

Strange Fruit Study Guide

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Plot Summary

A tent revival serves as the backdrop for this novel of racial tension and transition in which a white man is shot, and an African American man hung and burned in retaliation. The novel focuses on the relationship between a black woman and a white man at a time during which that type of relationship was not accepted. As the white man seeks acceptance from his family he breaks off the relationship but his attempt to provide for the now-pregnant girl has unforeseen and terrible consequences.

The August heat paired with the cries for salvation from the tent revival set an emotionally charged stage for the story of hate, racial discrimination, and family turmoil. As the son of the town's doctor, Tracy Deen is expected to make something of himself. Instead, he's been ungrounded and has been secretly having an affair with an African American young woman, Nonnie Anderson. As the novel opens, Nonnie tells Tracy she's pregnant. Tracy, who is torn between his love for Nonnie and his desire to please his family, decides to join the church and propose to Dorothy Pusey, a white girl he's also been dating. In an attempt to take care of Nonnie and her baby, Tracy arranges for Henry McIntosh, a black man who has been a servant to his family, to marry Nonnie.

Trouble begins when Ed Anderson, Nonnie's brother, overhears Henry bragging that Tracy has paid him to marry Nonnie and cover up the illegitimate pregnancy. In his anger Ed, who had come home only to try to convince his college-educated sister Nonnie to move north with him, shoots Tracy. Ed is whisked away to safety in the north but when Tracy's body is found, all of the blacks know that someone will pay.

The novel is set in the Deep South during a time period of great transition following the Civil War. Blacks are being paid for their work but are still considered inferior to white people. Many have moved north hoping for better jobs and better treatment. The void leaves farmers without the free labor they'd once had for cotton harvest time. Blacks are now in competition with whites for jobs. Common laborers are angry they aren't being paid more and can now be replaced by cheaper black laborers. This anger kindles the hate many whites hold for the blacks.

Bill Talley leads a mob against Henry, who found the body, even though many know Henry could not have been responsible for the murder. Despite attempts by his friends and family to hide him from the bloodthirsty mob, Henry is found and killed. Reactions from the community range from surprise that some of the same men who sought salvation at the revival altar were responsible for the cruel death of Henry to anger at the ignorance of the people in the south. The novel ends with a snapshot of Nonnie, her sister Bess and their friend Dessie preparing for and returning to their work as servants to the white people the day after Henry's murder.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

The period of great transition in the south following the Civil War is the setting for this story that demonstrates the consequences of human hate and ignorance. Even as the people attend revival services to rekindle their faith in God, an underlying feeling of sin and resistance flows through the town.

In Chapter 1, the African American young woman, Nonnie, waits at the gate for Tracy to come. In the distance she can hear the hymns being sung at the town's tent revival. She thinks back to when she was six years old, and Tracy, a white boy who was 12 years old, had run off a boy who'd tried to take off her clothes. Now, Nonnie tells Tracy she's pregnant, a result of their secret love affair. Tracy leaves quickly, making excuses that his mother is worked up about the revival. He tells Nonnie he may return later. Nonnie knows that he won't be back.

In Chapter 2, Ed Anderson, Nonnie's brother, finishes his food at Salamader's Lunch Counter and walks outside. He has returned to Georgia from Washington in hopes of taking his sister back with him. As he walks through town he comes face to face with Tracy Deen. He refuses to call Tracy "mister." He tells Nonnie he wants her to come back with him to the north. She pretends not to hear, instead saying that she needs to check on their sister, Bess, who is sick with a headache.

Analysis

In these opening chapters the author starts to build and develop her characters to great effect. In the description in the first chapter of the novel, several different characters weigh in on Nonnie's personality, from the vague "they" who believe Nonnie to be one of the best of the black people in the county, to her fellow blacks who believe she is stuck up because she holds her head high and has a college education. Even the white women believe Nonnie is stuck up but also agree she's one of the best servants in the area. Nonnie patiently cares for Boysie Brown, a physically and mentally handicapped boy.

This racially charged novel quickly picks up a theme of Accepted Behavior of African Americans during this period of time. In the post-Civil War South, many residents still hold the mindset that blacks are inferior to white people. For instance, in the writer's description of Nonnie, it is said that Nonnie's mother taught her to work hard and know her place. This "place" that is referred to is one that is below that of the white people. Notice also, however, that Nonnie is involved in a relationship with a white man. Tracy Deen showed the girl kindness by running off a boy who was trying to molest her when she was only a small child. That act of kindness seems to have bound Nonnie's loyalty to Tracy. Now, Nonnie is pregnant with Tracy's baby. Even though Nonnie is glad to



have a part of Tracy that no one can take away, Tracy quickly realizes what a mess he's made.

Notice in this section of the novel how Ed's view of the town in which he was born differs from those of Bess and Nonnie. Because he's been away from it, he sees the discrimination against his sisters as what it is. He hopes to take Nonnie up North where she can make something of herself but Nonnie seems content to stay where she is. Notice also the brief meeting between Ed and Tracy. They speak but Ed refuses to refer to Tracy as "mister" a title of courtesy generally used by blacks when speaking to white men. There seems to already be some friction between the two men.

Also introduced in this section of the novel is the theme of Family Relations. Both Tracy and Ed are at odds with their families. Ed is frustrated with his sisters because their mother put so much effort into being sure they had college educations, yet his sisters aren't using the degrees they earned. He believes they both are wasting away in a town where the people will never let them get ahead. On the flip side of the coin, Tracy appears to be the black sheep in his family. He tells Nonnie that his mother is never pleased with him and is especially worked up with the revival. Notice that he points out that he's never known his mother to be unhappy with his sister as she is now.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Ed knows that his sister has been having a relationship with Tracy? Why or why not? Do you think this is the reason that Ed shows disrespect to Tracy?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Nonnie will not commit to go north with her brother?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author use the town's tent revival as a backdrop for the story? How does the religious setting add to the texture of the story being told?

Vocabulary

enviously, sallow, sauntered, nonchalance, arbor, mullet, titillated



Chapter 3

Summary

Bess lies on an old leather sofa in her mother's room as she waits for her headache to ease. She hears Nonnie talking to Tracy. She remembers catching Nonnie and Tracy together in Aunt Tyse's old cabin when Nonnie was only fifteen. Bess watched them and listened as Tracy talked to Nonnie about his desire to work with machinery. Bess ran to her mother determined to tell her about Nonnie's affair, but ultimately she did not confess what she had seen once she came face-to-face with her. She'd hoped Tracy would not come back after the war, but he did.

Bess thinks about Ed's attitude toward Maxwell and wonders why he came back. She remembers the two finding a cottonmouth snake while helping in the garden as children. They both screamed but after their mother killed it Ed had lied and told his mother Bess had stopped him from killing it. A few minutes later, the mother comments how pretty Nonnie with a squash bloom in her hair. Bess is jealous.

The night prior, Ed decided he wanted to have a fun-filled week with a fish fry and a party. He hoped even to have his old friend Sam spend time with them. As he described the fun he hoped to have, Ed criticized the shabby condition of the house. In the morning, Bess woke up sick with a headache. Now, when Ed learns Jackie stays with Miss Ada, a white woman, during the day, he is critical. Bess feels he wants to pick a fight. He asks to talk to her about Nonnie. When he says he wants to take Nonnie back up north with him, Bess wonders why he only wants Nonnie, not her.

Ed leaves to look for Sam and Bess tries to talk to Nonnie about not upsetting Ed while he's in town. Nonnie won't stay and talk, she goes instead to the gate to wait for Tracy, much to Bess' dismay. She thinks about Sam and the way he left Ella to go to study medicine. When she died, he didn't even come to her funeral. Bess remembers Ella as a dirty thing but she remembered her mother seeming unhappy with Sam. Her memories move on to her own husband, Jack, who works at a railroad porter. He is saving his money to move his family up north. Bess decides to go out and try to hear what Tracy is saying to Nonnie. When she looks, she sees Nonnie, but the place where Tracy usually sits is empty. Bess realizes her sister is hurt and at first feels pity for her sister and then is angry at the circumstances of the relationship.

Analysis

Family relationships continue to be important as the roles of members in the Anderson family are filled out. Just as Tracy feels an outcast from his white family, Bess feels as if she is the least desirable of the Anderson children. She remembers a time when Ed lied about Bess keeping him from killing a snake. Their mother took Ed's side. She also remembers her mother's pleasure in Nonnie's beauty. Bess feels slighted, as if the



comment about Nonnie's beauty takes away from her own. In the present, Bess is angry with Ed because he is so insistent in taking Nonnie away to the north. She wonders why he thinks Nonnie so much better than she that it is Nonnie who deserves to go to a better place and not her.

The reader learns that Bess' husband works as a porter on a train. He's saving his money in hopes of taking his family up north. Ed hints they should have already made the move for Nonnie's sake, which adds more resentment to Bess' attitude. He argues that Nonnie only stays in Maxwell because Bess is there.

Considering that racism in this time period is generally thought to be against blacks, Ed shows a perhaps unexpected form of racism in his chiding of Bess for letting Miss Ada care for Jackie. Miss Ada has been described as being irresponsible and her mother senile. Bess knows the two women need the money they earn keeping Jackie. Ed seems angry and offended that a white woman is taking care of his nephew during the day. He doubts her ability to care for the child properly even though Bess says she's popped in to check on the two at unexpected times just to be sure things are going smoothly.

Ed seems to have a history of being headstrong and showing his temper. He's had a run in with Pug Pusey, who owns a store in Maxwell. Luckily for Ed, he is not punished for his sassiness to the white man. When her brother begins talking to her, she seems prepared for him and even knows the signs that indicate he is trying to start a fight.

In this section of the novel, the reader learns that it is at least 1918, possibly later, as Ed notices the calendar in the house is still the one for the year of 1917 and makes the comment that they don't believe in changing things. Notice also the description of Sam looking at Nonnie as if she were a book he'd wanted to read for a long time. The words the author uses to describe Sam's look indicates he doesn't know much about Nonnie, but would like to learn more.

Discussion Question 1

When she sees that Nonnie is alone and appears to have been hurt emotionally by Tracy, Bess first pities Nonnie, but then becomes angry. Why do you think Bess becomes so angry?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Ed, Nonnie, and Bess. For what reasons is Bess resentful of her siblings?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the author's style of writing and her word choices for descriptions. How does her writing influence the story she tells?

Vocabulary

gallivanting, tendering, vigilance, calaboose, inexplicably, moralist, vicariously



Chapter 4

Summary

Tracy watches the Pusey home across the street. He knows Dorothy is preparing for bed. That night after meeting Ed on the path, he'd gone to Dorothy and went with her to church. After services they went with the College Street crowd of friends to the drug store for cokes. Harriet Harris talked about the corruptness of the revivals to make herself feel better wishing the preacher would talk about how to live life. Prentiss Reid, the editor of the town's newspaper, told Harriet she had it wrong as the church wanted her to sponsor it, not follow the teachings of Jesus.

Now, Tracy thinks of his time in the army. He'd met people with the idea that one day the world could be one where everyone was treated equally. Tracy argued they didn't know the mindset of those in South and doubted even those up north were willing to let the black people into their world. He had remembered Nonnie while in Marseille and was overcome with a desire to see her. He remembered Laura meeting him when he came home from the war and wishing it were Nonnie. His sister reminded him too much of his mother.

He remembered coming home to his family and being greeted by friends and family. He remembered his mother's look of displeasure when he asked to borrow the car. He went straight to Nonnie. They agreed to meet each other at Aunt Tyse's deserted cabin later. They danced together that night, then after they were finished, sat on the front porch talking about dreams for themselves. Nonnie's face lit up when he talked about his plans for the two of them. Later that night, he met up with the Reverend Livingston and his wife, Roseanna. After the encounter, he lost his happiness about Nonnie. He realized he was back home and suddenly remembered how differently black and whites were there.

Tracy stops at his father's drug store for a coke and thinks how he had once thought he would like to spend his life running it. His father had actually given it to him one day to run as he wished but then he discovered his mother going through the books in the store office. He never went back to the store after that. As Tracy puts out his cigarette the voice of Nonnie telling him she is pregnant and that of his mother telling him he owed it to Dorothy to make a decision echo in his head.

Analysis

This chapter focuses on Tracy, detailing his time in the war and the effect that being with others who dreamed of a world where color and religion didn't matter had on him. When he returned to Maxwell, the racial nature of his town hit him full in the face when he met the Reverend Livingston and Roseanna on the street, acting as was acceptable for black people. He remembered that Roseanna had spoken to him at first with a hint of



mockery as if she hadn't completely put on the manners she was supposed to use for white folks. He'd also noticed Ed's refusal to call him by the title of "mister" when they'd met earlier that day. Although Tracy is in love with a black woman and had at one time thought of her as his equal, and not just black, he is angered by what he calls "insolence" in her brother's refusal to refer to him by a courtesy title.

Notice the continued reference to family relationships, particularly struggles of children against their parents. Tracy makes it clear that he finds his mother overbearing and intrusive. When his sister, Laura, had met him on the dock when he came back from the war he tried not to compare his sister with his mother but he saw the same rigidity in his sister that his mother has. He also remembers how his mother's meddling had made him give up control of his father's drug store, the one thing he'd considered might be of interest to him before he'd even gone to war. Also in this chapter Tracy's feelings that his mother is too rigid and controlling are paralleled by Harriet Harris' distress that her mother will not see Harriet's views on religion. Harriet, unlike Tracy, wishes she didn't argue with her mother and hurt her feelings.

In the theme of Religion, Harriet rails against the preacher and his sermon when she is with her group of friends at the drug store after the revival meeting. She accuses the revival services of being immoral and wishes the preacher would talk more about how they should live than just yelling at them to get saved. The newspaper editor makes an important point that may seem cynical but seems more and more true of the area's religious opinions as the novel progresses. He tells Harriet that the church doesn't want her to live like Jesus, its representatives only want financial support. He makes the point that if people in that area were to live like Jesus, with his commands of treating others equally and doing good, they would be thought to be crazy.

Notice also Tracy's description of Dorothy as living in a rigid box with right and wrong carefully lined out. From this description, it seems that Dorothy might be very much like a younger version of Tracy's mother. As for Nonnie, Tracy doubts that she even knows the rules, much less follows them. Although it is obvious that Tracy's mother wants him to marry Dorothy, Tracy does not seem to have any desire to do so. He's taken her to parties since they were young just because he didn't see any way to stop once he'd started. Now, as he watches the light in Dottie's room, he realizes that he doesn't even have the desire to see Dottie undress.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is Tracy hurting both Nonnie and Dorothy by the way he's treating them? Is there any good way out the situation in which he's put himself?

Discussion Question 2

What changed for Tracy while he was away at war that he was able to see Nonnie as the woman he loved and not just a black woman? How and why did this feeling change once he was back in Maxwell?



Discussion Question 3

Consider Harriet's view of the revival and religion. Do you agree with her statement that the revival is immoral? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

barnacles, insolent, cadences, tentatively, statuary, evasive, debauch, cynical, radical, infidel, amenities, tabooed, jauntily, armistice, accosted, inflections, pliant, commissary, waning, trite, vivacious, deferential



Chapters 5-6

Summary

In Chapter 5, Tracy enters the dining room while his family is still eating breakfast. Dorothy calls for Tracy but he instructs Henry to tell her he'll call later. Laura announces she's going out to play tennis. When her mother requests she be back in time for morning services, Laura balks and calls the community revival services crude. Tracy only laughs at the exchange, causing his mother to spill her coffee. After breakfast, Alma Deen goes to Laura's room to straighten the drawers and finds a clay torso of a female that Laura has made. She is sickened by the torso and destroys it.

That night in bed Alma, who is going through menopause, thinks about how she'd hoped her family would be different from her mother's. She always thought her mother was not supportive enough of her father, who was a pastor. When she got married to Tut, she vowed to do whatever she needed to help him succeed. When Tracy, their first baby, came even Tut complimented her on the way she handled him so efficiently. When her mother came and hurt Alma's feelings with her bluntness, Alma admits she doesn't want the child. Rosa tells her that is natural and takes charge of Tracy, ruining all of the good habits Alma had developed in the boy. She finally let her mother take Tracy to Hawkinsville with her. Rosa had never interfered with Alma's raising of Laura. Then one day in the middle of telling a joke, she'd died. Now, Alma feels as if she has composed herself. She feels better now that she's made an appointment for Tracy to talk to Brother Dunwoodie. She believes the man of God will be able to talk some sense into her son.

In Chapter 6, Tracy keeps the appointment with Brother Dunwoodie that his mother made even though he doesn't want to do so. As Tracy treats the minister to a coke, his mother's voice echoes in his mind as she told him about the appointment and he'd sworn at her under his breath. Now Brother Dunwoodie tells Tracy about his calling to the ministry. The preacher then moves on to talk about individual sins. After going through a few, he begins to talk about visiting Colored Town. Tracy feels the man knows too much about his individual sin, and that perhaps he's been talking to someone who is hinting at Tracy dilemma. Brother Dunwoodie suggests to Tracy he try living on the Lord's side of life for a while, putting his faith in God even he doesn't really believe in or love Him. Tracy says he'll think about it, and then drives the pastor to the river.

As the pastor sleeps, Tracy thinks of the time he brought Nonnie to this same spot and they made love. He encouraged her to talk, knowing he had not given her the chance after her mother died. Nonnie told him her ambitions were few. She wanted only her mother and Tracy even though she knows they can't be together often. Although he had felt comfortable with Nonnie at the river, he begins to feel guilty once he enters his own house. Now, he suspects that people would think of him as crazy if they knew he loved and respected a black girl.



Tracy wakes the pastor, telling him they need to get back to town. During the drive, Tracy asks the preacher how he should get started on the right path in life. Dunwoodie tells him to join the church, marry Dorothy, and make her a good living. Tracy mentions Nonnie and her pregnancy. The preacher advises Tracy to fix things by finding a good black man to marry her and then giving them both some money.

Analysis

There is an abundance of flashbacks in this novel as characters remember the circumstances they have lived through that have brought them to this point in their lives. In this section as his mother's words come back to Tracy while he meets with the preacher, her words are in italic, noting they are not actually being spoken at that time, just being heard as a memory in one character's mind. It is perhaps the hateful words he said under his breath to his mother that made Tracy keep the appointment she'd made for him with the preacher even though he had no intention of doing so at first.

The tense parent-child relationship noted between Alma Deen and her son Tracy seems to go back at least one generation. In this section of the novel, Alma recalls how her mother always tried to boss her about and rule her life. She even went so far as to take charge of the raising of Tracy. Now, in turn, Alma tries to control her daughter's life. A hint of resentment is sensed from Laura as she questions her mother's request that she go to church. Tracy, who has always been considered the willful child, laughs as he watches his sister, who has always been seen as being perfect, tries to voice her own opinion.

Of all the men that one would expect not to be a racist it would be a minister, yet Brother Dunwoodie seems to be set very firmly against blacks. First, he compares black people to dogs that have to be pushed back in their places. Then he moves on to tell Tracy that "God made the white race for a great purpose" (p. 88). When Tracy voices his concern that Nonnie might have trouble with the baby, the preacher is very degrading in his comment that black women don't have trouble in childbirth, as if they were mules or animals who weren't worth caring about. Notice also that it is Brother Dunwoodie who suggests to Tracy that he find a good black man to marry Nonnie and give them both some money. As it will be seen later in the novel, it is by following the pastor's suggestion that Tracy gets into even more trouble.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is Alma treating her daughter just like her mother treated her?

Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion of Brother Dunwoodie's attitude toward black people? Do his words fit the religion he claims to teach?



Discussion Question 3

What do you think that Tracy will do with the advice Brother Dunwoodie gave him? Do you think he'll turn his back on Nonnie? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

glibly, monotone, resistance, crude, gestation, ardently, infallible, trivial, inexorably, opaque, exigency, modulating, subserviency, frivolous, indiscretion, conceding, parishioners, impresario, tactless, fanatic, temperance, divulge, discreetly, conferred, spraddled, scoundrel



Chapters 7-8

Summary

In Chapter 7, Tracy goes straight to Henry's cabin instead of to his own house. He asks his childhood friend to pour him a drink and announces he's going to join the church. Tracy explains to Henry his motivations for joining the church and then asks Henry why he goes to church. Henry says most times it is to get a girl. Tracy tells Henry he believes hell was made up as a way to scare and control people. Tracy rambles on about the war and Henry suggests they go fishing. Tracy says he's going to church. Henry makes him gargle to wash the liquor smell off his breath before he goes.

Tracy chides Henry for the filth he's let build up in the cabin. As he does so, he thinks about Henry's parents. Mamie McIntosh had been like a mother to him growing up. He remembers both he and Henry crawling up in her lap as toddlers. One day after having to whip Henry for sassing a white girl, Mamie tells Tracy to go to his own people, breaking his heart. He doesn't feel right until he knows he's back in good graces with Mamie. Later, Ten, Henry's father, is angry with Mamie for whipping Henry. He doesn't like living so close to white people and wishes they could live in the black section of town where they could do as they pleased.

After Ten lost his leg at the sawmill, he and Mamie had moved to Baxley to tend a small cotton farm. Despite her husband's wishes, Mamie decided at the last minute to leave Henry to live at the Deen's house instead of taking him to Baxley with them.

In Chapter 8, the people of Tom Harris' milltown discuss their ideas about going to the community tent revival. Most agree they won't be going. Willie Echols gripes about the stingy wages the workers are paid by Harris and talks of forming a union. The women from the milltown make their way to the revival tent, leaving the men behind.

Meanwhile, Nonnie stands at the gate listening to the sounds of singing from the revival and thinking about her baby. She envisions it having her skin and hair color but with Tracy's blue eyes. Bess comes home with the news that Grace, the teenaged daughter of the Stephensons, is pregnant. Nonnie takes the opportunity to tell Bess that she is pregnant as well. Bess is angry with Nonnie for her happiness and accuses her of living in a dream world, desiring nothing more than the life of a concubine. She advises Nonnie she must get an abortion but Nonnie refuses. When Nonnie goes to get Jackie from Miss Ada, she thinks of how she and the older lady are similar, having loved only one man. Nonnie feels Ada is the future version of herself. Although Bess harbors a fear that Miss Ada will one day remember it isn't proper for her to be looking after a black boy, Nonnie believes Ada would never do anything to hurt them.

That evening Ed confronts Nonnie asking her why she is content to live they way she does. Becoming belligerent, he tells her she's changed since their mother died. Nonnie tries to defend herself by explaining to Ed she isn't ambitious like him, then asks him to



stop scolding her. Later that night when she meets Tracy, she cries on his shoulder, but he does not notice.

Analysis

Notice the affection between Henry and Tracy even they are of different races. Knowing that Tracy's mother will be angry with her son for having the smell of liquor on his breath, Henry tries several things to make Tracy's breath smell better. Meanwhile, Tracy seems almost frustrated by Henry's attempts to help. Even with their affection for one another, however, there is still the idea that Tracy believes himself superior to Tracy. There is a memory included in this section of the novel where Henry and Tracy listen to Henry's parents argue about how to raise Henry. It seems it is the first time they've noticed their skin is different colors and that color difference should matter. Tracy remembers feeling pride when it was indicated his color was superior.

The fight between Mamie and Ten over the whipping that Mamie gives Henry for sassing the white girl is significant here in this section of the novel. Mamie believes she is protecting the boy by teaching him what he must do to survive among the white people. Ten, Henry's father, is resentful that they must live the way they do. This line of thinking seems to divide the black characters introduced thus far in the novel. They either act the way they've been taught to act in an effort to get along or they are resentful of the way they are expected to act around white people. Both Ten and Ed fit the role of those who are resentful of they way blacks are expected to bow and scrape to white people just to get along. Mamie, Nonnie, Bess and Sam all seem content to give the white people the respect they think they deserve in order to keep the peace.

In this section of the novel the theme of Work and Wages is introduced. Already it has been noted that several men in town have been losing arms and legs to the sawmill. Now, Willie, one of the men who works at the mill, speaks of starting a workers union to ensure better wages for workers. Some of his distress seems to come from the fact that blacks are willing to work at the mill for substandard wages, pay that he isn't happy with especially considering how much money Tom Harris makes off the men's labor.

Interesting in this section is Nonnie' description of Bess as a "cream-colored little luster jug, squat and pleasing, who longed to be a fancy crystal vase" (p. 120). Nonnie wishes her sister could understand the pleasure in just letting things be. Bess does not seem to think Nonnie accepts things the way they are and even fantasizes about possibilities that could never come to fruition.

Also in this section the novel takes on a tone of impending doom as the author describes the parishioners' motivations for going to the revival. They know they have sinned. They have a fear of God's anger. Notice also the change of words in the snippet taken from the old gospel hymn "Just As I Am." The author substitutes the words "Oh Lamb of God don't let them do it-don't let them do it" foreshadowing a coming cruel action against one of the citizens of the town.



Additionally, note that the theme behind Dunwoodie's sermon the night after his talk with Tracy matches the theme of their discussion. He speaks of the mother love calling the sinner back home to Jesus. This is similar to what Dunwoodie told Tracy as he indicated that it is generally through their mothers that men learn to love Jesus. Now, the preacher calls upon the love the townspeople have for their mothers to entice them back into the church.

Discussion Question 1

Why are some members of the Anderson family so concerned about Jackie staying with Miss Ada? What do they think might happen?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author use the community tent revival to add texture to the story? In what way does the revival affect the tone of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Nonnie tries to explain to both her sister and her brother that she is content to be who she is and doesn't have the ambition they do. Nonnie claims to be content with her life. In what ways do you think this is true? Do you think there are any areas of her life in which she isn't content?

Vocabulary

periphery, converted, mirth, privy, variants, amputated, stalwart, placid, sashaying, tranquility, pauper, adumbrations, fiend, inexorable, counterpane, animation, derisive, tribute, penitence, incandescent, belligerent



Chapters 9-10

Summary

In Chapter 9, as Tracy follows Nonnie he remembers worrying about the girl as a child and finally asking his cook to fix him an after school snack. He'd taken the food to Nonnie. As children, Tracy also helped Nonnie with her homework. Nonnie told him she considered him her knight. Now, they remember the first time they had sex. They are comfortable together until Tracy remembers her color. He leaves suddenly, taking the path through the fields so he would have more time to think. Earlier that day his father had pressured him about taking over the family farm and living there with Dorothy. Although Tracy knows he doesn't have to marry Dorothy, he believes he might as well give in. As he leaves the railroad track with the idea that he will fix up things for Nonnie in some way he looks back to see an illusion of a hunched up Nonnie sitting on the railroad tracks. This is rooted in his memory, and the tracks seem to spark this image. He feels the memory tug at his coat. Once inside his own house, he hears Laura crying in the dark.

In Chapter 10, Tut replays in his mind that morning's conversation with L. D. Stephenson. Stephenson's 14-year-old daughter is pregnant, and L. D. wants Tut to perform an abortion on her. Tut refuses as the girl had sex for fun with a boy she liked, citing it would be different if she were raped. Tut suggests marriage but L. D. refuses to let his daughter marry the boy who got her pregnant, claiming he is white trash. Tut recommends a doctor in Atlanta who might perform the procedure. He wonders if he'd tried to have sex with Alma before they were married what her response would have been.

That night at supper Alma tells him that neither Tracy nor Laura were at the meeting that morning. Tut mentions how lucky they are to have a daughter like Laura. As he thinks about his wife, he gets the sudden vision of a white cow that has plagued him since he saw the cow walk out in front of him and thought she reminded him of his wife. After Laura calls saying she won't be home for supper because she's staying at the Harris home, Alma tells Tut she wants Laura to go back to school. The phone interrupts Tut as he tries to convince Alma to let the girl stay home a little longer. On the way to a call at Mrs. Reid's house, Tut thinks of how he'd like to go live on the family farm himself.

Analysis

Notice in this section that just as Dunwoodie compared blacks to dogs, Tracy does the same thing as he thinks about how good it made him feel when he saw to it that Nonnie had food to eat as a child. He compares the feeling to the feeling that he got when he fed a stray dog. This continued comparison of blacks and dogs helps to cement in the reader's mind what the people of Maxwell, even those like Tracy, thought of blacks.



Notice that even in Tut's struggle to do what is right in Grace's situation, he bases his decision on a racist view. He refuses to perform the abortion because he believes it would be murder, and he can find no justification for this murder since he does not believe it is an error on the scale as if an African American man had raped her. Notice that Tut specifically notes that he'd perform the abortion if a black man had raped her but makes no mention of a white man raping her. The reader has to realize with his specific mention of a black man that although he struggles to do what is morally right, his ideas of right and wrong are skewed by the racial opinions that the people of his community hold.

Notice also the questions that run through Tut's mind as he thinks back on his meeting with Grace's father. "Where's little Grace? What's going to happen to Grace?" (pp 150-151) It is clear that the questions refer first to the idea that the child that was Grace being replaced as she grew into a woman who has taken her place. Second, the questions refer to the parents' and the doctor's worry about Grace and her condition, but these questions also seem to have a double meaning. The author seems to use them in an allegorical fashion to represent the idea of God's grace and man asking the question what has happened to the idea of grace—God's unconditional love—in the whole scheme of things.

Discussion Question 1

What does Tut's desire to go to the farm indicate to the reader about his ambition?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think Tracy means when he tells Nonnie that he is tired? Of what do you think he is tired?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Alma wants Laura to go back to school so quickly? What might be her ulterior motive?

Vocabulary

medievalism, importunate, proposition, demeanor, debutante, hypocrites, melodrama, surreptitiously, embellishment, interlinear, legible, reiterative, justified



Chapter 11

Summary

Ed rides with Sam to a call. He tries to convince Sam he's wasting his life in Maxwell. They stop one hundred yards from the house so Bill Talley won't see them riding in the car, something that angers the man. Sam is cordial to the man then moves on to the sick lady in the black quarters. He asks for Ed's help in moving her outside to the sunshine despite the protests of a young girl who believes it will kill her. Back at the Talley house, they hear Bill arguing with his foreman who says he's unable to get hands to help with cotton picking. As they drive to the Rushton farm, Ed's mind is filled with childhood memories including an attempt to run away from home and the white children calling him "chocolate drop."

At Cap'n Rushton's house many blacks are sick with typhoid. Sam tries to explain the people are sick from drinking water from a tainted well but Rushton only argues with him. Sam suggests all the workers should be inoculated. Although Rushton thinks the inoculation shot is black magic, he agrees to let Sam try to give the shots. Ed remembers working some time at the Rushton farm after he sassed Mr. Pusey. He knew it wasn't only for sassing Mr. Pusey but also because his mother had learned he'd been talking about chasing white girls with Jack. Sam had come and told Ed to not bother with white girls as it would be like picking up a rattlesnake.

When they leave the Rushton place, Ed once again chides Sam for the life he's chosen. Sam advises Ed he should leave Georgia as the way of life there bothers him so badly. He lists some of the good white people in Maxwell but Ed counters him by pointing out that even these "good" people don't show Sam any respect. It is not until they are almost home that Ed finally tells Sam that he is really worried about Nonnie. He says he'd be proud to take her to Washington with him and asks Sam to help him persuade Nonnie to go up north. As they get closer to the house, Ed catches a glimpse of Nonnie and believes he sees a blurred figure walking ahead of her. When he tells Sam about it, Sam suggests he get his eyes checked.

Analysis

The cow appears again in this section of the novel. Remembering again that the cow symbolizes the white woman, consider the different reactions of the two men to it appearing in the road. Sam slows down the car to keep from hitting the cow, waiting for her to move away. His actions represent his patient personality. Ed, on the other hand, wonders why Sam doesn't blow his horn at the cow, prodding her to move. This action represents the impatience and lack of empathy in his personality.

The differences between the two men continue to be noticed in this section of the text. Sam stops the car out of sight of Bill Talley's house because he knows the man doesn't



like the idea of black people driving cars. He's also pleasant and respectful to the man though it is apparent he holds highly racist opinions. Notice that Sam lies to Talley about Ed's identity. He also lies about why Ed is dressed as he is. With Rushton, however, Sam tells the truth about Ed and his job. It seems that Sam has grown to know the people of the area so well that he knows what he can and can't get away with around them. Notice also how the white farm owners seem to think that Sam isn't practicing real medicine. Even though Sam is as much a doctor as Tut Deen, the white men look down on Sam. Rushton, in fact, even refers to Sam's typhoid inoculations as black magic.

Ed, meanwhile, is critical of Sam and his rituals of bowing and scraping to white people. Like Nonnie, however, Sam doesn't see that his job devalues him in any way. Just as she is content watching after the handicapped child, Sam is happy in his job caring for his fellow black people. Sam tries to point out to Ed that Nonnie's spirit stays above any job that she might take but Ed doesn't seem to understand.

Notice in this section of the novel the way that Talley treats both Sam and Lias. This display of his attitude toward black people will be important later in the novel. Also in the discussion between Talley and Lias, the theme of work is touched upon. Lias, who serves as Talley's foreman, is having trouble finding laborers for the cotton picking because so many of the blacks have moved up north. This is one of the unbalancing effects of the Civil War that is, in turn, having an impact on worker availability in the south, especially for menial tasks like picking cotton.

Notice also in this section Sam's reaction when Ed begins to talk about Nonnie. It is the first time he seems to have gotten disturbed by the things Ed has had to say during their entire day together. Notice also that although Ed asks Sam to help him convince Nonnie to go up north with him, Sam does not give him an answer.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think that Ed's recurring vision of stepping on an ant and having the feeling he'd just killed Nonnie means?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Ed and Sam.

Discussion Question 3

Who do you think is the blur that Ed sees walking in front of Nonnie? Do you believe Sam saw the figure as well? If yes, why might he have not commented on it?

Vocabulary

stodgily, piazza, amenities, ponderous, inexorable, calamity, inoculated, prestige



Chapter 12

Summary

As Dorothy talks to him about her plans for their house, Tracy thinks to himself that Maxwell is on his side. They decide to get Dorothy's ring the following morning. As he leaves Dorothy's house and walks, Tracy thinks that things should be calm from that point forward. He expects no more arguments with his mother. With this in mind, he goes to his mother to try to borrow the money he will need to see to Nonnie. She pushes him for a reason he needs the money and he finally lies and tells her he needs to take care of a gambling debt. Tracy is dumbfounded when his mother begins to criticize him. She does, however, agree to give him the money.

Later that night on the way to Nonnie's house he stops for a bottle of whiskey. He is drunk by the time he gets to Nonnie's house. He calls for her loudly in the arbor, not even sure if he was calling the correct name. Nonnie stares at him in horror as he calls her a "nigger" and says he's caught on to her. Although Nonnie asks him to go away and come back later, Tracy insists on talking. When she tries to put her hand on his shoulder, he pushes her away too roughly and she falls, hitting her head. For a brief moment he is concerned but then tells her he is glad, as he shouldn't be the one to have to do all the hurting. He tries to have sex with her but is unable to get his body to function properly. When he wakes, he is alone.

In the morning Tracy walks back to Henry's cabin. He asks for more whiskey. He tells Henry he's marrying Dorothy, then bursts into tears. Henry begs Tracy to tell him what is wrong. Having nothing else to do, Henry kneels by Tracy and puts his arms around him. When Tracy recovers from his crying, he makes fun of Henry for his lack of washing habits. He then instructs his servant to tell Dorothy he'll be to see her that afternoon. Tracy also suggests he go wash with soap, a suggestion that Henry takes. Once in the house, however, Eenie makes fun of him and the two square off against each other, Eenie with a butcher knife and Henry with a skillet. Alma Deen walks in on the two and quietly stops their fighting. Meanwhile, in Henry's cabin Tracy fingers the check his mother has given him as Dunwoodie's words instructing him how to fix the situation with Nonnie echo in his head.

Analysis

In this section it appears that Tracy has made his decision to give in to his family's desires. Notice that as Chapter 12 opens, Tracy is jubilant, believing that the townspeople are finally behind him. His belief that he will hear no more criticism from his mother is crushed when she begins to scold him for his secrecy when he asks for a loan.



Henry's run-in with Eenie adds to and illustrates the growing sense of unease in the novel. The two trusted servants almost come to deadly blows as they lose their cool with one another. Henry is angered by Eenie's words to him after he's just come from his friend who has told him he plans to join the church but seems in despair as a result of his decision.

Notice also in this section of the novel that as Dorothy talks about her plans for their new home, Tracy wonders what has become of the old piano that used to be in his grandparents' parlor. The fact that Tracy thinks about this piece of furniture specifically is significant because he has come to liken the feelings of comfort he got from laying his face on the piano keys to those he got when he was with Nonnie. He offhandedly wonders what became of the piano. The reader might question if one day Tracy will wonder in the same offhanded way what became of Nonnie and his child.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship between Henry and Tracy as illustrated in this section of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Consider the way Alma defuses the argument between her servants. What does this scene say about Alma? What does it say about Eenie and Henry?

Discussion Question 3

Although Tracy has made up his mind to give in to his mother's pressure, it is clear he isn't at peace with the decision. In what ways can you tell he isn't happy with himself? Upon whom does he take out his frustrations?

Vocabulary

coition, obscenity, brandishing, consigns, escapade, connotations, decorously, futile, inarticulate, lucidly, pompous, immaculate, deprecatingly, ingratiating, candor



Chapters 13-15

Summary

In Chapter 13, Dessie wears a dress belonging to Harriet Harris, the daughter of her white boss, to a party. Dessie had made up her mind that borrowing the dress would not really be stealing even as Mrs. Harris had read to her from the Bible. Henry is coming to walk her home after the party. As she waits on the porch for him she hears Tracy come and try to talk to Nonnie but she asks him to come later. When Henry does come for Dessie and they walk away, he tries to pull her close but Dessie is afraid he'll mess up the dress. She fights against him and the dress gets torn in the struggle. Dessie goes to Miss Belle, the town's seamstress, the next morning even though it is Sunday. Miss Belle grudgingly agrees to fix the dress for a charge of \$3, two weeks of Dessie's pay.

In Chapter 14, it is revealed that Ed had been going each night to watch the revival meetings. On this night he sees the Pusey girl cuddled up against Tracy. He leaves the revival and heads to Salamanders for food. The restaurant is so crowded he isn't seen right away, and then Henry comes in. He brags he has been given one hundred dollars by Tracy to marry Nonnie because Tracy got her in trouble. Ed punches Henry. In his rage he decides that Tracy must die for what he has done.

In Chapter 15, Bess and Nonnie leave the Livingston home where they've just been talking to the twins about college. At home, Nonnie meets Tracy at the gate. Tracy tries to tell her how his whole life has been wrong and stumbles through an attempt to say he won't be back. He ends by telling her that he's arranged for Henry to marry her. Nonnie remembers her mother telling her one night after Henry had invited Nonnie to sleep with him that Henry was one of those people whose minds she wanted Nonnie to hate. Tracy tries to give her the package with the two hundred dollars but she won't take it. He lays it on the fence rail and walks away. As she stands there, Nonnie hears two shots. She runs into the house. Bess asks her what is wrong as Nonnie passes out. Ed walks in saying he's killed Tracy Deen.

Bess tells her brother he must get out of town. The sisters quickly get their money together and leave Jackie at Miss Ada's house. At Sam's house, after Bess tells her what Ed did, Aunt Easter tells them Sam is at Sally Mason's house delivering a baby. Sam agrees to drive Ed out of Maxwell. Before he leaves, Ed begs Nonnie to forgive him.

Analysis

The imminent doom toward which the author has been working takes place in this section of the novel as Ed kills Tracy Deen. Although Deen is dead, the readers are left with the feeling that things are far from over in Maxwell. With Sam's help, the Anderson girls get Ed quickly out of Maxwell. Mr. Pusey's warning that Ed would get into trouble if



he were allowed to stay in Maxwell comes to pass as he shoots Tracy. The novel, however, has built toward this outcome as Ed has boiled over white men's attitudes toward black men ever since he came back to the town. When Ed hears that Tracy, a white man, is moving on with his life without Nonnie and has arranged for his sister to marry Henry, a man who represents everything that Ed cannot stand in a black man, it is completely overwhelming for him. It is the tipping point that leads him on the road to expressing his frustration and anger in violence.

Notice that as Ed leaves his house with his gun, he says to himself “she’ll be sorry” (p. 221). It is assumed the “she” that Ed refers to in this quote is Nonnie. Notice also that the author indicates that Ed’s ears did not hear the words he said to himself. This seems to imply that while Ed wanted his sister to feel sorry for what she was making him do and what she had done, he didn’t really consciously realize how much he wanted to make her feel sorry. Before he leaves with Sam, Ed seems intent upon hearing Nonnie say that she forgives him but Nonnie does not make him feel better by saying those words.

Although Tracy had been so torn up about his decision to stop his affair with Nonnie and live as his mother wanted in earlier chapters, he tries to put a strong face on for Nonnie. She had expected him to continue to see her from time to time and didn’t expect to be totally shut out by him. The reader has to wonder if Tracy really wants the affair to end so abruptly or if he has had some sort of influence from another to pretend to be that way. Did he die a changed, saved man, or was he just putting on a show for Nonnie, trying to make her forget him?

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author include the incident with Dessie and the torn dress in her story? What role does it play?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Tracy has really undergone a conversion? Or is he just putting on a good face for Nonnie?

Discussion Question 3

Why do Bess and Nonnie try to get Ed out of town so quickly? What are they afraid might happen to him if he were to stay any longer?

Vocabulary

eloquent, leer, lecherous, inexplicably, delegate, strident, inertia, crescendo, barricade



Chapters 16-19

Summary

In Chapter 16, Henry goes to Dessie after Ed hits him. He has suddenly realized that Nonnie would never really marry him. Dessie asks Henry if they will get married and says it isn't right for them to be together unless they are married. She fixes food for Henry, then they go out to a palmetto bush where she lets him have his way with her. Henry sleeps afterward but Dessie is plagued by guilt. As they walk back home, Dessie sees Tracy's body in the bushes. Henry is shocked to see his friend dead. In his sorrow, he vomits. He believes the white men will decide he was the one who murdered Tracy.

In Chapter 17, Laura realizes her mother had found and thrown away the clay torso. She's also been suggesting Laura spend less time with Jane Hardy, who is older than she. Laura wants to throw a fit like Tracy might do but doesn't want to start a fight. She knows her mother has been in the letter that Jane has sent to her. Laura looks at her watch, realizing that Tracy hasn't come home yet. She thinks back to a night she'd left her door open and he'd stopped to talk to her before going to bed. In that brief conversation she believed she'd seen in him what Nonnie saw. Back in the present, Laura thinks about Jane, how she loves her and wants her. At the same time, Laura knows what her mother will do to her relationship with Jane.

In Chapter 18, at that night's tent revival, Dunwoodie is focusing his efforts on bringing the affluent and rich of the community back to the church. Dunwoodie starts the service with a time of testimony. As he moves into his sermon, the town sheriff comes in and leaves with Tom Harris. Harris comes back and goes out with Tut Deen. The new city marshall comes into the tent and searches out Pug Pusey. After other interruptions Prentiss Reid, and Alma and Laura Deen also leave. Dunwoodie finally gives up and closes the service. Dorothy Pusey pushes her way outside as questions and comments that something had happened to Tracy follow her. Jane picks Dorothy up in her car and carries her to the Deen home.

In Chapter 19, Dessie remembers Henry dragging Tracy's body off further in the woods as she serves the Harris family that day. At breakfast the preacher had made a comment about Tracy becoming a preacher and Dessie had dropped the coffee cup she was holding. Dessie believes she is responsible for Tracy's murder because of her bad behavior the night prior. She listens as the family members share the news of Tracy's shooting. Mrs. Harris scolds Dessie after she breaks her fifth dish that day, and Dessie bursts into tears apologizing for doing wrong. Mrs. Harris believes Dessie is physically ill and asks when her last bowel movement was. She then tells Dessie someone shot Tracy.



Analysis

The feeling of doom continues to build as Henry and Dessie stumble upon Tracy's body. Henry cries and vomits in his shock and sorrow. He also realizes that since he lives in the deep south, the white men will automatically assume that a black man is responsible. Henry immediately believes he will be the one accused of the crime even though he is innocent. His certain belief foreshadows the conclusion of the novel.

In this section the doomed tone of the novel continues and is edged with the feeling that the characters are becoming more and more uneasy about their own well being. This feeling of being on edge is captured in the behavior of Dessie the morning she and Henry find Tracy's body. She fumbles about and drops things bursting into tears when her mistress chastises her. Note the way that Mrs. Harris' lectures on spirituality have impacted Dessie. Dessie has the childish understanding that she has done wrong in allowing Henry to have sex with her but doesn't understand forgiveness because that aspect of God's mercy has never been taught to her. She sees God only as a mean and angry God who is punishing her by allowing them to be the ones to find Henry's body. Up to this point, Dessie has always has a childlike, trusting relationship with the white people around her. After Henry's reaction to finding Tracy's body and hearing him say that he will be blamed for Tracy's death, Dessie begins to realize that black people who get into a white person's way are in danger of being punished, even if they aren't the ones guilty.

It is also learned in this section of the novel that Laura, the perfect daughter, is hiding her own sin. She and Jane have apparently been carrying on some sort of lesbian relationship. This can be inferred by Laura's comment that she loves Jane and wants to be with her, and that her mother has described the relationship that a woman like Jane would want to have with Laura as being one her university professor said was immoral. Laura would almost rather leave Maxwell, and Jane, than to suffer the consequences if her mother were to find out exactly what sort of relationship the two were having.

Additionally in this section, the words of the infidel Prentiss Reid seem to be true as the preachers at the revival turn their attention to the influential and rich people of Maxwell. It is mentioned that the revival will be deemed a success not by the number of mill workers who are saved, but by the number of rich people who are brought back to the fold. So it appears it really is true that the church is more interested in monetary support than in encouraging people to live the way Jesus would want them to live.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Henry immediately assumes that he will be blamed for Tracy's death?

Discussion Question 2

How does Dessie's feelings of guilt and guilty reactions add to the tone of the novel?



Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Laura is having lesbian relations with Jane? How might her mother react if she knew the truth?

Vocabulary

wile, amorousness, ponderously, dejectedly, retched, imperceptibly, intricacies, circuitously, reformation, deprived, metabolism, abominate, deficit, inconspicuously, invariable, defiantly, manifold, tribulation, penitentiary



Chapters 20-21

Summary

In Chapter 20, Miss Sadie and Miss Belle discuss the events surrounding Tracy's death and the preparations for his funeral over the phone until Miss Sadie, who works as a telephone operator, quickly tells Belle she can't talk anymore and hangs up. She hears men talking outside her door, saying that Crazy Carl has told them Henry is responsible for killing Tracy. The men are making plans to find Henry. Later, when Crazy Carl comes to Miss Sadie's room for his daily glass of milk, she asks him what he's been telling the other men about Henry. She instructs him he can't place the blame on Henry if he isn't sure Henry was responsible. Carl strikes out at Miss Sadie and she is able to deflate the situation only by giving Carl his milk. As soon as Carl leaves, Miss Sadie calls Laura and warns her that the men are after Henry.

In Chapter 21, Bess has lied to her employer by telling her that Jackie was sick in order to be able to check on Ed's progress. Bess thinks at first that Ed has taken after their father, who was always finding fault in other people and situations and was never happy. However, Bess then she blames Nonnie for their situation. She remembers her sister coming back from her final visit with Tracy with a bruise on her arm and breast. She's worried Nonnie might die because she had nothing left for which to live. At Sam's house, he tells her that Ed made the train at Macon and was on his way to New York. She tells Sam they found Tracy's body but that it wasn't on the path like Ed said he's left it. Instead it was fifty yards from the path. Bess worries that if they don't get Ed, the white men will make someone pay for the murder. She wonders what they should do in that case. When she asks if there is a possibility they could think Nonnie was responsible, Sam gets uncomfortable and strongly suggests she go home for some rest.

Bess admits to Sam that she believes that Nonnie has never really accepted that she is African American, to which Sam asks if that matters. He tells Bess that white people have their own problems, just as blacks do. As Bess continues to rail against the white men and Nonnie's bad decisions, Sam tells Bess he wants to marry Nonnie. When Bess questions Sam's intentions, especially after Nonnie had been with a white man, Sam becomes angry with her. Back at the Stephenson home, Bess overhears Grace and Mrs. Stephenson talking about the abortion.

Analysis

The feeling of unease increases as Miss Sadie describes the neighborhood as "chattering like a nervous woman" about Tracy's death (p. 264). Miss Sadie overhears the rumors in the street that a mob of men is organizing to come for Henry. It is she who warns Laura that the men are coming for her family's servant.



Consider in this section that the men have decided to pin the guilt for the murder on Henry based on the word of a man named Crazy Carl, who is apparently seen as the town idiot. Carl enjoys the spotlight he's found since he's told his lie about Henry and refuses to tell the truth. The fact that these men are willing to take the word of a man they've never listened to before about anything shows that they are just grasping at straws, willing to sacrifice anyone who is handy in their anger.

In this section of the novel, Sam and Bess realize they face their own moral dilemma. They both know that Ed was the one who killed Tracy. They also know that the white men will make someone pay for Tracy's death. Bess asks Sam what he thinks they should do if some innocent person is charged with Tracy's death. He suggests they wait before thinking about that.

It seems Bess has a lesson to learn in this section of the novel as she finally pushes the normally-patient Sam to his breaking point. He tries to explain to her that just like the black people have problems, the white people also have problems. Bess won't listen and just continues to feel hatred. When she arrives back at the Stephenson house, she overhears Mrs. Stephenson and Grace talking about the abortion. The white family whom she serves and claims to hate so much is facing the same problem as her family. Just as Sam said, the whites have problems just as the black people do.

Bess also gets a sharp awakening when she realizes she isn't the one that Sam has been coming to see all these years. It is with Sam's request that he be allowed to marry Nonnie that Bess realizes Sam cares for her sister, even after Nonnie has gotten pregnant by a white man, a circumstance that Bess believes makes her sister unable to be loved by a good man. When Bess puts this feeling into words, Sam becomes truly angered by Bess' words, telling her she has made him sick.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that the men take Crazy Carl's word that it was Henry who killed Tracy?

Discussion Question 2

If you were Sam or Bess—the only people who know that it was Ed who killed Tracy—how might you plan to handle the situation if an innocent person were accused of the crime?

Discussion Question 3

How does the relationship between Bess and Sam change in this section of the novel?

Vocabulary

bilious, ingratiating, retorted, guileless, shrewd, compulsion, hypnotized, discreet



Chapters 22-26

Summary

In Chapter 22, Tom Harris questions Dessie after Laura tells him the circumstances of Dessie and Henry finding Tracy. After he feels she's told him the truth, he instructs her not to leave their house that night. As he walks home that night from his office, Tom is stopped twice by different groups of white men. He tries to warn them not to stir up trouble. At home, he asks Charles to go to the meeting with his mother and sisters. Although Charles is angry about the way the people in town are acting, his father advises him to keep his mouth shut and look after his family.

After his family leaves, Harris thinks about his afternoon at the milltown. He believes Nonnie is responsible for Tracy's death. He hopes they'll just take her to trial and then hush it up as best they can and try to get the people to think of something else. Earlier, in the milltown he had learned the chain-gang foreman was using the sweatbox as a punishment, a practice to which he put a stop. Back at his office, Tom had found Willie Echols waiting for him. He listened to the man complain and explained to him how he couldn't raise wages when he could barely meet payroll as it was. In the middle of Willie's rant Tom received the phone call from Laura saying the men were after Henry. Now, at his house, Tom goes and knocks on Jane's door.

In Chapter 23, Dunwoodie has decided there will be no song service during that night's meeting. He chooses to move straight into the preaching. He asks the people attending the service whether their relatives cause them to believe that anyone not attending the service is out committing some sin. One woman finally leaves the service. She is accused by the preacher of not being able to handle the strong word of God.

In the short Chapter 24, Alma Deen comes downstairs to see her son in his casket.

In Chapter 25, Nonnie helps Mrs. Brown put together a spray of flowers for Tracy's funeral. As they work, Tracy's words to her keep echoing through her head interspersed with those of Bess and Ed about Tracy. She sends Nonnie to the Deen house to deliver the flowers.

In Chapter 26, Laura is unable to feel any emotions about her brother or his death. Her only thought of him has been that he is finally free from their mother's demands. Laura believes Nonnie is responsible for her brother's death. When Nonnie comes to deliver the flowers, Laura calls Nonnie to her but cannot put together words to approach the subject. After Nonnie is gone, she hears men in the backyard looking for Henry. The night before she helped Jane and Tom Harris dress Henry up like a girl so they could move him to the safety of the jail. Later, at the funeral, Laura is almost amused by the way the black servants come with them, hoping to avoid whatever evil doings will happen when the white people are gone.



Analysis

The suspense continues to grow in this section of the novel as the town of Maxwell seems to be on the verge of great destruction. The preacher works the crowd in the revival into a frenzy, making them doubt not only their own salvation but also that of their family members. Even as the revival seems to reach a crescendo, the evil in the town seems to hit a high note as well. During a time of visitation at the Deen home, Laura hears men in her backyard looking for Henry. These men don't even have the courtesy to wait until Tracy is buried to try to carry out their own form of justice.

Notice that several people in town are beginning to believe that Nonnie is responsible for Tracy's death. Both Tom Harris and Laura suspect she is responsible, but don't say anything. Tom senses trouble brewing in the town as he meets several groups of white men searching through the town after dark. He is careful to send his son Charles along with the women to the gospel meeting, a precaution that indicates that Tom is concerned there will be trouble.

Meanwhile, Willie Echols, the man from the milltown intent on starting a union to get more wages, has paid Tom a visit. Willie represents the men and speaks their displeasure in getting paid so little. Tom thinks to himself how easy it would be to replace Willie and all the other workers. This anger and frustration voiced by Willie seems to be a factor in the feelings of the people in the milltown who get swept up in the fervor over finding and punishing Henry. It is almost as if Henry represents to them the reason they don't have better, more well-paying jobs.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Henry will be safe in the jail? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the author chooses to put Willie's discussion with Tom at this point in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the tone in this section of the novel. How is it changing from earlier chapters?

Vocabulary

regulated, elusive, loath, portent, impetus, paroxysm, vigilance, reticence, blighted, inept, precipice, capitulated, vigil, chirr, perturbation, bereaved, cortege, porte-cochere



Chapters 27-28

Summary

In Chapter 27, a mob of 40 men and 6 bloodhounds hunts for Henry through the afternoon after Tracy's funeral. They finally meet in a school office. The only place they haven't looked yet is at the jail.

In Chapter 28, Sam goes to warn Tom Harris that the men are looking for Henry. He tries to wait patiently but knows time is running out. As Sam is trying to make that point to Tom, Tom gets a phone call telling him the men have found Henry in the jail. Tom asks Sam to drive him to the ball field. There is already smoke rising from where the men have hung Henry and set him on fire. Sam starts to drive away and sees Charles Harris chasing Dessie towards his house. Dessie wants to help Henry but Charles tells her it is too late to help Henry as he is already dead. Sam takes charge of the girl. He drives her to Bess and Nonnie just she asks him to do.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Sam is forced to reconsider the moral dilemma first brought to him by Bess. Gabe, who witnessed the fight between Ed and Henry, tells Sam Henry isn't responsible. He prompts Sam to action when he tells him that he can't let an innocent man die when he knew who had committed the crime.

Notice later that when Sam is talking to Tom Harris, he uses a similar argument with him in an attempt to get the man to act. He isn't aware that Tom has already tucked Henry away in jail in the hopes that he wouldn't be found. Sam tells Tom that anyone who looks the other way when an innocent man is lynched is responsible for that lynching. The always-patient Sam who is always so careful not to cross the line with white people almost pushes Tom too far in this section when he asks why the white men have to take and use the black women the way they do.

Discussion Question 1

If the people of Maxwell are so afraid Henry will be hurt, why don't they get him out of town just as Ed was taken out of town by his family?

Discussion Question 2

In discussing the relationship between blacks and whites, both Tom and Sam make good points. Choose one of the points they make and expand on it. Discuss how things have changed, if at all, for both races.



Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Dessie choose to go to Bess and Nonnie after Henry's death?

Vocabulary

genuflection, recapitulating, tawdry, accumulated, alacrity, cacophonous, peremptorily, impotence



Chapters 29-30

Summary

In Chapter 29, Bill Talley gets back home and torments his foreman, Lias, with details of Henry's death. Across town, Miss Belle spends the night with Miss Sadie for safety. She continues to talk about the lynching until Miss Sadie asks her to hush. Mrs. Pusey tries to comfort her daughter, telling her that Tracy's death was the Lord's will. Roseanna Livingson asks her husband if they can send the girls to college early, wanting them to get out of Maxwell. In the milltown, Willie continues to rail against Tom Harris but Lewis comments the man was good to him when he lost his legs in a sawmill accident. Willie voices his opinion that all black people should be burned as Henry had been.

Meanwhile, Charlie praises his father for what he tried to do for Henry even though the man was not saved. Charlie doesn't understand why the blacks can't be equal to the whites. As he's talking to his father, Harriet comes out telling them she knows how the lyncher feels. She believes white people lynch the soul of black people every day. When Harriet comments that no one tried to stop it, Charlie tells her what their father did that day. After Tom goes to bed Charlie describes the hate he saw on the faces of the people who were killing Henry. He tells Harriet it was some of the same men who prayed to be saved at the revival that killed Henry.

After that night's revival service, Brother Saunders and Dunwoodie discuss the impact the lynching has had on their revival. Although they agree they don't condone the hanging, they think it's best not to talk about it. At his office, Sam gets a visit from Dan requesting medicine for his wife. As Sam fixes it he agrees with Dan their best route of action is to mind their own business. Cap'n Rushing thinks about the sickness among his servants and his own impending death. Alone on their porch, Laura tries to tell her mother she doesn't want to go back to school yet. Alma tells her daughter they will think about that later. Finally, Prentiss Reid, the newspaper editor struggles with his editorial for the following morning. In his own mind he knows the problems in the South are caused by ignorance and poverty. In his editorial, however, Reid blames the troubles on the war and the impact of northern industry drawing blacks away.

In Chapter 30, Bess, Nonnie, and Dessie rush to get ready for work after having hidden in their house in fear all night. As they walk away, Dessie runs back for her hat.

Analysis

The author wraps up her novel in a way that shows that even with the recent violence, nothing will change in the small southern town of Maxwell. In her final sentence in Chapter 29 the author indicates the moonlight whitens the revival tent, symbolically washing away all of the town's sins. Chapter 30 is a snapshot of Bess, Nonnie and Dessie getting ready for work the following morning just as if nothing had happened.



Of note are the differing reactions the people of the town have to the cruel way in which Henry was killed. The older generations of southerners, like Bill Talley and the mill workers, believe Henry deserved what he got, simply because he was black. The middle-aged generations, like Tom Harris, seem to be stuck between two worlds. Harris doesn't believe the incident was handled properly and tried to stop it but was unsuccessful. When his children question why blacks can't be treated as other people, Harris' lack of a good answer essentially indicates a fear among the people like him. They aren't sure what might happen if blacks were treated like whites so they are afraid to take the risk. Even the younger generation, symbolized by Charlie and Harriet, who believe change should be made aren't yet courageous enough to make that change. When Harriet asks Charlie why they aren't brave enough to just act like human beings, Charlie avoids the question.

Significant also in this section are the musings of the town's newspaper editor about the situation. Even though he sees the causes of people's hate and frustration, he knows they would not be able to read an account of their own failings. Instead of writing what he really thinks, Reid writes what he believes the people want to read, what will make them feel better about themselves.

Finally, it seems the two ministers preaching the town's revival have completely missed the point of God and religion. When they discuss the lynching, they agree that they don't condone the act, but also decide not to address the blatant sin that the people of the town have just committed. As it is portrayed in the book, religion seems a very hypocritical institution. This is seen when the men leading the revival say they are interested in saving men's souls, but their actions speak differently. For instance, the men believe it is not their place to get involved in a situation where people who are supposedly saved are committing sins that go against their salvation.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe the ending of the novel works? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the preachers decide not to address the lynching at the revival? Do you think this was a good decision? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Harriet's statement that white people lynch the black soul everyday. Do you agree with her statement?

Vocabulary

plaintive, paranoia, condone, mockery, scourge, tumultuous, automaton



Characters

Nonnie “Non” Anderson

Nonnie Anderson is one of the main characters in the novel. When she was child, a boy tried to take her clothes off but Tracy Deen, a white boy, chased that boy off. Since that time Nonnie has decided Tracy was the man for her. Nonnie is one of the few African American women in the South who has a college education. Following her time in college, she returned home to care for Boysie Brown, a handicapped child. She has continued an affair with Tracy, and the relationship is kept hidden. At the time the novel begins, Nonnie tells Tracy she is pregnant with his baby. To Nonnie’s despair, Tracy tells her that he is going to follow his mother’s wishes, join the church, and marry Dorothy Pusey. Nonnie insists on keeping her baby. Tracy arranges for her to marry his friend Henry, an idea that sickens Nonnie. He also gives her money to care for her baby but Nonnie gives it to her brother, Ed, to help him get safely out of town after he shoots Tracy.

Sam Perry

Sam Perry, an African American, is the doctor for the black community. He has been lifelong friends with the Anderson family. When Sam learns that Ed has killed Tracy, he drives Ed to the train station to seek refuge in the North. After Deen is killed, Sam decides he will marry Nonnie even though she is carrying a white man’s baby. Although he is black, Sam draws up his courage and asks Tom Harris to help him try to stop Henry’s lynching. Sam is described by members of the community as one of the few black men who wasn’t ruined by college. Although he takes a good deal of abuse from the white farm owners, Sam is patient and remembers his place. The only time he seems to lose his temper is when he is trying to convince Tom to help Henry. Sam feels he will be partially responsible for Henry’s death because he knows Henry did not kill Tracy but doesn’t want to cause trouble for Ed.

Tracy Deen

Tracy Deen is the son of Alma and Tut Deen. Although his parents have high hopes for him, Tracy flunks out of college and returns home with no real ambition. He serves in the army in World War I for a time but then returns to Maxwell and takes up a relationship he’d been having with Nonnie, a colored girl. Nonnie winds up pregnant just as Tracy decides that he needs to please his mother. He joins the church and proposes to Dorothy Pusey as his mother wished. In order to take care of Nonnie and her baby, Tracy arranges for his family’s house servant, Henry, to marry her. When Nonnie’s brother, Ed, hears Henry bragging he’s been given money to marry Nonnie, he flies into a fury and shoots Tracy.



Bess Anderson Lewis

Bess is Nonnie's older sister. She happened to see Tracy and Nonnie together when Nonnie was still a teen. She has kept her knowledge of the affair a secret for years. When Nonnie tells Bess she is pregnant, Bess scolds Nonnie for wanting so little. Since she was a child, Bess has felt that Nonnie and Ed were always more loved by her mother than she was. For this reason she has grown up resentful of both of her siblings. Bess is angry when Ed asks her to help him convince Nonnie to move north with him. Bess wonders why Nonnie is so much more special than she. Bess is married to a man who works as a railroad porter. She has a young son named Jackie.

Tom Harris

Tom Harris is the owner of Maxwell's sawmills and turpentine stills. He is one of the most prestigious men in Maxwell. His businesses employ many people in Maxwell but some of his workers are disgruntled because of what they consider low wages. These are the people who live in the milltown who are among those who lynch Henry despite Harris' attempts to keep him safe. Harris and Jane Hardy dress Henry up like a girl to move him from the Deen's house to the jail where Harris hopes he will be safe. When Harris gets the word from Miss Sadie that the mob has gotten its hands on Henry, Tom has Sam drive him to the ball field so that he can try to stop Henry's murder.

Henry McIntosh

Henry McIntosh is the son of Mamie and Ten McIntosh. He grows up in a cabin behind the Deen's home. Henry and Tracy are best friends because of their time growing up together. When Tracy is told by the preacher to find a colored man he trusts to marry Nonnie, he chooses Henry. Henry, however, brags to a group of men at Salamander's Lunch Counter and Ed, Nonnie's brother, learns what is being planned. He punches Henry. After Ed shoots Tracy, Henry and Dessie are the ones who first find his body. Henry is later lynched because some white people in the community believe that Henry was responsible for Tracy's death.

Ed Anderson

Ed Anderson is Nonnie and Bess' brother. He has come back to the south with the plan to take Nonnie back up North with him. However, Ed becomes angry with Tracy Deen when he learns that the white man has paid Henry to marry Nonnie to cover up her pregnancy. He kills Tracy and has to flee back North to avoid being killed. Ed has a habit of letting his temper get away from him. Before he'd gone to college, he's sassed Pug Pusey. Although Pusey had not punished Ed, he told Ed's mother that Ed needed to leave Maxwell or he would get into trouble, as he was restless.



Preacher Dunwoodie

Preacher Dunwoodie is the preacher who speaks at the town's tent revival. He is also the preacher who speaks to Tracy about his wandering ways. The preacher encourages Tracy to do as his mother wants. Even though he is a minister, Peacher Dunwoodie has a very low opinion of black people. He first compares them to dogs, then tells Tracy the woman he got pregnant won't have trouble with her baby because black women never have trouble birthing babies. It is Dunwoodie who suggests to Tracy that he find some man he trusts to marry Nonnie and give them both some money.

Laura Deen

Laura Deen is the daughter of Alma and Tut Deen. She is the younger sister of Tracy. While Tracy disappointed his mother, Laura has followed her mother's dreams for her life up until her college years. At the time the novel takes place, Laura has decided to revolt against her mother's control over her life. She is also carrying on some type of lesbian relationship with an older woman in her town. When her brother is killed, Laura is disturbed because she is not able to feel anything about his death or the brother he was to her.

Miss Ada

Miss Ada is the senile white woman who watches Jackie while Bess and Nonnie are at work during the day. Although Ed and Jack are both concerned the white woman might do something to hurt Jackie, Nonnie doesn't believe she would. Like Nonnie, Miss Ada had only one true love in her life. Nonnie believes she will be like Miss Ada when she gets older.

Alma Deen

Alma Deen is Laura and Tracy Deen's mother. She believes she is always right and has done nothing wrong in raising her children. She is disturbed by how badly Tracy seems to have turned out but believes that he is on his way to redemption when he joins the church and proposes to Dorothy. Alma also is disappointed with Laura who seems to be more distanced from her mother since returning from college.

Dr. Tutwiler "Tut" Deen

Dr. Deen is Alma's husband and father to Tracy and Laura. Although he is a successful doctor and drug store owner, he'd rather be running his family's old farm. When the Stephensons bring Grace to him to find out if she is pregnant, Dr. Deen acknowledges that she is pregnant but refuses to perform an abortion on the girl.



Pug Pusey

Pug Pusey is Dorothy's father. He is the man to whom Ed smarts off just before he was due to go to college. Luckily for Ed, Pug did not punish him, choosing instead to walk away from the boy. Mr. Pusey did, however, warn Ed's mother he would get into trouble if he did not get out of town.

Jane Hardy

Jane Hardy is the older woman who befriends Laura. She sits for Laura to make a clay sculpture of her. It is suggested there is some sort of lesbian attraction between the two. Later in the novel, Jane helps Tom Harris dress Henry up like a girl so that they can sneak him to the jail.

Tillie Anderson

Tillie Anderson is the mother of Nonnie, Bess, and Ed. She is not involved in the action of the novel as she had recently passed away. Tillie, however, is credited to working hard and seeing to it that all of her children had a college education. She is also said to have taught her children how to work hard and how to get along with white people.

Dorothy "Dottie" Pusey

Dorothy Pusey is the woman whom Tracy had been dating since they were in high school. His mother insists that he should propose to her and he finally does. Dottie is described as having a very rigid way of looking at life and categorizing right from wrong.

Dessie

Dessie is a servant to the Harris family. She and Henry are the ones who find Tracy's body. Dessie had thought that she would marry Henry. When Henry is killed, Dessie has to be chased from the scene by Charlie because she wants so badly to try to help save him.

Little Gabe

Little Gabe is the man who witnesses the interaction between Henry and Ed at Salamander's Lunch Counter. He later told Sam what happened during the confrontation between the two men.



Rosa Matthews

Rosa Matthews is Alma Deen's mother and therefore Tracy and Laura's grandmother. Alma is critical of her mother because she believes she was not a good wife and not properly supportive of her husband. She also spoiled Tracy when he was an infant, which Alma believes ruined the boy.

Grace Stephenson

Grace Stephenson is the young daughter of L. D. and Helen Stephenson. She gets pregnant by a boy whom her father calls white trash. Her parents take her to Atlanta for an abortion because Dr. Deen refuses to do the procedure.

Charles Harris

Charles Harris is the son of Tom Harris and brother of Harriet Harris. He supports his father in trying to stop Henry's lynching. Charles is the one who chases Dessie out of the crowd at the lynching and has Sam take her away from the scene.

Prentiss Reid

Prentiss Reid is the editor of the town newspaper The Maxwell Press. He is considered the town's infidel, as he believes there is no God. In reality, Reid sees the South for what it really is. He recognizes the ignorance and hypocrisy in the people there.

The Reverend and Roseanna Livingston

The Reverend and Roseanna Livingston are Maxwell's African American preacher and his wife. The couple has twin daughters whom they plan to send to college so the girls can make something of themselves.

Crazy Carl

Crazy Carl is a Maxwell resident with physical disabilities. People generally don't listen to what Crazy Carl has to say but they listen to him when he tells them that it was Henry who killed Tracy.

Miss Belle

Miss Belle is the seamstress who agrees to repair the dress that Dessie "borrowed" from Harriet Harris then tore. Because Dessie brings her the dress on a Sunday, she requires the girl pay her what was to Dessie an enormous sum of \$3 for the repair.



Salamander

Salamander is the old, deaf black man who is the owner of Salamander's Lunch Counter.

Nat Ashley

Nat Ashley is the boy who tried to take off Nonnie's clothes when she was a girl. Tracy stopped this boy from assaulting Nonnie. Since that time, Nonnie worshipped Tracy.

Bill Talley

Bill Talley is the man who leads the mob of men who hunt down Henry and kill him. He is a rich farm owner who treats his servants hatefully.

Willie and Mollie Echols

Willie and Mollie Echols are a couple who live in Tom Harris' milltown. Willie works at the mill, and though he is not highly schooled, he hopes to start a union demanding better pay for the mill workers.



Symbols and Symbolism

Bunch of Honeysuckle

After Tracy scares off the boy who was trying to take off Nonnie's clothes when she was a child, she hands him a bunch of honeysuckle. She notices as he walks away that he has disposed of the flowers. This honeysuckle represents the relationship between Nonnie and Tracy which Tracy takes willingly, but later throws away.

Squash Bloom

Nonnie and Bess' mother comments that Nonnie is beautiful after the child puts a squash bloom in her hair. Bess is jealous because she believes her mother doesn't think that she is pretty.

Empty Box

When Bess goes outside one day to hear what her sister and Tracy are talking about, she sees Nonnie sitting alone. The box where Tracy usually sat was empty. To Bess that empty box becomes a symbol of the relationship between white men and black women.

Maxwell Press

The Maxwell Press is the name of the newspaper that serves Maxwell. Although the editor of the paper has his own ideas about the way the people in the South should treat blacks, he chooses not to use his newspaper as a platform but instead tells his readers what he thinks they want to hear. The paper represents a means by which the people remain ignorant and resistant to change.

Clay Torso

Laura's mother is shocked when she finds this clay torso of a woman in Laura's drawer. She destroys the figure. The clay torso, which is actually a model of Jane, represents all of the things that Laura's mother hates in her daughter.

Book About Art

Laura reads a book about art, which causes her to want to be an artist. Her mother, however, has already decided she doesn't want Laura to be an artist.



Blue and White Glass Vase

Ten McIntosh smashes this blue and white glass vase that his wife was given as a gift from the Deen family during an argument about raising their son, Henry, so close to a family of white people. To Ten, the vase represents the white people. His wife's act of displaying the vase in a place of honor makes him feel as if she believes the white people are more worthy of honor than blacks.

A Thousand Lacy Valentines

Miss Ada's room is decorated with a thousand lacy valentines, gifts from the children on the town because they know she loves this holiday. Miss Ada's act of displaying these childish notions represents her innocent nature.

The White Cow

Tut sees this white cow walk into the road in front of his car and stare at him as he is driving one day. He thinks to himself that the cow reminds him of his wife, Alma. Since that day images of the white cow have come back to him occasionally, plaguing him with the feeling he shouldn't associate his wife with a cow.

Typhoid Serum

Sam decides the black workers at the Rushton farm need to be inoculated for Typhoid, a disease that is circulating in the black areas of the town. Rushton allows him to do so even though he refers to the practice of inoculation as forbidden or black magic.

Old Piano

Tracy remembers as a young man he used to lay his head on the cool keys of his grandmother's old piano in her parlor as a comfort. He has this same feeling when he is with Nonnie. When he and Dorothy are talking about plans for their home, Tracy wonders what has become of the piano, which has come to symbolize not only comfort, but also Nonnie.

Three Hundred Dollars

Three hundred dollars is the amount of money that Tracy asks to borrow from his mother in order to take care of Nonnie and her pregnancy. He gives Henry one hundred dollars to marry the girl and attempts to give Nonnie two hundred dollars to take care of doctor's expenses but she instead gives it to her brother to help him get out of town safely.



Red Silk Dress

Dessie sneaks this red silk dress out of Harriet's closet to wear to a party. On the way home, Henry handles her roughly and the dress is torn. Dessie pays Miss Belle three dollars to mend the dress so she can return it without Harriet knowing it was stolen and torn. The dress represents the differences between blacks and whites. The fancy dress is one that Dessie could never have afforded and those who see her wearing it at the party know she couldn't afford it. It is also a representation of Dessie's sin as the dress is torn and Dessie knows she must get it repaired at any cost to keep herself from getting into trouble with her mistress.

Jane's Letters

Even though they live in the same town, Jane and Laura write letters to one another. In one of these letters, Jane writes about the clay figure that Laura made for which Jane was the model. Laura's mother finds these letters and takes the one that addresses the clay figure.



Settings

Maxwell, Georgia

Maxwell, Georgia is the town in Georgia where this story is set. In the period of transition between the end of the Civil War and the Civil Rights era, the people of Maxwell hold highly racist views. Although blacks are now free, they are allowed only to hold jobs as servants or field workers. The town is segregated, with specific areas that blacks are not allowed to go. Even the community wide revival services have designated areas for the blacks to sit.

Colored Town

Colored Town consists of the areas of Maxwell where the black residents live. These areas are generally more ramshackle and not kept up well as the residents don't have the money to care for their homes. When the people of this area of town get together in what little spare time they have to socialize, they enjoy each other's company with dancing, drinking and food.

White Town

White Town is the name used to describe the place where the white people in Maxwell live. This is the upscale neighborhood of Maxwell where the large homes are kept neat and in good order. Although the people of this area do socialize with each other, there doesn't seem to be the sense of camaraderie as there is in the part of town where the black characters live.

Tom Harris' Milltown

Tom Harris milltown is the place where most of the people who work at the mill live, along with their families.

College Street

College Street is the street on which most of the respected, rich people in Maxwell live. Residents of this street include the Deens, the Puseys and the Harrises.



Salamander's Lunch Counter

Salamander's Lunch Counter is a restaurant in town for the African American residents of Maxwell. This is the restaurant where Henry brags that Tracy has given him money to marry Nonnie. Ed overhears Henry's bragging and decides he has to kill Tracy.

Deen's Corner Drug Store

Deen's Corner Drug Store is owned by Tut Deen. It is a place in town where primarily white people gather.

Aunt Tyse's Deserted Cabin

It is at Aunt Tyse's deserted cabin that Nonnie and Tracy meet for some of their rendezvous. Bess spies on the couple during one of their encounters in the cabin. This is where Tracy takes Nonnie the night that he is drunk and where he pushes her down and hurts her.

Bob Martin's School Office

Bob Martin's school office is the place where Bill Talley and his men meet as they search for Henry McIntosh with the intention of killing him.

Ball Ground

The ball ground in Maxwell is where the mob of people lynch and burn Henry McIntosh to death.



Themes and Motifs

Accepted Behavior of Blacks

It is made very clear in this novel that in this time period, probably the early 1920's, there were ways in which it was accepted for blacks to act when dealing with white people. Blacks who did not follow these rules of accepted behavior could be punished or even killed. Although some of the white people in the novel, and even some of the black people, don't seem to understand why some blacks have so much trouble with staying in the lines of this accepted behavior, it is evident these rules were an attempt to keep blacks believing they were inferior to whites.

Some of the blacks characters in the novel do not have trouble acting the way they should around white people. Sam is one of the best examples of a black man who follows the rules because he knows this is the best way to get along. Although Ed criticizes Sam, who is a highly intelligent doctor, for bowing and scraping to the white people, Sam doesn't seem to let the different expectations bother him. Sam once told a fellow African American that having good manners was the best life insurance policy a black could have. Like Sam, Nonnie is also not bothered by the white people and their expectations. The two seem to have some way of rising above the discrimination and not letting it drag them down.

However, some of the black characters in the book have a great deal of trouble when it comes to getting along with white people because they do not behave as expected. Ed is the best example of a black man in the novel who seems determined to cause trouble for himself and others. He refuses to call Tracy by the courtesy title of "mister," an omission noticed by Tracy but not addressed. Before going to college, Ed had almost gotten himself into trouble by sassing Mr. Pusey, a white storeowner. Mr. Pusey does not push the issue, but does suggest to Ed's mother that she get him out of town because of his rebellious attitude.

Discrimination

Many levels of discrimination are seen in this novel. The most dominating form is the discrimination against African Americans. In some cases, however, there are also examples of black people thinking in a manner that is prejudicial to white people.

This story takes place nearly fifty years after the end of the Civil War, but it is apparent that the southerners are still in a period of transition. There are laws requiring segregation. There is one restaurant in town reserved for blacks, Salamander's Lunch Counter, while the corner drug store with its soda fountain serves whites only. Even at the community tent revival where it seems all would be considered equal there is a section of benches in the back reserved for colored people. Although the blacks are encouraged by their employers to attend the revival meetings, the point is made by one



of the black characters that salvation would never be given to a black person at that tent altar.

Characters in the novel hold a mindset that whites are superior to blacks. As Tracy thinks about his relationship with Nonnie, he knows that there is no scientific reasoning behind the idea that white people are better, but it is an idea that has always been taught in his family and his community. Even the preacher who tries to get Tracy to join the church is racist. He compares black people to dogs, and then advises Tracy to pay his black mistress some money to take care of her baby and then be done with her. Even though he claims to be a man of God, this preacher doesn't seem to realize that although their skin might be a different color, black people are God's children just as he is.

While racism against blacks is the most common type of prejudice discussed in this novel some black characters also show prejudice against white people. For instance, Ten McIntosh doesn't like the idea of his son being raised living in the backyard of a white family. In the same line of thinking, both Ed and Jack are unhappy with the idea that a white woman is caring for Jackie during the day.

Religion / God

God and Religion is a major theme in this novel as the story of racism and hate is told against the backdrop of an old-fashioned community tent revival. A community-wide uncertainty and lack of understanding about God is seen in Tracy's struggle to decide if he should join the church. At this point in time God was portrayed as someone to be feared. This is shown in Dessie's reaction to the religious teaching that Mrs. Harris shares with her. Although it seems religion and true Christian living could heal the racial divide, even Religion is a topic that divides the blacks and whites in Maxwell.

One of the first aspects of the topic of Religion that the reader will notice is that the action of the story takes place as a community tent revival is underway. Going to the services is so important that store owners even close their shops so workers can attend morning services. The sound of hymns being sung and the preacher's voice can be heard even as far away as the Anderson home in colored town. As the townspeople attend their services, which Harriet Harris describes as "immoral," the town wrangles with the sin of racism. Harriet and the rest of the town's young people are tired of the old-fashioned ways of the revival which present the message of doom and damnation if one is not saved. At one point, Laura Deen describes the services as "crude." Harriet voices her opinion that she wishes the preacher would give advice on how to live as Christians instead of just calling for salvation.

The struggle with the idea of salvation is one that is deeply felt by Tracy. He loves Nonnie, a black girl. In his racist society, the rules told him it was not only immoral but also against the law to love a black woman. At one point in the book Tracy voices his frustration by thinking that God has tricked him by giving him a woman who fits all of his needs, but one he can't have. If he weren't already confused enough by his feelings for



Nonnie, Tracy's mother goes on a crusade for Tracy to join the church. She employs the pastor, Brother Dunwoodie, to persuade Tracy. Ironically, it is the very advice the pastor gives Tracy on how to deal with his problem with Nonnie that ultimately gets him killed.

Dessie is another character in the novel who struggles with faith. Her employer has taken to reading to Dessie out of the Bible and trying to describe to her the proper way to live. At first, Dessie finds ways around her employer's religious rules. For instance when she decides she wants to wear Harriet's dress to a party, she thinks if she terms it "borrowing" instead of "stealing" that makes the action okay. It is when Tracy is killed and she and Henry are the ones who find his body that Dessie feels persecuted by God. She's been told by her employer that her sins will be punished. Dessie believes Tracy's death and its effect on the county is a direct result of her act of sinning with Henry.

A final important thing to notice about the way religion is portrayed in this novel is the way the white people try to include the blacks in the revival in a way that is only superficial. For instance, many of the employers invite their employees to attend the services. Bess is angered by her invitation while Nonnie realizes Mrs. Brown intended no offense when she suggested Nonnie attend. In the revival tent there are even benches set aside for black people. Mrs. Harris reads to Dessie from the Bible while she works because she wants Dessie to have some influence from the revival. Note however, that it is pointed out that although the blacks are asked to attend services, it is also a fact that if one of them were to approach the altar at one of the services, they would be turned away as there was no salvation for black people in a white man's church.

Family Relations

Every family, whether white or black, has its share of family troubles and challenges, and thus Family Relations is a primary theme in the novel. At one point in the novel, Sam tries to get Bess to understand that white people have problems just like black people, but she doesn't seem to grasp his point. Through the novel, the trials of the Anderson family as well as the Deen family are detailed as the two families become interwoven with one another.

While Tracy is the member of the Deen family who is most openly considered a failure, all of the members of this family have their individual problems. For most of his life, Tracy has been a disappointment to his parents. He flunked out of college, hasn't made any moves toward finding anything profitable to do with his life, and hasn't gotten married. He and his parents believe he is the opposite of his sister Laura, who has succeeded at everything she's set her mind to do. While Tracy's faults are visible, it is learned that Laura is carrying on a lesbian relationship with an older girl, a relationship that she tries to keep secret. Meanwhile, both children are frustrated by their mother's overbearing attitude and attempts to control their lives. Tut Deen also experiences a sense of frustration because he feels driven by his wife to be a successful doctor and store owner when what he really wishes he could do is go and work on his family's old farm.



Meanwhile, the Anderson family has similar issues. Tillie Anderson worked hard to ensure that her children could all go to college. Ed, however, is the only one using his education. He is critical of his sister Nonnie for seeming to want nothing but to be a servant the rest of her life. He tries to convince her to move north with him so she can live her life as her mother wanted her to live. Nonnie wants only to stay at home. Bess is jealous of both her siblings as she feels they have been loved more than she. She is also critical of Nonnie because she learns about Nonnie's relationship with Tracy. Bess wants more for her sister than a clandestine relationship with a white man but not so much that she's not jealous when Ed suggests to Bess he wants Nonnie to go with him. Additionally, Nonnie admits that she's pregnant with Tracy's baby. Although Bess wants her to get an abortion, Nonnie has said she wants to keep the baby. This causes friction between them.

When Bess tells Sam she's tired of the troubles and challenges associated with being a black person, he tries to explain to her that white people have their share of trials. Bess doesn't seem to understand what he's trying to tell her but gets a first-hand example when she returns to work. As she's preparing to set the table for dinner, she overhears Grace Stephenson and her mother talking about the abortion. Bess moves away from their conversation and sets the table as she's been taught. Based on what she overhears, it seems she has learned not only that Grace is pregnant but also that white people really do have problems just as blacks do.

Wages / Work

The theme of poverty caused by low wages is significant. Willie Echols, a man who works at Tom Harris' saw mill, often complains about labor and the stinginess of the wages he's being paid. Workers are also scarce in the south for farming jobs, the ones once held by blacks. Farm owners and their foremen struggle to find people willing to do these menial tasks. This poverty, along with the struggle to find good work and find good workers, leaves the people angry and irritated. Some characters in the novel blame the lynching on this poverty.

Tom's saw mill is one of the major industries in Maxwell. Many men have worked at the mill and have lost arms or legs as a result of the dangerous job. Willie Echols, one of the men who remains unscathed at the mill, talks about putting together a union in order to try to get better wages for the mill workers and their families live. When Willie complains to Tom about the poor wages, Tom will tell him only there is no money in the budget for raises. In one of the final chapters of the novel, the newspaper editor, Prentiss Reid, comes to the conclusion that poverty is one of the problems that keeps the south from moving forward. He believes that someone with enough courage should start a union. Although Willie has the idea and maybe even the courage, his wife has warned him that he'll probably get fired if he pushes the issue. In fact, after Willie has talked to Tom, Tom thinks to himself he'll have to fire Willie if he continues to worry him about salary.



Another factor that seems to be affecting the south is the lack of farm workers. In the past, blacks could be recruited to work in the fields. Now, with more and more black people being lured up north by promises of good jobs, good wages, and better living conditions, the people who once worked the farms are now following those opportunities and going north. When Sam and Ed visit Bill Talley's farm, they hear Lias, the farm foreman, telling Bill he can't get together enough workers to harvest the cotton crop. Bill angrily tells Lias to find the workers though Lias seems doubtful he'll be able to do so.

When considering what to write in his newspaper editorial the day after Henry's lynching, Prentiss Reid blames a good deal of the problems in the south on the poverty present in the people's lives. He believes being impoverished has affected people to the point where they will lash out at anyone to relieve their frustration. Charlie Harris echoes this idea as he talks to his sister about the people who watched the lynching. He tells her he believes poverty probably was a factor in the anger that brought about the lynching.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the third person point of view. Parts of the story are told by a third person omniscient narrator while other sections of the story are told by a third person narrator with a point of view limited to that of one character. In addition to this third person point of view, there are also some points in the novel in which the author uses a reference to “you” making it seem as if the reader is being drawn into the novel.

Nonnie, Bess, Ed, Sam, Tracy, Laura, Alma Deen, and Tom Harris are among those characters who are singled out in the course of the story. The first chapter, for instance, starts out with an omniscient third person narrator who describes Nonnie. It is known this narrator is omniscient as he is able to share with the reader what individual townspeople say about Nonnie as well as what her fellow blacks think about her. The chapter moves into a section where the story switches to the limited point of view with a focus on Nonnie’s characters as she listens to the sounds of the church revival and waits for Tracy to come. Chapter Two switches the limited point of view to focus on Ed while this point of view switches again in Chapter Three to focus on Bess.

These individual glimpses into the thoughts and emotions of each character are important to the story as it allows the reader to see the changes in each character’s thought processes as the novel progresses. A first person point of view would have allowed only one person’s emotions and thoughts to be shared while a novel told completely in the third person omniscient might have been too broad a scope for the novel. By using the third person limited point of view but switching the point of view between characters, the author allows the reader to get to know each character individually and get a firm grasp on their way of thinking and acting.

Language and Meaning

Although she writes about an ugly subject, author Lillian Smith uses words and descriptions to present her subject matter beautifully. Many of her descriptions center on the sights and sounds of the south. For instance, Sam is described as being “big, heavy-muscled, a streak of light bringing out red under brown pigment, coloring him to the rich tone of swamp water with the sun in it” (p. 179). While maybe not a compliment to consider a man the color of swamp water, the people who lived in the south would immediately know the hue of which Smith wrote in this vivid and lyrical prose. She also uses images as a springboard for characters to remember significant events in their lives. For instance, when Ed watches the pine gum drip into tin cups from the trees, he is reminded of the tears he saw Nonnie cry and wonders what made her so sad.

Also significant in Smith’s writing is the way she mimics the speech patterns of each of the different classes of people in direct quotes. The educated blacks speak with proper



grammar and pronunciation while those who haven't been able to get a formal education don't speak in the same way. Dessie, for instance, confuses the words "learns" and "teaches," and she also drops the final consonant on many words, such as "fo" instead of "for" and "almos" instead of "almost." Henry's speech is even more indicative of his lack of education with mispronunciations and bad grammar.

Smith sets her story against the backdrop of an old-fashioned tent revival. She integrates the lyrics from hymns being sung at the revival into the text so the reader understands that even as the horrible events of Tracy's death and Henry's lynching are playing out, the members of the community are supposed to be returning to the beliefs and practices of Christianity. The story of hate intertwined with the text of songs about love and forgiveness highlight how disjointed the racial mindset of Maxwell really is.

Structure

This novel is divided into thirty different chapters. These chapters range in length from 3 to 31 pages. Each chapter is designated with a chapter number.

Although the main story moves forward in a linear fashion, there are flashbacks included in almost every chapter that sometimes take the reader back days, months, and even years into the past. These flashbacks are significant because they give the reader the background she needs about the characters and their families to understand story.

These flashbacks are generally presented in the story in the form of a character thinking back over the years. In some cases, however, a character will remember something someone has said to them that has an impact on their current situation. These memories are generally written in italics while the present text is in plain text in a way to separate the character's memories from the main story.

There is a good deal of dialogue in this book but there is also a good deal of exposition. In some of the exposition, the text is presented in the form of the character's thoughts with the ideas not even presented in complete sentences but instead a series of phrases separated by ellipses or dashes.



Quotes

Mrs. Brown's servant Nonnie was the best servant in Maxwell unless it was her sister Bess.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 5)

Importance: Nonnie, an African-American young woman who has an affair with a white man, is described as being the best servant in Maxwell despite the fact some believe she is stuck up because she has been to college. This quote also hints at the inequality between Nonnie and her sister Bess, who feels resentful of her sister's attention and love from their parents and affair with Tracy.

Had to talk to Bess. Relieved that he didn't have to do it now. Dreaded a talk with Bess. Like talking to God. End up by her knowing all about you. With Mama dead, bet she bosses Non like Mr. Almighty himself. Well...he was taking Non back. That's what he'd come for.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 19)

Importance: Ed Anderson, brother of Bess and Nonnie, returns to Maxwell with the idea of taking Nonnie back up north with him so she can live the life he believes her mother intended for her.

She had not told. No. And soon Non had gone to Spelman, and then the war came. A war can change anything, Bess said to herself all those years, trying to ease her worry. But he had come back. God yes...some folks always come back!

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 42)

Importance: Bess, who caught her sister with Tracy, did not tell her mother about the affair but had hoped Tracy would not come back to Maxwell after his time in the war. When he did come back, however, the affair started again.

That sounds good, you said, but you don't know the South, you don't understand us. We'd never let the Negro into that world and I'm not so sure you up in Newark would either.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph 38)

Importance: As Tracy listens to his war buddies talk about a new world where all races would be accepted, Tracy knows these ideas would not be easily accepted in the South.

Henry had just put a plate of Eenie's hot muffins in front of Mrs. Deen, and now stood, tray under arm, six feet two inches of cheerful, sweating servant, awaiting the family's wishes.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: Henry, who works as the Deen family's house servant, is described as a big, but happy man ready to please the family.



Race is something — made up, to me. Not real. I don't — have to believe in it. Social position — ambition — seem made up too. Games for folks to — forget their troubles with. Bess says that I'm crazy, that I live in a dream world.

-- Nonnie (Chapter 6 paragraph 103)

Importance: Nonnie voices her gentle opinions of race and ambition to Tracy. She says these things aren't important to her.

But one day when I was a little girl, a boy tried to take off my clothes in a gallberry patch, and you stopped him. It sounds funny, saying it out loud, like this, but there you were, and I knew I was — all right.

-- Nonnie (Chapter 6 paragraph 110)

Importance: Nonnie describes the incident in which Tracy ran off from Nonnie a boy who was trying to take off her clothes. It was after this incident that Nonnie decided Tracy was the man for her.

He got to learn there's white folks and colored folks and things you can't do ef you wants to live.

-- Mamie (Chapter 7 paragraph 140)

Importance: Mamie tries to explain to her husband why she spanked Henry for sassing a white girl in this quote.

Reckon I'm choosy,' Bess said to Non, after Mrs. Stephenson had invited her to attend, 'but when I pick a God, I'll pick a black one, black and kinky-headed! So black,' she'd laughed but there were tears in the sound, 'that He'll scare the wits out of white folks.

-- Bess (Chapter 8 paragraph 25)

Importance: Bess is deeply insulted when her white employer invites her to attend the community tent revival. She dislikes the idea of a white God and plans to choose a God who looks like she does and will scare the white people, just as the white people's God does to black people.

Non hadn't minded when Mrs. Brown spoke to her about the meeting. They don't mean any harm, these white folks, when they say things like this.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 27)

Importance: Unlike Bess, Nonnie is able to more calmly overlook Mrs. Brown's invitation to attend the town revival. She takes no offense from the invitation.

Just look at our skin! What does it mean to you, that color — just a pretty shade? You know what it means to the women back of us — you've got to know, Non! Shame and degradation and heartbreak. Now here you are — as well educated as any girl in this town — as Laura Deen, his own sister, Non! Mama saw to that with her hard labor. You can't be satisfied with a concubine's life — that's what you'll be, that's the Bible name. There're worse — God knows — and you'll hear them all before you're through.



-- Bess (Chapter 8 paragraph 59)

Importance: Bess chastises Nonnie for having an affair with Tracy, knowing that her actions will put to waste all of the hard work that their mother put into seeing that they both had a college education.

But she knew that Miss Ada was as harmless as she — that no injury would ever come to them through her, for this world with its racial hate, its bitterness, and struggle for bread, would never exist for Miss Ada again.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 107)

Importance: Miss Ada, the woman who many in the county believe is crazy, represents the ultimate saint. She is one of the only people in the area who does not judge people based on race or social ranking.

Sometimes he had a crazy feeling that she wouldn't be satisfied if he wasn't a failure. Needed to be disappointed.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 133)

Importance: Tracy feels that even if he lived his life with the intention of pleasing his mother, she would still find something that would displease her about him.

Here, He said, is a woman any man would love and be proud of. She has everything you could desire. But you can't have her. No. You can have sips and tastes, but you can't have her.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 153)

Importance: Tracy believes that God has tricked him by causing him to love Nonnie, but putting him in a position where he cannot have her as his wife.

Tut was remembering Little Ma. Remembering her words: 'There's right and there's wrong. You'll do right as a doctor, Son, or wrong. There's no middle road.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 50)

Importance: As Tut tells Mr. Stephenson that he cannot perform the abortion on Grace, he hears his mother's voice in his head telling him that as a doctor he must choose between right and wrong in making his decisions.

You don't git nowheres by runnin, Eddie. Member dat. Nowheres by runnin! You has to walk. Everybody has to walk. But folks our color walks slow. You hear?

-- Tillie Anderson (Chapter 10 paragraph 103)

Importance: While he was still a child, Ed's mother warned him that he would not get anywhere as a black man if he were to go at a run. She tells him he must move at a slow walk.



Find some good nigger you can count on the marry her – Give her some money – Give him some money – And get going! Deen, get going –
-- Brother Dunwoodie (Chapter 12 paragraph 117)

Importance: Brother Dunwoodie's advice to Tracy to clean up the mess he's made by finding someone to marry Nonnie and then giving them some money actually winds up making things worse for Tracy in the long run.

I'm to marry her.' Henry laughed. 'Yeah man, he give me a hundred bucks, and dis big boy gwine to marry Nonnie Anderson to -
-- Henry McIntosh (Chapter 15 paragraph 48)

Importance: Ed overhears Henry bragging how he's been paid money to marry Nonnie and make it appear her pregnancy is legitimate.

Beating against him now until all his body sang them: He's got to die for this – he's got to die – he's got to die -
-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 61)

Importance: Ed forgets his mother's advice to hold in his anger as he hears Henry bragging about being paid to marry Nonnie. He makes a decision to kill Tracy.

Stared as his grief was slowly soaked up by the age-old capillary pull of nigger facts, knowing now only one desolating thing. And staring into the stiff eyes of his dead playmate, he began to feel a thousand cold eyes on him, a thousand fingers pointing, a thousand bloodhounds baying down centuries, smelling him out, him, Big Henry, from the other millions of black men... and they'd git him sho. Sho.
-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 46)

Importance: As Henry stares at Tracy's body, he realizes that since he's the person who found the body, he will be the one suspected of the murder.

We're worried about Henry. Miss Sadie called. She says they're after him. He didn't do it of course,' she'd added quickly.
-- Laura Deen (Chapter 22 paragraph 2)

Importance: In an efficient way similar to her mother, Laura warns Tom Harris that some white men are planning to kill Henry for Tracy's murder. The Deen family is hoping Harris can help save their house servant.

Watch your step, boys,' he had called out to the darkness. If these irresponsible whippersnappers didn't watch out, there would be trouble. Bad trouble, and they didn't have the sense to see it.
-- Tom Harris (Chapter 22 paragraph 70)

Importance: Tom Harris hears the men intent on killing Henry milling about town in the



dark and warns them to watch their steps. He is afraid they'll cause trouble and not even be aware of what they are doing.

Something bad is happening, and they are not going to be left behind for it to happen to while white folks bury their dead. She wanted to smile...and she too was weeping, for the dead; weeping for the living.

-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 45)

Importance: Laura is almost amused at the way the black servants chose to go with their white employers to bury Tracy. She senses that they know something bad is about to happen and don't want to be left alone to be the victims.

But you don't hurry a white man. No, you sit and wait, hat in hand, and watch the clock over the pay window tick away minute after minute after minute of a black man's chance to live, knowing it has ticked away with it your right to decency.

-- Narrator (Chapter 28 paragraph 21)

Importance: Sam tries to be patient with Mr. Harris as he waits for the man to finish his paperwork. His patience wears thin as he realizes that every minute he has to wait is a minute less that Henry may have to live.

But Sam knew, and it was a terrible thing to know, that he loved her so much, that he loved this body Deen had used and tried to throw away so much that he was willing not only to take it, but Deen with it — to have Deen's blood forever mingled with his, Deen's child forever to bear his name...

-- Narrator (Chapter 28 paragraph 24)

Importance: Sam loves Nonnie enough that he plans to claim Tracy's child as his own, even though it means this white man's blood will be mixed up in his family from that point forward.

You know who's lynching him? It's you and me! That's right. White man and brown. Respectable white folks don't like to get mixed up in things like this. No. And respectable colored folks don't either. So we shut our eyes, I shut my eyes and —

-- Sam (Chapter 28 paragraph 75)

Importance: Sam argues to Tom Harris that people who pretend not to see the lynchings are just as responsible for these crimes as the men who are actually stringing up the man.

I came back because my people need me. They need me right here. I came back,' Sam looked up into his white friend's face and tried to smile, 'because it's my home.

-- Sam (Chapter 28 paragraph 80)

Importance: Sam tells Mr. Harris that he chose to come back to Maxwell because he knew the other blacks there needed him. Although it isn't perfect, the town is still Sam's home.



You've forgot, Sam," he said slowly, "there're things no nigger on earth can say to a white man!

-- Tom Harris (Chapter 28 paragraph 85)

Importance: Even though Tom Harris is fighting to keep Henry out of harm's way, he still believes that black people are not equal to whites, as it is shown by this comment to Sam that he has crossed the line with what he'd said.

Some of those men were at that revival last night at the altar...praying to be saved. This afternoon they burned a man to ash.

-- Charlie (Chapter 29 paragraph 153)

Importance: Although many of the mill workers had begged forgiveness for their sins the previous night at the tent revival, they didn't internalize the meaning of salvation as they went out and killed an innocent man the following day.

That's the South's trouble. Ignorant. Doesn't know anything. Doesn't even know what's happening outside in the world! Shut itself up with its trouble and its ignorance until the two together have gnawed the sense out of it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 224)

Importance: As Prentiss tries to write an editorial for his newspaper the day after Henry's lynching, he thinks to himself that one of the major problems with the people who live in the south is their ignorance.