Appointment in Samarra Study Guide

Appointment in Samarra by John O'Hara

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Appointment in Samarra Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

Chapter 1, Part 1....9

Chapter 1, Part 2....11

Chapter 1, Part 3....13

Chapter 2, Part 1....14

Chapter 2, Part 2....16

Chapter 2, Part 3....17

Chapter 3, Part 1....18

Chapter 3, Part 2....19

Chapter 3, Part 3....20

Chapter 3, Part 4....21

Chapter 3, Part 5....22

Chapter 4, Part 1....23

Chapter 4, Part 2....25

Chapter 5....27

Chapter 6....28

Chapter 7....30

Chapter 8....32

Chapter 9....35

Chapter 10....36

Characters....38

BOOKRAGS

Themes.....45

Style.....47

Historical Context.....48

Critical Overview.....51

Criticism.....53

Critical Essay #1.....54

Critical Essay #2.....58

Critical Essay #3.....66

Topics for Further Study.....70

Compare and Contrast.....71

What Do I Read Next?.....72

Further Study.....73

Bibliography.....74

Copyright Information.....75

Introduction

Appointment in Samarra, John O'Hara's debut novel, is situated in the small Pennsylvania town of Gibbsville, a fictional place whose occupants and mores mirror those of O'Hara's hometown of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. Appointment centers around the self-destruction of one of the town's more popular gentlemen, Julian English. Told from the viewpoints of several different characters, Appointment in Samarra is also a novel of manners in that it depicts the way in which one must abide by certain rules in order to gain acceptance or maintain one's social standing. While many seemingly scandalous foibles are often overlooked, a much smaller infraction could be perceived as completely unacceptable and topple the entire social order of Gibbsville's elite, letting unspoken truths and feelings rise to the surface.

Details abound of Julian's tenuous marriage, as well as his vulnerable financial situation; both are themes that were prominent in O'Hara's own personal life as he wrote Appointment in Samarra on the heels of his own failed first marriage. Furthermore, O'Hara was often subject to financial pressures as he had a great deal of trouble holding a job. The novel's main character, Julian, is also a rather heavy drinker, which closely mirrors O'Hara's own patterns of drinking to the point of excess.

The most critically acclaimed of all his works, Appointment in Samarra was an instant success, earning O'Hara popularity with the general public and critical praise for his ear for dialogue and his attention to detail. Ironically, the things that earned Appointment in Samarra accolades upon its publication are the very things that wrought harsher criticism of his subsequent works, according to Fran Lebowitz in her introduction to the 1994 edition of the novel. She writes, "[Appointment in Samarra] is the [book] generally considered to be his best, particularly by his detractors who tend rather showily to concede it and who almost invariably employ its virtues as a weapon with which to smite the rest of his work."

Author Biography

John O'Hara was a prolific author who produced an impressive number of novels, plays, short stories, and essays. Born on January 31, 1905, the son of an Irish Catholic physician in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, O'Hara grew up conscious of the class and religious lines that divided the small town. He alternately excelled and failed at school, his failures usually due to disciplinary problems. O'Hara's father punished his son by forcing him to perform hard labor as penance for his bad behavior. Before leaving Pottsville, O'Hara worked at the local paper, the Pottsville Journal, and became romantically involved with a woman who was beyond his reach socially. Her social status and his heavy drinking led to the demise of the relationship. The social dynamic of Pottsville and O'Hara's familial and romantic experiences would affect his writing in the years to come.

O'Hara's father passed away in 1925, leaving the family in a surprising amount of debt. Denied the opportunity to attend Yale because of financial concerns, O'Hara stayed with the Journal for a time before leaving to seek his fortune elsewhere. After brief stays in other regions, O'Hara made his way to New York in 1927, where he worked at various newspapers and magazines, including Time. However, he was fired from each post. At the same time, he began contributing stories to the prestigious New Yorker. It is during this period that he wed Helen R. Petit; it was a stormy union that ended in 1933.

With his failed marriage fresh in his mind, and in need of more money than selling short pieces to the New Yorker could provide, O'Hara isolated himself at New York City's Pickwick Arms Club Residence and penned Appointment in Samarra. While writing, he supplemented his income with freelance work. Appointment in Samarra was completed in April 1934 and was published in a speedy four months, that August. The book became so popular that three printings were required.

Armed with his newfound success, O'Hara went on to become a powerful force in the literary world, following Appointment with Butterfield 8 and a number of other works, including screenplays and a libretto. He won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1956 for Ten North Frederick and wrote successful newspaper columns for the Trenton Sunday Times-Advertiser, Collier's, and News-day. His second wife, Belle, passed away in 1954, and O'Hara married Kathenne Barnes Bryan a year later. He continued to write until his death, which was caused by a heart attack on April 11,1970. He left behind the beginnings of a novel, The Second Ewings.

Plot Summary

Christmas Eve

Julian's undoing begins when he overindulges in alcohol at a Christmas Eve gathering at the Lantenengo Country Club. There, he throws a drink in the face of Harry Reilly, a nouveau riche Irish Catholic windbag (in Julian's opinion). Convinced that his social stature is more secure than that of Reilly, Julian is shocked to find that his drunken act has serious repercussions that lead almost immediately to his being cast out of polite society.

Christmas Day

On Christmas Day, Caroline is incensed by Julian's irresponsible gesture and urges him to apologize to Reilly, who, it is later revealed, was one of Caroline's suitors prior to her marriage to Julian. Reilly had generously lent Julian a formidable amount of money the prior summer to help rescue Julian's Cadillac dealership from financial ruin. In fact, Reilly has lent a number of Julian's peers money, a fact that indebts them all the more to him rather than Julian. After Caroline and Julian share a chilly Christmas celebration with Julian's parents, Dr. William Dilworth English and Elizabeth McHenry English, Julian attempts to call on Reilly to apologize. When Julian arrives, however, he is told that Harry won't see him. Caroline's response to Reilly's refusal is one of doom; she fears that because Reilly is a powerful member of the community and a Catholic, he will use his influence to adversely affect the flow of business to Julian's car dealership as well as threaten their place among Gibbsville's elite. Julian, however, is more concerned with the fact that Caroline and Reilly have flirted from time to time and share a past.

That evening, they attend yet another Christmas celebration at the club. There, Julian is met with snide remarks from several of his peers, who clearly disapprove of and take secret delight in his assault on Reilly. While Julian appears to take much of it in stride, when he is left in quiet contemplation in the men's locker room, it is clear that his peers' disdain is bothering him. He makes a mental laundry list of the foibles of bis contemporaries but realizes the futility of such thinking as ^the trouble with making yourself feel better by thinking of bad things that other people have done is that you are the only one who is rounding up the

stray bad things." His spirits are momentarily lifted when he shares a drink with Father Creedon, the local Catholic monsignor. Creedon agrees in confidence that he thinks that "Harry Reilly is a horse's ass."

Empowered by this, Julian rejoins Caroline, who then reneges on her promise to meet him for a "date" at midnight and he is put off. She is withholding sexual favors because she doesn't approve of his behavior or his heavy drinking. He makes comments that bring his jealousy of her to the surface and when it becomes clear that she isn't

interested in having relations with him, he retreats back to the locker room to imbibe further.

The festivities then adjourn to the Stage Coach, a place where the second-tier society of Gibbsville often holds dances and dinners. Julian and Caroline and their set run into Lute Fliegler, who works under Julian at his dealership, and his wife Irma along with a number of their friends. Also in attendance are Al Grecco, yes-man to Ed Charney, the local gangster who oversees all illegal activities in and around Gibbsville, and Helene Holman, Ed's flirtatious mistress. After receiving the cold shoulder once more from Caroline, who is annoyed at how inebriated Julian is, Julian seeks solace in the company of Al and Helene. Julian and Al are friendly as Julian has something of a relationship with Ed (he gets his bootlegged liquor courtesy of Ed). However, drunken Julian is besotted with Helene and her revealing dress, and they hit the dance floor where all eyes watch the pair, waiting to witness something scandalous. While they merely dance, Julian and Helene deliver on the promise of a scandal when she escorts a wobbly Julian out to his car where it is implied that they make love, much to Caroline and Al's horror - Al is supposed to be keeping an eye on wild child Helene for his married and otherwise-occupied boss Ed. Caroline and Julian's friends fetch the hopelessly intoxicated Julian from the car after Helene returns looking disheveled, and on the way home, through a drunken haze, Julian knows that he is truly in for trouble.

The Day After Christmas

The next day, an ashamed Julian heads to work before Caroline can confront him about his infidelity. There, he realizes that the dealership is once again headed for financial ruin as he has squandered much of the borrowed money from Reilly. He also receives a dressing down of sorts from Lute, who chastises him for straying from Caroline. Lute, though, also assures Julian that things will turn around. After Lute leaves, however, Julian pulls out a gun and ponders suicide. Caroline calls to admonish him for being rude to their servant that morning, which distracts him. He then heads off to the club for lunch where he almost immediately gets into a fist fight with Froggy Ogden, Caroline's cousin and supposedly one of Julian's best friends. Froggy confesses that he's never liked Julian but merely tolerated him and challenges Julian to a fight. At first, Julian declines because Froggy lost an arm in World War I, but when some other members join the fray, Julian gets physical with all of them and flees.

Julian meets up with Caroline at her mother's home, where Caroline has been unsuccessfully trying to inform her mother of the gravity of her marital woes. Her mother brushes off any suggestions of divorce and Caroline leaves but runs into Julian outside. He tells her of the melee at the club and she is horrified. He begs her to run off with him, but she refuses. She tells him that if he leaves to go drink, she'll leave him for good. She then tells him she won't be coming home that night and that she is canceling the party they are hosting at their home that evening. They exchange sarcastic remarks and Julian leaves.

Once home, Julian drinks himself into a stupor. For a time, he is joined by a young woman who writes the society column for a local paper; she had stopped by to confirm the guest list for the party. They kiss, but she leaves before anything more illicit transpires. Left alone, he plays old records and drinks heavily before retiring to the garage where he shuts the door behind him, gets in the car, and starts the engine. Some of his final thoughts while pondering his last moments on Earth are of a failed romance with Mary, a Polish girl he couldn't wed because of her poor social status. When Caroline learns of his suicide, she is hysterical and blames his parents but ultimately she comes to realize that "it was time for him to die."

As the book ends, Lute Fliegler winds up running Julian's Cadillac dealership and it is revealed that Julian's true beloved, Mary, becomes involved with Ross Campbell, one of Caroline's two true loves.

Chapter 1, Part 1

Chapter 1, Part 1 Summary

A few hours after midnight on Christmas morning, Lute Fliegler wakes up wanting his wife, Irma. For a moment, he thinks about letting her sleep, because he knows she worked very hard to get ready for Christmas and is probably exhausted. However, he also knows Irma loves Christmas. Although she says three children are enough, she would probably risk it, because Christmas puts her in a good mood. Finally, Lute gives in to the temptation to wake her. Afterward, when Lute is asleep, the story shifts from the mind of Lute to the mind of Irma.

Irma looks out the window onto Lantenengo Street to see the snow and finds that she is thinking about how much she hates the Jewish family that has moved in across the street. Even though they paid much more than the asking price of their house, Irma is convinced that the Jewish family is driving down property values on her street.

Irma gets back into bed, thinking that, unlike the Jewish family, she belongs on Lantenengo Street. She belongs there, not only because she is Lute's wife, but also because she comes from one of the oldest and best families in Gibbsville. Her grandfather was even awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Irma feels that, as her grandfather's favorite, she should have inherited that medal. Her brother has it, though, since he carries on the family name. Irma reminds herself that, as long as he appreciates it and takes care of it, then that is all that matters.

Irma hears a car with a loose tire chain driving up Lantenengo Street. She thinks it is a Dodge and speculates that there might have been an accident at one of the mines. Maybe someone with a company car has been called out to see about it. She is glad Lute does not work for the mines. Lute is a Cadillac salesman. Irma hears another car coming down the road. She recognizes it as the Buick that belongs to the dentist. Since his wife is pregnant, Irma thinks, they probably left the party at the country club a little early. It is only 3:20 am, and the part is probably just now getting good.

Irma looks forward to joining the country club next year. Like everyone else, she hopes that President Hoover is right, and that money will not be so scarce in 1931. Even though Irma could go to the country club this year as a guest, she and Lute have decided to wait until they can afford to join. She appreciates how honest and dependable Lute is, so she does not mind waiting to join the club. She is glad she is not married to Lute's boss, Julian English, even though that would mean she would already belong to the club. She would not want to trade lives with Caroline English.

Chapter 1, Part 1 Analysis

Before being introduced to this book's unhappy protagonist, the reader is introduced to the happiest two people in this story, Lute and Irma Fliegler. They are a secure couple,

content with each other and with what they have. Though they have postponed some luxuries due to the Depression, the spare tire of flesh around Irma's middle symbolizes the comfort and plenty that the Flieglers experience. Irma's peace of mind is somewhat disturbed by her anti-Semitism, as well as the sexism that gives her brother the Medal of Honor that should logically be hers, but overall she is a content woman, as well as a loyal and loving wife. She thinks of the Depression as a slump and seems unaware of and unaffected by, how much suffering it causes others.

Cars are status symbols, in life and in this book. Irma can tell, just by the sound of a car, what type of car it is and what kind of person drives it. She is secure in her own status, and so she does not mind being patient about joining the country club crowd when her husband can afford it. Irma's thoughts also introduce Gibbsville's social scene and the story's main characters, which are similar in background, but different in character, from the Flieglers. The Englishes are not happy and – as the reader will later learn – cannot afford the country club any more than the Flieglers can.

Chapter 1, Part 2

Chapter 1, Part 2 Summary

The story moves from the Fliegler's bedroom on Lantenengo Street to the smoking room of the Lantenengo Country Club. The smoking room, built for men but now co-ed, is the hangout of the inner circle of club members. There are about 20 people in this in-crowd, which is made up of the big spenders and drinkers of Gibbsville, including Julian English. After these socially secure members have plenty to drink, they become more welcoming to people lower down the social scale. It is just after 3:00 a.m., and everyone is drinking. The drinks are mostly rye and ginger ale, since most people in this Prohibition Era have to get their liquor by buying drug store rye on prescription. A few of the biggest spenders have Scotch.

At a large table in the corner of the room, an Irish Catholic named Harry Reilly is telling a scandalous story in an Irish brogue. Julian English is sitting with all the other listeners at the table, wonder why he hates Harry so much. Although Julian does not intend to ever do such a thing, he fantasizes about throwing a drink in Harry Reilly's face, just to shut him up. Julian daydreams about the predictable reactions of his wife and friends. Julian knows that, while Harry's money and social climbing have brought him far, Harry is not yet sure enough of his social standing to say or do anything to Julian right away.

Julian does not intend to throw this drink, or the next, for a number of reasons. The first reason is that Harry has a lot of money invested in the Cadillac garage where Julian is president. The second reason is that Julian does not want people to think that he is threatened by Harry's attention to Julian's wife, Caroline. The omniscient narrator's attention wanders to the dance hall for a moment. He shares the gossip about a few of the young dancers, until suddenly one of the young men rushes in to tell his friends that Julian English just threw a highball in Harry Reilly's face.

Chapter 1, Part 2 Analysis

The author's technique, writing from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, allows him to tell this story from the perspective of all sorts of people. This book offers an astonishingly accurate portrait of alcoholism as it affect the drinker, his family, friends, business and community. It also illustrates how the isolation created by racism, sexism, money, status, and shame feed and perpetuate the disease throughout generations. Today, many of the effects are common knowledge, but at the time this book was first published in 1932, there was no such broad understanding.

The legal Prohibition of alcohol in the U.S., during the 1920s and early 30s, was an attempt to mitigate the effects of the disease on society. It failed miserably, however, because it created a market for organized crime. This, of course, made alcohol very expensive. The result is seen in O'Hara's story of Gibbsville, Pennsylvania. Cars are not

the only indication of status. During Prohibition, the type of alcohol a person can buy also indicates his social status.

This chapter illustrates that, in a world where people compete for status, there is never an end to striving. Being able to join the country club, for instance, is only the beginning, not the end, of striving for status. Even among the member of the Lantenengo Street Country Club, there is an inner circle.

Furthermore, money is not enough to allow a person into this inner circle. It turns out that Harry Reilly has more money than the rest of the men in the inner circle. Because he is Irish Catholic, however, he is never accorded the status of the rich young Protestant men. This religious prejudice is the same as the anti-Semitism that makes the Jewish family unwelcome on Lantenengo Street, although they can more than afford to live there.

The reader learns several things in this chapter about the character of Julian English, or at least about the character of his alcoholism. The first thing is the self-deception of the alcoholic. Specifically, all the reasons Julian tells himself he will not throw the drink in Harry's face are the reasons he finally does it. The second thing the reader sees is Julian's insecurity where his wife is concerned. Because of his lack of self-care, he cannot believe that she can care for him. Thirdly, and most dramatically, we see Julian's self-destructiveness, both personal and economic.

Chapter 1, Part 3

Chapter 1, Part 3 Summary

Al Grecco has driven his Cadillac the 94-½ miles from Philadelphia to Gibbsville. He is to deliver a case of good champagne to Julian's house the day after Christmas. Julian had placed his order with Al's boss, Ed Charney. Ed is the organized crime boss in this area. Only a few people can get booze on credit from Ed, and Julian is one of them. Most people order liquor from Ed in private, but will not speak to him in public. Ed likes Julian, because Julian treats him as an equal.

Al Grecco is Ed Charney's yes man. Though he certainly wants to maintain his position in the mob, he is especially loyal to Ed and loves any chance to do something for him. Now, he drives past the country club just as Julian leaves. Al allows Julian to pass him, so that he can watch Julian from behind. Al can see that Julian is drunk and that Caroline is not speaking to him. Al follows Julian all the way home, because he thinks that would please Ed Charney. Al makes it his business to know everything about everyone. Ed sometimes finds his information useful, when he needs to blackmail someone.

Once Julian is safely in the house, Al starts to go toward the Apollo Restaurant, when he suddenly realizes that Ed will not be at the Apollo, because it's Christmas. As he leaves Lantenengo Street and heads to his hotel, Al calls out the window, "Merry Christmas, you stuck-up bastards!"

Chapter 1, Part 3 Analysis

In this introduction to organized crime, the reader sees people living off the vices of wealthy Protestants, hating them all the while. Prohibition has created a big business for the mob, with its traffic in alcohol and prostitution.

The country club is not the only place divided by status. There are inner circles in the mob, too. Al values his place in the mob, because he is closest to its local boss, Ed Charney. Yet, he does not completely understand why Ed Charney and Julian English seem to like each other so well. It is not only because Julian is a friendly customer that spends a lot of money with Ed, but also because they are peers in the sense that they are both the acknowledged leader of their respective inner circles.

Chapter 2, Part 1

Chapter 2, Part 1 Summary

Julian English awakens at 11:00 on Christmas morning. For a few seconds, he enjoys the beauty of the snow-covered world outside his window, but as he turns toward Caroline's empty bed, he suddenly remembers last night. Julian is so ashamed of his behavior that he manages to brush his teeth and get dressed without once meeting his own eyes in the mirror. He dresses for Christmas dinner with his father and mother, and then goes downstairs for juice and coffee. He wishes he could stay home and never have to see another person besides Caroline.

Caroline comes in from making her Christmas visit to the neighbor's children. She asks him to return the expensive bracelet he bought her for Christmas. She says it is beautiful, but she is sure that they will no longer be able to afford it, when the consequences of humiliating Harry have played out. Julian says he can smooth things out with Harry, but Caroline knows the story is already all over town. When Harry realizes that, he will be humiliated, she says, and he will do almost anything to get even. Caroline does not think Julian's friends will be able to stand by him, because most of them owe Harry money, just as Julian does.

Caroline knows that Julian is jealous of Harry's attention to her, but she says she will try to get Harry to come to their party the day after English. She is doubtful he will come, but she thinks this would help make things look better to other people.

At this point, Caroline begins to cry. She says that the horrible names Julian called her last night are nothing compared to the public humiliation she suffered. She goes to get dressed for Christmas dinner with his parents, leaving Julian to his remorse and to her Christmas presents to him, a wallet with his initials done just the way he likes; J. McH. E.

Chapter 2, Part 1 Analysis

In this scene, the reader experiences the morning-after remorse from an alcoholic's perspective. In addition, the reader learns something important about Julian, separate from his illness. He is quite a sensitive person with an ability to enjoy nature and beauty, and he loves his wife. Even in his hung over state, the beauty and luxuries provide him some comfort. They also, perhaps, cushion him too much from the consequences of his actions.

In addition to his craving for alcohol, and his inability to predict or control his own behavior once drunk, Julian exhibits several other typical symptoms of alcoholism. First of these is his hostile dependence on his wife. He feels he has to have her, and that makes him behave in an ugly way toward her when his insecurities are threatened. He

also depends heavily on his ability to charm people, and he does not recognize when he has gone too far for his charm to rescue him.

This story is about a Protestant American man who has insulted an Irish Catholic. It is interesting then, that Julian is very fond of using the initials for his middle name, which was probably his mother's maiden name. The reader is not given the name, but the initials are McH. This would indicate that his mother's family might be Scotch or even Scotch-Irish. Scotch is also Julian's favorite drink. The irony is that Julian is unconsciously proud of his heritage, but his is what passes for an old family in Gibbsville, no one seems to realize that Julian has any other heritage, least of all Julian.

Chapter 2, Part 2

Chapter 2, Part 2 Summary

The Flieglers are having a very different kind of Christmas morning. Their children have enjoyed presents and candy. Lute has had a big breakfast, and Irma is planning a mid-afternoon dinner. Tonight, they will be joining some friends for a party. Lute phones the car dealership and arranges to pick up a Studebaker sedan, so that all the party can ride together. Lute had gotten permission from Julian for this beforehand.

Next, Lute turns his attention to the liquor for the party. Since the party's host will be paying the cover charge at the Stage Coach Inn for all his guests, Lute feels that he should bring his own liquor. He thinks about making gin, but then decides he should be more generous and share his best, which is the rye that his boss Julian gave him for Christmas. He decides to bring just a pint, so that he and his friends will not get too drunk to drive.

He asks Irma if he has to wear his tuxedo, but she knows he enjoys it. Lute teases that he was just thinking of her feelings, in case the other women see him looking nice and try to take him "outside."

Chapter 2, Part 2 Analysis

Once again, a study of Lute Fliegler provides an extreme contrast to Julian English. For instance, Lute is modest and discreet. As Julian's employee, he could probably ask for any car at the Cadillac Company, but he borrows a Studebaker wagon, because that makes the most sense.

While he is not ostentatious, Lute is generous. Julian gave his employees rye for Christmas, which would be considered second best to Scotch. Lute, on the other hand, shares the best he has, the rye, with his friends, although no one would think less of him if he chose to make a batch of gin. Additionally, Lute is thoughtful enough not to expect his host at the Stage Coach to provide the alcohol, since he is already taking care of the cover charge.

Again, Lute and Irma's contentment with each other and their circumstances are the complete opposite of the state of mind of the Englishes. Lute's joke about another woman taking him outside foreshadows the upcoming incident at the Stage Coach, when Julian English goes outside with a woman who is not his wife.

Chapter 2, Part 3

Chapter 2, Part 3 Summary

At 2:00 p.m. on Christmas Day, Al Greco, a permanent guest of the Apollo Hotel, walks into its restaurant. Ed Charney likes to have Al stationed at the Apollo to receive messages. By some arrangement Ed has made, Al stays at the Apollo rent free, whenever he is in Gibbsville.

Al has a meeting with Ed at 4:00. Christmas is the only day of the year that Ed Charney spends with his wife and 6-year-old child, but Ed does not love his wife anymore. He loves Helene Holman, a singer at the Stage Coach Inn.

Al sits at the mob table and orders a turkey dinner for $1.50. He reads the newspaper to follow the fights, because he used to be a prizefighter. Al Greco is 5'6" with shoes on and weighs 130 pounds when fully dressed. He was born the third of six children to a poor Italian family. He had had a troubled adolescence, went into prizefighting when he was 18, and was finally sent to prison for a year for stealing. When Al came out of prison and lost the only $10 he had in a game of pool, Ed Charney was waiting outside to give Al $10 just to take Ed's car to be washed.

For the next three years, Al worked at the poolroom. When the owner died, Al went to work for Ed Charney. Now, Al has more than $4,000 in the bank and $32,000 in his safety deposit box.

The waiter at the Apollo calls Al to the phone. It is Ed. He cannot make it to Gibbsville tonight, because his son broke his arm. Ed wants Al to go to the Stage Coach tonight to keep an eye on Helene and not let her get too drunk. Usually, Ed encourages Helene to drink, because she is more fun that way. However, without him there, Ed is afraid Helene will get so drunk that she sleeps with somebody else.

Chapter 2, Part 3 Analysis

During all of Chapter 2, the author is preparing the reader for Christmas Night at the Stage Coach Inn. In this section is a portrait of Al Greco's poor and violent background, which explains his dependence on Ed Charney. The reader is also introduced to Ed Charney's weakness, Helene Holman. Ed's fear that Helene will sleep with someone else is another foreshadowing of trouble at the Stage Coach tonight.

Chapter 3, Part 1

Chapter 3, Part 1 Summary

There are two kinds of coal. Gibbsville lies in the anthracite coal region. It is also a stronghold of Union labor. Five years before, in 1925, a strike turned out to be disastrous for the working people of Gibbsville. There was no violence, but the strike went on for so long that thousands of families switched to using oil burners in their homes. Once the strike was over, it was too much trouble to switch back to coal, so a lot of business was lost to the coal industry in Gibbsville forever. Therefore, what was a boom time for the rest of the U.S. in the late Twenties was not a boom time for Gibbsville, although many people in Gibbsville have money in 1930.

Chapter 3, Part 1 Analysis

The first part of Chapter 3 gives more information about the setting of Appointment in Samarra. Without this understanding of the background, the reader might get the impression that people in Gibbsville have nothing more to worry about than their reputations at the country club. In fact, for people like Julian English, money and status is the only thing that stands between them and a very difficult daily struggle for survival. This explains the level of fear involved in giving up money and status.

Chapter 3, Part 2

Chapter 3, Part 2 Summary

The second part of Chapter 3 tells the story of Julian's father, William Dilworth English, M.D. William belongs to every civic group in Gibbsville. He is a Republican and an Episcopal. He loves his wife, his son and surgery. He hates another physician named Malloy.

William's father, a bank president who used bank funds for his own expenses, committed suicide the summer after William got his M.D. Julian's mother had her own income, and so Julian had never been deprived of anything, even though William spent the first 10 years of his private practice paying back all the money his father had taken. Julian had wanted to go to Yale. William had once hoped that Julian would inherit his medical practice, but by the time he sent Julian to Lafayette, he knew Julian would not be interested. People in Gibbsville felt sorry for all the disappointments William had had in life.

Chapter 3, Part 2 Analysis

By telling the story of Julian's father, the author has given the reader more information about Julian's background. Not only does he live in a mostly impoverished part of the country, but Julian also grew up in the shadow of his father's shame over money and suicide in the family. The reader is not told why the grandfather overspent his money, but it would not be far-fetched to assume that he, too, may have suffered from alcoholism.

Like many children of alcoholics, William has lived a life of duty. He seems to have had good intentions for Julian, but his inability to listen to his son, e.g., about where he wanted to go to college, shows the reader that he is not a real source of support for Julian. Rather than being able to go to his father for guidance, Julian is ashamed before his father, who represents conformity, hard work and civic duty. This section of the book sets the stage for the next part, when Julian and Caroline have Christmas dinner with his parents.

Chapter 3, Part 3

Chapter 3, Part 3 Summary

When Julian and Caroline go to see his parents for Christmas dinner, Julian is relieved to see that his father has not yet heard about his behavior at the country club last night. Julian's parents, especially William, are obviously fond of Caroline. Meanwhile, they are loving, but critical, of Julian. His father makes a passing snide remark about Julian's drinking, and his mother scolds him for developing a double chin. Otherwise, the family shares a very polite dinner, during which they give Julian and Caroline each an envelope with a Christmas gift check of $250.

Chapter 3, Part 3 Analysis

The Christmas dinner at Dr. and Mrs. English's home is a very typical portrait of how families behave when alcoholism is present. Although he knows that his parents will hear the story soon, Julian does not tell them about the drunken incident at the country club. He avoids unpleasantness as much as he can, as long as he can. Caroline also stays quiet, covering for her husband wherever possible. A sad irony is that, today, Julian's father, as a physician, might know something about alcoholism and be able to suggest some help. In 1930, however, William sees Julian's drinking not as a sign of sickness, but as a character flaw and another source of shame for William.

Chapter 3, Part 4

Chapter 3, Part 4 Summary

At 4:35 p.m., Julian and Caroline leave his parents' home. In the car, Caroline immediately begins to talk about the situation with Harry. She says that if Julian does not go smooth things out with Harry, she will not go to any more parties, and she will cancel their party, which is scheduled for the day after Christmas and has already been announced in the society section of the newspaper. Julian offers to go apologize to Harry, on the condition that Caroline be in bed waiting for him when he gets home. She agrees. Julian drops her off at home and drives off to see Harry.

Harry refuses to see Julian, however. Harry's sister reveals that Harry has a black eye, so Julian realizes that the humiliation is complete. Once home, Julia walks slowly into the house, so Caroline will know that it did not go well. They both know this is very bad news, but Caroline makes love to him, anyway.

Chapter 3, Part 4 Analysis

Besides the fact that Julian's behavior may have terrifying economic consequences for Julian and Caroline, part 4 of this chapter illustrates the dual purpose of sex in Julian and Caroline's marriage. Their love is sincere, as is their act of love at the end of the scene. However, this couple also uses sex as a bartering tool. In hopes of controlling his own behavior, Julian asks for sex as a reward for what he considers good behavior, and Caroline grants it. Again, it is evidence of Julian's lack of maturity and coping skills. It also foreshadows the fact that sex can be withheld in punishment, as well as granted in reward.

Chapter 3, Part 5

Chapter 3, Part 5 Summary

Once it gets dark, Al Greco drives the 18 miles from Gibbsville to the Stage Coach Inn outside of town. Ed Charney owns the Stage Coach, but Foxie Lebrix runs it. Foxie tells Al that Helene is already drunk. He complains to Al that Helene is a lot of trouble, especially on a night like tonight, when Foxie is expecting several parties from Gibbsville. Al and Foxie arrange for Al to sit at Helene's table. They agree that this might remind Helene that she belongs to Ed.

Chapter 3, Part 5 Analysis

The book's theme of alcoholism is carried out in this scene, but now it is Helene's drinking that is the topic of conversation. Ed benefits from Helene and Julian's drinking. Helene's drinking problem is a benefit to Ed Charney when he wants to have fun with her, but it causes a problem when he is not there to claim ownership of her sexuality. In this way, the author further explores the issue of sex and its uses between couples. He also continues to foreshadow the crisis that will occur in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4, Part 1

Chapter 4, Part 1 Summary

Julian and Caroline drive to the country club, holding hands and sharing a happy mood after making love this afternoon. Julian talks about wanting children, and Caroline wants to wait another year. She talks about another woman who has ruined her teeth by having children. Suddenly, a cross-link on one of the tire chains breaks, and Julian says he will stop and fix it now, while he is still sober.

Caroline is alarmed by this remark and begs him not to get drunk. She says that she will come outside with him at the intermission of tonight's party at the Lantenengo Country Club. She does not expect him not to drink, she assures him. She just wants him not to get drunk. She will come out to the car with him as she used to when they dated, even though they have no contraception. They can start trying now to have a baby, she says. Julian parks the car as close as possible to the verandah, and they enter the club arm in arm. Caroline goes freshen up, and Julian goes to the men's locker room.

He is in great spirits and greets six or seven men happily, but then Bobby Herrmann begins to tease him about throwing the drink in Harry's face last night. He says that Julian is too late to fight in the war. Julian accepts his first drink as he tries to answer Bobby with insults of his own, but Bobby is getting the better of him, and the other men are laughing.

Trying to save face, Julian leaves the locker room to meet Caroline in the foyer. When she joins him, Julian tells her about Bobby Herrmann, and she tells him that Whit's wife is worried, because Harry has money in the garage.

The couple moves to join Froggy and Jean, a married couple among their best friends. Julian is completely comfortable with Jean, with whom he had been in love when they were younger. He feels safe with Froggy, too, but slight guilty, because Froggy lost an arm in the war, while Julian stayed in college. The four of them visit for a bit, and then the dinner and dancing begin.

Chapter 4, Part 1 Analysis

At the beginning of this scene, Julian is not defensive about his drinking. He is poignantly aware that he cannot predict when he might get drunk, or what he will do when he gets drunk. Caroline is not judgmental in this scene, but she is afraid of further public humiliation. Her express fear of further humiliation foreshadows the worse humiliation she will experience tonight.

Today, many alcoholics find it best not to drink at all, but Julian and Caroline live in 1930, so they are unaware of this strategy. They think they need to figure out a way to control the drinking. Now, not only do they try to control it through sex, but through the

promise of a baby. It is very common for alcoholics and their families to think that having children will help the alcoholic settle down and become a normal drinker.

In the locker room, Julian is not treated as the center of the inner circle, but as someone slightly on the outside. Because his social and economic status is no longer assured, his weak spot – the fact that he did not fight in World War I – has become fair game for locker room banter. Julian's guilt on this issue, of which he is only vaguely aware each time he sees Froggy, makes him a sensitive target for this teasing. His shame on this issue provides more fuel for his drinking.

Chapter 4, Part 2

Chapter 4, Part 2 Summary

The party that Julian and Caroline are attending tonight has been planned like any other in Gibbsville. Escorts for the single women have been planned according to social status and attractiveness. Once married, even the ugly duckling girls are among the most popular. This is true no matter what kind of man she has married. As long as her husband is not Jewish, a girl improves her social status by getting married. Until then, every attractive man is expected to entertain one ugly duckling and one attractive girl.

While Julian is trying not to drink too much, he creates a mental game to keep himself occupied. Tonight, he entertains himself by comparing Caroline to her younger cousin, to whom he is assigned. His game backfires on him however, when he becomes aroused and the girl clearly realizes it. Julian is ashamed and excuses himself to go to the locker room.

This party is the largest, but not the only, dinner party at the club tonight. Harry Reilly's sister gives one of the smaller dinners. One of her guests is Monsignor Creedon, who once bought a Cadillac from Julian. When Julian passes this party on the way to the restroom, he senses a chill from the men at the table. After a moment, he realizes that these men consider his insult to Harry an insult to them all, because Harry is Catholic. Julian knows of two men in Gibbsville who went bankrupt after acting against Catholics. He does not want to be another bankruptcy. He decides to speak to the Monsignor.

Julian goes to the locker room, sets a table with Scotch and waits for Father Creedon to need the restroom. He plans to intercept Creedon and invite him to have a drink. Men and boys wander in and out, teasing Julian and treating him like an outcast. Julian sits and thinks of all the terrible things people have done at the club without being outcast, and how unfair it is that he is outcast for one mistake. As he thinks about how terrible people are, he has another drink.

Telling himself that this drink will be his last, Julian moves on to ruminating about his age. He is thirty and realizes that the college boys think he is old. He gets tired of waiting for Father Creedon to come to the locker room, so he walks out on the verandah. Julian looks at the landscape, made beautiful by snow, and vows to learn more about the seldom seen people living in the hills.

Father Creedon happens onto the verandah to have a cigar. Julian and he have a friendly discussion, during which Creedon reveals he dislikes Harry and thinks him too ambitious. Julian is greatly reassured. When Julian confides that he probably should have been a doctor, Creedon confides that he, too, has sometimes wished he had chosen another career. He acknowledges, though, that this is probably not as shocking to Julian as it would be to a Catholic.

The two men go in to the locker room for some Scotch. Afterwards, Julian feels encouraged and thinks that the fresh air has sobered him up. He hurries back to dance with Caroline, not realizing he has been gone for an hour. Caroline is angry; as she knows he has spent the hour drinking. Julian tries to tell her about his talk with Creedon, but she is still afraid, because she is convinced that all the Catholics will stick together.

The two begin to argue, and Caroline lets Julian talk her into going to the car, just to avoid a scene indoors. However, it is cold in the car, and she does not want to stay. In his drunken state, Julian becomes paranoid that she loves someone else. As soon as they get back inside, Caroline hurries upstairs to the ladies' room. Suddenly, Julian realizes they will not be having their rendezvous in the car, so he goes back down to the locker room to get really drunk.

Chapter 4, Part 2 Analysis

The author uses this scene to illustrate how limited an upper class girl's options are in 1930. If she is not attractive, the only way she can improve her status is to marry. Even if she is attractive, a woman's choices are to marry, spend her life without men as a fifth wheel in the social scene, or live as a mistress or prostitute. Caroline English was presented with these choices, or lack of choices, when she was a young woman.

There is a poignant moment in the scene in which Julian looks at the landscape surrounding his hometown and feels love for it. He vows to himself to learn more about the people who live outside of his circle of knowledge. He goes outside of his circle of friends to confide in Father Creedon. This is the first time Julian reaches out to someone besides Caroline, but Father Creedon is right in saying that he himself may not be in the right line of work. Creedon is not priest enough to hear Julian's need for help. Creedon himself is too much of a part of the social scene to give Julian any advice about it, and he obviously needs a confidante as much as Julian does.

The background of sexism, racism and religious prejudice fuels Julian's fear and resentment, which fuel his alcoholism. This background also fuels Caroline's concern for the opinions of others. When she realizes that Julian has not controlled his drinking, she withdraws from him sexually, because she is so angry and afraid of pubic humiliation. As is often true of alcoholics, Julian immediately worries that Caroline loves someone else. Because he values himself so little, he cannot imagine how much she really values him.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Caroline Walker had known Julian English his whole life, but she was 27 years old before she fell in love with him. Chapter 5 tells the story of Caroline's romantic life until she fell in love with Julian. She kissed many of the men and boys she grew up with, but her first love as a young woman was a cousin from England. He had been wounded in World War I and died within six months of his visit to Gibbsville.

Next, Caroline fell in love with Joe Montgomery, a wealthy, alcoholic war veteran who impressed Caroline, because he had known Scott Fitzgerald at Princeton. They were in a wedding party together, but her previously planned trip to Paris cut short that romance.

For a year after her trip to Paris, Caroline played golf on Tuesdays, participated in women's charities, took a typing and shorthand class, gave her share of parties, and drank a little bit more than was socially acceptable. She began to worry that she would never be completely known by any man. She dated Julian English, Harry Reilly, Carter Davis and Ross Campbell. Of these, Ross Campbell from Harvard seemed to be the right man for her to marry, but she lost interest in him. In the spring of 1926, Caroline surprised herself by falling in love with Julian English, and she realized she had never really been in love before.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter, the author explores more thoroughly the limited options available to a young woman in the 1920s. Even had more options been available to Caroline, it is clear that she would not have felt free to go outside of convention to explore them. As she neared the age of 30, then, her choice was not so much whether to marry, as it was whom to marry. Perhaps because she herself is so conventional and cautious, Caroline has a history of being drawn to men who are wounded physically or emotionally. A stable man like Ross Campbell would never show her anything new.

Besides being a study of Caroline, this chapter also helps the reader understand that Julian English viewed Harry as his competition for Caroline years ago. Again, because of his insecurity, he seems unable to let go of fear that he will lose her to someone else.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

At the Stage Coach Inn, Lute and Irma Fliegler enjoy the Christmas night dinner dance with their friends. Al Grecco watches from across the room. He is there to keep an eye on Ed Charney's girlfriend, Helene. Al knows all about every man in town. He knows who drinks too much, as well as who goes to the Dew Drop Inn to take a prostitute. Al knows that Lute does neither of these, and he begins to feel angry with Irma as he wonders whether she knows what a good man she has.

Al is mad at women in general right now, because he hates Helene. She knows that Al's there to watch her, and she's angry that Ed is at home with his wife. Helene is openly contemptuous of Al and says he ought to leave, but he would not dare without having orders from Ed.

At the Fliegler's table, some of Lute and Irma's friends are getting drunk and argumentative. One of the unhappily married women comments that if all married men were like Lute, marriage would not be so bad. Lute tries, but fails, to have an intelligent conversation with her about his opinion that when you are not rich, no one thinks you are democratic if you treat people normally. Only the very rich are democratic, he says, because they can afford to be.

As if on cue, Lute's boss, Julian English, comes in with Caroline. Some of their friends trail in behind them. Lute sees that Julian is very drunk, though he may not look drunk to others. Julian comes to greet Lute, looking for Scotch, and his conversation is nonsensical. He sees Al Greco and goes to see about getting some Scotch from him.

When Helene comes back to the table after singing a song, Julian is there. Al introduces them and makes it very clear that Helene is Ed's mistress. As if only to frustrate Al, Julian and Helene dance. The whole room watches them, because even though both are so drunk, they dance very well.

After dancing, Julian goes back to Al Grecco's table, instead of his own. Carter Davis, who had come to the Stage Coach with Julian and Caroline, comes over and tries to bring Julian back to his own table. Julian tricks him into leaving him be by making a $5 bet that Carter can't remember which tie he gave Julian for Christmas. Julian hands Al the betting money, Carter goes to Caroline to verify which tie it was, and Julian leads Helene to the dance floor again. After this dance, Julian and Helene go out to his car together. Julian's wife Caroline, the Stage Coach manager Foxie, and Al Grecco all see them go.

In a little while, the book says, Julian fell asleep in the car, and Helene went back to the house by herself. After 3:00 a.m., Julian awakened when his wife and friends got into

the car. All the way home, he felt the tension of knowing he was in for a tremendous punishment.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This author opens this chapter how angry Helene is with Ed, both for not being at the Stage Coach and for sending Al to watch her. In her drunken state, it is clear she wants to punish Ed. For instance, she makes several passes at Al, even though Al is there to report all her actions to Ed.

The reader already knows that Julian is very drunk, hurt and angry that Caroline backed out of their rendezvous in the car. Like Helene, when he punishes someone, it is through his own self-destruction. The reader is not told that Julian actually had sex with Helene, but whether he did or not, all the witnesses at the Stage Coach believe his did, or at least intended to. Julian's actions are not only destructive to his marriage, but to his relationships with his friends and his Scotch supplier, Ed Charney. To Ed's manager, Foxie Lebrix, it looked like Julian paid Al to let him take Helene outside, although what really happened was that Julian handed Al the betting money.

In addition to moving Julian's story forward, this chapter also adds another dimension to the characterization of Lute Fliegler. Lute is not only a nice guy, but also a perceptive social commentator. He observes that the very rich are considered democratic when they deign to interact with people from all status levels, because they are not expected by society to act normal. He is also aware that the rich can afford to be nice to everyone, because they do not have to protect their status by distancing themselves from anyone.

Julian enters the Stage Coach and associates with everyone. However, because his financial status is no longer secure, and because he crosses a line by taking Helene outside, Julian's social status as the center of his wealthy friends is lost. On the way home, Julian feels the way he felt as a boy in very big trouble. This is part of the cycle of his drinking. The cycle involves drinking, drunken behavior, remorse, and finally, punishment, which clears the slate, makes him angry, and justifies another drink.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

As a little boy, Julian tried only once to run away from home. He had gotten in the habit of shoplifting with other boys. He had not wanted to, and at first tried to make it look like he was stealing when he was not, but the other boys were not satisfied until he really stole something. Once he experienced the thrill of getting away with it, he became increasingly daring, as his status rose among the other boys. When he was caught stealing a flashlight, he got away and hopped a train out of Gibbsville with one of his friends, only to be returned home a few hours later.

Julian's father did not view this incident as a normal boyhood adventure. He decided then that Julian was a thief, like his grandfather. Julian never stole again, but sometimes he overdrew his checking account in college, due to his drinking. When that happened, his mother would remind him that William worried about Julian's use of money, because stealing was "in the blood."

The day after Christmas is a Friday. Julian wakes up at 9:30 a.m. to prepare for work. He sees that Caroline is sleeping in the guest bedroom, and he has a drink before breakfast. He is verbally abusive to the maid later, and then he hates himself for it. When she calls him Smarty a few minutes later, he cannot help but laugh, as he pours himself another Scotch.

Before Caroline went back to bed this morning, she left word with the maid asking Julian to leave a check for the liquor, which Grecco will deliver today, for the party they are to host tonight. Julian leaves the check, but thinks her request an odd one, since Caroline has her own money.

On his way to work, Julian feels paranoid that people are talking about his conduct at the Stage Coach. Suddenly, he remembers Harry Reilly and decides to go catch Harry at work to apologize to him. When Julian arrives, however, Harry is hurrying out the door, because he has just four minutes to catch a train. Although he has an obvious black eye, he does not behave angrily toward Julian. Harry simply rushes past him to catch the train, saying he will be back in a few days.

Julian proceeds on to his own office, where he soon receives a visit from Lute Fliegler. Lute speaks compassionately and directly about Julian's recent behavior. He is concerned, not only about the effect on Cadillac sales, but also about Ed Charney's wrath. Furthermore, as the older man, Lute gives Julian the advice that he should patch things up with Caroline. He finishes by saying that Julian can fire him, if he thinks Lute is insubordinate in what he has said.

Of course, Julian does not fire Lute, but he does tell Lute he did not have sex with Helene. After a moment, Lute says it is the appearance, not the facts, that matter here.

Julian asks Lute what he should do. Although he means well, Lute has no answer other than a general reassurance that things will work out. Julian spends the rest of the morning figuring up the debits and credits of the Gibbsville Cadillac Motor Car Company.

Caroline, meanwhile, is at home in the guest bed, nearly hysterical with grief. She tries to make herself believe that Julian did not really have sex with Helene, but she thinks he really did. Caroline, feeling crazed by hurt and humiliation, stays in bed all morning.

Al Grecco is upset this morning, too. He has spent hours stewing over all the insults Ed Charney hurled at him after receiving a report from Foxie Lebrix. Al tried to tell Ed that Helene was not outside long enough to do anything with Julian, but Ed does not believe it. Foxie told him that Julian gave Al $5, and that Helene was outside for half an hour. Al is ruminating on how to take revenge upon Ed, even as he delivers Scotch and champagne to Julian's home for tonight's party. As Helene packs to leave the Stage Coach, Foxie begs her not to go.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The story from Julian's boyhood reminds the reader that he cannot go to his father for advice, because his father decided long ago that Julian was just like William's father. This may be part of the reason for Julian's extreme dependence on the approval of his peers, which led him astray as a boy and causes him to panic now.

This chapter illustrates the emotional fallout of the events of the last few days, as well as Julian's ineffective attempts to improve things. His drinking is completely out of control. He starts drinking as soon as he wakes up after a few hours' sleep, yet he tries to behave as other men do and get some work done. Though his attempt to apologize to Harry Reilly was ill timed, at least Harry is speaking to him again. Sadly, Julian is too drunk and paranoid to realize that.

Lute Fliegler's words seem to come as a relief to Julian, because Lute speaks with honesty and real concern for Julian and Caroline. When Julian asks what he should do, it is the first time he has shown any real humility. The problem is, even Lute's well-meaning words are useless against Julian's alcoholism. Lute does not know what Julian should do, and there are no treatment centers or 12 Step programs for people with his problems. The best Julian can hope for in 1930 is to end up in a sanatorium, and that is if he does not go to jail.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Julian's secretary has gone home to lunch, and Julian sits looking at his 1930 income and losses. Included in these figures are a cash advance he made to himself earlier in the year, notes due at the bank, and cash he needs for payroll. Two thousand dollars would be enough to carry him until the auto show early in the New Year, but he characteristically decides he needs $5,000. He does not know where he will get it. Last summer, when Julian needed $10,000, he borrowed $20,000 from Harry.

Julian reflects on how much Harry has changed since last summer. He cannot imagine asking Harry for help now, but he finally admits to himself that Harry is not the one who has changed. Julian's feelings toward Harry changed as soon as he felt beholden to him.

Next, Julian upsets himself by imagining Caroline having sex with anyone other than himself. He takes a gun out of his desk and to the restroom. Even though he knows he will not end his life this way, he puts the barrel of the gun into his mouth for a moment. Then, he bathes his head, goes back to his desk for another glass of whisky, and he cries.

Caroline phones to say that if Julian speaks rudely to the maid again, Caroline will be through with him. She also wants him to know that if he comes home drunk, she will cancel tonight's party. Julian begins to respond sarcastically, but Caroline hangs up on him.

Julian leaves work to go to the club for lunch. There, he is confronted by Froggy Ogden, who is Caroline's cousin. In his fury over Caroline's humiliation last night, Froggy tells Julian he has always hated him, and that he tried to stop Caroline from marrying him. He becomes even more enraged when Julian refuses to fight him, and hits at Julian with his one arm.

Some Polish lawyers sitting nearby hear the smack and assume that Julian has hit Froggy. Julian knows instantly that the story will forever be told this way. The lawyers come to Froggy's aid and are astonished when Froggy warns Julian that one of them has a bottle. Julian fights the lawyers, rushes at Froggy and knocks him down, then runs out of the club.

As Julian gets into his car, he hears Whit Hoffman greeting him, but he does not answer. Julian thinks to himself that Whit has probably hated him for years, just like Froggy. He drives away as fast as he can, on a road heading out of Gibbsville.

About half an hour southwest of town, Julian realizes it is 3:11 p.m., (not yet 48 hours since he threw the drink in Harry's face) and he needs to get back to the garage to meet Lute Fliegler. He fantasizes about driving on until he has spent all his money, sold his

car, coat and watch. He dreams he would get a job as a laborer somewhere, but knows that he would not last 15 minutes. Besides, he thinks, with the garage in the red, he has no right to sell the car. He has to go back and face what needs to be faced.

Caroline visits her mother and tries to talk about how unhappy she is. She tells her mother she wants a divorce, but she does not tell her mother the specifics. Caroline's mother minimizes her feelings so much, and is so obviously scandalized by the idea of a divorce in the family, that the daughter stops trying to gain guidance from her mother.

Instead, Caroline tries to understand her mother by asking questions about her marriage to Caroline's father, but her mother is clearly disturbed by this train of thought. Although there is a strong indication that Caroline's father was unfaithful, her mother does not want to think about that. She would rather remember only the good things about him.

Caroline feels bad about disturbing her mother and goes to her own to return home. She finds Julian outside waiting for her. He is worried about what Caroline told her mother, so he is upset and sarcastic. He also wonders aloud if she heard what happened at the Gibbsville Club. She has not, but just knowing that something else has happened, makes her cry. Julian will not tell her what happened, even after Caroline threatens not to go home, never to sleep with him or see him ever again. He leaves, and she stays at her mother's house.

Chapter 8 Analysis

As Julian goes over his end-of-year debits and credits, the reader begins to see what makes him nervous. He has been living beyond his means for some time, and that is not only due the expense of buying liquor on the black market. Unlike the Flieglers, the Englishes have not moderated their standard of living since the market crashed in 1929 and inaugurated the Great Depression. Julian has taken loans to make payroll and to pay his expenses, and his company is now in debt. Although his father can afford to help him financially, Julian dreads facing his father with the truth about his finances. William, who was always so frugal and honest, would only remind him that Julian is like his grandfather.

Julian has an unusual moment of clarity, when he realizes that Harry Reilly has not changed since last summer. Julian has changed in his attitude toward Harry, because he owes Harry money. He is not so honest with himself, however, when he panics over the idea of Caroline sleeping with someone else. He is the one who has hurt Caroline, by going outside with Helene. It is not only that he went outside the restaurant, but also he went outside their social circle. The truth is, he probably does not remember what he did or did not do with Helene. It is not unusual for alcoholics to have blackouts.

However, Julian is not the only one who is being dishonest. When Caroline phones, she threatens to leave Julian if he is ever rude to the maid again. She does not address the real reason she is angry, any more than he does.

When Julian goes to the club for lunch, he feels completely disillusioned by Froggy's anger. He is so guilty and frightened by the idea that his friends could ever hate him that he does not even notice that Froggy takes his side against the Polish lawyers. The lawyers, on the other hand, are surprised. They underestimate the power of classicism, as well as Julian and Froggy's shared history.

For the second time in his life, Julian tries to run away from Gibbsville. As he begins to sober up slightly, he realizes that it will do him no good. Although he has been saddled for his whole life with the belief that he is just like his grandfather, Julian comes back, because he realizes his car does not really belong to him. He is, in fact, not a thief, but he does not have the coping skills to make things right.

Her visit to her mother illustrates why Caroline's skills are not any better than Julian's are. Caroline's mother is not able to share any wisdom for dealing with difficult circumstances, because she would rather pretend they do not exist. The only tool that Caroline has for dealing with her marriage is to give or withhold affection, and it does not work anymore. Julian's alcoholism has progressed too far.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Julian does not meet Lute at the office. He decides instead that, because it will be so awful to tell his father, Harry Reilly and others that he needs to be rescued from bankruptcy, he deserves to have the rest of the day to himself.

Julian thinks of all he has done in the last couple of days, and especially about his discovery that people can be his enemies, even when he thinks they are his friends. He thinks of all his friends and their wives, and he wonders if any of them are really his friends. He remembers a Polish girl, Mary, whom he had loved as a young man. Neither his friends, nor her family, were supportive of their love. The girl's father had sent her away. Then he lay down to sleep.

The doorbell wakes Julian up. Ms. Alice Cartwright has come to cover the English's party for the society page of the local newspaper. Julian explains that the party has been postponed, and he invites her in for a drink. He wants to seduce her, but loses interest when he realizes that she dares to have as much confidence as any of the society women. Still, he gives her several drinks, and she tells him about her wish to move to New York to work for a paper there. She allows him to kiss her, but quickly puts a stop to his advances and leaves.

Julian hates her for this and continues to drink. He eats some food left for the cancelled party, drinks some more and begins listening to his jazz records. When he accidentally breaks his favorite ones, he wants to cry, but cannot. Julian goes into the garage and makes sure it is airtight. He starts the car at 10:41 p.m. and continues to drink. At 10:50, he tries to get up, but he is too drunk. By 11:10, he is dead.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In this chapter, alcoholism's destruction of Julian is complete. The disease has isolated him from his wife and friends, has made him paranoid and makes him think he deserves to continue drinking. The reader might be tempted to think Julian's life would have been okay, if he had been allowed to love his Polish girl, but his encounter with the newspaper reporter corrects this notion. A symptom of advancing alcoholism is a heightened need to look down on people. Even if he had married his Polish girl, his alcoholism would have taken advantage of their different backgrounds to ruin that relationship, too. His grief over breaking his favorite records is symbolic of his grief over breaking every good thing in his life. If he had been able to cry, it might have saved his life.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Julian's neighbor finds him, after he realizes he has been listening to Julian's car run for half an hour. He calls Dr. English, who pronounces his son dead. Dr. English feels crushed and fears his wife might have a nervous breakdown, when the shock wears off. He begins to plan a trip for her and decides that he will recommend one to Caroline and her mother, too. He will also offer to pay Caroline's way, even though he knows she probably will not accept. He feels confident, though, that people will see that what he refers to as the "suicide strain" has skipped a generation.

When William tells Caroline that Julian is dead, she explodes with anger and grief, accusing her mother and Dr. English of causing his suicide. The next morning, she begins to miss Julian, as she knows she always will. "He was drunk, but he was Julian, drunk or not, and that was more than anyone else was." In the newsroom of the Gibbsville newspaper, the city editor gives Alice Cartwright a lecture on how a reporter should always know more than he prints in every story. Alice says nothing.

Harry Reilly returns a phone call to his sister from his hotel, and she tells him about Julian's suicide. His sister wants to know if Harry is involved somehow. She is worried that people will say he has something to do with it. Harry reassures her that he and Julian liked each other. He knows Julian would not have borrowed money from him, if he had not liked him. When Harry hangs up, he says to himself, "He was a real gentleman. I wonder what in God's name would make him do something like that?"

Lute Fliegler and Irma are a little worried about what will happen to Lute's job. Irma thinks that Lute will be the new head of the company. Lute is afraid that Dr. English will think that he is a drunk, too. Either way, Lute and Irma will be all right. The president of GM called Lute just the other day, he tells her. Irma wants to know what he had to say.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Julian's father feels grief over his son's death, but the saddest thing is that he always expected it. Besides sorrow, he feels an egotistical, self-centered relief in knowing that others will not blame him, but genetics, for Julian's death. Caroline's love for Julian has been rescued, in a sense, by his death. Now, she can remember him, as she loved him, without his creating any further public embarrassment for her. However, she has learned nothing about herself. She has not grown from this tragedy at all.

Ironically, just as Julian was oblivious that anyone could be his enemy, Harry Reilly is oblivious that Julian has disliked him. Even after the Christmas Eve incident, which Harry apparently blames on Julian's drinking, he naively believes that Julian could not possibly have disliked him, because, he thinks, a guy does not money from people he dislikes.

Lute and Irma's concern is with their own family, but as soon as it looks like Lute has job prospects, they know they will be all right. In the final analysis, all of the characters in the story failed to grow or learn in any way. That is perhaps the greatest tragedy of all.

Characters

Ross Campbell

Ross had been one of Caroline's suitors just prior to her marriage to Julian. By the book's end, he is with Julian's former love, Mary Manners, and working for Ed Charney.

Miss Alice Cartwright

Miss Cartwright is the society columnist from The Standard who arrives at Julian and Caroline's home on the last night of Julian's life in order to verify the guest list for the party that was to have taken place there that evening- After she is told of the party's cancellation, she winds up sharing several drinks with Julian and telling him her woes as an underpaid journalist. She and Julian kiss, but she leaves before anything more serious occurs. Miss Cartwright is the last person to see Julian alive.

Ed Charney

Ed is Gibbsville, Pennsylvania's answer to Al Capone. A minor gangster, Ed oversees all bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution activities between Reading and Wilkes-Barre. Unhappily married, Ed keeps a mistress, Helene Holman, under the watchful eye of his henchman Al Grecco.

Despite having little use for most of the Lantenengo Street crowd, Ed thinks highly of Julian: "I will take that English. He's a right guy." Although Ed does not often employ extreme violence as a means to an end, he is not above blackmail and his men are capable of carrying out his bidding.

Monsignor Creedon

Monsignor Creedon is the local Catholic rural dean, who had been denied the opportunity to turn his parish into a cathedral and become a bishop. Well-respected by all faiths in the community, Creedon is also a country club member who tells Julian in confidence on the night before Julian's suicide that he thinks "Harry Reilly is a horse's ass." He also listens to Julian's confession of sorts - that he never should have been a Cadillac salesman - and Creedon suggests that perhaps Julian is a failed literary man.

Carter Davis

A childhood friend of Julian's, Carter is also a member of the country club set. Once counted among Caroline's potential suitors, Carter attempts to save Julian from himself

and the attentions of Helene Holman at the Stage Coach. Carter is also there to shuttle Julian home from the Stage Coach.

Caroline Walker English

Caroline is the thirty-one-year-old wife of Julian English. Married to him for more than five years, Caroline is a much-admired member of Gibbsville's smart set. Despite her education at Bryn Mawr, Caroline is a rather naive yet sexually manipulative woman who had grown "a little tired" of Julian, whom she had known since she was a child, by the time she fell in love with him in 1926. Although she had a few failed romances, Julian took her virginity and they wed and settled into a privileged lifestyle. The couple, however, never had any children and seem to have grown apart over the years.

As Julian's life begins its downward spiral, Caroline has grown weary of his drinking and reckless behavior. At one point, she even wishes him dead since he has killed something inside of her after apparently seducing Helene Hohnan. When Julian, at the end of his rope, requests that they both leave Gibbsville, she opts to remain, choosing the life of convenience she has always known rather than the unknown. While she is saddened by his death, she confirms the inevitability of it, saying, "It was time for him to die."

Mrs. Elizabeth McHenry English

Mrs. English is Julian's mother and the wife of Dr. English. She seems to hold Caroline in higher esteem than she does her own son, perhaps because of her husband's negative views of Julian and his character.

Julian McHenry English

Julian English is the thirty-year-old protagonist of the story. Born into a life of privilege, Julian begins a seemingly purposeful slide into oblivion over the course of three days. Ensnared in the complicated web of Gibbsville society, Julian has fallen into a trap of sorts, expected to fulfill the role of a businessman when he's not much of one at all. He also finds himself married to a well-admired woman of whom he does not always feel worthy. Julian indulges in heavy drinking and inappropriate behavior that leads to his self-inflicted downfall, which is perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts as he follows his grandfather's fate of suicide.

Julian takes pride in his sexual prowess; however, this likely masks his greater insecurities and shortcomings as a husband and a son. Furthermore, he bears a certain degree of guilt over the fact the he was unable to serve in World War I. His outrage, too, at the hypocritical behavior of others is ironic in that he too is a hypocrite. He can barely comprehend that his so-called long-time friend Froggy never really liked him when Julian himself had turned to Harry Reilly in a time of need even though he didn't ever care much for the man. For all his shortcomings, though, Julian has the capacity to be a

regular guy, attempting to treat those around him with the same respect with which they treat him.

Ultimately, Julian feels stifled and takes his revenge by acting out with unacceptable behavior. His affair with a Polish girl who was beneath his social station is quashed, and this untraveled road haunts him until the end of his life.

Dr. William Dilworth English

Dr. English is Julian's father. A socially successful physician, his medical practices have been deemed murderous by some. He holds a certain amount of disdain for his son, having desired Julian to follow him into a career in medicine. Julian, however, never had any desire to pursue a medical degree.

Dr. English seems to note characteristics in Julian that were also present in Dr. English's own father, who committed suicide many years earlier amid a scandal involving misappropriated funds. At the novel's end, Caroline attempts to blame Dr. English for Julian's suicide, saying, "You did it. You, you don't like him. You did, too, you pompous old man."

Irma Fliegler

Irma Fliegler is the wife of Lute Fliegler. Content in her modest life with Lute on Lantenengo Street, she still strives for an improved position while noting that she wouldn't trade her life with Lute for that of Caroline and Julian. Proud and respectful of her hardworking husband, she is a pleasant complement to Lute, a fact that is not lost on Julian. He "knew that if there was one person to whom he would tell [his troubles], it would be Irma." Unfortunately for Julian, he opts not to turn to Irma for help, despite the fact that he'd grown up with her, as she is "the wife of one of his employees."

Luther LeRoy Fliegler

The underling of Julian English at the Gibbsville Cadillac dealership, Lute is something of a foil to Julian. His social position is not nearly that of Julian's; he is saving earnestly in order to join the Lantenengo Country Club. He lives a modest life with his wife, Irma, and their three children; their fife, although much less glamorous than that of Caroline and Julian, has a happy and honest quality to it. Lute, however, is not one to pass judgment. When he speaks with Julian about his recent bad behavior, including Julian's supposed physical indiscretion with Helene Holman, he is chastising but also supportive and reassures Julian that things - and the business - will turn around in due time: "Aw, what the hell. We'll get by... it'll work out one way or another."

After Julian's death, Lute finds himself in a position to run the dealership and perhaps catapult into a higher social echelon.

Al Grecco

Al Grecco has been henchman to Ed Charney for four years. A Gibbsville native, young Al's real name is Anthony Joseph Marascho. He picked up the name Al Grecco while pursuing a career as a prize fighter. Only twenty-six years old, Al has accumulated a formidable amount of money overseeing Ed's bootlegging operations.

Al holds the rich of Gibbsville in a certain amount of disdain and, unlike others in the town, he has his doubts about the integrity of Caroline English; however, he does hold Julian in a higher regard. In fact, Al even goes so far as to follow Julian home one evening when he spies him weaving drunkenly on the road. After doing so, though, Al's true feelings toward the rest of the Lantenengo Street crowd become clear as he rolls down his window and shouts, "Merry Christmas, you stuck-up bastards!"

Al is present when Julian leaves the Stage Coach with Helene Holman.

Herbert G. Harley

Herbert Harley is Julian's next-door neighbor. After hearing the Cadillac's engine running inside the garage, Harley discovers Julian's lifeless body in the car. He pulls him out but is minutes too late to save him.

Bobby Herrmann

Bobby is a member of the Lantenengo Country Club and, as such, is part of Julian's extended circle of peers, although it is clear that he takes great delight in Julian's slipping status. He and Julian exchange words at the club on Christmas night and Bobby implies that Julian had purposefully avoided service in World War I while he and others braved the perils of going overseas.

Kitty Hofman

Kitty Hofman is the wife of Whit Hofman and a member of Caroline and Julian's inner circle of friends. Known for being frank, she first informs Caroline of how dire the consequences of Julian's actions against Harry Reilly could be. Kitty has had her own run-ins with socially unacceptable behavior, having received a black eye from Carter Davis after she kicked him, and then getting into a cat-fight of sorts with another woman in the club. Kitty is present when Julian leaves the Stage Coach with Helene Holman.

Whitney Hofman

Whit Hofman is the ringleader of the Lantenengo Country Club set, often presiding over the hub of action at the club. Whit remains decidedly neutral during Julian's foray into

oblivion. Married to Kitty, he has been known to engage in childish, albeit harmless antics from time to time. Whit is present at the Stage Coach when Julian overindulges and goes off with Helene Holman. He enters the country club as Julian is fleeing from his bout with Froggy; Julian thinks as he passes Whit, "Whit probably hated him and had hated him for years, just as Froggy had done." Whit is the only one of Julian's friends who had never made a pass at Caroline.

Helene Holman

Helene is Ed Charney's mistress and a professional singer of sorts. Al Grecco spends a good deal of time keeping tabs on Helene, but she winds up dancing with Julian one ill-fated night and leaves the bar to go out to a car with him. It is implied that she and Julian have sex, although Julian denies the charge to Lute.

Mary Klein

Mary Klein is Julian's secretary at the Cadillac dealership. A world-class worrier, she greets Julian each morning with a laundry list of woes; however, Julian notes, "you could stop her at any point and she would not be offended." She represents to Julian "precisely what she came from: solid, respectable, Pennsylvania Dutch, Lutheran middle class," something that raises insecurities and prejudices within Julian, who believes that she and others like her "secretly hated him and all the Lantenengo Street people." He spends his last day of life at work trying to look busy in the hope that "he was making a good impression on Mary Klein."

Mary Manners

Mary Manners is the Polish girl who was the love of Julian's life. Because of their differing social positions, Julian was unable to pursue a real relationship with Mary. She was forced to "go away or her father would have killed her." The two shared a sexually charged relationship and Julian comes to the realization that she "had loved him and never would love anyone else the same way." She appears at the novel's end, sharing a drink with Ross Campbell, who describes her as "the prettiest girl I ever saw."

Joe Montgomery

Joe Montgomery is a playboy with whom Caroline fell in love just prior to leaving for an extended trip to Europe. He is the first man to see her unclothed as well as the first to seriously proposition her, an offer she declines. She does, however, accept his informal marriage proposal but is unable to see him again before she departs two days later, having made prior plans to get together with Julian, Jean, and Froggy. While Caroline is in Europe, Joe meets another woman and ends the long-distance affair. Caroline continues to remember him as "the man she had loved most in her life."

Froggy Ogden

Froggy Ogden, thirty-four years old, is a cousin to Caroline English and a member of Julian's social enclave. Froggy served in World War I and lost an arm in battle there. Froggy's presence reminds Julian of his lack of service in the war.

Froggy and his wife, Jean, who is Caroline's best friend, helped orchestrate the pairing of Julian and Caroline by planning a double-date the night before Caroline was to leave for her extended trip to Europe. Julian counts Froggy as one of his best friends, something that is an error in judgment as Froggy confronts Julian after his dalliance with Helene Holman and tells Julian that he's always hated him. Froggy then challenges Julian to a fistfight, something Julian tries desperately to avoid, but he winds up punching Froggy anyway.

Jean Ogden

Jean is married to Froggy Ogden and is Caroline's best friend. Many years ago, Julian and Jean had had a passionate love affair, one in which "everything that they ever could have been to each other, Jean and Julian had been." The affair ended amicably and left each "ready really to love someone else."

Harry Reilty

A former suitor of Caroline's, Harry Reilly is a member of Gibbsville's nouveau riche. A long-winded Irish Catholic, he shares his home with his widowed sister and her children. Harry has managed to social-climb in Gibbsville "by being a 'good fellow, "being himself,' and by sheer force of the money which everyone knew the Reillys had."

A member of several committees, Harry Reilly uses his money to get things done. Further, most of Julian's set are in personal debt to Harry as he has lent them money with the onset of the Depression. He lent Julian a formidable sum of money the previous summer, a fact that does not prevent Julian from hurling a drink in Harry's face the night before Christmas at the country club. Harry is hurt and humiliated by the gesture (he refuses to see Julian the next day when he comes to Harry's home to apologize) and word quickly spreads through the town that Harry could use his influence to hurt Julian professionally and socially.

While other townspeople concede that Harry Reilly is a bit of a blowhard, Julian's motivation may also come from the fact that he believes that "Reilly always danced a lot with and was elaborately attentive to Caroline English."

Constance Walker

Constance is Caroline's cousin and ten years her junior. She bears a striking resemblance to Caroline, and although she isn't as pretty, she is "fresher - to [Julian]." Constance isn't a virgin, but the boys at the club believe she is; although she has a gorgeous figure, those who bed her are ashamed to admit it because she is not considered a beauty. She attends Smith College and, in spite of her youth, is more worldly than Caroline, a fact that Julian notes as he shares a dance with her at the Christmas Day dinner at the country club.

Jerome Walker

Jerome is a distant cousin of Caroline's and her first love. A captain in the British army, he arrived in Gibbsville in 1918 at the age of twenty-five to teach modern warfare to the draft army after suffering a leg wound. He left Gibbsville without declaring his love for Caroline and succumbed to gangrene six months later.

Mrs. Waldo Wallace Walker

Caroline's mother, Mrs. Walker, is a well-dressed lady and the most attractive woman of her age in Gibbsville. She is decidedly shallow on many levels: "You would know her for all the things she was . . . [when] you expect her to say something good and wise about life,. . . what she would say would be: *Oh, fish! I must have my rings cleaned.'"

Because someone once told her that Caroline had a great independence of spirit, Mrs. Walker took this to heart, raising Caroline in a very hands-off manner. A serious emotional distance exists between the two and when Caroline goes to her mother for sympathy over the terrible state of her marriage, her mother only offers vague advice and contradictions and refuses to hear any talk of divorce.

Themes

The Failure of Love

A theme common to most of John O'Hara's works is the failure of love and Appointment in Samarra is no exception. Although Julian English is ultimately responsible for his own demise, he may have indeed felt that his situation were less dire had he felt loved by those most important to him. The most basic love of all□parental love□ eludes Julian. His parents, Dr. and Mrs. English, treat him with cold disregard; his father, in particular, sees in Julian the very qualities evident in his own father□weakness of character□which led to Julian's grandfather's suicide. It is because of this perception on Dr. English's part and this loathing that he cannot love Julian unconditionally. Caroline confronts Dr. English about his coolness toward Julian when he comes to inform her of Julian's death in the following passage:

Ah, go away. You did it. You, you don't like him. You did, too, you pompous old man.

She continues her assault:

Well, he never liked you. I guess you know that, don't you? So high and mighty and nasty to him when we went to your house for Christmas. Don't think he didn't notice it. You made him do it, not me.

Caroline's deflection of guilt is indicative of her lack of deep love for Julian. Although she claims to have fallen in love with him when she agreed to marry him, neither Julian nor Caroline are truly capable of actively loving the other unconditionally. When Julian begs Caroline to go away with him as he is nearing the end of his life, she refuses, choosing instead the life to which she'd grown accustomed. Clearly, she'd never grown accustomed to Julian in a meaningful way.

Fate versus Free Will

Fate is a common theme throughout Appointment in Samarra. The book's title, in fact, is taken from a legend having to do with fate and inevitability. A man has a brush with Death in a Baghdad marketplace and leaves for Samarra in order to elude Death, only to again meet Death when he arrives in Samarra later that day.

Julian's self-destruction raises many questions with regard to fate and free will. His behavior may well have been part of his predetermined fate, springing from his familial legacy of suicide. Dr. English pigeon-holed Julian as being weak-willed when he was caught stealing as a boy:

William Dilworth English was thinking of his own life, the scrupulous, notebook honesty; the penny-watching, bill-paying, self-sacrificing honesty that had been his religion after

his own father's suicide. And that was his reward: a son who turned out to be like his grandfather, a thief.

Despite the fact that Julian never stole again, his father's perception of him never changed. As Julian grew older and had a few incidents in college involving being overdrawn at the bank, his mother warned him:

Your father... is specially worried about you where money matters are concerned because he thinks it's in the blood, because of Grandfather English.

It is plausible, then, that these and other similar incidents contributed to Julian's ill-fated destiny. His own wife, after hearing of his suicide, conceded that Julian had actually outlived his usefulness:

It was time for him to die. There was nothing for him to do today, there was nothing for him to do today.

Conversely, though, Julian's behavior, so outrageous in the eyes of his fellow patricians, may be seen as his first exertion of free will in his life. The morning after he throws a drink in Harry Reilly's face, Caroline demands:

Oh, God, Ju, why did you do it?

And when he comes to her after his fistfight at the country club, she cries out:

Oh, Julian, what did you do? My God.

Each time she says these things, Caroline is crying hysterically, perhaps out of shock that Julian would do such unseemly and uncharacteristic things, things out of line with who he was supposed to be. These rebellious acts may have been Julian's efforts at exercising free will to free himself from a miserable fate in Gibbsville.

Style

Point of View

Appointment in Samarra features an omniscient narrator who tells the story from the points of view of several key characters intermittently. These characters include Luther Fliegler, Irma Fliegler, Julian English, Al Grecco, Dr. English, Caroline English, Mrs. Walker, Mr. Hariey, Alice Cartwright, Harry Reilly, and Mary Manners and Ross Campbell. This technique allows O'Hara the ability to present characters through the perception of the other characters.

Setting

Appointment in Samarra is set hi the fictional town of Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, in !930. Gibbsville, according to the novel, is part of the anthracite coal region of the United States. As such, it is "a stronghold of union labor."

The story unfolds in different places around Gibbsville, including the Lantenengo Country Club, Julian's Cadillac dealership, and the homes of various characters. Another place where a great deal of action occurs is in or around the automobile. Cars, in general, play a large role in the story. In the beginning of the novel, Irma Fliegler listens to the comings and goings of her neighbors on Lantenengo Street while lying in bed, knowing each person by the specific sound of each family's automobile. Al Grecco's character is first introduced while driving and spends a good deal of time thinking about driving in general. Caroline and Julian have several rows, depicted or inferred, in their Cadillac; additionally, Julian's infamous indiscretion takes place inside a car.

As important as the region is to the story, Gibbsville's social structure drives the plot and provides the impetus for much of the novel's action. Inasmuch as Appointment in Samarra is the story of a man's self-destruction, it is also a study of the social hierarchy of a small-yet-affluent town in 1930 America. Race, religion, and wealth dictate position in the order; however, it seems that each tier of society has an equal interest in maintaining the social order as each seems to have a good amount of disdain for the other. The Protestants do not care for the Catholics; the Catholics bond together against the Protestants; and the solid, respectable, Pennsylvania Dutch, Lutheran middle class serves to act as a barometer of sorts for the self-indulgent behavior of the privileged Protestants.

Structure

The novel is told in the present tense from varying viewpoints; however, flashbacks play a large part of the tale in relating character histories, especially those of Caroline and Julian.

Historical Context

World War I

World War I began in 1914 because of a series of events triggered by the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the presumed heir to the Austrian and Hungarian thrones, by Gavrilo Princip, a Serb nationalist. This single event may have prompted the war; however, tensions had long been building between several European countries. A strong feeling of nationalism existed in Europe, a feeling that spurred the desire for people who spoke the same language and shared the same culture to exist in independent states. This, of course, flew in the face of the imperialist activities taking place around the globe. European powers were clashing over colonial interests, specifically in Africa.

On top of this, two very powerful strategic alliances were formed, each of which had amassed enormous military power. First, the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy was formed. Great Britain, France, and Russia then bonded together to create the Triple Entente. When Ferdinand was killed, then, the Austrian-Hungary government viewed it as a hostile act from the Greater Serbian movement (which was a movement to take control of areas of Austria-Hungary inhabited mostly by Slavic peoples). Russia and Great Britain intervened and persuaded Serbia to attempt to pacify Austria-Hungary; however, when Serbia agreed to only eight of Austria-Hungary's ten demands, Austria threatened to march on Serbia. The Russian government then said it would take up arms against Austria if it did so.

On July 28,1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. Russia quickly made good on its promise; however, the Russian response prompted Germany to threaten war on Russia if it did not demobilize immediately. When Russia refused, Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914. France then mobilized against Germany, and on August 3, Germany declared war on France. When the government of Belgium, which was a neutral country, balked at Germany's plan to march through Belgium to get to France, Great Britain showed its support by demanding that it honor Belgium's request.

The Germans ignored the request, and Great Britain declared war on Germany on August 4. Italy broke its affiliation with the Triple Alliance several months later and entered the fray on May 23, 1915. Ultimately, then, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Italy were joined by Japan and the United States, the last nation to become involved on April 6,1917. Turkey, long allied with Germany, had entered the war on Germany's side in late 1914.

World War I was a war fought on several fronts, using submarines, trench warfare, and fighter planes. It devastated Europe on many levels, directly claiming the lives of 37 million people, including many American soldiers. While Russia withdrew in 1917 (it was undergoing civil problems of its own that led to the toppling of the czar and the institution of communism), Germany was eventually defeated. Ordered to pay war

reparations to the allied forces amounting to $186 billion, Germany's economy was ravaged and would never fully recover, a factor which led to the rise in power of Adolf Hitler and World War II.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression was a period of intense economic collapse that began in 1929 and ended in

the early 1940s. While the depression began in the United States with the crash of the stock market, its effects were felt worldwide and soon most of the world's industrial nations were adversely affected.

While its onset may appear to have been sudden, conditions existed for years that led to the sudden collapse of the economy. First, in the United States, there was an imbalance in the distribution of income. The wealthiest 0.1 percent of American families had a combined income equal to that of the bottom 42 percent of American families. At the same time as this situation was building up, manufacturers of goods were producing products for consumers at an all-time high rate. To encourage people to buy these new products, such as household appliances and radios, advertising strategies that had been employed to get people to support the Allies' efforts in World War I were used to urge lower-income people that they needed these things. If people didn't have the money to purchase things, which most didn't, credit was extended to them, credit that allowed people to buy now and pay later.

At the same time that these things were occurring, the United States government was placing high tariffs on foreign-produced goods to encourage the sale of American-made goods. Unfortunately, though, many foreign economies had been weakened by World War I, especially Germany and France (whose male workforce was all but decimated in the war). The United States wound up being creditor to those countries and when the countries balked at the high tariffs, they lost product sales□and income□on goods that might have been sold in the United States. Decreased income meant that these countries began having difficulty paying their debt to the United States.

All of these situations were compounded when stock market investors began buying stock "on margin," which is similar to buying goods on credit. A small part of the stock's initial price is paid and the rest is borrowed against future profits the investors believe they will make when they sell the stock at a higher price□'/they can sell the stock at a higher price. When confidence that the stock market prices would continue to rise waned, the stock market began to plummet as many investors began selling off their stock. On October 29, 1928, known as Black Tuesday, stocks lost from $10 to $15 billion of their worth; by mid-November there were losses of $30 billion. Entire fortunes were wiped out over the course of two weeks.

The stock market crash and its negative effects on the economy, coupled with all of the other negative economic conditions that existed, left people with little money to spend

on disposable goods; further, many could not make good on the credit that had been extended to them for goods previously purchased. Manufacturers could not sell enough product and jobs were significantly cut. Banks closed as people began to attempt to withdraw all of their money; many people were unable to get to their savings before the closings and people were left bankrupt.

Unemployment rates skyrocketed to nearly twenty-five percent; almost fifteen millions Americans were jobless. Conditions worsened until the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932; Roosevelt implemented the New Deal, a variety of programs to assist the public and boost the economy. While some gains were made, however, the economy was not fully restored until government spending increased dramatically with the United States' preparation for entry into World War II, the groundwork for which began to be laid in 1939.

The Great Depression affected the level of government involvement in many aspects of daily American life. Banks began to be regulated closely and the Social Security Act of 1935 was passed. Furthermore, union activity, which had long been viewed as controversial and had many opponents, became protected under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. This gave rise to the powerful labor unions that still exist in the United States today.

Critical Overview

The book underwent several rapid printings, a testament to its popularity with the public. O'Hara had found his audience and would go on to publish books for nearly the next four decades. His peers, too, praised his freshman effort. Ernest Hemingway wrote of Appointment in Samarra: "If you want to read a book by a man who knows exactly what he is writing about and has written it marvelously well, read Appointment in Samarra by John O'Hara." Dorothy Parker, who was something of a mentor to O'Hara, pointed out that "Mr. O'Hara's eyes and ears have been spared nothing, but he has kept in his heart a curious and bitter mercy." Parker's comments reflect the acclaim given to O'Hara's descriptive flair and ear for dialogue that is especially sharp in his first novel.

Just as there were mixed reviews for Appointment in Samarra upon its release, contemporary times have not extinguished the ongoing debate over O'Hara's merits. For example, when the Modern Library released its list of the top 100 best twentieth-century English-language novels in 1998, Appointment in Samarra was ranked at No. 22, a fact that caused much furor and opened the door for ridicule of the list as a whole by a number of contemporary critics.

Ten years prior to the issuance of the Modern Library list, John Updike looked at Appointment in Samarra in hindsight in an article in the May 2, 1988, issue of The New Republic entitled, "Reconsideration: Appointment in Samarra□O'Hara's messy masterpiece." Updike tells of his first experience with the book:

I first read Appointment as a teenager (because, I suppose, the scandal of it in Pottsville had stirred waves still felt in Reading [Pennsylvania], 40 miles away, 15 years later); this monstrous mad drink, and Julian's sodden retreat to the interior of his Cadillac, seemed to me then overwhelmingly dreadful□a liquid vortex opening a hole in the workaday world about me. How surprisingly brief, on rereading, the sentences are! [Dorothy] Parker correctly spoke of the book's 'almost unbelievable pace.'

Despite the passage of more than fifty years (at the time of the article's publication), Updike insists:

The 'slight' novel . . . has lasted. Though O'Hara wrote many more, and produced volumes of short stories as bulky as bulky novels, he never surpassed the artistic effect achieved by Appointment in Samarra. He belongs, with Hawthorne and Hemingway, to the distinguished company of American novelists whose first published novel is generally felt to be their best.

Several years later, Margo Jefferson, reviewing the re-release of Appointment in Samarra in 1995 in The New York Times Book Review, said of the novel (along with Butterfield 8) that they "deserve to be back in print: it's amazing how much [O'Hara] got right."

Finally, Benjamin and Christina Schwarz wrote in their article "John O'Hara's Protectorate" in the March 2000 issue of The Atlantic Monthly:

Today's reader can still appreciate the taut Appointment in Samarra . . . even if he or she is puzzled by the enormous significance O'Hara placed on the differences between drivers of the comparably priced Buick and Franklin.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Caroline M. Levchuck, a writer and editor, has published articles on literature along with nonfiction essays and children's books. In this essay, she focuses on O 'Hara's Appointment in Samarra as a portrait of the disintegration of a marriage.

Appointment in Samarra has been viewed in many different ways. John Updike called it a "social panorama," while Ernest Hemingway dubbed it "a Christmas story." O'Hara himself, however, in a letter to his brother Tom prior to the novel's publication, referred to it as "essentially the story of a young married couple and their breakdown in the first year of the depression." Despite themes of fate and inevitability and the failure of parental love, then, Appointment in Samarra may be seen as an intimate look at the failings of a young union. Many of the truths evident in O'Hara's work hold true to this day, an age where divorce is almost as common as marriage.

Rather cleverly, O'Hara does not first present Caroline Walker English and Julian English; rather, he sets up their introduction by framing their relationship and the story itself within the solid book-ends that are Lute and Irma Fliegler's marriage. Lute and his wife share a rather practical union, far less glamorous than that of Caroline and Julian. Their kindness and mutual respect and understanding of one another, however, is evident from page one. Lute awakens in the early morning desiring his wife but, realizing that she is probably too tired to be intimate with him, he decides to allow her to sleep, conceding that "Irma can say no when she is tired." He does caress her lovingly, though, and Irma wakes with a start but acquiesces to his amorous overtures and "for a little while Gibbsville knew no happier people than Luther Fliegler and his wife, Irma." After their romantic coupling, Irma rises from bed to commence with her holiday preparations. While doing so, she ponders Lantenengo Street, on which they live, and its inhabitants and the state of her and Lute's life together. They are not as well-off as Caroline and Julian; after all, Lute works under Julian at the Cadillac dealership. Irma and Lute are not yet members of the exclusive and expensive Lantenengo Country Club, although Irma is anxious to be. Still, she respects her husband's philosophy about such things; Lute believes that they should join when it is within their reach financially. Unfortunately, though, this means that they are missing out on the big Christmas Eve party being held at the club. Despite this, Irma is quite aware of the good man she has found in Lute: "Lute was all right. Dependable and honest as the day is long, and never looked at another woman, even in fun." This realization quells her momentary envy as she ponders the goings-on at the club and she reminds herself that "she wouldn't trade her life for that of Caroline English, not if you paid her."

It is then that the reader is thrust into the glamorous world of the country-club set that includes Caroline and Julian English. Against this backdrop of parties and privilege, O'Hara lays out the relationship of the golden couple. Almost immediately it is clear that Julian does not truly have a grasp on who his wife is as a person. He completely misses the mark in estimating what her reaction to his throwing a drink in Harry Reilly's face would be, guessing wrongly that she would simply exclaim, "Julian!" Despite this, when he realizes the growing gravity of the situation the morning after and is loathe to face

the consequences of his actions, his affection for his wife is clear. He tells himself he'd be all right, "if I could just stay here for the rest of my life and never see another soul. Except Caroline. I'd have to have Caroline." This sentiment is sharply contrasted with Caroline's ominous response to Julian's impetuous act and her chilly behavior toward him for the remainder of the novel.

While each has a certain understanding of the mannerisms and preferences of the other, the premise of their very relationship appears to be rather shallow. Caroline is aware of Julian's idiosyncrasies, such as the precise manner in which he prefers his monogram. Julian, for his part, can predict some of Caroline's responses. Yet, there is an entire character living just under the surface that each possesses but of which the other is ignorant. When O'Hara reveals the history of Caroline's love life, it seems implausible that Julian is aware of any of the details of her past heartbreaks. Caroline, for her part, possessed a naivete about the depth of Julian's feelings for Mary Manners, the Polish girl with whom he shared a doomed romance. Even when Julian was seeing both women at the same time, Caroline was "sure he loved Caroline the most." As evidenced by Julian's thoughts of Mary toward the end of his life, he actually loved Mary the most.

Although wed for nearly five years, Julian and Caroline are childless, having adhered to their initial five-year plan, which one can assume included purposefully not reproducing. Over the course of the story, this point is presented as a minor issue between the two, with Caroline impulsively deciding en route to the Christmas dinner at the club that they shall embark on building a family that very night. When Julian asks if she means it, she tells him insistently, "I never meant anything so much in my life." The fact remains, though, that Caroline never truly seems to be certain of anything. When she first recalls her and Julian's relationship, she says that she didn't fall in love with him until 1926. However, this is contradicted when Caroline, in her ire over Julian's escapade with Helene Holman at the Stage Coach, wishing him dead, refers to a time "when I knew [him] in an Eton collar and a Windsor tie, and I loved [him] then." Of course, Julian wouldn't have worn an Eton collar and a Windsor tie as an adult but rather as a young boy. In her reverie, she also proclaims that Julian has "killed something mighty fine" in her; however, when she'd phoned him at his dealership earlier that morning, she merely chastised him for being cross with their housekeeper, concealing her true feelings about his supposed infidelity and public humiliation. It appears implausible that two people can truly love each other and have a successful marriage when neither is certain of his or her own feelings nor does either make an effort to convey their anger and outrage at the other.

The supposed depth of Julian's feelings, which he conveys with his "need" for Caroline, also are contrasted with his true understanding of Caroline as a person; perhaps, though, lack of understanding might best be the way to view Julian's perception of Caroline. On Christmas evening, as he dances at the club with Caroline's much-younger cousin Constance, her dissimilarities to Caroline bring him to a startling realization about Caroline of which he'd not been previously aware, despite the fact that they'd been married for several years and had known each other their entire lives. In contrasting Caroline with Constance, Julian realizes, "Caroline was an educated girl

whose education was behind her and for all time would be part of her background." Excited over this new theory, Julian wishes to "tell Caroline about it, to try it out on her and see if she agreed with it." While he realizes that her reaction will be one of affirmation and she will point out that she's been "telling him that for years," this incident points to the fact that even though he is aware of her reactions, he hasn't much knowledge about who Caroline really is as an individual.

Another sticking point in their marriage is the tensions that surround their romantic couplings. Julian spends a good deal of time angling for "dates" with his wife, something for which she appears to have little desire. Although the book spans only three days, Julian asks Caroline to have relations with him several times and his request is indulged only once. When Julian returns from Reilly's house after trying unsuccessfully to apologize for throwing a drink in the man's face, Caroline comforts him physically and Julian refers to the experience as "the greatest single act of their married life. . . . It was the time she did not fail him." The latter part, which refers to Caroline's acquiescence to his needs, denotes that it was "the time" - in other words, the only time. This, of course, implies that Caroline has failed him on countless other occasions.

Much of the tension that surrounds their sexual relationship may be due to Julian's inflated sense of his physical appeal and his bravado in terms of his ability to physically satisfy a woman. While he may, in fact, satisfy Caroline on a physical level - after all, it is implied that she hadn't ever strayed physically from the marriage - he hasn't the first idea how to fulfill her emotionally. Compounding Julian's shortcomings is Caroline's skewed view of sexuality. When O'Hara details her past experiences, it is clear that she attached a degree of shame to sexuality and possessed a good amount of fear over it even when she was in her mid-twenties; she was embarrassed when suitor Joe Montgomery glimpsed her in her undergarments when they went swimming at the beach. She tells Montgomery later that she wishes to engage in a steamy physical affair and marry in a whirlwind; however, she never makes good on her desire. Further compounding her troubled perception of her own sexuality is the fact that she had been molested by a student while teaching when she was just out of college; and, following her failed fling with Montgomery, she was taken to a live-sex show in Paris and is left frightened by the entire incident. On top of all of these events, Caroline's mother cannot bring herself to speak of anything sexual with her daughter when Caroline comes to her mother for help. She tells Caroline, "I told you when you were married, I told you to take a firm stand on certain things." Caroline replies, "You never told me what things though." All of these things lead Caroline to be so out of touch with her own sexuality that she admits that she wants Julian most when she is not well more "than any other tune." This impulse conflicts with the viability of their pairing, and her supposed desire for something when she knows she cannot have it can be taken as proof that while the desire is there, she is afraid of indulging it.

Before the book's end, Caroline fails Julian once again, on another, more crucial level. After his final faux pas at the country club in which he fights with several other members, Julian begs Caroline, "Listen, will you go away with me? Now? This minute? Will you? Will you go away with me?" Caroline refuses his desperate request and remains at her mother's home, effectively sealing the fate of their marriage and Julian's

fate as an individual. As they trade parting barbs outside Caroline's mother's home and discuss how to handle the cancellation of that evening's party, Caroline suggests that she tell the invitee? that the party is canceled because Julian or she broke a leg. Julian tells her, "But it's nicer for us to be agreeable and sort of phony about it. You know what I mean?" His words are apropos of not only the situation but of their entire marriage.

After Julian's death, Caroline mourns not for Julian but rather for herself, for her loss, "because he had left her." While she insisted repeatedly throughout the tale that she loved Julian, she likened her love for him to having a cancer, a metaphor that is not likely used by truly happily married people. Certainly, there were moments of tenderness between the pair and an amicability that allowed them to live out their days together in a content state. Unfortunately, though, the pair held each other at arm's length, just as each did to their friends and family around them, swallowing their true feelings until they practically choked on them, withholding genuine affection and understanding until it was impossible to summon any sort of compassion.

At the novel's close, O'Hara affords his readers one last brief glimpse into the happily married lives of the Flieglers. While Lute frets about his financial obligations and their shaky future due to Julian's demise, Irma looks at him with genuine affection and wishes "daytime were a time for kissing [for] she would kiss him now." Their ability to come together in the face of adversity stands in direct opposition to Caroline and Julian who were so easily driven apart by the smallest adversity - a drink being thrown in the face of a tipsy club member.

Appointment in Samarra stands as an example of a marriage whose internal workings fly in the face of the external perceptions of it. The situation was both plausible and true-to-life in 1934 and cements the truth that lies in the old adage, "Times change but people do not." Almost seventy years after its publication, the world is undoubtedly full of married couples having relationships that parallel that of Caroline and Julian's.

Source: Caroline M. Levchuck, in an essay for Novels for Students, Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Grebstein explores the emotional history of Julian English and its influence on his tragic circumstances in Appointment in Samarra.

The tragedies of our time are very likely to be what Arthur Miller has called the tragedy of the common man. These are the tragedies of the mundane, the ordinary, the familiar; tragedies of men worn down by the everyday pressures of life or by their own inner pressures; pressures of earning bread; finding and maintaining an identity; of doing useful work; of keeping the love of one's wife, children, neighbors; of expressing one's simple human dignity; of remaining decent in the concrete jungle, the social jungle, the factory jungle, or the army jungle. So the tragedy of Julian English, of Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, who expires in his own garage during the evening of the day after Christmas, 1930, is a tragedy of the common man, a tragedy of the surrender to these forces. It is, indeed, doubly a tragedy of the common man; for Julian's motivation for suicide derives partly from the belated discovery of his own commonness, of the terrifying recognition of his own susceptibility to the failures, pains, and defeats others had earlier confronted. The trials and disappointments which early come to ordinary men presented themselves to Julian during three packed days of a Christmas holiday; and he was not capable of absorbing the lesson. A few hours before Julian kills himself, he falls into a drunken sleep "wishing he knew more things," but it is too late for him to learn.

Appointment in Samarra thus seems to chronicle the unhappy history of a man wholly victimized by Forces, especially Fate and Society. Fate appears to operate through the compulsion which drives Julian to throw a drink into Harry Reilly's face, the event which begins the protagonist's swift slide to doom. Fate is presumably the theme of the novel's epigraph, which retells the ancient tale of man who seeks to flee death only to find that in his very flight he keeps his destined appointment with it. Fate is also suggested in Caroline English's agonized reflection after her husband's death that "It was time for him to die."

Society, too, takes a significant part in Julian's history. As one recent commentator has interpreted the novel, "... place is agency, and the tragedy, depends upon the disguised impetus of the sociological forces." Another critic states: "What makes Appointment in Samarra remarkable ... is not the story of Julian English; it is the story of Gibbsville. All the characters, even Julian English, are here for not their own sakes but because they represent significant social elements in Gibbsville."

Certainly these observations are pertinent, and no understanding of the novel would be complete without the recognition of the influence of Fate and Society upon the book's characters and action. Social status occupies an especially prominent position in the minds of O'Hara's fictional people; accordingly, much detail is given to family background, wealth, clothing - even to the social meaning of such seeming trivialities as the price of the various entrees on the country club's dinner menu. True, there exists in Gibbsville a delicate relationship between the various classes, religions, and ethnic

groups. True, there is much snobbery both petty and vicious, notably the prejudices against Jews and Catholics. True, in Gibbsville one begins at birth with particular advantages and disadvantages. True, finally, O'Hara depicts all this with such convincing thoroughness and admirable subtlety that Appointment in Samarra would be a far weaker book without it.

But to his cognizance of these forces the sensitive reader must add a third element, one I believe to be crucial: free will. As I interpret the novel, Julian's tragedy derives less from fate, less from social pressure, than from a series of wrong choices, bungled acts, and misinterpretations which reflect his immaturity and defective character. He behaves as he is - a man who does not know himself. If a fatalism does operate, it is neither an occult power nor an exterior force but a fatalism in the way men are, of human nature. The tragedy, therefore, depends not so much upon circumstance but upon the failure of love, nerve, will. Or, to put it in another way, the tragedy could have been averted at almost any stage by the exercise of love, nerve, will. Even Julian's apparently uncontrollable impulse to attack Harry Reilly can be seen, like his other compulsions, as the outlet for an accumulation of past emotions. His impulses are, in fact, but one aspect of a destructiveness symptomatic of a life deficient in love, trust, and moral value. By the same token, as I will later argue, Julian's tragedy amounts to something more than a treatise about an individual who violates group protocols or an illustration of the rigidity of class structure in a small Pennsylvania city.

What, then, is the emotional history of Julian English; upon what foundations does his character at thirty stand? Most important - and this is a dominant and recurrent theme in O'Hara's fiction - is the failure of love between parents and children and, more specifically, between father and son. Because of one boyhood mistake, some petty larceny performed partly as a boyish prank and partly as a means for Julian to assert his place in the gang, Dr. English comes to think of his son as a thief and a weakling. The father's judgment, reinforced by his undemonstrative nature and by his stern, unbending righteousness, forever bends the twig of Julian's personality. To protect his own ego, already threatened by his own father's reputation as an embezzler and a suicide, Dr. English dissociates himself from his son at exactly the moment when Julian most needs assurance of his love. The father of another boy involved m the same escapade handles the matter with greater compassion. He severely punishes his son but continues to favor him. In contrast, by detaching himself from his son and his son's mistakes Dr. English cuts Julian adrift in a world without god, a world without authority, meaning, and hope of redemption; for to a boy god is manifested in his father.

This crucial rejection has several results, some of them ambivalent, as they often are in people. For one, Julian reacts against his father and all his father represents: a profession, an ordered life, respectability, restraint, politeness. Only to Father Creedon, Julian's father-surrogate, can he admit that he should have become a doctor. In his rebellion he releases his pent-up anger, the need to hit back and hurt and destroy, wishing subconsciously that he will be caught and punished. At the same time Julian wants to be liked, admired, accepted: to have from others what he cannot have from his father. He develops a charm which is enhanced by his good looks and supported by the family's prosperity, charm which he can exercise on those higher social levels of

Gibbsville automatically open to him through the English name, money, and Aryan background. Accordingly, Julian becomes a "personality," but one without an identity; for in O'Hara's world the boy also first learns his identity from his father. Julian's mother might have compensated for the father's failure, as the mother sometimes does in O'Hara's fiction, but we are told nothing about her except that she is a sweet, adoring woman, obviously without the strength or influence to fill the role of both parents.

Because Julian never fully assumes a stable identity, he can never grow up. He can never perform the adult function of understanding himself in relation to others; his own emotions remain of prime importance to him. All these sins of omission and commission return to torment him in the frantic days before his death. He has made few loyal friends to stand by him in his crisis. Rather, his country-club associates step back to see how well he can sail out the tempest he has himself blown up. Instead of appealing for help to the one person who could have been his salvation, his wife Caroline, he alienates her by making her the target for his anger and frustration. For a time a saving rapport is almost established, but at the club dance on the night following the Reilly episode - a dance they have come to in a mood of intimacy - he ignores her a little too long and violates her tender feeling. Then, rebuked, like the child he is, he takes revenge by humiliating her in public for what he has suffered in private.

Later, on the afternoon of the day culminating in his suicide, he says to Caroline: "This is a pretty good time for you to stick by me ... Blind, without knowing, you could stick by me. That's what you'd do if you were a real wife ..." As much as Julian needs such unquestioning loyalty and love - as much as he needed it from his father and, failing to get it there, goes on needing it from everyone else - Julian does not deserve what he demands. Even if given it, he would probably not repay it. And the final choice remains his. To gain Caroline's support, he has only to remain with her and tell her what troubles him; but arrogantly and pettishly he refuses, flaunting her warning: "Julian, if you leave now it's for good. Forever." Thus the second support for Julian's life, his beautiful wife in whom he takes pride, is lost, this time largely by his own action.

Yet another of the pillars shoring up his existence is demolished when Froggy Ogden tells Julian he has never liked him, a crucial admission to a man who had needed to think of himself as popular and well-liked because inwardly he had feared the contrary. And at this phase in the discussion of the protagonist, one must take into account the social realities of Gibbsville as they impinge upon character and behavior.

Of first importance is the fact that Gibbsville society is not a steel trap which, once sprung, relentlessly holds its victim. Rather, it is a shifting, fluid society, a society in transition in which old and rigid lines are being dissolved under the multiple impact of emergent elements in the town's population and the exigencies of the Depression. To note but two examples of this change, there is the upward mobility of Harry Reilly, the Irish Catholic with his crude manners and smutty stories, who pushes his way toward the top because he is tough, clever, and strong. Similarly, the lawyers of Polish background who are Julian's antagonists at the Gibbsville Club have made their way into this once-exclusive establishment because they are now too able and prominent to be suppressed. Even the Jews at the bottom of the Gibbsville scale have begun to

climb, first to residence on Latenengo Street, and soon, one infers, to club membership - just as the Poles and the Irish have already made it.

Nor does Julian's conduct immediately cost him his social place. When Julian loses control with Reilly, his friends back away warily, but they neither turn upon him nor against him. He is not suspended from the club, not reprimanded, not even cold-shouldered; their final attitude and conduct toward him will depend upon his future behavior, just as other club members have acted foolishly in the past without suffering drastic punishment. Further, Julian's behavior looms much more horrendously in his own mind than in anyone else's. As O'Hara shows us at the end of the novel, Harry Reilly continues to think of Julian as a gentleman and to be proud that Julian likes him - despite Julian's humiliation of him. Froggy Ogden, despite his avowed dislike for Julian and his insults, takes his side against the Polish lawyers in the fist-fight (completely confounding Julian's antagonists). Father Creedon, spokesman for the Catholic community, offers him comfort. Lute Fliegler, representative of the middle class and of the strong Pennsylvania-Dutch element, continues to be Julian's friend and advisor. Ed Charney and Al Grecco, the bootleggers O'Hara uses to represent Gibbsville's lower class and demimonde, do not condemn Julian for the episode with the roadhouse-entertainer; time and an apology would have squared Julian with them also.

Of course, Julian's outrageous behavior will have social consequences. But in Appointment in Samarra society is neither the god nor the unknowable, juggernaut force that the plurality of critics have described. It has its stupidities, its cruelties, its excrescences; but it depends largely upon basic human needs and upon the observation of fundamental decencies. It sets forth only one strong rule that a violator breaks at his great hazard; one must not publicly offend the dignity of others, and even when this does occur, the transgressor can find ways to restore himself to good standing. Thus it is less a problem of "society" than of the verifies of human nature, of the ego. Some of Gibbsville's citizens may have an exaggerated sense of what that dignity means; but, although these may be the "best people," they are rarely the most admirable human beings. Dr. English is perhaps the prime example of this self-assumed superiority, and his snobbery is a function of his own inadequacies and anxieties.

Having remarked these social realities, we may return now to complete the inquiry into the novel's central character. Two final aspects of Julian's emotional history remain to be explored: the influences of sex and money, powerful determinants in O'Hara's work.

Learning that Froggy Ogden and perhaps others have always disliked him is the second great discovery in Julian's life. Had he lived, this discovery might have brought about a change in him toward the better - toward humility. His first great discovery, however, had been that of his own sexual power: his ability to control his physical passion so as to be able to give his sexual partner prolonged pleasure. (Doubtless it was O'Hara's daring in broaching such facts of human behavior which offended the early critics and which has continued to offend others.) While O'Hara does not explore all the ramifications of the subject, the reader arrives at the sure conclusion that Julian's discovery of his special ability had been essential to his jauntiness and self-assurance. With that power over women, he could think himself very much a man, at least in one basic sense; and the

conviction of his own masculinity had produced the peculiar charm and insouciance which springs from a man's total self-confidence with women. It had attuned him to women as sexual creatures, leading him to the belief that he could have anyone he wanted and keep her as long as he wanted. Nor does O'Hara minimize this factor. As his work demonstrates again and again, his men and women are sexual creatures; and the men are especially subject to the urges of their sexual needs.

To O'Hara's credit, he does not let the issue drop just there; he has more respect for humans than to portray them as laboratory specimens reacting only to physical stimuli. As Julian learns to his chagrin - both with his own wife and then, just before his death, with the reporter Alice Cartwright - a self-respecting woman has her values and her times of strength which make her proof against the most accomplished lover. She insists upon recognition as a person, as an entity. Julian begins to realize this fact during the final three days of his life when he reflects that his physical intimacy with his wife has not also given him possession of her soul. Unfortunately, Julian fails to act upon this realization; nor is there evidence that he tries. He has too long depended upon charm and his body to begin to treat his wife, or any attractive woman, with full human decency. Ultimately, Julian's sexual power turns against him. It has given him one kind of perception at the expense of another, more important kind. His blindness costs him the only two women he ever loves: the Polish girl, Mary, who Julian realizes sometime during the drunken haze of the last few hours of his life, had also loved him; and the other, the fatal loss, his wife.

Just as the shallowness of Julian's sexual values assist in his crucial self-deception, so does his inability to manage money, to take it seriously, to understand its meaning (the same character flaw in another manifestation) mark a further milestone on the way to his collapse. Product of a boom time and a wealthy home, graduate of a college but possessor of no durable knowledge, skill, or talent, and without the maturing experience of combat in war, he slides along as owner of a Cadillac agency (presumably his father's gift), getting by, as he always has, on charm and luck. It had gone well enough in the prosperous years of the late 1920's, but it is 1930 and things are changing. He had needed $10,000 but had exploited his charm and once-superior class position to borrow $20,000 from Harry Reilly, indebting himself to precisely the wrong man.

Now Julian needs more. He will always need more. Despite his sexual self-confidence, he conceives a completely irrational fear of Reilly as a rival for Caroline's affections because, in Julian's fevered imagination, Reilly's money has invested him with a potency which his own looks, background, and manners cannot match. His ineptitude with money becomes increasingly one of his major fears and an irritant to his latent anger, and money in O'Hara's fictional world is power. Upon money depends respectability and social acceptance; its possession and wise use also testify to the virtue of its possessor. To Julian insolvency becomes more than a mistake, it seems a sin - one more added to the overwhelming burden of guilt and self disgust he already bears. We see, then, that his suicide springs from no sudden compulsion, no quirk, no command of the gods. His fate flows, as it does in the creations of most serious novelists, from the wellsprings of his character.

With all these faults, what makes Julian important? Why is his end tragic, or at the very least poignant? We note something of its significance in the way Caroline thinks of him after his death: as a young officer who had died in the war, with his own inimitable gallantry of attitude, manner, and gesture. Moreover, he is considered a true gentleman by the two men in Gibbsville least likely to romanticize about people, Al Grecco and Ed Charney, who trade in other men's vices, as well as by such other tough, experienced men as Harry Reilly, Father Creedon, and Lute Fliegler.

In other words, there is an indefinable winningness about Julian, a finer substance underneath the glitter. One might almost say that he has an aura of beauty about him, or of the potentially beautiful: a zest, a joy in living, a sense of the comic, a spontaneity. He reminds us in part of Fitzgerald's people, of Dick Diver in Tender Is the Night; like him, he has the gift of stimulating others by his very presence, of bringing them an illusion of happiness. Like him, too, his grace is curiously emphasized by his very flaws. For Gibbsville, Julian represents the glamor, the noblesse oblige, the easy carelessness of the high aristocratic life; and his spark glows all the more brightly against the grey Gibbsville backdrop overcast by the lengthening shadows of Depression. His tragedy, and by implication man's, is that he lacks the self-knowledge, the nobility of character, the moral stamina to sustain the surface beauty.

Just as the themes and events of Appointment in Samarra operate on several different levels, so does O'Hara's narrative method work toward the effect of simultaneity and felt life. We find in O'Hara's first novel one of his fundamental techniques: that of the concurrent use of varying points of view, or what will hereafter be called the shifting perspective. An analysis of the book's opening chapter will seek to describe this technique and to demonstrate how it interacts with other elements of the work.

The novel's first three words are: "Our story begins ..." That is, the reader hears a narrator's voice and is guided by an impartial observer's cues. It is the familiar, traditional mode of the editorial

omniscient. However, O'Hara quickly removes his own obvious presence and melts into the selective omniscient; first briefly entering the mind of Lute Fliegler and then that of his wife. Irma's thoughts become the narrative projection for the remainder of the scene. This technique resembles stream-of-consciousness but differs from it in that the reader does not directly confront the inchoate outpouring of Irma's thoughts and emotions, as he does with Joyce's Molly Bloom; instead, he hears them as they are first filtered through the mind of a nearly invisible neutral observer. Through Irma the reader gets the middle-class attitude of the not-yet-rich but socially ambitious family, replete with its prejudices and snobberies. Further, through Irma one is convinced of the quality of her husband, Lute, as a strong, loyal, sensible, stable man. Since Julian later measures himself against men like Lute, one must know what he represents. Finally, the spontaneous and affectionate sexuality which the Flieglers enjoy symptomizes the security and harmony of their marriage, conjugal love as well as desire - yet another contrast to the Englishes.

Scene I of Chapter One closes with Irma thinking about the country club dance and wondering whether Julian and Caroline English are fighting again.

Scene II shifts to the dance, rendered by means of a dual point of view: an unobtrusively editorial-omniscient depiction of the people at the dance and the introduction of Harry Reilly telling an off-color joke downstairs in the smoking room, followed by the shift into the mind of Julian English at the very instant it entertains the notion of throwing a drink into Reilly's face. O'Hara then momentarily returns to the dance upstairs, creating a brief but telling interval of suspense, before the reader learns that Julian has indeed surrendered to his absurd impulse.

Scene III shifts to Al Grecco, the young hoodlum who works for the local bootlegger and crime-boss, Ed Charney. From the mental processes of Grecco, the reader is apprised that Julian enjoys the liking and the respect of the Charney-Grecco element in Gibbsville. He is further apprised of the town's power-structure, and that every "respectable" man can be either bought or silenced if he dares oppose Charney. Through Al Grecco's eyes, the aftermath of Julian's disastrous act at the club is first presented. Grecco has always respected Julian for his expert handling of an automobile; now, on his way home, Julian wheels his car recklessly and abusively (a foreshadowing of his more general loss of control, already under way), while his wife sits furiously silent beside him. As Al drives down Latenengo Street, his greeting to the darkened houses of the prosperous fully represents his worm's-eye vantage point and serves as a fittingly ironic ending for the chapter: "Merry Christmas, you stuck-up bastards!"

Thus in Chapter One O'Hara has offered a representation of the novel's milieu, a synopsis of its situation, a foreshadowing of its outcome, and an insight into some of its characters and conflicts. The reader also knows through O'Hara's astonishing dexterity in his handling of point-of-view that he is in the hands of a craftsman. Certainly the placing of the crisis of the novel at its very start is a bold and effective gambit. The remainder of the novel continues to build one's admiration for O'Hara's skill; for, with the use of varying scenes and the shifting perspective, O'Hara employs yet other techniques.

For example, in Chapter Five O'Hara slows the action to insert a flashback summarizing the life, especially the romantic life, of Caroline, Julian's wife. Not only does this chapter serve the immediate purpose of exposition, of illuminating certain aspects of Caroline's character and of her marriage, but in the structure of the entire novel it also serves a vital esthetic function. In the first four chapters O'Hara has set down a series of swift running episodes which build to an almost excruciating sense of gathering doom. Such rapid movement and cumulative tension could not be maintained, nor should they be, if the novel is to hold its reader to the end. Therefore, in the more leisurely told chapter recounting Caroline's past, a chapter shrewdly placed at exactly the halfway mark in the novel, O'Hara achieves stasis by changing the mood and pace and by pulling the reader away from the "now" of the action.

The same effect, the alternation of action and inaction, of dramatic scene with narration and description, of violence and stasis, is also maintained throughout the novel by O'Hara's strategic insertion of little anecdotes about the characters or items of local history. At times, in fact, Appointment in Samarra has something of the construction of the pattern or tapestry novel in which characters and events are at first presented individually, seemingly without the least relationship to one another, only later to be woven together into a whole, large, variegated fabric.

Finally, to O'Hara's accomplishment of a multi-layered rendition of reality, must be added his success in individual scenes, notably those in which he produces a completely convincing sense of lived experience: the sensation of hangover which seems to saturate the entire novel; the absurd wisdom of drunkenness; the almost Surrealistic scene of the events at the Stage Coach Inn; the tactile response to putting a gun in one's mouth; the flow of thoughts in the mind of a bereaved woman; and, most unforgettable of all, the montage of fear and self-disgust in Julian's whiskey-stimulated imagination just before his suicide, as he visualizes himself going down, down. One notes the adroitness with which O'Hara moves from external observation to interior monologue, altering the reader's stance from that of observer to participant. We begin by listening to O'Hara approximate Julian's thoughts about himself, but before we finish the passage we have witnessed Julian's conjuration of all the damning, humiliating whispers and rebuffs he fancies as his future:

He didn't want to go back and make a more definite break with Caroline. He didn't want to go back to anything, and he went from that to wondering what he wanted to go to. Thirty years old. "She's only twenty, and he's thirty. She's only twenty-two, and he's thirty. She's only eighteen, and he's thirty and been married once, you know. You wouldn't call him young. He's at least thirty. No, let's not have him. He's one of the older guys. Wish Julian English would act his age. He's always cutting in. His own crowd won't have him. I should think he'd resign from the club. Listen, if you don't tell him you want him to stop dancing with you, then I will. No thanks, Julian, I'd rather walk. No thanks, Mr. English, I haven't much farther to go. Listen, English, I want you to get this straight. Julian, I've been a friend of your family's for a good many years. Julian, I wish you wouldn't call me so much. My father gets furious. You better leave me out at the corner, because of my old man. Listen, you leave my sister alone. Oh, hello, sweetie, you want to wait for Ann she's busy now be down in a little while. No liquor, no meat, no coffee, drink plenty of water, stay off your feet as much as possible, and we'll have you in good shape in a year's time, maybe less."

Source: Sheldon Norman Grebstein, "Love, Failure and Death in the O'Hara Country," in John O'Hara,

Twayne Publishers, 1966, pp. 34-45.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Carson explores the theme of "social snobbery"' in Appointment in Samarra.

Appointment in Samarra constitutes O'Hara's object lesson in the cruel side of social snobbery. Julian English, the novel's protagonist, affronts a social climber at a dance. In turn, English himself is made the subject of ridicule for this error in taste. Two days later English commits suicide in despair.

Two varieties of social snobbery exist here. One is that of the "smoking room of the Lantenengo Country Club" and the other is the kind of censure exerted upon English by the middle class populace of Gibbsville who "collectively . . . presented a solid front of sound Pennsylvania Dutch and all that it implied. . . What a pity it was that this business wasn't in the hands of one of their own men instead of being driven into the ground by a Lantenengo Street. . . wastrel."

It is the snobbery of the Gibbsville creme de creme which displays first how the snobbery of Julian English's social milieu is turned back, ironically speaking, upon himself- Thus, English must suffer the same limitation as any person from another social group. He is reduced to humility by the censure of his clique. Whereas previously he might have relied upon his own social position in the "upper crust," he now becomes, like Harry Reilly (the 'Irish social sycophant whom English insults), equally despised. O'Hara's intention, morally, is to render the anguish of the socially snubbed. Julian English is the spokesman for most of us who at one time or another have been subject to the scorn of the haute monde - those of us who are excluded from the membership in the "better" college fraternity or the intimate circle of the Long Island garden party.

O'Hara's treatment of the finer points of class stratification appears meticulous, refined and precise in the expository part of his narrative. This is how O'Hara does it:

Any member of the club could come to the dance, but not everyone who came to the dance was really welcome in the smoking room. The smoking crowd always started out with a small number, always the

same people. The Whit Hofmans, the Julian Englishes, the Froggy Ogdens, and so on. They were the spenders and the socially secure, who could thumb their noses and not have to answer to anyone except their own families. There were about twenty persons in this group, and your standing in the younger set of Gibbsville could be judged by the assurance with which you joined the nucleus of the smoking room crowd.

In like fashion, O'Hara depicts the wrath of Julian English against Harry Reilly, who is not a member of "the smoking room crowd."

Reilly, had gone pretty far in his social climbing by being a "good fellow" and by "being himself," and by sheer force of the money which everyone knew the Reillys had. Reilly

was on the greens committee and the entertainment committee, because as a golfer he got things done; he paid for entire new greens out of his own pocket, and he could keep a dance going till six o'clock by giving the orchestra leader a big tip. But he was not yet an officer in the Gibbsville Assembly.

In passages like these, O'Hara never falters in noting exactest gradations upon the social ladder.

Two days after insulting Reilly, English becomes subject to the same variety of malice and petty hatred which he has seen fit to exercise upon the Irishman. A fellow club member says to him, "I've done a lot of things in my life, but by Jesus if I ever sunk so low that I had to throw ice in a man's face and give him a black eye." The man's violence suggests a little ludicrously that English has committed an error in taste unbecoming to a member of the Gibbsville aristocracy.

That evening Julian English goes to a road-house with his wife. He becomes drunk and makes an attempt to sexually overcome Helene Hoffman, a singer there. By this time, he has done more than behave in bad taste, as with Reilly. He has attempted a major moral infraction. The chain of events is now speeding blindly toward the novel's fatal conclusion. When he appears at the Gibbsville Club for lunch the next day, he is insulted once more, and a quarrel ensues. Julian attempts a gentlemanly exit, but open violence follows:

Froggy swung on him and Julian put up his open hand and the punch made a slight sound on his wrist, and hurt his wrist.

"Gentlemen!"

"Don't be a God damn fool," said Julian.

"Well, then. Come on outside."

"Gentlemen! You know the club rules." It was [the steward]. He stood in front of Froggy, with his back toward Froggy, facing Julian.

A lawyer then insults English, who insults him in return by calling him a "Polack war veteran and whoremaster."

"Hey, you!" said the lawyer.

"Aw," said Julian, finally too tired and disgusted with himself and everyone else. He took a step backwards and got into position, and then he let the lawyer have it, full in the mouth.

Julian attacks both the lawyer and Froggy. Infuriated, he hurls a carafe at still another man and runs for his car. His doom has been sealed. As he drives away, he suddenly realizes that Whit Hoffman, another friend, has detested him just as Froggy had - for a

long time, quietly. This last experience has cost Julian any chance to make amends for his bad behavior, and his reputation in the town of Gibbsville is now at an ebb.

English arrives home to discover that his wife has deserted him. His final act of status derangement occurs during an attempt to seduce Alice Cartwright, a visiting journalist. Julian knows that he has by this time committed the local unpardonable sin of marital disloyalty. Sooner or later, he must face the enmity of all Gibbsville for his several moral infractions: The drink thrown into Harry Reilly's face, the Stage Coach Bar misadventure, the fight with Froggy and the lawyer, and the attempted seduction. Finally Julian English climbs into his car and dies of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Morally speaking, Appointment in Samarra attempts to display the psychological effect upon an individual of rejection by an in-group coterie. The didactic function of this novel is thus to warn the reader of the iniquity of pressing class distinctions to so extreme an issue. While John O'Hara may be a snob in his own right "as sensitive to social distinctions as any arriviste ever was," to quote from Delmore Schwartz. O'Hara nevertheless takes time to display the person on the receiving end of class bigotry based upon a knowledge of "upper crust" ways. While one may detect in O'Hara's own motivation - at least as Delmore Schwartz sees it - an attempt to play vicariously the snob by writing about snobs themselves - Appointment in Samarra possesses a sympathy for English, and poses the question of just why such a calamity was necessary.

The novel of social criticism concerned with class mobility is no unusual phenomenon in American fiction. It has existed from Henry James through J. P. Marquand, as well as in the writers who constitute the chief influences upon O'Hara in this novel. "As for influences, here they are:

Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Galsworthy, Tarkington, Owen Johnson, but chiefly Fitzgerald and Lewis." Yet, in none of these authors exists so stringent an emphasis upon the suffering endured by the snubbed, except possibly in Fitzgerald's characterization of Gatsby. O'Hara, as Delmore Schwartz shows in Partisan Review: . . . has a rich gift for social observation, for knowing how people are, what they are because of their background, and he has an acute, accurate ear which makes it possible for his characters to possess reality when they converse. But best of all, O'Hara is a snob; he is as sensitive to social distinctions as any arriviste ever was, and his snob-sensitivity provides him with inexhaustible energy for the transformation of observation into fiction. It was neither accident nor invention which made him call the scapegoat hero of his first novel, Julian English; for English is an Anglo-Saxon, he resents the Irish, he belongs to what is supposed to be the upper classes, and the tragic action which leads to his suicide is his throwing a drink in the face of a man with the choice name of Harry Reilly. It might just as well have been Murphy, O'Mara, or Parnell.

Merely to pinpoint O'Hara as a social commentator, however, or chronicler of the ways of the haute monde is to fall short of the mark. Edmund Wilson, writing in 1941 in The Boys in the Back Room, says this about O'Hara, but also considerably more. While maintaining that "to read O'Hara on a fashionable bar or the Gibbsville Country Club is

to be shown on the screen of a fluoroscope gradations of social prestige of which one had not before been aware," Wilson also says, by way of certifying O'Hara's perception of class distinctions:

[There is] no longer any hierarchy here, either of cultivation or wealth; the people are all being shuffled about, hardly knowing what they are or where they are headed, but each is clutching some family tradition, some membership in a selective organization, some personal association with the famous, which will supply him with some special self respect . . . eventually, they all go under. They are snubbed, they are humiliated, they fail.

O'Hara's characters cling to their illusions of superiority, their unvarying lot in the Gibbsville milieu, knowing only too well their own impotence and despair. Out of a hostility for this weakness and emotional apathy they will snub others and practice their kind of life before a mirror. Although O'Hara writes of "the cruel side of social snobbery" he does so from an even greater pessimism. It is a pessimism about the Very Rich, who perceive life only on the most sensate level possible, from one moment of indulgence to the next. As models for moral conduct, only a few of O'Hara's characters from the world of Julian English would suffice for most of us. It is a world which O'Hara describes with precision and insight. Because of O'Hara's restricting himself to describing only the visually real, the moral element in his novels becomes a thing of mundane but democratic necessity.

Source: Edward Russell Carson, "The Novels," in The Fiction of John O'Hara, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961, pp. 9-14.

Topics for Further Study

Certain critics have accused O'Hara of misogyny in his writings. Research their claims and determine whether O'Hara's texts support or denounce their statements.

Research the Great Depression and discuss the full effects this economic crisis would have had on a town such as Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, in the years following 1930.

Research the philosophical concepts of fate and free will as outlined by different philosophers, such as Descartes and Nietzsche, and determine how each might have viewed Julian English's actions.

In this novel, there is a clear-cut social order. Discuss whether or not class systems exist in current society and what impact they have on individuals today.

Compare and Contrast

1900: The divorce rate for America at the turn of the twentieth century per 1,000 people is 0.7. Out of 76,212,168 people living in the United States at the time, only 55,751 couples are divorced.

Today: The divorce rate in 1996 hovers at 4.3 per 1,000 people. Of a population sized at 265,283,783 people, 1,150,000 couples are divorced. In the last hundred years the population has increased at a rate of 250 percent, while the divorce rate has increased by more than 600 percent.

1930s: The United States is in the midst of the Prohibition era, which began in 1920 and will last through 1933. Prohibition is the legal ban on the making and/or selling of alcoholic beverages.

Today: Since the end of Prohibition in 1933, the manufacture and sale of alcohol in the United States has been legal; however, public concerns about overindulgence in alcohol have led to the growth of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a fellowship of people who follow a twelve-step program and support one another in their quest to abstain from drinking. Also, an increase in drunk-driving accidents and deaths resulting from those accidents led to the formation of Mothers Against Drank Driving (MADD) in 1980. MADD helps increase laws against and penalties for drunk driving.

What Do I Read Next?

Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, published first in 1877, centers around a sophisticated woman and her demise as she pursues her true love despite the price to her family. She defies high society with her rebellious behavior and mentally disintegrates as a result, ultimately ending her own life.

Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth, published in 1905, relates the tale of a woman and her descent down the social ladder. Fate and inevitability are both themes of this acclaimed classic story.

Ten North Frederick is O'Hara's award-winning 1955 novel detailing the life and death of another of Gibbsville's prominent citizens, Joseph Benjamin Chapin. Trapped by societal constraints, Joe's life is marked by a series of unfulfilled desires and regret.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night (1934) relates the story of the dissolution of a man's marriage and his entire life. Set against a jet-setter Depression-era backdrop, the tale of Dick Diver's destruction shares many common traits with O'Hara's work; in fact, O'Hara heartily endorsed this book as one of his favorites of Fitzgerald's.

Further Study

Bruccoli, Matthew J., The O'Hara Concern: A Biography of John O'Hara, Random House, 1975.

Offers a detailed look at the author's life and works, including analysis and criticism.

Eppard, Philip B., ed., Critical Essays on John O 'Hara, G.

K. Hall, 1994.

Early reviews and modern scholarship on John O'Hara can be found in this collection of articles and reviews by writers such as John Cheever and Malcolm Cowley.

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Updike, John, "Reconsideration: Appointment in Samarra□ O'Hara's Messy Masterpiece," in The New Republic, Vol.

198, No. 18, May 2, 1988, p. 38.

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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 memberseducational 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

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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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