

The Terrorist Short Guide

The Terrorist by Caroline B. Cooney

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Terrorist Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	5
Social Sensitivity.....	7
Literary Qualities.....	9
Themes and Characters.....	12
Topics for Discussion.....	20
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	21
For Further Reference.....	22
Related Titles/Adaptations.....	23
Related Web Sites.....	24
Copyright Information.....	25

Overview

Laura William's life changes dramatically when her eleven-year-old brother, Billy, is killed by a terrorist package bomb in the London Underground. Completely distraught, she turns from feelings of mourning and loss towards anger and revenge.

With her parents completely overcome by their son's death, she begins a determined search for the person who took her brother's life as well as the reason for which he or she did it. Everyone she knows becomes a suspect in Billy's murder, including her friends.

Her search will ultimately lead her to the true murderer, but first she must come to understand herself as well as some of the workings of the outside world.



About the Author

Caroline B. Cooney was born on May 10, 1947, in Geneva, New York, and grew up in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. An excellent student, she was always involved in many activities at school, and by the time she was in the tenth grade, she played the piano for musical productions, directed a choir, and had a job as a church organist. A passionate reader, Cooney often read series books such as the "Hardy Boys" and "Cherry Ames," and it is characters from such books that ultimately had a significant influence on her life. In 1965, Cooney graduated from Greenwich High School and attended various colleges, where she studied music, art, and English. It was in college that she began writing and discovered pleasure in a talent that would develop into an award-winning writing career. Although her first attempts at writing novels of historical fiction for adults remain unpublished, Cooney's perseverance was finally rewarded when her book, *Safe as the Grave*, written for young adults, was published. Since then, she has written well over fifty books for young adult readers consisting of mystery and suspense novels as well as general contemporary fiction.

Today, reading and writing continue to make up a very important part of her life, and Cooney admits that most days of the week she can be found in a library or a bookstore. In her biography in the Random The Terrorist 425 House website, she reveals that she loves writing and cannot understand "why it is considered such a difficult, agonizing profession. I love all of it, thinking up the plots, getting to know the kids in the story, their parents, backyards, pizza toppings." She further admits, on the Scholastic website, that she does not usually know where she gets her ideas and inspiration from, and that sometimes she just wakes up with a mind full of ideas. Other times, her ideas come from experiences either from her life or from those of loved ones and friends. She uses her three children, Louisa, Sayre, and Harold, in all her books. *The Terrorist*, for example, was based on the year Harold and Sayre convinced her to live in London, England. She points out, however that although everyone may have good ideas, the hard part of being an author is when one must turn those ideas into a book.

Cooney's passion for writing for young adults is clearly demonstrated in her numerous celebrated novels, including *Driver's Ed*, *Among Friends*, *Whatever Happened to Janie*, *Twenty Pageants Later*, *The Terrorist*, and the time travel novels, *Both Sides of Time* and *Out of Time*. A master of combining spellbinding suspense with thought-provoking insight into teenagers' lives, Cooney conveys the importance of thinking about good things and planning good lives even if the lives surrounding her characters are filled with misery, violence, and hate.

An accomplished writer, author, and mother, Cooney shares her knowledge and love of writing by visiting schools and libraries, as well as by attending conferences.

Her favorite part of school visits is when she meets her readers. Currently, she lives in Westbrook, Connecticut.

Setting

In the case of realistic fiction, the time and place of a story such as *The Terrorist* must reflect fact rather than stereotypes and inaccuracies. In addition, the setting, however integral or incidental, is a significant element in establishing the mood within which the plot takes place.

The use of present-day London, the capital city of the United Kingdom, as the setting of *The Terrorist* is most certainly not incidental. The setting is a dynamic component of the novel as well as integral to the development of the plot. The descriptions of the city and its inhabitants are not simply a static theatrical backdrop which can be raised and changed with ease, but rather a dynamic element of the novel whose authentic components aid in creating a perfect nest within which the plot and all its accompanying themes may hatch. The fact that such tourist sights as Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, and the Thames River are not mentioned brings about an even more authentic portrayal of London and its urban everyday life. Furthermore, the distinct differences between the European capital and its inhabitants and an average American city act as preparation for the differences in culture and environment that the reader encounters through the characters' eyes.

An example of such comparisons may be witnessed in a comment by Thomas Williams who maintains that the United Kingdom "is a tiny country, literally a drivethrough, close to everything and so miniature in size where everything was in your own back yard." Laura, on the other hand, loves London where she is free the way no kids back at home are, unless they have their own car, due to the ease in which an adolescent her age can use public transport.

Although the plot could easily have been set against a different backdrop, and the most important aspects of the novel (i.e., the package bombing) could occur anywhere in the world, this specific setting allows the themes emanating to develop and acquire more substantial values. It further allows the reader to distance himself or herself from an explicitly political environment (i.e., a setting in Northern Ireland or Israel) whereupon the reasons would be "country-specific" and allow for the problem to be discussed and viewed in a more neutral environment. Furthermore, the school that the characters attend, London International Academy (L.I.A.), can be viewed as a microcosm of the world that readers live in today along with its dangers, friendships, different cultures and races, losses, and gains. At times, Cooney's descriptions of settings seem a bit extreme. However, in order for one to thoroughly appreciate the full strength of the plot and the situation, extremes are sometimes necessary.

With deliberate references and comparisons to the United States and Americans, London and its inhabitants are thoroughly described along with their culture and mannerisms in order for there to be a clearer understanding of the setting by readers of the novel. In Billy's words, London is a city separated by brick walls because the United Kingdom is a "country . . . mad for walls."



The high brick walls hide the front gardens of Victorian row houses. The Williams' flat (or apartment) is on the second floor of a brick row house that reminds one of a Mary Poppins picture, and while every flat in their area has white curtains covering the windows, the Williams' has bare glass.

Although Nicole Williams had expected to meet the kind of people she read about in British mystery novels—avid gardeners, retired mayors, and handsome barristers—at their neighborhood church, it turns out, that aside from the Episcopal priests, few people in London attend church on a regular basis. That such stereotypical expectations are given within the novel is greatly appreciated because they offer a way for Cooney to describe what the setting of London is really like. A further such statement is made by Laura who was very disappointed with her friend Eddie's palace: "palaces in England did not have turrets or The Terrorist 427 moats, they were immense grim stone houses with several million windows across the front. The palace in Disney World was better." Although stereotypes are undeniably present within the novel, it is also somewhat filled with such latter descriptions which, through realistic statements and thoughts made by people unacquainted with other countries and nationalities, aim for an authentic presentation of the environment.

In addition, these statements help in portraying the attitudes of the main characters of *The Terrorist*, while also preparing the reader that life is not a fairy-tale but harsh, cruel, and indifferent to youthful expectations.

The multicultural environment, while of great importance to the plot, is highlighted not only in the school environment through classmates of various nationalities, but also through depictions of common Londoners that are met on the street. On his way to school, "Billy [slithered] among the Indians, Asians, and Africans who made up the English population that he had thought would look like Robin Hood and Maid Marian." He would say "Hi" to the flower man, who was Asian, "Good Morning" to the newsstand man, who was Pakistani, and "How are ya?" to the ticket woman, who was Jamaican. A further important reference is made in order to emphasize the multicultural situation of London. According to Cooney, in London live angry exiles, all in a bad mood and all mad at somebody: Iraqi, Tamil, Nigerian, Cypriot, Azerbaijani, Hong Kong Chinese, Irish, Israeli, Palestinian, or Kenyan. "London is the seismograph of the world," she writes, "A needle that shakes at the slightest political tremor."

These references create the appropriate atmosphere in which the plot can unfold and also act as warnings for what is to occur in the upcoming pages of *The Terrorist*.

Finally, smaller everyday details necessary in enhancing the authenticity of the setting are presented throughout the novel.

These include mention of the constant rain which is an almost classic detail linked with the United Kingdom and London, in addition to such details as the ritual of afternoon tea along with all the appropriate terminology related to it.



Social Sensitivity

The Terrorist is a fine book that one can read in order to discuss the theme of multiculturalism as well as coming to accept that there are other nationalities with differences and which readers should try and understand. The novel gives the reader the opportunity to begin questioning various ideologies and wonder about other religions and histories. In a neutral fictional environment, it allows for the perfect opportunity to question what is real and what is stereotype. Not all Arabic Muslims are terrorists, nor are all Muslim women forbidden to leave their home and required to enter arranged marriages. Stereotype can also be discussed further in relation to the comparisons made between the British and the Americans. What is also important is the description and the commentary related to Americans and their attitudes to foreigners. Finally, this novel also attempts to persuade the reader that it is not enough, as an adolescent, to think only for today—what to wear, whom to date, and where to go out—nor is it only important to do many activities in order to list many items on college applications. The important thing is to realize that once teenagers leave school, they are suddenly out in the wide world and they should know a few things about other people, other nations, and other cultures. Americans should not limit themselves to their national border and hope to survive in that way. Otherwise, if Americans try to adjust everyone else to their own method of thinking and culture, they are being terrorists themselves. Selfish lack of interest in accepting other points of view and ideas slowly destroys what makes other people and their cultures unique.

This book can most definitely be used within the context of a general discussion focusing on the theme of terrorism. However, since it presents only one aspect of terrorism, it should be read with other accounts to provide a bigger picture of terrorism's evil. Although terrorism is defined accurately up to a point, care has to be taken to inform the readers of the novel that terrorists are not unique to any one race or nationality. They can exist, even in the reader's back yard. The fact that terrorism is cruel and unjust is accurately portrayed, particularly the observation that even children can be trained as terrorists.

The Terrorist can further be used to portray and discuss children who live abroad and outside of their countries due to their parents' careers. It is possible, however, that children who have lived abroad may find discrepancies within the novel in terms of the stereotypes used to describe Americans, the international school setting, and other nationals. However, readers may also find that there are many similarities in terms of the Williams' children reactions to their new environment and in how easily they have assimilated to their new country and made friends.

Finally, this novel is an important text in describing the reactions that both children and parents may have to the death of a loved one, in particular a sibling. The descriptions of the characters' feelings, actions, and thoughts are very realistic, and if a reader has recently experienced such loss, he or she may find many similarities and perhaps even feel secure that someone else has had the same thoughts and feelings.

Naturally, one would hope that the readers do not think that wrath, anger, and revenge are the best manner in which one may cope with such a situation, although anger and frustration are natural feelings to be experienced.

Literary Qualities

The Terrorist has various very interesting literary techniques at play within its pages.

Written in the third person, the book has a narrator, although unknown and not specified, who knows more than the reader.

However, from a certain point in the novel and onwards, the reader knows much more than the characters. The narrative order of the novel is basically chronological. There are times however, that although the narrative is in the present, the reader suddenly knows more about certain elements of the plot than the characters know. Such instances include the second chapter when Billy has already been killed, and his sister is not yet aware of what has happened; she only finds out at the end of the chapter when she finally arrives at the Underground station where the bomb has exploded. Another instance occurs in the fourth chapter, when the reader has already begun to get over the first shock of the bombing. Thomas Williams is returning home by car thinking about the vacation that he has planned for his family and especially his son, only to be stopped by the police in order to be told the tragic news. A very dramatic atmosphere is created, when one reads about what Mr. Williams had in store for his son, how much he loves his son, and how he was certain of young boy's reaction. All the while the reader knows of the bombing and that Mr. Williams is thinking about things that shall never happen and that he shall never see his son again. It is a painful experience, yet it is exquisitely created.

The narrative is beautifully written with cinematic-type descriptions and imagery.

In the scenes where the main action takes place, short phrases are used and quick snappy thoughts are conveyed. Examples of this fast paced action can be found in the end of the first chapter where Billy's murder is described as well as in the chapter where Laura and Jehran go to the airport. In the first example, the narrative is so fast that one can hardly catch a breath: Billy is racing up the escalator, when someone grabs his arm, smiles at him, and hands him a package and disappears. Billy tears up escalator, is stopped by woman balancing a stroller with a baby, and finally looks down at package. He cannot remember any of his friends carrying anything, and the package does not look American but rather very British due to way it was wrapped. Recalling the signs and warnings at Heathrow airport, Billy has "a sickening moment of knowledge." He cannot throw the package into the innocent crowd, finds no place to set it down or give it back. Billy thinks "Oh Mom!," turns away from the stroller, and wraps himself around the package before the bomb explodes.

In the second example, the narrative is filled with questions, suspicion, and fast paced sentences, as well as repetition. For example, "bombs" is mentioned four times in one page, while at the end of the book, the word "kill" fills Laura's brain, bringing the novel to its third and final climax where the true terrorist is "unveiled." In the chapter immediately following Billy's murder, the description and narration begins at a slow, relaxed pace, but once Laura arrives at the scene of the bomb blast, cinematic description immediately



takes over. In addition to the narrative suddenly becoming swift with staccato phrases, attention is turned from Laura and her thoughts towards the police sirens and a literary "camera" zooms in to show everyone swinging round to look at her. The young girl is then shown letting go of her school bag and holding up her hand to stop the bad news from reaching her. This would be a perfect moment to fade out the action in a "real" film.

As mentioned briefly above, repetition appears masterfully within the text. This is used often in order to emphasize a point or an idea that is of importance at the specific moment in the action. A strong example of repetition is the following: "Nothing is more frightening than nothing.... But there was nothing. She imagined the truth as nothing.

Billy as nothing. God as nothing. It was too terrible. There had to be something." The word "nothing" is repeated six times on one page and in a single paragraph. There is so much negation that finally, Laura comes to realize that this must define something positive: "something." The same technique occurs further on in the novel, only this time the word "nothing" is repeated three times, while "something" becomes more important and is repeated five times. This 436 The Terrorist repetition creates an almost poetic atmosphere in the instances in which it is used and certainly succeeds in conveying its message to the reader.

The language of the narrative is very chatty and familiar to the reader. In addition, in order to aid with the authenticity of the setting, British English is often used and discussed by the characters: "A to Zed.

Zed." British words and their American English equivalents are explained to readers in the novel. Cooney's British characters say loo not bathroom, Swedes not turnip, Biro not Bic, plasters not band-aids, and plimsolls not sneakers. Italics are also used often throughout the novel in order to emphasize various thoughts, phrases, or comments that are significant to the plot.

Metaphors, similes, and personification appear abundantly within the novel and not only allow the reader to imagine the descriptions more accurately, but also seem to be plays on words sending clues to the reader as to the identity of Billy's murderer.

Examples of these metaphors and similes being used to make the description of a person more real and distinct include Laura's face being "as swollen as if she'd walked into a beehive," her mother's "pixie face [being] twisted like paper," and the "family [being] flat and one-dimensional without Billy. Soda with the cap left off. The fizz was gone." The plays on words, however, are even more successful. Laura, for example, reminded Billy's friend, Andrew, of an unattended suitcase, Jehran's Persian rugs had "explosive colors," Billy was "one big explosion," and finally Con "having a sense of time running out, of a clock ticking, of an end rushing towards her. But other things ticked besides clocks. Bombs ticked." These all bring a sense of unease to the reader or even of a sense of foreboding.

A further important narrative technique is when the narrative turns to characters other than the main character as a point of focus and reference. For example, although the



reader is aware that Laura is the main character in the novel, after the Billy's death, the focus is sometimes taken away from Laura and pointed at secondary characters such as her parents or even Mohammed and Jimmy who are only "supporting" characters within *The Terrorist*. By giving the reader further information than that which Laura can see and offer, Cooney gives new perspectives and more information which may aid the reader to understand or see more sides of the story. The reader is given a rounded, complete view of the characters and the action. Thus the reader is ultimately more knowledgeable than the characters themselves. This rounded view is further aided by the foreshadowing technique that is excellently used within the novel.

Foreshadowing appears throughout *The Terrorist*, often in conjunction with other literary techniques used so masterfully by the author. The mention of unattended luggage and packages is found at the very beginning of the novel and carried through to the final climax where Laura enters the airport filled with fear and the thought of bombs and terrorism. Furthermore, if one follows the text closely enough, one comes to realize that Jehran is pointed out as the terrorist from the very beginning of the novel through Cooney's small hints and clues. These clues and hints discussed throughout the elements of setting, themes, and characters are all part of foreshadowing and the creation of the feeling of foreboding, a technique that Cooney has mastered.

Finally, intertextuality is cleverly used within the novel in order to accentuate the setting. The books that are alluded to are British in their majority, except for one book by Louisa May Alcott which is alluded to in order to refer to the "safe" American setting that Laura believes that she belongs to, in contrast to the one that she is currently living in. The British books that are mentioned include *Mary Poppins*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and mystery books that are most certainly those of the classic mystery writer, Agatha Christie.



Themes and Characters

There are three main themes which are developed within *The Terrorist*: terrorism; multiculturalism and learning to accept and understand cultures other than the readers' own; and coping with the death of a loved one. Furthermore, smaller parallel themes that run through the novel include those of friendship, revenge, and naivete.

The title of *The Terrorist* itself draws attention to the main theme of the novel.

Terrorism and everything that it encompasses such as death, terror, anger, cruelty, and revenge is the driving force of the plot.

From the very first pages of the book, travelers are warned to be suspicious of unattended luggage and never accept packages from strangers, all imminent associations to bombs and terrorists. In addition, the characters of the novel find themselves in proximity to potential terrorist attacks, which is emphasized through a reference made to bomb practices at school being just as common as fire drills conducted in Massachusetts. It should naturally be noted that the L.I.A. is described as security minded not only due to the threat of terrorism, but also due to the particular nature of its students.

In this way, the theme of terrorism is linked to multiculturalism.

However, terrorism is defined within *The Terrorist* as criminal; evil people killing for selfish reasons. They should not, however be mistaken for "common" criminals, for terrorists do not believe that they are evil. They believe that their actions are justified, that they are doing something good, that "they are changing the world, not just damaging it." According to the author, "The point is to terrify. To show off power. To prove they can do whatever they want and hurt whomever they want when they want to do it. The only silver lining to terrorism is that they give you the first clue." Cooney further writes that "Terrorism, whether there is one victim or a hundred, earns its name.

People are terrified." *The Terrorist* has no qualms in hiding the cruelty of a terrorist attack and its aftermath. One of the most horrifying scenes occurs when the Williams' are not allowed to see their dead son's body as only bits and pieces remained. Furthermore, although Billy was heroic in that he wrapped himself around the ticking package so it would not harm the baby in a carriage beside him, the baby's mother lost one of her legs in the explosion. In addition there is mention of authentic terrorist attacks that have taken place such as the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City and the Pan Am 103 plane bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

When tackling such an emotionally and morally difficult theme as terrorism, discrepancies and stereotypes are bound to appear. It is stated that terrorists are "country-specific" and that they usually originate from such countries as Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Northern Ireland. This point-of-view is not very accurate. Although it may be said that some terrorists come from either Northern Ireland or the Arab world, there



are terrorists in many other countries of the world, including Spain, Greece, and Italy, as well as El Salvador and Japan. This stereotyped view of the Arab world is not only apparent in this theme of terrorism, but is also encountered within the theme of multiculturalism. While both themes are significant to the plot, the stereotypes form an inaccurate characterization which creates doubt with regard to the amount of research set into the writing of the novel.

However, in Cooney's defense, a generalization of terrorists is rebutted further on in the plot and thus attempts to soften the seriousness of the inaccuracies previously noted. The author does make one thing clear in her book: acts of terrorism are done by individuals who make their own choices to commit violent acts. Cooney writes, "The eyes of a terrorist should be cold and amoral, unblinking and uncaring. Eyes to be afraid of." With such a description, one naturally begins to conjure up all sorts of forms and types of people who would most likely be Billy's murderer, even bringing to mind Mohammed's expressionless face. Unless one has followed the cleverly planted clues scattered throughout the novel, one is caught completely off guard by the revelation that Tehran is the true culprit.

The true evil and cruelty of terrorism is further enhanced by the theme of death, or more accurately the death of innocents.

Laura cannot understand why someone innocent, young, and so full of life could be chosen by a terrorist and murdered. She wonders why there are innocent victims in such bombings, and, if they are not random, what causes terrorists to seek out their victims. Laura reflects, I'm sixteen.... In America, I lived in a little white house with a picket fence and maple trees. I lived in the same town where Louisa May Alcott grew up. I've never had a drink except Coca Cola. I've never tried a cigarette. I'm ordinary. I'm the most ordinary American there is. And my very own brother has just been killed by terrorists.

Laura is innocent, just as innocent as her brother Billy. She demands to know "Who could put a bomb into an innocent little boy's hand? And, when there were so many other 'better choices,' why choose Billy, a nobody?" It is these questions which haunt the young girl and which make her begin her search for her brother's murderer and seek revenge.

Throughout *The Terrorist*, the reader follows the Williams family trying to cope with the death of young Billy. The family's confusion and devastation at their loss is not only very humane, but also realistic.

Various such depictions include poor Nicole Williams standing at the gates of the school staring desperately at the doors, hoping that her son will appear. Laura finds her brother's forgotten lunch at home and realizes that he will never eat those sandwiches again or finish the grape jelly so he can drink out of the Tom and Jerry glass which holds it. Laura wishes that she had thrown temper tantrums when her father had told her that they would be moving to the United Kingdom, forcing them to stay in Massachusetts. Laura's second guessing ultimately transforms into a wish that it would have been her



who had been killed instead of Billy. In addition to these, there are also other small details such as the fact that the family cannot remove the extra chair at the dinner table on which Billy used to sit or the fact that everything, even a basic trip to the neighborhood grocery store, reminds them of the young boy.

Laura is further confused by how Billy could be dead while others' lives did not stop as well. She even questions religion and God's motives, especially how He could decide that Billy should die when others live. Although both parents are presented at a complete loss, trying to seek comfort in each other, Laura becomes angry and "moves from tears to wrath, from dim to volcanic."

Blinded by this anger she almost becomes an innocent victim herself. At the end of the novel, once the family has returned to the United States, it is made clear that although the Williams's have had to accept the fact that their life must go on and that their son now rests in peace, they will never forget Billy and will be reminded of him every time there is a senseless act of violence in the world.

The third most significant theme is that of multiculturalism and the acceptance and understanding of people from other nations with different religions, mannerisms, and ideologies. London is a perfect setting for this theme in which a multitude of different foreign nationals live together. In addition, it is within this setting that Laura comes to realize that, "there were an awful lot of people out there who didn't think much of America. Laura was still trying to get used to that since as far as she knew, America was perfect, and she was luckier than they would ever be because she was American." This issue is very important in this novel, not only due to its aimed readership, but also due to the fact that once Americans exit their secure border and go to live abroad, they have to understand that there are many new cultures and people to become acquainted with. Simultaneously, Americans must come to terms with the fact that although they love their country, there are others who may not agree with American culture, policies, or politics.

Although various nationalities are referred to within the novel, there is one main culture which is singled out: Arabic Muslim culture. There may be many accurate descriptions, however most of these are associated with followers of fundamental Islam. Within the novel, the author describes an Islamic religion that does not allow much freedom to its followers and, in particular, to its women. For example, women are not encouraged to acquire an education, and once they are married, women are no longer permitted to leave the house and must show complete obedience to their husbands. The reader is told that most marriages within the culture are arranged ones and that the customary dress for wives is that of the veil and black robe. In turn, with regard to young Arabic men and their relationships with women, it is ironically commented upon that "Jehran is amused by the thought that any brother or cousin of hers would want to associate with an American girl." Parents come first as a priority for both males and females. This is supported by Mohammed's surprise and dismay at how boys (especially Americans) talked to their fathers. It is possible that the reason that there is so much stereotypical and extreme description of this culture is to persuade the reader into thinking that Jehran's desperation to flee to the United States is justified: "The heavy draperies and



tapestries of the room closed in on them, like the life Jehran wanted to flee." The reader of this novel should not believe all these descriptions of Islamic culture, but rather see them as fictional descriptions used as plot fillers.

Another important point that is raised within the theme of multiculturalism is that of the differences between Americans and people of other nationalities that compound the difficulty of living abroad. Furthermore, it is very interesting to read how Americans are described when they are outside their country and what people think of them.

When one lives abroad, according to *The Terrorist*, one finds out some of the stereotypes of Americans are actually true: Americans do talk louder, laugh harder, and swing their bodies more than the British. While British posture is condensed, American posture is a swagger, and Americans take up more space on a sidewalk than the English do. American's are also described as being people with no morals in comparison to their Arab Muslim counterparts, as well as being very loud, rude, and easily impressed by small simple details. An example of this are foreign accents. Americans, in Jehran's point of view, love English accents and Laura agrees to the latter by stating that "Jehran's accent made Americans think of castles and princesses." Other differences, which are highlighted between American and foreign children, include age and naivete; that is, foreign children always seem older as if they have suffered more and understand life and its workings better. American children, on the other hand, expect that life is good and that evil is something distant which can never touch them. This is further emphasized when Mohammed advises Laura that she must be careful in her friendships and not be such an American.

This point is accented upon, as it is very important in justifying why Laura is such an easy victim for Jehran's web of deceit.

Multiculturalism, terrorism, and death thus make up the main themes of *The Terrorist*. Smaller themes, including true friendship, revenge, and naivete, run parallel to the primary themes and are either included within the primary three themes or add further dimensions the main messages being transmitted through the novel.

There are three main characters who are distinguishable within the novel: Billy Williams, Laura Williams, and Jehran. These three dynamic characters are further surrounded by a variety of supporting characters, some very dynamic and others flat, classic stereotypes who seem to appear once or twice without adding anything of essence to the plot or the novel as a whole.

Getting to know Billy Williams would not seem to be an easy task, especially if one considers that there is only one opportunity to meet him in person due to his untimely death on the last page of the first chapter.

However, the descriptions of the young eleven year old are so alive and so vibrant that one comes to know him instantly. In addition, a large part of his character is further shaped after his death through the discussions others have about him.



Young Billy was an "all-American," yet normal, boy enjoying his life in a new country. He was excited, enthusiastic yet conscientious, prepared and thirsty for the adventures life had to offer him. According to Laura, Billy was handsome. What with his developing muscles, easy wide American grin showing perfect white American teeth, and his dark floppy hair falling lazily over his smooth tan face, he would probably have become the heartthrob of his entire school by the time he reached the tenth grade. A collector of peculiar items, he had a large number of notebooks in which he wrote about his collections, made lists of different things, and recorded what he wished to accomplish in life. A young entrepreneur, he did not allow a simple move to London, England, deprive him of his income, and thus developed various clever moneymaking activities such as turning a big profit on Kraft macaroni and cheese and Oreo cookies, or even trading M & M's with a classmate for the possibility to share textbooks that he had left at home. With his earnings, he aimed to see every inch of China one day.

All this did not mean that young Billy was not a playful and curious boy; Laura describes Billy having worn a purple punk wig with a necklace of bicycle chains to school and even a suit of his father's, pant legs rolled up six times and sleeves shoved up past his elbows. Billy could be described as the most curious, funniest, lovable, best boy that one would ever wish to meet, and, in addition to that, he was also heroic.

When he held the package in his hands on the escalator and realized what its true contents were, he did not try to throw the package into the innocent crowd. He calmly wrapped himself around the brown paper wrapped box and called out for his mother.

Having gotten to learn the young boy so well through his likes and dislikes, his lists and collections, and his utter zest for life, the reader finds the futility and unfairness of his death so much more powerful. When searching for reasons for his murder, Laura comes across comments such as: "He stole bricks from construction sites! Took photographs! Kept notes! Asked questions! Bothered people! Went right up to strangers! He was one very invasive little boy!" Perhaps not all people could tell how much in love with life and all its elements Billy was, nor could they understand that he wanted to know about everything and everyone and have a little piece of the world in his heart and in his life at all times. Also, just as he enjoyed researching and finding out everything about everyone and anything, so would he have enjoyed being the center of attention. This wish comes true when Laura notes that Billy would have loved knowing that Scotland Yard was examining his photograph. When asked by the police whether Billy could ever have been involved in something that he would have kept a secret, Laura replied in two short sentences that encompass just about everything: "Billy never kept a secret in his life. He was one big explosion."

In comparison to Billy, Laura is completely uninterested in the world around her, and perhaps it is this disinterest that brings about the tragic consequences. While Billy, for example, was proud to be able to finally prove to everyone that he was born in the United States when he saw his new passport photograph, Laura was appalled by her picture, afraid that customs officials might actually think that "that hideous girl in the photograph with the bad hair was her." Before Billy's murder, Laura seems very aloof and dislikeable to the reader. She is superficial and only has teenage concerns such as



her school's Junior-Senior Thanksgiving Dance and her dream to date someone dark, handsome, mysterious, and romantic. Even her choices in public transport have to do with romance and sophistication. She prefers the bus in order for her to be able to fulfill her social obligations. She takes pride in the fact that she knows the complex transport routes, uses them with flair, and fulfills her need for romance by admitting that she revels in the wind that lifts her hair and turns her skirt into a flaring tulip. While her other classmates study current events religiously and are involved in multitudes of extracurricular activities in order to understand the world more and be better prepared for their future, not only as university students, but as citizens of the world, Laura maintains that she has more important concerns in her life.

Although she is aware that college is out there somewhere, "she [is just] too busy telephoning friends, planning her wardrobe, and thinking about the weekend to consider college just yet." She is so materialistic and superficial that she even finds security romantic and wishes she could date a wealthy boy with an unlisted number who lived in a house with his own submachine-carrying guards on the ground floor to keep out the terrorists. As it is obvious, she does not realize the tragic irony of her words.

With regards to her brother, although Laura claims to be proud of Billy, this is only when nobody knows she is related to him. In her opinion, her brother was embarrassing in public, and a person got tired of being embarrassed. When Laura finally arrives at the scene of the explosion, although her first thought is that "Billy took the underground," her second one is that "Billy could be such a jerk."

The complete change that takes place in Laura's personality after Billy's murder is dramatic. From an uninterested teenager, she becomes a terrified, yet psychologically strong young woman determined to seek revenge on her brother's murderer. This is evident not only through the fact that she is able to speak to the police while her mother needs to be sedated, but also in school.

Heartbroken that because of the terrorist attack, Michael will not be able to take her to the dance, Laura catches herself falling into her old, superficial ways, saying "You fool! Michael's nothing but a date! It doesn't matter! He's not dead!" She is simultaneously screaming at herself and rejecting her previous self-absorbed self. Now, she must become strong and knowledgeable of the world and the situation around her. A bomb has exploded and destroyed the rosy-colored walls which had surrounded her to reveal terror, death, loss, and deceit as well as new cultures, politics, religions, ideologies, and mannerisms. She begins to suspect everyone at school, even all her friends, and questions them about their background, their families, countries, and beliefs. She imagines outlines of killers in everyone and becomes utterly obsessed with Billy's murderer. Because of her previous disinterest and self-absorption; however, she has not cultivated the appropriate knowledge in current affairs or the qualities necessary to distinguish who her true friends are. In this *The Terrorist* 433 way, because Laura is vulnerable and gullible at this same time, she becomes easy bait for the true murderer and gets caught up in Jehran's evil plan.



On the other hand, Laura's newfound strength is shown in contrast with that of the parents portrayed within the novel.

Although her mother becomes weak, "dim like a bulb going out" upon Billy's death, the young teenager sits quietly with her, trying to calm her down and having to be strong for her. Readers see a distinct rolechange where Laura takes matters into her own hands and is comparably stronger than her own parents. Her strength and anger is distinctive in *The Terrorist*, in comparison to her parents who become weak like children and stumble, unable to cope: [They] were stumbling through their lives now too, unable to pick up their feet or their hearts or their words. It seemed to Laura that her parents were living in rented bodies, whose parts didn't work well, and whose speech was erratic. Laura's mother was spending hours each day on the phone with Grandma, desperate for the comfort of her own mother's voice.

It is not only Laura's mother who cannot cope, however, but both of her parents who cannot stomach the loss of their son and close themselves into a world of their own.

Both parents are constantly shown as struggling with their son's death. They try to hang on to their previous habits although they are certainly aware that their loved one will never return. At night her parents tucked themselves into the envelope of each other. Her mother is at such a loss that she even comes to the school and looks through the fence trying to find her son. Laura takes on the role of her parents and even the police officer, Mr. Evans, tells Laura that she is the one who must try and persuade them to move back home. Only she can make them return to the United States.

In relation to their children, both Nicole and Thomas Williams are very shallow and unconvincing characters in the novel and are almost completely overshadowed by their children. Although Thomas Williams is most certainly stronger in character than his wife, his presence in *The Terrorist* is minimal and most certainly much weaker than should have been expected in a novel with such a theme. The parents are completely unsupportive to their daughter, who just like them, is trying to cope with the death of Billy.

Jehran is a character about whom the reader finds little direct description, as most of the information that is revealed about her is through other people's comments and research. She is a mystery and rightfully so, as she is the missing link between the actual murderer and the reason for Billy's murder. From what readers are told, Jehran (who has no surname) is from the Middle East, but had never liked it there, as her father had been a friend to the wrong people and had to flee when the opposition came to power. Ironically, Billy had been fascinated with her exotic and beautiful perfume, her hair, clothing, and her "lovely, classy, television theater accent that Americans adored." A true coquette, she is always perfectly preened and dressed: hair absolutely flawless, scarf hanging just so, jewels glittering. She also looks a lot like Billy, and this is commented upon early by Laura's mother who says that they have the same coloring, as well as by Samira, who observes that Jehran's dirty look reminds her remarkably of Billy's when he did not get his way. Jehran herself comments about this and Laura agrees that beneath her elegant wardrobe, she had the twiggy shape of a sixth-grade



boy. Unlike Billy, who was full of life and had that warm American smile, the evil hidden within Jehran cannot be disguised for her smile is not a broad and easy one like her American counterparts, nor does she have a warm face. Hers is strangely white beneath her olive skin, "as if her soul had fallen out and there was nothing behind those dark features." Not even her hair is warm, which surprises and simultaneously frightens Laura.

Although Laura is suspicious about everyone, Jehran manages to fool Laura, who is not at all surprised by the fact that Jehran suddenly becomes friends with her. This action, however, shocks both Mohammed and Samira (two of Laura's Arab classmates) who know that Jehran considers Americans as a stain on her carpet and absolutely despises them. Once, when Laura had asked Jehran to introduce her to one of her brothers, Jehran had been amused by the thought that any brother or cousin of hers would ever want to associate with an American girl let alone condone such an Americanism as dating. Naturally, if one begins to properly follow all the clues that are supplied throughout the novel, one can understand Jehran's motives behind her American slumber party and the reason why she went to the International school (even though she had said that education for women was frowned upon in her culture). From what the reader is told, Jehran attends the international school in order to get to know the enemy and ultimately give information to her family. Mohammed supplies further information about Jehran's family. What he finds out is cryptic: "That family is very questionable. If they are a family. I have doubts." Having read the novel, one comprehends what Jehran's true character is: an unaffectionate, calculating, sly, evil, quick-thinking, Western Culture hating, pretentious young girl who is a trained terrorist or pawn in a terrorist organization. Jehran's character is very cleverly shaped and constructed, for she is not developed by her own personal direct actions, but rather by other people's observations of her. Her own actions seem to complement and reassure what has already been found out about her.

Finally, the other secondary, yet supporting characters of *The Terrorist* must be regarded. These are mainly Laura and Billy's classmates and friends at school. Although various details concerning almost each one of them are given throughout the novel, fully developed characters do not emerge from these descriptions. Some are stereotypes like Tiffany, others are not. What is interesting, however, is that the characters are cleverly used, in the thematic sense, to portray the fact that sometimes one does not distinguish or realize who one's true friends are. Despite being hidden so far back in the background, they are present and protective. Con, Mohammed, Jimmy, and even Mr. Evans look after Laura from the distance in which they have been placed and, ultimately, save Laura from an uncertain fate. It is also through their viewpoints of the main characters that one sees new perspectives of their personalities and of the situation. Although not always seen, they are of significant relevance and have a specific role to play. It is unfortunate that Cooney does not go into further depth with some of these personalities, particularly Mohammed who unfortunately remained relatively undeveloped and most certainly had much potential.



Topics for Discussion

1. What kind of career do you think that Billy would have pursued if he had not been killed in the terrorist bombing? Why?
2. Discuss the use of foreshadowing in *The Terrorist*. In what manner is it employed? Why is it such an important element of the novel?
3. How do you think that Billy would have reacted if Laura had been killed in the terrorist bombing instead of him?

What would he have done?

4. At which point in the novel did you figure out who the "terrorist" was?

What hints were you given throughout the novel that pointed out this "evil" character?

5. Are the various nationalities in *The Terrorist* described objectively and authentically, or do you think that there are various unforgivable flaws in their descriptions?

6. Who are Laura's true friends in *The Terrorist*? How is she finally reassured of this even after she has accused them of murdering her brother?

7. Who do you think Jehran really was?

Was she a trained terrorist or the daughter of a wealthy family trying to escape so desperately that she had an innocent boy killed? Explain your arguments as fully as possible.

8. A few months after the incident at the airport, the young girl walks away and is never found. What does Jehran's ultimate disappearance symbolize not only within the context of the novel, but also within the context of the real world?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. In her book Cooney writes, "Terrorists think they're good guys [and] believe they are changing the world, not just damaging it." Do you believe this statement to be true or false? Explain your reasons in depth.
2. Why is the study of current events important within the school context and later on in life?
3. Write a brief front-page newspaper article relating to the capture of Billy Williams's murderer. Give as much background information from the novel as you can gather to inform the public of this fortunate ending to a tragic occurrence. Who was the murderer? Who caught him? How was he caught? Where?
4. Who and what are "expatriates"? Where do they live? Why do they live there? Is the unkind description of them in *The Terrorist* justified?
5. The London Underground is one of the oldest subway train systems in the world. Write a brief report about its history, including when it was built, how it was built, if it served as anything other than a subway train system, and any other special stories that may be linked to it.
6. If you were moving to a foreign country for one or two years with your parents, would you take a large supply of your favorite foods or items with you or would you prefer to try and find new foods or items when you got there?

Why would you or would you not want to get to know the different foods and items of the new country?

For Further Reference

O'Malley, Anne. Booklist (1997). This is a very complimentary review of *The Terrorist*. Although it does mention that readers may have difficulty in getting past a primary dislike of Laura Williams in the beginning of novel and that perhaps there may be some dissatisfaction with the ending of the plot, O'Malley commends Cooney in conveying the appropriate ambiguity in one's search for reason within "the dark underground of terrorism."

Horn Book Guide (Spring 1998). This review of *The Terrorist* claims that "despite a sometimes implausible plot," *The Terrorist* is a fast-paced, timely novel crackling with tension.

Kirkus Reviews (June 1, 1997). Although this review of *The Terrorist* speaks well of Cooney's prose and narrative technique, it is critical of the novel's characters, who are described as generally flat and stereotyped. However, according to the reviewer, with "a few big leaps of faith," the reader will find that the *The Terrorist* is a suspense-filled adventure accompanied by thought-provoking themes.

Related Titles/Adaptations

For further reading within the same theme of terrorism, *After the First Death* by Robert Cormier and *Broken Bridge* by Lynne Reid Banks are two very strong young adult novels that can be read and compared to *The Terrorist*. Differences in these books include the fact that the first novel is set in the United States and the second is set in one of the politically charged countries mentioned in *The Terrorist*. Though using different settings, they both describe the cruelty of such terrorist actions and the fact that the innocent are usually the ones involved in such situations. A further point of relation between *After the First Death* and *The Terrorist* is the fact that the terrorist goes free in both novels. For another depiction about the threat of terrorism, readers might wish to discover *Frankie's Story*, *The Beat of the Drum*, and *Starry Night* by Martin Waddell.

In this trilogy of books set in Northern Ireland, Waddell depicts young adult characters living within an environment of terrorism and racial discord. This trilogy can be read and used as further discussion with relation to the general theme in the same manner as *Broken Bridge*.

In terms of nonfiction books which can be used to further explain terrorism, *A Circle of Love: The Oklahoma City Bombing Through the Eyes of Our Children*, compiled by Frances Jones; *The World Trade Center Bombing: Terror in the Towers*, written by Victoria Sherrow; and *The Lockerbie Airline Crash*, written by Madelyn Horton are three very good choices for background reading on three actual terrorist acts.

In relation to cultural differences between Americans and the Arab world, another novel which can be reliably recommended is *Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye. Nye tells the story of a young girl of Arab ancestry who moves from St. Louis to Palestine.

Cultural confusion and denial which ultimately changes into understanding and acceptance within the new "politically-charged" environment is imminent.

Related Web Sites

"About This Author." Random House <http://www.randomhouse.com/>. March 17, 2001. This website includes various information about Cooney and her books.

"Caroline Cooney's Biography." Scholastic <http://www2.scholastic.com/>. March 17, 2001. The Scholastic website includes much biographical material about Cooney, as well as a very amusing yet informative interview held on-line with various school students. It is well worth a visit.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996