



Closing Arguments

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Fourteen previous books of fiction have shown Frederick Busch to be a writer both prolific and intelligent, but with the publication of *CLOSING ARGUMENTS*, he has leaped into the ranks of major contemporary authors. Major may seem a rather unlikely way to describe a writer whose most recent novel depends so much on conventions and subjects associated with popular literature: the murder mystery, courtroom trials, sadomasochistic sexual intrigue, and rank topicality, everything from the Preppy Murder case and the film *FATAL ATTRACTION* to the current American preoccupation with child abuse and the post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by so many Vietnam vets. Busch, however, is not engaged in the kind of name- and topic-dropping which characterizes the most ephemeral popular novels. In *CLOSING ARGUMENTS*, topical and cultural referents serve as more than the material out of which he constructs his story; they are the very substance out of which his main character constructs both his decidedly American tale and, more important, his archetypally American self.

CLOSING ARGUMENTS is thus a novel in the tradition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *THE GREAT GATSBY* and Theodore Dreiser's *AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY*, but told from a far more unsettling point of view and written in a subtly postmodern manner. The novel deals with not only the life of Mark Brennan, a country lawyer in upstate New York, but with his telling of that life. It is a telling which interweaves four narratives. One concerns his distant relations with his family, especially his wife, whose "reconciliation project," a local Vietnam War memorial, Mark has long opposed, even now with its unveiling just weeks away. A second involves flashbacks to Mark's past: his relations with his abusive parents and his incarceration in a North Vietnamese POW camp. A third traces his relationship with a client, Estella Pritchett, on trial for the murder of her lover. And the fourth is the narrating itself and the narrator's relationship with his reader. "The best defense," Mark likes to say, "is a good story." *CLOSING ARGUMENTS* is more than a good story and more than just a good read (though it is that too). It is a compelling, even compulsive novel, disturbing in its implications and dizzying in its permutational narrative possibilities.

Sources for Further Study

Booklist. LXXXVII, June 1, 1991, p. 1842.

Boston Globe. August 11, 1991, p. 93.

Chicago Tribune. August 28, 1991, V, p. 3.

Kirkus Reviews. LIX, June 1, 1991, p. 683.

Library Journal. CXVI, July, 1991, p. 131.

Los Angeles Times. August 15, 1991, p. E6.

The New York Times Book Review. XCVI, August 18, 1991, p. 6.

Publishers Weekly. CCXXXVIII, June 7, 1991, p. 55.

Closing Arguments: Closing Arguments

USA Today. August 8, 1991, p. D4.

The Washington Post Book World. XXI, August 4, 1991, p. 1.

Copyright Notice

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/closing-arguments-salem>