

The Ponder Heart Study Guide

The Ponder Heart by Eudora Welty

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Plot Summary

The book "The Ponder Heart" by Eudora Welty tells the story of kind-hearted Daniel Ponder who is accused of murder by the family of his deceased wife. The story is told by Daniel's niece, Edna Earle Ponder, who runs the Beulah Hotel in the small town of Clay. Themes of the story include differences in people, fickleness and the impact of money and trouble on friendship.

Edna Earle narrates her story as if she is talking directly to the reader, who plays the part of a visitor to the hotel. She first describes her Uncle Daniel and his habit of giving things away. In an attempt to cure Daniel this habit Grandpa Ponder gets Daniel married to widow Miss Teacake Magee. The marriage only lasts two months and Daniel is back to his old ways.

Grandpa Ponder next tries to discipline Daniel by having him admitted to a mental institution. After returning to the institution after a visit home, Daniel turns the tables on his father by leaving his father at the asylum when a nurse mistakes Grandpa Ponder as the patient. Before Grandpa can make it out of the asylum and back to Clay, Daniel has married Bonnie Dee Peacock. When he returns home and finds Daniel married, Grandpa Ponder has a heart attack, the result of the Ponder heart, and dies.

Daniel and Bonnie's marriage is filled with angst as Bonnie decides to leave him five years into their trial marriage. Edna Earle puts an article in the Commercial Appeal begging Bonnie Dee to come back and promising a weekly allowance for her. Bonnie returns but kicks Daniel out of the house. In an attempt to fix things, Edna Earle suggests Daniel stop giving Bonnie Dee her weekly allowance. Bonnie Dee calls for Daniel a few days later. As he and Edna Earle prepare to travel to the Ponder home, a thunderstorm is coming up.

Daniel sits on the sofa tickling Bonnie Dee with a pillow tassel, trying to distract her from the storm. During this time, she apparently dies laughing, a detail that never comes out in the trial but Edna Earle tells her visitor in detail. Instead, Daniel has gone to the bank and begins giving his money away to every one present at the trial. Though some try to get Edna Earle to stop him, she refuses to do so. Since Daniel has given away all of their money, the people treat them strangely. No one has spent any of the money and can't seem to decide what they should do with it.



Pages 7 - 27

Pages 7 - 27 Summary

The story "The Ponder Heart" by Eudora Welty tells the story of kind-hearted Daniel Ponder who is accused of murder by the family of his deceased wife. The story is told by Daniel's niece, Edna Earle Ponder, who runs the Beulah Hotel in the small town of Clay. Themes of the story include differences in people, fickleness and the impact of money and trouble on friendship.

In this first section of the novel, narrator Edna Earle Ponder describes her Uncle Daniel and his love of people. She speaks of his vice of giving things away freely, and lists the different things that he's given away in the past. She speaks of the trouble that her grandfather had with Daniel because Daniel gives away his father's possessions as well as his own. Despite this failing, Daniel is admired by his father and his niece. Edna Earle tells that Daniel has no meanness in him.

In fact, Edna Earle tells her guest that she came to have the Beulah Hotel because Uncle Daniel gave it to her. The giving away of the hotel bothers Daniel's father because he is afraid that someone will find out about Daniel's vulnerability and take advantage of him. Grandpa Ponder decides to teach Daniel a lesson by having him committed to an institution. Because he really does not suffer from any mental instability, Edna Earle says that Daniel gets plenty of vacations from the asylum. While he is at home on these visits, he always gives things away whenever he has the opportunity. The only thing that seems to stop Daniel's sprees of giving things away is his desire to talk to others about his experiences when he has taken a trip somewhere.

Daniel's favorite tale to tell is the one about the time Daniel turned the tables on his father by passing his father off as himself at the asylum. A new nurse who did not recognize Daniel mistakes Grandpa Ponder as the patient. As a result, Grandpa is locked up and Daniel returns home in the car. Judge Tip Clanahan finds out what has happened and goes to rescue Grandpa Ponder from the institution. Meanwhile, Daniel does something that surprises them all.

Edna Earle changes the subject and talks about the time that Daniel married Miss Teacake Magee. The wedding actually comes from Grandpa's attempt to be strict with Daniel for the first time. Grandpa decides to get Daniel married after Daniel spends an evening at the fair chasing after girls. The marriage doesn't last, however, and Daniel soon comes back home. The only reason he will give Edna Earle for the break up was that he didn't like the sound of "spool-heels coming and going on Professor Magee's floors."



Pages 7 - 27 Analysis

Edna Earle, who is the narrator of the story, is the owner of the Beulah Hotel and the niece of Daniel Ponder. Because Daniel's parents had him late in life, Daniel and Edna Earle are close to the same age. Edna Earle seems to regard Daniel as more of a brother than an uncle. The story is written as if Edna Earle were telling the story to the reader. The reader actually has a role in the novel as they are a person visiting the Beulah Hotel because their car has broken down and they have stopped for repairs. In fact, Edna Earle refers to the people who "come here, pass through this book" as if the book were a living, changing thing with which its readers could interact.

In this section, Edna Earle talks to her hotel guest about Uncle Daniel. He has a bad habit of giving things away, even things that don't belong to him. Daniel is described in the novel almost as if he were mentally handicapped. Grandpa Ponder is concerned someone will recognize Daniel's good heartedness and try to take advantage of him. In order to try to calm him down, Daniel's father, Sam Ponder arranged for Daniel to meet, and marry, an attractive widow. The marriage doesn't last long and Daniel is soon back home again. At this point, Daniel's father has him committed to an asylum in an attempt to discipline him. In a weird twist of fate, the two arrive back at the asylum early one day after Daniel has been away on a visit. The new nurse mistakes Grandpa Ponder for the patient and Daniel doesn't correct her. When he returns home without his father, Daniel apparently does something that shocks and brings fear to the entire family as it causes Grandpa Ponder to have a second heart attack and die.

Notice in this section the emphasis put on the worth of money. Daniel's habit of giving "things" away is frustrating to his family, but the loss of the things doesn't really seem to bother them. It is only when Daniel gives the hotel away to Edna Earle that Grandpa Ponder begins to worry that Daniel might let someone take advantage of him. He has already told Edna Earle that he does not plan to tell Daniel about the family's money and that she is not to tell him either. Edna promises not to do so.

Another important issue in this section of the novel is the emphasis that Edna Earle puts on going too far away from home. She seems to indicate that when one got far enough away from home that they were not well known, there was bound to be trouble. This is how she accounts for Daniel being able to get Grandpa Ponder locked up in the mental institution so easily. She says that if Grandpa Ponder had been in an area where he was well known, this mistake would never have taken place.



Pages 28 - 44

Pages 28 - 44 Summary

Edna Earle next tells how Bonnie Dee Peacock and Daniel happened to meet. Bonnie Dee had come into Clay and taken a job in the ten-cent store. On the day that Daniel left Grandpa Ponder in the asylum, he went to the store and saw Bonnie Dee there. Edna Earl assumes he told Bonnie Dee about the Ponder house and his money, and then asked her to marry him. Two and one half hours later, the two return to town from Silver City where they were married. Narciss, the cook at the Ponder house, had driven them to Silver City in Grandpa Ponder's Studebaker.

Edna Earle learns of the marriage when Narciss pulls up to the hotel. Narciss waits until a crowd has gathered before she announces the news that Daniel has taken a new wife to Edna Earle. Edna Earle describes Bonnie Dee as being little and dainty with fluffy yellow hair. She also recognizes her as being shallow. After they have driven off to see the Ponder house, Judge Tip Clanahan tells Edna Earle that if Daniel does one more thing, he will turn him over to his grandson DeYancey. Edna Earle blames Daniel's actions on the discipline that her father and judge tried to impose on Daniel.

Although she tries to head them off, Grandpa Ponder and DeYancy head straight for the Ponder house instead of stopping at the hotel as she had hoped they would do. DeYancey calls from the house telling her that Bonnie Dee has married Daniel on trial. Edna Earle drives out to the house just in time to learn that Grandpa Ponder has died. When he learned what Daniel did, his heart gave out. The funeral is at the Presbyterian Church. After the funeral, Narciss drives Daniel and Bonnie Dee around in the Studebaker. They live in the Ponder house, which is way out in the country according to Edna Earl, and come to the hotel to eat.

Pages 28 - 44 Analysis

A theme addressed in this section that has been mentioned before is that one shouldn't stray from the places where they are known. Edna Earle believes that had Daniel and Bonnie Dee gone anywhere else to get married, someone would have stopped the marriage. She reasons that people in the other surrounding towns would have known to call Grandpa Ponder or Judge Clanahan before the wedding could have taken place.

In addition to not liking Bonnie Dee and believing her to be shallow as her first opinion, Edna Earle seems to think that Narciss, the black lady who cooked for the family has betrayed them. Not only did Narciss not try to stop the wedding, she actually encouraged it by driving Bonnie Dee and Daniel to Silver City to get married. To make matters worse, Narciss waits until a large, interested crowd has gathered at the hotel before she announces to Edna Earle that Bonnie Dee and Daniel have gotten married.



Edna Earle is upset with her, first for allowing the wedding to take place and second for announcing it in such a public way.

When Clanahan learns of Daniel's marriage to Bonnie Dee, he threatens to Edna Earle that if Daniel does one more thing, he will turn him over to DeYancey. This threat will be important later in the book. Although Edna Earle gives Clanahan credit for helping to get Daniel out of trouble, she also lays some of the blame on him because he helped get Daniel sent to an asylum. There is some indication that Daniel married Bonnie Dee as a way to get back at both his father and Clanahan for sending him to the institution in the first place.

Also in this section, Grandpa Ponder's heart gives out. Edna Earle names his condition "The Ponder Heart" which is the same name as the book. It has been Grandpa Ponder's fear for some time that Daniel will give away something of real value to the family. Since he has invited Bonnie Dee to live with him in the house that Grandpa and Grandma Ponder built, Grandpa Ponder must think this is the beginning of the end.



Pages 45 - 63

Pages 45 - 63 Summary

After five and a half years, Bonnie Dee decides that she no longer wants to be married to Daniel. She doesn't even say good-bye to Daniel in person but instead leaves a note in the kitchen. The note does not even indicate if it is written to Bonnie Dee or Daniel. When they read the note, both Daniel and Narciss cry because Bonnie Dee has left. Although several people tell Edna Earle they saw Bonnie Dee leave, no one tried to stop her and no one can tell Edna Earle where Bonnie Dee got off the bus. Edna Earle believes it was Bonnie Dee's dream to get out of the country by marrying Daniel, but only found herself right back in the country. She is happy only when she learns that Daniel never gave Bonnie Dee any money during the time they were married.

Each evening after Bonnie Dee leaves, Daniel comes to the Beulah hotel to ask if anyone has seen Bonnie Dee and tell the story of her. When Daniel gets sick, he calls for Edna Earl to come take care of him. While there, Edna Earle misses electricity, a comfort she has in town but Grandpa Ponder never had put into his own home. She finds the magazines from which Bonnie Dee has ordered things while she was in the house with Daniel. During her stay, Edna Earle determines Daniel isn't really sick, he just doesn't want to be alone. She spends her time cleaning house and reading. She invites Daniel to come into town and live at the hotel, but he doesn't want Bonnie Dee to come back and find the house empty.

Edna Earle goes to Judge Tip Clanahan for advice. Although the judge wants to leave the matter alone, Edna Earle convinces him to allow her to put an advertisement in the Commercial Appeal to beg Bonnie Dee to come home. She has heard by word of mouth that Mr. Springer saw Bonnie Dee in Memphis. In the article they offer Bonnie Dee an allowance, which will be retroactive to the time she and Daniel got married. They agree not to tell Daniel about the article.

The day after the article runs, Bonnie Dee comes back to Clay. Edna Earl learns she has returned when she hears Daniel hollering from the dining room that his throat was being cut. Edna Earle calms him down and convinces him it is just Bonnie Dee who has returned and is apparently taking up the habit of shaving him at the dining room table. Narciss rejoices when she sees the lady is back. As Edna Earle is leaving to return to the hotel, Narciss calls her back claiming they need the doctor. Daniel has passed out. Dr. Ewbanks diagnoses him with a racing heart. Although Edna Earle is angry with Bonnie Dee and wishes she didn't have to, she leaves her retroactive allowance on the parlor table.



Pages 45 - 63 Analysis

In this section, it seems to be fairly clear that all Bonnie Dee wants out her relationship with Daniel is money. It is only when Edna Earle and Judge Clanahan put an article in the paper promising Bonnie Dee money that she returns. Edna Earle is understandably angry with Bonnie Dee for the way that she is treating her uncle. She is happy that Edna Earle has returned because it seems to make Daniel happy. It is surprising that Edna Earle goes to Judge Clanahan for help with Daniel since he has already shown a certain amount of impatience with Daniel and his antics. Although he seems to think it would be best to leave the situation alone, Edna Earle is tired of seeing her uncle moping about.

In this section of the novel, Edna Earl makes the point that Daniel doesn't know the difference between being rich and having money. Daniel knows that he is rich. He has a house to live in, plenty of food and doesn't want for anything. However, Daniel doesn't seem to have any concept of what money is or the worth of items. He thinks of money and things only as items that can be given away and replaced easily.

Also in this part of the novel the reader learns that Grandpa Ponder had been afraid of lightening. Edna Earle indicates that her grandfather will not have electricity put in his home because he is afraid that it will draw lightening in.



Pages 64 - 80

Pages 64 - 80 Summary

Daniel walks to the hotel one day carrying a suitcase with the news that Bonnie Dee has kicked him out of the house. Edna Earle suspects Daniel is happy with the arrangement because even though Bonnie Dee has kicked him out, he knows where she is. Later, Narciss tells Edna Earle and Daniel that as soon as Daniel left the house, Bonnie Dee began ordering things. Bonnie Dee even orders a washing machine. When Edna Earle mentions to Narciss the machine won't work without electricity, Narciss tells her that Bonnie has had the house hooked up for electricity. Edna Earle seems to think this is improper on Bonnie Dee's part since the Ponder house is not even her home. She learns that Bonnie Dee even gets a telephone in the house even though Edna Earle doubts it is ever used.

Edna Earle never asks Daniel why Bonnie Dee kicked him out of the house. She doesn't want to know. She does wonder, however, if she should go on allowing him to live the way that he is with Bonnie Dee living off the family's money. Edna Earle suggests to Daniel that he stop giving Bonnie Dee her allowance since the two are no longer living together. Mr. Springer and Eva Sistrunk, who are present at the conversation, agree there is nothing to lose. Bonnie Dee sends for them the following Monday after the money is stopped. When Edna Earle learns that Bonnie Dee has called for them, she feels tired, a feeling she believes is a premonition of what will happen next. Bonnie Dee is dead by suppertime on Monday.

Bonnie Dee's funeral is held at the Dee family's home in Polk. There are two country preachers at the service. Uncle Daniel becomes upset at the gravesite when they try to bury the casket. Edna Earle has to talk him down. As soon as the funeral is finished, the Peacocks charge Uncle Daniel with Bonnie Dee's murder.

Pages 64 - 80 Analysis

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this section of "The Ponder Heart" is Edna Earle's premonition when Daniel tells her that Bonnie Dee is returning home. Edna Earle states that she feels tired. It seems that Edna Earle somehow knows that this is only part of a larger battle that she will have to fight on Daniel's behalf.

In this section, no mention is made why Bonnie Dee died. It is only indicated that she died the day that Daniel returned home and that the Peacocks believe that Daniel had something to do with her death.

Notice also in the section the description of the country life of the Peacocks. Edna Earle had thought that Bonnie Dee had agreed to marry Daniel because it would get her out of the country and by the description of the tiny town, house and people of her family, Edna Earle may have been right in her assessment. Instead of moving up in the world,

however, Bonnie Dee makes a luxurious life for herself with fine clothes, electricity, phone and fancy food in the Ponders' home, using Daniel's money. She has even kicked Daniel out of the house, keeping him from interfering in her plans for happiness.



Pages 81 - 103

Pages 81 - 103 Summary

Instead of supporting his friend, Judge Tip Clanahan hands Daniel's case off to his grandson, claiming that he has to go to Hot Springs for health reasons during the time that the trial will be taking place. Although they had always been close friends, Daniel becomes upset at DeYancey when he tells him that he will not be allowed to testify at his own trial. Daniel is not locked up in prison as the people trust him not to run away. Besides, Edna Earle knows that Daniel will stay with her. Even so, DeYancey follows Daniel everywhere, having him practice being quiet and making sure he doesn't talk about the case to others.

On the day of Daniel's trial, the courtroom is crowded that morning with people who know the Ponders, those who know of the Ponders and the Peacocks. Mr. Truex Bodkin, the coroner, is the first one to testify. He testifies that Bonnie Dee's death was caused by heart failure. He is confused though and first says her death was of natural causes, then said it might have been from not so natural causes. The next witness is Big John Beech who tells the court that Daniel had sent for him to give Bonnie Dee a message of his own. John testifies that Daniel had told him to tell Bonnie Dee he would kill her if she did not take him back.

The next witness is Miss Teacake Magee. She admits to being married to Daniel and says she would not take him back, but won't tell why. Narciss comes next. She talks of the way that Bonnie Dee had her pulling the sofa away from the windows in the dining room the day she died because she was afraid lightening would come in the house. Narciss tells the judge that she knew Daniel and Edna Earle had come to the house around this time but didn't know what happened after that because she went and hid under the bed. After the storm was over, Narciss said she came back into the room to find Edna Earle and Daniel in the parlor and Bonnie Dee dead. She talks of horrible noises she heard while she was hiding. As evidence, two boy scouts bring in part of a tree broken off right next to the house when it was hit during the lightening storm. DeYancey suggests to Narciss that it was the sound of this tree being hit and breaking, and not Bonnie Dee being killed, that she heard.

As she listens, Edna Earle indicates that she doesn't recognize the story that Narciss tells of the events of the day of Bonnie Dee's death. She believes the woman has turned on them when she won't tell for sure if the ball of fire from the lightening or Daniel and Edna Earle came into the house first.

Pages 81 - 103 Analysis

In this section, Judge Tip Clanahan makes good on his threat to turn Daniel over to his son if he did one more thing. Edna Earle is angry with the judge for walking out on them



when they needed him most. She figures that her grandfather, who was close friends with the judge, was turning in his grave, a phrase to indicate just how severe the judge's betrayal of his friendship to the family was.

In this section, Edna Earle describes a country courtroom where Daniel's trial is the happening of the year. Curiosity seekers from all over have come to watch what happens. It is like Edna Earle's idea that one shouldn't stray too far from home because they will not have anyone who knows them to help them get out of trouble has been turned on its head. Although Edna Earle and Daniel are surrounded by people who know them, there doesn't seem to be anyone there who wants to help them. Judge Tip Clanahan has already ducked out on them. Narciss, the black woman who has worked in the Ponders' service for years, has told a story on the stand that Edna Earle doesn't recognize. It seems that even though Daniel and Edna Earle are surrounded by people who recognize them, they are still all alone in their trouble.

On top of everything, Daniel seems most upset that DeYancey won't let him talk at his own trial. For a man who loves to talk, tell his stories and entertain others, this inability to talk will go against his nature. In fact, it seems that DeYancey's rule that Daniel can't talk about what has happened is more upsetting to him than his murder conviction.

Two other things to note in this section is Edna Earle's comment that she thought Daniel looked fat when he came back to the hotel from getting his haircut in preparation for the trial. Also note that Edna Earle indicates that Big John got the message that Daniel gave him for Bonnie Dee, was right. It is surprising that Edna Earle would be pleased to know that Daniel would get such an incriminating message correct.



Pages 104 - 126

Pages 104 - 126 Summary

In this section of the book, DeYancey begins to present his case. He intends to prove that Bonnie Dee was already dead before Daniel and Edna Earle had walked into the house. He calls many people who testify that Bonnie Dee had called for Daniel to come to the house. Dr. Ewbanks testifies that Bonnie Dee's death was death by misadventure. He testifies that when he arrived at the Ponder house Bonnie Dee was already dead and Daniel and Edna Earle needed more attention than Bonnie Dee. DeYancey also calls on Edna Earle to testify. One of the things that DeYancey concentrates on is the commonness of Daniel's message to Bonnie Dee. She says members of her family often threatened to kill others in order to get them to do what they wanted, but never really intended to follow through on the threat.

She also testifies that the visit on Monday was Bonnie Dee's idea, and tells the court what was happening in the Ponder house when she and Daniel went in. She tells that Bonnie Dee was already dead when they found her. Mr. Gladney mostly questions Bonnie Dee about the ball of fire she says went through the Ponder house. When Edna Earle sits back down next to Daniel, she indicates that Daniel was looking at her as if he had never seen her before.

After lunch, DeYancey calls up Johnnie Ree Peacock as a witness. Johnnie Ree looks just like Bonnie Dee and testifies that she has been to Memphis. She testifies that although she and her sister were alone in Memphis, they behaved themselves the entire time. At the conclusion of her testimony, however, Johnnie Ree finally tells the court that Bonnie Dee never went to Memphis, but stayed home the whole time. It turns out, though, that Bonnie Dee never went to Memphis, it was Johnnie Ree and her sister, Treva who traveled to Memphis while Bonnie Dee stayed at home.

Pages 104 - 126 Analysis

Note in this section that Edna Earle's good nature comes out in full force. Even after the way that Bonnie Dee treated Daniel and the Peacocks have charged Daniel with Bonnie Dee's murder, she still does not want Bonnie Dee's reputation smeared. She is upset when DeYancey begins to question Bonnie Dee's sister on the stand, believing some misdeeds done by Bonnie will be uncovered. It turns out, though, that Bonnie Dee never even went to Memphis.

Note also in this section the look that Daniel give Edna Earle after she is finished with her testimony. Edna Earle indicates that Daniel looks at her as if he has never seen her before. One must wonder what this look from Daniel means. Did Bonnie Dee give away some information that he didn't want out or did Daniel not recognize Bonnie Dee's story?



Pages 127 - 156

Pages 127 - 156 Summary

In this final section of the novel, Daniel gets more and more agitated and demands to be allowed to have his say on the stand. The judge hears Daniel's desire to testify and tells DeYancey that he can't stop Daniel from testifying if Daniel wants to do so. DeYancey will not allow Daniel to testify without firing him first, so Daniel does so, even though he believes that it is a shame. He chooses to allow Gladney, the Peakcocks' lawyer to question him. Gladney first asks Daniel if he loved Bonnie Dee and if she returned his love. Daniel is unsure and first tells Gladney he needs to check with Edna Earle. He does, however, believe that Bonnie Dee did love him on the day that she died.

Daniel tells the court that when he and Edna Earle had first entered the house, Bonnie Dee has hollered at him about the thunder and lightening. He then testifies that he told Edna Earle to catch Bonnie Dee because she was falling. Gladney asks Daniel if he had done anything to her before she fell, to which Daniel replies that he did nothing. Even though Daniel has fired him, DeYancey tries to get Daniel's testimony struck from the record because of his stay in the asylum. Because Daniel was never proved to be incompetent, however, DeYancey has no grounds.

As an aside, Edna Earle tells the reader there was no way she was going to let Daniel tell the real story after the way that she had protected him for his whole lifetime. She describes to the reader, her guest, that Bonnie Dee had jumped because of the storm when Daniel ran up to her. Recognizing her fear of the noises, he used a tassel on a pillow to tickle her and try to distract her from the storm. When she slides from the sofa, Edna Earle believed she playing dead to keep Daniel from tickling her. When Bonnie Dee doesn't move Edna Earle is concerned. She examines Bonnie Dee, however, and found the girl was dead. Edna Earle believed she had died from laughing. Edna Earle admits that she didn't feel right about going off and leaving Daniel, and never thought about using the newly installed telephone. When Dr. Ewbanks does finally come, Daniel faints at his feet.

Back at the trial, Edna Earle tells Daniel that he can't tell the whole story because no one will believe it. Daniel opens his mouth, but is unable to talk. Instead of talking, he opens his coat, displaying that it is full of money. Daniel begins passing this money out to the people in the room. He is getting rid of it all. Everybody in the room gets some. Jeff Ewbanks hollers at Edna Earle to make Daniel stop, but she doesn't do so. Disagreement comes up in court as to how the Ponders got their money and that perhaps Daniel's actions are their punishment for their actions. Edna Earle also tells the reader that those people that got money from Daniel never treated them the same again.

Edna Earle tells that the judge charged the jury at some point, and that they came back with a verdict of not guilty. After the verdict is read, a Baptist preacher requests that all



the money be given to the Baptist Church, while the Peacocks reply that they will be keeping theirs. Edna Earle indicates she had no idea how much of Uncle Daniel's money the Peacocks got. For a moment as they cross the street back to the hotel, Edna Earle admits that she wishes Uncle Daniel had just taken a stick to Bonnie Dee as she believed that obvious and outright punishment would have been better accepted than what actually happened.

Back at the hotel after the trial, Daniel tells Edna Earle that he has decided that he will come and live with her. He admits to her that she fooled him in the courtroom, but that no one fooled him as badly as Bonnie Dee did. Now, the town is empty, keeping Daniel from enjoying his life. Even the preacher doesn't come to visit. Edna Earle believes it is the money that has come between them and the rest of the town. No one seems to know what to do with the money that Daniel gave them. She tells the reader he is the first person to come to the hotel since the trial. Edna Earle concludes the book by calling Uncle Daniel down from his room to meet the guest.

Pages 127 - 156 Analysis

The truth comes out in this section of the novel even though it is never told in the courtroom. Bonnie Dee died laughing. Even though she had treated Daniel so badly, he is trying to distract her from the storm that he knows is frightening her badly. Her heart gives out because she is laughing as he tickles her with the tassel from a pillow. Even though the truth is never told because Edna Earle is able to convince Daniel that no one will believe him, the jury finds Daniel not guilty.

Before the verdict is given, Daniel opens his suit coat and begins giving away the money that he has stowed in his pockets. This is symbolic because it indicates that even though Daniel seemed very slow it appears that he understands what really motivated all of the people around him. It was Daniel's money that drew Bonnie Dee to him and also this money that made her take him back. Probably the reason that the Peacocks have brought charges against Daniel is because they are hoping to get a monetary pay off. Even though they do not win their case, they still get money, given to them freely by the man they manipulated.

Even though Edna Earle did not want Bonnie Dee's reputation smeared during the trial, it is obvious that she did not like the girl. Not only did she manipulate Daniel, but she also created strife between Edna Earle, Daniel and the rest of the community. Edna Earle makes the comment that Daniel should have taken Bonnie Dee out in the street and beaten her. Although it doesn't appear that Edna Earle really wanted Daniel to abuse Bonnie Dee, she believed that the people of the town would have understood and accepted this punishment more than they understood Daniel's willingness to take Bonnie Dee back and try to reconcile with her even after he treated her so badly.



Characters

Daniel Ponder

Daniel Ponder is the main character of this story. He is Edna Earle's uncle and Sam Ponder's son. Daniel's parents have him very late in life and for this reason he is very pampered and indulged. He is only slightly older than his niece, Edna Earle. From his actions in the novel, Daniel appears to have some sort of mild mental retardation. He is able to function in life, but doesn't seem to understand the way that life works. He loves to talk to people and tell his stories. Daniel also loves to give things away, even things that don't belong to him. For this reason, Daniel is a great burden to his father. Grandpa Ponder, as Edna Earle calls him, is afraid that Daniel will give away property or something else important.

The basis of the story lies in Daniel's habit of giving things away. In order to try to distract him from this habit, Grandpa Ponder first arranges for him to get married to the widow Teacake Magee. This marriage only lasts two months and Daniel is back to his old ways. Next, Grandpa Ponder has his friend, Judge Tip Clanahan arrange to have Daniel committed to an asylum. During a return trip to the asylum, Daniel takes advantage of a nurse, who mistakes Grandpa Ponder for the patient and locks him up while Daniel goes back home. Before Grandpa can get out the institution, Daniel has married Bonnie Dee Peacock, a pretty but shallow girl who is only interested in Daniel because he has money.

Daniel is worried about Bonnie Dee when she leaves him after their marriage of only five and one half years. He is overjoyed when she returns and never knows that his niece and Judge Tip Clanahan offered her a weekly allowance in order for her to return. Daniel happily goes to stay in the Beulah Hotel when Bonnie Dee kicks him out of his own house. He seems to be happy just knowing where he can find his wife. Daniel stops giving Bonnie Dee her weekly allowance as Edna Earle suggests and is again overjoyed when Bonnie Dee asks him to come back home.

On the evening that Daniel returns, there is a bad storm and Daniel tickles Bonnie Dee with a pillow tassel in order to distract her from the storm. As he tickles her, she dies laughing. Not knowing the circumstances of her death, the Peacocks charge Daniel with murder. Daniel is found innocent at the trial, but had apparently already planned his big ending as he had withdrawn all of his father's money from the bank and had it with him at the trial. Before the verdict is given, Daniel begins giving away all of the money that he has with him.

Edna Earle Ponder

Edna Earle Ponder is Daniel Ponder's niece and Sam Ponder's granddaughter. Edna Earle is the narrator of the story. She owns the Beulah Hotel because her uncle gave it



to her during one of his giving sprees. She tells her story to the reader as if the reader is a guest who has stopped at the hotel.

Although she is Daniel's niece, Edna Earle spends much of her time taking care of Daniel and trying to keep him happy and out of trouble. Edna Earle is very unhappy with Daniel when she learns that he has married Bonnie Dee. She recognizes what a shallow person Bonnie Dee is. Although she does not like Bonnie Dee, Edna Earle does what she can to make the marriage work because she knows how happy it makes Daniel.

In the trial, it is Edna Earle who convinces Daniel not to tell the true story about Bonnie Dee's death. She believes that the people have so strongly made up their minds that they would not believe the real story. Edna Earle and Daniel are the only ones who know that Bonnie Dee died laughing, not of any cruelty that Daniel did to her. She believes it is easier to let people think that Bonnie Dee died from shock and fright during the storm.

When people begin telling Edna Earle to stop her uncle from giving away the family's money near the conclusion of the trial, she will not do so. Although she realizes that Daniel is giving away her inheritance as well as his, she does not stop him because she believes that he is doing what he needs to do. At the conclusion of the novel, Edna Earle calls her uncle down from his room, where he has come to live after the trial. Someday, she would like to do something with the Ponder house, which been empty since Bonnie Dee died.

Sam Ponder

Sam Ponder is Daniel's father and Edna Earle's grandfather. He and his wife built a house in Clay, the house that Bonnie Dee lives in, and also opens the Beulah hotel. He is most often referred to in the novel as Grandpa Ponder because it is Edna Earle who is telling the story.

During the course of the story, Grandpa Ponder is haunted by Daniel's habit of giving things away. He is afraid that he will give away everything for which he has worked so hard. In an effort to keep Daniel from giving things away, Grandpa Ponder first tries to get Daniel married off. When this doesn't work, he arranges to have Daniel committed. Through a strange twist of fate, Daniel passes Grandpa Ponder as the patient at the asylum and returns home. Before his father can get to him, Daniel marries Bonnie Dee. When Grandpa Ponder confronts the couple at the Ponder house, he has a heart attack and dies. Edna Earle blames his death on the Ponder heart.

Bonnie Dee Peacock

Bonnie Dee Peacock is Daniel's second wife. He marries her while his father is locked in the institution and can do nothing to stop it. Bonnie Dee is described as being very pretty with fluffy yellow hair and a tiny figure, like a doll. Bonnie Dee never has much to



say, but appears to have married Daniel for his money. She stays with him five and a half years and gets no money from Daniel. She returns home although others believe that she has gone to Memphis. Bonnie Dee returns after Edna Earle puts an article in the Commercial Appeal promising Bonnie Dee money if she will return to Daniel. She returns, but soon kicks Daniel out. While Daniel continues to give Bonnie Dee her weekly allowance, Bonnie Dee lives in the Ponder house as she wishes, buying clothes, appliances and even putting electricity and a phone in a house that is not even hers. Again, when Daniel threatens to stop giving her money, Bonnie Dee asks him to return home. She dies laughing when Daniel tickles her with a tassel from a pillow in an attempt to distract her from a storm that is scaring her badly.

DeYancey Clanahan

DeYancey Clanahan is Judge Tip Clanahan's son and Daniel's friend from childhood. It is DeYancey who goes to the institution to free Grandpa Ponder after Daniel leaves him there. It is also DeYancey who drives Grandpa Ponder straight to the Ponder house without stopping at the hotel on their way back from the asylum. DeYancey is there when Grandpa Ponder dies.

Later, DeYancey represents Daniel in the trial. Although he tries to do a good job for his friend, neither Daniel nor Edna Earle understand DeYancey's methods. DeYancey will not allow Daniel to testify at the trial. DeYancey is fired by Daniel so that Daniel can tell the truth about what happened the day that Bonnie Dee died. DeYancey tries to have Daniel's testimony stricken from the record by claiming his is mentally instable but is not able to do so.

Narciss

Narciss is the black woman who worked at the Ponder house. She worked as a cook for the family, but has become a driver from Daniel and Bonnie Dee once they get married. Even after Bonnie Dee makes Daniel leave the house, Narciss stays there with Bonnie Dee. The two seem to have become friends. Edna Earle often sees Narciss going around town wearing Bonnie Dee's hand-me-downs and acting as if she is a rich lady. At the trial, Edna Earle believes that Narciss has turned on the Ponder family because she doesn't tell the truth about the evening when Bonnie Dee died.

Judge Tip Clanahan

Judge Tip Clanahan is a friend to the Ponder family. He helps them to get Daniel out of the many scrapes that he gets himself into. Clanahan is not really a judge, but is a good lawyer. It is Clanahan who helps Grandpa Ponder get Daniel committed. When Daniel gets married to Bonnie Dee, Clanahan threatens to turn Daniel over to his son if he does one more thing wrong. Clanahan makes good on this threat by deciding that in the interest of his health, he needs to go to Hot Springs and will not be able to represent Daniel at his trial. Instead, he has his grandson do the job.



Dr. Ewbanks

Dr. Ewbanks is the doctor who is called to help Bonnie Dee. He testifies at Daniel's trial that Bonnie Dee was already dead when he arrived at the house and he instead had to treat Daniel and Edna Earle. Dr. Ewbanks also treats Daniel when he passes out from fear when Bonnie Dee returns and scares him by trying to shave him. Dr Ewbanks also diagnoses Grandpa Ponder's bad heart

Dorris R. Gladney

Dorris R. Gladney is the lawyer who represents the Peacocks during Daniel's murder trial. After Daniel fires DeYancey as his lawyer, he decides that he will allow Gladney to question him. After the trial, Edna Earle wonders if Gladney had sought out the Peacocks and encouraged them to bring charges against Daniel so that he could earn money from them.

Old Judge Waite

Old Judge Waite is the judge who sits the bench during Daniel's trial. He tells DeYancey that if Daniel wants to testify at his trial, there is no way to stop him. Waite is also surprised by the heat at the trial and the uncouthness of the people who are attending the trial.

Mr. Ovid Springer

Mr. Ovid Springer is the traveling drug salesman who stays often at the Beulah Hotel. While he is at the hotel, he always calls on Edna Earle to entertain him by going to dinner or a movie. Edna Earle does not appear to like Mr. Springer, but puts up with his affection. It is Mr. Springer who spreads the rumor that he saw Bonnie Dee in Memphis.

Cora Ewbanks

Cora Ewbanks is the woman whom Grandpa Ponder allowed to run the Beulah Hotel after Grandma Ponder died. Edna Earle indicates that the woman did not take much interest in the hotel and had let it become run down before Daniel gave the hotel to Edna Earle.

Teacake Magee

Teacake Magee is the widow to whom Daniel is married for a short while. She is a Baptist and is known for her ability to sing. When she testifies about her marriage to Daniel, she will only say that she would not take him back. She will not tell why the two split up.



Big John Beech

Big John Beech is the black man to whom Daniel gives his message to Bonnie Dee saying that he intends to kill her if she does not allow him to return home. Although Edna Earle wishes that it had gone some other way, Big John Beech remembers the message exactly as Daniel gave it to him.

Miss Lutie Powell

Miss Lutie Powell was Daniel's teacher in school. It is she who stands up to Daniel in the trial and orders him to stop giving away money. He pauses for a moment, but continues on what he is doing. Miss Lutie is perhaps the only person in the courtroom who doesn't get any money from Daniel.

Eloise Clanahan

Eloise is the teller at the bank who gives Daniel all of his money when he goes to the bank the morning of the trial. She claims that she does so to cheer Daniel up, but the bank president claims that he plans to fire her for her actions. The bank personnel had been told not to give Daniel the money.

Johnnie Ree Peacock

Although she looks just like Bonnie Dee, Johnnie Ree says that she and her sister are not twins. Although Mr. Springer believed he had seen Bonnie Dee in Memphis, it was actually her sister, Johnnie Ree, whom he had seen. Johnnie Ree testifies at Daniel's trial that it was she and not Bonnie Dee went to Memphis.

Mr. Truex Bodkin

Mr. Truex Bodkin is the coroner for Clay. He is blind. He testified that Bonnie Dee died of heart failure. He first says the heart failure was a result of natural causes then goes back and says it could have been caused by unnatural causes.

Jeff Ewbanks

Jeff Ewbanks is Dr. Ewbank's father. During the trial when Daniel begins giving away money, Jeff Ewbanks is the one who demands Edna Earle to make him stop.

Treva Peacock

Treva Peacock is the sister who went with Johnnie Ree Peacock to Memphis.



Objects/Places

Beulah Hotel

The Beulah Hotel is the setting of the story in which Edna Earle Ponder tells the story "The Ponder Heart." Edna Earl owns the hotel, as it was given to her by her Uncle Daniel.

Big Grey Stetson

This big grey Stetson that hangs in the hotel lobby belongs to Uncle Daniel.

A Studebaker

It is for this car that Grandpa Ponder finally spends some of his money.

Jackson

Jackson is the town to which Grandpa Ponder takes Uncle Daniel to have him confined to an asylum.

Beulah Bible Class

The Beulah Bible Class is named after Edna Earle's late grandmother.

The Ponder Heart

The Ponder Heart is the name that Edna Earle has for her grandmother's heart condition.

Polk

Polk is the city from which Bonnie Dee Peacock comes.

Silver City

Silver City is where Narciss drives Daniel and Bonnie Dee to be married.



Tom Thumb Wedding

"The Tom Thumb Wedding" is the play that Edna Earle's mother wrote. It is the first wedding in which Daniel participated.

A Note Written in a Pencil Tablet

This note written in a pencil tablet was how Bonnie Dee chose to tell Daniel that she no longer wanted to be married.

Three Dollars a Month

Three dollars a month is the amount of Daniel's allowance.

Memphis

Memphis is the city to which others believe that Bonnie Dee has gone after she leaves Daniel.

Ponder Hill

Ponder Hill is the location three miles out of town where Grandma and Grandpa Ponder built their house.

Commercial Appeal

It is in the Commercial Appeal that Edna Earle and Judge Tip Clanahan puts the want ad asking Bonnie Dee to return to Daniel.

Little Bone Razor

Bonnie Dee is holding this razor, preparing to shave Daniel when she returns to the Ponder home.

Washing Machine

One of the things that Bonnie Dee buys is a washing machine. This machine sits on the front porch of the house and is never used.



Hot Springs

Hot Springs is where Judge Tip Clanahan says that he must go during the time of Daniel's trial.

Four Foot Section of the Little Blue Fig Tree

This tree section is a piece of evidence in Daniel's trial. It is used to demonstrate how bad the storm was at the Ponder's home.

Death by Misadventure

Death by misadventure is the term the coroner uses to describe the cause of Bonnie Dee's death.

Spirits of Ammonia

Edna Earle runs for the spirits of ammonia to try to revive Bonnie Dee even though she knows the lady is dead.

Lightening Rods

These lightening rods which would have kept the fire ball out of the Ponder house were taken from the home and put on the courthouse soon after Grandpa Ponder's death.

A Ball of Fire

A ball of fire is what came through the Ponder house about the same time that Bonnie Dee died.

Monday, the Sixteenth of June

Monday, the sixteenth of June is the day that Bonnie Dee died.

The Asylum

The asylum is the place that Grandpa Ponder sends Daniel in an attempt to keep him from giving things away.

The Ponder House

The Ponder house is where Edna Earle and Daniel grew up. It was built by Grandma and Grandpa Ponder. The house is located on Ponder Hill, three miles from town.



Themes

Money

Money is a major theme in this novel. It seems that most of the actions of the characters are triggered by their desire either to get or to keep money. Daniel is the only exception to this general statement. Bonnie Dee Peacock is the main person in the novel who is money hungry. She appears to marry Daniel only because she learns that he is rich. She is convinced to come back to Daniel only because Edna Earle offers her money. It is only when Edna Earle tells Daniel to stop the money to Bonnie Dee that Bonnie Dee asks Daniel to come back to him.

Bonnie Dee's family is also money hungry. They use their daughter's death in order to try to get money from Daniel and the Ponders. Even though they don't win the case, the Peacocks still get money from the Ponders when Daniel hands out his money at the end of the trial.

Grandpa Ponder's behavior is also triggered by his fear that Daniel will give away all of the family's money. He has his son committed to an asylum and married to a woman whom Daniel doesn't necessarily like in an attempt to keep Daniel from giving away all of his money.

At the conclusion of the novel, Edna Earle indicates that the money that Daniel gave away has come between their family and the rest of the community. She says that even the preacher will not come to visit them. Edna Earle also indicates during the trial that she believes that as the people take money from Uncle Daniel that they have lost the ability to be ashamed of themselves. She also will not stop Daniel from giving away money because she realizes that he is doing what makes him happy. It is also his money to do with what he wants.

Taking Advantage

The habit of taking advantage of people is another theme that is addressed in this novel. The person most often taken advantage of in this story is Daniel. Daniel is friendly, kind-hearted and trusting which makes him an easy person of whom to take advantage. Sadly, some of the people who take the most advantage of Daniel are his family members. Grandpa Ponder is perhaps the one who takes advantage of Daniel. Because Daniel does not appear to be as intelligent as others, Grandpa Ponder is easily able to convince Daniel to marry a widow lady in the community thinking that this marriage will keep him out of trouble. When this marriage doesn't work out, Grandpa Ponder again takes advantage of Daniel's mental capacity by having him committed to an institution. Even though Daniel is not the type of person who should be admitted to an institution, Grandpa Ponder feels fit to do so in order to protect his money and possessions.



Bonnie Dee Peacock is another character in the novel who takes advantage of Daniel. She wants money. She wants to be able to live the high life. When Daniel comes into the ten-cent store bragging about his money and his house, she sees him as easy bait. Edna Earle is surprised to learn that Daniel never gave Bonnie Dee any money during their first five and one-half years together. Later, Bonnie Dee will put up with Daniel only because she knows it is the only way to keep the allowance that Edna Earle has promised her, coming.

The Peacock family as a whole also takes advantage of Daniel. Although they must recognize that Daniel never hurt Bonnie Dee, they still take him to court and charge him with her murder. It can only be assumed that the Peacocks hoped that they could get some monetary settlement from the court proceedings.

Fickleness

The fickleness of people is another theme that is often seen in the novel. The first of these people to show their fickleness is Judge Tip Clanahan. As soon as Daniel is in real trouble, he does not stay around to help Daniel. He instead decides that he needs to go to Hot Springs for his health. Although Judge Tip Clanahan was one of Grandpa Ponder's friend and had promised to help with Daniel's problems, he turns his back on the family when they need him the most.

Bonnie Dee is also fickle to a certain degree. She marries Daniel on a trial basis. It is obvious to everyone but Daniel that Bonnie Dee is marrying him only for his money. However, Bonnie Dee never really claims otherwise. Edna Earle indicates that Bonnie Dee would never smile for Daniel, but died laughing.

Humor

One attractive aspect of the way that Edna Earle tells her story is the humor that she uses in telling a story that could be considered a tragedy. Her manner of telling the story gives the reader the impression that Edna Earle is a person who rolls with the punches that life has handed to her. She does not get terribly upset with the injustice that she sees in world, but she does acknowledge that injustice exists.

Edna Earle describes the people in her story in a way that is warm and generous. She does not make fun of the people she talks about, but points out the unusual and ironic things that they do. For instance, Edna Earle lists the things that Daniel has given away. This list includes ponies, a cistern and a pasture. She indicates that at one point, Daniel even tried to give away his own cemetery plot.

Edna Earle's description of the courtroom scene abounds with humor as she describes the scene there. Again, a potential serious portion of the novel is lightened by Edna Earle's description of the Peacocks sitting on each others laps to watch the trial, the unbearable heat, one lady who talks during the trial, and the constant stream of people coming and going to get water.



Style

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of a first person narrator. Edna Earle narrates the story from her own point of view. This is obvious because when speaking in the novel, Edna Earle refers to herself as "I." She has no insight into the thoughts or emotions of any of the other characters in the novel, she can only tell the story as she sees it from her own point of view.

As the entire story is being told to the reader by Edna Earle as if the reader were a guest at the Beulah Hotel, the whole story could be considered to be dialogue. However, Edna Earle incorporates about 20 percent dialogue into her story as she tells her listener what characters in the story actually said to one another during the course of the events of the story.

Setting

The main setting of this story is the Beulah Hotel. It is in this hotel that the guest stops because his car has broken down. It is in the lobby of this hotel that Edna Earle relates her story to this guest, the reader. Along with being the main setting in which Edna Earle tells her story, the Beulah Hotel is also a major setting in the novel. Edna Earle owns the Beulah Hotel because Daniel had given it to her. She lives there and runs the business.

Another major setting in the novel is the Ponder house. This is the house that Grandma and Grandpa Ponder built. It is located nearly three miles from the city. Daniel lives here with his father until he is married to Bonnie Dee and Grandpa Ponder dies. Edna Earle stays with Daniel in the Ponder house for a short while because he claims to be sick. She does not like being there because there is no electricity, a convince she has grown to enjoy.

The courthouse in Clay is another major setting in the novel. More than one-third of the novel is dedicated to Daniel's trial which takes place in this small country courtroom. It is in this courtroom that Daniel is declared innocent by the jury and in the same room where Daniel gives away all of his money. Edna Earle writes that she suspects the portion of the tree that was brought in as evidence during the trial was still in the courtroom.

Language and Meaning

The language used in the novel is that of country people. One of the country quotes used in the novel is Daniel's message to Bonnie Dee that he will kill her if she doesn't take him back. Taken literally, this message could be interpreted as a death threat. In



the country vernacular, however, the phrase is simply a really strong suggestion that the person for whom the message is intended do what is asked of them.

In writing her book, author Welty tries to copy the form of speech that country people might use. For instance Daniel speaks in the way that one might expect a person of low intelligence to speak. He uses the wrong forms of verbs. For instance, he says that Bonnie Dee "run him off" and that "my wife's done left me." DeYancey and Gladney, however, speak using proper grammar, as one would expect a lawyer to speak.

Structure

The structure of the novel is interesting as it is divided into seven different sections. There are no chapter numbers or titles assigned to each individual section, just a break in the story. The timeline of the story is also unusual as the story is written as if it is being told to the reader by Edna Earle. Edna Earle starts the story in the present and then takes the reader back in time to tell them Daniel's story.

To make the story more intriguing, Edna Earle does not tell the story all at once but instead weaves her way through the events of the story, starting at the present and then working backwards and forwards to tell the story. Edna Earle also keeps the story moving by not giving the reader all of the details of the action at one time. She will instead tease them with a little bit of information, then later tell the entire story.

The plot of the novel is simple with no subplots. The only difficult part of the novel is its framework structure in which Edna Earle tells her story within the frame of the author's story. The main plot of the story is Edna Earle's description of how her family lost its money. The frame in which the story is told is a guest who has come to town, giving Edna Earle an opportunity to tell her story.



Quotes

"My Uncle Daniel's just like your uncle, if you've got one — only he has one weakness. He loves society and he gets carried away." Pg. 7

"Grandpa was of the old school, and wanted people to measure up — everybody in general, and Uncle Daniel and me in general." Pg. 8

"People come here, pass through this book, in and out, over the years — and in the whole shooting-match, I don't care from where or how far they've come, not one can hold a candle to Uncle Daniel for looks or manners. If he ever did a thing to be sorry for, it's more than he ever intended." Pg. 11

"Grandpa just wanted to teach Uncle Daniel a lesson. But what he did was threaten him with the asylum. That wasn't the way to do it." Pg. 14

"She was little and she was dainty, under the dust of that trip. But I could tell by her little coon eyes, she was shallow as they come." Pg. 35

"Well, he did have a surprise; he just had to get to it. Do you know it turned out that she'd just married Uncle Daniel on trial? Miss Bonnie Dee Peacock of Polk took a red nasturtium out of her mouth to say that was the best she could do." Pg. 40

"So the marriage trial — only it had completely left our minds it was one — went on for five years and six months, and Bonnie Dee, if you please, decided No." Pg. 47

"It was safer for his welfare to let him talk than let him give away, but harder on the constitution. On everybody's" Pg. 51

"I don't really think Uncle Daniel missed Bonnie Dee as much as he thought he did." Pg. 54

"There's something I think's better to have than love, and if you want me to, I'll tell you what it is — that's company." Pg. 56

"'Edna Earle, she didn't go a step,' says Uncle Daniel, setting down his suitcase real gentle before me and taking off both hats. He'd walked all the way in, but made it all in one trip. 'She didn't break her promise,' he says. 'She run me off.'" Pg. 66.

"I imagine Bonnie Dee was making hay while the sun shone. Because sure as you're born, if she hadn't run Uncle Daniel off, he'd be there giving away as quick as she could get them in the door, or up to the porch." Pg. 68

"Well, to make a long story short, Bonnie Dee sent him word after dinner and was dead as a doornail Monday before supper." Pg. 75



"Because of course, the minute the funeral was over good, and the county paper came out with Eva Sistrunk's write-up and poem, that county attorney we wished on ourselves, Dorris R. Gladney — no friend of the Ponders — out he sailed in a black Ford older than mine, and searched out the Peacocks in Polk and found them, too, and told them what they could do.

They charged Uncle Daniel with murder." Pg. 80

"I didn't want any harm done to Bonnie Dee now! I don't have an ounce of revenge in my body, and neither does Uncle Daniel. The opposite." Pg. 122

"He might have picked up Grandpa's trusty old stick hanging right there on the hatrack where Grandpa left it, and whacked her one when she wasn't glad to see him. That would have gone down a whole lot easier in Clay. Even with the Peacocks, who didn't know anything was out of the way till a man like Gladney spotted it right through a poem and had to haul off and tell them about it. Sometimes I think old Gladney dreamed the whole thing up by himself, for lack of something to do, out of his evil mind." Pg. 153

"But he don't enjoy it any more. Empty house, empty hotel, might as well be an empty town. He don't know what's become of everybody. Even the preacher says he has a catch in his back, just temporary. And if people are going to try being ashamed of Uncle Daniel, he's going to feel it." Pg. 154

"You see, that money has come between the Ponders and everybody else in town. There it still is, on their hands." Pg. 155

"And it may be anybody's heart would quail, trying to keep up with Uncle Daniel's. But I don't give Bonnie Dee Peacock too much credit for trying." Pg. 156.



Topics for Discussion

On page 50 of the story, Edna Earle says that Uncle Daniel was used to being rich, but not used to having money. What is the distinction between these two situations?

Discuss the role of the lightning rods in the story. Why does Grandpa Ponder try so hard to keep lightning away? Why does he believe that electricity will draw lightning to the house?

Why does DeYancey not want Daniel to speak during the trial? Why do they believe the judge would not have believed the true story?

Why is Edna Earle angry at Bonnie Dee because she died laughing? What does this indicate about Bonnie Dee's relationship with Daniel?

What does Edna Earle mean when she said that she believed that people had lost the ability to be ashamed of themselves?

Why does Edna Earle believe that it would have been better if Daniel had taken Bonnie Dee out and beaten her with a stick instead of the way things happened?

Discuss the culture and mentality of the people in the novel. How do they live? What is important to them? How are the people in Edna Earle's community different from those in your own community? How are they similar?