Winter in the Blood Study Guide

Winter in the Blood by James Welch (poet)

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

With its sharp poetic imagery and its realistic portrayal of life on a Montana reservation, *Winter in the Blood* is considered one of the most important works of the movement known as the Native American Renaissance. This refers to works published from the late-1960s onwards, when Native American writers began to become more prominent in the American literary landscape.

Author Biography

Ethnicity 1: Native American

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1940

Deathdate: 2003

James Welch was born on November 18, 1940, on the Blackfeet reservation in Browning, Montana. His father, a welder, hospital administrator, and later rancher and farmer, was a Blackfeet Indian. His mother, who trained as a stenographer, was a member of the Gros Ventre tribe.

Welch was raised as a Catholic and attended schools on the Blackfeet and Fort Belknap reservations before moving with his family to Minneapolis. He graduated from high school in 1958 and briefly attended the University of Minnesota before returning to Montana. He graduated from the University of Montana in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts. He began writing poetry and entered the master of fine arts program, but he did not complete the degree. In 1968, he married Lois Monk, a university teacher. The following year, Welch was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant. This led to the publication of his first collection of poems, *Riding the Earthboy 40: Poems* (1971).

Riding the Earthboy 40: Poems was followed by the publication of Welch's first novel, *Winter in the Blood*, which he wrote between 1971 and 1973 and which was published in 1974. Critical reception of the novel was enthusiastic. Welch's second novel, *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), also featured an alienated protagonist; it was about an alcoholic half-Indian, half-white man. Welch's third novel represented a departure from his previous work. *Fools Crow* (1986) was a historical novel that told the story of the Blackfeet Indians in the 1860s, culminating in the massacre on the Marias River in 1870. *Fools Crow* was awarded the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Book award in 1987. Welch's fourth novel was *The Indian Lawyer* (1990), about an Indian attorney and congressional candidate who served on the Montana prison parole board (as did Welch). The attorney gets involved with the wife of a prisoner and is blackmailed, forcing him to return to practice law on the reservation.

For his next project, Welch collaborated with filmmaker Paul Stekler on the PBS documentary about the battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, in which the Seventh Cavalry under General George Custer was annihilated by Sioux Indians. Welch then published his own account of the battle from an Indian point of view, *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (1994).

Welch's final novel, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000), was a historical novel about a Sioux Indian who as a child witnessed the battle of Little Bighorn. The protagonist of this novel joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which toured Europe, and was left behind in France recovering from an injury. Remaining in France, he had to make his way in an alien culture.

Welch was a Visiting professor at the University of Washington and Cornell University. In 1997, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas.

Welch died on August 4, 2003, of a heart attack, at the age of sixty-two.

Plot Summary

Part One

Winter in the Blood begins on an Indian reservation in Montana sometime in the 1960s. It is summer. The narrator, a thirty-two-year-old Blackfeet Indian, comes home after a drinking spree in town, where he got into a fight with a white man in a bar. When he arrives at the cattle ranch where he lives□with his mother, Teresa, and his grandmother□he finds that Agnes, his Cree girlfriend, who had been living with them for three weeks, has left. She has taken his gun and electric razor.

The narrator goes fishing and comes home with Teresa's friend, Lame Bull. After supper, he reads and listens to the radio with his grandmother. Lame Bull and Teresa go away for three days. When they return, they report that they got married in Malta, one of the small towns that border the reservation.

The next day, the narrator helps Lame Bull on the ranch. In conversation with Teresa, he recalls events from his childhood, such as the day he accidentally drowned five ducks he had won at a fair and the death of his father ten years ago, who froze to death returning home drunk one winter's night.

Lame Bull hires Raymond Long Knife to work on the ranch, but Raymond is dissatisfied with the pay. Lame Bull punches him on the nose and takes him back to town.

After a night in which the narrator recalls stories told by his grandmother and his dead brother, Lame Bull gives the narrator a ride to Dodson. The narrator then takes a bus to Malta, fifty miles from his home, to find Agnes, even though he claims she is not worth the trouble. In a bar, he meets Dougie, Agnes's brother. Dougie gets the narrator to help him rob a white man who is drunk and passed out.

At a bar in a hotel, the narrator meets a man from New York, who tells him he has left his wife and intended to fly to the Middle East but instead drove out west. He tells the narrator he wants to go fishing and insists on it even when he is told there are no fish in the river. The man talks to the barmaid, thinking he knows her. She tells the narrator that she used to be a dancer, and the man paid her to dance for him. He recognizes her and rushes out of the bar.

The narrator wakes up the next morning with a hangover. He goes to another bar and remembers that the barmaid was with him in his hotel room the previous night.

Part Two

The narrator rides his horse, Bird, to visit an old blind man, Yellow Calf, who lives in a shack three miles away. They drink coffee and Yellow Calf comments that the world is □cockeyed.□

Lame Bull drives with Teresa and the narrator to Harlem, where the narrator gets talking to a woman named Malvina in a bar. He spends the night sleeping on the couch in Malvina's house. In the morning, she rejects his sexual advances and tells him to go away.

The narrator travels to Havre, since he has been told that Agnes is there. In a restaurant, he again encounters the man he met in Malta. The man thinks an old man at the bar is eavesdropping on them, and he wants the narrator to meet him at the Legion Club. After the man leaves, the old man's face plunges into his oatmeal. The narrator realizes he is dead.

At the Legion Club, the mysterious man wins several boxes of chocolate-covered cherries and a teddy bear at a punchboard. He says he is going to Canada to escape the FBI. He wants the narrator to accompany him by car to Calgary and then return alone with the car, which would be his to keep.

They walk through the streets of Havre, the narrator carrying the teddy bear. The man buys a hunting knife and a used Ford Falcon. As they drive downtown, the narrator spots Agnes standing in the street next to her brother.

The narrator and the mysterious man plan to start for Canada at midnight. That evening, the narrator goes out to walk, and a movie house showing old Westerns jogs his memory. He is taken back to his childhood. On a winter's day twenty years ago, when he was twelve and his brother Mose fourteen, their father sent them to bring the cows in. They rode out on horseback at dawn and, by lunchtime, had gathered over half of the seventy-eight cows and three bulls.

The narrative returns to the present. The narrator finds Agnes in a bar, but Dougie and his friends beat him up. The narrator ends up on the street with a broken tooth. A woman named Marlene helps him, and he goes back to a bar and has a whiskey. He then observes the man who wants to go to Canada being arrested and taken away in a police car. He meets Marlene again, and they spend the night together in a hotel. He leaves around mid-morning and decides he has had enough of Havre.

Part Three

The narrator hitchhikes a ride home with a man in an Oldsmobile. When he arrives home, no one is there, not even his grandmother. He assumes she must have died, which is confirmed when Teresa and Lame Bull return in the evening. They took the body to Harlem for preparation before burial. They drink a glass of wine. The next day, they dig her grave.

The narrative returns to the narrator's memories of herding the cows with Mose. It was getting dark, and they had to get the cows across the highway. A calf broke away, and the narrator's horse, Bird, gave chase. A car went past them, and hit Mose, killing him.

Back in the present, after the grave has been dug, the narrator rides to visit Yellow Calf.

Part Four

Yellow Calf talks about the narrator's grandmother, whom he knew when he was young. She was the youngest wife of Standing Bear, a Blackfeet. Yellow Calf recalls a terrible winter of starvation, when they had to run from the soldiers. Standing Bear was killed in battle with the Gros Ventre. The Blackfeet turned against the narrator's grandmother, blaming her for bringing them despair and death. She was left to fend for herself, surviving only because Yellow Calf brought her food. The narrator suddenly realizes that Yellow Calf is his grandfather, not Doagie, a man of mixed race, as he had formerly believed.

The narrator returns home, thinking about the affair between his grandmother and Yellow Calf and wondering how it could have remained hidden for so long.

Ferdinand Horn and his wife visit to offer their condolences. The narrator then struggles, with the help of Bird, to free a cow that is lying on its side in mud. The cow is freed, but the effort kills Bird.

Epilogue

The next day, Teresa, Lame Bull, and the narrator bury the old lady. The narrator's thoughts stray to his future. He will have to see a doctor about his injured knee. He also thinks he may start again with Agnes and perhaps even marry her.

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Winter in the Blood is a novel about the modern life of an American Indian. This novel takes a look at Indians through the eyes of someone who has lived this life and knows it better than most writers of this novel type. The plot follows the plight of a young man who has lost his sense of identity due to his heritage, family secrets, and the death of his brother. The young man accidentally discovers some truths about his family's past and this information finally frees him to discover the man he really is. It is a novel full of truth and hope.

The narrator makes his way home from a night of drinking, battered and bruised from a bar fight. While walking, the narrator thinks about the people waiting at home for him, his mother, grandmother, and a girlfriend, and feels no particular emotion for any of them.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter simply introduces the narrator, who makes no mention of his name, and begins to introduce the pervading theme: lack of identity. The narrator talks of how he has no emotion when he thinks of his mother and grandmother or the woman who lives with him, whom his mother thinks is his wife. This lack of emotion is an example of the young man's lack of identity. The young man has no emotion for himself so he cannot feel for these people in his life, either.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

When the narrator arrives home, his mother tells him that the girl has left with his rifle and his electric razor. The narrator seems unconcerned, but the mother expects him to try to retrieve his rifle. The mother sends the narrator out to get water. On his way, he thinks of how his mother thought he was married to the girl and was polite because of her Catholic values. The grandmother, however, knew the girl was Cree and plotted silently to kill her.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter further introduces the mother and her attitude toward her son, one of authority and mild respect. The chapter also further discusses the young woman the mother believed to be her son's wife, expresses how she was Cree Indian and therefore an enemy of the grandmother who must be old enough to remember the old Indian feuds. This chapter also touches very briefly on the theme of the plight of the American Indians as the narrator mentions the refusal of a local priest to bury the Indian dead in their family cemeteries on the reservation.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

The narrator reaches the river to fish and thinks how the water has no fish. Everyone thought the lack of fish was because of run-off from a sugar beet factory, but the factory closed several years ago and there are still no fish. The narrator thinks of his father while at the river. His father liked to go into the towns and tell the white men stories. His father could also fix almost anything mechanical. The narrator's fishing line breaks.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter introduces the narrator's father, who has died before the opening of the novel. The narrator thinks of his father with some affection in contrast to the lack of emotion with which he thinks of his mother and grandmother. This introduction is important because it discusses his father's affinity for telling the white man stories, something that foreshadows a more in-depth discussion of his father.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Lame Bull, a friend of the narrator's mother, joins him at the river. They discuss the fish and then talk about a flood that happened twelve years ago. Lame Bull remembers the narrator being a child when the flood took place even though he was in his twenties. They go into the house where Lame Bull teases Teresa, the mother. The narrator goes out to the barn to separate the calf from its mother since they are trying to wean it, then feeds the animals.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

The introduction of Lame Bull is important on two counts. First, it is clear that he is the mother's boyfriend, which foreshadows a change in the family dynamics. Second, Lame Bull purposely mistakes the narrator's age while telling a story and attempts to make himself sound better than the narrator's father, which adds a small amount of tension to the plot and brings into the story the theme of lack of identity again as the narrator struggles to prove his age and to protect the memory of his father.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

After dinner, Lame Bull and Teresa leave the house. The narrator attempts to talk to his grandmother, but she only grunts. The narrator turns on the radio, prepares his grandmother's pipe for her, and sits down to read a magazine he has already read many times.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

The narrator introduces the grandmother by showing that she does not talk and that he has enough respect for her to care for her needs. This serves only to show that the grandmother is not scenery in the story, but will prove to be important to the development of the plot later in the novel.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Lame Bull and Teresa come back three days later with new clothes and boots. They have gotten married.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

The marriage of Lame Bull and Teresa is important foreshadowing, as the reader is left to wonder what this union will mean to the narrator.

Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Through marriage, Lame Bull has gained a three hundred and sixty acre ranch. The next morning, the narrator and Lame Bull get up early to retrieve Lame Bull's belongings from his home.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

Lame Bull moves into the home the narrator shares with his mother and grandmother; he also takes possession of the family ranch. This chapter again foreshadows the effect Lame Bull's presence will have on the narrator and the dynamics of the family.

Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Teresa and the narrator remember how they came to have a duck named Amos. The narrator's father won a group of chicks at the fair, but the boys forgot to fill the water tub and all the others died except Amos. Teresa remembers having eaten Amos for Christmas dinner, but the narrator remembers a bobcat killed Amos. When Lame Bull leaves the room, his mother says she killed Amos.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Teresa seems to think that she cannot admit her strength in front of Lame Bull, nor speak about First Raise as though he were a good man. Teresa is hesitant to recall how First Raise killed the big turkey for Christmas dinner. Instead, Teresa first claims that Amos was killed by a bobcat and then insists that she killed him for Christmas dinner. Teresa is confused, and her confusion only works to increase the narrator's own struggle to remember his past and to find his own identity, again touching on the predominant theme.

Part 1, Chapter 9

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

The narrator asks about his father, First Raise, and why he was not home very often. Teresa insists he was home often and that he was on his way home when he died. The narrator remembers he ans his mother finding his father's body in the snow, though Teresa insists some nameless person found his body. The narrator asks if his father was unhappy and she insists he was simply restless. Teresa complains about her husband's habit of drinking in the bars and compares her son to him. The narrator thinks that no one expects much from Teresa and that is what they usually get, which may be why his father stayed away so much. Then his mother asks about his wife and suggests there is not enough for him on the ranch and he should look elsewhere.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

Again Teresa's memories and those of the narrator differ greatly. The narrator remembers his father always gone, but his mother insists he was not gone very often. The narrator suggests that his father was unhappy and his mother calls him restless. Teresa goes back and forth in her opinion of her husband, at first criticizing him and then defending him. This adds to the narrator's confusion in his memories of his father and adds to his identity crisis, again touching on the theme of lack of identity. Finally, the mother suggests that the narrator go find his wife or someone else, somewhere else. This foreshadows a time when the narrator will decide which action to follow.

Part 1, Chapter 10

Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

Lame Bull is happy being the proprietor of his own ranch. Lame Bull and the narrator spend a day bringing in the alfalfa crop together. For extra help to stack the bales, Lame Bull hires Long Knife. Long Knife comes from a family with a strong reputation for hard work. However, Long Knife is on the lazy side. The first few days go well with Long Knife and the narrator building the stacks. However, on the third day they take the morning off to allow the bales to dry out from the humidity in the air. Long Knife shows up in the field, but instead of working, he asks for his pay and a ride into town. Lame Bull does not want to allow him to leave until the work is finished, but Long Knife insists. The narrator attempts to make peace by encouraging Lame Bull to pay Long Knife and send him away. Lame Bull continues to refuse the ride, but he pays Long Knife. When Long Knife continues to ask, Lame Bull punches him, puts him in the truck, and gives him the ride.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Analysis

Lame Bull is thrilled to be the owner of a large ranch until he hires a lazy worker who refuses to stick around till the job is finished. Lame Bull tries to refuse the worker's insistence at being paid and given a ride, but finds he cannot make him stop asking. Lame Bull punches Long Knife out of frustration, but takes him into town anyway. Lame Bull has discovered that being the owner of a working ranch is not as much fun as he first thought, foreshadowing later strife for Lame Bull.

Part 1, Chapter 11

Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

Lame Bull stops smiling so much because it gives hired hands the wrong impression. It does not stop him, however, from telling the story over and over to his friends. One of these friends tells the narrator that he has seen his girl in Malta. Everyone wants to know if the narrator will go after the girl. The narrator reluctantly says he will.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Analysis

The narrator has decided to go find his girl. This introduces the next few chapters as the narrator makes the trip to the town of Malta to attempt to find the girl. The reader must wonder now if he is going for his possessions, or if he has feelings for this girl he claims to be unemotional about.

Part 1, Chapter 12

Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

The narrator lays in his bed thinking about the girl, thinking that she is not worth chasing after. The narrator finds it amazing that his grandmother wanted to kill the girl even though she is so old and can hardly speak. His grandmother once told him how she was married to Standing Bear, a Blackfeet chief. The tribe had been chased out of their grounds by the soldiers and had met up with another tribe with whom they decided to winter. When word came that the soldiers were closing in, one band went to Canada, and Standing Bear's group went to Montana and the valley where the Gros Ventres lived. Standing Bear died during a raid on the Gros Ventres. After her husband's death, the narrator's grandmother had been made an outcast. His grandmother later settled on this reservation with a man named Doagie, a half white man who most likely built the house where they now lived. It has always been rumored that Doagie is not Teresa's father, however. A thunderstorm begins. The narrator rises to look out the window and finds himself looking at an empty jar that once belonged to his brother.

Part 1, Chapter 12 Analysis

The most important part of this chapter is the introduction of the grandmother's story regarding her husband, Standing Bear, and the revelation that Teresa's true father may be unknown. These stories serve not only to explore the heritage of the narrator in that of a true Indian tribe, touching briefly on the theme of the plight of the American Indian, but it also foreshadows the narrator uncovering family truths. Also touched on here briefly is the subject of the narrator's brother, a character not mentioned before, and the hint of his death.

Part 1, Chapter 13

Part 1, Chapter 13 Summary

Lame Bull gives the narrator a ride to Dodson so he can catch a bus to Malta. The narrator stops to check for mail, receiving a letter for his mother from a priest in Harlem. The narrator then goes to meet Lame Bull for a drink before purchasing a toothbrush and going off to wait for his bus.

Part 1, Chapter 13 Analysis

The narrator retrieves a letter for his mother, leaving the reader with the impression that the narrator will have to decide whether or not to give the letter to Teresa. The narrator then has a drink with his new stepfather, suggesting some friendly relations between the two men. Finally, he buys a toothbrush, suggesting his own hygiene is suddenly important for unknown reasons, and foreshadowing a time later in the plot development when the narrator misses this toothbrush.

Part 1, Chapter 14

Part 1, Chapter 14 Summary

The bus is late due to the rain. The narrator goes to a local bar and finds the girl's brother sitting there. They talk, but the brother does not tell him where she is. Instead, the brother tells him that she has a new guy, a white guy with a big car. The girl's brother, Dougie, talks the narrator into helping him rob a man who is passed out drunk. The narrator does, but Dougie will not give him any of the money. Dougie runs off. The narrator spends a great deal of time looking for him but fails. The narrator goes back to the bar.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Analysis

The narrator gets into Malta and finds Dougie, the girl's brother, but after helping him rob a drunken white man, he runs out on him without telling the narrator where the girl is. This impromptu robbery and lack of closure indicate that perhaps the narrator will face repercussions from the activities at the bar.

Part 1, Chapter 15

Part 1, Chapter 15 Summary

The narrator is now in a bar at the local hotel. A man from New York talks to him about his problems, tearing up an airline ticket and talking about how he can never go home. The narrator and this man talk about fishing, but the man does not believe the narrator when he says there are no fish in the river. Two other men come in and join the conversation, along with a barmaid the airplane man claims to know. The barmaid says he must be confusing her with her sister. The narrator is becoming drunk and he finds himself attracted to the barmaid.

Part 1, Chapter 15 Analysis

The narrator meets a new group of people, including a man he refers to as Airplane Man because he tears up his airline ticket, claiming he can never go home again. This meeting is important because it foreshadows a time when the narrator will meet this man again. Also important here is the barmaid and her description of her sister. Both will reappear later in the story.

Part 1, Chapter 16

Part 1, Chapter 16 Summary

The narrator wakes the next morning after having odd dreams, hung over and all his possessions missing except for the clothes he is wearing. The narrator gets dressed and remembers robbing the drunk the day before, and he is curious as to whether the man is looking for him. The narrator leaves the hotel in a hurry.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Analysis

The narrator wakes, hung over with little memory of the night before, a parallel between him and his father's habit of drinking. This symbolizes a life and, perhaps, a death similar to that of his father. The narrator remembers the man he robbed and feels remorse, touching on the theme of guilt, but is more concerned with the possibility of getting caught.

Part 1, Chapter 17

Part 1, Chapter 17 Summary

The narrator goes to a bar near the bus station and buys a Coke and chips. The bartender talks to him, recognizing him as Teresa's boy. The bartender asks about Lame Bull too, but the narrator can tell that Lame Bull caused trouble in the bar, and so the narrator pretends that he is someone the bartender does not recall. The narrator thinks about the night before, feeling guilty about the barmaid for reasons he cannot recall and regretting the loss of his belongings. The narrator then remembers the letter he has for his mother. The narrator pulls it out and rips it into pieces, not happy with his mother's relationship with a Catholic priest who refuses to step foot on a reservation.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Analysis

The narrator prepares to return home, full of regrets regarding the night before. The barmaid proves to be important to him but he does not remember why, foreshadowing a time when he might remember some of the reasons. The narrator also tears up his mother's letter from the priest in Harlem, representative of the angst he harbors regarding his heritage.

Part 2, Chapter 18

Part 2, Chapter 18 Summary

The narrator saddles his horse, Old Bird, and rides him three miles to the home of Yellow Calf, a man his father once visited on a regular basis. The man proves to be blind, a fact the narrator has not recalled. They talk about the past, about First Raise and the narrator's first visit, one he does not recall, and how the animals are unhappy with the turmoil in the world. The narrator leaves, waving to Yellow Calf even though he cannot see him.

Part 2, Chapter 18 Analysis

The narrator introduces two characters in this chapter, Old Bird the horse, and Yellow Calf, an old man his father once brought him to visit. Old Bird is just a cow horse the narrator has owned since he was a child, and his importance does not seem huge at this point. However, the introduction of the horse is an important point in the plot. Yellow Calf, too, seems to be a minor character, simply an old friend of the father's that the narrator feels some nostalgia for. However, this introduction, too, is important, foreshadowing later plot development.

Part 2, Chapter 19

Part 2, Chapter 19 Summary

The narrator, Lame Bull, and Teresa drive into Harlem. On the way, Teresa reminds the narrator of a time he and his brother were stuck in a thunderstorm. Mose had built a shelter for them where they waited out the storm. In Harlem, Teresa goes to see the priest, Lame Bull goes to the John Deere place for baling twine, and the narrator goes to visit a friend at his gas station. The narrator talks with his friends for a few minutes and finds out that his girl is now in Havre. The narrator goes with his friends to a bar where Lame Bull is and finds a woman there who is on her way to Havre, too. The narrator talks the woman into giving him a ride.

Part 2, Chapter 19 Analysis

The narrator has a trail on his girl again and finds a ride to see her. This is important because it foreshadows the plot development in the next few chapters as the narrator attempts for a second time to find the girl. This is also important because it seems to suggest that the narrator's motivations in finding the girl are more personal than he had implied at the beginning of the novel and that there might be more emotion involved than originally acknowledged.

Part 2, Chapter 20

Part 2, Chapter 20 Summary

The narrator wakes in a strange home and sees a little boy eating breakfast. The narrator goes into a bedroom where he finds the woman who gave him the ride. The narrator wants to have sex with her, but she refuses and he does not want to upset the little boy.

Part 2, Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter goes deeper into the narrator's character, suggesting he is not as innocent as he has been portrayed up to this point. The narrator thinks about raping a woman but does not do so because of her little boy, not because it is wrong.

Part 2, Chapter 21

Part 2, Chapter 21 Summary

The narrator goes into town and has a piece of pie at a diner. While there, Airplane Man walks in and tells him he is in trouble. Airplane Man says he is wanted by the police and needs the narrator's help, though he refuses to tell him in the diner and arranges to meet him somewhere else.

Part 2, Chapter 21 Analysis

Airplane Man is reintroduced and brings with him some intrigue, which foreshadows the next few chapters in which he will elicit the narrator's help, foreshadowing trouble for the narrator.

Part 2, Chapter 22

Part 2, Chapter 22 Summary

The narrator stands outside a local store and thinks how silly it is to be here since the girl had probably gotten rid of his belongings by now. The narrator meets with Airplane Man again in a bar. Airplane Man plays a game and wins several boxes of candy and a teddy bear.

Part 2, Chapter 22 Analysis

The narrator meets the airplane man again, once more foreshadowing trouble in the plot development. The airplane man wins some candy and a teddy bear, leading the reader to wonder what import these items have, or if the game playing is inidicative of this man's character.

Part 2, Chapter 23

Part 2, Chapter 23 Summary

The airplane man tells the narrator he wants to go to Canada because he is wanted by the F.B.I. The airplane man says he will buy the narrator a car he can keep and give him five hundred dollars if he will agree to drive him. The airplane man's hope is that having an Indian driver will draw the Canadian's attention away from him and help him cross the border safely. The narrator agrees.

Part 2, Chapter 23 Analysis

The trouble is exposed, and now the narrator finds himself roped into helping a near-stranger escape the country and the law. The narrator agrees because it will mean a free car, something he could use to gain some independence. However, this chapter also foreshadows more trouble since the airplane man openly admits he is wanted by the F.B.I.

Part 2, Chapter 24

Part 2, Chapter 24 Summary

The narrator and the airplane man walk through town with the teddy bear and the candy, looking for car lots. The narrator feels stupid with the teddy bear, but the airplane man tells him it is for his daughter. On their walk, the airplane man stops and gives candy to two girls and buys himself a knife. They finally find a car lot and the airplane man buys a Ford that does not run. The narrator manages to pop the clutch and get the car moving. On the way back into town, the narrator asks about the barmaid, suddenly remembering the airplane man's description of his daughter is very similar to the barmaid's description of her sister. They stop at a hotel to retrieve the airplane man's things and the narrator sees his girl. The narrator leaves the airplane man, promising to meet him again that night.

Part 2, Chapter 24 Analysis

The narrator and the airplane man buy a car to sneak across the Canadian border. The narrator does not feel worried about this illegal act, but he does remember something about the night he met the airplane man and begins to wonder about it. The narrator asks the airplane man about the barmaid and why his description of his daughter is similar to the barmaid's description of her sister. This may foreshadow future events and the dishonesty the airplane man exudes.

Part 2, Chapter 25

Part 2, Chapter 25 Summary

The narrator remembers a winter morning when First Raise got him and Mose out of bed early to go to the summer pastures and collect the cows to move them to the winter pastures. First Raise fixes them breakfast, gives them the lunch Teresa made the night before, and watches them saddle their horses before they leave. The narrator is twelve in this flashback, and his brother, fourteen. They reach the summer grazing lands and begin to round up the cows, having fun teasing the cows and discussing how they would shoot the coyotes they had seen if they had had their rifles.

Part 2, Chapter 25 Analysis

This chapter begins to reveal more about Mose, his relationship with the narrator, and possibly his death. This is important because a large part of the narrator's identity crisis has to do with the loss of his brother and a small part to do with the loss of his father. The narrator remembers his father helping them prepare for their daily work, remembering how his father loved them. The narrator also remembers the gentle relationship between himself and his brother, another important factor in the theme of lack of identity, because it is clear to the reader that the narrator wrapped a great deal of his identity in these two men.

Part 2, Chapter 26

Part 2, Chapter 26 Summary

The narrator walks around downtown for a short time before seeing the airplane man with the barmaid from Malta. The narrator takes the car keys from his pocket and throws them into the gutter. The narrator goes into a bar where he finds his girl. The narrator sits with her, and tells her that he has no hard feelings about her stealing his stuff. The longer the narrator talks to the girl, the more he sees how sad and lonely she is, and he briefly thinks about proposing marriage. Before he can decide, however, Dougie comes into the bar and beats the narrator up out of fear that he has come to get what is due him from the robbery they both committed.

Part 2, Chapter 26 Analysis

The narrator spots the barmaid with the airplane man, confirming the narrator's belief that there is something wrong with the airplane man's plans. The narrator has finally found his girl and finds that she is just as lost and lonely as he is. The narrator suddenly has affection for the girl and does not want to hurt her over the missing possessions. The narrator even goes as far as thinking of asking her to marry him before they are interrupted. This shows some growth on the part of the narrator, showing the reader that instead of a lack of feelings for this girl, the narrator appears to be in love with her. Dougie coming in at the end and beating up the narrator is foreshadowing fulfilled from an earlier chapter. This is also an example of irony. The narrator is the one with a problem, the theft of his belongings, yet it is Dougie portrayed as the abuser rather than the narrator.

Part 2, Chapter 27

Part 2, Chapter 27 Summary

The narrator remembers eating lunch with Mose during their cattle drive, discussing the weather and thinking maybe they should try to get all the cows moved in one day in case there was a blizzard the next day, as the clouds suggested.

Part 2, Chapter 27 Analysis

This chapter continues the story of Mose and foreshadows a later flashback about this one particular day and its importance.

Part 2, Chapter 28

Part 2, Chapter 28 Summary

A woman helps the narrator off the ground next to a car full of children where he has landed. The woman thinks the narrator needs a drink, so the narrator gives her money to buy them both some beers.

Part 2, Chapter 28 Analysis

The narrator has been beat up pretty badly by Dougie, as foreshadowed in a previous chapter. A woman comes to his rescue and the narrator falls into his old habits by giving her money to buy beer.

Part 2, Chapter 29

Part 2, Chapter 29 Summary

The narrator waits, but the woman does not come back. The narrator goes into a bar and cleans up. While there, the narrator hears that something is going on at the hotel across the street. The narrator goes outside to see and is just in time to watch the airplane man being arrested.

Part 2, Chapter 29 Analysis

The narrator sees the airplane man arrested. This arrest appears to have saved the narrator from some sort of scam or proves that the airplane man was being truthful. The narrator never knows which it is; therefore, the reader never does, either. However, it seems the narrator was about to be the victim of something, touching on the theme the plight of the American Indian. However, none of it seems to matter anymore.

Part 2, Chapter 30

Part 2, Chapter 30 Summary

The narrator runs into the woman he gave the money too and she claims to have been looking for him. They go to a hotel, drink beer, and have sex all night. The next morning they have sex again, and then the narrator hits the woman for no apparent reason. The narrator dresses and leaves while the woman begs him to stay.

Part 2, Chapter 30 Analysis

The narrator treats the woman badly in this chapter, using her and then threatening violence, showing the narrator's lack of character due to his identity crisis. His infliction of abuse on this woman may be the result of his inability to determine who he is and why he has been given this particular plight in life. Also, it is interesting to note that he seems to jump from one extreme to the next, exhibiting moments of genuine compassion juxtaposed with moments of violence and abuse. This behavioral change is indicative of his lack of identity.

Part 2, Chapter 31

Part 2, Chapter 31 Summary

The narrator is tired of the city and decides to go home.

Part 2, Chapter 31 Analysis

This short chapter ends the second part of the novel and the plot line surrounding the narrator's search for whatever it was he was looking for in the city.

Part 3, Chapter 32

Part 3, Chapter 32 Summary

The narrator gets a ride back to his ranch with a couple and their teen daughter, who is sick. They ask a lot of questions about Indians and ask to take his picture.

Part 3, Chapter 32 Analysis

Again the theme of the plight of the American Indians is touched on here as the people the narrator has gotten a ride with treat him like some sort of novelty, asking stupid questions and taking his picture.

Part 3, Chapter 33

Part 3, Chapter 33 Summary

The narrator walks up to the house, thinking about his brother and a time when they shot a hawk. When he reaches the house, the narrator finds that his mother and Lame Bull are gone and his grandmother's chair is empty. The narrator knows this must mean she is dead. The narrator sits in her chair for a brief second and takes her tobacco pouch. Then the narrator goes into the kitchen and takes a bath before heading out to feed the calf.

Part 3, Chapter 33 Analysis

The narrator returns home thinking about his dead brother and finds his grandmother gone. The narrator knows this must mean she is dead, but he shows little emotion, instead taking a bath and feeding the calf. The change the reader saw briefly in the narrator when he spoke to the girl is gone now, and in its place is the lack of emotion the narrator admitted to at the beginning of the novel. This again touches on the theme of lack of identity as the narrator cannot even feel close enough to his grandmother to mourn her death.

Part 3, Chapter 34

Part 3, Chapter 34 Summary

Teresa and Lame Bull return and confirm the narrator's suspicion about his grandmother. Lame Bull and Teresa have taken the body to Harlem for preparation for burial. The narrator asks if the priest will come, even though he already knows the answer, and Teresa makes excuses for him. To make peace, Lame Bull pulls out a bottle of wine to toast the grandmother.

Part 3, Chapter 34 Analysis

The theme of the plight of the American Indian is again in evidence here as the narrator suspects the Catholic priest, despite being a friend of Teresa's, will not come to officiate over the grandmother's funeral. This is discrimination and even though all three know it, only the narrator is willing to admit to it.

Part 3, Chapter 35

Part 3, Chapter 35 Summary

Lame Bull and the narrator dig the grave the next day, disagreeing on how large it should be. Lame Bull thinks because the grandmother was short they should only dig it five feet wide and five feet deep. The narrator talks him into adding another foot to the width to fit the coffin but agrees on the depth. While they work, the narrator becomes aware of the other graves around them, including his father's and Mose's.

Part 3, Chapter 35 Analysis

Foreshadowed here is trouble with the burial of the coffin as Lame Bull has decided not to build the grave as wide nor as deep as it should be. The narrator looks at the graves of his brother and father, indicating to the reader that Mose is in fact dead, and that the narrator will likely reveal this part of the past to the reader soon.

Part 3, Chapter 36

Part 3, Chapter 36 Summary

It was getting dark when they reached the highway. Mose opened the gate approaching the highway and they successfully led the cows onto the highway. However, after Mose opened the gate on the other side, the spinster cow in the lead refused to go through. While they attempted to encourage her, one of the calves ran off. Old Bird, the horse, took off after the calf as he was trained to do. The narrator could barely hold on. Suddenly behind them, the narrator heard a car hit his brother where he sat on his horse. Old Bird stopped and the narrator flew off his back, crushing his knee against a rock.

Part 3, Chapter 36 Analysis

Finally the reader gets to hear the story of how Mose died, a story that has been alluded to through the majority of the novel. Mose's death was an accident, but touching on the theme of guilt, the narrator carries around a great deal of guilt. The narrator has repeatedly said they should not have run the cows that day. If they had waited to the next day to round the rest of them up so they got to the highway in the light, or if the cows had not been so tired, or if the calf had not run off-there are many things the narrator can feel guilty for, but it is important for the reader to note at this point that the accident was not the narrator's fault. The telling of the story, in fact, could possibly foreshadow a healing for the narrator should he realize this lack of blame.

Part 3, Chapter 37

Part 3, Chapter 37 Summary

Teresa and Lame Bull go into town to retrieve the grandmother's body. The narrator saddles up Old Bird and goes to visit Yellow Calf. On the way, the narrator thinks about the night his brother died, of the sight of his body and the feel of the man pulling him from the sight. The narrator also thinks of Old Bird's role in the event and forgives him for doing only what came naturally to him.

Part 3, Chapter 37 Analysis

The narrator thinks again of the night of his brother's death, of Old Bird's role in the death, and forgives him for what happened that night. This is a big step for the narrator, able to find some forgiveness after all this time. Perhaps this is the beginning of some significant personal growth for the narrator.

Part 4, Chapter 38

Part 4, Chapter 38 Summary

The narrator tells Yellow Calf about the old woman's death and learns that Yellow Calf is also from the Blackfeet tribe. In addition, he had been with Standing Bear's tribe at the time of his death. Yellow Calf saw the women of the tribe turn the grandmother into an outcast, threatened by her beauty, and he chose not only to take care of her, but to remain behind when the rest of the tribe was taken to a reservation. As the narrator prepares to leave, he suddenly realizes that Yellow Calf might possibly be his grandfather.

Part 4, Chapter 38 Analysis

Yellow Calf has lived silently close to the grandmother for many years and tonight admits to the narrator that he knew her and cared for her many years before. This revelation has been foreshadowed in previous chapters and suddenly helps certain facts surrounding his grandmother begin to make sense for the narrator. The possibility that Yellow Calf may be the narrator's grandfather begins to open some doors for the narrator, touching on the theme of lack of identity and possibly giving the narrator a real clue to his true heritage.

Part 4, Chapter 39

Part 4, Chapter 39 Summary

The narrator rides home, mulling over Yellow Calf's revelations and realizing that his father must have brought him to meet Yellow Calf all those years ago because First Raise knew their true relationship to one another.

Part 4, Chapter 39 Analysis

The narrator has realized that his father must have known Yellow Calf's secret and that he brought him there to meet his grandfather. This reinforces the narrator's belief that his father was a good man and again touches on the theme of lack of identity as the narrator is once again given information that makes his own identity more concrete, more easily within reach. This signals the possibility of personal growth in the narrator.

Part 4, Chapter 40

Part 4, Chapter 40 Summary

The narrator arrives home and finds his friend and his wife waiting to express their condolences. While the two men talk, the wife begins to bug the narrator about his own girl. The narrator becomes so annoyed by her that he tells her his girl is in the house and welcomes her to check for herself. The wife refuses and insists that they leave.

Part 4, Chapter 40 Analysis

Some personal growth can be seen here if the reader can see growth in the narrator's desire to protect his girl's reputation from the dirty words of a woman he dislikes. The narrator defends his girl, suggesting some emotion there that goes deeper than the nonchalance the narrator claimed for the girl at the beginning of the story. The narrator has clearly grown toward this girl and this perhaps will shed a positive light on the end of the novel.

Part 4, Chapter 41

Part 4, Chapter 41 Summary

The narrator approaches the barn and hears the calf crying. Soon he sees the reason as the cow becomes visible, stuck in a large mud pile. The narrator does not want to help the cow but feels he must. The narrator wades into the mud and puts a rope around the cow. Then he climbs onto Old Bird and encourages him to pull the cow out of the mud. The cow begins to come out of the mud, but then Old Bird begins to slip on the wet ground.

Part 4, Chapter 41 Analysis

The narrator, against his better judgment, decides to help the stuck cow. The narrator uses Old Bird because he is already saddled, giving him a chance to practice his training one last time. However, the cow is stuck quite deep and Old Bird has trouble, beginning to slip as the chapter ends. The suspense created by ending the chapter prior to the revelation of the outcome for Old Bird indicates that perhaps something unfortunate is about to occur.

Part 4, Chapter 42

Part 4, Chapter 42 Summary

Old Bird falls and the narrator falls with him. The narrator lies still and listens to the silence.

Part 4, Chapter 42 Analysis

The narrator lies injured, thinking about his father and Mose, unable to care that Old Bird might be fatally wounded or that the cow might be dead. The narrator has realized that the only people he has ever cared for are dead, further exploring the depth of his own emotions and helping him to heal, touching on the theme of lack of identity one last time, as it is the confusion of the narrator's emotions that have caused him this identity crisis in the first place.

Epilogue,

Epilogue, Summary

Teresa, Lame Bull, and the narrator are the only people present at the grandmother's burial. The depth of the grave is uneven, causing Lame Bull to have to jump in and fix it. Teresa is devastated while the narrator is calm and quiet. His injuries are superficial and he is thinking about the future. Perhaps he will ask the girl to marry him, after all.

Epilogue, Analysis

The novel has come full circle. The narrator has shown little character growth, but enough to prove to the reader he has fallen in love with the girl and is thinking of a future, resolving the theme of lack of identity to some extent. The narrator also appears to have come to terms with the secrets his grandmother kept and the death of his brother, Mose, another example of his attempt to resolve his identity crisis. The novel ends on a positive note.

Characters

Agnes

Agnes is a slender young Cree woman from Havre. She is the narrator's girlfriend, who lives with him and his family for three weeks. The narrator's grandmother hates her because she is Cree. Agnes walks out on the narrator, stealing his gun and electric razor. He meets her again in Havre, where she appears to live an aimless life, full of drinking and promiscuity.

Airplane Man

The unnamed man meets the narrator in Malta and then again in Havre. He comes from New York, where he left his wife, apparently taking some of her money. He says the FBI is looking for him. He intended to fly to the Middle East, but at the last minute tore up his plane ticket and drove out west. He persuades the narrator to accompany him by car to Canada, but his scheme fails when he is arrested in Havre.

Doagie

Doagie was a half-white drifter who lived with the narrator's grandmother. The narrator was told that Doagie was his grandfather, but it later transpires that this is not the case.

Dougie

Dougie is Agnes's brother. In Malta, he gets the narrator to help him rob a drunken white man. In Havre, Dougie and his friends beat the narrator up.

First Raise

First Raise was the narrator's father. He was good with machinery and could repair almost anything. He was often away from home, drinking in the bars in town, and Teresa describes him as a foolish man. First Raise's dream was to go on an illegal hunt for elks, but he never got to make the trip to Glacier National Park. One winter night ten years before the story begins, he was on his way home drunk after spending an evening in a bar in Dodson, when he fell down, passed out, and froze to death.

Grandmother

The narrator's Blackfeet grandmother lives with him, Teresa, and Lame Bull. She is old and blind and does not speak. She dies while the narrator is away in Havre and is

buried on the family property. As a young woman, she was the wife of Standing Bear and was known for her beauty. After Standing Bear was killed in battle, she was scorned by the Blackfeet, except for Yellow Calf, who brought her the food that enabled her to survive a harsh winter. For years, the narrator believed that his grandmother remained alone for twenty-five years following the death of Standing Bear, until she began living with the drifter Doagie. The narrator later learns that his grandmother was close to Yellow Calf, and that Yellow Calf, not Doagie, is his grandfather.

Larue Henderson

Larue Henderson is an acquaintance of the narrator in Harlem. He manages an auto repair garage.

Ferdinand Horn

Ferdinand Horn is a friend of the narrator's family.

Lame Bull

Lame Bull is Teresa's friend who becomes her husband early in the novel. He is forty-seven years old, eight years younger than Teresa. Part of the reason he married Teresa was so he could own some of the best land in the valley. Being a prosperous cattleman makes him happy. He is efficient, practical, and crafty, although Teresa complains about his sloppy habits.

Raymond Long Knife

Raymond Long Knife is a white man who comes from a long line of cowboys, but he is lazy and does not like to work. Lame Bull employs him for a couple of days to help stack hay bales.

Malvina

Malvina is a woman the narrator meets in a bar in Harlem. He stays the night at her house.

Marlene

Marlene is the woman the narrator meets in Havre. They spend the night together in a hotel.

Mose

Mose was the narrator's elder brother. Mose was fourteen when he was killed by a car as the two boys were driving the cows home one early evening in winter. The brothers were close, and the narrator often remembers the enjoyable times he had with Mose.

The Narrator

The unnamed narrator is a thirty-two-year-old Blackfeet Indian who lives on a ranch with his mother Teresa and her husband Lame Bull. He lives an aimless, unfulfilling life, hanging around the bars in the small towns that border the reservation, getting drunk, picking up women, and getting into fights. The great tragedy in his life was the loss of his brother Mose when the narrator was twelve and Mose was fourteen. In the accident that killed Mose, the narrator smashed his knee, which has never fully recovered. Even though he is intelligent and capable, the narrator has never had much of a career. He worked in a rehabilitation clinic in Tacoma, Washington, for two years, although his mother claims that he was there for much less than that. Then, he spent most of his time in bars in Seattle. Although, during the course of the novel the narrator does nothing of note, he does gain some dignity and self-respect when he discovers that he is the grandson of Yellow Calf, not the half-breed Doagie.

Teresa

Teresa is the narrator's mother. She is a widow who marries Lame Bull. Although she is Indian, she speaks disparagingly of other Indians. She is also a Catholic. Teresa is a rather bitter woman who is not known for her generosity of spirit. The narrator says he never expected much from her and nor did anyone else. Teresa was disappointed in her first marriage. She refers to her late husband as a fool. Teresa is also disillusioned about her son. She regrets that he has not made anything of his life, and she criticizes him for his failure. She does not like having him hang around the ranch and tries to get him to start looking for a job.

Yellow Calf

Yellow Calf is an old blind man who lives in a shack three miles from the narrator's home. He lives a spartan life in tune with nature. After he tells the narrator about the severe winter the Blackfeet endured when he was a boy, and tells what he knows about the narrator's grandmother, the narrator realizes that Yellow Calf is his grandfather.

Objects/Places

The Reservation

The narrator and his family live on an Indian reservation in Montana.

The Ranch

The narrator's father owned a ranch on the reservation that was passed to his wife, Teresa, on his death. This is where the narrator and his family live.

Rifle and Electric Razor

When the girl leaves, she takes the narrator's rifle and electric razor with her. These two seemingly unrelated items are important, though, because of the possible symbolic nature of the items. While both have monetary value, the rifle is representative of the narrator's power, while the razor represents his adulthood. Losing these items to a woman for whom he supposedly has little regard is indicative of woman's ability to contribute to his lack of identity.

Rocking Chair

The narrator's grandmother spends her time in a rocking chair in the living room of their house.

Letter

The narrator picks up a letter at the post office in Dodson for his mother. The letter is from a priest in Harlem. The narrator tears up the letter rather than give it to his mother, purely out of frustration at the lack of respect Indians receive from the outside world.

Yellow Calf's Cabin

Yellow Calf lives in a cabin that is old but in good repair with a sparse but neat interior.

The Car

The airplane man buys the narrator a car in exchange for driving him to Canada, but is arrested before they can leave.

Highway

Mose and the narrator are attempting to cross their cows over the highway in the dark when Mose is hit by a car.

Malta

Malta is a town in Montana where the narrator goes to find the girl and instead meets with her brother and the airplane man.

Havre

Havre is another town in Montana where the narrator goes to look for the girl. This time he finds the girl, but he also runs into the airplane man again.

Themes

Alienation

The narrator is in an alienated state of mind, closed off from his own emotions. He does not feel affection for his family or for his girlfriend. Neither does he feel any other emotions for them, such as hatred or guilt. His emotional life is simply flat. In the first chapter, which sets the tone for the novel, he refers to this state of mind as □distance,□ and says it has been growing in him for years. Part of this distance can be explained by the narrator's loss of his father and brother, both long dead. He comments toward the end of the novel that these two were the only people he ever loved. Since then, it appears, he has been unable to find his way in life and connect with others. He lacks self-knowledge and a sense of identity, which may explain why he remains unnamed. He does not really know who he is, and as a result, his life lacks purpose and direction. He hangs around the ranch even though his mother would sooner he went out and looked for a job. When he goes on small expeditions to the local towns, he never connects with anyone in a meaningful way. He drinks too much and the one-night stands he has with the women he picks up in bars are depressing affairs. When Marlene, one of the women, starts sobbing, the narrator cannot respond with an iota of empathy. He simply stares at her, and the image that comes to his mind is devoid of humanity:

I was staring at the sobbing woman with the same lack of emotion, the same curiosity, as though I were watching a bug floating motionless down an irrigation ditch, not yet dead but having decided upon death.

The narrator is also alienated from the wider community in which he lives and from his cultural heritage. Culturally, as an Indian he is part of a minority group that is mistrusted by the white majority. When he returns home at the beginning of the novel, the narrator has just been in a fight with a white man in a bar, and in Havre, he feels □that helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men.□ But this is not a novel about the subjugation of Native Americans. The narrator does not get on any better with the Indians he meets in the towns, one of whom, Agnes's brother, beats him up. He admits, referring to Indians as well as whites, that □I was a stranger to both and both had beaten me.□

Re-integration

Breaking through the prevailing mood of distance, alienation and separation, the narrator gains at least one moment when he feels more integrated with himself and his world. It comes when Yellow Calf, in telling the story of himself and the narrator's grandmother, obliquely hints that he, Yellow Calf, is the narrator's true grandfather. This is a moment of revelation for the narrator because up to that point, he has believed that a □half-breed□ drifter named Doagie was his grandfather. Discovering an important fact

about his true origins re-connects him to his family and perhaps also to his Indian cultural heritage, represented by the wise old Yellow Calf. When the narrator realizes the truth, he instinctively knows the importance of what has transpired, and he starts to laugh: □It was the laughter of one who understands a moment in his life, of one who has been let in on the secret through luck and circumstance.□

Welch is a subtle writer, and he does not suggest that the narrator's life will now suddenly change for the better. But the ending of the novel does show the narrator in a positive frame of mind, ready to take more decisive action than he has in the past. He seems to be more in touch with his emotions also. When Ferdinand Horn's wife tells him that she has seen Agnes in Havre, it is □a stab in the heart□ for the narrator. He realizes that he does feel something for her after all. Then in the final scene, as he stands at the graveside of his grandmother, he is still thinking of Agnes. He decides that □Next time I'd do it right. Buy her a couple of crèmes de menthe, maybe offer to marry her on the spot.□ Although the tone, in keeping with the rest of the epilogue, may not be entirely serious, the narrator seems now to be a changed man from the disaffected individual presented in the first chapter, who had no feelings for his girlfriend and was □as distant from [him]self as a hawk from the moon.□

Lack of Identity

The main character in this novel, an unnamed narrator, is a young man who feels as though he has no identity. There are many reasons for this man to feel this way. The first is because he is an Indian who has grown up on a reservation hearing stories of the bravery and traditions of his people, but has never experienced these traditions for himself because of life on the reservation. Second, the young man feels a lack of identity because his grandmother and mother have not told him who his grandfather is, keeping secrets from him regarding his basic genetic heritage. Third, the young man lost his brother at a young age and feels the loss deeply.

This sense of no identity drives the young man to live a directionless life, unable to motivate himself to leave his mother's home and find a career or a life of his own. This man is unmarried, not involved with a woman, and uninspired to get an education or find work outside of the reservation. This man feels lost, as though there is no where for him to go except his mother's ranch. The narrator does become involved with a young woman his mother assumes is his wife, but this woman leaves him before the story opens, stealing several of his possessions, causing him to go in search of her. This search is inspired, not because of the narrator's own desire to find the woman, but because his family and friends think it is something he should do. However, when the narrator finds the woman he briefly considers proposing marriage to her, but just a short time later ends up in a motel with another woman.

Still lost at the end of the novel, the narrator learns that his grandmother has died. The narrator's grandmother is silent in her old age, but the narrator can remember a time when she would tell him stories about being the youngest wife of a Blackfeet chief who was stranded in Montana after the death of her husband. Twenty years later, the old

woman became a mother to the narrator's mother, but has never told anyone who the father was. The narrator goes to visit an old friend of his father's and realizes for the first time in his life that this man has to be his grandfather. This revelation helps the narrator find some sort of identity for himself, giving him some peace as the novel comes to a close and he buries his grandmother.

Guilt

The narrator's brother died one winter night while they were moving a herd of cows from the summer pastures to the winter pastures. The brother, Mose, was attempting to encourage the cows to cross a highway when he and the horse he rode were struck by a car. The narrator was present at the time, but away from the road because his horse had independently gone chasing after a calf that had attempted to run away. The narrator has suffered guilt over this death for the majority of his life due to the idea that he should have done something to save his brother or at least had been standing beside him at the time of the accident so that they would have died together. This guilt not only causes the narrator to have trouble with emotional connections to other people, but it also contributes to an identity crisis that finds the narrator unable to leave his mother's home and make a life of his own.

Guilt is a powerful driving force in a person's life, often stopping him from taking risks that come without thought in most people's lives. The narrator of this book holds onto his guilt because it is the only thing he knows. The narrator is a lost soul who has no clear direction in his life, and has no understanding of what his place is in this world. The narrator's father was an alcoholic and a gambler, his mother an emotionally stunted woman. The narrator was never told the truth about who his grandfather on his mother's side was, never had clear direction, never had a good role model to show him how to be a productive man in the world he grew up in. The only strong role model the narrator ever had, the only person he could identify with, was his brother. The narrator not only lost his brother when Mose was killed, but he lost the only person who could show him a direction in his life. Further, the way the accident happened left the narrator so wracked with guilt that he is stuck with the sense of identity he had when his brother died.

Plight of the American Indian

Another, more subtle, theme in this novel is the plight of the American Indian. The American Indian faced terrible hardship in the years after the Civil War when the American government made it their goal to make travel from the east to the west safe for travelers. This meant moving the Indians onto reservations. Many of the Indians did not go willingly and fighting ensued between the Indians and the American military. This violent and unfortunate history is one that has become engrained in subsequent generations of Indians, filling them with anger and a sense of identity loss. The narrator of this novel is suffering from the latter, unsure of who he is, where he has come from, and where his life will take him.

Although this novel refrains from becoming a political statement on the plight of Indians, it does reveal the emotional damage done to a young man not only from learning this lesson and feeling the anger of his elders, but also from living with parents who also suffer from a lack of identity and therefore have their own problems.The writer himself says that only an Indian knows who he is and this is well illustrated within this novel. The writer, an Indian himself, carefully portrays a young man like himself who struggles to find his own voice in the world. This book, while not a political statement, is a simple and honest look at what life is truly like for the American Indian in modern times.

Style

Metaphor

The novel is structured around the metaphor of a journey, which represents the need to come home□to oneself and to one's family and heritage. It is a difficult journey, as the narrator himself announces in chapter 1, when he returns home from a night on the town: □Coming home was not easy anymore.□ After the first homecoming, the narrator goes away again, to Malta to find his girlfriend. Part 2 sees him back on the ranch, and then journeying once more, to Harlem and Havre. In part 3, he returns home again. Within this structure of departure and return, two more journeys are embedded in the form of flashbacks. These flashbacks are mental journeys made first by the narrator, as he recalls the events leading up to the tragic death of his brother, and second by Yellow Calf, as he recalls the terrible winter of starvation endured by the Blackfeet when Yellow Calf was in his teens.

Another way of understanding the journey metaphor is to see these journeys as episodes on the path of the most fundamental journey of all, the one that begins with birth and ends with death. In part 4, the wise man Yellow Calf calls this the only cycle he knows. As if to remind the reader of the ultimate destination of all journeys, the novel begins and ends with the focus on death. First, the narrator sets the scene by referring to the grave of the Earthboys, a local family. More significantly, he also refers to the □borrow pit□ (a place from which the earth has been excavated and used for other purposes) where□it is later disclosed□the narrator's father died. Then the novel ends with the burial of the narrator's grandmother.

Imagery

The image of blood that appears in the title of the novel represents passion, life energy, and connection to family, culture and race. Winter in the blood suggests that the blood in the narrator runs thin; he suffers from a kind of spiritual and mental anemia. The blood image returns at a significant moment in part 4, after the narrator's sudden realization that Yellow Calf is his grandfather. This realization was □as though it was his blood in my veins that had told me.□ In other words, Yellow Calf awakens the cultural and family blood that runs within the narrator, suggesting that the winter in the blood may be at an end.

The suggestion of regeneration is conveyed by another image, that of rain. At the end of part 4, after his strenuous struggle to free the calf, and Bird's collapse, the narrator lies on the ground, feeling the summer rain fall on his face. His thoughts turn to his dead brother and father, and for the first time in the novel they are peaceful rather than troubled thoughts. He thinks that First Raise and Mose will like the rain: □they were that way, good to be with, even on a rainy day.□ The peaceful nature of this scene is a marked contrast to the chilly wind and falling sleet that occurred as the narrator knelt

before the dead body of his brother twenty years ago. The final paragraph of this scene, that concludes part 4, has an unmistakable feeling of something having been washed clean by the rain:

Some people, I thought, will never know how pleasant it is to be distant in a clean rain, the driving rain of a summer storm. It's not like you'd expect, nothing like you'd expect.

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The narrator is a young Indian man in his early thirties and still living at home with his mother and grandmother. The narrator tells the story through his own point of view, moving quickly from scene to scene and at times seeming to get lost in his own thoughts. The narrator comes across as a lost soul, a young man still fighting to come to terms with the loss of his brother and father. The narrator also seems incapable of trusting and loving another person, although the desire is there as suggested by his attempts to find a young woman who left him and stole some of his belongings.

The point of view of this novel works because the novel is about a young man who is lost in his own identity because of the history of his race and because of secrets kept among the members of his own family. The narrator has no sense of who he is; therefore, he never tells the reader his name and it is never mentioned by any of the other characters. This reinforces the sense of an identity-less narrator. The first person point of view, on the contrary, reinforces the narrator's existence, as if to show the internal struggle to prove his own existence, which becomes more concrete through his choice of narration and his decision not to give his name.

Setting

The setting of the novel is a ranch on an Indian reservation in Montana; periodically, the setting changes to several small cities in Montana. These are important because the location of the reservation and the reason the family lives there solidify the identity crisis that is the internal struggle within the narrator driving the plot. The narrator and his family are Indians from various Indian tribes with a strong history of persecution by the white government of the United States. This history has caused the Indians in more recent generations to lose their sense of identity in a world that is stuck between the past and the present. It is living on this reservation that has contributed to the narrator's identity crisis.

Other important settings in this novel are the seasons. It is summer during the time the majority of the novel takes place. The narrator talks often of the intense heat and his discomfort while working around the ranch. However, it is winter when Mose dies and this is the time that the narrator spends the majority of his time remembering. Cold continues to run in the narrator's blood because of his attachment to his brother and his intense guilt in not being able to stop his brother's accident. Cold also comes into play when the narrator speaks about his father. The narrator's father, an alcoholic and

gambler, died while walking out in the snow during the winter. Cold and winter are also symbolic to the plot as they are associated with unhappiness and the narrator's identity crises.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is simple and direct English; there is little in the way of foreign words used in this novel. However, many of the character names may seem foreign to a reader unaccustomed to the traditional form that Indian names sometimes take, such as the names First Raise and Lame Bull. None of the language is overly complicated, nor does it include large, unfamiliar words, and it is language that is easy for readers of all ages to comprehend.

The purpose of the language used in this novel is to express the lack of education the narrator has as another attempt to show the poverty level that this particular man was raised within. The novel is about being an Indian and living on an Indian reservation and the hardships that this situation implies, but it is not a novel written for the sole purpose of making a political statement. This novel is a story of one man's search for his own personal identity. This is also a possible explanation as to why there are few Indian words used in this novel. The young man who narrates the novel feels as though he has no identity, either that of an Indian or of a Caucasian man. The language in this novel reinforces this lack of identity in its failure to use either Indian phrases or the language of an educated white man. It is a writer's technique that reinforces the plot in a subtle, almost invisible, way.

Structure

The novel is divided into four parts and forty-two chapters. Each of the chapters is short, some as little as a paragraph long, while others are five or six pages long. The story is told in a linear fashion with only a few chapters that contain flashbacks in order to allow the reader to see events from the narrator's past as the narrator experienced them. The book is written with equal amounts of exposition and dialogue, with all the thoughts expressed throughout the novel those of the narrator alone, indicative of the first-person narrative form.

The plot is simple and linear. The plot follows the narrator as he first searches for a woman whom his mother and grandmother had assumed to be his wife. The narrator finds himself involved with a criminal during this search and ends up going home without completely dealing with the girl he has gone to find. The narrator then stumbles upon the truth of his mother's paternity when his grandmother dies, finding a small piece of his family's past and his own identity before the end of the novel. The plot has little structure and tends to wander in odd directions, reinforcing once more the narrator's search for his own identity.

Historical Context

Native Americans in 1960s and 1970s

Taking their cue from the civil rights and □black power□ movements, Native Americans in the 1960s and 1970s became more assertive in their efforts to preserve their culture and improve their economic situation. In 1969, more than two hundred Native Americans from a group called Indians of all Tribes took over Alcatraz Island, the former federal penitentiary in San Francisco Bay. They used their occupation, which lasted until June 1971, to protest the conditions on Indian reservations.

There was plenty to protest. Native Americans were lower on the socio-economic ladder than any other minority group in the United States. In 1970, the median income of Indians was half that of whites, and over one-third of all Indians lived below the official poverty level. Housing conditions on many reservations were unsanitary, with some dwellings little better than shacks with no running water, sewers or electricity. Life expectancy for Indians was forty-four years, compared to sixty-six years for the general population; infant mortality was three times the national average; and teenage suicide was five times the national average. In 1973, the unemployment rate on Indian reservations averaged 37 percent.

There were more examples of Indian militancy in the early 1970s. A group of Native Americans established a settlement at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota to demonstrate their claims to the Black Hills. In November 1972, members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, D.C., to publicize their grievances. In 1973, AIM received national attention when two hundred of its members mounted an armed occupation of the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Wounded Knee was the site of a massacre of three hundred Sioux Indians by U.S. soldiers in 1890.

The Native American Renaissance

Although Native American culture traditionally emphasized oral storytelling, works of fiction by Indian writers existed from the early twentieth century. But it was not until the late 1960s that Indian literature began to blossom in unprecedented ways, as Native American writers developed a body of written work that helped to preserve and extend knowledge of Indian life and culture. A landmark event in what came to be known as the Native American Renaissance was the novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969. The novel tells the story of a Native American who grows up on a reservation in New Mexico, fights in World War II, and then moves to Los Angeles, where he forgets his Native American roots in the harsh city environment.

During the 1970s, as more notable literature was produced by Native Americans, mainstream literary culture became more accepting of books which presented the Native American experience. The major publisher Harper & Row, for example, began a Native American Publishing Program, and the third book in that program was Welch's *Winter in the Blood*. Other important Native American works of the period include Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* (1977), Jo Harjo's poetry collection, *The Last Song* (1975), and *Voices from Wah'kon-tah* (1974), an anthology of Native American poetry.

Critical Overview

Winter in the Blood received warm praise from reviewers on publication. Reynolds Price, in a front-page review in the *New York Times Book Review*, was so impressed he argued that the novel should not be classified as an □Indian novel.□ He described it instead as □a nearly flawless novel about human life.□ Price commented on the way in which the narrator's life, so enclosed and self-defeating for most of the novel, was transformed at the end: □it opens onto light□and through natural, carefully prepared, but beautifully surprising narrative means: a recovery of the past; a venerable, maybe lovable, maybe usable past.□ In *Newsweek*, Margo Jefferson described the novel as □beautiful and austere.□ She commented that its □power lies in the individual scenes, with their spare dialogue and piercing detail, and in the atmosphere Welch ... creates.□

Winter in the Blood soon came to be considered a classic of Native American literature. In 1977, the Modern Language Association of America held a seminar on the novel at its annual convention. Arising from that session, an entire issue of *American Indian Quarterly* in 1978 was devoted to essays on the novel. Since that time, it has been the subject of much scholarly interest, with whole dissertations being devoted to it. Scholars have interpreted the novel in various ways. Some have placed it within the European literary tradition; others have examined its place within the Native American tradition, in the context of the myths and religions of the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes. The tone of the novel has been variously interpreted as comic, tragic or satiric, and there has been discussion about whether the novel presents a negative picture of Indian life or offers the possibility of spiritual redemption.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth century literature. In this essay, Aubrey analyzes the importance of Native American consciousness in the novel, as seen in the characters of the narrator and Yellow Calf.

Welch once commented that the reason he did not give his protagonist a name was because □he didn't do anything significant enough to give him a name□ (quoted in Mary Jane Lupton's *James Welch: A Critical Companion*). Insignificant the narrator may in many ways be, but lying behind his ordinariness and the apparent meaninglessness of his existence are glimpses of something that is not ordinary and certainly not meaningless. As another critic, William Bevis, has pointed out, the narrator possesses □a very sophisticated consciousness ... so sensitive, so observant, so intelligent, so articulate, so verbal□ (quoted in *Understanding James Welch*, by Ron McFarland). MacFarland might well have added that even though Welch commented that he wrote within the □Western, European-American tradition□ (quoted in McFarland), there is a distinctive Native American tinge to the way the narrator perceives the world; his poetic images and metaphors suggest a way of experiencing life that is quite different from the dominant Western view. When this is viewed in conjunction with the wisdom of old Yellow Calf, the novel reveals the presence of a Native American consciousness that still, even after centuries of domination and invalidation by the Eurocentric West, remains intact and is ready to reaffirm itself.

One of the major differences between the scientific, materialist worldview that has dominated Western thought for more than three hundred years and the Native American view is the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. In the scientific view, consciousness resides only in humans; the material world of rocks, earth, plants, and trees is essentially dead. And to the extent that the traditional Christian worldview has survived the onslaught from scientific rationalism, Westerners regard humans as quite distinct from the animal kingdom, since only humans have been endowed by their Creator with an immortal soul. However, this way of thinking is foreign to the Native American, for whom the entirety of creation is alive, and everything is connected in a web of interacting relationships.

Carol Lee Sanchez, herself a Native American, describes the difference between the two worldviews in her essay, □Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral: The Sacred Connection□:

Most Euro-American or Euro-Western peoples tend to separate themselves from □nature□ and to rank humans above animals, plants, and minerals in hierarchical fashion, and so it is not easy for them to perceive or accept a *personal* relationship with what they describe as the □natural world.□ Native Americans believe themselves to be an integral part of the natural world. When we speak of □nature,□ we are also including ourselves.

Welch is not a didactic writer; he does not write specifically to express or promote the Native American worldview, and so the narrator in *Winter in the Blood* does not act as a mouthpiece for the Indian way. After all, he is drifting through life with no firm compass, alienated as much from Indians as from whites. But just as a man raised in the Deep South cannot wholly erase his southern accent no matter how long he has lived in New York, the narrator cannot entirely hide who he is and the culture he represents. This is particularly noticeable in his descriptions of animals and birds. As Mary Jane Lupton puts it, Welch characterizes □animals as near humans, by naming them and giving them histories. Animal references appear with great consistency, either as metaphors or as genuine presences.□ An example of this occurs when the narrator remembers the six ducks that drowned when he was a boy. He not only remembers the exact place it happened, he also observes that □The weeds grew more abundant there, as though their spirits had nourished the soil.□ It appears that even the lowly duck has a spiritual significance and a continuing connection to the place where it lived its earthly life. The circumlocution □as though□ or □as if□ is a frequent device the narrator uses in his descriptions of animal life, as if he feels the need to draw back from the full implications of his words and suggest they are merely metaphors. Be that as it may, he seems to be able to divine in non-human creatures a capacity for relationships with humans that are more than merely poetic. Arresting details surface from time to time in this respect. At the end of part 4, when the narrator struggles to free the cow from the mud, a magpie alights on a fence post and □then squatted to watch.□ After the cow has been freed, the magpie flies closer, and □his metallic *awk! awk*! was almost conversational.□ It is just a hint, but here is a glimpse of a world in which all creatures are interrelated and have something to say to each other.

The most notable example of this is the narrator's old horse Bird, whom he has owned since he was a boy and who is a character in the novel in his own right. Long years of association between them enable the narrator to converse with Bird, and Bird has a range of personal responses to his words. When Bird gets tired and the narrator teases him, Bird □flicked his ears as if in irritation.□ When the narrator tries to free the cow and Bird for a moment does not cooperate, the narrator chides him and a repentant Bird □nodded his agreement.□ But the most remarkable moment between them comes as the narrator ponders the story he has just been told by Yellow Calf, about the winter of starvation endured by the narrator's grandmother. As the narrator thinks the story over, □Bird farted,□ and at that moment, the narrator suddenly realizes that Yellow Calf is his grandfather:

And it came to me, as though it were riding one moment of the gusting wind, as though Bird had had it in him all the time and had passed it to me in that one instant of corruption.

Here, wind, horse, and human mind seem to come together in one stunning moment of secret communication and understanding. It is appropriate that this happens in the presence of Yellow Calf, because he is the wise old man of this tale. In Yellow Calf, the Native American worldview that hovers at the margins of the narrator's consciousness is seen in its fullest form. He appears in only two scenes in the novel, but his importance to its underlying theme is immense. When the narrator first visits Yellow Calf, in part 2,

he tells the old man that no one should live alone, but Yellow Calf says that the deer provide him company in the evening. He talks to them and understands what they talk about amongst themselves. He says he understands other animals too, although some more than others. This shows that for Yellow Calf, in keeping with Native American tradition, there is a fluid interplay between the human and the nonhuman worlds. Understanding the animals comes perfectly naturally to him. He does not think it in any way remarkable. As Sanchez says regarding her Native American beliefs: □We are as familiar with the natures and aspects of our local animal populations as we are the natures and personalities of our sisters, brothers, and cousins□because we believe all things are our relatives.□

Yellow Calf says the deer are not happy because things on the earth have changed: □They know what a bad time it is. They can tell by the moon when the world is cockeyed.□ The narrator pokes fun at him, but if for a moment one puts aside culturally based beliefs that one cannot hold a conversation with a deer, Yellow Calf's gnomic comment is full of meaning. It suggests another level of alienation in the novel, beyond the merely personal condition of the narrator. In part 1, it is revealed that there are no longer any fish in the river that runs by Teresa's ranch, due to industrial pollution. It appears that Yellow Calf can sense the disturbance in the environment from the deer's reaction to it; the phrase □the world is cockeyed□ suggests a pervasive condition of which a polluted river may be only one symptom. And when he says, cryptically, □sometimes it seems that one has to lean into the wind to stand straight,□ he again hints at some large disturbance of the environmental balance. He is the wise man who, despite his blindness, sees further than other men.

The second scene in which Yellow Calf appears, in part 4, is notable for the way in which the narrator seems to perceive Yellow Calf in terms of the old man's union with the natural world. At one point, Yellow Calf's □shoulders squared and hunched like the folded wings of a hawk□; and the narrator senses that behind his unseeing eyes, Yellow Calf lives in a world □as clean as the rustling willows, the bark of a fox or the odor of musk during mating season.□

This pure quality of Yellow Calf's life is part of what the narrator calls his □distance□; it is a distance from all corruption, superficiality and pettiness, and quite different from the distance that separates the narrator from himself and his environment. Yellow Calf lives deeply within himself and is on good terms with everything in the universe. At one point, the narrator remarks, □A mosquito took shelter in the hollow of his cheek, but he didn't notice.□ Needless to say, mosquitoes are not usually perceived as □taking shelter□ on human skin. There is something remarkable, something unshakeable, about Yellow Calf that suggests a way of experiencing the world undreamed of by the impoverished Western imagination. It gives us the clue that, lying just beneath the surface of this rather bleak tale is something far more rich and strange than the dispiriting escapades of an aimless drunk.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Winter in the Blood*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Quotes

"My right eye was swollen up, but I couldn't remember how or why, just the white man, loose with his wife and buying drinks, his raging tongue a flame above the music and my eyes."

Part One, Chapter 1, pg. 2

"Lame Bull and my mother were gone for three days. When they came back, he was wearing a new pair of boots, the fancy kind with walking heels, and she had on a shimmery turquoise dress. They were both sweaty and hung over. Teresa told me that they had gotten married in Malta."

Part One, Chapter 6, pg. 13

"It was always 'they' who had found him, yet I had a memory as timeless as the blowing snow that we had found him ourselves, that we had gone searching for him after the third day, or fourth day, or the fifth, cruising the white level of highway raised between the blue-white of the borrow pits." Part One, Chapter 9, pg. 19

"She was Cree and not worth a damn. Not worth going after. My grandmother, before she quit talking, had told me how Crees never cared for anybody but themselves."

Part One, Chapter 12, pg. 33

"I had slept fitfully, pursued by the ghosts of the night before and nights past."

Part One, Chapter 16, pg. 52

"I dropped the sheet over her and sat for a moment, trying to decide how I should attack her, but the thought of the boy eating cereal in the next room took over and I felt the quick desire dying in my crotch." Part Two, Chapter 20, pg. 84

"First Raise got us each a cup of coffee and watched us drink. It was beginning to get light. He loved us." Part Two, Chapter 26, pgs. 105-106

"Randolph Scott had plugged me dead with a memory I had tried to keep away."

Part Two, Chapter 26, pg. 108

"I had had enough of Havre, enough of town, or walking home, hung over, beaten up, or both. I had had enough of the people, the bartenders, the bars, the cars, the hotels, but mostly, I had had enough of myself. I wanted to lose myself, to ditch these clothes, to outrun this burning sun, to stand beneath the clouds and have my shadow erased, myself along with it."

Part Two, Chapter 31, pg. 125

"I couldn't have seen it—we were still moving in the opposite direction, the tears, the dark and wind in my eyes—the movie exploded whitely in my brain, and I saw the futile lurch of the car as the brake lights popped, the horse's shoulder caving before the fender, the horse spinning so that its rear end smashed into the door, the smaller figure flying slowly over the top of the car to land with the hush of a stuffed doll." Part Three, Chapter 36, pg. 142

"Yet I had felt it then, that feeling of event. Perhaps it was the distance, those three new miles, that I felt, or perhaps I had felt something of that other distance; but the event of distance was as vivid to me as the cold canvas of First Raise's coat against my cheek. He must have known then what I had just discovered. Although he told me nothing of it up to the day he died, he had taken me that snowy day to see my grandfather." Part Four, Chapter 39, pgs. 161-162

"Next time I'd do it right. Buy her a couple of crimes de menthe, maybe offer to marry her on the spot." Epilogue, pg. 175

Topics for Further Study

What do you think is the cause of the narrator's alienation? Is his alienation mostly his own psychological problem, or are there wider social causes of it, such as the difficulties of Indians living in a dominant white culture? Does the narrator grow and change during the course of the novel? If so, in what ways? Or, does he stay much the same?

Research Native American religion and spirituality. What are its main characteristics, and how does it differ from the Judeo-Christian tradition?

Research what current conditions are like on Native American reservations. Has life on reservations changed much in the thirty years since the novel was written? What are the main issues facing Native Americans living on reservations today, and how are those issues being addressed?

Research the history of the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes, and other tribes of the Great Plains, during the nineteenth century. How were they were forced onto reservations? What was the Dawes Act of 1887, and why did most Indian leaders oppose it?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: The American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut population numbers 827,000, which is 0.4 percent of the population of the United States. This represents an increase from 1950, when the Indian population numbered 343,410, which is only 0.2 percent of the population.

Today: According to the 2000 census, there are more than 2.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives (Eskimo and Aleut).

1970s: The federal government takes action to preserve Indian rights and culture by promoting Indian self-determination. In 1975, Congress passes the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act, under which Indian tribes may administer their own social programs such as housing and education. Congress also passes the Indian Child Welfare Act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978.

Today: Native American tribal governments have large responsibilities for the administration of their land. This includes protection of hunting and fishing rights, water rights, religious traditions, and cultural heritage. Many tribal governments have taken advantage of the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which permits gaming on tribal lands. Nearly 130 tribes in twenty-four states are involved in some kind of gaming.

1970s: Large numbers of Native Americans live in poverty on Indian reservations. But because of growing Indian militancy, mainstream society and American policy-makers are forced to take notice of their plight.

Today: The U.S. Civil Rights Commission reports to Congress in July 2003 that Native Americans still suffer high rates of poverty, poor educational achievement, substandard housing, and high rates of disease and illness. Native Americans continue to rank at or near the bottom of nearly every social, health, and economic indicator.

What Do I Read Next?

Welch's *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (1994) is his retelling of the story of the massacre of General Custer and the Seventh Cavalry by Sioux warriors at Little Bighorn in 1876, the aftermath of the battle, and Welch's experience of making the documentary film *Last Stand at Little Bighorn* with Paul Stekle for PBS in 1992.

Growing Up Native American: An Anthology (1995), edited by Patricia Riley, includes writings by twenty-two Native American authors in which they tell stories of oppression and survival, of heritage denied and reclaimed.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1993), by Spokane Indian writer Sherman Alexie, is a well-reviewed collection of twenty-two interconnected stories about life in and around the Spokane, Washington, Indian Reservation.

The Ancient Child: A Novel (1990), by N. Scott Momaday, shapes the Kiowa myth of a boy who turned into a bear into a novel about Set, a Native American boy in search of his identity. Set was raised far from a reservation and, when he returns to Indian lands, he meets a young medicine woman named Grey, who reconnects him to his cultural heritage.

Further Study

Beidler, Peter, G., ed., "Special Symposium Issue on James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*," in *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 4, May 1978.

This includes eight essays on the novel and a preface. Three of the essays, by Kathleen Sands, A. LaVonne Ruoff and Louise K. Barnett, discuss the theme of alienation. Other essays analyze the tone of the novel, including humor, the comic mode, and elegy.

Larson, Charles R., *American Indian Fiction*, University of New Mexico Press, 1978, pp. 140-49.

Larson praises the novel as almost flawless. He admires its comic elements and also comments on the feeling of goodwill displayed by the author to his characters.

Owens, Louis, "Earthboy's Return: James Welch's Acts of Recovery," in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, pp. 128-66.

Owens discusses the theme of alienation in *Winter in the Blood*, focusing on the narrator's quest for identity. The narrator's recovery from his alienated condition is dependent upon a renewed sense of identity as a Blackfeet Indian, and he makes significant progress toward that goal.

Wild, Peter, *James Welch*, Western Writers Series, Boise State University Press, 1983, pp. 24-38.

Wild offers a comparison between *Winter in the Blood* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. The book reviews the critical response to Welch's novel, and gives his own interpretation of its themes.

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Sanchez, Carol Lee, □Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral: The Sacred Connection,□ in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, edited by Carol J. Adams, Continuum, 1999, pp. 207-28.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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