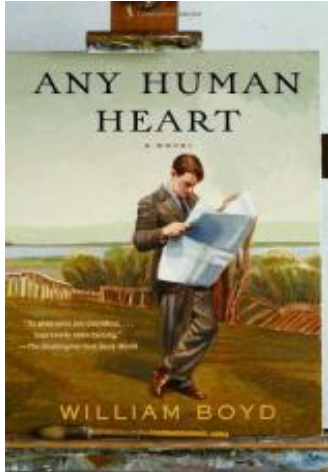


Any Human Heart: The Intimate Journals of Logan Mountstuart

by William Boyd



About the Book

Here is the "riotous and disorganized reality" of Mountstuart's eighty-five years in all their extraordinary, tragic, and humorous aspects. In his journals he recounts his boyhood in Montevideo, Uruguay; his college years during the 1920s at Oxford, where he published his first book; his time in Paris with famous expatriates like Joyce, Picasso, Hemingway, among others; and his coverage of the Spanish Civil War. During World War II, as an agent for Naval Intelligence, he becomes embroiled in a murder scandal that involves the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. After the war, he relocates to New York where he works as an art dealer during the wave of abstract expressionism; until he moves on to West Africa; then London, where he has a run-in with the Baader-Meinhof Gang; finally in France, in his old age, acquiring a measure of hard-won serenity.

Any Human Heart is a moving, ambitious and richly conceived novel that embodies the heroics and follies of twentieth-century life.

Discussion Guide

1. Is Logan a likeable and engaging character? If so, what are the qualities that make him so? Is he a risk-taker? Is he egotistical? What qualities does he bring to his friendships? How does he change as he grows older?
2. What is the purpose of the "challenges" that Peter, Ben and Logan impose upon each other in their last year at Abbey? How is Logan's approach to his challenge indicative of his approach to life? Why is Logan so unhappy at Oxford, and why does he receive only a third-class degree?
3. Logan's father is the manager of a corned-beef factory; his Uruguayan mother was his father's secretary but claims descent from the Spaniard who first entered Uruguay in the sixteenth century. What are Logan's assumptions about his

own class status while at Abbey, at Oxford, and in his first marriage to the daughter of an Earl? Is he a snob or just the opposite? To what degree is Logan's life determined by the solid bourgeois values his father instills in him?

4. Is Logan's early literary success surprising? Is it a matter of luck, or is it driven by his intelligence and his confidence in his own abilities? At the beginning of 1929 he writes "I sense my life as a writer?my writer's life, my real life?has truly begun" [p. 113]. How does this idea resonate throughout the book? Why does Logan choose to have his tombstone commemorate him, simply, as a writer? Is his autobiography his most significant work?

5. What role does sexuality play in Logan's life, and to what extent is his erotic life an indicator of the level of his vitality?

6. Throughout the novel, various historical figures pass through Logan's life?Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ian Fleming, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, etc. [see index]. What is the effect of these moments? How do these famous people come across in 'real life'?

7. Logan's chance meeting with Freya is described in urgent, bewildered terms: "it terrifies me, the fragility of these moments in our lives. If I hadn't lost my passport. If her father hadn't crashed the car. . . . If she hadn't gone to the consulate at that precise hour. . . . The view ahead is empty and void: only the view backward shows you how utterly random and chance-driven these vital connections are" [p. 155]. The loss of Freya and Stella is similarly chance-driven. How is Logan changed by the deaths of Freya and Stella?

8. During the Spanish Civil War, Logan and his friend Faustino discuss what is most important to them. To Faustino's "love of life, love of humanity," Logan adds "love of beauty" [p. 185]. How important is this friendship to Logan? What is the significance in Logan's life of the Miro paintings Logan "inherits" from Faustino?

9. What happens on Logan's mission in Switzerland? Why is he captured? Was the whole mission, and Logan's long imprisonment, a set-up? If so, who set it up and why? What does Boyd want his readers to understand about this crucial and tragic episode in Logan's life, and why doesn't he explain exactly how and why it came about? Does Logan ever exact revenge on those he suspects are responsible?

10. How does Boyd use **Any Human Heart** to comment on the relationship between an individual life and the historical moments through which that individual lives? What, if anything, is the relationship between the two? How does Logan react to, or interact with, the moments that become "history"? Is history a critical part of Logan's life, or simply its backdrop?

11. How reliable is Logan as the narrator of his own story? Are there moments when the reader distrusts the veracity of Logan's account? Or, on the contrary, does the journal form project a sense of immediacy and truthfulness?

12. What is comical, or touching, about the phase of life Logan calls his "dog-food" period [see pp. 416-18]? How does he adapt to poverty and obscurity, given the wealth, success, and fame of his youth?

13. Boyd's book **The New Confessions** is a fictional autobiography of a character whose life spanned much of the twentieth century; **Any Human Heart** takes up, with a very different character, a similar fictional task. If you have read **The New Confessions** how do the books differ? What do both books express about the process of telling a life? What is

it about fictional autobiography that might interest a writer so much?

14. What is the reason for the dwindling of Logan's creative life? How humiliating is it when his literary agent points out that his books haven't made money since the Second World War? Why does he destroy the draft of *Octet* before his death? Given that his friend Peter Scabius is meant to be a sort of foil to Logan in his writing career, what does the novel have to say about the vocation of writing?

15. What is the effect of "The French Journal"? What does Logan mean when he says "the pleasures of my life are simple?simple, inexpensive and democratic" [p. 476]? What are Logan's realizations in his old age? What has changed about Logan's observant eye and his state of mind? Does this section provide what could be seen as a happy ending to Logan's life?

16. What illusion is created by the novel's footnotes and index? The notes indicate an editor?who might this editor have been, and why doesn't Boyd complete the illusion by providing the editor's name?

17. Late in his life Logan's thoughts about Freya and Stella become a meditation on luck: "Freya and Stella. That was my good luck. . . . That's all your life amounts to in the end: the aggregate of all the good luck and the bad luck you experience. . . . There's nothing you can do about it: nobody shares it out, allocates it to this one or that, it just happens. We must quietly suffer the laws of man's condition, as Montaigne says" [p. 458]. To what degree is this conclusion sensible, even profound, in its stoic resignation?

18. The book's title, as the epigraph points out, comes from novelist Henry James: "Never say you know the last word about any human heart." Does Boyd want his readers to assume that despite the private revelations of the diary form, we still cannot know the last word about Logan Mountstuart? Does the human heart refute even self-authored attempts at revealing a complete truth?

Author Bio

William Boyd was born in 1952 in Accra, Ghana, and grew up there and in Nigeria. He is the author of 16 highly acclaimed, bestselling novels and five collections of stories. ANY HUMAN HEART was longlisted for the Booker Prize and adapted into a TV series. His books have won many literary awards, including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for Fiction, and the Costa Book Award. He was named a *Granta* Best Young Novelist in 1983, and in 2005, he was awarded the CBE. Boyd is married and divides his time between London and southwest France.

Critical Praise

"Entertaining and moving. . . . Can be read with sheer pleasure not only for the delicacy of its emotions but for the truth of its perceptions. Like saying goodbye to a good friend, it's hard to see this brilliant novel come to an end."

**Any Human Heart: The Intimate Journals
of Logan Mountstuart**

by William Boyd

Publication Date: January 6, 2004

Genres: Fiction

Paperback: 512 pages

Publisher: Vintage

ISBN-10: 1400031001

ISBN-13: 9781400031009