

The Thomas Berryman Number Study Guide

The Thomas Berryman Number by James Patterson

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Plot Summary

The Thomas Berryman Number is the first novel by acclaimed author James Patterson. This novel follows the investigation and research of a Nashville reporter into the murder of Jimmie Lee Horn, one of Nashville's first black mayors. Set in the early seventies, this murder is wrapped in racial tensions that prove to have little to do with the actual motive to murder. The reporter, Ochs Jones, meets with friends and family of an unknown assassin named Thomas Berryman and soon discovers that everything he thought he knew about Horn's murder is wrong. The Thomas Berryman Number is an award winning first novel that will surprise and inspire James Patterson fans and newcomers alike.

Ochs Jones is sent to Long Island to investigate claims by a mental patient that Bert Poole did not shoot Jimmie Lee Horn. Ochs, along with almost every person in America, has seen news footage of Poole killing Horn; therefore, Ochs believes he is on a fool's errand. However, the information this mental patient, Ben Toy, gives him leads Ochs to believe there might be something to Toy's story. Ochs calls his editor and gives him an outline of what he has heard thus far and is given permission to continue talking to Toy. Toy tells Ochs that a man named Berryman was hired by a southerner to kill Jimmie Lee Horn.

Ochs reviews Toy's patient file and makes a list of all the people Toy has mentioned or called since being in the hospital. Ochs then goes to New York where he takes a look around Berryman's apartment. Inside the study, Ochs finds photographs of the man who hired Berryman. Ochs sends these photos to his editor where he quickly learns the man is a lawyer in the employ of Johnboy Terrell, an ex-governor of Tennessee. Ochs is excited because he knows that Terrell is corrupt and this might finally prove it.

Ochs continues his investigation by speaking with Oona Quinn, Berryman's girlfriend. Ochs knows the young woman is not telling him all he needs to know, but he continues to speak to her hoping she will tell him something that will break the case once and for all. Ochs continues to investigate, learning slowly the exact events of the fateful afternoon Horn was killed. It turns out that Berryman went to see Terrell in person, causing Terrell to become worried about his own safety. Terrell then hires another man to kill Berryman in order to hide Terrell's connection to the Horn murder.

This other killer comes to Nashville shortly after Berryman. While Berryman follows Horn around and checks out his schedule for the Fourth of July, making a plan for the murder, the other killer, Joe Cubbah, makes plans of his own. Cubbah kills a state trooper and uses his uniform to gain access to the circle of security around Horn. Cubbah does not know what Berryman looks like and hopes to identify him when he kills Horn. Cubbah does identify Berryman, but is shocked when Berryman fires a gun equipped with a silencer in order to make it appear that Poole killed Horn. As a result, Cubbah is unable to kill Berryman in the crowd, but does shoot Poole.



Berryman leaves the rally and takes his girlfriend into a store where they pretend to be innocent shoppers. Later, they sit in traffic, waiting for the emergency vehicles to clear out of the way so they can leave. As they wait, Cubbah stabs Berryman in the chest and leaves him for Oona to take care of. Ochs learns all this when he visits Cubbah in prison after his conviction for the murder of the state trooper. Later, Berryman's body is discovered in a field. The man behind the entire ordeal, Johnboy Terrell, is murdered while awaiting trial on his part in Horn's death.



Prologue, Down on the Farm (1962), Preface, Jones' Thomas Berryman (1974), and Part 1, The First Trip North

Prologue, Down on the Farm (1962), Preface, Jones' Thomas Berryman (1974), and Part 1, The First Trip North Summary

Mayor Jimmie Lee Horn of Nashville has been killed. His apparent killer, Bert Poole, is shot by a man dressed as a state trooper who later turns out to be a hired killer. The entire episode is captured on news footage that is aired over and over again, leaving no doubt in anyone's minds who the killer is.

In the prologue, two young men in Texas get a ride with a local man, then kill him and steal his car to make their way to New York. In the preface, Ochs Jones is introduced. Ochs Jones is a reporter with a local Nashville newspaper who has investigated and is writing a book about the death of Jimmie Lee Horn, Nashville's first black mayor, who was murdered in front of hundreds of his supporters by a young man Ochs knew personally. Ochs does not believe the young man is responsible for Horn's death and his book will reveal the truth behind the murder. In part 1, Ochs is sent to Long Island to interview a mental patient who claims to have information about the death of Jimmie Lee Horn. Ochs believes this mental patient is a dead end but agrees to go anyway. Ochs is not allowed to see the patient, Ben Toy, when he first arrives but has to wait until the following day. During his first visit with Ben Toy, Toy tells Ochs how his friend and business associate, Thomas Berryman, was approached by a southern man to kill Horn. Toy describes how he played the go-between, forcing the man to wait for nearly an hour before he spoke to him and accepted the job on Berryman's behalf. Berryman immediately begins doing research on Horn, attempting to learn all he can about his target before making a definite plan. At the same time, Toy visits his small flower shop and begins to think he is being followed by the southerner who hired Berryman.

After this first meeting with Toy, Ochs asks the guard assigned to Toy if he can get Ochs a look at Toy's medical records. The man agrees and sets Ochs up in a small conference room. Ochs reads through the file, making notes and writing down every name Toy has ever mentioned and all the phone numbers he has called since his arrival. The next morning, Ochs calls a few of the numbers but gets nowhere. Ochs then calls his editor and tells him he thinks there is something to the story Toy told him. Ochs returns to the institute and speaks with Toy again. This time Toy tells Ochs about Berryman's last number, what he calls his jobs. The job was for Berryman to kill two of three brothers who own a small airplane company. Berryman was hired by the third brother. Berryman makes friends, using an assumed name, with the brothers and stays as a guest at their house. One night Berryman sabotages one of their planes and



stashes the body of a young bodyguard aboard. Berryman then poisons himself and his customer with ipecac syrup, mimicking food poisoning. Due to their illness, Berryman and the customer cannot go on a planned trip with the other two brothers. However, Berryman insists he is well enough to go, so he goes to the hanger with the two men only to back out at the last minute. When the plane crashes, three bodies are found aboard, making everyone think Berryman died as well.

Following this second meeting with Toy, Ochs goes to New York and bribes a doorman into allowing him access to Berryman's apartment. Inside the apartment, Ochs finds little of use except several photographs of Toy with another man whom Ochs believes is the southern man who hired Berryman to kill Horn. The following day, Ochs visits the head nurse on Bowditch ward at home. The nurse tells Ochs stories she heard Toy tell about his childhood with Berryman in Texas and the planning of the murder of Horn. The nurse also gives Ochs a photograph of Berryman that Toy had in his personal belongings when he was first brought to the institute. Ochs then returns to Tennessee where he learns Berryman bought a ticket to Nashville on his American Express card before July Fourth. Ochs then has a meeting with his editors and discusses the direction of the story. All the editors agree that Ochs is on to something big and suggest he begin writing short articles with the information he has so far. Ochs spends some much needed time with his family while researchers begin showing the picture of Berryman around local hotels. Unfortunately they all come up empty.

Prologue, Down on the Farm (1962), Preface, Jones' Thomas Berryman (1974), and Part 1, The First Trip North Analysis

The prologue of this novel introduces the reader to two young men who are clearly the type who think they can do anything they want and get away with it. These two men accept a ride from a local man only to kill him and steal his car. This prologue establishes the characters of Ben Toy and Thomas Berryman before the reader even knows what their part in the plot will be. In the preface, Ochs Jones sets up the structure of the novel, informing the reader that this is supposedly a non-fiction book about the assassination of Jimmie Lee Horn and his killer. The preface also introduces Ochs Jones to the reader, allowing the reader to see that Ochs is a reporter who is honest and has come upon this story almost by accident. Ochs also admits to a personal relationship with Horn's accused killer, giving the reader the idea that he may not be a reliable narrator because of his personal stake in the story.

Ochs is sent to Long Island to interview a mental patient who no one is taking terribly serious at this point. No one thinks the man knows anything about Horn's murder because he has been talking about the murder since before it happened. However, Ochs goes to see this man anyway just to make sure there is nothing important in what he has to say. The reader already knows this mental patient from the prologue. The patient turns out to be Ben Toy, one of the young men who stole the car in the prologue. Now the reader knows that Toy is a dishonest man who is most likely up to no good.



When Toy begins telling his story about how he spoke to the man who hired his friend Berryman to kill Horn, the story seems untrue not only because Toy is clearly attempting to hurt someone who was once his friend, but also because everyone knows that Bert Poole killed Horn. Ochs seems to want to believe him, however. Then Toy tells a story about how Berryman killed a couple of men in Oregon and Ochs seems to believe every word of it. This story is one that can be verified, however, so the reader is beginning to wonder if maybe there might not be something to Toy's story. Therefore, when Ochs returns home after having little success in New York only to learn that Berryman did in fact buy a plane ticket to Nashville, it begins to look like there might be something to Toy's story.



Part 2, The End of the Funniest Man in America

Part 2, The End of the Funniest Man in America Summary

Ochs returns to Long Island to speak to Toy one last time. Toy says he had been seeing a psychiatrist for more than six months but that he hid it from Berryman because he did not want Berryman to lose faith in him. After accepting the order to hit Horn, Toy began to feel a depression coming on. This depression is not helped by the usual assortment of medications the doctor gives Toy. Toy feels the depression is related to things he had learned about Horn. At the same time, Toy sees the southern man following him again. Toy tells Berryman and is ordered to kill the man. After shooting the man and leaving him in his parked car, Toy admits himself to a mental hospital for a few days. At the same time, Berryman calls the men who hired the mysterious southern man and tells them that if he sees anyone else following him, he will take the money and run. At this point in his story, Toy becomes hysterical and has to be sedated.

That night, while bathing in his hotel room, Ochs receives a phone call telling him that the photograph of the mysterious southern man who hired Berryman to kill Horn is a lawyer from Houston who is employed by Johnboy Terrell. Ochs becomes excited because Terrell is an ex-governor of Tennessee who is corrupt and a sworn enemy of Horn's. This information makes Ochs think that Toy's story has to be true.

Part 2, The End of the Funniest Man in America Analysis

Ochs talks to Toy again hoping to learn more about Berryman and the contract to kill Horn. Toy tells Ochs how he killed the man who hired Berryman under Berryman's order. Again this seems to be something that can be verified, lending more credence to Toy's story. Ochs is not happy with the meeting, however, because it ends with Toy having to be sedated. Ochs is empathizing with Toy, causing the reader to forget that Toy is a cold-blooded murderer who is partners with another cold-blooded murderer. Toy has become a sympathetic character because of his mental health issues, again causing the reader to be concerned that Ochs' empathy might be clouding his judgment. However, when Ochs learns that Johnboy Terrell is behind the contract on Horn's life, the reader once again begins to see the validity of the story. Terrell is an ex-governor of Tennessee who is corrupt and who many people have waited a long time to see get his just deserts. Perhaps this is that opportunity if Toy's story proves to be real.



Part 3, The Girl Who Loved Thomas Berryman

Part 3, The Girl Who Loved Thomas Berryman Summary

Ochs goes to Thomas Berryman's beachfront home where he finds Oona Quinn in residence. Oona is a beautiful young woman who was something like a girlfriend to Thomas Berryman. Oona allows Ochs to stay at the beach house as she tells him her part of Berryman's story. Berryman and Oona spent a weekend at the beach house in the weeks before the murder. While fixing the roof, Berryman saw a car driving in front of the house many times but did not become alarmed. That night, Berryman and Oona spent a romantic night in bed where, influenced by too much drink, Berryman lets it slip that he has been hired to kill Horn. The next morning, Berryman discusses murder, wondering if Oona thinks she could kill someone if a stranger gave her money to do it.

The following day Ochs visits Oona's parents. Ochs finds the Quinns to be an unassuming couple who love their daughter deeply. The Quinns also appear not to be aware of the company their daughter is keeping with Berryman. Ochs likes the Quinns and feels bad that any article he should write mentioning their name will turn their lives upside down. Ochs also finds himself beginning to believe Oona is not telling him everything, especially when she assures him that Thomas Berryman will not be returning to the beach house any time soon. When Oona returns to her story, she talks of how Berryman took her into the city and then went to visit a man who could make him a new identity with credit cards and a driver's license. When Berryman visits this man, the man wears a mask because he does not want anyone to see his face. Toy normally does these errands for Berryman, but he has disappeared. Before leaving the city, Berryman goes to Toy's flower shop and leaves him a note. A few days later, Oona returns from the grocery store to find Berryman agitated. Berryman leaves a few minutes later after finding a note from Toy on the screen door. Berryman does not return as promised and Toy continuously calls, leaving Oona both angry and worried. A short time later, Toy walks into a police station in Quogue in the midst of a nervous breakdown. It is at this point that Toy is admitted to William Pound Institute.

Part 3, The Girl Who Loved Thomas Berryman Analysis

Oona Quinn is introduced in this section. Oona is a beautiful young woman who appears innocent and unaware. However, Ochs soon begins to wonder if this young lady is hiding something from him. Oona tells Ochs stories about Berryman, how Berryman told her about his contract to kill Horn and how Berryman went to New York to have fake identities made up. Oona also tells Ochs about Toy's nervous breakdown and



how it had something to do with Horn. However, Oona does not tell Ochs where Berryman is now, leaving both Ochs and the reader wondering how Berryman could have just walked away and left this beautiful girl in his beach house. The reader suspects that Oona saw Berryman again; she simply does not want to share that information with Ochs. This leaves the reader wondering if Oona is a liar or if she is trying to protect the man she loves. Oona's motivations are not clear at this point; however, the reader is anxious to continue to see how the plot develops over the next few parts.

At the same time, the reader is getting to know more about Berryman. Berryman is a cautious man who normally uses Toy to make contact with the people he needs to use in his line of work, leaving Toy exposed to the world while Berryman remains an enigma. This suggests Berryman has a lack of concern for Toy's safety. At the same time, Toy has a nervous breakdown over the idea of Berryman killing Horn. Toy has learned more about Horn and does not believe Berryman should kill him. However, instead of stopping his friend, Toy has a nervous breakdown, leaving the reader with the impression that Toy is weak. At the same time, this leaves the reader with more sympathy for Toy, giving more strength to the merits of Toy's story.



Part 4, The First Southern Detective Story

Part 4, The First Southern Detective Story Summary

Ochs returns to Nashville where an investigation into Johnboy Terrell is just beginning to take form. Ochs writes several articles for his paper, one of which receives national attention. As a result, Ochs receives a letter from a customs inspector who had his identity stolen and a seafood dinner charged to one of his credit cards. Later, Ochs reviews some of the things he knows about Jimmie Lee Horn. Ochs wrote many articles on Horn and therefore got to know him quite well. Horn is a strong man, proud to represent the black vote. However, Horn has many aspirations for his political future. At one point Horn cuts his famous pompadour because his political adviser tells him that the hair style could cost him many white votes. After the haircut, Horn goes to police headquarters to speak personally to a drug dealer who has been brought in. Horn tells this man to leave town in order to protect the image of the black man in Nashville.

Berryman changes his appearance and travels to Nashville in the final week of June. On the flight, Berryman recalls a week he spent in Mexico planning a kill and decides he would like to retire there. Once in Nashville, Berryman checks out the location of the rally on the Fourth of the July and visits Horn's campaign headquarters. Several times Berryman sees Bert Poole and comes to recognize Poole's interest in Horn. An idea begins to form in Berryman's mind. Berryman then goes to Texas to visit his father. Berryman's father is a retired judge who is very ill. While there, Berryman visits an ex-girlfriend. Berryman returns to Tennessee where he meets with Johnboy Terrell. Berryman wears a mask to hide his identity. Berryman makes threats to Terrell before he leaves, causing Terrell to call one of his many connections and arrange for a hitman to take out Berryman after Horn is killed. At the same time he relates this story as a flashback, Ochs thinks about a time still five months in the future when Terrell will be arraigned on murder charges as a direct result of Ochs' work on the story.

Several days before Horn's murder, he is in a television studio doing a live show, answering caller's questions. Bert Poole calls and threatens to kill Horn, but the conversation is never heard over live television thanks to a ten second delay. Five months later, Ochs and several of his co-workers would study film footage of Horn's murder and attempt to see if Berryman were in the crowd and if someone else could have shot Horn other than Poole. Their conclusion is that Poole killed Horn. About that same time, Ochs manages to get an interview with Poole's parents. The poor people are devastated by their son's crime. Back in July, Berryman snuck into Poole's house and found his gun. Berryman then goes out and buys an illegal gun of the same caliber with a silencer. In Philadelphia, about the same time, Joe Cubbah is hired by a local cop to kill Berryman. At the same time, Terrell speaks to a member of his country club and asks the man to consider running for the senate seat Horn is after, implying that Horn will be out of the way very soon.

Part 4, The First Southern Detective Story Analysis

This section moves back and forth in time more often than the other chapters. The author will tell a little bit about what is happening in the past, around the time Horn was shot, and then return to the present where Ochs is watching Terrell being brought down and continuing his own investigation into the murder. Ochs learns that Berryman used another man's identity to buy himself dinner while in Nashville, giving more proof to the idea that Berryman did intend to kill Horn, whether he did it or not. At the same time, Ochs tells the reader things about Horn, making him more real to the reader and not just a name, a leader who was killed. The reader is beginning to see Horn as the victim of a terrible crime. The reader also sees the human side of Berryman, a man who has an ailing father he goes to visit before committing this terrible crime. Berryman's visit home suggests to the reader he is not confident in his survival in the aftermath of the crime, causing the reader to wonder if Berryman's disappearance after the death might have more to do with his own incarceration or death rather than retirement in Mexico, although both are still a possibility at this point.

At the same time the reader is watching Berryman plan his crime, the reader is also getting to see some of the motivation behind the murder. Terrell has hired Berryman apparently to move Horn out of the way so Terrell can put his own man in the vacant senate seat Horn is hoping to win. It is an ironic twist, suggesting that racism, a theme of the novel, the reader assumed to be there was not really a factor in Horn's death.



Part 5, Punk, Part 6, The Jimmie Horn Number, and Part 7, The Thomas Berryman Number

Part 5, Punk, Part 6, The Jimmie Horn Number, and Part 7, The Thomas Berryman Number Summary

In part 5, the November elections are over with the winner turning out to be neither Horn or Terrell's candidate. Also in November, Ochs moves his family to his hometown in Kentucky in order to finish writing his book. Back in July, Joe Cubbah buys an illegal gun. The same day, Oona Quinn boards a plane to meet Berryman in Nashville, but she does not know why. In Nashville, the state troopers assigned to Horn change shifts with one cop making a special note in the log about a Hippie who shook hands with Mr. Horn. Later, the cop, Mart Weesner, meets Cubbah at a coffee shop. Later they go to a bar together and discuss women and the army. Later Cubbah takes Weesner out to his car and slices his throat in order to take his uniform. Across town, Berryman notices his hands are shaking.

In part 6, Bert Poole wakes and thinks he has slept through the Fourth of July. However, it turns out he has simply woken before sunrise. Across town Berryman has breakfast at a local diner. A little after ten, Horn arrives at a local sports stadium to give a speech. Cubbah is there, masquerading as a state trooper. The speech goes off without a hitch. In his hotel room, Berryman practices firing his gun from a distance. Afterward, Berryman goes to Poole's house and pretends to be a repo man in order to find out when Poole intends to make his play. Everyone begins to converge on the Fair Farmer's Market where there is a rally planned. As Horn begins to take the stage, chaos breaks out when Poole pulls his gun. Horn is shot and dies before he can be moved to the hospital.

In part 7, Ochs interviews Joe Cubbah at the federal penitentiary in Louisville. Cubbah says he shot Poole out of instinct. Cubbah then admits that he was there for Berryman. Cubbah saw Berryman escape into a grocery store with a woman. Cubbah followed and waited. After a while, Berryman and his female companion got into their car and waited in line for the traffic to clear. As they waited, Cubbah approached the car and stabbed Berryman to death. Cubbah then told the girl to take care of the body before he walked away. Berryman's body would later be found abandoned and naked in a field. They would also find several id's near the body. A few months later, Johnboy Terrell would be killed while vacationing in Biscayne Bay.



Part 5, Punk, Part 6, The Jimmie Horn Number, and Part 7, The Thomas Berryman Number Analysis

This final chapter lays out the murder of Jimmie Horn as it occurred on the Fourth of July. Horn was killed by Berryman, but Berryman used Poole to make it appear as though Poole were the shooter. Berryman fired at the same time as Poole with a gun that had a silencer so no one could hear it over Poole's gun. This is why Ochs and everyone else were convinced that Poole committed the crime. Berryman's actions show his great intelligence and his desire to remain a free man. Jimmie Horn, despite all the security around him, is killed.

Joe Cubbah is a new character only recently introduced to the reader. Cubbah is hired to kill Berryman in order to protect Terrell from being linked to Horn's murder. Unfortunately for Terrell this trick does not work. Cubbah is arrested after the body of a state trooper is discovered in the trunk of his own car. Cubbah killed the trooper in order to gain access to Horn and to be close enough to identify Berryman when he made the hit. Cubbah is able to finish his assignment but is later arrested. However, no one but Ochs ever hears the true story of Cubbah's actions that day. In the end, three people are dead, two innocent and one murderer who perhaps expected to meet a tragic end one day. Terrell and Cubbah both pay for their actions, Cubbah with prison and Terrell when someone kills him. No one knows who killed him, but the reader finds themselves wondering if Toy is still in the institute.



Characters

Ochs Jones

Ochs Jones is a writer with a Nashville newspaper. Ochs has won awards for his articles on Jimmie Lee Horn but believes he only won the award because he happened to write the articles about a black politician less than a year after Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. Ochs believes a lot of his career is based on luck, but when he is sent to Long Island to speak to a mental patient who claims to have information on the death of Jimmie Lee Horn, Ochs feels his luck has run out. However, this mental patient proves to have information that will help Ochs discover that the man everyone believes killed Horn is really innocent.

Ochs spends the next few months investigating the leads this man gives him, researching the life of a man named Thomas Berryman who the mental patient claims is Horn's real killer. Ochs learns so much about Berryman that he not only comes to believe the patient is telling the truth, but decides to write a book about the murder, fingering Berryman as the real killer. This novel is supposed to be the result of all that research.

Thomas Berryman

Thomas Berryman was born and raised in a small town in Texas. Berryman left Texas with his close friend, Ben Toy, and traveled to New York in a Cadillac they stole from a man they murdered. When they arrive in New York, Berryman decides he wants to be a hitman. Berryman hires himself out as a killer. One of the murders Berryman committed consisted of killing two of three brothers who own an aircraft company. Berryman makes the murders look like a simple plane accident.

Berryman is hired to kill Jimmie Lee Horn by the ex-governor of Tennessee who does not want to see Horn in the United States Senate. Berryman accepts the case even though his friend and associate, Ben Toy, has disappeared forcing Berryman to prepare for the case, or number as he calls them, himself. Berryman arrives in Tennessee a few days before the Fourth of July and checks out Horn. Berryman believes in lots of studying before making a hit. As Berryman does this, he becomes aware of a young man who appears to represent a threat to Horn's life. Berryman decides to use this young man to commit the murder, helping himself to escape from the ordeal without anyone being aware of his connection to it. Unfortunately, there is another hitman in Nashville who has been paid to kill Berryman.

Ben Toy

Ben Toy grew up with Berryman in Texas and has remained his friend. Toy is also Berryman's business associate, acting as a go-between with Berryman and the people



who hire him to commit murder. Toy is paid well for his work and has bought a flower shop to run on his off time. Toy battles depression and is seeing a psychiatrist. Most of the time the psychiatrist is able to keep Toy happy with medication, but when Toy learns about Jimmie Horn and Berryman's determination to kill him, Toy falls into a dark depression. Toy checks himself into a mental hospital, locking himself off from Berryman. After the murder takes place, the doctor taking care of Toy contacts a newspaper in Nashville to alert them to information that Toy claims to have about the murder. It is through Toy that Ochs learns about Berryman and his role in the murder.

Mayor Jimmie Lee Horn

Jimmie Lee Horn is mayor of Nashville at the time of his death. Jimmie Horn is a black politician in the years shortly after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Horn's success in politics upsets some people who are still clinging to the past. Horn's success has also paved his way to a senate seat, upsetting a man who was once governor of Tennessee and likes to think he still runs the state. This man wants to put his own man in the senate so needs to get rid of Horn. It is because of this that Horn is targeted and assassinated during a Fourth of July rally in a predominantly black section of town.

Bert Poole

Bert Poole is an aimless young man who is often overlooked by the people around him. Poole gets it into his head to do something that will cause people to stand up and take notice of him. Poole decides he wants to kill Jimmie Lee Horn. Poole is not doing this because Poole is black but because he knows it will make him famous. However, Poole is not a good shot with guns and is not of the moral character to kill someone. Poole does pull his gun, but it is not his bullet that kills Jimmie Horn. Horn is killed by Berryman. Poole does fire his gun, however, causing Joe Cubbah to kill him, not to protect the people around him but out of instinct. Poole will be named the killer because news footage of the murder makes it appear Poole committed the crime. Ochs will clear his name when he writes his book.

Joe Cubbah

Joe Cubbah is a hired killer like Berryman. Cubbah is from Philadelphia. Cubbah is hired in an indirect manner by Terrell to kill Berryman. Cubbah travels to Nashville and hangs around all the places Horn is going to be, waiting for Berryman to make his move so Cubbah can identify him. In order to be close to Horn, Cubbah kills a state trooper and uses his uniform to enter the security perimeter around Horn. It is from this vantage point that Cubbah sees Berryman kill Horn at the same time Poole fires his gun. Cubbah takes out Poole and chases after Berryman but is unable to get him until later in the afternoon as Berryman is sitting in his car waiting for traffic to clear. Cubbah then stabs Berryman and tells Oona Quinn, Berryman's girlfriend, to take care of the body.



Santo Massimino

Santo Massimino is a political consultant hired by Horn to help him in his campaign for the Senate. Massimino makes Horn cut his trademark pompadour, claiming it will not impress white voters. Massimino also encourages Horn to rid his town of black criminals who might reflect poorly on him. Massimino is also in charge of Horn's security on the Fourth of July. It is this day that Horn is shot, leaving Massimino appearing to be inept. Massimino also planned the rally to which Horn was arriving at the time of his death.

Oona Quinn

Oona Quinn is Berryman's girlfriend. Oona knows little about Berryman and his profession but shares his house in Hampton Bay and plans to run away with him after the Horn murder. Oona helps Ochs with the story, telling him what little she knows about Berryman. However, Oona leaves out the fact that she went to Nashville to join Berryman, that she was present when Berryman shot Horn, and that she was with Berryman when Cubbah stabbed him. It was Oona who hid Berryman's body in a field. Ochs does not learn this until after Cubbah is sentenced to prison and gives him an interview. However, Ochs has sympathy for Oona and her family and does not hold her lies against her.

Martin Weesner

Martin Weesner is a state trooper assigned to Horn's security. Cubbah meets Weesner in a bar and has a few drinks with him, making friends. After Cubbah wins Weesner's trust, he takes him out to his car and kills him. Cubbah then takes Weesner's uniform and uses it to get into the circle of security following Horn around on the Fourth of July in order to be able to identify Berryman when he kills Horn. Cubbah has been paid to kill Berryman. Later, Cubbah will be tried and convicted of Weesner's death.

Johnboy Terrell

Johnboy Terrell was governor of Tennessee for many years in the sixties. Terrell has always run Tennessee, specifically the Nashville area, and plans to continue. When Nashville elects a black mayor, Terrell is unhappy. However, Horn does not gain Terrell's wrath until he plans to run for the United States Senate. Terrell wants his own man in the senate. Terrell has a lawyer in his employ hire Berryman to kill Horn. Terrell then hires Cubbah to kill Berryman in order to hide his connection to the murder. When Ochs begins to research Toy's story about Berryman, he is able to identify the lawyer and make the connection to Terrell. Terrell is arrested, but before he can go to trial he is murdered on a beach by an unknown assassin.



Objects/Places

Flower and Toy Shop

The Flower and Toy Shop is owned by Ben Toy. Ben works in the shop whenever he has free time from his other job as a go between for hitman Thomas Berryman and his customers.

Dudley Stadium

Jimmie Lee Horn gives a speech at a sports stadium in Nashville on the Fourth of July just hours before he is shot and killed.

Fair Farmer's Market

The Fair Farmer's Market is located in a predominately black area of Nashville. Jimmie Lee Horn intends to attend a rally at this market on the Fourth of July. Before he can take the stage, however, Jimmie Lee Horn is shot and killed.

Book

Ochs Jones is writing a book on the murder of Jimmie Lee Horn based on the idea that Horn was killed by Thomas Berryman rather than Bert Poole as it is generally believed.

Jiminy

Jiminy is the title of Jimmie Lee Horn's autobiography. Jimmie Horn, a black politician in the south, is the target of a hit ordered by the governor of Tennessee, Johnboy Terrell.

William Pound Institute

The William Pound Institute is a mental hospital where Ben Toy is a patient from before the murder of Jimmie Lee Horn. Ochs visits Ben here and speaks to him about Thomas Berryman's role in the murder.

Bowditch

Bowditch is the maximum security wing of the William Pound Institute where Ben Toy is being held as a patient.



Federal Penitentiary at Louisville

Joe Cubbah is locked up in the Federal Penitentiary at Louisville after his conviction for the murder of Bert Poole in the aftermath of the assassination of Jimmie Lee Horn, as well as the death of state trooper, Martin Weesner.

Nashville, Tennessee

The ex-governor of Tennessee "runs" this city. Jimmie Lee Horn, a black man running for the Senate is assassinated in this city.

New York City, New York

Thomas Berryman keeps an apartment in New York City, and it is also here where Ben Toy lives.

Hampton Bays

Thomas Berryman has a beachfront house in Hampton Bays. It is here that Ochs meets Oona Quinn and learns more about the story of how Thomas Berryman killed Jimmie Lee Horn.

Zebulon, Kentucky

Ochs Jones is forced to pack up his family and move temporarily to Zebulon, Kentucky while writing his book to escape danger as well as distractions.



Themes

Racial Tensions in the Early Seventies

This novel is set in the seventies, a short time after the Civil Rights Movement that rocked the country in the sixties. In the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Civil Rights leaders, Jimmie Lee Horn has become a political superstar in the eyes of many still embracing the need for change in the American government. Jimmie Lee Horn is elected mayor of a major American city and believes he has enough support to become a member of the United States Congress. This places Jimmie Horn in the spotlight and also makes him a target for those who do not believe the country is ready for a black man to be a senator. Although Horn has the support of many people in Nashville, there are those who are against what he stands for and what he might mean to the future of the country.

Horn stands up, not only for blacks, but for all citizens. However, because of Jimmie Horn's race and because of the expectations of the people around him, he finds himself forced to act in ways other politicians would not. For example, Horn feels pressure to keep black criminals out of his city in order to protect the reputation he has developed there. Horn also feels the need to change his appearance in order to please the white constituents he hopes to entice to vote for him. Horn does not like doing these things, but feels he must to further his political career in a racially charged atmosphere. Horn is a superstar, a politician with a lot of support. Therefore, Jimmie Lee Horn would not have been targeted for assassination if he had not been black and if he was not a threat to someone who is threatened by Horn making racial tensions a theme of the novel.

Politics

Beyond the color of Horn's skin, there are people who are threatened by him simply because he is a strong candidate in the political arena. Horn wants to run for the United States Senate and might go beyond that if he can continue to develop support. The ex-governor of Tennessee is threatened by this idea. The ex-governor runs the state and has run Nashville for many years. However, Horn's burgeoning career is threatening his control. The ex-governor does not like Horn and he wants him removed in order to take away the threat Horn represents for the ex-governor's own power and political aspirations.

The ex-governor of Tennessee is a criminal and many people are aware of this fact. When Ochs Jones learns of the ex-governor's part in the death of Jimmie Horn he is not surprised. Johnboy Terrell is a man used to doing things his own way, in part because of the power he has as governor and partly because that has simply always been the way it is. Terrell is threatened by Horn, by his color, by his supporters, and by his aspirations. This causes Terrell to hire Thomas Berryman to kill Horn, leading to the one of the most bizarre assassinations in Tennessee history.



Murder

Thomas Berryman is a criminal. Berryman has always been a criminal. Berryman grew up in a small Texas town where he spent his weekends stealing cars and taking advantage of beautiful young girls. As an adult, Berryman becomes a hitman. Berryman is hired to kill people in specific ways. One way Berryman commits these murders is by making them appear to be accidents. Berryman also commits assassinations, so when Johnboy Terrell needs Jimmie Lee Horn killed, it is Berryman he asks.

Berryman lives in a dangerous world. Berryman attempts to protect himself by having limited contact with the people who hire him to commit these murders, but when his assistant and friend, Ben Toy, goes missing, Berryman is forced to deal with the people surrounding the assassination plot against Horn personally. These meetings make Terrell nervous, so he hires a second hitman to take out Berryman. As a result, Horn's apparent killer is shot by a man masquerading as a state trooper. Later Ochs finds out that Berryman ended up just like one of his own targets. Berryman is killed by a hired assassin as he sits in his car waiting for traffic to clear. It is these murders that make murder a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrating character is Ochs Jones, a writer for a Nashville newspaper who is writing this book to tell the real story behind the assassination of Jimmie Lee Horn, the first black mayor of Nashville, Tennessee. Ochs tells the story through his own first person viewpoint, but he also tells the stories of the various characters in the novel through their own voices. While telling these stories, the point of view shifts to the third person omniscient point of view. However, the reader is aware that Ochs is still there because even during these third person narratives his voice still appears in a type of authorial voice.

The point of view of this novel works because the novel is told through the eyes of a character who was not directly involved in the death of Jimmie Lee Horn. This objectivity allows the reader to discover, along with Ochs Jones, what really happened the day of the murder. This point of view also allows the reader to see and feel everything Ochs Jones sees and feels as he learns the details of Horn's death. The point of view also allows the reader to learn about Thomas Berryman from the point of view of his friends and acquaintances while still having Ochs' guidance. This point of view is unique, but it works well with this novel's structure.

Setting

The novel begins in Nashville where Jimmie Lee Horn was the mayor. The novel then moves to Long Island as Ochs begins to investigate the rumor that a mental patient has information on the murder of Mayor Horn. From here, Ochs finds himself moving to many locations along the East Coast, including New York City and Hampton Bay. Finally, the novel moves to Kentucky where Ochs goes to finish writing his book.

The setting of Nashville sets up the racial tension behind the candidacy of Jimmie Lee Horn for the United States Senate. It is this candidacy that leads to Horn being killed, an act that propels the entire plot of the novel. The settings along the East Coast are interesting because they take Ochs Jones, a country boy, out of his comfortable surroundings while he investigates Thomas Berryman, the man he suspects really killed Horn. These settings work well in this novel because they shadow the tensions building in the story and help add to them as the plot develops.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. There is no foreign phrases in the novel. The novel does contain some slang, especially slang relating to the South. These slang phrases are common and easily understood by the reader, causing no difficulty in reading the novel. The language tends to be more simplistic when characters such as



Ben Toy or Oona Quinn are speaking, touching on their lack of education. When Ochs Jones speaks, his language tends to be slightly more formal, reflecting his higher level of education.

The language of the novel works because it successfully incorporates both the characters' backgrounds and the setting of the novel. The novel is set in the South; therefore, the reader expects certain slang and nuances to be present in both the dialogue and the exposition. Both are present. The characters also range quite a bit in their level of education. Ben Toy is a boy from Texas who barely finished high school while Ochs Jones is a college-educated writer. The speech patterns of both these characters differs somewhat, reflecting the differences in their backgrounds.

Structure

The novel is divided into a prologue, a preface, and seven parts. There are no specific chapters in the novel. However, each part is divided by dates, allowing the reader to follow along with the progression of time toward the murder of Jimmie Lee Horn. The novel is told in a combination of dialogue, exposition, and a list of notes the main character, Ochs Jones, is keeping for the book he intends to write on the death of Jimmie Lee Horn. These notes are meant to clarify the information Ochs Jones has come across in his investigation. However, these notes often confuse the reader more than clarify anything.

There is only one plot in this novel. The plot of this novel is simply the investigation of Ochs Jones' into the death of Jimmie Lee Horn. The world believes Horn was murdered by Bert Poole, an acquaintance of Jones'. Jones has never believed Poole is capable of such a crime; therefore, when word comes that a patient in a mental ward swears to have information on the murder, Jones is happy to go check out the man's story. This story leads Jones to Thomas Berryman and the real murderer of Jimmie Lee Horn.



Quotes

"My parents, Walter and Edna Linda Jones, didn't want me to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or even successful; they just wanted me to be refined...I disappointed them badly, however; I went out and became a newspaperman. Sign over the desk of Ochs Jones."
Preface, Jones' Thomas Berryman (1974), pg. 3

"Needless to say, this matter of a professional killer shooting down an assassin confused the hell out of everybody." Preface, Jones' Tomas Berryman (1974), pg. 7

"Sitting in the cramped library, he was thorough as an archbishop's secretary, wore no cowboy boots, wore high-priced cologne, read Larry McMurtry books to relax. Thomas Berryman's idée fixe was to study, study, study, and then study some more." Part 1, The First Trip North, pg. 27

"This was journalism by committee. It's always a disaster. No exceptions."
Part 1, The First Trip North, pg. 71

"This was the day the walls came tumbling down on my head...I remember how it was real sunny. Nice out. I wouldn't have believed it was going to turn into such a shit day..."
Part 2, The End of the Funniest Man in America, pg. 81

"A modern woman I guess you could call her, Oona Quinn was growing up in the manner of young men: she was groping, grappling, scratching for what she considered her rightful place in the world. That's why Thomas Berryman liked her, I imagine."
Part 3, The Girl Who Loved Thomas Berryman, pg. 94

"I decided to give the family a false name in any stories I'd write. I invented the 'Quinn' for them.
That's what some people call protecting a source. It's what I call common decency. And I think it's what Walter and Edna Jones, way back in little, antiquated Zebulon, Kentucky, call 'refined.'" Part 3, The Girl Who Love Thomas Berryman, pg. 132

"I felt I nearly had my story. I also had a frizzy honey-colored beard. The beard frightened old southern women, small children, and my editors."
Part 4, The First Southern Detective Story, pg. 133

"Horn accepted his punishment without flinching. Without words. Stoical as Aurelius, whom he admired when he was tired or sleepy, he watched his own stone-face in the



mirror."

Part 4, The First Southern Detective Story, pg. 147

"As he sat over the coffee, he noticed his hand in the light from the table candle.

His hand was shaking.

A slight, steady, machinelike tremor made more obvious by the cup.

Berryman couldn't take his eyes off his hand."

Part 5, Punk, pg. 234

"Berryman was playing a mind-game with himself: he was thinking about all of the jobs he'd completed successfully. He was figuring out exactly how they compared with this one; degree of difficulty they called it in those high-diving contests. The thing he didn't trust about his plas was that it was so spectacularly different from all the others. Either it was brilliant, or it was foolish; and even though he was ninety-nine percent sure it was the former, he could have done without the latter 1%." Part 6, The Jimmie Horn Number, pg. 260

"Early in January, sitting upright in a canvas chair at the Royal Biscayne Hotel in Key Biscayne, a copy of National Geographic in his lap, Johnboy Terrell felt a brief, sharp pain at the center of his chest. His head dropped sharply and his wife said something. He thought he was throwing up his breakfast until he saw blood all over his lap. He died right there in the beach chair, his jury trial not having reached the courts yet." Part 7, The Thomas Berryman Number, pg. 272

Topics for Discussion

Who is Ochs Jones? What is his interest in the death of Jimmie Lee Horn? Is this interest professional or personal? Why does Jones go to Long Island? What does Jones hope to learn from Ben Toy? What does Jones learn? How does this lead Jones to the truth?

Who is Ben Toy? Why is Ben Toy in the mental institute? Who put Toy there? Why does Toy tell everyone he knows who really killed Horn? Why do the doctors believe him? Is Toy telling the truth? What is Toy's connection to Horn's murder?

Who is Thomas Berryman? Where does Jones get his name? Why does Jones believe Berryman killed Horn? How would Berryman have done this when video tape shows another man committing the murder? Why does Berryman kill Horn? What does he hope to get out of the murder? Does he?

Who is Joe Cubbah? Why is Cubbah in Nashville? Who tells him to kill Berryman? Why? Why does Cubbah kill Poole? Is this intentional? Does Cubbah do this to help Horn or the crowd surrounding him? Why or why not? Does Cubbah get his man? How?

Who is Bert Poole? Why does Berryman become interested in him? What does Poole do to make Berryman believe he might be interested in killing Horn? Why does Berryman not try to stop Poole? Does Berryman believe Poole capable of killing Horn? Why or why not? Why does Poole want to hurt Horn?

Discuss Jimmie Lee Horn. Why is his race an issue in this novel? Is his race the reason he is killed? Is this what the people believe? Who wants Horn killed? Why? Why does Horn cut his hair? Why does Horn chase a drug dealer out of town? Are these things motivated by something other than a desire to clean up the town? What is Horn's main motivation?

Who is Oona Quinn? What is her role in the death of Horn? Did Oona Quinn know her boyfriend was a killer? Did Berryman love her? Why does Berryman want Quinn to go with him to Mexico? What does Berryman plan to do there? What does Quinn do after Berryman is murdered? Does anyone know what her role was in Berryman's death? Does anyone do anything about it?