinner after his concert next week. Tom goes to the concert with Susan and thoroughly enjoys the music. He is struck by Herbert's artistry. The small dinner party turns ugly as Herbert goes after Tom with cruel sarcasm. Susan has enough and lashes out at the beautiful blonde, Monique, for having an affair with her husband. Monique runs out of the room crying. Madison Kingsley, a famous playwright, and his wife Christine are also guests. They try to diffuse the situation, but Herbert will not let up. Finally, Tom gets Herbert to apologize to everyone by holding his Stradivarius over the edge of the terrace. When Tom leaves, Susan follows him, and they go to Savannah's apartment.

Late Sunday morning, Tom receives a phone call from Lila. She is in town and tells Tom she is coming to Savannah's apartment. Susan is gone before Lila arrives, but Lila smells her perfume in the air. Tom tells her it came from the homosexual next door who had just been in the apartment. Lila tries to get Tom to say that the story he told Dr. Lowenstein was the result of his shock treatments after the breakdown that eventually got him fired from his coaching and teaching job. Then she tells Tom that Sallie wants him to call her. She thinks Sallie has been jilted.

Lila wants to mend her relationship with Tom and Savannah, and Tom agrees to try. She invites him to dinner at her hotel, and he agrees to go. Just after he meets Lila at the bar, his stepfather walks in, and Tom shakes hands with and apologizes to Reese Newbury.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The conflict between Herbert and Tom is metaphorically the conflict between New Yorkers and southerners. In a way, it also reflects the difference between Tom and Savannah, who wants to forget everything about her southern past. Ironically, it is the southern Tom who comes out on top in the confrontation, ending with his cuckolding Herbert in Savannah's apartment.

Lila's sudden appearance adds tension to the situation, but Tom recognizes something of a change in his mother. He also recognizes that he has never stopped loving her, even though he simply did not like her. They make a tenuous truce that implies a subtle shift in the family relationships. The appearance of Reese Newbury is no real surprise after the letter to Dr. Lowenstein in Chapter 8.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Tom tells Susan how in 1962 he goes to South Carolina University, arriving early for pre-season football training. He is shy about being naked in the locker room, fearing that some mark on his body identifies him as a boy who has been brutally raped. After weeks of training, the coach informs him that he is not quarterback material, but he retains his scholarship as a defensive safety. His roommate is a scion from a wealthy family who takes Tom somewhat under his wing, but even that is not enough to get Tom pledged to a fraternity. This, though, is how he meets Sallie, who has also been snubbed by the sororities. They meet at the phone booth bank, each calling home to deliver the sad news. Later, they will both be Phi Beta Kappa, an honor they esteem more highly.

Tom gets his moment of fame during the Clemson game when he scores two touchdowns for South Carolina, one of them a hundred-and-four-yard return of a kick off. The second is on the return of a punt. Savannah has not gone to New York yet because of her suicide attempt. Luke has built himself a small house on two acres of the island Henry gave him, and Tom and Sallie use it for their honeymoon after their marriage. During that summer, Tom works for Luke on his new boat the *Miss Savannah*.

Almost simultaneously, Savannah publishes an anti-war poem in the *Saturday Review,* and Luke gets called up for military duty. Tom runs his boat for him during the rest of the summer and hires someone to take over when he has to go back to school. Luke joins the SEALS and is highly decorated for his bravery during the Viet Nam war.

One of Luke's exploits is going with a lieutenant to see if they can rescue a downed pilot on land. The wrecked plane turns out to be an ambush site, and the two SEALS come under fire. The lieutenant is killed, but Luke manages to make it back to the sea and swim three miles to his ship with the lieutenant's body. Luke returns finally to Colleton, his only world.

Chapter 24 Analysis

This chapter tells of the separation of the siblings, each going into a different world. The lengthy tale of Luke's heroism in Viet Nam foreshadows the skills he will use in the future, survival skills that he begins learning as a boy, hunting on Melrose Island.

Tom's failure to become the university quarterback and to get into a fraternity is a model of what his life is to become. He has his fleeting moments of glory, which do not last, and his marriage to Sallie is based on mutual disappointment and lower-class backgrounds. Sallie, however, has the drive that Tom lacks, contrary to what everyone believes of Tom when he is growing up.

Luke's experiences in Viet Nam are full of conflict. He exhibits all of the survival skills he learned as a boy on Melrose Island and still has a defiant respect for the Vietnamese people. He does what he has to do because he wants nothing more in life than to return to the island and live out his life as a contented shrimper.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Tom relates how the year 1971 is a year of change for him and his family. Jennifer Lynn Wingo, their first daughter, is born. Lila becomes nursemaid and friend to the dying Isabel Newbury, and Grandpa has his glorious swan song. Quiet bands of surveyors show up in Colleton and begin measuring its bounds. No one thinks much of it at the time.

Grandpa Amos is a notoriously reckless driver, usually because he is talking to God and not keeping his mind on the road. His eyesight is also failing. When he nearly kills Mr. Fruit, the retarded man who directs traffic on the Street of Tides, the Sheriff takes his driver's license away from him and cuts it up into little pieces. To prove that he is not feeble, Amos declares he will water ski forty miles ending at the Colleton dock. He challenges the Sheriff to be there with his new driver's license when he arrives. Not without facing perils, Amos makes the ski run, and the whole town is out there to see him get his new license. A year later, Amos collapses and dies at the grocery store. His funeral is a testimonial of how the citizens who often laughed at him really do admire him for his steadfast faith.

Lila moves into Colleton and takes care of Isabel Newbury, who is dying of cancer. She sees a lawyer and sends divorce papers to Henry. Even as a grandmother, Lila retains the great beauty that she was born with. Henry goes to see Tom and actually cries, hoping that Tom will try to get Lila to change her mind. Tom confronts Henry about his cruelty to the family when they were growing up. Henry denies that he ever struck the children or Lila. Tom makes Henry look at the scar on his arm that Henry got from a stab wound the night of his and Savannah's birthday years ago. Henry had refused to come and watch the kids blow out their candles, and Lila had gone in and turned off his TV. Violence had erupted until finally Luke took a pistol and shot the television set. Lila and the children made it to the truck and left to go stay with Amos and Tolitha. Henry's reaction is one of denial. He tells Tom that he does not remember how he got the scar but that he is a shrimper and has scars all over his body.

Chapter 25 Analysis

There is a subtle contrast in this chapter between Grandpa Amos, who Savannah classifies as "crazy," and Savannah herself. Grandpa talks to Jesus, and at his funeral people show their respect for his devoted, if somewhat fanatical, life. On the other hand, Savannah talks to black dogs and morbid angels and tries to kill herself several times. Amos' defiant ski ride completes the image of a man who lives by his principles without violence or hatred toward anyone. That he is fanatically religious does not in any way diminish his gentleness.

In the end, Lila is not the only member of the Wingo family who pretends the bad things in life never happened. Henry also has closed the door on his abuse of both Lila and the children. The tale of Luke's shooting the television set foreshadows the ends Luke will go to for his principles. Luke is shaped both by Henry's abuse and Grandpa Amos' gentleness. Luke always sees the goodness in his grandfather rather than the lunacy that other members of the family see when looking at the old man.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Tom continues his family history by telling how he goes to see Lila at the Newbury house. He gets a bizarre reception from both Reese Newbury and the dying Isabel, who insists on seeing Tom and apologizing for her past behavior. She recognizes that all her old friends have deserted her, and only Lila is there to care for her on her deathbed. When Lila directs Tom to the Newbury's bedroom, he notes that she has "closed the door" on the memory of the Wingo children going there to deposit the loggerhead turtle those many years ago. Tom is stunned when Isabel suggests that she and Reese have agreed he will marry Lila after her death.

Back in Reese's study, Tom notes that the map on the wall showing Newbury's ownership of land now includes a marker on Melrose Island. Tom confronts Lila about her plans. He does not attempt to get her to return to Henry but challenges her not to abuse power the way his father has done with the family. The message Lila sends back to Henry is blunt. Lila wants Tom to testify for her in court at the divorce proceedings, but Tom refuses. Lila's reaction is that it is the only time she has ever asked Tom to do something for her, and she will never forget that he has refused to do it. Tom tells Lila that he and Luke will prevent Henry from hurting her physically as she goes through with the divorce.

Isabel Newbury dies. Savannah testifies at the divorce proceedings, and the divorce is granted. Henry is awarded all belongings of the family (including his boat), but Lila is given Melrose Island. A year later, Lila marries Reese Newbury.

Right after Lila's remarriage, the government descends on Colleton and announces in a public meeting that the town will be demolished and moved to a place called "New Colleton." All the land that Reese Newbury has been buying up for years is to be used for a nuclear production site. The only person who speaks up and challenges the government is Luke, who declares independence from the U. S. and raises a call for Colleton to secede along with him. He is immediately arrested and jailed as an insurrectionist. When Lila and Tom go to visit him in jail, he is unrepentant and declares his intention of remaining an opponent of the government that is taking away the only world he knows and loves. He admits that the speech he gave before his arrest is a re-working of one of Grandpa Amos' old sermons.

Chapter 26 Analysis

The threads of both denial and influence run heavily throughout this chapter. Henry and Lila continue to deny events that have happened and the effects of those events on the children. Lila conveniently forgets that Tom has refused to testify for her in her divorce by the time they go to visit Luke in jail. Henry forgets all the times he has been violent

with his wife and children. Lila forgets what Melrose Island means to Luke when she gladly accepts the land with the full intention of turning it over to Reese Newbury.

The ironic twist of Isabel Newbury's attitude toward Lila and her deathbed apology to Tom is a metaphor of the dying south and its changing politics. Luke's defiance of the government represents the last vestiges of resistance in the south to the inevitable change that is coming.

The influences at work on Luke are his father's brute force, his experiences in Viet Nam and his grandfather's fanaticism. Luke becomes as fanatical as Amos over his obsession to save his beloved land and is ready to use whatever force is necessary to accomplish his ends.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Tom recounts the headlong rush Luke enters into for the sake of his land. He becomes a formidable opponent of the government, using sniper fire to frighten off the workers and blowing up four important bridges that allow access to Melrose Island and the surrounding area where the nuclear site is to be built. He blows up heavy equipment and inadvertently kills four railroad employees when their train goes flying off one of the blown up bridges. The FBI and two ex-Green Beret soldiers are dispatched to neutralize Luke.

Lila receives over two million dollars for Melrose Island, and she deposits $100,000 in four accounts for Tom, Luke, Savannah and Henry. Tom and Savannah accept her gifts, but Luke refuses. Henry is now in prison. His last hurrah at becoming wealthy sends him to jail for attempting to run drugs from Jamaica into Florida.

Luke develops a Moses complex as he continues to devastate the countryside. Only Luke and the retarded Mr. Fruit remain in the destroyed town of Colleton, which Luke visits at night, declaring to himself that he will rebuild it and everyone will know his name.

An FBI agent approaches Tom and gets him to agree to find Luke. He convinces Tom that Luke will be given a light sentence if he surrenders because the deaths of the railroad men are accidental manslaughter and not calculated murder. Tom and Savannah work together to find Luke. It takes a long time, but they finally locate him on the uncharted Marsh Hen Island that only their family knows about. Luke agrees to surrender to the FBI, but he wants two days to be alone on his island before he does so. As he is on his way to the surrender rendezvous spot, he goes by Melrose Island to take one last look at what is left of his old home. An ex-Green Beret in the woods near the ruins of the house shoots Luke.

Savannah and Tom take Luke's body out to sea for his burial, and Savannah recites a poem she has written about her brother, *The Prince of Tides*. Then, they return to try and learn how to live without Luke.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Luke's solitary war against the government is rife with symbolism, representing futility in the face of so-called progress. A large part of Luke's war is based on his first-hand knowledge of what war and nuclear destruction can do to the land and the people who live on it. Luke represents all those who love the land and nature and seem helpless to stop the devastation of the environment. Mr. Fruit represents the lunatic remains of those who are left in the wake of enforced change. Lila's gifts of money to the family call to mind Judas's thirty pieces of silver, and only Luke refuses to accept it.

Savannah and Tom are left with the guilt of trying to bring Luke to the justice of the law, and they are now without the glue that has held them together all of their lives. Both Tom and Savannah try in vain to "close the door" on Luke's death, and both are affected by that effort. Savannah, already unstable, demonstrates the more extreme reaction to Luke's death. However, Tom also becomes depressed and mentally incapacitated by Luke's demise.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Tom recognizes that he has taken a long time to tell the complete story to Dr. Lowenstein, and in the process, he has fallen in love with her. The call of family eventually wins out, however, and Tom returns to Sallie and the girls.

Savannah is about to be released from Bellevue, and she declares that she may still go away. Tom tells her to let him help if she does because he cannot imagine living his life without her. They conclude that the family has given survival to Tom and genius to Savannah. They welcome Henry back out of prison, a subdued man. He accepts the gift of a new shrimp boat from Lila, and they all go out on the water like they did when the children were small and Lila talked to them about the sunset and moon rise. Still, in Tom's mind, one word repeats itself over and over: *Lowenstein*.

Epilogue Analysis

Tom achieves some closure. He has settled back into family life with Sallie and the girls. The language Conroy uses with Savannah is more tentative, implying that her problems may never be fully solved. There is irony in Tom's mentally hearing the word *Lowenstein* that suggests a certain sacrifice on his part. The tale is ended the way it began, with them out on the boat watching the golden sunset and the silver rise of the moon.

Characters

Tom Wingo

The narrator of the novel, Tom is the principal character, and his mental instability is actually the focus in the tale. Tom is a subdued man who once had great potential but has become depressed and mentally unbalanced by the events of his life. He is flippant and makes jokes, often extremely inappropriate, about everything. He has literally driven his wife into the arms of another man, and he feels his daughters slipping away from him. It is history repeating itself. He is losing the girls who once adored him to their realization of his inadequacies just as he and his siblings lost their family as they recognized the failures of their parents. His descent into depression has left him impotent both physically and mentally. He goes to New York ostensibly to help Savannah, the twin he has always been close to, only to find himself under his own analysis. It takes Tom a long time to get the entire story of his family history out. Part of that history is a "family secret" the children and Lila have sworn never to mention, even among themselves. It is not, however, the family secret that has so devastated Tom as much as it is the loss of his beloved brother and the guilt he feels for his part in his death. When Tom comes to grips with all that, he is able to restart his life rather than re-invent himself as his mother often did.

Luke Wingo

Tom's older brother runs through the background of the novel to emerge as the force that once held the family together and finally led to its utter destruction. Luke is the one with strength - both physically and emotionally. He is the tolerant one, the lover of the land, the support Tom and Savannah turn to when things are going badly. Not endowed with the academic skills of his siblings, Luke has the strongest and most resilient character. He is true, not only to his family, but also to himself. He embodies all the best qualities of his parents, whereas Tom and Savannah seem to have assumed many of their worst qualities. Luke is a man almost from birth. He never goes through the same growing-up pains that Tom and Savannah endure. His strength is supportive of the underdog, though he never fights anyone's battle if he sees they are capable of doing it themselves. There is a tragic aura about Luke, nonetheless, that suggests his strength will one day be his downfall.

Savannah Wingo

Tom's twin sister Savannah is the fragile member of the family. She is an escapist, despising everything about her southern home. Even as a child, she reads the *New Yorker* and determines to live in the city one day. Tragically, Savannah never faces her problems but succumbs to them. Even before the hideous "family secret" occurs, Savannah is mentally unstable, hiding her problems carefully from her brothers. This is

not actually Savannah's story, and she is revealed only through Tom's perceptions about her, though those perceptions are from the strong bond of a twin. Savannah embodies the physical and character strength of Luke and the emotional instability of Tom. Savannah champions the underdog when Benji Washington comes to Colleton High School as its first black student. Savannah never really confronts her past, however, and even tries to use the escape of becoming someone else, perhaps a reflection of Lila's frequent re-inventions of herself and her family.

Lila Wingo

The mother of the Wingo children is the main contributing force of destruction in the family. She is totally self-centered and manipulative. Though she regrets having married Henry Wingo, she sees it through until her children are grown. Her denial of the unpleasant events in her life sweeps through the family like a hurricane, wrecking devastation behind her. She is blissfully unaware of the effects of her behavior. Her relationship with her husband, Henry Wingo, is contradictory. She disapproves of him and berates him at every opportunity but has an intense physical attraction to his strength and manliness. Her greatest familial flaw is that she works hard to turn the children against Henry, never quite succeeding. Lila's ultimate betrayal comes when she marries the archenemy of the family, Reese Newbury. There is a hint that under the surface, she recognizes her own shortcomings as, later, she attempts to make peace with her children and ex-husband.

Henry Wingo

The father is a character whose affect upon the family is felt more than actually stated. He is a physically violent man, given to beating his wife and slapping his children around to keep what he deems is necessary for control. He represents the chauvinistic southern male who sees himself as the king of the castle with the family as his obedient subjects. As the children grow up, his physical attacks against them diminish, but he is still violent with Lila. He believes Lila should subjugate herself to her husband, which she never really does. Like Lila, Henry conveniently forgets the unpleasantness he renders. He adopts the same "it never happened" attitude that Lila always takes. Interestingly, Lila's denials ultimately lead her to achieve her ultimate goal while Henry's lead to his downfall.

Tolitha Wingo

Henry's mother and the grandmother of the Wingo children is the free spirit of the novel. Tolitha demonstrates the characteristics of self-fulfillment and tolerance of other people. Unlike Lila, when she can no longer abide her married life, she flees and carves out a new existence for herself. When she finally returns to Grandpa Amos, it is not an act of desperation. She returns to offer some protection for her grandchildren and to care for the unstable husband she abandoned years before.

Amos Wingo

A religious fanatic, Amos, in his own way, is as unstable as Savannah. He firmly believes he talks to Jesus and follows a rigid spirituality all of his life. Unlike Savannah, his delusions cause him to challenge the moral depravity he sees around him without any hint of a judgmental attitude. He is stubborn in his beliefs but gentle in his dealings with others. What he is unable to instill in his own son, he gives unknowingly to his grandson, Luke.

Sallie Wingo

Tom's wife is the antithesis of Lila. Like her mother-in-law, she comes from the backwoods. Unlike her, Sallie pulls herself up by her own determination. She does not marry Tom out of any sense that he is other than what he is, and she is able to give him the drive to become a great coach and teacher. She is unable to deal with Tom's self-destruction after the death of Luke. Sallie also has no knowledge of the "family secret."

Susan Lowenstein

Savannah's psychiatrist is the strong but also vulnerable character of the novel who represents the good qualities of New Yorkers. She puts on a brave face to cover the unhappiness of her marriage and has a "mother hen" protectiveness of her son, Bernard. A consummate professional at her work as a psychiatrist, she does not know how to reach her teenage son.

Bernard Woodruff

Susan's son bears the last name of his father although his mother has chosen to retain her maiden name. His attitude is at first sullen and rude, and Tom recognizes and sets about to change this. Bernard's transformation comes through mastering the game of football.

Isabel Newbury

The default leader of Colleton society represents all the snobbery of the aristocratic south. Only on her deathbed does she realize the unkindness of her past actions, especially toward the Wingo family.

Reese Newbury

Reese is the personification of ruthlessness in business. He is unnerved by Isabel's illness but never really changes, even though he eventually marries Lila.

Mr. Fruit

Mr. Fruit is the retarded self-appointed traffic director on the Street of Tides in Colleton. He represents both the innocence and backwardness of the southern mentality. He is the only citizen remaining in Colleton besides Luke when the town is razed.

Otis Miller

The man the children dub Callanwolde is the obsessed threat to the Wingo family. His cruelty and unrelenting stalking of Lila represent all the elements of destruction that bear down on the Wingos.

Objects/Places

Melrose Island

The Wingo homestead is the embodiment of unspoiled nature.

Colleton

The small South Carolina shrimping town is a figure of the vanishing south along with its historic attitudes.

The Miss Lila

Henry's shrimp boat is the tangible evidence of Henry's love for his wife.

Snow

The albino porpoise symbolizes all the hopes and aspirations of the Colleton people.

Caesar's Cage

The cage represents the captivity felt in one way or another by all of the family.

The Cross

Grandpa Amos carries the cross every year on Good Friday, and it is a symbol of both Amos' religiosity and the burden he carries in trying to save the souls of his fellow man.

Callanwolde

The forbidden forest represents all of the threatening dangers that confront the Wingo children.

Black Widow Spiders

Papa John's black widow spiders are comparable to Lila, who is both dangerous and beautiful.

Bathsheba

The hurricane called *Bathsheba* represents the storm of life that the Wingo twins are born into.

Sport Jackets

The homemade sport jackets are a contrast between the privileged and unprivileged. They are a source of pride to Tom and Luke and a source of contempt from the snobbery of the overindulged university students.

New York

New York represents a haven for Savannah and all that is repulsive for Tom and Luke. These elements are portrayed in both the city's ugliness and beauty.

New Yorker

The *New Yorker* magazine becomes a symbol of freedom for Savannah.

Sunset and Moon Rise

Sunset and moon rise over the river present an image of ending and beginning in the lives of the Wingo family.

Marsh Hen Island

Marsh Hen Island, the hiding place for Luke during his war with the government, is the last gasp of nature holding out against the assault on the land.

Gold Fountain Pen

Lila's gift to Savannah of a gold fountain pen shows her reluctant acceptance of her daughter's determination to move to New York and become a poet.

Stradivarius

Worth over $300,000, the Stradivarius violin is the symbol of New York artistic snobbery, more important to Herbert than his son's happiness.

Statue of the Infant of Prague

Stolen from the church in Germany where the old priest is hanged, the statue becomes an instrument of death in Tom's hands.

Social Sensitivity

In The Prince of Tides, Conroy closely examines the effect of one's past upon one's life through his main character, Tom Wingo. Forced to relive his childhood in order to provide information for a psychiatrist trying to help his twin sister, a famous poet, to sanity following a suicide attempt, Tom finds himself undergoing therapy. As the novel's opening line, "My wound is geography" suggests, Conroy once again examines the effects of culture upon the development of personality.

The Wingos are members of the South Carolinian fishing society, where Tom was raised on an island, learning to crab and hunt from a young age.

His account reveals that he places most of the blame for his family's problems squarely upon the shoulders of his mother. The novel develops through vignettes reflecting upon the household activities and interrelationships within which Tom, his twin Savannah, and their brother Luke matured. He probes the past to help illuminate the present, revealing a distressing situation which may very well account for not only his sister's psychosis, but the stubbornness which led his brother to partake in a suicide mission, and which has left Tom without goals or focus. Through the medium of the psychiatrist, Susan Lowenstein, Tom is forced to separate his own problems from those of the other members of his maladjusted immediate family. By doing so, he learns to cope with the present in order to make plans for a future with his own physician wife and three daughters. The book examines the affects of inconstancy, both sexual and intellectual, upon two generations of marriage.

Techniques

The form of The Prince of Tides is that of multiple stories within a story. Conroy employs the voice and methods of a poet and a weaver of myths in his relaying of stories of his childhood. His use of imagery and figurative language to create the effects of a dreamy type of remembrance have been praised by critics and poets alike. He is the consummate storyteller, and in this novel shows this capability off in fine form.

With a seemingly endless imagination, Conroy concocts tales that deal with everything from childhood revenge, through the placing of a dead sea turtle in the hated Newbury house, where it rots and ruins an entire room, to Mr. Wingo's procurement of the tiger Caeser, eventually tamed by Luke. The tiger literally becomes the family's salvation as he later kills three men who sexually assault Savannah, Tom and Lila. The tales of the grandparents are some of the most memorable, representing the best in the Southern bizarre, such as the elderly Mr. Wingo's carrying a cross on his shoulders up and down Colleton, or Mrs. Wingo's "trying out" her own casket in a fu neral home. One must not overlook the mystery aspect of this novel, as Tom and Susan attempt to find the key allowing them to unlock Savannah's mind. Tom becomes a detective, seeking clues from his past which will help Susan Lowenstein in her efforts as his sister's physician.

In addition to family mythology, Conroy also offers poetry, supposedly written by Savannah Wingo. Within the novel is an entire children's book, which Savannah writes under a pseudonym. The symbolism of the children's book provides clues as to the source of Savannah's madness. Some of Conroy's strongest descriptive technique can be found in his descriptions of Savannah's nightmares. Truly a look into madness, his projection of her Satanic visions are fraught with gruesome, yet fascinating detail.

Conroy's first person narrative structure does not seem to restrict his presentation of the other characters. From the novel's opening, he constructs a mystical spiritual relationship amongst the three Wingo children which allow him a view into his sibling's souls. This creates a marvelous irony, in that Tom can produce detail after detail regarding the external events of his life, and he analyzes Savannah and Luke with fine precision. Yet his lack of self-understanding remains tremendous.

When Lila's greed and ambition directly cause her own son's death, the narrator must struggle to elicit any sympathy for his mother. Luke's physical death symbolizes the spiritual death all of the children have undergone at Lila's hands; this makes the resurrection of Tom and Savannah all the more dramatic.

The very aspects which make his novel so compelling, and such an entertaining read, also act to make the reader doubt Tom's early statement regarding the truth of his narrative. As one story after another appears, the reader cannot help but feel that any single one would serve as an experience of a lifetime for most families. But then, as Tom makes perfectly clear, the Wingos are not the ordinary family.

The long litany of stories builds with a palpable rhythm of tension toward Tom's self-realization. His love of language and his storytelling talents rescue him from total devastation. Conroy's own grappling with emotional abuse as a child maturing in the South allows an insight into his characters' pain without which the novel could not have been written.

Themes

Themes

As has come to be expected of Conroy, he examines themes of family, marriage, religion, social status, Southern culture, sibling and parental relationships, and the interdependence of spiritual, mental and physical health.

Most of all, he emphasizes storytelling itself.

The rich culture of the South acts as a backdrop for a modern drama in which characters enact roles seemingly shaped for them. Savannah's psychosis, in which she is literally haunted by personalities and events from her past, acts as a center for the various mental and spiritual problems suffered by all the Wingos. The novel showcases the varying abilities of the human psyche to adapt to the worst of conditions; some manage to emerge unscathed, others reach near-destruction.

Tom is caught between the various roles the South demands that its males play. His father expects the sons to be tough and is harsh in his discipline when Tom doesn't accept that role.

Tom's mother encourages his sensitive side, and Tom sees hiself as a failure at both. Luke was the epitomy of Southern macho; Savannah an accomplished poet. Tom is merely a high school footbal coach who teaches English and does not communicate well with his accomplished physician wife. All aspects of the Wingo family and the children's lives are dysfunctional, and the novel's purpose is to explain why.

An important part of Conroy's depiction of Southern culture is ritual and religion. The Wingos are Catholic, and as the novel develops, Catholicism, with its iconology, revering of saints and sacraments of confession and baptism (symbolizing a cleansing and a rebirth) acts as an apt symbol for Tom's mental and spiritual rebirth through the relation of the "myths" of his family.

Spousal relationships emphasize the fragility of love where trust is lacking.

Tom and his wife, Sallie, have lost faith in one another, as have Susan, and her famous violinist husband. All four members of the two couples turn to lovers for sustenance; Tom and Sallie finally come to terms at the end of the novel; Susan and her husband do not.

The power of "duty" for Tom is greater than the force of desire; in time, duty may lead to spiritual love between husband and wife. Susan and her husband Herbert do not feel duty bound, and thus they can only split up.

The fixed social strata of the South is represented through Torn Wingo's mother, Lila. The wife of a shrimper, she craves the high society into which she can never be

admitted. Ruthless in pursuit of formal recognition of her worth by the people of Colleton, South Carolina, Lila ultimately betrays every member of her family in order to achieve status. She accomplishes this by disposing of the family property, Melrose Island, which effectively leads to the death of her eldest child, disposing of her Wingo husband, and then marrying the wealthy father of Tom's childhood nemesis.

Tom orally reviews his family's history, relating the backgrounds of three generations of Wingos. In this way, Conroy emphasizes the crucial necessity for understanding, or at least acceptance, of one's past in order to function properly in the future. That all humans are composed of bits and pieces of those who have gone before becomes a repeated emphasis in the novel. Tom tells of the existence of two kinds of Wingos. One is loving and forgiving like his paternal grandfather, a Bible salesman. The other group of avenging Wingos "passed their grievances through their children and these feuds and germinating vendettas entered our bloodstreams like bruised heirlooms." Lila Wingo struggles against her own family background of poverty, alcoholism and abuse, a struggle in which she will eventually involve her three children.

The novel consists of one tale after another, any of which might stand alone, with all eventually woven together to represent the fabric of the Wingos' existence. Lest the reader doubt that so many fabulous occurrences might envelope a single family, Tom promises veracity in the introduction, remarking, "The truth is this: Things happened to my family, extraordinary things. I know families who live out their entire destinies without a single thing of interest happening to them. I have always envied those families." As Tom relates events from Savannah's childhood to Dr. Lowenstein, he unravels his own history.

Through his recollections, he succeeds in recapturing the imagination which formed his sole protection from the tortures of his childhood. The episodic structure of the novel acts to make it a mystery of sorts, complete with foreshadowing leading up to the major traumatic event of the Wingo children's lives.

Secrets and Lies

The major thread that runs throughout this novel is the damaging effects of secrets and lies upon the family. The catastrophe without catharsis of the "family secret" Lila forces her children to keep becomes central to the story of mental imbalance and desperation. The already flawed Savannah is driven to self-destruction by having no opportunity to cleanse herself of the defilement she suffers during the rape. She is so bound to the promise never to speak of it and her mother's insistence that it "never happened" that Savannah has never breathed a word of it to her psychiatrist. Tom makes the decision to break the silence that brings forth a gusher of release both for himself and for his twin sister. Once that is accomplished, they are able to confront their feelings about Luke's death.

The innocent and enchanting fantasies Lila tells her small children became unbearable absurdities as they grow older. Savannah is the gifted writer of the family, but Lila is the

greatest creator of fiction. Not only are the lies fabulous fabrications, but they also often place the children in untenable positions for dealing with the citizens of Colleton.

Henry's lies are more denial than out and out fabrications. He simply wipes his memory clean of the violent acts he perpetrates upon the family, fully believing that nothing of the sort has ever occurred. His denials are much easier for the siblings to accept and forgive. They are able to love him in spite of his rough treatment during their formative years.

Lila's insistence that nothing happened with Otis Miller at Tolitha's house results in the ultimate horror of the rape years later. Then, her insistence that it become a "family secret" that she instructs the children never to speak about leads to the unraveling of both Savannah and Tom. Tolitha and Amos are the antithesis of the lies told by Henry and Lila. Their lives are open and fearless in the face of truth. Their legacy to Tom leads him ultimately to reveal the "family secret" and tear apart the lies that have so entangled them all.

Class and Social Distinctions

Throughout the novel, the theme of class and social differences runs like the tide. It first appears in the form of Lila, who deludes herself with elaborate lies about her origins. Her alcoholic father and limpid mother become, in her mind, wealthy aristocrats with inroads to the very best society. Sallie also comes from common stock but faces her background down by becoming an outstanding scholar and medical doctor.

Isabel Newbury hands the Wingo family great servings of condescension over their low-class shrimper station in life. Her orchestration of the charity Thanksgiving turkey is a direct snub of Lila and her social aspirations. Reese does the same thing to Tom after his fight with Reese's son.

School colleagues in high school and the university evaluate the Wingo children by the clothes they own, putting them down as laughable lower classes. Herbert Woodruff taunts Tom, calling him a "southern boy" in front of the dinner guests at the Woodruff apartment. At first, Bernard affects his father's class snobbery until Tom teaches him to respect people for what they are rather than what they wear or where they come from.

Luke and Tom run headlong into the New York feminists who put them down for being southerners and, by their definition, male chauvinists. Ultimately, Luke refuses to meekly accept the right of wealth and power to destroy an entire community.

Marriage and Infidelity

A more subtle theme that runs throughout the novel is the conflict between marriage and infidelity. Tolitha defies early-twentieth century tradition and ideas of morality by leaving Amos and Henry in the middle of the depression. She marries Papa John and makes a new life for herself in Atlanta. The one lie she insists that her family adhere to

is referring to her as "Aunt Tolitha" because she has never told Papa John about her previous life. Henry is eleven years old at the time, and this sudden and drastic change in his life leaves him without guidance or direction. In effect, Henry raises himself.

Tom and Sallie are on the verge of divorce because his mental state has left him both unemployed and impotent. Sallie does not want to hurt Tom any more than he already is hurt, but she turns to a lover to fulfill her needs. She is ambivalent about continuing in her marriage to Tom. At the same time, Tom does not want to lose her or see the destruction of his family, but he is powerless to do anything about it.

Interestingly, as much as Lila despises everything her husband represents to her, Lila sticks out her marriage until the children are grown. Even when she finally resolves to divorce Henry, it has nothing to do with any infidelity on her part. She is no longer needed at home to bring up her children, and she sees the chance to go for the life she has always dreamed of while she still has her beauty.

Herbert Woodruff is having simultaneous affairs with several women, one of whom is his wife's patient. Susan is faithful to Herbert until the night on her terrace when Tom brings Herbert shamelessly to his knees in front of their dinner guests. That same night, she and Tom stay together in Savannah's apartment. Savannah has multiple affairs with both men and women in New York, but Luke, the one most like his father, never marries in spite of the fact that many girls and women are attracted to his handsome maleness.

The author seems to say that marriage and fidelity are important, but that it is more important to be true to yourself and those that you love. Although Lila stays with her husband, ultimately her children are hurt by lies more than they might have been hurt by a divorce. While Tom wants to save his marriage, he cannot until he can face the truth. When he does finally reconcile with his wife, it is bittersweet because another truth has surfaced. He is in love with someone else. Is he repeating Lila's error in sticking to a marriage for reasons other than love? Is the importance of marriage greater than the importance of love which may be fleeting?

Style

Points of View

The novel is told through the eyes of Tom Wingo from his embryonic swim with his twin sister through the resolution of both their mental problems in the end. Conroy is capable, however, of relating the other characters' viewpoints through the stories that Tom tells Dr. Lowenstein. His style allows the reader to get inside the minds of Lila, Tolitha, Amos, Luke and Henry simply through his uncolored accounts. Susan Lowenstein's point of view is reflected in the constant confrontations she has with Tom, calling him down for his flippancy and withholding of all the facts.

Some of the stories are almost omniscient in viewpoint because of the clear use of dialogue that gives each character a believable truth. As Tom's time with Dr. Lowenstein goes on, Tom becomes less and less subjective in his narration, and the reader can almost feel that he or she is peering into the heads of the various personas.

Subconsciously, Tom seems to see himself most clearly through the eyes of his family and friends as he gets deeper into the Wingo family history. His newly learned ability to see himself as others see him begins to create changes in his attitude and self-perception. Seeing everything through this single character's eyes, however, never interferes with the reader's ability to understand the other characters of the novel.

Setting

The main setting of the novel is in South Carolina, on Melrose Island and in the small town of Colleton. The importance of this location lies not in it greatness but rather in it insignificance. By contrast, the secondary setting is a limited view of New York City. Colleton and the island are the raw edges of southern society with all it goodness, charm, prejudices and backwardness. New York is viewed as representing everything cultured, sophisticated and cold about its population. It is not a true picture of the city with all its diversity. Rather, it is viewed through the biased perceptions of Tom and Luke.

A third minor setting is in Papa John and Tolitha's house in Atlanta. Callanwolde, the estate and the forest next door come to be synonymous with fear in the person of Otis Miller, and *Callanwolde* becomes the word the children use to define anything frightening.

Melrose Island takes on the role of a major setting for the novel because that is where the most significant events in the Wingo family's lives occur. It is on the island during a hurricane that Tom and Savannah are born, and their connection to their one-year-old brother, Luke, begins there. On Melrose Island, Lila and the children run away in fear of the drunk and violent Henry on the night of the birthday party. On the island, Isabel

Newbury casts her most humiliating barb at Lila and the Wingo family. There, also, the hideous "family secret" occurs.

Language and Meaning

Conroy delights in meaningful and colorful language, beginning with the opening words of the prologue to *The Prince of Tides* when Tom says, "My wound is geography. It is also my anchorage, my port of call." (Page 1) The language is always crystal clear and simple to understand. Still, it conveys the underlying feelings that the novel slowly brings to the surface. In the prologue, Tom speaks of the childhood he and his siblings have endured as "part elegy and part nightmare." Such language grips the reader and makes one not want to put the book down until both the elegy and nightmares are explained.

The subject of mental illness can become maudlin in the hands of a less creative writer. Conroy treats it with a detached use of vocabulary that lends a reality to the sufferings of both Savannah and Tom. Tom expresses his anger over Savannah's latest attempt at suicide with the words, "I'm angry that she's crazy and is allowed to be as crazy as she needs to be." (Page 27) The language does not tiptoe around the usually unmentionable subject of madness.

The poetry in Conroy's prose renders a shocking contrast against the ugliness that creeps into the lives of the Wingo children. "We said our prayers together, and she kissed each of us good night. She turned out the light and although we heard her footsteps descend the winding stairs, her perfume lingered in the darkness. I fell asleep listening to the wind in the trees. Two hours later I awoke and saw his face in the window...a paralysis of exquisite, impenetrable terror entered each cell of my body." (Page 135)

Instead of mundanely reporting of the sound of breaking glass, Conroy's language colors the scene by selecting words like "the brutal showering of glass." (Page 135) In describing the body of the stillborn Rose Aster, Tom says, "Savannah had laid Rose Aster in the small wooden box we had built for the interment. The box was not much longer than an oversized bird house, and the infant herself looked like some defeathered, unevolved species of bird." (Page 173) Throughout the novel this kind of colorful language evokes images and feelings that aid the flow of the narrative.

Conroy's use of dialogue is fast-paced and real. For example, one of Tom's telephone conversations with his mother draws a true picture of their relationship. "'You're the spitting image of your father.' 'I know, Mom, and the translation of that is I'm a worthless shit...'" (Page Reference?)

Structure

The novel is structured with a prologue, twenty-seven chapters of varying lengths and an epilogue. The chapters contain Tom's telling of his family story, building up to a

climax that is only cursorily hinted at during the novel. The use of time and place to prolong the telling of the "family secret" and the demise of Luke adds suspense to the reading.

At first the reader might think the novel is Savannah's story, but quickly it becomes clear that the real central character is Tom himself. The structure of the novel, which draws the story slowly out of Tom, allows the reader to come to know Tom at the same time as he is rediscovering himself.

The pace of the novel is quick, and it could be finished in one sitting by a fast reader, although most readers will want to take time to savor Conroy's skillful use of language. The suspense and tension evoked by the narrative, with all the possibilities it raises, puts *The Prince of Tides* in the class of well-written books that are difficult to put down.

Quotes

"I did not yet have the interior resources to dream new dreams, I was far too busy mourning the death of the old ones and wondering how I was going to survive without them." (Page 24)

"It is an art form to hate New York City properly. So far I have always been a featherweight debunker of New York; it takes too much energy and endurance to record the infinite number of ways the city offends me." (Page 32)

"We've pretended too much in our family, Luke, and hidden far too much. I think we're all going to pay a high price for our inability to face the truth." (Page 51)

"My family hates everyone. It's nothing personal." (Page 59)

"The priest knelt beside my father and they prayed together, priest and warrior transfigured by moonlight, by warfare, destiny, and the urgent, mysterious, and ineffable cries and secrets of souls turned inward upon themselves." (Page 92)

"If I could summon the courage to tell it all, by speaking without forestallment, by humming the melodies of all those dark anthems that sent us marching so resolutely toward our appointments with a remorseless destiny, I could explain my sister's heartbreaking war with the world." (Page 99)

"We did not know then that she was a most unhappy woman. Nor did we know she would never quite forgive us for growing up. But growing up was a misdemeanor compared to our one unforgivable crime: being born in the first place." (Page 109)

"From my father I inherited a sense of humor, a capacity for hard work, physical strength, a dangerous temper, a love of the sea, and an attraction to failure." (Page 251)

"Larceny is not a difficult crime to condone unless your childhood was the item stolen." (Page 282)

"He was in the middle of a lifelong soliloquy, a loosely organized high-octave monologue addressed to no one in particular." (Page 289)

"These are the quicksilver moments of my childhood I cannot recapture entirely. Irresistible and emblematic, I can recall them only in fragments and shivers of the heart." (Page 323)

"When I try to recall my mother's voice as a child, it is lifted in a grave and euphorious lament of our economic situation; I hear her chansons and plainsongs of her ineradicable belief that we lived out our days in the most hideous poverty." (Page 398)

"Whenever I am angry, my displeasure is written in code on my mouth in a thin-lipped, downturned crescent. I have perfect control of the rest of my face but my mouth is the renegade that broadcasts my vexation and wrath to the outside world." (Page 433)

"With her beauty alone, Lila Wingo could have troubled the licentious dreams of kings. But with her beauty *and* her cunning she could have inspired anarchists and regicides to bring her the heads of a dozen kings, garnished with parsley and roses, on pale blue Wedgwood plates." (Page 544)

Adaptations

The adaptation of The Prince of Tides (1991) to film probably remains the most famous movie to grow from any of Conroy's novels. This highly successful film version earned Nick Nolte an Oscar nomination and also featured Barbra Streisand as co-star, producer, and director. Although the movie could not possibly portray all the incidents and characters of the book, those presented remain faithful to Conroy's concept. Both Nick Nolte as Tom and Barbra Streisand as Susan present riveting portrayals of the complex main characters.

Key Questions

The very massiveness of Conroy's novel, at more than 500 pages, offers a tremendous focus for discussion. Within those pages exist not only Tom Wingo's story in the present, but also a multitude of tales from his past. His fiction reflects his fascination with the capabilities humans have to mask their internal struggles. The crippling mental and physical effects of emotional abuse supply a geography of the body which contrasts beautifully with the magnificent setting of the coastal Southern region. The setting becomes a character itself, supporting Tom's opening statement that "My wound is geography."

The opportunity to compare Conroy's novel with other Southern favorites should afford a basis for lively interaction among readers. A discussion group might glance at the characterizations and themes found in wellknown Southern masterpieces such as Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird (1960) and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (1929). While Conroy's presentation bears the marks of more contemporary fiction, such as depiction in graphic terms of a rape scene and the abundant use of profanity by his characters, this difference in methodology does not alter the novel's relation to those by other Southern writers.

As many of the episodic chapters present stories complete unto themselves, this novel may be assigned in sections to different individuals for analysis. Because the characters appear over a long span of years, through the use of flashback, it is interesting to trace their changes and development.

Readers will enjoy discussing the differences between the Southern and the Eastern characters and the contrast between Lila Wingo and her children.

1. Discuss the effectiveness of Conroy's abundant use of flashback in this novel.

2. Point out as many instances of foreshadowing of the fates of the Wingo children as you can find. Are the children themselves responsible for any of the events which shape their future selves?

3. Analyze the importance of Sallie's character to Conroy's plot. Explain why the novel could or could not better function with Tom as an unmarried character.

4. Discuss the themes of repentance and grace in the novel. Do any of the characters better symbolize these themes than others?

5. Compare and contrast what the novel reveals regarding inhabitants of the South versus those of New York.

Why did Conroy establish New York City as the focus of Savannah's long time dream of escape?

6. How do Savannah's nightmares and visions act as clues to the puzzle of her mental illness?

7. How does Savannah's illness act as a catalyst to help Tom achieve health of spirit? How does Susan Lowenstein contribute to this change?

8. In what ways does Susan Lowenstein's characterization differ from that of the stereotypical psychiatrist? In what ways does she match the stereotype?

9. How is the tiger, Caesar, used to help shape Luke's characterization?

10. Does Lila Wingo ever find satisfaction in life? Is she ultimately a sympathetic or unsympathetic character?

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the imagery of the birth of the twins during the hurricane and how those images are mirrored in their subsequent lives.

Aside from the "family secret," cite examples of how secrets and lies run as a theme throughout the novel.

Savannah and Tom are fraternal twins of opposite genders. Find references showing the masculine side of Savannah and the feminine side of Tom.

What is the significance in the retaking of Snow and how does it relate to Luke's war?

A significant moment in Tom's search for clues in Savannah's apartment comes when he reads the poem attributed to Renata Halpern. When he finishes, he thinks, "You are hiding behind fur." Why does this poem cause a change in Tom?

Compare and contrast Grandpa Amos' talking to God and Savannah's talking to black dogs and macabre angels.

Literary Precedents

The Prince of Tides reflects its heritage of traditional Southern Gothic, featuring the macabre as well as the divine.

Conroy's imbuement of his Southern "crazies" with a particular warmth and grace resembles similar portrayals by Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers.

Some of this type of characterization may also be seen in works by Truman Capote, an author who spent much of his youth in the South, most notably in short stories such as "Children on Their Birthdays." It does, however, depart from those authors' use of suggestion, depending instead upon shocking specifics, at once profane and compelling.

It is not a stretch to situate this novel within the tradition of epic mythology such as Beowulf and The Odyssey, as this novel represents the oral tradition of storytelling at its best. Classic tales of the hero and the heroine also whisper in the background of The Prince of Tides, and its use of the tale within the tale has too many precedents to name.

Conroy's work also mimics poetry; the dense imagery and persistent rhythms of his prose depart from normal narrative style.

While the narrator's intent is to involve the listener/reader in the immediacy of his experience, the novel cannot be termed realism. Its details are those which might be found on a muted canvas, rather than a stark black-and-white T.V. screen, with each image dependent upon another in order for the viewer to comprehend the entire picture.

Related Titles

The Prince of Tides is closely related to The Great Santini (1976). Both novels share the same themes of family and abuse, and Tom Wingo could almost serve as a mature Ben Meecham. Readers of both novels will recognize strong parallels between Tom's memories of football games and the athletic arena and the rendering of Ben's participation in basketball. Both characters find themselves strongly attracted to the field of English and the use of language, although this attraction remains much stronger in the more mature Tom Wingo. While physical and emotional abuse are expressed in differing manners in the two novels, the children's unification against that abuse is similar. The sisters of both protagonists are wise-cracking cynics who each brag they are more intelligent than their brothers. Discerning readers will note the similarities between Savannah's forcing Tom to act as a champion for the first black to attend their high school to Mary Anne Meecham's commanding her brother, Ben, to defend the Jewish boy at the Ravenel high school. The uniting of the Wingo children in their under-water circle of solidarity resembles the retreat to the branches of a tree by the Meecham children as they escape their father's fury. And Tom Wingo's ritualistic repetition of the name "Lowenstein" while on the highway in the final scene of The Prince of Tides parallels Ben Meecham's prayer of love for Santini as he drives the family car away from Ravenel in the conclusion of The Great Santini.

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