Go: A Novel Study Guide

Go: A Novel by John Clellon Holmes

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Go, by John Clellon Holmes, is the first novel published by a member of the so-called Beat Generation of the 1950s in the United States. The years immediately following World War II saw America emerge as a prosperous world power, but the Beats, whose name was derived from "beatitude" or "beatific," felt that something was missing. The devastation of the war, followed by a period of calm and order in America, created a sense of formless anxiety among young artists and thinkers. They didn't accept that the world had become perfect now that the carnage of war had somehow solved humanity's problems, and so they searched their lives for a deeper meaning. This search took the form of experimentation with drugs and sex, a fascination with the structural freedom of "modern" jazz, and a constant movement from one place to another, as if the answers these young people sought could be en route to somewhere. Indeed, Jack Kerouac's novel, On the Road, became the most famous portrayal of this generation, but Go appeared five years before Kerouac's book was published. Holmes was a friend of Kerouac and of many other prominent members of the Beat Generation.

Go revolves around a group of young friends and acquaintances living in Manhattan in the early 1950s. The men are mostly writers and poets, although the women in the book generally do not work in the arts. The main character, Paul Hobbes, is working on a novel, as is his close friend, Gene Pasternak. Hobbes is married to Kathryn, who works at a job she dislikes, and is uncertain about Pasternak and the other new friends her husband is making. Unbeknownst to her, Hobbes is writing love letters, often unsent, to a woman he met in college several years ago, whom he hasn't seen since then.

A collection of other young men and women are introduced as the novel progresses, usually at parties held in their various apartments around the city. Among them is David Stofsky, a poet who emerges as the kindest, most thoughtful person among a group that gradually reveals itself to be largely self-centered and unfocused. Each successive party among the many depicted in the novel seems to become increasingly wild, with an angry edge to it. Several characters are involved heavily in narcotics use, others are alcoholics, and still others are petty criminals. The hopefulness that seemed to hover over these young people early in the novel disintegrates even as their interactions become more and more chaotic. Nevertheless, Hobbes and Pasternak finish their novels, and Pasternak's is accepted by a publisher. The marriage between Hobbes and Kathryn falls on hard times, but they manage to weather her infidelity with Pasternak and her discovery that Hobbes has been writing love letters to someone else for three years. Stofsky becomes inadvertently involved in crimes by friends he has been trying to help. Shortly after that, another friend, the constantly drunken and abusive Bill Agatson, dies in a train accident. Hobbes finally realizes how dysfunctional this group really is, and at the novel's close, it appears that he and Kathryn will finally begin to avoid the questing yet confused and dangerous company of this group.

Go, Part 1,The Days of Visitation, Chapters 1 and 2

Go, Part 1,The Days of Visitation, Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Go, by John Clellon Holmes, portrays an urgent quest for new experiences and a thirst for meaning among a young group of writers and poets in Manhattan in the early 1950s, who came to be known as the Beat Generation. Based loosely on real people, several of whom later became famous, the book shows them in their early days of unformed ideas, drug use, partying, and even occasional crime.

As the novel opens, Paul Hobbes, a young man living in New York City, is writing a breathless and confused letter to someone. Hobbes seems a little annoyed with a friend, Gene Pasternak, who is sleeping late after spending the night at Hobbes' apartment. Pasternak has written a manuscript of a novel, and Hobbes is struggling with his own novel. Hobbes has a wife, Kathryn, who is at work. Her job as a public relations agency supports the couple. Pasternak awakens and talks with Hobbes about a party to be hosted by their friend David Stofsky, who is apparently an unpredictable character.

Stofsky arrives at Hobbes' apartment and the three mention several other mutual friends who will be at the party, including Bill Agatson, Albert Ancke, Daniel Verger, and a girl named Winnie. Stofsky says he told his analyst, Doctor Krafft, that he was suddenly having sexual feelings for him, which Stofsky considered to be a breakthrough in the therapy. He says Doctor Krafft replied that Stofsky wasn't taking the therapy seriously, which Stofsky denied.

The three friends go for a beer at a dingy neighborhood bar. Stofsky goes into a reverie about each of their friends facing his or her personal monster, which is whatever that individual most fears. Hobbes and Pasternak are amused until Stofsky says Hobbes' monster is his sense of decorum, while Pasternak's monster is his mother. Pasternak retaliates by saying Stofsky is dependent on his analyst, which makes Stofsky uncomfortable. The three leave the bar, agreeing to meet later for the party. Back at his apartment, Hobbes goes back to writing his letter while he waits for Kathryn to come home. In the letter, he tells someone named Liza that he loves her.

In chapter two, Kathryn comes home tired, but insists on doing little chores to tidy the apartment, which makes Hobbes feel guilty. The reversal of their traditional roles, with her working and him at home trying to write, is stressful for both. They go to a small restaurant, but they quarrel and are on edge. Kathryn says she too tired to go to the party and isn't interested in the people who will be there. Hobbes attempts to convince her that it will be fun, while trying not to sound like he's pleading. She reluctantly agrees to go for a short while. On the way back to their place, Hobbes tells her about Stofsky's idea of everyone having a monster. He says these new friends are interesting, although

she isn't certain about that. He asks Kathryn if she's happy and she merely replies that she guesses so.

Go, Part 1,The Days of Visitation, Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The significance of Paul Hobbes writing a love letter as the novel begins is twofold. First, his urgent and flustered style demonstrates the intensity of his emotional life, which foreshadows an important theme in the novel concerning whether love, logic, or experience is more important in life. Second, it is soon revealed that Paul has a wife, and the letter does not appear to be for her, which sets up a small mystery to keep the reader's interest. Paul irritation toward his friend Pasternak sleeping is soon seen to be about something else. Pasternak has completed the manuscript of a novel, and Hobbes is struggling with his book, which foreshadows a major plot thread, concerning the efforts of Hobbes and his friends to become writers of note. When Stofsky arrives, and Hobbes and Pasternak accompany him to a bar, Stofsky's talk about personal monsters they all have is the first indication that psychological analysis will play an important role in the book. This isn't surprising, because a hallmark of the American novel in the last half of the 20th century is a frequent emphasis on examining one's own psyche. At the end of the first chapter, when it is revealed that Paul's letter is to someone named Liza, the prospect of his unfaithfulness to Kathryn arises as a plot complication.

Depiction of the strained relationship between Paul and Kathryn is the focus of Chapter 2. This is important because it demonstrates the stress that the life of a struggling artist can place upon family. Although Paul seems committed to writing, he also seems uncertain, because he has had no major success as yet, and does not know if he ever will succeed. He is concerned about how hard Kathryn works and how much she dislikes her job, but he wants her to keep doing it for the foreseeable future. This indicates the egoism necessary for artists to achieve things, while showing that such egoism often comes at the expense of loved ones.

Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter three depicts Stofsky's party in his apartment in a grim section of uptown Manhattan. The rooms are full of strangers because Stofsky invites anyone he meets to such parties, even though it often seems as if he's the only one having a good time. The strikingly handsome but hard-drinking Bill Agatson is there, and he insults a friend, the tubercular Daniel Verger, by pretending to think he is someone else. Paul and Kathryn meet Christine, an attractive, salt-of-the-earth young mother and wife who is having trouble in her marriage to a blue collar man. Pasternak takes an intense, frowning interest in her, and she is attracted to him.

Christine's friend Bianca worries that Christine might get hurt by Pasternak, and she takes Christine away from the party, but not before Kathryn gets Christine's phone number. Pasternak is approached by a girl named Georgia, who doesn't interest him, but he brings her to the Hobbes' place anyway. She spends the night but sleeps on a separate couch from Pasternak, which irritates him. After Georgia leaves in the morning, Pasternak goes home to Long Island, where he lives with his parents. Kathryn goes to work and later tells Hobbes on the phone that she doesn't want Pasternak bringing girls to their apartment anymore.

Chapter four begins with the information that Paul Hobbes is twenty-five and has been married for six years to Kathryn, who is two years older than he. Their early years are recounted. When Hobbes is sixteen, his parents divorce and he moves with his mother and sister to the wealthy commuter town of Westchester, where his mother works in a real estate office. Hobbes meets Kathryn on the train that he takes to go to Columbia University in New York City, and one that she rides to a job with an export firm. Her father is an illiterate Italian day laborer who works for the parents of Kathryn's wealthy friends. Her father loves her more than her three brothers, and is eager for her to read to him, which both pleases her and makes her ashamed and angry. Shortly after Kathryn meets Paul, her father dies suddenly of "brain fever." This sends Kathryn into turmoil, and she becomes aggressive and cynical with everyone.

Meanwhile, Paul struggles to finish college before being drafted to serve in the Navy. A war is on, apparently World War II. Despondent about the future, Paul writes bad poetry and feels like a fellow outcast with Kathryn. Their friendship grows into a love affair and they marry while he's on leave from boot camp. Their life is regimented by the military but unsteady because of the war. Paul isn't sent overseas, and when he is discharged, he goes back to Columbia, where he now feels unfocused. He meets an unhappily married young female student named Liza Adler, who is brilliant and challenges him with her ideas. He declares his love for her, but she soon has a mental breakdown and leaves the university to go into psychoanalysis. He writes to her regularly, but she responds only on occasion.

After Paul leaves school, his poems improve and they begin to be accepted by magazines. He hesitantly begins work on a novel. He and Kathryn begin going to parties, where they meet Pasternak, among others. Paul realizes he is less inhibited than they are, and less inclined to madly pursue experiences and excitement, although he still feels rootless. He starts to believe they're right that the times have a soul-changing effect on all of them.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The party at Stofsky's apartment is loud and full of directionless movement, creating the impression that these young people are eager for experiences and understanding, but do not yet know what they should be doing to create meaning in their lives. The introduction of Christine brings a simpler, more innocent character into the story. Her problems are no different from those of the other characters, but she seems to feel her emotions more directly rather than trying to intellectualize them. This doesn't mean she is closer to satisfactorily resolving her problems than the other people are, but it does suggest that she will act from the heart, which is why her friend Bianca is worried about her. The party is full of ego-driven, self-involved young people, who can be thoughtless and cruel to others without even meaning to be. Christine is naturally kind, and that could be dangerous for her in this crowd.

Pasternak's decision to take Georgia with him back to Paul and Kathryn's apartment shows his callousness. He doesn't even like Georgia, but she's better than nothing. In the morning, it's not surprising that he's angry with her for not sleeping with him. It's also revealing that he lives with his parents, because his attitude in wanting everything and not caring about others is child-like. Kathryn shows she recognizes this, and doesn't like it, by telling Paul that Pasternak should not bring girls back to their apartment anymore.

The information at the start of chapter four that Paul and Kathryn married young and that she is older than he is reinforces the notion that Kathryn has a more mature attitude about their marriage than Paul does. The reasons for this maturity are sketched in the story that is provided about their earlier years. Although Paul experiences the divorce of his parents when he us a teenager, his mother has a job that is acceptable, if not good, in his eyes. Moreover, he goes to college. Kathryn is humiliated by her father's lowly position in society, even though he's a good man. Her shame about her father is compounded by his death, because now she feels guilty about not having loved him unconditionally. It makes her angry and cynical, but it also teaches her a lesson about mortality and the importance of love to giving life meaning. This is a lesson in maturity.

Paul goes through changes, as well, but it is hard for him to gather from them an understanding that he can use. This is because his experiences are principally about attachment rather than the loss that Kathryn suffers. Paul joins the military, where one is told what to do all the time, for reasons one often cannot perceive. He gets married, another attachment, which seems unreal to both him and Kathryn, because of the artificial circumstances of their military life. Once he is discharged and returns to school, he attaches himself to Liza, whom he hopes will guide him to some sort of clarity,

because she is so intelligent and opinionated. When she has a breakdown, he continues to pursue her, in defiance of his allegiance to Kathryn, as if Liza were his answer. At this point in his life, Paul is lost, because he does not understand himself.

Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In chapter five, it's a week later. Kathryn comes home from work exhausted to find Paul writing his novel, but he hasn't washed the breakfast dishes all day. He washes them, but the couple gets into a familiar argument about when Kathryn will be able to quit working at a job she hates, for a boss who yells at her. Paul tries to defend his writing. Stofsky calls to say he's looking for Pasternak. Stofsky says he has big news that he wants to tell Hobbes in person. Paul agrees to meet him, which renews his argument with Kathryn, who claims he's more interested in his crazy friends than in her. They're glum during dinner at their favorite restaurant, the Athens, but afterward they make love and are both happy for a while. Paul goes out to meet Stofsky and Kathryn goes to sleep contentedly.

Chapter six opens at Stofsky's apartment, which still hasn't been tidied since the previous week's party. Stofsky reads poetry he wrote two years ago, and finds it adolescent. The poetry was inspired by a professional killer who had kicked his own girlfriend to death at a party at Agatson's place. Checking his mail, Stofsky finds a note from Jack Waters, a friend from his Merchant Marine days. Jack begs him to come to see him immediately, which thrills Stofsky, because he needs a focus to his day, and he needs to feel wanted. He often feels unloved and freakish, which stems from the commitment of his mother to an insane asylum when he was a boy. Stofsky reflects that he is disenchanted with his own analyst lately, ever since Doctor Krafft showed no interest when Stofsky mentioned his sexual feelings for him.

Stofsky goes to see Waters in a grubby tenement flat, and finds his friend talking to himself about time being an illusion. Waters is gaunt, frantic, and desperately wants marijuana. He asks for Stofsky's wristwatch, and then smashes it. He talks wildly about living in eternity now, every instant, and then says he has committed himself to an asylum. The attendants are supposed to arrive shortly. When Stofsky hears someone coming, he surprises himself by diving into the closet to hide until they go away, taking Waters with them. Later, Stofsky describes this episode to Hobbes, and says Waters might not too crazy after all. Stofsky says perhaps Waters recognizes that these wild experiences they all are having in life have no meaning, because everyone is living in an illusion. Hobbes says maybe it was just the marijuana. The two search the nightclubs for Pasternak but can't find him, because he is standing across from Christine's house, hoping to get a glimpse of her.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Paul's attention to his novel at the start of chapter five shows that he really is committed to being a writer, which is an encouraging sign. Even so, Kathryn is exhausted when she gets home from work, and the problem deepens of the sacrifice she is making for

his sake. The question that arises is how long this unsatisfactory situation can last, although it is obvious that Paul hopes it will continue at least until he can finish his novel. When Stofsky calls, the other aspect is shown of the martial troubles Paul and Kathryn are having. Kathryn wants Paul's attention and sympathy in return for what she is giving to the marriage, but Paul needs the companionship of his friends, who are going through literary struggles similar to his. This classic problem in the lives of artists is happily resolved in chapter five, when the couple makes love. They still can give each other solace and joy, even though they cannot fulfill all of each other's needs.

The story of the killer who kicked his own girlfriend to death at a party is a shocking example of how out-of-control the lives of these people can get. When Stofsky goes to find his old friend Jack Waters in an almost psychotic condition, the implication is that this post-war time of searching for meaning is taking a toll on people's sanity. Waters raves about time being an illusion, which raises the question of whether all that really counts is to live fully in the present moment. This idea has value, and was searchingly examined by European novelists of the Existential movement at about the time this book was written, but Waters is much too drug-addled and frightened to mount a serious discussion. Even so, Stofsky recognizes value hidden in Waters' wild thoughts. When Stofsky and Hobbes search the nightclubs for Pasternak, expecting to find him carousing there, living wildly in the moment, they fail to locate him. Pasternak's attention is focused on his new love for Christine. His thirst for experience has narrowed down to her.

Chapters 7-10

Chapters 7-10 Summary

A week passes in chapter seven, during which nobody sees Stofsky, who sometimes disappears in that way. Pasternak becomes deeply involved with Christine, abetted by Kathryn, who lets the couple come to the apartment despite Kathryn having told Paul she didn't want Pasternak to do that anymore. She suggests it would be better for Pasternak and Christine to have an affair than to torture themselves about it. One night, when Kathryn and Paul are at a bar with Pasternak and Christine, Paul gives the apartment key to Pasternak. After the couple leaves the bar, Kathryn and Paul have a discussion about how they would feel if one of them had an affair. They agree uncertainly that it might be okay if they told each other. When they leave the bar, they witness a fight between a big man and a little man, apparently over a slatternly woman. Paul hurries Kathryn away from the scene of the fight, highly agitated by it.

In chapter eight, Stofsky arrives at Paul's place to announce breathlessly that he has quit his analysis. Kathryn is visiting her mother for the weekend and Paul is busy writing, which doesn't happen all the time. He tries not to show that he is miffed by the interruption. Stofsky says his doctor was not impressed by the Waters episode, and anyway, Stofsky has decided to believe in God. Paul tries not to laugh. Stofsky obviously is disturbed about the mess the world is in, and he thinks God is cruel, so he does not intend to worship Him. Stofsky quotes a poem by William Blake that impressed him recently, and Hobbes is impressed as well, but he is too irritated to respond. Stofsky hurries away.

In chapter nine, it's the same evening, and a restless Paul has given up hope of doing more work. He goes out, wanders the bars, and then finds himself near Agatson's apartment. He finds Agatson and Bianca eating from cans in the disheveled apartment. Agatson looks ill, and Bianca is anxious to put him to bed.

Hobbes wants company, so he calls Pasternak at Christine's place, even though it's late. Christine's husband is away. Hobbes feel guilty for interrupting, so he says he's going away to Mexico in the morning. Pasternak and Christine meet him at a bar, but after a few minutes, Paul feels ashamed about his lie, and goes home. His lie causes him to recall a young man in the hospital during the war, who died before Paul's stricken eyes, and he didn't have it in himself to comfort the young man.

In chapter ten, Stofsky is reading Blake at his apartment, getting increasingly agitated as he reads. He thinks the poet has finally made him understand the love that underpins everything. The very words on the page seem to create a beautiful hallucination, but then his vision turns dark and frightening. In a long passage, Stofsky becomes increasingly uncertain of whether he is having a wonderful experience or is going crazy, as his mother did. He wonders if God Himself could be insane, and is deeply fearful. He wants to cry, but cannot.

Chapters 7-10 Analysis

The growing romance between Pasternak and Christine, a married woman, has a direct parallel to the rocky marriage of Paul and Kathryn. The unconventional life being led by the characters in the novel is a big part of the reason that Paul and Kathryn are under stress. When Kathryn supports Christine despite her earlier objection to Pasternak bringing girls to the apartment, it's a warning bell that her thoughts about her own marriage might be changing. This development is further strengthened by the conversation between Paul and Kathryn concerning how they would react to the other's infidelity. They are entering dangerous territory, and they do not seem well-prepared for the troubles that may await them. Again, this impression is strengthened by the fistfight they witness, in which a big man beats up on a little man, while a slatternly woman stands by. The fight is over the woman, and it's an obvious metaphor for the problems that could await Kathryn and Paul. A struggle between men for the affections of a woman inevitably takes on primal traits, despite whatever civility the men might try to display. One man probably will be dominant (or larger) in the affections of the woman, and her loyalty or "purity" will be diminished by the battle. Paul sees the ugliness of the fight, but on an unconscious level, he also recognizes the threat to his own marriage, and is appalled.

When Stofsky arrives at Paul's place to announce he has quit analysis, is reading poetry, and has decided to believe in God but does not intend to worship Him, the frantic nature of Stofsky's search for meaning is clear. Paul is trying to find meaning through his writing, but it always seems difficult for him to immerse himself in the work. This indicates that whatever he is writing is not compelling to him, which suggests it is not helping him to work out the difficulties in his own life. Psychotherapeutic analysis and writing are often compared, because both involve deep introspection, yet neither activity seems to be working for these two characters. Paul's decision to go out is indicative of the restless, searching quest of all the book's characters. When Paul lies about intending to go to Mexico, he knows it will sound wild and romantic to Pasternak.

For these characters, the action of movement, even from bar to bar, or from partner to partner, carries the possibility of finding something or someone to believe in. Stofsky's decision has merit to believe in God and William Blake, and through them, to believe in love, but his desperation and his fear that he is going insane are more powerful than his good intentions. The point is that right thinking requires a clear mind.

Go, Part 2, Children in the Markets, Chapters 1-3

Go, Part 2, Children in the Markets, Chapters 1-3 Summary

After dinner in the city, Paul and Kathryn walk down the street and make sure their friend Arthur Ketcham will attend their party on Friday night. They're going to visit Pasternak, who has tactfully not mentioned Paul's supposed plan to go to Mexico. The scene flashes back to earlier that afternoon, when Christine had called Paul to complain that she hadn't heard from Pasternak lately and is worried that he might be seeing another woman. Ketcham is worried that Pasternak is disappointed in him, because Ketcham suggested that he cut out part of his novel. Ketcham is normally reticent, but one flaw about which everyone is aware is his devotion to Bianca, even though she has a crush on Agatson. Paul, Kathryn, and Ketcham meet Pasternak at a bar. He has just visited their friend Winnie, who is trying to kick her morphine habit by tying herself to the bed. Pasternak is excited about getting a letter from his friend Hart Kennedy, who is coming to visit from California.

In chapter two, everyone arrives at the party as if on cue. Verger has brought marijuana, and Kathryn drinks and smokes heartily. The party is full of loud music, drinking, talk, and movement. Christine seems lost among this crowd, and fights with Pasternak about him smoking weed. Kathryn scolds Pasternak, but soon she is kissing him, which Paul witnesses without much concern, thinking to himself that she won't be able to reproach Paul for flirting anymore. A girl named Estelle attaches herself to Paul. He walks her outside, kisses her, and takes her to the subway. When he gets back, about an hour later, most people have left the party, and Kathryn is passed out on the bed. Stofsky is still there, and is still preoccupied with reading Blake and seeing visions. Stofsky compares this in importance to the rage he provoked in his father when Stofsky told him he was homosexual. He says that earlier in the day he called Doctor Krafft, who refused to see him. Stofsky tells Hobbes he has decided that the way to salvation is to "love ruthlessly."

In chapter three, Hobbes awakens to fantastic disorder in the apartment. Kathryn is hung over and guilty. Paul says he saw her with Pasternak, but says he doesn't mind. She asks about Estelle, and Paul says he took her to the station, but he doesn't mention kissing her. They pass a quiet afternoon in the apartment, which makes Kathryn think Paul is angry, but he insists that he isn't. He says it's all right for her to be attracted to someone else. They discuss Stofsky's visions, and laugh uncomfortably, thinking that this strange group of people is taking them in new directions.

Go, Part 2, Children in the Markets, Chapters 1-3 Analysis

These chapters depict various ways in which this questing, earnest group is beginning to spin out of control. They're eager to wrest all the truth, beauty, and love they can get from life, but their methods are frantic and their ideas are unfocused. In some cases, such as Winnie, their dysfunction is so bad that they risk their own lives. The chapters also show how this extravagant behavior undermines the trust they naturally feel for each other as close friends. Ketcham has a crush on Bianca, but she spurns him for Agatson, who already has dropped her. Ketcham worries that Pasternak is angry with him. Christine is losing faith in Pasternak's love for her, and is displeased with his drug use. Kathryn finds herself increasingly drawn to Pasternak but feels guilty about it because of Paul. Stofsky is struggling with his own sanity, as well as rejections of him by both his psychotherapist and his father.

Another aspect of the party, however, is that it's thrilling for everyone. They like each other's company, and to behave wildly excites them. Even Kathryn and Paul, who are the two most conservative ones in the group, participate eagerly in the debauchery. The interesting thing about the attitude of these partiers is that they have a motivation behind the madness. It isn't just wildness for the sake of it. They really are searching for a truth or a vision of some kind, even though they don't really know what they seek. Only Stofsky, with his half-crazed visions, seems to be formulating an answer to his questions, however half-baked that answer might be. The morning after the party, when Kathryn and Paul confront the wreckage of their apartment and the potential damage to their marriage, he tries to assure her that everything is all right, but the assurance seems unconvincing. Thinking of Stofsky's visions, they laugh, but they also recognize that the influence of their friends is carrying them into dangerous territory.

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Three days later, Hart Kennedy, his friend Ed Schindel, Pasternak, and Stofsky arrive at Paul and Kathryn's place. Hart has just come from the West Coast with Schindel and Hart's former wife, Dinah, whom they had picked up in Denver on the way to New York. At the moment, Dinah is at Pasternak's mother's house on Long Island. At first, everyone is a little nervous, except Hart, who immediately gets interested in the jazz playing on the phonograph. Pasternak and Stofsky are clearly delighted by Hart, who brims with nervous energy. Hart asks Paul if he can borrow ten dollars for a few days, and Kathryn says she has the money, which delights Paul. Hart immediately wants to buy marijuana, and the men all set off together to find Albert Ancke, who apparently has just gotten out of jail. Stofsky says Ancke stole books the other day from Verger to sell them so he could buy heroin.

Full of excitement, Hart drives them speedily through the city. They check several bars, but can't find Ancke. Pasternak confides to Hobbes that a publisher has rejected his manuscript, and Paul encourages him to keep sending it out. Stofsky then remembers that a friend wrote a letter to him recently, saying he was sending weed to him at a post office box. The group races across town and finds the weed, which elates Hart. They head toward Stofsky's apartment to smoke it, but Paul asks to be dropped off at his place, even though he wonders about missing the fun.

As chapter five opens, Paul is writing a letter to Liza, describing Hart and their recent adventures, but he is interrupted when Christine calls. She wants to talk about Pasternak, who has ignored her for days, and Paul reluctantly listens and consoles her. After the conversation, Kathryn tells Paul she expected such trouble between Pasternak and Christine. Paul thinks about his book, which he has just finished writing. He realizes that he feels no great joy over finishing the first draft, and that Christine's phone call has ruined his day.

Chapter six takes place during the weekend of the Fourth of July. Hart, Dinah, Paul, Kathryn, Pasternak, Ketcham, and Schindel all gather at Verger's messy apartment. Verger's neighbor, May, is also there. Verger offers Dinah whiskey, which she sweetly refuses, mentioning in an offhanded way that she used to be an alcoholic and once tried to commit suicide. Agatson shows up with a bunch of other people from Greenwich Village who poke about the apartment, looking for liquor. People smoke weed, which they also refer to as "tea." Hart and Dinah dance, and Paul hovers against a wall, wondering what it's all about. Agatson breaks a window, and the crowd rushes out of the apartment before the police come. They go to another bar, watch a jazz singer, go to party where nothing is happening, leave to go to Ketcham's place, and Hobbes and Kathryn go home, exhausted. Seeing some Girl Scouts on the subway, Paul suddenly wonders if between these innocent kids and his crowd, there is another way to be.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

The introduction of Hart Kennedy to the story personifies the ideals by which Paul and his friends are trying to live. Hart fascinates them because he seems to constantly affirm and embrace life and experience. His eagerness to do everything and be everywhere seems to be driven by a lust for life that the others admire and envy. Although they aren't clear about what they believe in, they do agree on the importance of grabbing life with both hands and trying to make every moment intense. Hart seems more capable of doing this than the rest of them, which makes him their leader. An unanswered question is what Hart is pursuing, but that is not surprising, because at this point in the book, it's clear that this group has plenty of questions but few answers. Nevertheless, the questions they're asking, and that fact that they care enough to ask them, are admirable.

The interest, even the respect, that these young people show for self-destructive behavior and crime are part of the serious nature of the questions they are asking. They even accept Albert Ancke's theft of books from his friend Verger so that Ancke can buy heroin, apparently on the grounds that Ancke must do what he has to do. It's as if the dark places to which their questing natures could bring them are part of the risk they take in trying to find meaning in their lives. Paul's writing is another, more positive way in which he explores these questions, yet the completion of the first draft of his novel gives him no joy. It's difficult to find satisfaction in quiet contemplation amidst the uproar of frantic living, which can become addictive, especially to young people still trying to find their way. When the group embarks on yet another round of wild partying and restless movement from place to place, Hart remains full of energy, as if his spirit feeds on motion, but Kathryn and Paul finally drop from exhaustion. Paul is aware that he could never be totally innocent and conventional, because these experiences have changed him forever, and yet he wonders if there isn't another way that is more controlled than the turmoil of his current life.

Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

At Ketcham's place, a guy named Ben asks Hart if he wants some Benzedrine or benny, but Hart declines, saying the drug makes him angry. He talks to Paul about how he prefers marijuana, because it gives him "a perspective on everything." Hart says he started cars when he was taking Benzedrine two years earlier. He estimates he stole a hundred cars in six months, quitting only after he almost got caught. Stofsky calls from a new job as a night boy at Associated Press, and Hart, Dinah, Pasternak, Paul, Kathryn, and Ed Schindel go to pick him up. They stop for gas, which Ed steals, to Kathryn's dismay. They get Stofsky and everyone goes to the Hobbes' apartment, where Kathryn talks to Dinah about how wild Hart is, and Dinah replies that she knows, but it's okay now that she is no longer married to him, and doesn't have to worry about him. Stofsky tells Paul that Kathryn's disapproval of stealing gas was really what Paul would have liked to say, if weren't hypocritically pretending not be concerned about it. Paul is affronted by this accusation. Paul feels sick from drinking and smoking tea, so he goes into the bathroom and makes himself vomit.

In chapter eight it's the next morning, and Stofsky goes straight to Verger place after work. He finds Verger sprawled on a coat, his shirt ripped and dirty, and beer bottles scattered around him. He's coughing from his tuberculosis. Stofsky asks about the broken window and Verger explains, but doesn't mention that Agatson did it. Stofsky has his first pay from the job, and he wants to give Verger $10, as a start to repaying Verger for the books that Ancke stole from him. Stofsky says Ancke would not have stayed overnight at Verger's place if it hadn't been for Stofsky, and he feels guilty. Verger refuses to accept the money. Stofsky then tells Verger that Waters has returned from a month's stay in the insane asylum, where he received shock therapy, and is staying with Stofsky. He says Waters was talking wildly about visions, eternity, and madness. He then asks about May, and Verger blushes, and says he doesn't know where she is. Finally, over Verger's complaints, Stofsky succeeds in leaving the $10, and he goes.

Chapter nine begins with a description of a nightclub called the Go Hole in Times Square. This is a main hangout of hip young people, and also is frequented by others wearing suits who have come to see the hipsters. The club features modern jazz, which the hip crowd considers to be its music. A week has passed, and the friends are assembled at the Go Hole. Hart, Dinah and Ed have stayed two nights at Paul and Kathryn's place, because Waters had not left Stofsky's place on schedule. Kathryn is miffed about the selfishness of Hart and the other two. Hobbes thinks about a recent phone call from Christine, who says she told her husband about her and Pasternak, and says she never wants to see Pasternak again. Ketcham, Paul, and Kathryn decide to leave. On the way out, they see Hart chatting up a club employee named Margo. Over coffee at a drug store, they talk about how Ed always runs errands for Hart, and Kathryn says she thinks Dinah will be leaving soon. When Paul and Kathryn get home, she is pleased, and out of habit, he agrees.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Hart's talk of how Benzedrine makes him lose control, and of his car-theft exploits, foreshadows trouble. Until now, Hart has been the personification of constant happiness and excitement about being alive, but the book has also been about all the characters' lack of focus and struggle to understand themselves. Hart, who pushes everyone into constant searching for drugs, alcohol, and parties, now appears to have a history of reckless and dangerous behavior. Ed's theft of the gas, which Dinah has seen Ed and Hart do many times, is further evidence that they will commit crimes. Dinah's assurance to Kathryn that she won't be affected by Hart because they are divorced rings hollow to Kathryn. Dinah is still with Hart, and what he does surely will have an impact on her. Stofsky is uncommonly frank with Paul about being hypocritical for pretending not to care about the gas theft. It seems as though Stofsky's visions while reading Blake have had such a profound effect on him that he feels his eyes have been opened, and he wants to help his friends to open their eyes. In a sense, Stofsky's "awakening" is like a religious conversion, but instead of being helped, Paul literally becomes sick. The beer and weed contribute to his illness, but it's also a spiritual malaise that Paul feels.

Verger is in even worse shape than Paul, both physically and spiritually. He seems to pining for May, drinking himself into a stupor and paying no attention to personal hygiene. Stofsky's offer of money to Verger for the books that Ancke stole is Stofsky's attempt to correct a wrong to which he feels he contributed. Stofsky's role in the theft is virtually nil, except that he was responsible for Ancke staying overnight at Verger's place, yet Stofsky is determined to be hard on himself. He is the only one in this group who thinks regularly about the welfare of his friends, which makes him the only truly loving person among them. The Go Hole is just the opposite of what Stofsky is trying to achieve. It's the ultimate destination for these self-involved young people, and neither Paul, nor Kathryn, nor Ketcham feels comfortable at the nightclub. These three are probably the least wild and thoughtless ones in the group, aside from Stofsky. Yet when Kathryn declares that she's happy to be back at their apartment, Paul's agreement is not wholehearted, which indicates his ambivalence about who he is and who he wants to be.

Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary

In chapter ten, Hart tells Stofsky about Margo while Dinah is at her job at a drugstore. Hart says he arranged to meet Margo at her apartment, but got the wrong apartment number. When he finally called, her husband was due to come home soon, and Hart says Margo was very angry with him. Hart thinks the episode is a terrific joke, but Stofsky chastises him for deceiving Dinah. Hart is stunned. He replies that Stofsky understands everything about what's important or unimportant, and should not be condemning him. Dinah and Ed enter, having stolen food at the store, which turns out to be a regular occurrence for them. Stofsky makes veiled accusations about Margo, and Hart takes the bait. He tells the entire story to Dinah, just as he told it to Stofsky. Dinah is hurt, and eventually becomes outraged, despite Hart's continual attempts to make a joke out of the whole thing. In a harrowing scene, their confrontation grows increasingly ugly until Dinah starts beating on Hart, who finally punches her in the forehead, knocking her down and making her bleed. After the two calm down, Stofsky is terribly distressed and tries to raise their spirits by showing them two letters he received, one from Ketcham and the other from Verger. Both have asked him not to visit them anymore because the way he has been acting lately upsets them. Stofsky calls the letters rejection slips of the soul. Later, at the news office, Stofsky writes a verse about inhumanity. Dinah and Hart sleep tenderly and laugh about their fight the next day, but when Dinah gets her check from work, she takes a bus to California, telling nobody except Ed.

In chapter eleven, Paul and Kathryn come home from dinner a few days later and find Pasternak, Hart, and Stofsky waiting for them in the car. Hart has decided to go back to the coast the next day, and they want to party before he leaves. Hart is in a depressed mood, for him, because of Dinah's absence. Pasternak announces that he's leaving on the trip with Hart. He has given his book to another publisher, but says he isn't worried about rejection, because it isn't important. Pasternak starts praising Kathryn, telling her how pure and motherly she is. Estelle, who was at an earlier party and is a friend of Ed's, chats with Paul, while Stofsky sits on Hart's lap. Kathryn and Pasternak slip out the door. This causes a flustered Stofsky to offer to be Paul's lover, which Paul rejects.

Stofsky says he's been thinking of a plan to save Verger, who is upset because Agatson has stolen May from him. Paul tells Estelle he may call her, and after everyone leaves, Kathryn comes home very late to find Paul waiting. She is very embarrassed, while he tries to be completely accepting of the situation. Finally, she admits that she slept with Pasternak, but says it meant nothing. Paul insists that it's all right and she need not make excuses, but he refers to himself as a cuckold, and then tries to say it was a just a joke. She asks if he loves her, he says yes, and they go to sleep quietly.

Chapters 10 and 11 Analysis

The encounter between Hart and Margo shows that he will be just as uncompromising in pursuit of romantic entanglements as he is in pursuit of other experiences. It also shows that Kathryn was right to doubt that Dinah could remain personally unaffected by Hart's extravagances. Of course, this is no great surprise, given that Dinah already said she is a former alcoholic who once attempted suicide. The problem Hart's misbehavior highlights is that love is too delicate and too illogical to withstand assaults on it for the sake of embracing experience. People who think they can protect themselves emotionally while engaging in activities that endanger their most important relationships are wrong. Hart's hunger for life is attractive and compelling, but it will never replace the value of simple kindness and thoughtfulness. Stofsky, who is torn apart emotionally by the violence between Hart and Dinah, understands this truth. The only way he can think to soothe them is to tell them about his rejection by both Ketcham and Verger, as if to suggest that such sadness is the lot of each person, and the only solace is to bear these pains in sympathy with one another. When Dinah leaves, it shows that she has understood the folly of trying to divorce her feelings from her relationship with Hart.

Hart's decision to go on the road is obviously a reaction to the bad ending with Dinah. True to his nature, his response to the problem is movement. Pasternak likewise has romantic difficulties, both with Christine and with his attraction to Kathryn. He enthusiastically embraces the idea of a road trip with Hart, and it's hard not to think that the two young men are trying to outrun the complications of their lives. Paul's interest in Estelle is a reaction to the jealousy he won't admit that he feels because of Kathryn leaving with Pasternak. Stofsky, in sitting on Hart's lap and later propositioning Paul, is clearly trying in his own confused way to bring love back to the fractured group. When he starts talking about trying to help Verger, it's another indication of how seriously, if futilely, he is attempting to mend the broken lives of his friends. Paul and Kathryn try to reaffirm their love for one another, but the stress in their marriage has entered a deeper phase.

Chapters 12 and 13

Chapters 12 and 13 Summary

Pasternak calls Paul to say that Hart, Ed, and he are leaving for the West Coast that evening, which gives them time to get together once more. Paul, who has harbored a suspicion that Pasternak would leave without saying goodbye, agrees to meet early that evening. In the afternoon, Ketcham stops by Paul's place and they go to a bar, where they encounter Verger. He has seven empty glasses in front of him and looks terrible. Verger immediately asks if they have seen Agatson. He then tells them that May had never even kissed him, for fear that she would catch tuberculosis from him. It becomes apparent that he is besotted with May, who has abandoned him for Agatson. Eventually, the three go to Agatson's apartment. Agatson verbally abuses Verger fiercely, telling him to go away and stop coughing on everyone. When May appears from another room, she looks sick and messy, but she defends Agatson, even as he calls her names. Finally, Ketcham and Paul make Agatson realize that Verger is extremely ill, and then Agatson readily agrees to let Verger stay at his place. Before Verger falls asleep, he produces the $10 that Stofsky had given him and insists that Ketcham return it to Stofsky.

In chapter thirteen, Pasternak and Paul meet at a cafeteria, where they talk about Kathryn. Paul continues to insist that he isn't upset by the affair, and Pasternak counters that Hobbes is always jeering at him. Finally, Pasternak brightens when he seems to accept that Paul isn't angry with him. Hart has returned from filling the car with gas, and everyone says goodbye. Hart seems fully recovered from his gloom of the previous night, and Pasternak promises to write to Hobbes. They drive away, leaving Paul feeling like a blind man in a crowd, always just an instant behind everyone else.

Chapters 12 and 13 Analysis

At the opening of chapter twelve, neither Pasternak nor Paul has spoken to the other person about the tension between them. They both recognize a need to do this, and the nervousness they feel about the coming confrontation is balanced by anticipation of what a relief it will be to speak about the problem. But before they meet, Paul and Ketcham encounter Verger, who is in a much different state of mind concerning his love life. Verger is abject and self-pitying about May's abandonment of him. He is open to his emotional life, which is good, but rather than experiencing it and learning from it, he is victimized by it. His self-image is so poor that he hasn't even the energy to be angered by Agatson's treatment of him. Agatson, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly egotistical. And yet, his verbal attack on Verger reveals Agatson's self-guilt over behaving so badly. The only way he can try to excuse himself is to make Verger, the victim, into the villain. May is also in a state of self-delusion. The only excuse she can create for allowing herself to be controlled by the abusive Agatson is to declare to everyone that Agatson is a wonderful man.

These are all portraits of people in destructive acts of dishonesty to themselves and to others. When Paul and Pasternak meet, they approach the truth that they both feel guilty over their immature treatment of Kathryn, but neither can really face it. Instead, they attempt to convince each other that everything is all right between them, as if Kathryn were not central to the situation. This focus on patching things up between the Paul and Pasternak suggests that their main interest is in how they appear to the other person. Neither wants to look foolish in the eyes of his friend, and this is more important to both of them than the truth. When they say goodbye at the car, with Hart full of his usual excitement about the upcoming trip, Paul momentarily feels left out again. The two sides of his nature, one down-to-earth and the other yearning for experience, create a tension of wanting everything all at once. It's a longing that can only be fulfilled by a true love of life that the characters in this novel are frantically pursuing.

Chapters 14 and 15

Chapters 14 and 15 Summary

A week later, Paul writes in a letter to Liza that he thinks of the two of them as doomed lovers. He goes on in this overwrought vein for some time, and then puts the letter aside without mailing it, along with many other unsent letters to her, which he knows she would dislike if she read them. Kathryn is going to visit her mother in Westchester for the weekend, and Paul calls Estelle at her job. She agrees to meet him after work. He takes her to dinner and to a few clubs, and he talks nervously, while she mostly just serenely listens. At the Go Hole, he explains the term "cool" to her, which is new at this time in history, and he points out a man who looks really cool. Hobbes says cool is about feeling so deeply that you go beyond it, to the end of feeling, and to a loss of interest in everything. He also talks to her about the "beat generation," which is characterized by faithlessness in the future, and discontent. Estelle kisses him, and they end up at his apartment. Paul tries to make love to her, but he can't, and is astonished. He takes her home, knowing they will never want to see each other again.

Chapter thirteen takes place a few nights later, when Kathryn, Paul, and Ketcham bump into Stofsky on Sixth Avenue. Ketcham returns the $10 that Stofsky had given to Verger, which bewilders Stofsky. He also is worried, because nobody has seen Verger for about a week. The four go to visit Bianca, who tells them that Christine has cut off everyone in the group, including Bianca. Pasternak treated Christine very badly, Bianca says, a remark that disturbs Kathryn. Stofsky tries to tell Kathryn to cultivate Paul's love for her. Stofsky says Paul is the silent type, who probably keeps all his deepest thoughts in a personal journal somewhere. After a while, Kathryn goes home, leaving Paul with the others. She then calls Bianca's apartment, asks for Paul, and tells him she has found his letters to Liza. Kathryn declares she is leaving Paul. Stunned, he lingers briefly at Bianca's place, and then races home.

Chapters 14 and 15 Analysis

In Paul's letter to Liza, he writes over-romanticized nonsense that shows he doesn't yet fully understand the nature of mature love between a man and a woman. He recognizes this shortcoming, because he doesn't mail these letters, knowing Liza would scoff at them. When Paul calls Estelle, the act is a continuance of his search for something undefined in his mind and heart about love. He is unsatisfied with his marriage, but doesn't know why. That condition mirrors his emotions about life in general, and about this post-World War II time in America. He should be happy, everything should be fine, and he can't quite figure out what's missing. When he talks to Estelle about the nature of "cool" and the beat generation, he's also exploring his inner self, including his confusion about feelings and his concerns about the future. Even when he finds that he can't make love to Estelle, he doesn't seem to fully realize that this tells him how strongly he feels about Kathryn, and how loyal he is to their love.

Stofsky again shows that he is the only character who is making strong progress toward understanding and properly using the power of love. The $10 symbolizes his spirit of giving, which is at the heart of a loving nature. When Bianca tells the others that Christine has cut off everyone in their group, it's a condemnation of them for how poorly they are faring in the effort to treat each other with true friendship. Stofsky tries to counsel Kathryn, just as he has tried to help others of their friends, but his good intentions backfire on him again. The implication is that well-meant advice can go wrong if the recipient of it is not emotionally ready to put the advice to good use. Paul doesn't even try to defend himself when Kathryn says she has read his letters to Liza and his leaving him. On some level, he must recognize that he has been unfaithful to Kathryn in his heart, and he deserves her punishment.

Go, Part 3, Hell, Chapters 1-3

Go, Part 3, Hell, Chapters 1-3 Summary

When Paul returns to Kathryn at their apartment, she is tight with hurt and rage. She reads aloud a few passages from his letters about his love for Liza and how marriages can go wrong. He tries to explain that it's just an adolescent, literary exercise, but she doesn't believe him. Nor does she believe him when he says he never had an affair with Liza. He talks about the difference between real love and this imagined emotion, but she screams that he's a liar. They exhaust themselves from the tension of the fight, and when they finally go to bed, they end up making fierce love, full of despair. In Chapter 2, Stofsky leaves Bianca's apartment late and outside the door of his apartment he finds Albert Ancke, his morphine-addicted friend. Ancke, who has been living on the street, is a complete mess. Stofsky gets him inside and washes his feet, which are swollen and covered in sores. Ancke has been out of jail for two months but has run out of money and connections to get him morphine, so he has come to Stofsky as a last resort. His plan is to hole up and sleep.

Stofsky believes that Ancke's troubled life makes him receptive to understanding the way Stofsky thinks about all their friends. He delightedly begins telling Ancke about his attempts to foster more love in the hearts of Verger, Ketcham, Hart, Pasternak, and Hobbes. Barely awake, Ancke nods dreamily and smokes cigarettes. His advice is that Stofsky shouldn't get hung up on any of that. He says Stofsky's ego is driving him to interfere in the lives of others. This startles Stofsky, who is even more amazed when Ancke says everyone should abandon their egos and their wills, as he has done. Ancke falls asleep, and that night, Stofsky dreams of a conversation with God about what he should do. God says he should go and love, without the help of anything on earth, which Stofsky recognizes as a line from Blake. He asks why God doesn't help suffering people, and God replies, "I do all I can." In Chapter 3, two weeks have passed. Nothing has been settled by the fight between Kathryn and Paul. Pasternak has returned from the West Coast. Paul has a meeting with an editor who buys him lunch and talks at length about his book. Gradually, Paul realizes that the editor is gently rejecting the manuscript, which makes Paul feel that it is worthless. He later tells Pasternak about the rejection, and then learns that Pasternak's manuscript has just been accepted by a publisher. Both of them are sad and happy about the bad and good news. Paul reminds Pasternak that he should go to Long Island and tell his mother. Pasternak goes to the subway, full of hope, and Paul goes home, troubled.

Go, Part 3, Hell, Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The collapse of Kathryn's faith in Paul makes him understand the depth of his treachery in writing letters to Liza, even though many of them were never sent. He suddenly sees that he has been unfaithful to her for three years, despite not having an actual affair, because his emotional energy has been directed at another woman, and his thoughts

about his marriage have been negative. To Kathryn, it's clear that these transgressions are much worse than her casual fling with Pasternak. When they make love, it's a sign that they still need and want each other, but the purity of the emotion is tainted by fear, desperation, and anger. In contrast, Stofsky's acceptance of the dissolute Ancke is full-hearted and without hesitation. He even regards Ancke as the only person who can understand how Stofsky feels about his confused group of friends. Stofsky looks beyond Ancke's terrible physical condition and sees that his friend's soul has been damaged by the lovelessness all around him. As Mary Magdalene washed the feet of Jesus, Stofsky washes Ancke's feet. Stofsky takes seriously Ancke's advice that he should not get hung up in the problems of others. Stofsky is willing to look at himself critically, and ask if perhaps his will to help actually is just an expression of ego. But Stofsky's dream about God reaffirms his conviction that he must continue to try to love others, even without help from anyone.

The idea that God is doing all He can to help suffering people is a way of suggesting that people fail to help one another because of their own limitations. As expressions of God's love, each of us does all we can, but it isn't enough. The scene between Paul and Pasternak, in which one young writer's manuscript has been rejected and the other's has been accepted, shows that both of them are capable of responding to the situation of the other person, but in the end, each must bear his own fate. At the moment, Pasternak is basking in accomplishment, and Paul's life has never seemed more dire. All they can do is express support for one another. Each life will take its own course toward enlightenment or lack of it, which is perhaps a lesson Stofsky has yet to learn.

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Kathryn is thoughtful but not too inquisitive about the rejection of Paul's manuscript, which is less consoling than he would have liked. He goes to Stofsky's place and finds that Ancke, who mostly sleeps, spends his waking hours fixated on keeping the apartment tidy. This disturbs Stofsky, who prefers his own clutter. Winnie, who has kicked her morphine habit, and her boyfriend Little Rock start hanging out at Stofsky's apartment. Hobbes recognizes Little Rock as the same "cool" guy he pointed out to Estelle at the Go Hole. It turns out that Rock is a petty criminal, and he and Winnie have brought their stolen items and drugs to Stofsky's place. As a shaken Paul leaves, Stofsky tells him not to worry, because Ancke and the others are like God's chosen people in a world that is damned. Stofsky insists that he won't get mixed up in the crime.

In chapter five, Paul gets a call in the afternoon from Agatson, who already is very drunk. He wants Paul to help celebrate Agatson's "last birthday." Pasternak is at Paul's place, having spent the night there. The previous night, Ancke visited and gave Pasternak a radio as collateral for a $10 loan.

Pasternak and Paul go to Agatson's apartment, finding him and May in a disheveled, drunken condition. They all walk to Bianca's place, with Agatson snapping aerials off parked cars along the way. They pick up Bianca and go back to Agatson's loft, where Kathryn soon arrives with Ketcham and his friend from college, Peter Trimble, and Trimble's wife, Janet. The party soon degenerates into a drunken mess of broken records and bottles, ear-splitting music, and insults shouted by Agatson at everyone. In the midst of the chaos, Verger calls and says Stofsky has been arrested with Winnie, Little Rock, and Ancke. Everyone rushes to help, even though they're all drunk.

Chapter six recounts what has happened to Stofsky and the others. In this chapter, Stofsky is worried about the stolen goods and decides to put his writings in safekeeping at his aunt's house. To do this, he goes with Rock and Winnie in a stolen car that is filled with stolen goods. When Rock drives the wrong way down a street and police spot him, he panics, races away, and crashes the car. He's unconscious, but Winnie and Stofsky flee. They meet at Stofsky's place, where he flushes the drugs but can do nothing about the stolen goods before the police arrive to arrest him, Winnie, and Ancke.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Paul's marriage is so troubled that Kathryn can't even find it in herself to sympathize with him over the rejection of his manuscript. At Stofsky's place, the obsession Ancke has developed with keeping everything tidy symbolizes Ancke's recognition on some level that his life is out of control. His sweeping and dusting is an attempt, however futile, to bring order into the chaos of his life. The uselessness of this effort is

underscored when Winnie and Little Rock show up, bringing danger and trouble with them. As they pile up stolen goods in the apartment, it's like a powder keg. The inevitable explosion is just a matter of time. Stofsky's assurances to Paul that these petty criminals are God's children is clearly a delusion Stofsky has created for himself in his fierce desire to help and love everyone. Agatson's wild, drunken insistence that Paul and Pasternak come to his "last birthday" party is another foreboding of something bad. It's as if Agatson foresees his own death. The mention of the radio that Ancke had left with Pasternak at Paul's apartment is a plot device that will soon reappear as a complication in the story.

Of all the uncontrolled parties that this group has had in the course of the novel, the one at Agatson's loft is probably the worst. Agatson's attitude is extremely aggressive, even hateful, and it infects everyone with wildness, fear, or anxiousness. Almost everyone gets very drunk, which only worsens the atmosphere. All the talk in the novel about thirsting for experience and searching for meaning seems to have been forgotten by the characters in their single-minded pursuit of hedonism and oblivion. They certainly don't look like young philosophers in this chapter. The news that Stofsky, Winnie, Rock, and Ancke have been arrested comes as no great surprise. The recounting of the events that led to their arrest is marked principally by Stofsky's still-urgent desire to make everything right among his friends, followed by his wonderment at the arrest, and then his dawning recognition that he has been foolish.

Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

Ten days pass. Stofsky, whose father has bailed him out of jail, visits Paul. Ancke is still in jail, and Rock has literally gone mad, because he's a four-time felony loser and will get life. Stofsky says Winnie is pregnant by Rock, and her father is coming from Toledo to post her bail. Stofsky is about to go with a lawyer to see Bernard, his former literature professor, to get a letter that says he's of good character. The lawyer has already contacted Stofsky's former analyst, who wrongly said he was an incurable heroin addict. After Stofsky leaves, Kathryn calls and tells Paul to get rid of the radio that Ancke had given Pasternak, because it probably was stolen.

In chapter eight, Kathryn comes home and Paul says Stofsky intends to return later. She says Stofsky can take the radio, but Paul dislikes this idea. They argue about it. Stofsky returns and says his professor probably will write a letter for him, but asked him first if Stofsky believes in American society. All three of them find this absurd, because what else can they believe in?

Kathryn mentions the radio to Stofsky, who immediately insists on taking it away, which embarrasses Paul and even makes Kathryn a little ashamed. In chapter nine, Agatson is killed in the subway when he suddenly tries to climb out a window while the train is moving. Verger is choked up and May is distraught, although Agatson apparently broke up with her three days earlier. Everyone meets at a bar and it's obvious that Trimble is also badly shaken by the death of Agatson, who was his close drinking buddy. They all go to a dismal wharfside bar in New Jersey, where a grubby man stumbles in and plays a tune on the accordion for spare change. Paul goes into the filthy men's room and is overcome with disgust and despair at the life they're all leading. He comes out and takes Kathryn home with him. The two cling to each other as they ride the ferry across the river toward the city lights.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Little Rock's insanity and the pregnancy of Winnie are sad but telling outcomes of the uncontrolled nature of their lives. The accusation of Stofsky's former analyst that Stofsky is a heroin addict demonstrates a terrible failure of the doctor as a close confident of his patient. The conclusion one must draw is that the analyst's attitude toward Stofsky is loveless. Kathryn's insistence that Paul get rid of the radio is practical, on one level, but on a deeper level, it represents her rejection of everything antisocial about their friends and acquaintances. Of course, Stofsky quickly takes the radio when asked, because he still takes responsibility for the actions of his friends, on the grounds that they all influence each other and that he cannot divorce himself from them and still remain a loving person.

Agatson's rather absurd death in the final chapter demonstrates the inevitable result of all the characters' chaotic living. They won't find new experiences, and they won't learn to love life, by raging against something insubstantial that they don't understand. Without a clear idea of what's wrong with society, and of what they should do to try to improve it, they are doomed to self-destructive anger and frustration. The grubby young man busking at the wharfside bar is the artistic equivalent of what the characters in the book are doing with their lives. Finally, the death of Agatson makes Hobbes realize that what this group is doing with itself is fruitless and miserable. He and Kathryn, still anchors of sanity and love for each other despite what they have been through, leave the place together. As they ride the ferry back to Manhattan, the clear indication is that they have begun to shed the influence upon them of these mostly well-meaning but badly dysfunctional people.

Characters

Paul Hobbes

Paul Hobbes is the main protagonist, and is also a thinly veiled portrayal of the novel's author, John Clellon Holmes. An aspiring writer in his early twenties, he's a college graduate living in Manhattan in the early 1950s. He works on his novel in the daytime and does not have a paying job, although he does have some money from his recent service in the military reserve. His wife brings in most of the income, which creates tension for both of them, because Paul's wife doesn't like her job. She hopes he will sell his novel, but they both realize the chances of making a living at writing are slim for him in the immediate future. Paul would like for his wife to be able to quit working, but he doesn't want her to do so,because he wants to keep writing.

Paul writes secretive love letters, usually unsent, to a woman he met in college. He regards this as a kind of emotional release and as a writing exercise, which appears to be a rationalization to prevent him from facing the fact that this letter writing is a betrayal of his wife's trust in him. Paul has a number of friends and acquaintances in Manhattan, many of them involved at least tangentially in writing, and he draws his wife into socializing with this crowd, despite her initial reluctance. At first, the conversations that Paul has with his friends about life and the post-World War II times in which they live are often interesting, but as the novel progresses, the attempts by this group to find meaning in their lives become increasingly more frantic. Paul is drawn into heavy drinking, drug use, and wild partying that eventually leads him to despair and leads his wife into an affair. When she discovers that Paul has been writing to another woman for the past three years, their marriage is close to collapse. Meanwhile, the lives of various friends in their group spin out of control. Finally, after one of their friends dies in a drunken accident, Paul seems to realize he must get away from this group, whose bright promise has taken such dark turns.

Kathryn Hobbes

A woman of twenty-eight, about three years her husband Paul's elder, Kathryn Hobbes is from a working class family and feels a little intimidated by the well-educated young people among whom she and Paul circulate. Yet Kathryn is also a down-to-earth person with a pragmatic view of life, and she regards the philosophizing of Paul's friends with some skepticism. This doubt grows in her as the novel goes on, and the many ideas of the group's members amount to very little in practical terms, even as their daily activities grow increasingly more chaotic. Nevertheless, the growing emphasis on wild parties seems to wear down Kathryn's resistance, especially since she dislikes her job at a public relations agency and hates her boss. Paul is really the only important person in her life, and she needs to be involved with him. If it takes going to parties and drinking nonstop, she's willing to do even that.

When some of Paul's friends and acquaintances get heavily involved in narcotics use and turn to crime to support their habits, Kathryn is appalled and tries to stay clear of them. Yet she also has been drawn into friendships with some of the women in the group, and the drinking leads her into a sexual fling with one of the men, which creates huge guilt in her mind. Although Paul insists that he isn't concerned, because his ideas about sex and marriage are very progressive, Kathryn rightly doesn't believe him. Her capability of intense anger is demonstrated when she discovers that Paul has been writing secret love letters to another woman, but Kathryn's rage is always tempered with a sense of hurt and sadness that is closer to her true nature. By the end of the novel, she has let go of her guilt and her anger, and is left clinging to a sad, almost desperate love for her husband.

Gene Pasternak

Gene Pasternak, the best friend of Paul Hobbes in the book, is a fictional version of the real-life novelist, Jack Kerouac. Pasternak has a huge love of life, travel, music, women, and literature. He's well-read, intelligent, and ambitious, although his desire to write a book is sometimes counteracted by an idea he has that writing is not nearly as important as it is to live fully. By that, he means trying to experience every moment as if it were his last one. Gene and Paul have many conversations throughout the novel about the importance of finding meaning in life through loving every moment of it. They seem to agree that something vital is missing from America in the post-World War II years, as if the country had fallen asleep spiritually, or has lost its zest for being alive, but they can't quite put a finger on what is wrong. Pasternak draws Hobbes into trying the find the answer through an endless round of talk, drinking, and chasing after excitement around Manhattan.

Pasternak still lives with his mother on Long Island, which indicates that he hasn't fully matured, and helps to explain why he seems to think meaning can be found in excitement. He becomes enamored of a young married woman named Christine, who is not well-educated and rather uncomplicated compared to Pasternak's other friends. He sees her as a motherly type, by which he means solid and dependable. Before long, he grows weary of her, and despite his better judgment, he drifts into a brief fling with Kathryn, his best friend's wife. Paul forgives him, and the two remain friends, but Pasternak's self-involvement and unfeeling attitude toward others is evident. His ambivalence about the importance of writing disappears after his first book is accepted for publication. Suddenly, he realizes it might be possible to make a living in America as a novelist, and this makes all the difference in his attitude toward the work.

David Stofsky

David Stofsky, a poet, is a fictional version of a young Allen Ginsberg, who later became one of America's most famous poets. Stofsky is needy, warm-hearted, and sincere. At first, he seems to be rather lost, as are the other characters in the book. Later, he has a strange experience, during which he becomes convinced that he has been visited by

the spirit of the long-dead, mystical poet, William Blake. After this event, Stofsky's attitude toward his friends changes. In place of his former, unfocused hopes for them to be happy and to love one another, he adopts a probing, questioning approach. He confronts their inconsistencies and their unkindnesses, and tries through force of argument to make them recognize that they must change their ways if they are ever to attain the understanding of life and its sacred nature that they supposedly are pursuing. This uncompromising stance makes several of his friends nervous, and two of them even write him notes telling him to stay away because he's too strange for them now. He accepts such rejections with a sad humor that suggests he understands why they wish to avoid him.

Stofsky is the only character in the book who makes a concerted effort to treat everyone with nonjudgmental love and kindness. His questioning of them and their motives is not because he has a low opinion of them. Indeed, it reflects a conviction that they are capable of major change in their lives, if only they will face the need to do so. Stofsky sees himself as a kind of messenger of love, yet he has his own neuroses to deal with.

At the beginning of the novel, he is in therapy, and it soon is revealed that he is homosexual and that his father is disgusted by this orientation. Later, when Stofsky takes in several friends who use narcotics and have histories of theft, he becomes inadvertently embroiled in their crimes and is arrested. His father bails him out of jail, and Stofsky's initial horror at the entire episode eventually turns to a kind of bemused acceptance of the unpredictability and injustices of life. What will come of the arrest is not resolved in the story, but Stofsky is clearly a survivor, because he knows what he believes and he acts on his convictions.

Hart Kennedy

A restless young man with leadership qualities and an insatiable love of life, Hart Kennedy is admired and beloved by Gene Pasternak, even though Hart often steals to support himself. Hart is based on the real-life Beat Generation figure, Neal Cassady, who also was portrayed as Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's novel, On the Road.

Bill Agatson

A drunken nihilist who insults and degrades everyone around him, Bill Agatson ends up accidentally killing himself. He's handsome, and several women in the group, including Bianca and May, have crushes on him.

Albert Ancke

Albert Ancke is a well-read, gentle, and thoughtful friend of David Stofsky, but he's also a morphine addict who steals to feed his habit.

Daniel Verger

A hard-drinking, mournful and powerless young man, Daniel Verger is a classic victim. He loves May, who is disinterested in him.

Arthur Ketcham

An erudite and sophisticated member of this group, Arthur Ketcham is often appalled by the behavior of the others, and tries to avoid their worst excesses. He has a crush on Bianca, who merely likes him.

Peter Trimble

Peter Trimble is a young physicist who went to Cambridge with Arthur Ketcham and is a close drinking buddy of Bill Agatson.

Janet Trimble

Janet Trimble, Peter's wife, is probably the most conventional and sober person in the entire group.

Little Rock

Little Rock is a taciturn, heartless criminal whose activities get David Stofsky in trouble.

Winnie

Winne, the girlfriend of Little Rock, is an on-and-off morphine addict with a wild streak.

Bianca

Bianca is a bright young woman who is beloved by Arthur Ketcham. She used to love Agatson, but has given up on him because he's an abusive drunk.

Christine

Christine is an innocent, working class, married woman who has an affair with Pasternak but soon is ignored by him and goes back to her husband.

Dinah

Dinah is Hart Kennedy's former wife, a reformed alcoholic who goes on a trip with him from her home in Denver to Manhattan. She gets in a fight with Hart over another woman and leaves him.

May

May is Daniel Verger's neighbor, who meets Agatson at a party and becomes besotted with him. His abusiveness leads her to the brink of madness until he dumps her a few days before he dies.

Estelle

Estelle is a married office worker whom Paul Hobbes meets at a party and later takes out to dinner. He brings her to his apartment while Kathryn is away, but Paul finds that he can't make love to her, and the two part, never to meet again.

Ed Schindel

Ed Schindel is Hart Kennedy's right-hand man, who travels with him and generally does whatever Hart asks him to do.

Objects/Places

Manhattan

Manhattan is the island of New York City where most of the characters live and where the major action takes place.

Westchester

Westchester is a suburban county in New York, north of Manhattan, where Paul and Kathryn Hobbes met while living there with their families. Kathryn ccasionally visits her mother in Westchester during the course of the novel.

Spanish Harlem

Spanish Harlem is a predominantly Latino neighborhood within the Manhattan borough of Harlem, where Bianca and Agatson both live. It's poor and the rent is cheap. Several parties in the novel takes place there.

New Jersey Wharf

The New Jersey wharf area is across the river from Manhattan, where the friends go to drink after Agatson's death toward the end of the novel.

Long Island

Long Island is an island in southeastern New York, just east of Manhattan. Gene Pasternak lives there with his mother, although he often spends nights at the apartments of friends in Manhattan.

The Go Hole

The Go Hole is a nightclub in Manhattan frequented by members of the Beat Generation and by more conventional folk who want to see how the "cool" people party. The Go Hole has great, live jazz.

The Athens

The Athens is a small restaurant near Paul and Kathryn's apartment where they often go for dinner because it's easier than cooking.

The West Coast

The West Coast of the United States is where Hart Kennedy goes with Ed Schindel and Gene Pasternak on a road trip, but in the novel it also represents the sense of freedom and happiness that can be had from going to new places and having new experiences.

The Hobbes' Apartment

The Hobbes' apartment is their sanctuary from the frenetic lives of their friends, but it is a sanctuary constantly being breached. People are forever dropping by, or even staying overnight, much to Kathryn's dismay, and this loss of Paul and Kathryn's privacy ultimately damages their marriage.

The Beat Generation

The Beat Generation is a term first used in this novel, which came to define a generation of young, searching artists who embraced jazz, frequent travel, drug use, and wild times in search of "beatitude," or a deep appreciation and joy in the sanctity of life, in the prosperous but drab years following World War II in America.

Themes

The Quest for Enlightenment

Literature is full of stories about heroes on quests for enlightenment. Essentially, that's what the Beat movement, the subject of the novel Go, was all about. The Beat Generation, which arose in America in the 1950s, was a philosophy that "beatitude," or boundless joy, could be found only through a constant, restless quest for the elusive heart of experience. The idea was that pure joy and love are the essence of whatever we do or whomever we encounter, but those qualities aren't easy to perceive. They often are shrouded by disappointments, lies, violence, and other obstacles created by the greedy, non-spiritual side of human nature. To reach the beatitude at the heart of experience requires energy, persistence, and open-mindedness.

Those who achieve this goal are considered by the Beats to be "cool." This signifies an ability to go past longing, anxiety, ambition, and other emotions that impede an appreciation of the "beat." In a sense, they go past all feeling, which is why they seem so unflappable, so cool. The novel Go revolves around a group of young people who belong to this new Beat Generation and who strive, throughout the book, to find and hold the beat. They seek it through jazz music, reading, through travels, and through experimentation with drugs and sex. At its core, the searching of the characters in this novel is legitimate, but nobody explains clearly why such beatitude is missing from America in the 1950s, and why such extreme methods to find it are the best ones to use.

The Outsider

The outsider is a theme found in myths, fables, and art movements. Outsiders do not necessarily come from somewhere else. Their differences derive from within, and concern how they perceive society. Generally, they think something is wrong, outmoded, or inadequate about how people see the world and interact in it. Their new approach often has a simple notion at the center of it. Outsiders usually are trying to get back to a more natural, more grounded way of perception and action. This can result in actions so far out of conformity with the status quo that these people become regarded as outsiders. Indeed, outsiders often are convinced that the only way to break the mold of old habits is to do something radically different.

Although their new perceptions and attitudes generally do not become so widely accepted that they enter the mainstream, outsiders nevertheless often have a significant influence on their societies. They can effect change, even though their ways never become the status quo. In Go, the Beat Generation members are outsiders. They're trying to shake up America, to wake the nation from its post-war doldrums and make it come alive again. They believe that American society is in a dream world of consumerism and isolation from true spirituality that can only be escaped by grabbing

life with both hands, as if it were about to slip away. As an outsider movement, the Beat Generation never became mainstream, but it had profound effects on future generations, especially the so-called counterculture of the 1960s, in which "beatniks" transformed into "hippies."

Young versus Old

The young versus the old is a theme that goes back to the origins of story-telling, in which old ideas are threatened and sometimes overturned by new ones. Often, a young person or people carry the new ideas, and older, more powerful individuals embody the ideas under siege. In Go, the old ideas are about conformity, security, and predictability. The new ideas that the Beat Generation introduce are nonconformity, risk-taking, and spontaneity. The characters in Go believe that the proponents of the old ways are dead to true beauty and zestful living. Instead, they merely survive, comforted by their material goods and interacting with pleasantries and homilies that mask their boredom and lack of love for life. The Beats believe that beatitude is at the core of existence, and it can be accessed only through fully experiencing life, as opposed to merely going through the motions. They try furiously to find and hold onto joy, yet they often feel thwarted by the rules and regulations of society. Consequently, they are liable to slip into despair and the nihilistic attitude that life is actually meaningless and cruel.

This tension of the Beat Generation between the potential rewards of their quest for beatitude and the danger to their state of mind should they fail is a central problem in Go. It's always the main danger in stories whose theme is an attempt to replace the established order with a new one. What if the shortcomings of the old order have been overstated? What if the strengths of the new way have been overestimated? Perhaps those who are trying to replace the old ideas are too young and inexperienced to understand what's wrong with their new ideas, and why they are bound to fail. On the other hand, maybe the audacity they display in attempting to cast off the worn-out ways of the past is exactly what society needs if it is to progress. What they're trying to do is difficult, but maybe that's part of its value. Such questions are often not easily answered, and perhaps they have no simple answers, which is what makes the theme worth exploring.

Style

Point of View

Go's point of view is limited omniscient, which means the author goes into the thoughts of a limited number of characters, and knows everything those few people think. The novel unfolds principally through the eyes of the main character, Paul Hobbes, who is a literary stand-in for the author, John Clellon Holmes. When other characters enter the action, their feelings and thoughts are demonstrated by what they do and say, rather than by going into their minds.

Some chapters in Go are presented through the mind of the poet, David Stofsky. When Paul Hobbes and David Stofsky are together in a scene, Paul's viewpoint tends to take over. In any case, the story is told entirely in third person. The author never fully assumes the persona of a character by using the first person "I" to narrate the story.

Setting

The setting for almost all the action in Go takes place in New York City, on Manhattan Island. The city itself plays a small but significant role in the novel, because of its size, cosmopolitanism, and cultural offerings. The characters in Go have come to Manhattan for these qualities, and have benefited from the city through its power to attract bright people with fresh ideas and artistic skills. However, the city also represents a kind of coldness and a dog-eat-dog attitude that always seems to hover over the characters, threatening their well-being. Manhattan, therefore, embodies the promise and the perils of contemporary society. It's the heartland of arts and ideas, but also of addictions and despair.

Over the many decades that people have flocked to New York City to seek their fortunes, the city has assumed great mythical power. It symbolizes the hopes and fears not only of immigrants, but of Americans who come to Manhattan from all corners of the country to try to break into the "big time." If the characters in Go are to have an impact on the nation with their ideas and writings, it's not surprising that they would gather in New York City to make that collective effort. Any story set in this city immediately gathers to it a set of preconceptions that raise the possibilities of excitement and tension, of great achievement or catastrophic failure, even before the plot unfolds. In Go, Manhattan is mostly dark and dangerous, full of chaotic night spots and dismal, dirty tenements. Finding beauty within its foreboding confines, as the Beat Generation hopes to do, is not easy.

Language and Meaning

The language in Go is perhaps a little high-flown, with a liberal sprinkling of large words and occasional long sentences held together by semi-colons. The author was in his

early twenties when he wrote this first one of his published novels, and he has a tendency to wax poetical that sometimes seems overwrought. On the other hand, some of the descriptions of places and emotions are quite effective. This unevenness in the prose is a sign of a talented writer who is still perfecting his craft. It's also significant that big, difficult ideas play a major role in the plot. The language attempts to cope with the challenge of transmitting these ideas to the reader without turning the novel into a lecture, but it lacks a certain precision in clarifying what these ideas are, and exactly why the characters think that what they are doing in the book will help to put those ideas into action. Successfully inserting philosophy into the storyline of a novel has long been a problem, and this author's breathless, sometimes imprecise language betrays his uncertainty about how to achieve that goal.

Then novel has a lot of dialogue, most of which is effective. Dialogue allows the characters to express themselves in then-contemporary slang, which is revealing. Also, conversations are by nature imprecise, which is useful in this case, because the characters don't really understand what they're doing or why they're doing it. The way they dance around their reasons in talking to each other shows this uncertainty. The dialogue also lends a sense of immediacy and often urgency to the moment, which is very much in keeping with the rushed pace of these characters' lives. To them, everything is important, everything is huge, and their statements often end with exclamation points! All this helps to move the story along at a nice clip.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts which are subdivided into ten, fifteen, and nine chapters, respectively. The story proceeds chronologically, except for Chapter 4 of Part 1, which goes back a number of years to fill in the "back stories" of the two main characters, Paul and Kathryn Hobbes, showing how they were raised, met, and married. The rest of the novel covers a fairly short period of time, probably less than a year. Many chapters begin by establishing that a night, a week, or perhaps two weeks have gone by since the previous chapter. This simple structure makes it easy to keep the plot details in mind, and virtually eliminates the structure itself from playing a significant literary role in the story through any rearrangement of the chronology or by taking the reader on other tangents of the plot.

Reader interest is maintained by interweaving the stories of a fairly large group of friends and acquaintances. The dramas in each person's life are sketched, and as the story goes on, the characters reappear, interact, and complications occur in their individual stories. No attempt is made to bring most of these interwoven subplots to formal conclusions. To a large extent, this book is a roman a clef, or a factual story disguised as fiction. The real lives upon which many of its characters are based were still very much works in progress when the novel was published. But the fact that everything is not tied into a neat bow is not a drawback. The story moves along at the pace of real life, albeit fast living. The simple, straightforward structure of the book helps to achieve that goal.

The only other setting in the novel is Westchester, a suburban county in New York from which Paul and Kathryn Hobbes came to Manhattan. The city where they lived is not named, and Westchester is described only fleetingly in one chapter, during which the earlier lives of Paul and Kathryn are recounted.

Quotes

"Of course, everyone has his monster, the personification of everything he really fears. A sort of Dracula in daylight!"
Part 1, Chap. 1, p. 10

"You know, everyone I know is kind of furtive, kind of beat. They all go along the street like they were guilty of something, but didn't believe in guilt."
Part 1, Chap. 4, p. 36

"So I've decided that life is holy in itself, life itself! All the details, everything."
Part 2, Chap. 4, p. 121

"The music came from the same all-night program of wild jazz that midnight unleashed to all the city's hidden, backstairs pads where feverish young people gathered over their intoxicants to listen and not to listen, or hipsters woke, like some mute and ancient dead, to have their first cigarette of the 'day.'"
Part 2, Chap. 6, p. 134

"Where's the end of the night? That's all I was thinking. The whole long night. But go have a drink."
Part 2, Chap. 6, p. 136

"Everything happens perfectly for me because I know it's going to! I expect everything, everything is kicks!"
Part 2, Chap. 7, p. 144

"The lone runner, now in the street, now on the sidewalk, sprinted wildly through crossings, was momentarily lost to them behind overhanging neons, and finally vanished entirely in a dark block, going full speed uptown on his crazy mission."
Part 2, Chap. 7, p. 150

"It was more than a music; it became an attitude toward life, a way of walking, a language and a costume; and these introverted kids (emotional outcasts of a war they had been too young to join, or in which they had lost their innocence), who had never belonged anywhere before, now felt somewhere at last."
Part 2, Chap. 9, p. 161

"Crawl off like a spider and die. Think of how that would impress everyone! If you just died! Think of how everyone would pity you then!"
Part 2, Chap. 12, p. 198

"You see, it's really the end of feeling, through feeling too much."
Part 2, Chap. 14, p. 210

"We should expect people (and ourselves mainly, of course) not to understand why other people think us abhorrent, unbearable, a contagious disease . . . but to accept it as well!"
Part 3, Chap. 2, p. 243

"The next hours were a maze, without center, growing denser the farther into them they wandered, and permeated with a feeling of imminent peril for which there was little tangible cause."
Part 3, Chap. 5, p. 265

"He looked like a man who is witnessing the vision of his whole unredeemable existence, seeing it as a savage mockery; but more, perceiving that all of his life is a blasphemous, mortal joke at everyone's expense, a monstrous joke in which everything is ignoble, ludicrous and without value or meaning."
Part 3, Chap. 5, p. 273

"The sense of freedom in his life, the idea of being able to control it, direct it, even waste it, of being able to entertain fancies that were detrimental or exercise a volition that was dangerous: all this suddenly seemed to him to have been the most shameless illusion all along, the idiotic industry of an ant building his hill in the path of a glacier, and imagining that he is free."
Part 3, Chap. 6, p. 281

"'Where is our home?' he said to himself gravely, for her could not see it yet."
Part 3, Chap. 9, p. 311

Topics for Discussion

Why is it so difficult for people to find meaning in life? Why do you think the characters in this novel search for meaning through constant movement, music, drugs and drinking? Why would they hope to find the joy and beauty of life in such activities?

What is the difference between egoism and egotism? Why don't the friends in this book treat each other with more kindness and concern? Why do you think they are so self-involved and not more giving?

Is there a spiritual hole at the center of peace and prosperity? Why are these characters so anxious to deny the tranquility of life in America after the end of World War II? What do they mean when they say they feel marginalized by society and doubtful about the future?

The Beat Generation's preferred music was jazz, in particular, modern or "free" jazz, which is structurally open and full of improvisation. Why would they like this type of music most? What does it say about their philosophy of life?

In this book, the characters constantly move from one place to the next, rushing to someone's apartment, to a club, a restaurant, another apartment, a bar, and sometimes even driving across country. Why can't they stay put? Why do they think it's so important to keep on the move, and what do they think they'll find?

The friends and acquaintances in this book are remarkably unwilling to criticize each other's activities, even when someone is being thoroughly obnoxious, dangerous, or doing something illegal. At times, it's obvious that some of the characters are against such behavior, but they rarely complain. Why not? What thinking lies behind this willingness to accept whatever someone does, no matter how wild or wrong it may be?

Discuss the sexuality in this book, particularly the attitudes of the characters toward uncommitted or casual sex, and how they deal with feelings of guilt that arise from sexual relations with the partners of friends. Do they seem well-adjusted in this respect? Do they know what they think, and do they act in accordance with their beliefs? Are they moral people?