

# **The Ghost Writer Study Guide**

## **The Ghost Writer by Philip Roth**

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# Plot Summary

The Ghost Writer is the eleventh novel by acclaimed writer Philip Roth. The novel tells the story of Nathan Zuckerman, a young writer at the beginning of his career who has sought out E.I. Lonoff, an established author who is just beginning to receive popular acclaim for his writings. Zuckerman comes to Lonoff looking for a mentor, placing Lonoff on a pedestal that makes the older man most uncomfortable. During his visit, Zuckerman meets another house guest of Lonoff's that causes his imagination to race with the possibilities that orbit this young beauty. The Ghost Writer is at times amusing, sad, and frustrating, placing art at odds with reality in a unique way that leaves the reader with something to think about long after the final paragraph is done.

Zuckerman arrives at Lonoff's house, excited just to be in the same room with his idol. The two discuss other Jewish writers, sharing opinions on literature and art as the afternoon quietly rolls away. As they talk, Zuckerman becomes aware of a beautiful young woman who is organizing papers in Lonoff's study. Zuckerman at first imagines this young woman is Lonoff's daughter or granddaughter, but soon learns that she is a former student. Lonoff, who teaches at a nearby university several times a week, sponsored the young woman to bring her to the United States from some unnamed location in Europe. Zuckerman becomes enchanted by the young woman even though they never share a word, and is disappointed to learn she will not be having dinner with them.

Over dinner, Zuckerman is pleased beyond words when Lonoff praises his few published pieces. However, dinner takes a turn downhill when Hope Lonoff, Lonoff's wife, begins to talk about how Lonoff has never done anything to make himself happy. Hope begins suggesting Lonoff should have an affair with Amy. When Lonoff refuses to acknowledge his wife's outrageous suggestion, she becomes angry and storms out of the room, leaving a broken dish behind.

After dinner, Lonoff invites Zuckerman to spend the night. When Lonoff goes up to bed, Zuckerman makes himself at home in Lonoff's study. As Zuckerman reads a Henry James story several times just because Lonoff made an offhand comment about it. At the same time, Zuckerman thinks about an argument he has been having with his father. Zuckerman wrote a short story about a fight over money a couple of cousins had a few years before. Zuckerman's father believes the story perpetuates a stereotype about Jews and has enlisted the help of a respected judge in their neighborhood to pressure Zuckerman into throwing the story away. Zuckerman is offended by this interference and attempt at controlling his career.

While Zuckerman is thinking about all this, Amy returns to the house. A few minutes later Zuckerman can hear arguing in the rooms above him. Zuckerman attempts to listen in, imagining Amy and Lonoff having an intimate discussion in her bedroom. Later, Zuckerman begins to imagine that Amy is Anne Frank. Amy survived the concentration camp where she was rumored to have died and has come to the United States to study under Lonoff in her aspiration to become a great writer. When the Diary of Anne Frank is



published and later turned into a Broadway play, Amy becomes distraught, reading the book over and over, convincing herself that it is too late to let her father know she is still alive.

The following morning, Lonoff and his wife read Lonoff's fan mail to Zuckerman and Amy over breakfast. When Hope reads a letter from a young man asking Lonoff to sponsor him to come to the United States to study and become a writer, Hope attempts to apologize to Amy, believing the letter to have hurt her feelings in some way. Amy becomes upset even as she attempts to brush off the apology. Hope then begins her rant again, pushing Lonoff to become Amy's lover. Zuckerman imagines the two are already lovers. Hope then insists that Amy remain at the home with Lonoff while she will leave. Hope packs a bag and wanders out into the snow, determined to allow her husband and Amy to be alone. In the confusion of this argument, Amy leaves, leaving Zuckerman stranded.



# Chapter 1, Maestro

## Chapter 1, Maestro Summary

Nathan Zuckerman is an established writer who is looking back on his youth. Twenty years ago, Zuckerman had just published his first few short stories. Zuckerman reaches out to Lonoff, an established writer whose work Zuckerman admires, and goes to visit him at his farm in the Berkshires.

Zuckerman arrives at Lonoff's house and is immediately beside himself with hero worship. Zuckerman believes Lonoff to be a great writer despite his lack of acceptance in the literary world Zuckerman so badly wants to be a part of in New York City. Zuckerman takes a quick inventory of Zuckerman's home and vows to himself that he will one day live like this himself. They begin to talk. Zuckerman tells Lonoff about his day job selling magazine subscriptions while Lonoff talks about his days, which are filled with writing and the occasional class he teaches at a local university. Zuckerman notices a young woman in Lonoff's study and wonder who she might be. At first Zuckerman believes her to be a daughter, but Lonoff tells Zuckerman that his children are all grown and gone. Zuckerman then thinks that she might be a granddaughter until he sees the wistful look Lonoff gives her. Lonoff says the girl is a former student of his whom he had sponsored to come to the United States from an unspecified country. Lonoff brags on the girl, Amy Bellette, after she leaves to meet a friend for dinner.

Over dinner, Lonoff compliments Zuckerman on his writing, declaring that he will one day be a great writer. Zuckerman is beyond himself with excitement at this proclamation. When Hope Lonoff asks Zuckerman if he has a girlfriend, Zuckerman recalls a fight he recently had with Betsy, his girl. Betsy confronted Zuckerman with an affair she was told he had had with one of her girlfriends. Zuckerman honestly admitted to the affair, then went on to admit to other affairs he had also had. Betsy became so angry she broke all the dishes they had bought together when they first moved in with one another. Zuckerman does not tell all this to Hope, however.

Hope then mentions a short blurb about Zuckerman that had appeared in the Saturday Review, declaring him an up and coming writer. Zuckerman is once again pleased that Hope and Lonoff had noticed the article. When Amy comes into the conversation, Hope becomes agitated. Hope claims that Lonoff never does anything to make himself happy. Hope then suggests that perhaps an affair with Amy would make him happy. Hope becomes so agitated that she breaks a dish before storming from the room. When they are done eating, Zuckerman helps Lonoff clear the table. Lonoff picks up the broken dish and says Hope can glue it.

Back in the living room, Lonoff and Zuckerman discuss literature. Zuckerman compares Lonoff's work to several other Jewish writers. Zuckerman praises these writers, claiming their work has propelled the image of Jews in the eyes of their Gentile writers. Lonoff seems to disagree, however. Lonoff claims he is simply a writer, a man who turns



sentences, and he has little in common with the other writers Zuckerman mentions. Zuckerman does not mention to Lonoff that one of the Jewish writers they discuss is a man he once worshiped. Zuckerman met the writer while in college and the man came to lecture in one of his classes. The writer appeared to be aware of Zuckerman and like his writing, but he quickly disregarded Zuckerman and forgot he had mentioned he might be able to help Zuckerman get published.

When Zuckerman suggests he ought to leave soon, Lonoff asks him to stay. Zuckerman quickly agrees. Before going to bed, Lonoff shows Zuckerman the record player. Lonoff talks about how his wife wants him to learn to relax, but he does not believe it is possible. Lonoff talks about running off to Florence and agrees that it would be nice to do so with a young woman when Zuckerman pushes him. However, Lonoff does not believe it would ever happen, that no young woman would ever want to run away with him. Finally, Lonoff tells Zuckerman that his writing has a strong voice and he will be an excellent writer once he finds his own style.

## Chapter 1, Maestro Analysis

This chapter introduces the main characters. First is Nathan Zuckerman. Zuckerman is young and naive, a writer who has yet to discover the maturity that will eventually give him the career he hopes to have. Zuckerman has come to E.I. Lonoff, looking for a mentor he has not been able to find in anyone else. Lonoff, however, is a simple man who does not want to be a famous writer or even a bestselling author. Instead, Lonoff simply wants to be allowed to turn sentences, as he calls it. Zuckerman looks to Lonoff as a fan might look upon a rock star, so infatuated with the idea of Lonoff that he drinks in everything about him and lives and breathes for each compliment Lonoff offers.

Amy Bellette is a beautiful young woman who clearly also suffers the same hero worship that Zuckerman does, but for different reasons. Lonoff brought Amy to the United States to help her go to school at the university where he teaches. Lonoff never mentions where Amy came from, perhaps suggesting that she came from Germany and he is afraid to mention this because of the Holocaust, the extent of which is only just then becoming known in the United States. This idea never occurs to Zuckerman, however.

Hope Lonoff is Lonoff's long suffering wife. Hope is the daughter of wealthy southerners and she married below her station to be with Lonoff. Hope clearly believes that Lonoff's writing has taken over his life and that he should relax, that he should take time away and find some peace of mind for himself. To this extent, Hope tells Lonoff to have an affair with Amy. The reader sees this and realizes this woman is deeply unhappy in her marriage and she more than likely suspects that this affair has already begun, suggesting she only wants her husband to admit it. Infidelity seems to be a theme of this novel because Zuckerman too recalls that he was not faithful to his girlfriend, resulting in a fight that resembles closely the same one he witnesses between Lonoff and his wife at dinner.



## Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus

### Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus Summary

Zuckerman is left alone in Lonoff's study. Zuckerman wanders around, touching Lonoff's things. Zuckerman finds a copy of *The Middle Age* in a book and begins to read it due to a comment Lonoff made about Henry James. In fact, Zuckerman reads the short story twice. As Zuckerman reads, he thinks about an argument he is having with his father. Zuckerman wrote a short story about a couple of cousins who were fighting over some money left for the education of one cousin's twin sons. The other cousin felt that the money was meant for all their education while the other believed the money was meant for college, not medical school. Eventually the dispute went before a judge and Sidney, the one who thought the money was not meant for medical school, won. Sidney took the money and wasted it on a parking structure. Essie, the other cousin, ended up working herself to the bone to pay for her boys to go to medical school. The story is based on fact, therefore Zuckerman thought his father would be proud of it as he had been of all of Zuckerman's previous works. Zuckerman was wrong.

Dr. Zuckerman invites his son out to his childhood home the weekend before he is to leave for Quahsay, the retreat where he is currently staying. Dr. Zuckerman walks his son to the bus stop after dinner and tells him that the story perpetuates stereotypes about Jews. Dr. Zuckerman does not want the story published. Zuckerman argues that the story is based on truth and that it is a humorous story, not meant to be taken seriously. Dr. Zuckerman does not agree and refuses to back down, but neither does his son. Dr. Zuckerman turns to Judge Wapter, a respected Jewish judge from the old neighborhood. Wapter and his wife write to Zuckerman, offering a list of questions they want answered that leave Zuckerman without a doubt as to their opinions of the story. Zuckerman refuses to respond to the letter, causing a great deal of displeasure to the Wapters and embarrassment for his parents.

In Lonoff's study, Zuckerman attempts to write a letter to his father to explain his position, but has trouble writing it out. Eventually Zuckerman gives up. Zuckerman returns to *The Middle Years*. *The Middle Years* is a story about a novelist who is ailing in a hospital and has just received a copy of his last novel. The novelist befriends a doctor who is in love with one of his patients who insists the doctor leaves the novelist and tend to her alone. The novelist tells the doctor to go, but the doctor chooses to remain by the novelist's side. As Zuckerman is reading this, attempting to understand Henry James' statement 'the madness of art', he hears Amy return. A few minutes later Zuckerman can hear angry voices in the rooms above him. Zuckerman stands on Lonoff's desk and eavesdrop on a conversation between Lonoff and Amy, imagining Amy sitting in Lonoff's lap with few to no clothing on. The conversation appears to be Amy's attempts to seduce Lonoff while Lonoff declares that an affair between the two of them will result in his wife's death.



## Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus Analysis

In this chapter, the reader learns that Zuckerman has had a falling out with his own father, perhaps explaining his need to find a father figure in Lonoff. Zuckerman has written a story that makes Jewish people look foolish and greedy. Zuckerman believes the story, a work of fiction even though it is based on fact, is all in fun while his father believes it perpetuates a stereotype and as a Jewish boy he should not want to perpetuate any stereotypes about anyone, especially Jews. Zuckerman continues to resist his father, even after his father enlists the help of Judge Wapter, a respected Jewish judge in their neighborhood. Zuckerman wants to find his own voice, to be his own man, and in this way he is resisting his father. However, at the same time Zuckerman has come to Lonoff looking for a father figure, for someone to guide him in his writing. Zuckerman figures it is okay to look to Lonoff for this because Lonoff is a Jewish writer who has written things that might have offended other Jews. This situation appears to be a personification of a young man's struggle to find himself and to become a man in his own right.

Zuckerman hears Amy come home and overhears someone crying. Immediately Zuckerman's imagination kicks in and starts conjuring up possible scenes that might be taking place in the rooms above him. Zuckerman climbs up on Lonoff's desk and tries to eavesdrop. At this point, the reader is unclear if Zuckerman actually hears Lonoff and Amy discussing the possibility of an affair or if Zuckerman's imagination is supplying the words just as it is supplying the visuals. Zuckerman imagines Amy sitting naked on Lonoff's lap, but there is no way he could know this even if the noises he hears are accurate to his idea that Amy is sitting in a bedroom, sitting on her bed. This section begins to show the reader the depth of Zuckerman's imagination, preparing the reader for the following chapter.





## Chapter 3, Femme Fatale

### Chapter 3, Femme Fatale Summary

Amy calls Lonoff hysterical from a hotel room after seeing a Broadway production of *Diary of Anne Frank* and begins to tell him her true story. Amy is released from Belsen, a concentration camp, at the end of the war and placed with a foster family. Amy moves from family to family, uncomfortable with the stories they tell about her as though she is some sort of prize because of her experiences. Amy burns her arm to hide the number tattooed into her skin by the Nazis. Amy then writes to Lonoff and convinces him to bring her to the United States.

After learning about the publication of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Amy rents a mailbox in a post office in Boston and sends off for a copy of the book. When Amy receives the book, she reads it twice in one day, remembering every second chronicled in its pages. Amy recalls her sister, so quiet and self contained, her mother and her dear Pim. Amy aches for her Pim, wishing she could let him know she is still alive. There was so much confusion after the war, Amy is not surprised her father believes her to be dead. They were to meet in a designated place after the war, but Amy was unable to get the money and papers she would need to get there on her own. However, Amy decides she cannot tell her father she is still alive because the diary is too important. People need to know what happened during the war and to realize that Jews are not the enemy. If people were to learn she was still alive, it would take away from the impact of the book.

After telling Lonoff her story, Lonoff arranges for her to see a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist develops the opinion that the creative mind can often make people believe they are someone they are not. At the same time, Lonoff refuses to tell his wife because he believes she will not believe Amy, but only believe she claims to be Anne Frank in order to have a hold on Lonoff.

### Chapter 3, Femme Fatale Analysis

Amy Bellette believes she is Anne Frank. Amy tells Lonoff this story, making it seem completely believable by giving it rich detail. Amy believes she survived the concentration camps and that she chose to hide her history in the concentration camps because she felt uncomfortable when people talked about it as though she were some sort of celebrity. Amy later decides not to tell her father she is still alive because her diary can change people's lives, it can speak for the ones who died and it can spread the word about the atrocities perpetrated against the Jews during the war. This all seems very noble and wonderful. However, the reader cannot be sure all this is true. First, Lonoff takes Amy to a psychiatrist and he claims that the creative mind can often cause people to believe they are someone whom they are not. Second, Zuckerman has quite an imagination, as shown to the reader in the previous chapter. There is no way Zuckerman could know this story, therefore it must be something he made up. This story



plays into his fascination with both Amy and Lonoff, making them both heroes. The story also plays directly into Zuckerman's trouble with his father, suggesting a root to the story. In the end, the reader must come to the conclusion this story is simply what Zuckerman wants to believe about both Amy and Lonoff, and nothing more.



# Chapter 4, Married to Tolstoy

## Chapter 4, Married to Tolstoy Summary

The following morning Zuckerman has breakfast with Lonoff, Hope, and Amy. Lonoff is going through his mail as he eats. When Zuckerman asks about the letters he receives about his writing, Lonoff hands a few to his wife and has her read them. Some of the letters are disturbing, while many of them are from people like Zuckerman who want to have Lonoff as some sort of mentor. Hope then reads a letter from a young man who wants Lonoff to sponsor him to come to the United States so that he might get a good education. Hope suddenly stops reading and offers Amy an apology for possibly embarrassing her. Amy denies embarrassment and decides to leave. Before Amy can leave, Zuckerman begins asking her where she lived before coming to the United States. Amy refuses to answer, only admitting that she missed the war, but not elaborating. Zuckerman tells Amy she resembles Anne Frank and she agrees, but denies being her.

Hope, who had run from the room in anger, marches down the stairs with a suitcase. Hope declares that she is going to leave so that Amy might take her place. Lonoff tries to stop her, but Hope marches out of the house into the snow despite the fact that she has no transportation. Annoyed, Amy leaves, forgetting she promised to take Zuckerman to the train station. Lonoff then charges after his wife, leaving Zuckerman with the statement that living with his wife is like being married to Tolstoy.

## Chapter 4, Married to Tolstoy Analysis

The letters Hope and Lonoff read in the morning are a mixture of hero worship and disdain for a Jewish writer in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Somehow one of these letters, one that must be similar to the one Amy wrote to Lonoff to ask for his sponsorship to come to America, leads to another outburst from Hope. Amy decides to leave, but before she does, Zuckerman needs to know who she is. Again Amy refuses to mention where she came from, leaving the reader convinced that rather than being Anne Frank, Amy is a German. Zuckerman does not see this obvious truth, however, and it never occurs to him that Amy's roots might have anything to do with Hope's feelings toward her and her relationship with Lonoff. Zuckerman is instead stuck on the idea that she is hiding her whereabouts because she is Anne Frank and she does not want to take away from the power of her diary. To the reader, however, it is clear that Zuckerman has quite an imagination and it has been busy these past twenty four hours.

Lonoff and his wife fight once more and Hope leaves. Amy leave too, disgusted with Hope's behavior and clearly familiar with it. Lonoff chases after his wife, clearly a man who has suffered, but who loves his wife. Zuckerman wondered earlier in the novel where Lonoff got his inspiration for the turmoil his characters suffer when he was living

what appeared to be a happy, simple life. Now the reader understands Lonoff's inspiration even if Zuckerman is still too young to appreciate it himself.



# Characters

## Nathan Zuckerman

Nathan Zuckerman is a writer who recalls twenty years before when he was just beginning his career, he went to visit the home of his favorite author, E.I. Lonoff. Zuckerman imposes of the writer in the hopes that he will find a mentor in this established author. Zuckerman reacts to everything about this author as a great fan of a rock star might react to meeting their idol. Zuckerman hangs on Lonoff's every word, imagining things about Lonoff that are not necessarily true. Zuckerman is just like the man other fans of this writer who want some of his genius to rub off on them, but he does not see it.

Zuckerman has had a falling out with his girlfriend after she discovered Zuckerman had had a one night stand with one of her friends. In an attempt to be honest, Zuckerman also tells her about the dozen other women he had slept with during their relationship. The girl became infuriated, which confused Zuckerman who imagined she would be pleased with his honesty, so he ran away from the situation to stay at a writer's commune for a month. At the same time, Zuckerman has had a falling out with his family over a short story he wrote based on a true story of a family dispute over some money. Zuckerman's father believes this story to be a perpetuation of the stereotype Gentiles hold against Jews. Zuckerman disagrees and therefore refuses to speak to his family about the situation any further.

There is a girl staying with Lonoff when Zuckerman arrives at his home. Zuckerman instantly falls in love with this beautiful girl and begins to fantasize about her relationship to Lonoff. At first Zuckerman believes the girl to be Lonoff's daughter or granddaughter, but when he learns she is a former student of Lonoff's, Zuckerman begins imagining that the old writer is having an affair with the girl. When Lonoff's wife practically accuses him of the same thing at dinner. Zuckerman begins to dream up a whole backstory to the girl and her relationship with Lonoff. In the end, neither the reader nor Zuckerman are ever completely sure if Lonoff is having an affair with the girl, but it does not seem to matter because the girl is out of Zuckerman's league.

## E.I. 'Manny' Lonoff

E.I. Lonoff is a Jewish writer who has been publishing short stories for more than twenty years before his writing finally becomes something of a cultural phenomenon. Zuckerman discovers Lonoff's writing in college and becomes a huge fan. Zuckerman writes Lonoff a letter and asks permission to visit the writer and permission is granted. Lonoff invites Zuckerman into his home and even allows him to spend the night. As Zuckerman talks with the old writer, he finds a man who is easily distracted and interested in little about the culture of writing. Lonoff claims over and over that he would



be perfectly happy to sit in the middle of nowhere and turn sentences for the rest of his life. Lonoff is a writer at heart and he cares very little for popularity or recognition.

While Zuckerman is visiting Lonoff, Lonoff fights with his wife. Hope Lonoff is convinced that her husband needs to have an affair with his former student in order to find some happiness in his life. Lonoff continuously claims that he does not want the young woman, that he is happy just writing, but the woman persists. Zuckerman gets it into his head that Lonoff is having an affair and makes up a whole narrative about the relationship, and is almost sad to see reality appear to turn in a different direction.

## Hope Lonoff

Hope Lonoff has been married to E.I. Lonoff for nearly thirty years. Hope is the daughter of wealthy southerners who married below her station in life when she married Lonoff. Hope and Lonoff have three children together who are now fully grown and living their own lives. While Zuckerman is staying with the couple, Hope accuses her husband of never doing anything to make himself happy. Hope claims all she has ever wanted for her husband is happiness. Due to this, Hope tells Lonoff he should have an affair with a former student. Hope claims that this affair would finally make Lonoff happy. Lonoff ignores his wife's pleas, causing her to leave the room in anger. The following day, Hope makes the same declaration, this time in front of the young woman, then packs her bags to leave. Once again Lonoff denies his wife's claims and chases after her, determined to make her stay.

## Amy Bellette

Amy Bellette is a young woman who wrote a letter to Lonoff several years in the past to ask for his help in coming to America. Lonoff thought the young girl was highly intelligent, so he sponsored her to come to America and attend classes at the university where he teaches several times a week. Amy has since graduated and has a good job with Harvard University. Amy is visiting the Lonoffs the same weekend Zuckerman visits. Zuckerman falls instantly in love with Amy without speaking a word to her. Zuckerman is enchanted with her looks and with the soft hint of an accent in her voice.

That night, Zuckerman is sleeping in the study and he overhears Amy and Lonoff speaking in a room above him. Zuckerman imagines that Amy is really Anne Frank, a survivor of the Holocaust in Europe. Zuckerman imagines how strong Amy had to have been to survive the atrocities she saw and to keep her mouth shut when she realized her father had had her private diaries published. This narrative excites Zuckerman, making him fall even deeper in love with Amy. However, the two never truly speak to one another and Amy leaves while Lonoff and his wife are fighting.



## Dr. Zuckerman

Dr. Zuckerman is Nathan Zuckerman's father. Dr. Zuckerman is a podiatrist. Zuckerman has always shared his writing with his father while he was in college, so he thought nothing of sending his father a short story he had written about a family feud between a couple of cousins that had taken place a few years earlier. However, Dr. Zuckerman is offended by this short story, believing that his son has written a story that perpetuates the stereotype of the Jew, that they always fight over money and that they are all greedy. This belief leads Dr. Zuckerman to approach a respected Jewish judge and ask him to talk to Zuckerman about the story. Zuckerman is offended and decides not to write the judge back, further infuriating his father. It is this feud between father and son that causes Zuckerman to have a fantasy that Amy, a girl he knows next to nothing about, is Anne Frank.

## Essie and Sidney

Essie is a widowed cousin of Zuckerman's who was left widowed with twin boys. A great aunt left these boys all her money in order to pay for their education. Any money remaining was to go to another cousin, Sidney. When Essie's children graduate college, they decide they would like to go to medical school. Sidney feels as though their great aunt did not intend for the money to pay for anything beyond college. The two fight for quite a while before they finally go to court. The judge sides in Sidney's favor, leaving Essie forced to work to pay for her children to finish their education. It is on this story that Zuckerman bases his story, Higher Education.

## Judge and Mrs. Wapter

When Zuckerman writes a short story based on the story of two of his cousins fighting over money, Dr. Zuckerman turns to Judge Wapter to try to talk some sense into his young son. Judge Wapter is a highly respected Jewish judge whom everyone in Zuckerman's neighborhood always turns to when they need a referral for college or advice. Wapter reads Zuckerman's story and shares it with his wife. Together, Wapter and his wife write a letter to Zuckerman, including a list of questions, that make it clear they also feel that Zuckerman is perpetuating a stereotype and that he should be doing more to promote a more benevolent opinion of Jews. Zuckerman is so offended by this letter that he refuses to answer it despite the horror this causes his parents.

## Betsy

Betsy is Zuckerman's girlfriend. Betsy is a professional dancer. When Betsy learns that Zuckerman slept with one of her friends, she confronts him. Zuckerman not only admits to the one affair, but he admits to many others he also had. Betsy is so outraged that she screams at Zuckerman and breaks many of the dishes they bought together when



they moved in with one another. It is to escape Betsy's wrath that Zuckerman decides to spend a month at a writer's commune.

## **Anne Frank**

Anne Frank is a young woman who lived in Amsterdam during World War II. Anne Frank's father managed to hide his family in the attic of a business when he learned the Nazis were imprisoning Jews. The family remained in hiding for more than a year. During that time, Anne Frank kept a diary. Eventually the family was found and sent to concentration camps. Anne, her sister, and her mother all died in the concentration camps. Otto Frank, Anne's father, was the sole survivor. After the war, Otto returns to the attic and learns that the owners found Anne's diary. Otto decides to have the diary published.

## **Teddy**

Teddy is a young man who works in Judge Wapter's office. Teddy is the young man Dr. Zuckerman calls anytime he wants to speak to the judge. Dr. Zuckerman called Teddy when Zuckerman needed a referral to college. Teddy is also the person Dr. Zuckerman calls when he needs help persuading Zuckerman that his short story, Higher Education, should never be published.





# Objects/Places

## Letters

Lonoff receives many letters every day, some fan letters, some letters denouncing his literary work, and many letters asking for help from aspiring writers. Lonoff met Amy through one such letter.

## Multi-colored Paper

Lonoff writes on paper of different colors to distinguish between drafts of his novels.

## Dishes

Lonoff's wife breaks several dishes after having an argument with him regarding his feelings toward Amy Bellette.

## Lonoff's Desk

Zuckerman stands on Lonoff's desk in order to eavesdrop and hear what Lonoff is saying to Amy in the room upstairs.

## Higher Education

Higher Education is a short story Zuckerman wrote about a dispute over money between several members of his family. The story causes a rift between Zuckerman and his father because Zuckerman's father believes the story places Jewish people in a poor light.

## The Middle Years

The Middle Years is a short story by Henry James that chronicles the declining years of a novelist. Zuckerman reads this short story while staying in Lonoff's home after Lonoff makes reference to it even though he has already read it several times.

## The Diary of Anne Frank

Diary of Anne Frank is published sometime before Zuckerman comes to visit with Lonoff. Zuckerman imagines that Amy Bellette, a young woman staying with Lonoff, claims to be Anne Frank and to have written the diary.



## **The Saturday Review**

The Saturday Review is a weekly publication that printed a blurb on Zuckerman as one of the up and coming new writers in New York.

## **Stage Play of The Diary of Anne Frank**

A production of Diary of Anne Frank is playing at a theater in New York. It is suggested by the Wapters that Zuckerman go to see the play.

## **Lonoff's Farm**

Lonoff lives on a farm in the Berkshires, secluded from the literary world by choice. Zuckerman comes here to visit Lonoff whom he proclaims is his favorite writer and hopes Lonoff will become a mentor to him.

## **Quahsay**

Quahsay is where Zuckerman is invited to stay at a writer's retreat. Quahsay is near Lonoff's farm, making this time a perfect opportunity to visit his favorite author.

## **Belsen**

Belsen is the name of the concentration camp where Anne Frank reportedly died. In Zuckerman's imagination, Amy professes to have memories of time spent in this concentration camp.



# Themes

## Being Jewish

Zuckerman writes a humorous short story about a true event that took place in his family. The story told how one member of the family sued another over money left for the education of a relative's grandchildren. A cousin thought the education ended when the children finished college even though the children wanted to continue on to medical school. The children's mother felt the money should also pay for medical school. The cousin one and wasted the money on a parking structure while the mother worked to pay for her children's medical school cost. When Zuckerman shows this story to his father, whom he has always shared his work with, the father believes the story shows Jew's in a poor light. The father believes that because Zuckerman is Jewish, he should write stories that only show Jews in a good light rather than allow his stories to perpetuate the stereotype Gentiles tend to believe in regards to Jews. Zuckerman insists that his story is based on reality and in that way represents Jews faithfully, therefore he refuses to apologize or change the story in any way.

At the same time this argument is taking place, the book *Diary of Anne Frank* has been released and is gaining in popularity. A young woman who is a friend of Lonoff and his wife claims in Zuckerman's imagination that she is Anne Frank. This girl claims she survived the concentration camps and changed her name in order to avoid the reactions she often receives when people learn of her time in the concentration camps. This young woman has turned her back on her Jewish heritage in an attempt to avoid notoriety and the overwhelming empathy that comes with her story.

The two young people in this novel appear to have chosen to turn their backs on their Jewish ancestry at a time when Jewish people are often in the news because of the war that ended just a decade before. The word of the atrocities Jewish people experienced during the war is still only beginning to reach the general population and books like *Diary of Anne Frank* are beginning to express the depth of the tragedy that unfolded during the war. Due to these things, Jewish leaders shy away from anything that appears to perpetuate the Jewish stereotypes and causes any kind of animosity against Jews. As a result, both Amy and Zuckerman find themselves struggling with their own identities and turning away from the stereotype of the Jewish faith that they are accused of perpetuating. It is this that makes being Jewish a theme of the novel.

## Aspirations/Hero Worship

Zuckerman is an aspiring writer. Zuckerman has been published a few times, but he has yet to find the voice that will help him become the novelist he hopes to one day be. Zuckerman has come to Lonoff, hoping the older man will take him under his wing and help form the novelist Zuckerman knows exists inside of himself. Zuckerman admires



Lonoff greatly, seeing Lonoff as the person he wants to be. This causes Zuckerman to treat Lonoff as though he is a rock star, aspiring to be all that he believes Lonoff to be.

At the same time, Lonoff is an established writer who is beginning to find fame where once he existed in near obscurity. Lonoff shuns success, preferring to keep to himself and to live in peaceful solitude. Lonoff sees himself as a sentence turner, a man who turns sentences over and over until they sound as he believes they ought to be. Lonoff does not see himself as famous, as a novelist, or as a great literary mind. However, Lonoff allows Zuckerman to compare him to other great literary minds.

Amy Bellette dreams of being a famous writer. Amy has come to America to become a student to Lonoff's teachings. Amy wants to write the great American novel, to have the same sort of life Lonoff has found. In her own way, Amy also worships Lonoff as a great writer, as her idol. This great admiration on Amy's part is obvious to everyone, except perhaps Zuckerman. Amy wants to be as close to Lonoff as possible, perhaps even aching to share his bed. It is this worship of Lonoff on Amy's part that attributes to Hope's unhappiness and determination to see her husband with Amy.

## Family Loyalty

When Zuckerman writes his short story about the family his father sees it as a slap in the face to the entire family. Not only this, Zuckerman sees it as a slap in the face of all Jews. Zuckerman's father thinks a Jewish writer should use his talent to perpetuate a good opinion of all Jews rather than furthering the stereotypes Gentiles believe about Jews. When Zuckerman refuses to change his story his father becomes upset, asking a respected Jewish judge to talk to Zuckerman. To Zuckerman this feels like a reprimand and it causes him to feel like a child who has displeased his beloved family. Zuckerman feels as though his loyalty to both his faith and his family is being questioned.

When Zuckerman goes to visit Lonoff, he hopes Lonoff will look to him as an adopted son, helping to guide him in his writing career. Zuckerman does not believe this is disloyal to his own father, he simply separates the two in his mind. To the reader, however, Zuckerman's actions do appear to be somewhat disloyal, as though he is doing the same thing to his father that he feels his father did to him in reaction to his story. Zuckerman has turned his back on his father as mentor just as his father turned on him as unconditional supporter.

At the same time, Lonoff's wife has turned on her husband. Lonoff's wife seems to believe that Lonoff is either having an affair or wants to have an affair with Amy Bellette. Lonoff's wife repeatedly tells him that he has never put himself first, that he has never chosen to be happy, and that she now wants him to be happy. Mrs. Lonoff even threatens to walk out on her husband in an attempt to give him the space he needs to be with Amy. Mrs. Lonoff believes she is continuing to support her husband by allowing him to have Amy, but Lonoff sees her actions as selfish and inappropriate. Mrs. Lonoff is testing her husband's loyalty to her, but the reader is never sure if his decision to stay

with his wife confirms that he is not having an affair with Amy or if he is simply attempting to deny the affair to protect his wife's feelings.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The narrator is Nathan Zuckerman, a young writer who is just beginning to experience some success in his career. Zuckerman has come to visit Lonoff, an established writer who is just beginning to experience fame after publishing for more than twenty years. Zuckerman admires Lonoff's writing and hopes he will serve as a mentor to him. The novel takes place over a twenty-four hour period, keeping both the plot and the narration tight. There are a few points, however, where the narration moves into a third person point of views. These points take place when Zuckerman relates Amy's story, relating it to the reader through her viewpoint as she told her story to Lonoff.

The point of view in this novel works because it is a very short novel that tells a very simple story. If the point of view shifted from the main character to one or more of the minor characters, the plot would become too complicated for the short plot the author is attempting to develop. There is a place in the novel in which the author moves from the first person to the third person point of view, but even in this section the reader can still hear Zuckerman's voice, therefore it is still clearly a story being told from his first person view point.

## Setting

The novel is primarily set at Lonoff's farm house in the Berkshires. This setting is an isolated home miles from the literary hubbub of New York City. Zuckerman is fascinated with this home because it is so far from the rush of New York City, a place Zuckerman thinks is essential to his own budding career. Zuckerman aspires to a career so well established that he can move away from the city. The novel also includes settings in New York City, specifically Zuckerman's own apartment in the city and his family's home in one of the suburbs of the city.

The settings of this novel are highly appropriate for the plot that unfolds within the novel. The main setting, Lonoff's farm, is symbolic of Lonoff's career in Zuckerman's mind. Zuckerman believes that Lonoff has progressed so well in his career that he can afford to live outside the mainstream of the publishing industry. Zuckerman can only dream of becoming so well established that he too can live on an isolated farm one day. Zuckerman's own home is in New York City, the heart of the publishing industry. Zuckerman grew up in a suburb of the city, an area close to the publishing industry by a map, but a long distance by industry standards. Zuckerman sees the area where he grew up as a long way from publishing stardom, but in reality this distance is only in his own mind.



## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is educated English peppered with the occasional slang appropriate to the time of the novel's setting and the religious background of the characters. The novel is set in the 1950s, a short time after the Second World War ended. The Second World War has an important bearing on the novel because of the Holocaust against the Jews that took place in Europe. Zuckerman and Lonoff are both Jewish while Amy Bellette might be the famous Jewish diary writer, Anne Frank. The language of the novel is heavily influenced by both the setting and the religious background of the novel's characters.

The language of the novel works well because the author has allowed the background of his characters to influence the language. The language is highly educated, influencing the language of the characters, all of them writers except for Lonoff's wife. All of the characters are also Jewish, including Amy Bellette who claims to Lonoff, in Zuckerman's imagination, that she is the writer of a famous book, *Diary of Anne Frank*. The reader might expect this religious background to cause the language to include Yiddish words, but the language of the novel does not include many of these traditional words. This is because the characters in this novel have either shunned their religious backgrounds for various reasons or because the characters believe Yiddish is stereotypical of Jews and they are attempting to avoid these stereotypes in both their writing and their personal lives.

## Structure

The novel is divided into four chapters titled with names or descriptions of characters important to the chapters. Each chapter is fairly long, each more than thirty pieces each. The novel is told completely from Zuckerman's point of view in the first person in the style of a personal diary or first person account of a non-fiction story. For this reason, most of the novel is comprised of exposition with dialogue only appearing at points in the novel when Zuckerman is speaking to Lonoff or one of the other characters, or when Zuckerman overhears conversations between other characters. This dialogue tends to be brief and somewhat summarized.

The novel contains two distinct plots. The first is Zuckerman's visit to Lonoff in an attempt to ask the writer to be something of a mentor and to help guide Zuckerman's budding career. The second plot revolves around the mysterious Amy Bellette. Amy is a young woman who came to the United States in order to attend the university where Lonoff teaches. When the book, *Diary of Anne Frank*, comes out, Amy claims to Lonoff that she is Anne Frank. This is an exciting idea to Zuckerman, he has begun to fall in love with the idea of Amy without even having talked to her. This plot is further complicated when Lonoff's wife begins to suggest that Lonoff and Amy are having an affair. Both plots come to an end at the same time, however, neither is clearly concluded.



## Quotes

"When I had recently raised his name before the jury at my first Manhattan publishing party—I'd arrived, excited as a starlet, on the arm of an elderly editor—Lonoff was almost immediately disposed of by the wits on hand as though it were comical that a Jew of his generation, an immigrant child to begin with, should have married the scion of an old New England family and lived all these years 'in the country'—that is to say, in the goyish wilderness of birds and trees where America began and long ago had ended." Chapter 1, Maestro, pg. 4

"To me the lined face and the shadowy, timorous manner bore witness to a grinding history of agonized childbearing and escapes from the Indians, of famine and fevers and wagon-train austerities—I just couldn't believe that she could look so worn down from living alongside E.I. Lonoff while he wrote short stories for thirty years." Chapter 1, Maestro, pg. 31

"Bold honesty, of course, produced far more terrible results than if I had only confessed to seducing the wily seductress and left it at that; nobody had asked me about anybody else. But carried away by the idea that if I were a perfidious brute, I at least would be a truthful perfidious brute, I was crueler than was either necessary or intended." Chapter 1, Maestro, pgs. 36-37

"I sat—suing myself, as the man said." Chapter 1, Maestro, pg. 55

"Before the night was over I was to read 'The Middle Years' twice through, as though preparing to be examined on it in the morning. But that was canon law to me then: ready to write a thousand words on 'What does Henry James mean by "the madness of art"?' if the question should happen to turn up on my paper napkin at breakfast." Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus, pg. 77

"Our trouble had begun when I gave my father the manuscript of a story based on an old family feud in which he had played peacemaker for nearly two years before the opponents ended up shouting in court. The story was the most ambitious I had written—some fifteen thousand words—and, as I saw it, my motives for sending it to him were no less benign than those I'd had in college, when I mailed home poems for the family to read even before they appeared in the student verse magazine." Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus, pg. 79

"But what about sons? It wasn't Flaubert's father or Joyce's father who had impugned me for my recklessness—it was my own. Nor was it the Irish he claimed I had maligned and misrepresented, but the Jews. Of which I was one. Of which, only some five thousands days past, there had been millions more." Chapter 2, Nathan Dedalus, pgs. 110-111





"Van Anne Frank. Her book. Hers." Chapter 3, *Femme Fatale*, pg. 134

"How could even the most obtuse of the ordinary ignore what had been done to the Jews just for being Jews, how could even the most benighted of the Gentiles fail to get the idea when they read in *Het Achterhuis* that once a year the Franks sang a harmless Chanukah song, said some Hebrew words, lighted some candles, exchanged some presents—a ceremony lasting about ten minutes—and that was all it took to make them the enemy." Chapter 3, *Femme Fatale*, pg. 144

"Of course he told Hope nothing about who Amy thought she was. But he didn't have to, he could guess what she would say if he did: it was for him, the great writer, that Amy had chosen to become Anne Frank; that explained it all, no psychiatrist required. For him, as a consequence of her infatuation: to exchange him, to bewitch him, to break through the scrupulosity and the wisdom and the virtue into his imagination, and there, as Anne Frank, to become E.I. Lonoff's femme fatale." Chapter 3, *Femme Fatale*, pg. 155

"On her head was the white wool cap with the long tassel that ended in a fluffy white ball. Of course! He had given it to her, her first winter here in the Berkshires; and now she could not part with it, no more than she could part with him, her second Pim." Chapter 4, *Married to Tolstoy*, pg. 167

"'It's like being married to Tolstoy,' he said, and left me to make feverish notes while he started off after the runaway spouse, some five minutes now into her doomed journey in search of a less noble calling." Chapter 4, *Married to Tolstoy*, pg. 180



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Nathan Zuckerman. Who is Nathan Zuckerman? Why has he come to visit Lonoff? What does Zuckerman hope to get from Lonoff? Why? Are Zuckerman's expectations reasonable? Why or why not?

Discuss Lonoff. Does Lonoff like begin a writer? Why is Lonoff's work only just beginning to gain recognition? What is the result of this new found celebrity? Why does Lonoff live on a farm? What is Lonoff avoiding?

Discuss Amy Bellette. Who is Amy Bellette? Why has she come to America? What does Amy want from Lonoff? How does this compare to what Zuckerman wants from Lonoff? Is Amy having an affair with Lonoff?

Who is Anne Frank? Why does Amy believe she is Anne Frank? Is Amy Anne Frank? How does this belief affect Zuckerman? Is Zuckerman in love with Amy? Why does Amy choose not to tell anyone but Lonoff that she is Anne Frank? What does this say about Amy?

Discuss Mrs. Lonoff. Why does Lonoff's wife insist he have an affair with Amy? Is Lonoff having an affair? Would he admit it to his wife if he were? Why or why not? Does Lonoff's wife really want him to be with Amy? Why?

Discuss Higher Education. Why did Zuckerman write this short story? Why does Zuckerman's father not like the story? Is this story offensive to Jews? Why or why not? Why is Zuckerman expected to write stories about Jews that place them in a good light rather than perpetuating a stereotype, even if the stereotype is right? Is this an honest thing to do? Should a Jewish writer think about stereotypes when writing short stories? Why or why not?

Discuss the letters Lonoff receives. What are these letters? What are the writers hoping to achieve with these letters? Why does Mrs. Lonoff apologize to Amy while reading one of these letters? How do these letters parallel the letters both Amy and Zuckerman sent to Lonoff? What do these letters say about Zuckerman's hope of making Lonoff his mentor?