HEART OF STONE

Professor Parsons

First impressions may cause lasting memories, but as shown in John Cheever's, *Five-Forty-Eight*, second or third meetings may be just as memorable. In this story, a woman, Miss Dent, seeks revenge on her one-time lover and employer, Blake. But because Blake represses his feelings, avoids confrontation and deceives himself, he has become numb to all emotions.

Cheever gives plenty of insight on the personality of Blake, the main character. The first clue about Blake the reader notices is how he avoids his true feelings: "The slums and the city reminded Blake vaguely of the woman who had followed him. To avoid speculation or remorse about her, he turned his attention to the evening paper." Throughout the piece, Blake refuses to think about things that will make him sad or realize he was wrong.

The first paragraph also teaches us that Blake dislikes confrontations. He denies that he even needs to approach Miss Dent. He avoids her as he leaves his office and schemes to lose her in the crowd as he heads for home. After he visited her home "for a drink," he refused all contact with her. "The next day he did what he felt was the only sensible thing. When she was out for lunch, he called personnel and asked them to fire her. Then he took the rest of the afternoon off." After the intimate moments they shared, Blake can't face her again.

The biggest aspect of Blake's lonely personality is his self-deception. Many times he rationalizes his thoughts to complement what he considers reality. Although the reader can see his blindness, he is content. After explaining the strained relationship between himself and the other bus riders, he thinks, "Help will come. All he had to do was wait until someone noticed his predicament." The reader and Blake both know that the other passengers aren't conscious of the fact he's in danger, and if they were aware, they wouldn't be willing to help.

Blake's lifestyle of deceiving himself is shaped the way it is because he knows no love in his life. "He had quarreled with his wife, but so did every other man born of woman. It was human nature. In any place you can hear their voices. . . you will hear harsh words." None of his relationships show any signs of love or caring, especially between Blake and his wife and
Blake and his children. He has no reason to feel anything because he has never known the happiness love brings.

The most interesting facet of this story is the opinion Miss Dent has of Blake and his personality. Cheever notes she had worked for him only three weeks, and yet her assumptions are accurate. Her statement, "I know that you always prey on weak people," proves her knowledge of his need to feel superior. She tunnels beneath Blake's tough outer shell when she says, "I only feel like myself when it begins to get dark. But still and all I'm better than you... and after all I know more about love than you." The reader is left to decide on the mental state of Miss Dent, but it is obvious she has been hurt before and knows human nature—and she knows Blake.

Blake is a complex character and due to his environment, choices, reactions and relationships, he tries to blot out his feelings and seems selfish and self-absorbed. Deep inside, the final confrontation with Miss Dent has frightened and changed him, but he will never let anyone, even himself, know. He feels nothing.