

# **The Whites Study Guide**

## **The Whites by Richard Price**

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## Plot Summary

“The Whites” is a contemporary detective novel by Richard Price. The story is set in New York where Billy Graves, a sergeant detective on Night Watch, must work to uncover the truth behind the killings of criminals from his past. He must also protect his family from a stalker in the present. Billy's assignment to Night Watch is due to his accidental, nonfatal shooting of a ten-year-old boy several years before when he was part of an East Bronx unit nicknamed the “Wild Geese.” The Wild Geese were well-loved and well-respected for their ability to work with members of the community and for their fearlessness in putting down serious crime. However, the accidental shooting was the beginning of the end, as one by one, the unit broke up. With the exception of Billy, all the former Wild Geese have gone back into civilian life –including real estate king John Pavlicek to building superintendent Jimmy Whelan to funeral home owner Redman Brown. Billy's own first marriage ended because of the shooting. Now remarried to a kind nurse named Carmen, Billy has two young sons, Declan and Carlos. Billy's elderly father, a former officer, live with Billy and his family.

Billy responds to a call for the Saint Patrick's Day night murder at Penn Station, where the victim has been slashed with a knife. Billy discovers the victim to be Jeffrey Bannion, the White belonging to Pavlicek. Whites are criminals who have escaped justice. Each member of the Wild Geese has one. Criminal activities have killed some, while others have gone on to live as normally as they can. Others continue committing more crimes. Some former Wild Geese, like Yasmeen Assaf-Doyle, are emotionally distraught by their Whites. Others, like Pavlicek, are furious that their Whites still walk around free. The Wild Geese get together each month for dinner, and news of a dead White is always met with cheerfulness. Despite the death of Bannion being nothing, which bothers Billy due to Bannion's sexual abuse of children, Billy is still determined to find the killer.

As Billy begins his investigation, he notices that Pavlicek goes through periods of extreme exhaustion. Stacey Taylor, a former reporter who is now an investigator, reaches out to Billy. Ironically, at one time Stacey had almost ruined Billy's career with an unsubstantiated story that Billy was high on cocaine at the time of the accidental shooting. She and Billy have become friends since the story. Now, from Stacey, Billy learns that Pavlicek has been to see a hematologist. He later discovers that Eric Cortez, Yasmeen's White, lies brain dead in an institution. A shot to the head is the reason for his condition. Later, Billy discovers that Sweetpea Harris, Redman Brown's White, is dead because of a gunshot. Billy begins to suspect that Pavlicek is responsible. However, his queries to the other former Wild Geese lead to nothing except dismissals. They urge Billy to leave things alone. Their actions increase Billy's suspicions.

At the same time, a police detective named Milton Ramos begins to stalk Billy and his family. Ramos savagely beats up Carmen's gay brother, Victor. Ramos wants revenge on Carmen who, at the age of fifteen some years before, directed gang members to the Ramos apartment when the gang members sought a drug dealer. Milton's older brother, Rudy, had broken Carmen's heart, leading her to direct the killers to the wrong



apartment for revenge. Both of Milton's brothers were subsequently killed, and his mother later died of a broken heart. While Billy does his best to protect the family, he also confronts the Wild Geese about the killings once more. Admittedly, most of the Wild Geese, not just Pavlicek, are responsible for killing the Whites of each other, rather than their own. Pavlicek's bright and kindhearted son is dying of leukemia. The White Geese are angry that while someone like Pavlicek's good son may suffer and die, bad people walk around free. Billy wrestles with his conscience as he considers turning in the Wild Geese. Carmen tells Billy to let it go.

Milton Ramos confronts Billy and Carmen in their home at gunpoint. The timely arrival of the police foils Milton's plans to kill Carmen. Carmen then confesses her past to Billy and urges him once more to let things be as they are with the Wild Geese. Ultimately, Billy decides that it would not be worth it to turn in the Wild Geese, even though they broke laws to serve justice. Billy considers this from his own standpoint because it was true that Billy was high on cocaine during the accidental shooting years ago. As the novel ends, Billy heads out on Night Watch, where he responds to a smash-and-grab at a jewelry store. The capture of the robber is successful, as well as the return of the jewels.



# Chapters 1 – 4

## Summary

Chapter 1 – "The Whites," a detective story by Richard Price, begins on the night of Saint Patrick's Day. Billy Graves, a New York Police Department Night Watch Sergeant, heads to work on the packed streets. Billy and the detectives of Night Watch are responsible for covering all the ground between Manhattan's Wall Street and Harlem from 1:00 a.m. until 8:00 a.m. Billy knows that he might be on patrol duty far longer as situations dictate. He always hopes that the crimes his unit encounters are simple, so regular officers can handle them. Night Watch operates out of the second floor of the Fifteenth Precinct, sharing an office with Manhattan South Homicide, which operates during the day. Billy's regular squad includes people from several backgrounds: Emmet Butter, who is new to the force and a part-time actor; Gene Feeley, a force veteran, who wants to max out his pension; Alice Stupak, who takes night shifts in order to spend time with her family during the day; and Roger Mayo, who works nights to avoid spending time with his family.

Billy swings by Joon's, a Korean convenience store, to pick up his nightly rations of energy drinks, power gel squibs, and cigarettes. He then heads to the office where obese dispatcher Rollie Towers, known as the "Wheel," is already fielding calls. The rest of the squad has already left on calls. Theodore Moretti, a day shift officer who has volunteered for Night Watch, heads out with Billy to the scene of a gang fight in Central Park. Field Intelligence Officer (FIO) Eddie Lopez, who has overseen the breakup of the fight with the gang unit, explains that the gangs had been trading insults on Facebook all week. The parents of the fighting teens begin arguing with each other. Moretti is sent to the emergency room to take interviews from the gang kids who have ended up there.

Billy then receives a call from the Wheel, who says that 1972 Olympic four-by-four relay silver medalist Horace Woodley, who lives in Terry Towers in Chelsea, has reported the theft of his silver medal. Billy takes the call and instructs the Wheel to have Alice meet him at the Towers. Billy heads to Apartment 7G in the Towers. Horace is an Afro-American in his sixties. He looks very young for his age. Horace is drunk as he explains to Billy that he suspects his girlfriend, Clara Garrett, of the theft. Clara explains she has hidden away the medal because whenever Horace drinks, he wants to pawn it to start a new life. The pawn shop only offered \$125 when it should be worth thousands. With the situation settled, Billy and Alice head to Finnerty's bar for a break. Billy ignores a call from Stacey Taylor, then receives a call from his wife, who always worries about him working night shift.

The Wheel then calls and directs Billy and Night Watch to Penn Station's lower-level arcade which connects Long Island-bound commuter trains to the subway platforms. There, a one-hundred yard-long blood trail has been discovered. Gene Feeley, first on the scene, explains to Billy that it seems the victim was slashed and had died by the time Gene got to the actual subway. Billy is stunned when he sees the body of the dead



man. It is Jeffrey Bannion, brother of Eugene Bannion, a learning-disabled man who eight years before was accused of sexually molesting and murdering twelve-year-old Thomas Rivera. Billy recalls how his partner at the time, John Pavlicek, had believed Jeffrey to be responsible for the crime, especially after Jeffrey had temporarily moved out of state. During that time, two assault incidents involving young males stacked up against him.

While working the scene, Billy discovers that one of the commuters has blood on his Rangers jersey. He questions the man, who is named Mike, about the blood. Mike is too drunk to make much sense, but he says that he wants to kill them all. Billy has Mike and the group he is with sent down to sleep off their drunkenness at Midtown South. Billy calls everything in to the division captain, sends Alice out on an unidentified task, then sneaks away from work long enough to go home to drive his kids to school. He says hello to his second wife, Carmen, a triage nurse at Saint Ann. His first wife, a black woman named Diane, left him after his accidental, but non-fatal, shooting of a ten-year-old Hispanic boy in the Bronx some years before. Inside Billy's house, his father, a well-loved and retired former Chief of Patrol is asleep. Billy's kids, Carlos and Declan, are dragging their feet getting ready for school. After Billy drops them off at school, he finishes up his shift and heads home. There, Millie Singh, the housekeeper, is watching television with Billy's father. Billy calls John Pavlicek, who already knows about Bannion. Billy agrees to go with Pavlicek later on to see the Rivera family after the annual Wild Geese dinner.

Billy reflects on his time on the Wild Geese, a nickname given to the East Bronx unit of seven young anti-crime officers of which he was a part back in the 1990s. One has since died of cancer from cigarettes; another has moved to Arizona; and the remaining members (Billy, Pavlicek, Jimmy Whelan, Yasmeen Assaf-Doyle, and Redman Brown) still meet up each month for dinner. Billy thinks back on the group being hardcore and proactive. They were like a family. Billy remembers how the locals loved them. The squad remained intact for five years until Billy's shooting. Each member of the team had their own "White." For one reason or another, they system did not serve justice in the case.

Milton Ramos- Milton and his patrol partner arrest a drunk who has lost three thousand dollars betting on the NCAA Final Four, blamed his wife, and beat her up. The drunk calls Milton a spic, so Milton stops their police cruiser at a park, gets out his baton and a towel, and walks the drunk into the park. He punches the drunk, knocking him down. Using the telescoping baton and a branch for balance, Milton covers the drunk's throat with the towel and then steps on it.

Chapter 2 – As John Pavlicek moved on from the police force, he invested in real estate by purchasing old brownstone homes. After evicting thugs and druggies, he rehabbed the homes and rented them to decent people. Billy is amazed that John is now worth \$30 million, but he is sad that John's personal life is a wreck because his mentally unstable wife is institutionalized. However, John does have a good relationship with his son, John Jr.



Billy and Pavlicek head over to meet with Ray and Nora Rivera, the parents of Thomas. Thomas' death has devastated the Riveras. Ray explains that while his pastor has urged forgiveness, he is all about the God of the Jews.

Billy and John then head out to pick up Jimmy Whelan who works as the building superintendent where he lives. They head to Collin's Steak House. Billy notices that John appears exhausted. The other Wild Geese (WGs) arrive. The group toasts the death of Bannion, happy that bad things have happened to a bad person. The personal lives of the WGs come up. John explains he has hired an exorcist for his most recently purchased building because his Chinese construction crew believes the place is haunted. They would not work there without an exorcism.

After dinner, Billy heads to work. His first call is an assault in a flower shop between Harlem and Hamilton Heights. He heads there with Roger Mayo, who has been on Night Watch for eight years. Mayo is thin and does not talk much. The victim is an overweight Latina; the perpetrator is a seventy-year old Wallace Oliver. Wallace explains he left his wife for the Latina purely for the sex. However, he can no longer put up with the Latina's attitude or the things she says to him even for the sex. Billy then receives a text message from Stacey Taylor, who says she knows he is screening her calls.

Milton Ramos -- Milton Ramos questions Carlos Hernandez at Saint Ann's ER, but he gets nowhere. On his way out, he sees Carmen working at the ER desk. Seeing the last name on her tag, he realizes she has moved on and gotten married. This troubles him.

Chapter 3 – When Billy gets home, his father is telling Declan and Carlos about having to fight hippies back in the day. Billy's father, Billy Senior, admits he feels bad about having to be so rough with the hippies, but they gave no choice. Billy is sad about his father because his mind is slowly going. For example, Billy Senior often forgets his wife is dead. Billy knows caring for his father is like caring for another child. He is both happy and troubled to care for his father in such a way. Billy thinks about how it was because of his father that he joined the police academy after being kicked out of college for selling weed. Billy owes a lot to his father, who was never violent and never used his fists to punish.

Carmen's younger brother, Victor Acosta, and Victor's husband, Richard Kubin, drop by to let Billy and Carmen know they will be adopting twins from Brazil. While Billy cannot wrap his head around gay marriage, he does his best to be supportive. His wife, however, is far less thrilled. At a therapist, Carmen says that she is not happy with her brother adopting because he is irresponsible.

Billy then heads out to visit Redman Brown, who owns and operates Brown's Family Funeral Home with his family. Redman's youngest son is ill and must be hooked up to a gastrointestinal feeding tube. Redman himself is on his fifth wife, a 23-year-old, Cote d'Ivoire immigrant named Nola. The funeral home is currently overseeing the funeral of a dead gang member, Hi-Life. This gets Redman to talk about his own White, Sweetpea Harris, who murdered a talented fifteen-year-old basketball player named Salaam who was being courted by colleges. Billy says to let the Bronx handle the situation.



Billy heads to Yasmeen's house, where Dennis, her husband, is waiting with Billy's shield. Dennis believes Billy must have dropped it when he brought the drunk Yasmeen home after the WG dinner the previous evening. Billy reflects on how he and Dennis both dated Yasmeen years before. Dennis wants to know why Yasmeen passed out drunk. Billy explains it must be because talk of Bannion may have brought to mind Yasmeen's White, 28-year-old Eric Cortez, who stabbed and killed 13-year-old Raymond Del Pino for talking to Eric's 14-year-old girlfriend in the school cafeteria. Billy knows that Yasmeen got wind of the killing before it happened when Raymond reported text threats from Eric. Arresting Eric failed due to lost time spent on an incorrect warrant. Dennis worries that his wife will become crazed about Eric as she has in the past.

Milton Ramos – Milton hates attending parent-career day at Rose of Lima for his daughter, Sofia, and hates visiting his Aunt Pauline at Daughters of Jacob Assisted Living Center. Milton visits Pauline regularly, however, out of gratitude and respect for taking him in when his family fell apart years before. The killers were never caught.

Chapter 4 – Billy heads to the Alfred E. Smith Houses, the scene of a double shooting. Mayo and Alice Stupak are already on the scene. Reluctantly, Billy meets Stacey Taylor for breakfast in Mount Vernon. Stacey is the New York Post reporter. While rushing for a scoop, she published rumors based on fraudulent eyewitness testimony that Billy was high at the time of the shooting. This ultimately ruined her career and sent her into the private investigation business. Billy, rather than hating Stacey, feels sorry for her. It was Billy who first reached out to her to settle things since it was indeed true that he and the other WGs were indeed all high that night. Billy and Stacey have since become casual friends. Stacey relates over breakfast that she hates the PI business, and has begun writing an online sex column for the magazine "Matterhorn." She is also dating her editor at the magazine. She has information on the whereabouts of Curtis Taft, Billy's own White. Curtis Taft got away with murdering his ex-girlfriend, Tonya Howard. He also murdered Tonya's daughter, Dreena Bailey, and fourteen-year-old Memori Williams. Stacey also has information on what has become of Memori's sister, Shakira.

Billy goes to see Curtis Taft, who is in the hospital for treatment for a perforated ulcer. Billy begins speaking about the murder, but Taft denies having anything to do with it. Billy relates that Memori's sister, Shakira, has gone downhill and stabbed a girl in the chest in Jersey City. Billy does his best to get Taft to talk, but Taft refuses. On the way out, he runs into Patricia, Taft's wife. Billy asks Patricia if Taft ever wakes up screaming at night. Patricia refuses to speak to Billy. As Billy turns to leave, he encounters Pavlicek who says he is in for cholesterol tests. Billy and Alice then head to an accidental killing, where a sixteen-year-old Yemeni kid has been killed when his best friend shows off his dad's shotgun.

Milton Ramos – Milton watches Disney's Pocahontas with his daughter. Then, he sends her to bed. He reflects on the death of Sofia's mother some eight years before to a hit-and-run. Milton relies on Marilys Irrizary to keep house and care for Sofia five days a week. He remembers cutting the brakes on the car of the man believed to be the hit-and-run killer. Then, he provoked the man on the highway, which led to the man's death.





Milton then pulls out a sheet of paper with information scrawled down about Carmen, her husband, and their children.

## Analysis

“The Whites” is a contemporary detective novel by Richard Price set in New York where Billy Graves, a sergeant detective on Night Watch, must work to uncover the truth behind the killings of criminals from his past, while protecting his family from a stalker in the present. From the very start of the novel, the theme of mystery is readily apparent. Billy’s nightly calls are always mysteries that must be solved. Some are far simpler than others, such as the Olympic Silver Medal case compared to the Bannion stabbing. It is the Bannion stabbing which proves to be the kind of mystery that Billy would rather not have to deal with since it is so involved.

The killing of Bannion is also the sort of mystery that Billy would rather not have to tackle because it dredges up the past. The past here becomes as important to the plot of the novel as mystery. The killing of Bannion brings up not only Billy’s personal past, but his past with the Wild Geese. Billy’s career, as the reader will carefully note, was nearly ended by a cocaine-fueled accidental shooting. While Bannion compels Billy to think on Pavlicek and the concept of Whites –those criminals which escape justice. The entire purpose of officers like Billy and Pavlicek is to protect the public and uphold the law while bringing criminals to justice.

A White defies the very purpose of the existence of the police officer to the point that it becomes a psychological trauma to the officer in some way, shape, or form (consider that Yasmeen drinks when confronted with thoughts of her White, for example). The reader should pay careful attention to the absolute agony the Wild Geese suffer over their Whites –and their understandable celebrations when a White is killed. Billy confronts his own White, Curtis Taft, in a hospital room. Here, the past comes back to haunt Billy, physically face to face. Dredging up the past also causes Billy to remember how the Wild Geese survived well together, but how the accidental shooting was the beginning of the end for the group. Since then, each of the members of the Wild Geese has gone on to do their own thing. What is important to note here, though, is that the Wild Geese remain good friends and in close contact, meeting together as a group once a month to get dinner.

This is because the Wild Geese bonded over their common work as police officers back in the 1990s and became something of a family. The Wild Geese looked out for one another and their actual families back then, and still do. Family is incredibly important to Billy, especially given how his first wife left him over the shooting. Billy deeply cares for his current wife, Carmen, his two children, Declan and Carlos, and his father, Billy Senior, whose mind is slowly ebbing away. Billy refuses to put his father in a home because he loves his father too dearly. His father was a stellar role, and his father encouraged Billy to join the police after Billy was kicked out of college for selling drugs.



Billy believes it is not only the love and loyalty of family which make him want to take care of his father, but justice as well for all the good Billy Senior did for Billy –and the City as a police officer –in the past. Billy does his best to live his life, in general, as justly as possible. This pertains to his work as a police officer, especially. It is why men like Taft and Bannion are so difficult to stomach, because these are criminals who have managed to escape justice despite their clear and overwhelming guilt. Billy and the other Wild Geese know that justice has not been served in these cases, which is why it is all the more cause for them to celebrate when a criminal finally gets what is coming to him. As Billy says in Chapter 3, they should let the Bronx bring about its own justice against the criminals. A warped sense of justice has also clearly infected Milton Ramos, whose morbid obsession with Carmen is deeply chilling –and adds yet another layer of mystery to the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

What is a White? Why do Whites bother Billy and the other members of the Wild Geese so much? What is Billy's prescription for handling the Whites?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe it is just or unjust for the Wild Geese to celebrate when their Whites end up dead? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does family matter so much to Billy? Why does Billy choose to keep his father at home rather than sending him to an institution? How does this seem to affect Billy's family life?

## Vocabulary

felony, fraught, spontaneous, uncanny, esoterically, sodden, indiscriminate, visceral, companionability, inarticulate, preternaturally, requisite, euphorically, publican, geriatric, demonstrative, transposed, redolent, accosting



## Chapters 5 – 8

### Summary

Chapter 5 – Billy goes to visit Edna Worthy, grandmother of Martha Timberwolf, the girl murdered by Memori Williams' twin sister Shakira. Feeling responsible for not being able to put Taft away, Billy offers Edna financial help with Martha's funeral. Billy then goes to see Redman at the funeral home to ask him to bury Martha. Billy explains the entire story, and Redman agrees to help by giving Billy a price of six-thousand. Billy then meets with Elvis Perez, a detective working the Bannion homicide. He explains that the bloodstained witness, Michael "Mike" Reidy, has been out of touch. Perez then plays security camera footage for Billy, which shows Bannion running toward the turnstile, blood pouring down his body, trying to leap the turnstile, then falling dead. Perez explains they are awaiting more security footage. Billy later calls Stacey to ask her to look into outpatient records for Columbia Presbyterian, specifically for John Pavlicek. He explains he is worried about John, and Stacey agrees to look into things for him. Yasmeen then calls to apologize for her drunkenness the other night, even though she is drunk once again.

Milton Ramos –Milton and his daughter visit 2130 Longfellow Avenue, a six-story walk up in the East Bronx where he spent his childhood. Sofia asks about all the people who lived in the building back then. Milton explains that among them were Carmen and Victor. They then come to Apartment 4F, where Milton, his mother, and his brothers Edgar and Rudy lived. Milton recalls how he and Edgar later found the killers who murdered Rudy, and how the killers explained that a girl on the front steps of the building had told them where Rudy lived rather than telling them where the actual drug dealer they were seeking lived. Milton remembers how when he and Edgar went to confront Carmen about this, they learned from her mother that Carmen had suddenly gone to Atlanta. Milton also remembers how Edgar was killed in retaliation a week later, and within another week, his mother died due to heartbreak. After dropping off Sofia at school, Milton goes to Yonkers where he stakes out Carmen and Billy's house. He wonders what he will do now.

Chapter 6 – Billy and Carmen are called into school after Declan gets into a fight. Carmen defends her son for being teased for having to dress up like the planet Uranus. At home, Billy spends time with his father out back while Declan and Carlos play. His father suddenly spits out a torrent of foul and racist language, then returns to normal as if nothing has happened. That night, Billy and Alice respond to a robbery-homicide where they speak with Patricia Jenkins, who is one of the members of a drug party interrupted by a high school drop-out thug. Patricia reveals he robbed them, then shot and killed a woman named Donna who doubted the rifle the boy carried was loaded. Feeley arrives and directly asks if Patricia knew the killer. Patricia immediately reveals the killer to be Eric Cienfuegos, who lives upstairs in apartment 11C. This annoys Alice, who has been quarreling with Feeley lately for taking his job so casually. Billy suggests



that Feeley either transfer or not come in anymore, while Billy covers for him. Feeley becomes angry, saying no one tells him what to do.

Milton Ramos – Milton Ramos is at the vending machine near the front desk where Sergeant Maldonado is working when two sisters come in to report one of the sisters' missing fiancée, Cornell "Sweetpea" Harris. Sweetpea was on the phone on Concord Avenue when someone took his attention just before he went missing. Milton then goes to the hospital where he fakes illness and a trip to Atlanta when he is examined by Carmen. He mentally urges her to recognize him and to apologize for the past so that they may both avoid the future.

Chapter 7 – Billy discovers a red handprint on Carlos's jacket. When Billy asks Carlos about it, he explains a fat brown man in a suit and tie with a gun lump came up to him on the way home from school and told Carlos to tell his parents hello. This disturbs Billy and Carmen greatly. At work, Billy contends with a young father who has brought his injured four month-old daughter into the hospital ER, saying he has accidentally dropped her. Billy gets to the root of the situation, getting Billy to admit it was not an accident.

Milton Ramos – After having sex with Marilys, Milton thinks happily about how his speaking to Carlos and Declan will put Carmen on edge, and make her fear losing those she loves the most. He wonders if his daughter could go and live with his cousin, Anita. Milton has no idea how it will all end, but knows nothing he has done so far has been illegal.

Chapter 8 – Billy makes sure to take his kids to Immaculate Conception school the next day, then meets up with Stacey. Stacey reveals that Pavlicek is seeing a doctor named Jacob Wells, not for cholesterol but for hematology. Why, precisely, she has been unable to determine. Later, Billy brings his father to physical therapy, then heads to Immaculate Conception to meet with Albert Lazar, who recalls seeing a heavy Hispanic man with dark hair and a moustache the day before. The school security officer, retired Westchester County State Trooper Wayne Connors, says he will be on the lookout for the man Billy describes to him. Billy then meets with Jimmy, who describes the handprint on Carlos's coat as the "mark of the Beast." Jimmy says he will help out however he can. Billy also asks if Jimmy has noticed anything strange about Pavlicek lately. Jimmy says he has not, and asks if something is wrong. Billy answers that nothing is wrong.

Milton Ramos - Aunt Pauline suffers a debilitating cerebral hemorrhage. Milton is there with her sons Herbert and Stan when she is put onto life support, and must be the one to call for her to be removed from life support. He knows this is because Herbert and Stan have never liked him, and want him to play the part of Reaper. Milton later calls his cousin Anita while thinking of Carmen's house.



## Analysis

The past continues to haunt Billy deeply, as the murderous actions of Taft and their repercussions have continued to make waves through the murder of Martha Timberwolf by Memori Williams. Billy is beside himself with anger and grief at not having been able to put Taft away. He feels personally responsible for Martha's death—even though he knows people make their own choices. It is why Billy is so determined to help pay for Martha's funeral. It is a small symbolic offering of justice and respect for the dead and those the dead have left behind. Billy himself could not intervene to change the lives of the living through putting Taft away.

The past continues to haunt Milton Ramos as well, coming back to disturb and distress him in ways that have never before been so strong. His return to his old apartment building where he grew up is a symbolic journey into the past. Milton's brothers were killed and his mother ultimately died, all due to the actions of Carmen. Carmen had directed gang members to the Ramos apartment. Milton has no idea why Carmen would do such a thing, but he is determined to find out why—in addition to making her pay for the past. Milton's twisted sense of justice leads him to begin stalking Carmen and to interact with her children by way of the red hand print. This, Jimmy Whelan fittingly refers to as the "mark of the Beast," a reference to the Devil and to evil. In a way, Carmen is something of a misplaced White—and certainly an unsolved mystery—to Milton Ramos.

Because Milton's family was destroyed by Carmen's actions, Milton is especially protective of his daughter and very devoted to his Aunt Pauline—and especially determined to get to Carmen through her own family. This explains why Milton has no problem subtly threatening Carmen and Billy through Carlos and Declan. The red hand print here is not only symbolic of evil and the Devil. It symbolizes the guilt or blood which Carmen has on her hands, relating to Milton's dead family members. There is a subtle reference here to Shakespeare's "Macbeth," in which Lady Macbeth psychologically sees the blood she has on her hands for the deaths she has orchestrated to ensure Macbeth became king. As the reader will learn later in the novel, Carmen still dwells on her actions—something she can never wash from her hands.

Meanwhile, Billy continues to be hounded by the mystery of Bannion's killing, which was done in a very public place and in full view of security cameras. He cannot seem to make sense of anything about the case because of horrible security film footage and the lack of witnesses. It was as if the killing was intentionally done on Saint Patrick's Day night, when the crowds of people would be mostly drunk and distracted. Rather than the public place providing a plethora of witnesses, the public place provided a whirlwind of activity, chaos, and unreliable witnesses. This means the killing was not random. It was premeditated. Two other mysteries emerge at this point in the novel which will catch the reader's attention. The first is that Sweetpea Harris, Redman Brown's White, has gone missing. The second question is why Pavlicekis is seeing a doctor for hematology.



## Discussion Question 1

Why is Milton Ramos stalking Carmen and her family? Can Carmen be considered a White for Milton Ramos? Explain.

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Milton Ramos begin to harass Billy and Carmen through their children? How does he do this? What effect does it have –especially on Billy and Carmen?

## Discussion Question 3

Although Billy has nothing to do with the murder of Martha Timberwolf, why does he feel responsible? What does this compel him to do for Martha's family?

## Vocabulary

fortuitous, condolence, evoking, blariness, festooned, versatile, bemused, placate, synonymous, anarchic, deference, intuitively



# Chapters 9 – 11

## Summary

Chapter 9 – Billy later learns about Sweetpea Harris being reported missing. He goes to see Dennis to see how Yasmeen is doing and to see if there are any reports that have been filed on Sweetpea. Dennis instructs a detective (Milton Ramos) to check in with Maldonado to this end. When Billy gets home, he learns his father is missing. Billy and Carmen spread out across the neighborhood, asking after Billy Senior. Billy finally catches up with his father, who is following his old patrol route. He learns from Billy Senior that a large Hispanic man picked him up. Billy realizes his father mistook the man for his old driver. At home, Billy suggests that Carmen and the kids move elsewhere for safety, but Carmen refuses. She suggests putting Billy Senior in assisted living or going to live with Billy's oldest sister. Billy refuses assisted living but calls Brenda. Brenda agrees to take on Billy Senior beginning that day.

That night, the NYPD Threat Assessment Team, including detectives Amato and Lemon, arrive to speak with Billy and Carmen. Billy can think of no police officers whom he has crossed or with whom he had issues. Lemon and Amato promise they will do their best to get security cameras around the house as soon as they can. Meanwhile, officers are stationed at the house. Billy later meets with Albert Lazar. Lazar explains he has been away on an overnight trip, during which time he ran into his neighbor, Eric Salley, going into a gay bar. Lazar worries that Eric will make trouble for him since Lazar works for a Catholic school and Eric now thinks that Lazar is gay. Billy says he will see what he can do. He heads home annoyed since the meeting had nothing to do with the man who approached Carlos. On a call that night, Billy encounters John MacCormack from Brooklyn North Narcotics. MacCormack has heard that Billy has been asking after Eric Cortez, and wants to know why. Billy explains he has simply been looking into old cases. MacCormack explains that Cortez needs to be protected right now, because Cortez has turned snitch.

Milton Ramos – Marilys tells Milton she is pregnant after they have sex twice. Milton is stunned but says he will support Marilys. He then heads out to stalk Victor, Carmen's brother. Victor enters Bryant Motor Lodge's rear entrance like a common criminal. Milton considers the idea that to avenge his family, he would be halving their number with Sofia being sent elsewhere. However, Milton also knows he could double the number by committing to Marilys. Milton then heads to see Marilys, and to reveal his past to her as a point of honesty. The two end up kissing.

Chapter 10 – The next morning, Brenda returns Billy Senior to Billy, saying she cannot handle their father. Carmen is attacked at the hospital by a deranged, homeless man who says he brings news of "he who is to come." Carmen finally relents and decides to move into an apartment offered up by Pavlicek. Pavlicek also says he will have his security guy come to Billy's house to install a CCTV system. Pavlicek says he is surprised that Billy did not have one previously, arguing that no one is immune from



crime. When Billy mentions that Sweetpea is missing, Pavlicek tells Billy to worry about his family, then storms out on Billy.

Billy goes to meet with Donna Barkley, Sweetpea's fiancée, about Sweetpea. Billy says he is a private investigator looking to open up an office in the area. To drum up interest, he is doing free casework. Donna explains that when she was on the phone with Sweetpea the last time she heard from him, a white guy called Sweetpea's name, after which Sweetpea hung up. Donna says the time was 3:15 a.m. Sweetpea was leaving 502 Concord Avenue. She also explains the tone of voice of the white man sounded like he was NYPD.

Billy then goes to see Stacey, whose boyfriend has been savagely beaten after returning home from a bar. Billy cannot help but wonder if the attack was an actual mugging, or if the stalker has increased his efforts. Billy calls Jimmy to come over, who arrives with one of his many girlfriends, Mercedes. Jimmy will watch over things while Billy is out at work. Billy heads to 502 Concord, an old Victorian family home divided into single rooms. Billy interviews the residents, but only gets good information from Ramlear Castro. Castro explains he heard gunshots the night of Sweetpea's disappearance, both being fired and returned. Castro says he saw some of the fight through the window, and noted that there were at least three people outside, including a driver in a car. The driver was seemingly white, Castro recalls, and believes the gun that was fired was a .38.

Milton Ramos – Milton, Marilys, and Sofia eat at Applebees. Milton is beginning to test the waters with his daughter about a future marriage, asking her how she would feel about Marilys coming to live with them. Sofia is excited by this idea. Milton and Marilys are thus set to be married the following month. Marilys asks if her mother, still in Guatemala, can move to the United States and live with them. Milton agrees to this, wanting to have a grandmother figure in the house. Milton resolves that night to stop drinking so much.

Chapter 11 – The next morning, the police arrive to install a CCTV system in Billy's house. Billy speaks with Pavlicek on the phone, who apologizes for storming out. Pavlicek says he has had a lot on his mind lately. Billy reveals that he and Carmen have decided to remain in their home due to directed patrols, the new cameras, and the contact of the Threat Assessment Team. Billy then speaks with Jimmy about Pavlicek. Jimmy confesses that Pavlicek is seeking to buy his building from its owner, after which Jimmy will go from superintendent to building manager, doubling his pay. Billy then attends Martha Timberwold's funeral, after which he speaks with Redman. Billy reveals that he believes Sweetpea Harris is dead. He also explains he is worried about Pavlicek. Redman encourages Billy to respect Pavlicek's privacy.

When Billy gets home, Victor is crying to Carmen that he thinks he will be a bad parent. Carmen reassures him that everything will be okay. Victor later explains to Billy that he is worried about Carmen, about family in general, and wants Carmen to be proud of being a big sister. Victor says he knows Carmen still hates herself for going to live in Atlanta, leaving him alone with their father. Billy is later called to a strangling with Butter





and Mayo. Gene Feeley arrives soon after. He points to an old tattoo of a blackbird on the strangled woman's thigh, the mark of Frank Baltimore, a player in the 1980s who stamped his women. Gene explains he knew the woman, Tomika Washington, back in the day when she was a seventeen year-old kid Frank brought up from Virginia. When Frank left, Gene explains, Tomika turned to prostitution and drugs but later cleaned herself up through church. Gene explains he'll handle the scene, and shakes hands with Billy. He tells Billy that Billy is a good boss. If Billy wants him gone, he will go. Billy tells Gene to stay.

Milton Ramos – Marilyns tells Milton she has had a nightmare about her mother getting crushed and dying while she and Milton are getting married. Marilyns is terrified because she says her dreams always come true. Marilyns is beside herself with fear, questioning her engagement, and whether she should go back to Guatemala. Milton calms her down and tells her to go through with brining her mother up from Guatemala. Marilyns makes some calls, and says that she will need a total of ten-thousand dollars for airplane tickets and rushed visas. Milton withdraws the money from his pension for this. Milton also purchases a serape as a gift for Marilyns's mother.

## Analysis

The mysteries of the novel for Billy deepen when he learns that Sweetpea Harris is missing, and probably dead. This makes the second White that has recently been killed. Things take a startling turn when Billy confides in Pavlicek about Sweetpea missing – after which Pavlicek angrily tells Billy to worry about his family. Billy is disturbed by Pavlicek's reaction, but knows he also has his hands full with his family. Although the reader knows Milton Ramos to be the stalker, Billy still does not –and this is a mystery which continues to plague him. Billy arranges to have the police install a CCTV system at his house to provide further protection, and arranges to have designated patrols circle by at regular intervals. Family is everything to Billy, and Billy will do everything he can to ensure his family is protected. This especially matters to Billy since his father was put in such danger by being picked up by the stalker.

Interestingly enough, Milton Ramos has been having second thoughts about his revenge plot. This has less to do with worries about being caught than about learning that he is to be a father –and has the chance to expand his family. Marriage with Marilyns is the direction that Milton decides to pursue. He wants his daughter to have a solid and stable family life, and so thoughts of family crowd out thoughts of the past and of revenge. Milton is even intrigued by the idea that Marilyns's mother could come to the United States and live with him –and would not only give Sofia a grandmother figure, but would give him the mother figure that he is now without after the death of Aunt Pauline.

Meanwhile, Billy has become increasingly concerned about Pavlicek and Sweetpea Harris, so he goes to talk to Redman about this. Billy relies on his extended family by way of the Wild Geese for counsel –but surprisingly to Billy, Redman tells Billy to respect Pavlicek's privacy. Redman is, understandably, glad that Sweetpea Harris is



dead, and doesn't think Billy needs to continue dig around. On the surface, this appears to be a simple question of Redman being glad that justice has finally caught up with Harris. However, as Billy later learns, there is more to it than Redman merely trying to get Billy to respect Pavlicek's privacy.

As if these incidents were not troubling enough, Billy runs into a brick wall courtesy of a fellow policeman. Detective MacCormack tells Billy not to bother about finding Eric. He brusquely tells Billy that Cortez needs to be protected since he has turned snitch. That MacCormack should react so coldly to Billy for a simple inquiry generates yet another layer of mystery with another White. Billy cannot shake the past, and the more events unfold, the more the past comes to matter in the present.

The reader should note the crime scene involving Tomika Washington not because it has anything to do with the Whites, but with the past in general, and with justice. Feeley notes that Tomika was a girl who was forced to turn to prostitution and ended up doing drugs –but then turned her life around in the end. Tomika brought about her own justice by righting her life –but was wronged through being murdered. Feeley is saddened that someone who should have turned good could meet such an unjust end. This provides a contextual sort of atmosphere for Billy given his investigation into the killing of those like Taft, who have not changed their ways.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Billy Senior go missing from the house? Why does this terrify Billy so much? What does this lead to happening with respect to the family home?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the significance of family come to affect Milton Ramos in this section of the novel? What does this mean, especially, for his stalking of Carmen? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

When Billy goes to Redman about Pavlicek and the Whites, what is Redman's response? How does Billy react in turn to Redman's response? Why?

## Vocabulary

vigorously, narcissistic, melodrama, catastrophic, moniker, dapper, superstitious



# Chapters 12 – 14

## Summary

Chapter 12 – When Billy gets home from work, MacCormack is waiting for him. MacCormack reveals his superiors are angry Billy has asked about Cortez, and want Billy's guns. MacCormack says he needs to know what Billy's interest in Cortez is. Billy explains he already told MacCormack the other night. MacCormack refuses to collect Billy's gun, then heads outside with him. He brings Billy to the state-run home in Ozone Park where Cortez has been committed. MacCormack explains that Cortez was shot in the head three months back, barely survived, and is now barely cognizant of anything. The only time he moves is when he has a seizure. MacCormack reveals the bullet fired into Cortez's head was from a .38 Smith and Wesson, the standard police issued gun. MacCormack says he needs to have all his bases covered. After handling a drug call, Billy and Yasmeen discuss John Pavlicek and Eric Cortez. Billy explains that all of the Whites stacking up is disturbing him. Yasmeen could care less if someone is taking out the Whites, she explains.

Milton Ramos – Milton packs up Marily's apartment to bring her things to the house. He receives a call from his friend, Peter Gonzalez, who works for the TSA. Peter reveals that Marily's Irrizary never boarded any plane for Guatemala. This disturbs Milton, who comes to suspect that Marily's never made it out of the city. Milton goes to fill out a Missing Persons report. He then manages to get a hold of Marily's sister, Anna Goury, who also goes by the name Josepha Suarez. Anna reports that their mother has been dead for fifteen years, and that they are from El Salvador, not Guatemala. Anna then tells Milton she hopes he didn't give Marily's any money.

Chapter 13 – When Billy gets home from work, he is surprised to find Pavlicek waiting for him, chatting with Carmen and the kids. Billy finally confronts Pavlicek about the hematologist. Pavlicek explains that the visits are not for him, but for his son, who has terminal leukemia. Pavlicek explains he has been taking care of unfinished business, horrified with the fact that someone like his son could die of an illness while someone like Bannion could walk around free. While Pavlicek does not outright admit the killings, he does not deny them. Billy is stunned by everything he has learned, but he does not arrest Pavlicek. He later learns through research at Columbia Presbyterian that Pavlicek has essentially been living at the hospital to keep his son company.

Billy, unable to sleep, is approached by his father who says he knows something is bothering Billy. While Billy does not give particulars about the Pavlicek situation, he speaks in generalities. While Billy's father does not explicitly identify himself, he explains that he knew the partner of an officer who looked the other way when the officer beat a cruel pimp to death who ran teenage girls, all under sixteen. Billy's father further explains that the pimp had threatened the officer's family, and would slash the heels of any girl who tried to run away. Billy's father explains that the officer's partner now sleeps like a rock. Billy later gives the newbie, Butter, a pass when Butter fails to



get the names of witnesses to a gang attack. Billy tells Butter his guys have one strike, and cannot screw up again. Butter thanks Billy, and promises to do better next time.

Milton Ramos – Marily's scam annoys Milton and sets him back to harassing Carmen. Milton lies to his sister, telling her he is being targeted and wants her to adopt his daughter if anything happens to him. At home, Milton puts half of Sofia's clothes into a garbage bag, then goes into the basement. When he emerges to put the bag in his car, the bag is fuller and leaking red.

Chapter 14 – While at work, Billy receives a picture sent from Curtis Taft's phone, of Curtis Taft tied up and gagged on the floor. Billy immediately calls Pavlicek to see what he has done. Pavlicek tells Billy to come find out, saying he is at 1422 Vyse. Billy races over to the address and confronts Pavlicek. Pavlicek denies having anything to do with Bannion's death, but not the other Whites. Pavlicek leaves Billy with the tied-up Taft, then exits. Billy unties Taft, and tells him not to tell anyone or go to the police. Billy and Pavlicek watch Taft leave. Billy asks Pavlicek if this is how he honors his son. Pavlicek punches Billy in the face. A patrol car comes by, but Billy refuses to tell the officers what is going on, instead waving his badge.

At home, Billy discovers red paint all over everything in the front of the house, including a garbage bag with girl's clothing inside. The paint, Billy sees, is the same kind as the handprint. Billy has Carmen set his punched jaw back into place, and blames the injury on a fight with a dusthead. Carmen tells Billy to go to Saint Joseph's for an X-ray, and then tells her she wants him to pick up the kids from school. Billy reviews CCTV footage, but sees nothing beyond the bag being thrown. He calls the department to ask for 24-hour-surveillance, but is denied.

Billy next heads out to meet Redman at the funeral home. Redman gets straight to the point, saying that everyone in the WGs have had a hand in getting rid of their Whites, and that Pavlicek only ever did his part. Redman tells Billy to let things be. Billy is stunned by this. Before going home, Billy scribbles down a chart in his notebook, matching up each WG member with their White: Redman for Sweetpea; Yasmeen for Cortez; Pavlicek for Bannion. Whelan is kept off the list because his White, Tomassi, was run over by a bus. Billy wonders if Redman was telling him a story about group involvement to protect Pavlicek. When Billy gets home, Carmen tells Billy she saw "him" in a dream.

Milton Ramos – Milton facilitates a meeting with him, Sofia, Anita and her husband, Ray, along with a little girl who lives on Anita's street. Milton then calls Marily's sister and demands she give him the names, numbers, and addresses of all of her family members in New York. Through this information, Milton is able to track down Marily to her cousin Ottavio's house in Astoria. He confronts them. Milton later follows Victor from the Crown Motor Lodge to his apartment on Palmetto Street in Bushwick. When Victor goes to walk his dog, Milton follows with a baseball bat. Victor attempts to subdue Milton with a taser, but is unsuccessful. Milton beats Victor up with the bat, then flees, accidentally leaving the bat behind.



## Analysis

As the novel continues, the mystery of the Whites continues to deepen –and Billy is no closer to solving the killing of Bannion. Although Bannion was not a good guy, justice still needs to be done to get to the root of Bannion’s killing. It is ironic that even criminals who escape justice are equal under the protection of the justice system. This is something that Pavlicek cannot stand or handle –especially given the injustice of his own good, kindhearted, and morally just son dying of leukemia while horrible men are walking around free and healthy. As Billy learns, Cortez has been rendered incoherent after being shot in the head –and Pavlicek, though he does not readily admit to any of the killings of the Whites, does not deny them and argues that the Whites are finally receiving justice.

Billy is confronted with the great moral quandary of the novel. What constitutes justice? Certainly it is unjust that someone like Bannion, Harris, or Cortez could live happy lives after ruining other lives. Yet, Billy wonders if vengeance against such people –which requires the breaking of laws to serve justice –is justice itself. It is clear that Pavlicek and the other Wild Geese consider justice to be justice no matter how it is dispensed. However, Billy –still an active police officer and a detective at that –finds it difficult to either agree or disagree. The reader should understand that Billy is not so much concerned with who is being killed, but that they are being killed. Taking the law into one’s own hands could be dangerous, especially if the individual being served justice was not guilty. In the current situation, it is clear that the Whites are indeed guilty –but the dispensation of justice has not been through the regular or legal means.

Meanwhile, the past comes back to haunt Milton once more through family. Milton, who has actually begun to back off Carmen and Billy, is triggered to return to his stalking when Marilyns cheats him out of ten-thousand dollars and disappears. Milton, who has been hoping to reconstruct a family, has been sent over the edge. Whereas before Milton was merely menacing, now he is violent. His savage beating of Victor –the targeting of the family of Carmen –is evidence not only of his turn to violence, but his desire to seek revenge (justice in his own mind) against Carmen through those that Carmen loves. Billy himself feels personally injured by the attack, because Victor is his family as well.

Billy continues to look into the Bannion case, coming to discover the truth he has been so close to uncovering but trying to deny all along –that Pavlicek has not acted alone in their own dispensing of justice against their Whites. Redman explains that everyone in the WGs have had a hand in getting rid of their Whites, and that Pavlicek only ever did his part. Redman tells Billy to let things be, to let justice be. Billy still does not know who is actually responsible for the deaths of which Whites. Billy is not totally convinced of Redman’s claim that Pavlicek has not acted alone, but now knows that Pavlicek is indeed involved. This is only made apparent through Pavlicek’s offering of Taft to Billy. Billy does not arrest Pavlicek, however, because he has been so thrown off by the truth –and because the Wild Geese are his family.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Pavlicek say he has engaged in going after the Whites and bringing justice to them? What is Billy's response to this? Do you believe this is a just response? Explain.

## Discussion Question 2

When Billy discovers what Pavlicek has done, he refuses to arrest Pavlicek. Why?

## Discussion Question 3

When Redman tells Billy that Pavlicek has not acted alone, Billy refuses to believe him. Why? What does Billy consider has happened instead? Why?

## Vocabulary

quizzical, inexorable, redundant, artificial, cajoling, ubiquitous, arterial, conspiracy



# Chapters 15 – 17

## Summary

Chapter 15 – Victor survives his injuries, but he is rushed to the emergency room. Billy, Carmen, Detective Bobby Cardozo from the 8-0 Squad, and several of Victor's friends wait for news on Victor. Victor's friends, all gay, blame a street gang of kids who like to gay bash. Billy tells Cardozo about the stalker, but Cardozo is convinced the assault must be from locals. Billy later meets with Yasmeen, who denies shooting Cortez and being a part of Redman's conspiracy. She argues that she has been drinking due to life changes, such as menopause, not because she shot anyone. Billy does not believe her.

He later receives a call from MacCormack, who reveals that Cortez has just died of pneumonia brought on by the shooting. Now, MacCormack says, they are dealing with homicide. Dennis then angrily calls Billy over the conversation he had with Yasmeen, saying the entire family –including Yasmeen –was away in Florida when Cortez was shot. This makes Billy realize Redman was covering Pavlicek, and it has been Pavlicek all the time. While talking with Jimmy, Billy notices that Jimmy's car has bullet holes in it. He realizes that Redman was indeed telling the truth. The WGs had killed Whites other than their own.

Milton Ramos – Milton speaks with Anita by phone, telling her she needs to hold on to Sofia for just a little longer. Milton then visits the graves of his mother and brother, and knows he should be among them. He remembers watching Moby Dick in high school, and imagines Carmen to be his white whale.

Chapter 16 – Billy goes to meet with Redman. Redman confesses that Sweetpea has been buried along with Martha Timberwolf in her casket. Redman tells Billy to remember his heart, that if he pursues this, he will be taking away people from their families. Billy then goes to the station to review tapes of the Bannion killing from beneath the information boards at Penn Station. It is difficult to make out people because there are so many of them. He then sees one small, blurry figure break away from the crowd – wearing a Tibetan coat just like the one that Yasmeen owns. Billy then confronts Yasmeen with this information. Yasmeen does not deny anything, but says very carefully that she and the other WGs circled around Billy to protect him when he shot a kid while high on cocaine. As Billy goes to leave, he tells Yasmeen he will give her a week to get a lawyer.

Billy confesses everything to Carmen. Carmen tells Billy that sometimes, people just need to be forgiven. Billy then calls the other WGs, and meets with Pavlicek in person in his son's room at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla. Billy is saddened to see how thin John Jr. has become. Billy then reveals all he knows to Pavlicek. Pavlicek confesses to shooting Cortez. Billy says he cannot sit on three bodies, and Pavlicek tells him not to do it.. Billy also says Yasmeen has threatened him with the coke card.



Milton Ramos – Milton puts on his best suit, but he keeps on his usual pair of Nikes. He goes to the Fifteenth Precinct and asks to be directed to Night Watch.

Chapter 17 – Ramos heads out on a call with the other Night Watch detectives to investigate a stolen tuna. Billy has worked with Ramos before, and always tries to avoid him because he feels as if something is not quite right about Ramos. Tonight, Ramos appears flat-out drunk, and begins to recount his life story. Billy tells him never to work with his crew again, and that he will not write up Ramos for being drunk on the job. Ramos agrees and apologizes. A short time after getting home, Billy calls the police station to inquire about Albert Lazar, who Carlos says was arrested at school. Billy is then confronted at his door by Ramos, holding a gun. Ramos demands to know where Carmen is. Billy does not understand what Ramos is getting at. Ramos holds a gun up to Carlo's head, then instructs Billy to call Carmen downstairs. Carmen quickly recognizes Ramos. Ramos demands to know why Carmen gave the killers his apartment number so many years ago. Carmen says it was because Edgar Rudy broke her heart. She says she prays for Rudy every day. Outside, the police arrive in force.

Suddenly, Billy Senior appears with his old service .45. Ramos spins around as Billy Senior fires, during which time Billy grabs a snow globe from the windowsill and breaks it over Ramos' head, sending Ramos to the floor. Billy takes his father's gun and holds it on Ramos, telling Ramos to think of his own daughter. Billy Senior heads upstairs. Ramos suddenly jumps up, knocking Billy back and holding out his own gun once more. He forces everyone up against the wall, but the police breach the house and take Ramos into custody. The responding police say that they heard everything because when Billy called the station earlier, he never hung up.

A few days later, Carmen comes clean to Billy about the past. She explains that when she was fifteen, she wanted more than anything in the world to have Rudy Ramos like her, especially because her father was a horrible person. Carmen explains that when she finally got up the courage to talk to Rudy, Rudy and his friends laughed at her, revealing Rudy to be cruel and self-centered. She recalls sitting on the front steps of the building feeling heartbroken and humiliated when the killers showed up looking for Eric Franco, a known dealer. Miserable, she says she directed them to Rudy's apartment, where they shot him immediately when he opened the door. Carmen reveals that upon confessing this to her mother, her mother sent her to Atlanta within minutes to live with her estranged father. Carmen says she thinks about the lives she cost every day, and that no one can give her absolution. Billy reminds her she saves lives on a daily basis, but this does nothing to comfort her. She says she has more souls to answer for than Pavlicek, Yasmeen, and Jimmy.

Yasmeen comes to see how Billy and his family are doing. Billy says they are all doing well enough given the situation. Billy tells Yasmeen not to worry about getting a lawyer. Billy later tells Carmen everything is over. He then goes to meet with Stacey Taylor. Stacey reveals that Taft has been arrested for shooting his girlfriend, and that his girlfriend will live. Stacey also mentions she has heard rumors of frustrated cops killing bad guys, but will not reveal her source. Billy then wants to tell Stacey the truth about the shooting, but she stops by asking him whether he would have still shot at his





assailant. Billy says he would not have done anything differently. Stacey then explains she is onto something with her sex column, getting thousands of views and beginning to enjoy the work.

Billy then gets a call from Redman, who says Pavlicek's son has died and that the funeral will be on Thursday. Billy attends the funeral, telling Pavlicek that everything is over. Among those present at the packed funeral are the Rivera family. Pavlicek cries deeply for his son, and during his eulogy, says he feels for the parents who lost their children on the streets, whether they are innocent or guilty of crimes. That night, Billy responds to a smash-and-grab of a jewelry store. Fortunately, the police catch the thief and recover all of the stolen jewelry.

## Analysis

Family comes to be invaluable to both Billy, and Billy Senior as the novel comes to a close. Billy's refusal to have his father committed to assisted living pays off, as Billy Senior –still mentally sound enough to realize his family is being threatened –comes to the rescue, buying Billy and Carmen more time, and getting Carlos away from Ramos. This allows the police to arrive in time to haul away Milton. At the same time, Carmen reveals to Billy the full extent of the past, and how she blames herself for what became of Milton Ramos' family. It is, in part, through the importance of family that Billy becomes convinced not to turn in the Wild Geese, for they, too, have been his family –and have suffered tremendously in turn.

As it turns out, Redman is correct in saying that Pavlicek did not act alone. Indeed, the Wild Geese have all acted together to kill other Whites rather than their own, all in order to protect one another and to provide justice for one another. When Billy considers exposing them, Yasmeen reminds Billy that the Wild Geese circled around him and defended him against allegations of cocaine use, even though these allegations were true. This was done out of a sense of loyalty and family –something Yasmeen now expects in return.

Interestingly enough, Pavlicek tells Billy to do what he believes to be right rather than threaten Billy to keep quiet. While Pavlicek has no doubts in his mind that he has brought criminals to justice, he knows that he has broken laws to do so. He does not consider himself above the law, but has lived to bring justice to those deserving of it in spite of the law. While the law may not always bring about a just end to crimes, sometimes committing crimes brings about a just end. Billy is not totally convinced of this, and struggles to rationally understand where Pavlicek is coming from even though Billy personally and emotionally empathizes. The reader should note how Martha Timberlake's coffin becomes a source of controversy for Billy when he learns that Redman has used the coffin to get rid of Sweetpea Harris' body. Billy believes this is an injustice to Martha and her memory to bury a criminal with her, while Redman believes it is justice that in death, Martha should help to bring justice to a killer by getting rid of his body.



Justice is fittingly and genuinely served in many ways as the novel comes to a close. Milton Ramos is caught and arrested –and has so wrapped himself up in his crimes that escape will be impossible. Billy, who considers turning in the Wild Geese, is urged not to do so by Carmen. In addition to reasons of family, Billy accepts that justice has been delivered, even though illegally –and that must be enough. His pursuit of the Wild Geese would, in many ways be similar to Milton’s pursuit of Carmen. The past has haunted the Wild Geese long enough, and Billy considers the case of justice against the Whites to be closed. The novel ends fittingly, with a jewelry crime not only being solved, but the culprit caught and the jewels recovered, demonstrating that the law does indeed have a way of working out alright sometimes.

## Discussion Question 1

Although Pavlicek knows he is guilty of committing a crime to bring about justice, he does not believe he should not be accountable. Do you agree with Pavlicek? Justify your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe justice has been served through the Wild Geese taking out their Whites? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you believe Billy is right in refusing to turn in the Wild Geese for the killing of their Whites? Why or why not? Would you have refused to turn in the Wild Geese? Justify your answer.

## Vocabulary

exhumation, dutifully, stupefied, agile, philosophical, copious, intuiting, absolution, arbitrarily



# Characters

## Billy Graves

Billy Graves is a white, forty-something detective sergeant on Night Watch in the New York Police Department. Billy is the husband of Carmen, the father of Declan and Carlos, and the son of Billy Senior. Family, both blood and professional by way of the White Geese, means everything to Billy. Billy works the Night Watch following his accidental, nonfatal shooting of a ten-year-old boy years before while serving in the East Bronx with the Wild Geese. In the present, he takes on the case of the killing of Jeffrey Bannion at Penn Station, which brings up the past due to Bannion being John Pavlicek's White.

Billy comes to discover over the next several days that more Whites pop up dead, and that the Wild Geese are responsible. Billy has a moral crisis about whether or not to turn the Wild Geese in because justice has been served, though illegally. Billy's accidental shooting further agonizes his decision-making, since he wants to do everything right given the past. Things are only complicated when Billy must defend his family against Milton Ramos, which puts him in the place of victim. Eventually, Billy decides not to turn the Wild Geese in, considering that a form of justice has been served and the past must remain in the past.

## Carmen

Carmen Graves is the Hispanic wife of Billy Graves, the mother of Declan and Carlos, the sister of Victor, and the daughter-in-law of Billy Senior. Carmen works as a triage nurse in the ER at Saint Ann's Hospital. She has long been haunted by the role she played as a teenager in the deaths of the Ramos brothers many years before. At fifteen, Carmen had her heart broken by Rudy Ramos, so she misdirected gang members seeking to kill a drug dealer to Rudy's apartment. Carmen still holds herself responsible almost two decades later. She urges Billy to have mercy on the Wild Geese and not turn them in because the past for all of them is painful enough as it is.

## Declan and Carlos Graves

Declan and Carlos Graves are the sons of Billy and Carmen Graves. Declan, at eight, and Billy, at six, are typical kids who attend Immaculate Conception Catholic School. Both boys love spending time with their parents and grandfather, Billy Senior. When Carlos is headed home from Immaculate Conception, Milton Ramos stops him and places a red hand print on Carlos's jacket. He tells Carlos to say hello to his parents. The safety of Carlos and Declan becomes the paramount concern of their parents, who do everything they can to protect their children.



## Billy Senior

Billy Graves, Senior, is the father of Billy, the father-in-law of Carmen, and the grandfather of Declan and Carlos. Billy Senior is a gentle, respectful, and well-loved man who served for years as a police officer and later, police administrator, but is currently slowly losing his memory. Billy Senior is deeply loved by his son, for Billy Senior was the best father Billy could have asked for. It was Billy Senior who urged Billy to apply to the police academy when he was kicked out of college. Billy Senior is very close with his family, and comes to their defense when Milton Ramos holds them at gunpoint, buying time for the police to arrive.

## Milton Ramos

Milton Ramos is a Hispanic detective who stalks, harasses, and becomes violent with Billy and Carmen's family through the course of the novel. Milton seeks revenge on Carmen for giving killers the address to his family's apartment rather than a drug dealer's apartment, which resulted in the death of both of his brothers and the later death of his mother from a broken heart. Milton's desire for revenge is abated when he plans to marry Marilys to give his daughter, Sofia, a new mother, but when Marilys jilts Milton and steals ten thousand dollars from him, Milton is sent over the edge. He returns to his plans, brutally attacking Carmen's brother and later holding Carmen and Billy at gunpoint. Milton is apprehended and put in jail for his crimes.

## John Pavlicek

John Pavlicek is a white, former member of the Wild Geese, a good friend of Billy's, and a current real estate mogul. Though professionally successful and worth more than 30 million dollars, John's wife is in a mental institute. His son, John Jr., is dying of leukemia. Pavlicek becomes enraged that bad things should happen to good people while the bad walk around free. He and the other Wild Geese decide to kill of their Whites to bring about closure and justice. Pavlicek and the Geese are later found out by Billy, and they admit to what they have done. Pavlicek does not care if he is arrested for committing crimes to bring about justice. He urges Billy to do what Billy believes to be right. Billy ultimately decides to let things go, meaning Pavlicek may remain with his son until his son dies.

## Redman Brown

In his fifth marriage, Redman Brown is an Afro-American, a former member of the Wild Geese, and Billy's friend. Redman owns a funeral home. He uses his funeral parlor to dispose of the bodies of the Whites. He helps to cover the vigilante efforts of the Geese. He tries to throw Billy off the trail, but he is unsuccessful. Redman urges Billy not to follow up on things, saying that justice has been served and it would be heartless to



take so many people away from their families for getting rid of bad people who should have been brought to justice in other ways.

## Yasmeen

Yasmeen Assaf-Doyle is a Hispanic, former member of the Wild Geese and a friend of Billy's. Since leaving the Geese, Yasmeen now has a family. Yasmeen, like the other Wild Geese, is haunted by her White, Eric Cortez. She cannot stand the fact that he still walks around free. Yasmeen and the other Wild Geese engage in a plot to get rid of their Whites in the name of justice. Yasmeen personally takes out Pavlicek's White, Jeffrey Bannion. Then, she unwittingly triggers an investigation, headed up by Billy, into Bannion's death. Yasmeen is desperate to avoid Billy's turning them all in, so she threatens on exposing him for being high during the accidental shooting that occurred years ago. The Geese had defended Billy by saying that he was not high. Yasmeen is overjoyed when she learns that Billy will not be turning in the Wild Geese.

## Jimmy Whelan

Jimmy Whelan is a white, former member of the Wild Geese, and a friend of Billy's. Jimmy now works as a building superintendent. He plans on becoming the building's manager when Pavlicek buys the building. Jimmy and the other Wild Geese become part of a plot to get rid of their Whites, as a matter of closure and justice to the past. Jimmy attempts to help dissuade Billy from investigating the killings. He willingly helps to protect Billy's home as a guard when Billy is at work.

## Jeffrey Bannion

Jeffrey Bannion is killed on Saint Patrick's Day night at the beginning of the novel. It is his death which sets off Billy's investigation into the murders of the Whites. Bannion himself was the White of Pavlicek. Bannion escaped justice after he molested and murdered young Thomas Rivera. Also, there were two subsequent instances of sexual abuse of young boys. Bannion is stabbed and killed by Yasmeen.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Whites

Whites are criminals who escape justice. Billy and each other member of the Wild Geese have a personal White who has haunted them through the years. For Billy, it is the triple-murderer Curtis Taft. For Pavlicek, it is the sexual molester and murderer Jeffrey Bannion. For Yasmeen, it is murderer Eric Cortez. For Redman Brown, it is the killer Sweetpea Harris. For Jimmy, it is the killer Tomassi, who is struck by a bus and killed. In the present time, the surviving Whites are being killed off one by one by the Wild Geese, bringing to light a debate about justice for which Billy struggles to find an answer.

## The Wild Geese

The “Wild Geese” is a nickname given to a former group of seven young police officers who served in the East Bronx in the 1990s. The public loved and respected the Wild Geese, who could always be counted on to ensure justice would be served. The group slowly broke up following Billy’s accidental shooting, with one member dying of cancer, another moving to Arizona, and the remaining five (Billy, Pavlicek, Yasmeen, Jimmy, and Redman) meeting up for dinner once a month and staying in regular contact with each other. With the impending demise of Pavlicek’s son, the Wild Geese decide to go back into the field as vigilantes to end the reigns of their Whites, determined that some justice should be done when no justice is available for someone like Pavlicek’s son.

## Red Hand Print

Milton Ramos places a red hand print on Carlos’s jacket as a way to intimidate and harass Billy and Carmen. Jimmy Whelan fittingly refers to the red hand print as the “mark of the Beast,” a reference to the Devil and to evil. The red hand print is not only symbolic of evil and the Devil. It also represents the guilt that Carmen feels because of the blood on her hands. The blood on her hands is the blood of Milton’s dead family members.

There is a subtle reference to Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” through the red hand print, in which Lady Macbeth psychologically sees the blood she has on her hands for the deaths she has orchestrated. Carmen still dwells on her actions as a teenager. The blood is something she can never wash from her hands.

## Timberwolf Funeral Expenses

When Billy learns that Martha Timberwolf has been stabbed to death by Shakira, who is the sister of Memori Williams (a victim of Curtis Taft), Billy feels personally responsible



for not being able to put away Taft. As a symbolic act of respect and remorse, Billy fronts the entire cost of the Timberwolfs' funeral expenses. As a result, the family is able to have a good funeral for their lost relative. This demonstrates just how much Billy is pained by the cycle of violence that has spread from Taft. He is doubtful that justice will ever be served on Taft.

## **Tibetan Fur Coat**

Yasmeen wears a Tibetan fur coat that she owns when she stabs and kills Jeffrey Bannion on Saint Patrick's Day night at Penn Station. The coat is very distinguishable against the regular winter coats of other revelers and passengers at the Station. Billy is able to conclusively establish that Yasmeen is the killer of Bannion based on the fact that she owns the coat seen on the film. Yasmeen admits as much, and she later burns the coat to ensure it cannot be used as evidence.

## **CCTV**

A CCTV (Closed-circuit television) system is installed at Billy's house by the police after Billy's father is abducted by Milton Ramos. The CCTV system records twenty-four hours a day, but it provides only limited additional security. For example, when Ramos throws the garbage bag of paint and clothing on the porch, the cameras record only the bag being thrown. This frustrates Billy, who recognizes that even more security is needed to protect his family.

## **Residential Buildings**

Residential buildings are purchased, rehabbed, and rented out by John Pavlicek, beginning while he is still a police officer. First, Pavlicek clears the criminal residents from the buildings. Then, he rents only to good people, often the elderly. Pavlicek explains that this is a way for him to help sanitize and reform the bad areas of New York. Pavlicek owns twenty-six buildings and is worth more than \$30-million.

## **Cell Phone**

Billy is on his cell phone with the police department when Milton Ramos appears at Billy's house with a gun. Billy never has a chance to hang up, so the police are alerted to Milton's presence and the unfolding hostage situation. Because Billy's cell phone is still on, the police are able to send units to Billy's house and to apprehend Milton before he can kill anyone.



## **Martha Timberwolf's Coffin**

Martha Timberwolf's coffin becomes a source of controversy for Billy when he learns that Redman has used the coffin to get rid of Sweetpea Harris's body. Billy believes this is an injustice to Martha and her memory to bury a criminal with her. Redman believes it is justice that in death Martha should help to bring justice to a killer by getting rid of his body. Redman uses the opportunity to tell Billy not to pursue things against the Wild Geese because it will do more harm than good.

## **Baseball bat**

A baseball bat is wielded by Milton Ramos to savagely beat Victor. The baseball bat is a terrifying weapon that leaves Victor in a bloody, bruised state. In his rush to get away, Milton leaves the baseball bat behind. Milton's fingerprints on the bat later implicate him in the beating of Victor following Milton's arrest at Billy's house and help to seal Milton's fate in justice.





# Settings

## Penn Station

Penn Station is a major rail station which links New York and Long Island by way of the Long Island Railroad. Penn Station is where Jeffrey Bannion is killed by Yasmeen, and is where Billy is called to investigate the killing. What disturbs Billy is that Penn Station is a very public place, and the killing was done in view of security cameras. Billy at first can't seem to make sense of anything about the case, primarily because of horrible security film footage, but also because of the lack of reliable Station witnesses. It becomes apparent that the killing was intentionally done on Saint Patrick's Day night at the Station, when the crowds of people would be mostly drunk and distracted. Rather than such a public place as the Station providing a plethora of witnesses, the Station provided a whirlwind of chaos and very unreliable witnesses. This means the killing was not random, but it was premeditated to take advantage of the situation.

## Manhattan

Manhattan is one of the five boroughs of New York City, and it is the borough given to Night Watch to patrol. Manhattan includes everything from the financial district and Wall Street up through Central Park and on to Harlem, making for a wide diversity of people and crimes. Most of Billy's calls come from the Harlem area, where people are poorer and crime is greater. Many of Billy's calls not associated with Bannion come from the Harlem area, demonstrating the area has a great need of reform. People like Pavlicek are providing reform by rehabbing homes and renting only to good and decent people.

## Yonkers

Yonkers is a suburb-city of New York, located beyond Manhattan and beside Mount Vernon. Yonkers' residents are mainly working and middle class people. Yonkers is where Billy, Carmen, and their family reside. Compared to New York City, the area is relatively safe. However, it becomes a nightmare for Billy and his family when Milton Ramos begins to stalk and violently target them. Yonkers is where Ramos later confronts Billy and Carmen at gunpoint and where Ramos is finally apprehended.

## Brown's Funeral Home

Redman Brown owns Brown's Funeral Home in New York City. The funeral home is the host for the funerals of scores of young residents who fall into crime and lose their lives. The funeral home also comes to serve the Timberlake and Pavlicek funerals later in the novel. Redman uses his funeral home to hide the body of Sweetpea Harris after Sweetpea is murdered. Billy visits the funeral home several times, not only to attend



funerals, but to seek advice and counsel from Redman. It is at the funeral home that Redman tells Billy to stop investigating the killing of the Whites.

## **2130 Longfellow Avenue**

2130 Longfellow Avenue is the address of the apartment building where Milton Ramos grew up. During the novel, Milton returns with his daughter to his old apartment building. He tries to bring peace to the past, but it does not work. The visit serves as a symbolic journey into the past. Milton's brothers were killed and his mother died in the building when Carmen directed gang members to the Ramos' apartment. Milton has no idea why Carmen would do such a thing, but he is determined to find out her reason. He is also determined to make her pay for the past. Longfellow Avenue becomes a catalyst for greater violence as a result.



# Themes and Motifs

## Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel “The Whites” by Richard Price. In the novel, mystery involves the unknown. There are multiple instances of mystery in the novel, with each adding to or fueling the plot in some way. Only a few of the smaller mysteries remain unsolved.

When the novel begins, Billy’s task as a Night Watch detective is to solve the crimes and mysteries he encounters. These range from simple robberies and domestic calls to violence and murder. The supposed theft of an Olympic Silver Medal and a gang fight are among those calls Billy faces on Saint Patrick’s Day night, in addition to the killing of Jeffrey Bannion. Bannion’s killing is a mystery which will open up old wounds from the past for Billy and for all of the members of the Wild Geese. Two small mysteries never solved are why Mike had blood on his coat and why he later disappeared, even though he apparently had nothing to do with the killing.

As Billy seeks to solve Bannion’s murder, he discovers that due to the public place and the confusion generated by Saint Patrick’s Day crowds mean the murder was premeditated. As he investigates Bannion’s death, he learns that the Whites of the other members of the Geese are dropping one by one. Billy comes to suspect that Pavlicek is behind the murders, but this is a mystery which eludes solving for most of the novel. Only late in the novel does Pavlicek admit he is involved. His motive and who else worked with him remain a mystery until the end of the novel.

Pavlicek has not acted alone. All of the Wild Geese are involved in some way in the killing and disposal of the bodies where possible. The mystery of why is later revealed to Billy as well, when the various Geese explain they are sick of seeing their Whites walk around free and easy while good people suffer and die. Vigilante justice, rather than no justice at all, is relied upon to bring the Whites down. Likewise, the mystery of Pavlicek’s exhaustion is emotional distress over the coming death of Pavlicek’s son, John, Jr. It is this solved mystery which, in part, compels Billy not to turn in the Wild Geese for the killing of the Whites.

## Justice

Justice is an important theme in the novel “The Whites” by Richard Price. Justice dispenses punishment to those who do not act morally or legally. Billy and the other members of the Wild Geese struggle with justice not being served to the Whites throughout the novel. Justice is something which escapes the Whites.

When the novel begins, Billy is tasked with solving the killing of Bannion. Although Bannion is not a good guy, justice still needs to be done under the legal system. It is ironic that even criminals who escape justice are equal under the protection of the laws



that they themselves violated against their victims. Billy is no fan of Bannion and could care less that Bannion and other Whites are turning up dead. However, society requires upholding laws for the order of others, including the innocent.

This is something that Pavlicek cannot stomach or handle, especially given the injustice dealt to his own good, kindhearted, and morally just son who is dying of leukemia. Horrible men like Curtis Taft are walking around free and healthy. Taft is continuing on with his life as though he never committed a crime. As Billy later learns, Eric Cortez has been rendered totally incoherent and immobile after being shot in the head. Pavlicek, though he does not readily admit to any of the killings of the Whites, does not deny them and argues that the Whites are finally receiving justice. Billy is confronted with the great moral quandary of the novel. What constitutes justice? It is a question which has plagued the other Whites as well. Certainly, it is unjust that someone like Bannion, Harris, or Cortez could live happy lives after ruining other lives.

Breaking laws to serve justice to others is still questionable at the end of the novel. It is clear that Pavlicek and the other Wild Geese consider justice to be justice no matter how it is dispensed. Billy, who is still an active police detective, finds it difficult to either agree or disagree. Taking the law into one's own hands could be dangerous, especially if the individual being served justice was not guilty. However, in the current situation, it is clear that the Whites are indeed guilty, though the dispensation of justice has not been through the regular or legal means. In many ways, Carmen can be considered to be Ramos's own White. Ramos is set on taking revenge against her. He thinks that justice must be done no matter the cost.

Billy considers turning in the Wild Geese, but he is urged not to do so by Carmen for reasons of family and her own past. Billy reluctantly accepts that justice has been delivered, even though illegally, and that must be enough. His pursuit of the Wild Geese would be similar to Milton's pursuit of Carmen. The past has haunted the Wild Geese long enough, and Billy considers the case of justice against the Whites to be closed. The novel ends fittingly, with a jewelry crime being solved. The culprit is caught and the jewels are recovered. This final outcome of the crime demonstrates that justice is found sometimes.

## The Past

The Past is an important theme in the novel "The Whites" by Richard Price. Thematically, the past includes incidents, events, situations, and circumstances in a person's history which can affect the present. The past has tremendous bearing on the novel in three ways.

One part of the past which holds great sway over the present is Billy's time with the Wild Geese. The Geese were like a family. They protected their own, including Billy during his accidental, nonfatal shooting of a young boy. The shooting began the dissolution of the group, as one by one, the group went their own way. Each member of the group was haunted by their White, a criminal who escaped justice. In the present, the death of



each White is met with celebration by the Geese, who still keep in touch with each other and get together once a month for dinner. The suffering and deaths of good people, such as Pavlicek's son, awaken a desire in the Geese for closure with their pasts. They decide to act as vigilantes and bring their Whites to justice. It is these killings that Billy must contend with in the present.

Another part of the past which comes back to menace the present is through Milton Ramos. Ramos has long held Carmen responsible for the deaths of his brothers and his mother. He now wants revenge. In many ways, Carmen is Ramos' own White.. Ramos' targeting of Carmen's children and brother are reflective of the losses that Ramos' mother endured before dying herself. It is similar to the loss that Ramos himself endured when he lost his brothers in the past.

It is not until later that Carmen ultimately comes clean about the past to Billy. This is the third way in which the past has tremendous bearing on the present. Carmen tells about directing killers to the Ramos' apartment after having her heart broken by Rudy Ramos and without thinking such things through. Carmen's entire life has been dedicated to making up for the deaths by praying and becoming a nurse to save the lives of as many other people as she could. The horrors of the past should stay in the past, she believes, which is why she helps to convince Billy not to pursue legal justice against the Wild Geese.

## Family

Family is an important theme in the novel "The Whites" by Richard Price. Family, thematically, involves the love, compassion, loyalty, encouragement, and support of and between individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who act in accord with the traditional family unit. Family proves to be tremendously influential, and invaluable, not only to Billy's life, but to other characters and the plot of the novel as well.

For Billy, family is everything. He works hard to earn money to help provide for his wife, children, and father. Billy has long resisted putting his father into an institution, out of a sense of love and loyalty for family, and out of respect for his father who ensured that Billy turned out well. When Billy's family is targeted by Milton Ramos, Billy does everything in his power to protect his family. His decision to have his father live with the family comes back to benefit them greatly, as Billy's father intervenes against Milton when Milton holds Billy and Carmen at gunpoint.

For Milton Ramos, family is also everything. As a child, Milton only ever had his family to rely on. When his family was destroyed through Carmen's actions, Milton vowed revenge. Much later, Milton's wife is tragically killed in a car accident, so their daughter, Sofia, becomes Milton's world. As time passes, Milton cannot let the past settle, and so once again renews his desire for revenge against Carmen. However, Marilys's marriage scheme causes Milton to forget about Carmen for a while, until the discovery of the scheme as only a scheme sends him over the edge. Milton focuses his efforts on



scaring and harming Carmen's family members, so that Carmen too may know the fear and feelings of loss of family.

Family can also be seen in the loyalty, friendship, and camaraderie of the Wild Geese. As Billy himself notes early on, the Geese were like a family because they protected their own and the loved ones of their own. When Billy was eyed for being high during his accidental shooting, the Geese unhesitatingly rallied around him to protect him and deny this. In the present day, the Geese circle the wagons once more to protect one another as they decide to take out their Whites and finally deliver justice twenty years later. Billy ultimately holds to the loyalty of the group, refusing to turn them in as a question of family loyalty in addition to the pleading of his wife and the understanding that justice, though illegally dispensed, has still be done.

## Crime

Crime is an important theme in the novel "The Whites" by Richard Price. Crime – immoral and illegal activities which include everything from theft to murder –perforate the novel. Crimes both major and minor, serious and petty, become the background against which Billy operates as a police officer. As a police officer, Billy is sworn to fight crime and uphold the law.

The crimes that Billy sees on a nightly basis are quite common in New York. Some, such as the Silver Medal incident, are easily explained away and not even considered a crime. Others, such as domestic battery, require serious police work to bring about justice.. Sometimes justice is slow in coming, while at other times, it is never coming at all, as is the case with some of the Whites that appear in the novel.

The killing of Bannion opens up a new kind of crime for Billy, because the killing of Bannion and the other Whites is less murder than vigilante justice. While the killing of the Whites is certainly a crime because it is illegal, the Geese argue that the killings are not immoral crimes because the killings are bringing about long overdue justice. Billy, who is still an active detective, has difficulty either accepting or rejecting this train of thought relating to the killing of the Whites. While he understands that these acts are indeed crimes, he ultimately decides they are not in need of turning the Geese in.

By that same virtue, the Geese consider the freedom of the Whites not only to be a miscarriage of justice, but a crime in and of itself. The Geese consider the killing of the Whites from a purely moral standpoint, noting that while the law may not provide justice, the Geese can. They consider it a crime that those left behind by the dead must suffer without those they have lost, and they consider it a crime that the dead have not received their justice. While Pavlicek does not consider the killing of the Whites to be a moral crime, he does accept that it is a legal crime –and so offers Billy the chance to turn them in. Yet Billy himself cannot come down on either side of the situation, so in the end, he chooses simply to let it go –perhaps a legal crime, perhaps not a moral crime in and of itself.

# Styles

## Point of View

Richard Price tells his novel “The Whites” from the third-person, omniscient perspective. This is done for at least two reasons. First, Price alternates chapters through the course of the novel, with one chapter belonging to events surrounding Billy Graves and the next chapter belonging to events surrounding Milton Ramos. This allows the reader an omniscient point of view, seeing what is going on with Billy and Milton while the two are not aware of one another. The weaving back and forth between characters, as well as with much of the novel being the recollections of Billy and Milton of past events, means that the third-person narrator acts as common, unifying strand tying both men’s stories together. This in turn makes it easier for the reader to follow the plot as it unfolds. Likewise, given the vast array of important characters with both large and small parts, and given the wide-sweep and diversity of the characters, situations, and places featured in the novel, the third-person narrator helps to keep order by way of a standard voice. For example, the end of Chapter 11 features a nighttime conversation between Billy and Feeley as they go over the murder scene of Tomika Washington, while the subsequent Ramos chapter begins the next morning at seven-thirty. The transition between them is effortless, for the narrator remains the same and employs the same, standard language.

## Language and Meaning

Richard Price tells his novel “The Whites” in language that is quick, simple, streetwise, and to the point. This is done for several reasons. First, the sparse language lends a sense of briskness and urgency to the fast-paced nature of the plot of the novel, which occurs only over the course of several days. Second, the use of slang and street language adds a sense of realism and gritty reality to the setting in New York. Consider, for example, the following line from Chapter 1: “He had forgotten all about the dinner, the monthly steak house reunion of the self-christened Wild Geese, seven young cops averaging three years on the Job, fresh to anti-crime in the late ‘90s, a tight crew given a ticket to ride in one of the worse precincts in the East Bronx.” Third, the Spartan language denotes that the characters of the novel are current and former detectives with little time for nonsense or to mince words, for they are involved in a fast-paced and hectic job.

## Structure

Richard Price divides his novel “The Whites” into seventeen linear, numbered chapters, with the first sixteen followed by supplemental chapters detailing the thoughts and actions of Milton Ramos. The primary chapters which follow Billy are numbered from 1 through 17, while Ramos’s chapters are all entitled “Milton Ramos” and not denoted by

any number or other identifying feature. Because the past is so important, large sections of the numbered chapters and Ramos's chapters are devoted to reflections and recollections of the past while the characters work and operate in the present. Where one chapter leaves off, the next picks up sooner or later. For example, Chapter 13's Ramos section features Ramos packing some of his daughter's clothing, as well as red paint, into a bag, while Chapter 14 recounts Billy's discovery of the exploded trash bag and the mess of paint all over the porch. As noted in the point-of-view section, this allows the reader to know what Billy and Ramos are up to, even when Billy and Ramos do not know what the other is up to.





## Quotes

Mainly he hoped each night that most of Manhattan's nocturnal mayhem was not worthy of his squad's attention, just petty shit that could be kicked back to patrol.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** As Billy heads out on patrol each night, he hopes like normal that most of the calls he has to deal with are simple and can be handled by regular officers. However, this does not remain the case for long. The stabbing at Penn Station of Jeffrey Bannion reawakens old wounds among members of the Wild Geese, all relating to Whites.

...they had all met their personal Whites...

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 300)

**Importance:** The narrator explains that each of the members of the Wild Geese is haunted by a White—a criminal who escaped justice for one reason or another. In some cases, the criminals are killed by their lifestyles and crimes. In other cases, the WGs continue to plague the criminals, hounding them and going over clues to the open cases to find ways to bring them to justice.

All he had known this morning was that he wanted Carmen to feel things, to experience things, give her a taste of what it feels like to have the most precious people in your life snatched away from you, to feel without any warning the ground buckle and split beneath your feet.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7, Milton Ramos paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Milton wants revenge against Carmen for what she did to his family decades before, when she directed killers to his apartment. He wants her to feel what it is like to lose those she loves most, or at least to fear it for the time being. Through Milton, the past is coming back to haunt Carmen, just as the past is coming back to haunt Billy in other ways. Both Billy and Carmen will now have the battle of their lives.

He had no idea how or when it should end.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7, Milton Ramos paragraph 5)

**Importance:** As Milton considers what he will do to Carmen—at the moment, simply causing her distress—he considers the fact that he has no idea how his campaign of terror will end. He knows if he keeps it up long enough, he'll be caught. He also knows he would lose his daughter, which is something which both interests and disturbs him. Milton's thought pattern here demonstrates that he is himself deeply disturbed mentally, and is very dangerous.

Even worse, Milton was coming to discover, each act of carefully doled-out chaos set up a craving in him to get to the next one. He felt a burning urge to keep jacking up the stakes, intensify the act itself, until he could achieve something akin to the sensation of



finality he had always experienced, for better or worse, in the past.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 9, Milton Ramos paragraph 34)

**Importance:** As Milton continues to stalk and harass Carmen and Billy, he realizes that each effort on his part is like taking a drug –it is almost as if he gets high on each act of cruelty. Most recently, Milton has been stalking Victor, Carmen’s brother, which has once again brought him to a new level of dangerous excitement. Just as Milton had once experienced a feeling of finality with the death of his family, he wants to experience such finality again –but of his own making. Milton is slowly losing control, and approaching the realm of deadliness.

No one’s immune. None of us.  
-- Pavlicek (Chapter 10 paragraph 58)

**Importance:** After Carmen is attacked at the hospital, she agrees to move into one of Pavlicek’s apartments. Pavlicek is shocked and angered to learn that Billy doesn’t have security cameras at his house. Pavlicek underscores the point that just because they are police officers doesn’t mean they are immune from crimes. No one is immune from crimes. This is an important reality check for Billy, who endeavors to do more to protect his family.

Even if you’re not a paranoid delusional and somebody out there’s taking these shitheads out, so what? Who cares? Animals like these? They tend to breed. And so when they go young? It’s called the trickle-down effect, our gift to the future.  
-- Yasmeen (Chapter 12 paragraph 135)

**Importance:** When Billy explains he is freaking out because someone is killing all of the Whites belonging to the Wild Geese, Yasmeen shrugs it off. She could care less if someone is killing the Whites, because they are all criminals who leave more criminals in their wake. To Yasmeen, it is good that someone is taking out the Whites because it means less hatred and hurt in the world. Likewise, she knows the Whites have it coming to them.

All of us.  
-- Redman (Chapter 14 paragraph 171)

**Importance:** Billy at long last discovers that Pavlicek seems to be responsible for the White killings. But as Billy presents this information to Redman, Redman tells Billy to let things be. He explains that all of the Wild Geese have been in on putting away the Whites, and that Pavlicek did his part. Billy is stunned to learn this, but Redman tells Billy to let things be.

He had been riveted by the metal-eyed captain, his blazing doggedness, and in the end, when he went into the sea strapped to the beast that he had lived to kill, it has struck Milton as the perfect outcome. And that’s how it should end between him and Carmen.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 15, Milton Ramos paragraph 20)



**Importance:** Milton visits the graves of his mother and brother, and knows he should be among them. He feels at peace in the cemetery, and longs to be interred with the dead. He remembers watching *Moby Dick* in high school, and imagines Carmen to be his white whale. He knows he has been living to kill Carmen, and knows her death will probably mean his. This fatalistic conception of life means that Milton is prepared to do anything he must for revenge –and will not be deterred.

You pursue this, you'll be taking people away from their kids, so where's yours.  
-- Redman (Chapter 16 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** Billy goes to confront Redman about learning the truth about the WGs and the Whites. The WGs have taken care of the Whites of each other rather than their own. Redman admits he has buried Sweetpea Harris for the WGS in Martha Timberwolf's casket. Billy asks Redman where his heart is. Redman, who believes that taking out murderers and criminals is justified vengeance, asks Billy where his heart is because if Billy pursues things, he'll be ruining several families.

I made my dent.  
-- Pavlicek (Chapter 16 paragraph 135)

**Importance:** Billy confronts Pavlicek with the truth last. Billy feels a sense of loyalty to the WGs, but also a troubled soul from sitting on three bodies. Pavlicek tells Billy to turn them all in. Pavlicek, who has always been looking to make a mark on the world, believes he has finally made his dent. It is possible that Pavlicek may be referring to the twenty-six buildings he owns, his time as a police officer, or even his son –but it is most likely he is referring to bringing justice to those who escaped it in the past.

You're Milton.  
-- Carmen (Chapter 17 paragraph 117)

**Importance:** When Milton Ramos confronts Billy and Carmen about Carmen's past, Carmen doesn't recognize him at first –but very quickly does. Milton demands to know why Carmen fingered Rudy for a dealer so many years before. Carmen explains it was due to heartbreak. Billy now understands who Milton Ramos is, and why he has been stalking the family –for revenge for something that happened decades before.