

The Surrounded by D'Arcy McNickle (1904-1977) Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1978 (copyright 1936)

Questions and Opportunities for Discussion For *The Surrounded* by D'Arcy McNickle

By

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According to McNickle in his "Note:" "In this story of the Salish people are elements which will be recognized as belonging to the story of tribes from Hudson Bay southward." Particular facts are from the written works of Ross Cox, David Thompson, Alexander Henry, John Work, Major John Owen, Pierre J. De Smet S.J., Lawrence B. Palladino, or collections of traditional stories by Marius Barbeau, Helen Fitzgerald's story told by Chief Charlot.

- What Disturbs, Interests, Confuses, or Enlightens you about a character, a situation, an idea or something a character says or does?
- What line or phrase in the whole novel might summarize its theme or philosophical purpose?
- How does this novel contribute to any or all of OPI's Essential Understandings of Montana Indians?
- How does this novel explore or answer issues of identity?

Chapter 1 Archilde's return to the reservation

Questions

1. We are immediately introduced to Archilde and to his parents as we *witness* his approach to each. What does each of them *do*, and what does that action reveal about the relationship between Archilde and Max or Archilde's mother?
2. What calls Archilde home? What does he *want* or *expect* from this visit home? What does his mother want? His father? Do either of his parents know him? Explain.
3. What is Max Leon's attitude toward Indians? How do you know? What might explain it?
4. What assumptions does Max make about Archilde? And what assumptions does Archilde make about Max?
5. Who has the most power in the relationship between Max and his wife? Consider what each one says and does and then explain.
6. What does Louis' horse stealing reveal about Max, the Indian/white situation, Archilde's mother, Archilde, Louis?
7. What assumptions do Mike and Narcisse make about Archilde? Explain
8. What has changed or stayed the same for the Salish in the time Archilde has been gone?
9. What are the conflicts he *witnesses*? How do those conflicts affect him?

Broad Questions

1. This chapter introduces the conflict of living between or within two worlds: the Salish “tribal” world and the non-Native world of “Individualism.” *Distrust* of another is one of the most visible symptoms of this conflict. Where does it appear and what are the specific causes? With individuals, how might they resolve this conflict? What prevents resolution?
2. The causes and consequences of this conflict affect each character in the novel. To whom or to what group does McNickle attribute the most blame? Is his position justified?
3. What elements in McNickle’s life are echoed in Archilde’s?
4. How might the saying “we can only know what we remember” apply to the people Archilde encounters in the novel? How does it apply to him?

Words for Thought

“She would not tell him what he knew she knew. She did not trust him. That was something to make a man reflect on the meaning and purpose of his life.” (10)

“He had been home just these few hours and he was wishing to God that he had stayed away. But perhaps he would know enough next time. Tomorrow he would go fishing. He would look at the sky some more. He would ride his horse. Then wherever he might go, he would always keep the memory of these things.” (14)

Of what use in another world are these memories?

Chapter 2 – Catherine’s story

Questions

1. Archilde tells his sister Agnes that he won’t stay because there’s “nothing to do here.” But he knows he could take over his father’s ranch. What keeps him from pursuing that goal?
2. When we consider our own identity, how much of it is imagination and how much is reality? Who decides?
3. What causes the verbal conflict between Archilde and his brother Louis? How does trust/distrust play in this conflict? How does the influence of the non-Native world play in this conflict?
4. What does Louis want from his mother and what persuasive techniques does he use to get it? How does trust/distrust play in this exchange?
5. From the age of four, “Faithful” Catherine has trusted and lived obediently in the ways of the priests. Were they trustworthy? Explain.

Words for Thought

“At the creek’s edge he sat on an old log and listened to the water which, though night had come, was still awake, swirling in eddies, slapping upon stones. Owls talked back and forth. There were odors of the thimbleberry, of wet gravel, and, he thought, of fish, but that was imagination. It was a peculiar thing how images of such things entwined

themselves into one's life; they were nothing that could be touched and yet they had strength and substance. He had come a thousand miles because of their pull upon him/ someday they might pull him from across half the world." (16)

"Now in old age she looked upon a chaotic world—so many things dead, so many words for which she knew no meaning; her sons developing into creatures such as had never lived in her childhood (a son might steal horses but a mother was respected): the fires of hell slashing the gloom of a summer evening. . . . and she could not understand the ruin that had overtaken her. What had come about since that day of the planting of the cross? How was it that when one day was like another there should be, at the end of many days, a world of confusion and dread and emptiness?"

Chapter 3 – Moser's story

Questions

1. When Archilde draws on his hat and dresses for fishing, he feels good about himself until Max Leon ridicules him. "His father's words would not lie down," and "*It* was not what he wanted." What does "*it*" represent and why do his father's words have such an impact on Archilde?
2. Max has his own conflicts with white men and the trader and merchant, George Moser. What assumptions does Max make about Moser and other white men in town? Are Max's assumptions justified?
3. What assumptions does Moser make about Max? Are his assumptions true?
4. How might these assumptions influence the distrust they have of each other?
5. McNickle includes two details in his description of Max Leon: "brown hands" and "his big blue automobile . . . the gaudiest of machines." How do those details affect Max's perception of himself and the non-Indian settlers and merchants' perceptions of him? Where is the irony in these details? How is sympathy created for Max Leon in this chapter?
6. What details does this chapter provide about the beginnings of non-Indian settlement on Indian lands, allotment, promises to Indians and whites regarding land use and productivity, and money promised to Indians? Who would benefit and how?
7. From the time of treaties in the mid 19th century to the time of the novel, what happened to "justice" for the Indians?"
8. How does McNickle create sympathy for Moser?
9. What stereotypes of Indians influence characters' behaviors in this chapter?

Words for Thought

"[Max Leon] was a proud man, but he had not been too proud to marry an Indian squaw. That was how Mr. Moser looked at it." (34)

Chapter 4 – Max Leon’s story

Questions

1. How do the two towns on the Indian reserve differ from each other? What do their arrangements reveal about the culture of the people who live in each?
2. Why might Max Leon regard Father Grepilloux as a friend?
3. What does Father Grepilloux remember about the Indians when he first came to the Flathead?
4. Father Grepilloux asks Max what the Indians were like when he first came. What is Max’s response? What stereotypes do his memories contradict? Based on what you know about Max, do you find his response surprising?
5. Max provides a reason for why he stayed in the Flathead and didn’t go back to Spain. How does his reason compare with Archilde’s for coming home?
6. At the end of the chapter, both the Father and Max share perceptions about Indians now, about how things have changed on the reservation. What are they and what may have caused the change from the Father’s earliest perceptions?
7. Why did Max’s boys leave “him flat”? Father Grepilloux says “bad Indians” have “spoiled your boys for you.” Apart from his perception, who are the “bad Indians”?

Broad Questions

1. The chapter reinforces a theme that appears throughout the novel: our sense of ourselves and our own experiences will always get in the way of our truly knowing others. Only those who accept this truth can possibly achieve real understanding. How does the statement “we can only know what we remember” help clarify this theme?
2. How do the various characters and groups in the novel value land?

Words for Thought

“ . . . she kept a certain hold on them by demanding nothing and giving everything.” (44)

Chapter 5 – Father Grepilloux’ story

Questions

1. What stereotypes of Indians or the Salish appear in the priest’s journals? How might Max’s experiences contradict or support these stereotypes?
2. Does Father Grepilloux know the Indians? Explain
3. Regarding his knowledge or understanding of Indians, who is the most honest, Max Leon or Father Grepilloux? Explain
4. Explain how the forced intrusion of non-Indian culture disturbs the time-honored Salish practice of whipping to achieve redemption and the Salish tradition for administering justice. What are the consequences for the Salish? How do misunderstandings on both sides exacerbate the conflicts and consequences?
5. Does Father Grepilloux understand how the church has disrupted a system that worked? Or does he understand how the non-Indian system of justice has disrupted the Salish system? Why might his understanding regarding justice and

the situation for Big Paul and the Salish be greater than his understanding of the impact of the church?

6. Explain the irony in the last sentence of the chapter.

Broad Questions

1. What keeps people from desiring to know or understand others who might differ from themselves?
2. How do two stories in this chapter prepare the reader for events at the end of the novel: the Salish practice of whipping as a means of punishment and redemption, and the story of Big Paul?

Words for Thought

“So far as his knowledge of the Indians was concerned, he had never pretended to any.” (49)”

“... these people have lost a way of life, and with it their pride, their dignity, their strength.” (59)

Chapter 6 – Elders’ storytelling

Questions

1. Now that Archilde has returned from living in Portland, what does Archilde’s irritation with Indian relationships and Indian ways reveal about his own identity issues?
2. How does the phrase, “we only know what we remember,” help explain Archilde’s reaction to the old woman’s story about “Flint”?
3. After Whitey’s story about “The Thing that was to make life easy,” Archilde realizes that the story “was full of meaning.” For Archilde, what might that meaning be?
4. How does Modeste’s story differ from the old woman’s and Whitey’s?
5. How has fighting changed for the Salish since the white men came?
6. How does Modeste’s story about why the Salish wanted the black-robe Fathers to come to the Flathead compare/contrast with the explanation in Chapter 5 that Father Gripilloux gives in his journals? What didn’t the black robes understand about the Salish? What didn’t the Salish understand about Christianity and the black robes?
7. What do each of the three stories reveal about the Salish: their culture, their tradition, their history, their values?
8. How and why does Archilde’s attitude towards the elder Indians change by the end of the chapter?
9. How does this chapter help the reader answer Max Leon’s questions to himself as he lies in his own bed watching the fires of the feasting?

Broad Questions

1. How does the story “The Thing that was to make life easy” prove ironic in light of the tragic events that occur later in the novel?

Words for Thought

“My story will have to be a different one. I will tell it for this boy who has just come home after traveling out to the world. You have just heard him say that those old days are dead and won’t come again. And it’s true. But let me tell this story so he will see better just what it was like back in those times.” (69-70)

“Why couldn’t just one of his sons have the sense and the courage to make himself a new way of life!” He rolled away from the glow of light, but still the voices reached him. “What were they saying? Why didn’t they talk to him?” (75)

“Archilde, listening closely, felt something die within him. Some stiffness, some pride, went weak before the old man’s bitter simple words.” (74)

Chapter 7 Max’s story

Questions

1. What is outside Max’s control in his life? Why?
2. Considering the way Indian children were captured and taken to boarding school, what is most disturbing about the episode of Max tricking his nephews into going to the mission school? What made trickery necessary?
3. How do Agnes and Catherine control Max?
4. In the context of culture conflict in this novel, what might the image of the mare disliking the noise of the thresher symbolize?
5. What causes Max to change his tone towards Archilde?
6. What does Max’s surprise and then disturbance over seeing Archilde working reveal about Max?
7. Where does honest communication overcoming misunderstanding occur, where individuals attempt to break through to achieve some positive level of relationship with another?
8. How is Archilde maintaining control over his life despite the expectations of his mother and his father?

Words for Thought

“Much had been wasted, much destroyed, and men would have been richer if they had been satisfied with less.”

Chapter 8 Max and Archilde

Questions

1. Realistically, are the influences in Archilde’s life (his father and all he represents, his mother and all she represents, the priests and the church, Portland and the outside world) reconcilable?
2. Why are Max and Archilde cautious around each other?
3. Max and Archilde have two definitions of work. What does each mean?
4. Who has the most power in this chapter – Archilde, Max, the priest? Explain.

5. What does Archilde see in Max that's new?
6. What changes Max's attitude toward Archilde? Will it last?
7. Is the priest's offer to help Archilde with his violin trickery?

Words for Thought about work

"I never wanted much from my boys. Just for them to take a man's place, know how to work and do things. Not to have them work for me. Hell, no! That's not what I wanted. But a man ought to know how to work for his own good. That's what I wanted." (86)

"Work was a small matter. One knew about it. It seemed useless to talk about so ordinary a subject." (87)

Chapter 9 Archilde at Boarding School

Questions

1. Who was Mr. Duffield and how does he impact Archilde?
2. How does Duffield compare/contrast with Snodgrass?
3. How are the episodes of interaction involving misunderstanding, distrust, suspicion, trust and then betrayal connected to differences in culture or life experiences?
4. Why might the boarding school students have "scattered like white ash of a camp fire caught up by a sudden wind" after leaving the school?
5. Whose advice at boarding school is the most useful: Snodgrass or Duffield or, later, Father Gripilloux? Is it possible to follow all three? Which does Archilde value the most? Explain.
6. How does Father Gripilloux view Archilde's story as contradicting Big Paul's? What does he believe has changed since Big Paul?
7. Why does Archilde decide to stay? Why might he leave? Is he in control of his life?

Words for Thought – more about work

"Always take an interest in your work. No matter how much you dislike a job, or how unimportant it seems to you, if it is your job, do it with a will and to the best of your ability. That is the way to make yourself valuable and to win success. I wasn't as fortunate as you. I was twenty years old before an old teacher gave me the advice I'm giving you now. But I took it to heart and it's been my motto ever since—work with a will. That's how I might put it." (94)

"Archilde realized that he had been too eager to accept words without questioning their meaning. He had been betrayed by his own simplicity." (93)

Chapter 10 Archilde and the church

Questions

1. What causes Archilde's distrust of Father Cristadore?
2. What disturbs Archilde when he remembers the priests of his childhood?

3. Why does Archilde feel “wronged” when he sees the Punch and Judy show? What had his previous experience taught him was “right”?
4. How does Archilde take control over the images that created fear in him as a child?
5. What was Archilde’s “knowledge” based on memory, and how do his new experiences and memories adjust his previous knowledge?
6. How does this chapter further illustrate the consequences of misunderstanding, deceit and trickery?
7. What didn’t Archilde understand until he “knew” it?

Broad Questions

1. Arthur Miller, in *Death of a Salesman*, suggests that each of us has a conflict from which we cannot run away. Growing up means facing it. What does it mean to “face a conflict”? What are the conflicts each individual owns in *The Surrounded*, and who are the characters who face those conflicts? Which characters totally avoid the conflict? Who comes closest to facing it?

Words for Thought

“These visits to the church awakened old images that lay at the beginning of life. They were disturbing, half-fearful. It required effort to face them and be self-possessed.” (99)

“It was curious and unaccountable, how an incident, of no importance in itself, lodged unnoticed in the mind, took root, sent out branches; and in proper season the sweet or bitter taste of its fruit flavored everything.” (100)

Chapter 11 - Max and Father Grepilloux

Questions

1. This chapter reveals Max’s inner conflict over Archilde. Why is he afraid to trust the change that’s come over Archilde? Is his distrust Max’s problem or is Archilde an untrustworthy individual?
2. How does the priest’s polarized view of humanity affect his expectations for Archilde in this chapter? Who is a good person to him? Who is bad?
3. How is Archilde behaving that may lead the priest and Max to have changed their expectations of Archilde?
4. How might Archilde respond to the priest’s vision of music school in Rome and Paris?
5. What kind of power does Agnes have over Max, over her own life? If she has power, how does she exercise it? Is she successful? Do we know her at all?
6. What change has come over Max regarding his tricking the boys?

Words for Thought

“And your boy is standing there where the road divides. He belongs to a new time. He may not stay in this valley, and it makes no difference whether he does or not; it is what he makes of himself that will count. It will be felt by all.” (108)

“If you continue asking yourself questions, you’ll never have the answer you wish. Doubt breeds doubt and the mind can’t prevail against it. The only way is to give your faith to the boy.” (109)

“Nothing was accomplished with the whip, he had seen that; by friendliness, now, seemed to work miracles. Too bad he had had to wait until he was an old man to learn that.” (112)

Chapter 12 – Turning Chapter

Questions

1. Archilde has grown aware of the injustice done to Indians. What has brought him to this understanding?
2. Archilde has also grown more sympathetic to Max, and he honestly communicates with Max in this chapter. Does this increasing awareness or understanding of the Indians and of Max produce more or less internal conflict for Archilde? Explain.
3. Why does Archilde decide to go hunting with his mother despite his reservations? Are his reservations about the hunt realistic or are they a literary tool to build suspense?
4. How does Catherine get her son to take her hunting?
5. Characters in the novel trick or fool others, and some fool themselves. Which is the most dangerous kind of trickery?
6. What causes the recurrence of images of the city to collide with Archilde’s previous feeling of being at home in the mountains? Why does he now view “his home” as a “strange country”?
7. How does Archilde’s decision to not shoot the deer exhibit aspects of the conflict of old ways vs. new, Indian vs. non-Indian?
8. Is Archilde’s trickery of his mother and Louis regarding the deer justified? How does the author make him pay for this “foolishness” and dishonesty?
9. How do misunderstanding and distrust and confusion, and subsequent attempts to achieve power over the situation, bring about the tragedy in this chapter?
10. Is Catherine strong or weak in this situation? Are her actions reasonable or instinctive?
11. How does this episode with the hatchet prove ironic against the story about “The thing that was to make life easy”?
12. What is the dominating emotion that motivates the action precipitating Louis’ murder?

Broad Questions

1. Max wonders if Archilde is “of his own mind.” He’s concerned about who might control Archilde. From what we know of Archilde through the narration and through his actions, how much *does* Archilde know his own mind? Is Archilde a

- victim in this novel? Is he surrounded by forces over which he has no control? Does he have control over himself?
2. On the Flathead Reservation in the 1930's, what laws governed hunting for Indians, for whites? Why might the game have disappeared? Read McNickle's story "Meat for God" in *The Hawk is Hungry*. How does that story build insight into the situation for Louis and Archilde and Catherine in this chapter?
 3. How is their confusion over what laws apply to whom on the reservation realistic? What is the law on reservations today? Who governs what? Who suffers the most in this confusion?
 4. What is Max's greatest strength? His greatest fault? What is Archilde's greatest strength? His greatest fault?
 5. All characters are looking for truth. Some look for a truth that matches their own vision of reality. Others look for reality that reveals truth. Who is Archilde?
 6. How might "The Surrounded" be an appropriate title for this chapter?
 7. Is McNickle a naturalist or existentialist? What does this chapter suggest?
- From "American Masters: The American Novel"

www.pbs.org/wnet/americannovel/timeline/naturalism.html

"Although its origins were European, naturalism was an important movement in American literature from the 1890s until the 1920. While it is strongly associated with realism, in the shared emphasis on depicting surface reality, naturalism . . . emphasizes the limited ability of humans to impose will upon their own destiny." For the naturalist, human beings are part of the natural cycle of things – no God or force for good controls people's lives, and they have little control over external natural forces. "[Naturalism emphasizes the way] economic and social forces determine human behavior." (pbs.org)

Words for Thought

"There was no accounting for what happened next." (127)

Chapter 13 Return to Max's from the mountain

Questions

1. How does Catherine's fear differ from Archilde's?
2. What is Archilde's greatest fear?
3. In this situation, who behaves reasonably? Who behaves instinctively? Why?
4. What causes Archilde to act against his best reason and not bury Louis' body? Is his decision a sign of weakness or strength? Explain.
5. How does Catherine question herself and what she's done to bring her and her boys to this point?
6. Who is responsible for what has just happened?
7. What might the "snake" symbolize?
8. What might Archilde mean when he says he has a "soft head"?
9. Does Max believe Archilde when he and Catherine, nearly frozen themselves, tell him that "Somebody-shot-him?" Explain.

Broad Questions

It is said that McNickle was influenced by Hemingway, who relied on the “naturalistic concept of the individual who is being tested by extreme circumstance and learning to live without self-delusion.” (pbs.org)

1. Look at the nature images that occur throughout the novel. Consider the events that accompany the nature images.
2. How do images of nature as those listed below affect the implications of those events?

“ . . . he was ready to fashion a God of the moment and thank him.” (130) “They were met by a piercing wind blowing from the prairie. The snow had ceased but the wind carried it along in stinging gusts.” (133) “The wind increased its fury and piled snow on the window ledges only to blow it off again as it changed to a different quarter.” (134)

3. What aspects of *The Surrounded* may be attributed to naturalism as a literary philosophy? Does this in any way diminish the historical and very personal experience of Indians? Explain.

Words for Thought

“The Sheriff had become a symbol of his dead hope. Life would go so far—and there would be the Sheriff waiting to end it.” (132)

Chapter 14 Max remembers Grepilloux

Questions

1. What has caused Max’s confusion?
2. What does Max remember about Father Grepilloux? His career as a missionary, his view of Indians, his greatest sorrow?
3. What were the basic tenets of Father Grepilloux’s belief system?
4. Explain the irony in the situation of Father Grepilloux’ desire to see “tribal laws and customs restored and respected and his efforts to teach them about sin that “was the beginning of their earthly happiness”?
5. Compare/contrast Catherine’s view of the church’s impact on her people with Father Grepilloux’ perspective as revealed through Max’s reflections in this chapter.
6. What federal policy resulted in the refusal of money to support Mission schools?
7. What good had Father Grepilloux done? What evil? In Max’s mind, does the good the priest has accomplished excuse the bad he may have done?
8. What event shows Max that he has achieved respect at last? What has contributed to his fear of disrespect from the “accepted citizens”?
9. What were Max’s “impressions” at the funeral?
10. What might the absence of his hat symbolize?

Broad Questions

1. How might this novel illustrate good and evil?
2. How does Father Grepilloux's life represent, or not represent, the intention and impact of the outside world?

Words for Thought

"As for the Indians who had been taught to understand sin, certainly they offered no satisfaction. Instead one had to ask of them were they saved or were they destroyed? Bringing the outside world to them was not exactly like bringing heaven to them." (139)

"Outside the snow blew in flurries and the wind drove frost into the flesh." (140)

Chapter 15 Aftermath of the funeral – Moser and Max

Questions

1. Max considers sainthood. What does he learn?
2. For a time, Max lets down his guard with Moser. What causes his distrust to return?
3. What are the ironies in this chapter?
4. What does Moser the trader represent to the white people? To the Indians?
5. It is the Depression, and Max considers the consequences of a collective non-Indian presence. How does this guilt compare/contrast with individual guilt?
6. What historical events and policies have led to the list of consequences on page 149?
7. Who does Max hold responsible for his present situation? What has changed?

Broad Questions

1. How might naturalism explain the condition Max realizes by the end of this chapter?
2. How do the five stages of grief--denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—play in the lives of characters in this novel?

Words for Thought

"Well, I don't know. I'm not much that way myself and I might feel out of place."
(Moser speaking about saints 145)

"He had images of Father Grepilloux working like a peasant, of the Indians perishing of hunger and disease, of the outside world pouring into this sheltered valley, a paradise in its original state—and what had been the purpose? To develop boys who committed murder? Merciful God! There must be other reasons!" (148)

Chapter 16 – Indian Agent's story

Questions

1. Why were Max' matters left in the hand of the Indian Agent?
2. How are Max and the Indian agent alike?

3. How are Archilde's lies affecting him? How might he be trapped?
4. Is Mr. Parker's view of Indians as victims justified?
5. How does Parker view his situation as Indian agent?
6. Where is there evidence of distrust, assumptions, purposeful deceit, suspicion, and trickery in the situation with the agent, Quigley, and Archilde? What is the motivation for each?
7. How does Archilde side-step Quigley's suspicions? Does this demonstrate power or weakness? Explain.

Broad Questions

1. In this novel, is any individual really responsible for his own destiny?
2. What does it take for individuals to survive in this novel? Is it different for each individual? What might they share?
3. What is the distinction between predator and prey in this chapter?
4. What motivates Quigley or the agent? Power or a desire for justice?
5. How does Archilde perceive Quigley's prediction?
6. Do Indians view themselves as victims? Explain

Words for Thought

"Something had gone wrong, uselessly, without reason." (150)

Chapter 17 Truth-telling -- Max and Archilde

Questions

1. Why is it difficult for Max to ask Archilde about a possible murder?
2. When he asks Archilde if he will go away, what does that imply? What's the implication of Archilde's answer "I'd like to go away"?
3. What does Archilde want from this exchange? Why is he there?
4. What causes Archilde to change the way he interacts with Max and tell him the truth?
5. What has Max done to deserve this honesty?
6. Where is the hope in this interaction? How has the conflict between Max and Archilde been resolved?
7. Now Archilde and Max have some things in common. What are they? What's the plan?
8. How does Archilde's sense of responsibility for his mother interfere with his plans for himself? Is this tribalism or is it a positive character trait or is it typical of an individual who is "surrounded"?
9. How does Max let go of blame and take responsibility for himself and his behaviors?
10. What does his story about the raising of his sons reveal about his character?
11. Why did he kick his wife out of his house and why does he want to ask her to come back?
12. What does Max believe he can still control?

13. At the end of this chapter, does Max really understand who Archilde is? Have his expectations changed?

Words for Thought

“It was a long recital, giving the story of his dreams and desires, his notions about life, and how all this seemed to have come to an end.” (159)

“He’s been dead a long time. Didn’t you know?”

“What he had feared was not that the boy had killed but that he might be deceptive or cruel or dull of spirit—one of those who begin by killing the good things in themselves.”(159)

Chapter 18 Archilde at his father’s death

Questions

1. How has Archilde changed in the presence of his father and his father’s possessions?
2. What is the effect on our understanding of Archilde or the situation of the metaphor comparing his shock at learning his father has pneumonia to a “blow at the base of the skull”?
3. What does this event reveal about what Archilde really values?
4. How will Max’s death affect Archilde’s future?

Chapter 17 Catherine’s story

Questions

1. The chapter begins with images of wind controlling clouds and geese. What tone do these images establish?
2. When Catherine thinks about this spring bringing new life, why does this thought bring dark memories?
3. Who were the sisters who came to the reservation?
4. What did the Indian women question about the sisters’ actions?
5. What did Catherine learn at the mission school?
6. What was her attitude toward the church and its purpose?
7. When she marries Max, he controls her. How does she rebel against this control?
8. What bothers her about being a white man’s wife? Why?
9. What made Catherine question the church’s definition of evil?
10. How has her killing of the warden affected her relationship with the church? What had been her understanding of the consequences of mortal sin?

Broad Questions

1. How did the church, as defined in this novel, fail the Salish people?

Words for Thought

“She who had been called Faithful Catharine and who had feared hell for her sons and for herself—her belief and her fear alike had died in her. “ (173)

Chapter 20 Archilde and the aftermath of Max’s death: the farm, the trader, and Catherine.

Questions

1. What is Horace Parker’s perception of Max Leon?
2. Archilde gives up “looking for hidden meanings.” Is he setting himself up for a fall when he begins to relax around the agent he’s lied to about the death of Louis? Will he be more vulnerable?
3. What has caused Archilde to separate himself from the church and its influence?
4. What causes Archilde to be suspicious of the lawyer who settled Max’s estate and Moser? What might each want from Archilde?
5. How had the church failed Catherine?
6. How has Archilde’s relationship with his mother changed?
7. How does the reconciliation between Max and Catherine occur?
8. What is Archilde’s remembered understanding of his mother’s nature?

Broad Questions

1. Does survival depend on a person always watching out for “hidden meanings” or threats?

Words for Thought

“He was looking at the winter wheat which Max had planted and he was deciding that he would have to stay and harvest the crop. He would not plant more but he would harvest what Max had planted. It was a way of fulfilling the trust placed in him. He was just learning what that meant, that trust.” (177)

“He could see that she had a way, all unconscious, of making other people seem small and squirmy, like something you might pluck out of your hair (not that he had anything to pluck out of his hair!) She would sit quietly gazing off into space and you felt a longing to see what she saw, but you would not risk her contempt by asking her to confide in you.” (182)

“Even then, it seemed, they said but little to each other yet nothing went unsaid that needed saying.” (184)

Chapter 21 Mike and Mission School

Questions

1. What makes Archilde believe that something has gone wrong at the Mission school?

2. Both Mike and Catherine are having episodes in the night. What is the experience both of them share? (Guilt)
3. How has Mike exercised power over his situation at the school? Who suffers worse, himself or those he would punish?
4. Why doesn't Archilde's plea to Narcisse to tell Mike that the priests were lying have any effect on Narcisse?

Broad Questions

1. Is there a difference between real and imagined guilt, particularly with respect to the effects? In this novel, what are the causes and consequences of each?
2. The church and priests condemn some behaviors as "sacrilege." The Salish also regard certain behaviors as sacrilegious. What of Salish tradition is revealed in this novel and how do the Salish respond to the actions of sacrilege? How does "who has the power" affect the actions?
3. Does Mike's experience at the Mission school typify other Indian students in boarding schools?
4. How does the experience of the boys at the Mission school echo the language and conviction of the Puritans in Salem 1690? Is this the effect of religious fanaticism or is it a means of one group controlling another? Is it a kind of brainwashing?
5. Archilde feels himself an outsider. Can anyone, no matter how close, ever understand another? Is that one of the messages of this novel?

Words for Thought

"These efforts to bring peace and order into the lives of his relatives before he left them forever did not please him greatly. Whatever he did, he felt that he remained on the outside of their problems. He had grown away from them, and even when he succeeded in approaching them in sympathy, he remained an outsider—only a little better than a professor come to study their curious ways of life. He saw no way of changing it." (193)

Chapter 22 Archilde and his visit to Modeste

Questions

1. How is the Indian's homestead described?
2. What images of the sky and landscape suggest hope?
3. How have the Indians chosen to use the tools and building of the outside world?
4. Who is Octave?
5. What concerns Octave and Modeste?
6. How do Octave and Modeste hope to help Mike recover from his trauma?
7. Who is Elise?
8. How does Archilde's experience at boarding school differ from Elise's and from Mike and Narcisse's at the Mission School?

Broad Questions

1. What images might suggest a communal state of depression?
2. Why would fear be the most serious sickness?
3. What strategies does McNickle use to change the tone from dark to light?

Words for Thought

“ . . . in the old man’s mind, if you feared anything you were certainly sick.” (198)

“If an old man comes and spreads his blanket and sits down where he is not wanted, hear him speak anyway. It is easier for a young man to listen than for an old man to go away.” (199)

Chapter 23 Indian ceremonies and Caterine’s renewal and redemption

Questions

1. What were the federal policies regarding Indian ceremony, particularly the Sun Dance?
2. What was the purpose of each of these ceremonies and dances and what was/is their value to the Salish: the scalp dance, marriage dance, midsummer dance?
3. Why is the preparation for the midsummer dance relevant to the story and characters in this novel?
4. Why did the Salish regard confession and whipping as so important?
5. How do the Salish maintain their control over ceremony, confession and whipping today?
6. What does Archilde’s mother confess and what is the significance of her dream?
7. How does Archilde’s mother explain the cause of “bad Indians”?
8. In the conflict between the old ways and the new, which one prevails in this chapter?

Words for Thought

“Well, they gave us those new laws and now nobody is straight. Nobody will confess and nobody will go to the white judge and say, ‘My nephew has broken the law,’ or ‘my relative over there on Crow Creek whipped his woman and ought to go to jail.’ That’s the way it goes now; the old law is not used and nobody cares about the new. I am sorry about this; the young people respect neither old nor new, and the old ones do not enjoy having nothing to say about right and wrong.” (207)

“You knew my sons and how I prayed for them and tried to keep them from going to hell. It would have been better if they had been given the whip. Praying was not what was needed for them, and it does me no good.” (210)

“The old lady, with the red stripes of the whip on her back, slept without dreaming.” (211)

Chapter 24 The Midsummer Dance

Questions

1. Describe the community and individual preparations for the dance. What is their affect on Archilde?
2. What causes Archilde's feelings to change when he leaves the lodge of his mother and goes to the dancing ground?
3. Who are the spectators and how do they affect the Indians' experience with the dance and celebration?
4. What changes occur in Mike and what has caused them?
5. Where is the hope in this chapter?
6. How does Dave Quigley change Archilde's mood in this chapter? Is his threat expressed or implied?
7. How does Archilde respond to Quigley's underlying threat? Is he *surrounded*?
8. Considering the old ways and the new, Archilde's "outsider" status, what definite change has come over Archilde in this chapter?

Broad Questions

1. How has Archilde changed his opinion of his mother and her people?
2. Over the course of the novel, how has *he himself* changed? How is he the same?
3. According to Wikipedia Dictionary, the "**subjunctive** is a verb mood typically used in dependent clauses to express *wishes, commands, emotion, possibility, judgment, opinion, necessity, or statements that are contrary to fact at present.*" How does this mood in the following sentence affect the full meaning of that line? *It really seemed, for a moment, as if they were unconquerable and as if they might move the world were they to set their strength to it.* (218) Is change within their power?
4. How do individuals make use of ambiguity to exert power?

Words for Thought

"She was pleased with her duties in the way that only an old art or an old way of life, long disused, can please the hand and the heart returning to it." (215)

"A man's life was too long by comparison [with sparks from the fire]. It dragged out his misery, or if he had happiness that too was dragged out until it turned into misery. And he didn't die until he had tasted all of it. One had just to go on, taking everything that came, somehow." (221)

"Archilde sat quietly and felt those people move in his blood. There in his mother's tepee he had found unaccountable security. It was all quite near, quite a part of him; it was his necessity, for the first time." (222)

Chapter 25 Archilde and Elise, dancing and drinking

Questions

1. Who has the power in the exchange between Archilde and Elise? Explain

2. As he thinks about Dave Quigley, he feels guilty. Why? What has he done wrong?
3. How does Archilde contrast the Indian dancing with the white dancing? What do the differences mean?
4. What was the federal or state policy about drinking on Indian reservations? When did it begin/end? Where is the irony in the policy?
5. How do Archilde and Elise obtained alcohol?
6. According to the *Word Detective*, <http://www.word-detective.com/081203.html> "Scissor-bill was U.S. slang in the late 19th century for a foolish, incompetent or loud-mouthed person. It was this slang meaning of 'idiot,' and not a reference to the bird itself, that apparently led to 'scissorbill' becoming union organizers' slang for a worker deemed excessively fond of management." How does this definition help explain the people Elise refers to in this chapter?
7. When Archilde and Elise return to the dance, having had their alcohol, what explains the reaction of the white people at the dance? What are their assumptions about Indians? How do their assumptions govern their behaviors?
8. Who is most responsible for what happens at the dance? Explain.
9. In previous situations, Archilde has been wary of adversaries in many situations. What has changed and made him more vulnerable?

Words for Thought

"To some people, nothing is ever hidden and they live by habit in a world beneath the surface of things which most people never suspect even exists." (226)

Chapter 26 White ranchers and Indian town

1. Why were the farmers complaining? How did Archilde react to their complaints?
2. What does Archilde see in Indian town, and how does he react to what he sees?
3. What does the use of passive voice in the following passage communicate about the situation in Indian town? "The fir boughs covering the pavilion turned dry and yellow and were swept to the ground by the wind; coarse weeds pushed up through the packed earth where the warriors' feet had danced; paper and refuse were tossed about for many weeks, until in time the earth had cleansed and restored itself." (232)
4. What does Archilde wish the white ranchers would do? What could it change?
5. At the end of the chapter, Archilde sees the old woman carrying animal guts. How might her situation symbolize much of the rest of what Archilde, and probably McNickle, sees on the reservation? Who owns the problem?

Words for Thought

"He offered her money, held it out to her, even pressed it into her hands; but her fingers were nerveless for lack of recognition. She stood motionless for a long time after he had gone, gazing at the money note in her hand. What did it mean?" (235)

Chapter 27 Archilde's attempt to save the starving mare

1. Describe the open range along the Big River where Archilde rides. Why does he go to that place?
2. What does Archilde want to do when he sees a "thin and gaunt" aged mare and her colt who was "drawing the life substance of her"? (238)
3. How does this story of Archilde's chase serve as a metaphor for the situation between Indians and non-Indians (priests and sisters, Indian agents, lawmen, traders)?
4. How does Archilde's motivation compare/contrast with the non-Indians on the reservation?

Words for Thought

"He had to show her kindness in spite of herself. It was more important than ever."
(240)

"The sun had set and in the evening light a rider on a strong white horse led an unprotesting skeleton on a rope. It was grotesque." (241)

Chapter 28 Archilde finds Mike and Narcisse in the mountains

1. Why doesn't Agnes know where her boys are?
2. Does the boys move to the mountains show strength or weakness? Explain.
3. How does Archilde try and then come to understand the boys' motivations? What does he do?
4. *Websters New World College Dictionary* online <http://www.yourdictionary.com/scapular?print> defines *scapular* as "two small pieces of cloth joined by strings, worn on the chest and back, under the clothes, by some Roman Catholics as a token of religious devotion or as a badge of some order." What does this signify to Mike? Why hasn't Narcisse taken his off?
5. How is Archilde's approach toward the boys different from his approach toward the old mare? Why?
6. What insight into himself has Archilde gained from his experiences with his father, mother, elders, and the boys? What had the boys taught him?
7. What is the tone at the end of this chapter?
8. What conflicts have been resolved and how?

Words for Thought

"Their faces revealed nothing. He tried to get behind their minds." (245)

"He was always forgetting that his way of seeing things was his own. . . . All ideas were damn fool until they were understood and believed; and it was useless to wish them on to anybody else until the other person had come to them in the same way—by understanding and believing." (247)

Chapter 29 Archilde and Elise

1. How does Archilde view Elise?
2. What stereotypes or preconceived notions or assumptions influence the outsiders' opinions of Archilde? How does he respond to their opinions? Do they govern his behavior, or does he govern himself?
3. What causes Archilde to decide to leave?
4. What prevents Archilde from honestly telling Elise that he wants to leave?
5. Why is Archilde surprised by her reaction? What does he learn about her, and himself, that he hadn't realized?
6. What is Archilde's resolve at the end of the chapter? What is the vision he sees?

Broad Questions

1. What are all of the implications of "surrounded" as evidenced in McNickle's novel? Are they negative, positive, mixed? To what contexts are they connected?

Words for Thought

"He listened until the diminishing sounds of the running horse were lost in the faint thunder of the creek, and during that time her warmth surrounded him." (255)

"He could tell himself, as he stood there, not only listening but seeing, that of all joys, there was none like that of capturing the future in a vision and holding it lovingly to the eye. There was deep pleasure in that." (255)

Chapter 30 Archilde's mother's illness

1. How do the boys and Agnes react to the old lady's sickness?
2. Explain the irony in the story that Archilde recalls as he sees a cross in the window: in the cross "a great power was to come to them when they had that." (257)
3. Is Archilde as sure of his ability to do something as the people are? Explain.
4. Who has the better understanding of how to respond to the Catherine's dying, Archilde or Agnes? Explain.
5. What does Archilde understand about relationships and family that he didn't understand before? What stories have gone into his explanation in the last paragraph on page 258?
6. Why does Catherine refuse the priest? Why doesn't Archilde respond immediately to her wishes?
7. How does Agnes misunderstand the Catherine's sudden alertness and Archilde's part in this event?

Broad Questions

1. In light of the events that unfold at the end of the novel, explain the irony in the lines, "he knew how to make use of his wits." What prevents Archilde from making "full use of his wits"?

Words for Thought

“As he went to fetch the lamp from the adjoining room, his moving body was like a strong candle burning in the dark. He knew what to do, how to make use of his wits: that was a wonderful thing.” (258)

Chapter 31 Catherine’s death

1. Why has Catherine asked for Modeste?
2. Who is Father Jerome and what does he know?
3. How is he different from Father Grepilloux?
4. What has changed for Catherine since she confessed?
5. How does Archilde respond to Father Jerome’s judgment?
6. Is Father Jerome’s direction for Archilde to explain what happened to the authorities a reasonable suggestion? What doesn’t he understand?
7. What is Father Jerome’s definition of “civilized”?
8. After this exchange, Archilde feels like “a whole world” has collapsed upon him. Why? What is the “world” to him?
9. Why does the entire community know of Catherine’s renunciation of her faith and Archilde doesn’t?
10. What has Archilde been trying to do in every interaction with others throughout the entire novel that would lead him to be so disturbed over his misunderstanding this aspect of his mother?
11. Why does Elise oppose Archilde’s telling the agent the truth? What does she understand that Archilde doesn’t? What does he believe that differs from her? Which of the two would act instinctively and which one with thought?
12. Who has more power, Elise or Archilde?

Broad Questions

1. What is the implication of the narrator using the indefinite pronoun *one*, that follows Jerome’s judgment: “One should not feel compelled to answer such a thrust, and yet that was just what one did feel. And the worst of it was that one fumbled in answering.” (264)
2. Does Archilde have any choices left that can bring a positive resolution to this conflict with himself and with the law? Explain

Chapter 32 Archilde’s mother’s death

1. Why would McNickle leave out Archilde’s confession and just allude to it?
2. How did the agent respond to Archilde’s confession?
3. Can the agent be trusted? To whom does he owe his greater allegiance – the Indians or the law?
4. Why is Elise so important to Archilde?
5. Why is Archilde so interested in the reactions of his mother’s people regarding the Catholic church and their own spirituality?
6. Why doesn’t Archilde’s explanation of their fears about the devil help the boys?

7. Does Archilde's decision to let the priest have his way show power or weakness? Explain.
8. How does Archilde's mother win in her own conflict and in the larger conflict?
9. Why does Archilde give in to Elise's power to lead him away?

Words for Thought

"... death was something besides a tearing away; death for his mother, at this moment, just as she had turned her back on all those teachers who had come over the mountains—it was the triumph of one against many; it was the resurrection of the spirit." (272)

Chapter 33 The agent's stress over the missing Archilde

1. Why is the agent angry?
2. Who is Joe La Ronde, and what is his role in the situation with Archilde? Is he a realistic character?
3. What does Mr. Parker want? How much control does he have over his own circumstances?
4. What is Quigley's story?
5. Who does Parker trust or not trust? Quigley, Archilde, La Ronde? Explain.

Words for Thought

"The atmosphere with the changing tide of season grew restless, and wind currents sprang up, sweeping the powdered earth with them. On a day like that one remembered the pleasant green spring and resented its passing. It made a man realize that he was at odds with nature." (279)

Chapter 34

1. How does Elise respond to her role in camping with Archilde and the boys?
2. What does Archilde's relinquishment to Elise bother him? Who has the power?
3. How does Elise respond to the "cheerless company" she has taken into the mountains?
4. What is Archilde's argument against running away? What is Elise's argument *for* running away? Who is right, Elise or Archilde Explain.
5. Archilde realizes that Elise will do anything he wanted. Is this conclusion reasonable in light of their present situation? Explain.
6. What causes their vulnerability as Quigley approaches?
7. What nonverbal clues does Archilde observe in Quigley and Elise that prepare him, and the reader, for the ending?
8. What causes Elise to act—reason or instinct? Explain the irony in Quigley's approach and death?
9. The agent says, "it's too damn bad you people never learn that you can't run away. It's pathetic—" What might "it" represent?

Broad Questions

1. What is the role of the wind in this novel?
2. Who is the greater foe of the Indians, the church or the law or the Indian agent or the trader? Explain.
3. Is the end of this novel inevitable?
4. What will come next for Archilde?

Words for Thought

“Jerome’s stern eyes had taught them again how much greater—how everlasting--was the world of priests and schools, the world which engulfed them. When they had sensed that again, nothing interested them. Everything was hopeless. It made no difference whether they stayed at home or went to the mountains. When they were wanted, by priest or agent or devil, they would be sent for, and that was all.” (286)

“It was as if he were making the decision, as if it depended upon his will, whether he went or not; this saying so meant that he was delivering himself into the hands of powers greater than he.” (293)