Hollywood Study Guide

Hollywood by Charles Bukowski

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This novel is a barely fictionalized memoir of the writing and production of the Hollywood film "Barfly". Bemused screenwriter Hank Chinaski observes and narrates the story of a group of ambitious individuals with big personalities and even bigger dreams striving to gain control in an industry where control is a greater illusion than what plays out on the screen. As it satirizes Hollywood's excesses, attitudes and self-obsessions, the novel also explores themes related to the nature and craft of writing and the differences between reality and fiction.

The narrative begins in the aftermath of a telephone conversation between Chinaski and producer/director Jon Pinchot, who is desperate to make a film based on a screenplay, any screenplay, written by the renowned and respected author. The hard-drinking Chinaski, reluctant to turn his talents to a form of writing he believes to be less substantial than the forms in which he usually works (poetry and fiction), eventually agrees, and starts work on an autobiographical narrative inspired by his experiences as a young alcoholic writer.

As Chinaski writes (with the support of his patient wife Sarah), he receives repeated telephone calls from Pinchot updating him on the search for financing to make the film . There are conversations with potential star actors, meetings with various producers, agreements that get made and then broken. On every conceivable occasion, large amounts of alcohol are consumed. Eventually, as Chinaski and Sarah embark on a quest for home ownership inspired by the visit of a forceful tax accountant, the screenplay edges closer to completion, and a deal to produce the film is put in place ... and falls apart, and is put in place again, and falls apart again. Finally, though, the screenplay is completed, and a deal is put in place for good. Movie stars Jack Bledsoe and Francine Bowers sign contracts, producer Harry Friedman agrees to handle the money, shooting begins, and Chinaski (now living in a new house with Sarah and their five cats) resumes his regular routine of working on poetry, making regular visits to the racetrack, and drinking.

During shooting, Chinaski and Sarah are frequently struck by how sets, locations, and performances both evoke the reality remembered by Chinaski and get the emotional weight of his story and experiences wrong. Chinaski eventually realizes that he has no real hope of seeing the reality of what he lived and remembers portrayed on the screen, and lets the nature of film-making take its course. Meanwhile, Bledsoe and Bowers make what seems to be excessive demands, Friedman continually protests there is no money to pay the bills (at one point shutting down production altogether), and Pinchot repeatedly turns to Chinaski for both reassurance and advice. For his part, Chinaski continues to take refuge in alcohol and betting at the track.

Shooting is eventually completed, and as Pinchot is assembling an edited version of the final film, Chinaski returns to his routine of writing, drinking, gambling, and caring for the cats. Once the editing process is completed, and following a preview for industry insiders, Chinaski asks that the film be given a grand Hollywood premiere. Pinchot

agrees, but at the post-showing party, Chinaski realizes how empty the people there all seem to be, and leaves early. After attending a public showing of the movie and enduring the negative comments of several audience members, Chinaski and Sarah realize the project is finally, thoroughly done, and settle back into their domestic routine for good, with Chinaski commenting that his next project is going to be a novel based on his experiences.

Part 1 - Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Part 1 - Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Summary

This novel is a barely fictionalized memoir of the writing and production of the Hollywood film "Barfly". Bemused screenwriter Hank Chinaski (an avatar for renowned writer Charles Bukowski) narrates the story of a group of ambitious individuals with big personalities and even bigger dreams striving to gain control in an industry where control is a greater illusion than what plays out on the screen. As it satirizes Hollywood's excesses, attitudes and self-obsessions, the novel also explores themes related to the nature and craft of writing and the differences between reality and fiction.

Chapter 1 - Hank begins his first person narrative by saying that "a couple of days later Pinchot phoned", inviting him to a meeting to discuss the possibility of Hank writing a screenplay for him. Accompanied by his wife Sarah, Hank drives, via a marina (where the boats of several very wealthy people are berthed) to Pinchot's home. There, he and Sarah are met by a man Hank describes in narration as obviously "artistic" and whom Sarah introduces as the avant garde opera director Paul Renoir. All three pour themselves drinks and settle down to wait for Pinchot, with Hank describing, in narration, how he and Sarah once jokingly referred to themselves as Scott and Zelda (F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda). Pinchot eventually arrives, and all four settle down to some serious drinking, which Hank says is necessary to get him in the mood to discuss writing a screenplay. That night, after drinking too much to drive home, Sarah and Hank are offered a place to sleep. As they're drinking one last glass of wine, Sarah asks Hank whether he really is going to write a screenplay. "Hell no," Hank answers.

Chapter 2 - At another meeting at Pinchot's, prior to attending a screening of one of his documentaries, Hank and Sarah meet Francois Racine, a French actor whom Pinchot uses frequently in his films. Racine, addicted to gambling, declines an invitation to go to the screening because he wants to stay home and continue developing his system for predicting the winners of the roulette wheel.

Chapter 3 - At the screening, Hank meets daredevil director Wenner Zergog, who sits in and watches Pinchot's film, a documentary on ruthless, deluded African dictator Lido Mamin. When Hank compliments Pinchot on the effectiveness of the documentary, Pinchot comments that he admires strange men, which is why he (Pinchot) is looking forward to working with Hank. Hank comments ironically that he is honored to be in the same category as the evidently demented Mamin.

Chapter 4 - Back at Pinchot's home, Hank, Sarah and Pinchot discover that Racine is still there, still practicing. Over a first round of drinks, Pinchot rants in curse-filled, colorful language about a recent trip he and Pinchot took to Las Vegas, during which he lost thousands of dollars. At the end of his story, he and Hank half-seriously agree to share the work on the screenplay. Pinchot indicates he wants only Hank to write it, and the quartet toasts the beginning (Hank comments in narration) of a good night.

Part 1 - Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

The most important element to note about this section, and indeed about the novel in general, is the thin veneer of fiction the author lays over a series of truths, some concealed less successfully than others. Many of these truths include the identities of the real-life individuals upon whom some of the characters are based. For example, Lido Mamin is a barely disguised portrait of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin (with, incidentally, the reference to Mamin foreshadowing a moment in Part 6, Chapter 21, in which dictatorial and over-emotional movie producer Harry Friedman is likened to him). At the core of the narrative is another other widely acknowledged truth - that the script and film developed and produced in the narrative (referred to in the text as "The Dance of Jim Beam") is based upon the script and film "Barfly". When that fact is taken into account, other clear parallels in terms of the book's characters emerge - Jon Pinchot can be seen as a portrait of real-life director Barbet Schroeder, with other characters later associated with the film, particularly actors Jack Bledsoe and Francine Bowers, having equally obvious parallels.

Meanwhile, the brief appearance of Paul Renoir (in Hollywood terms, a "cameo") is also important to note, again for several reasons. First, given the entwined relationship between fact and fiction that exists throughout the novel, there is the sense that these cameos are glimpses of similarly masked Hollywood personalities. A related point is that there is also the sense that the cameos, and indeed all the parallels, are something of an in-joke, understandable only by people who know Hollywood, know the author, and know the world of filmmaking in general and the circumstances of "Barfly" in particular. In other words, the author seems to intend that someone in the know will recognize "Paul Renoir" for who he truly is, and have a bit of a laugh (ironic or otherwise) at the satirical point being made by his presence. Finally, Renoir's cameo is the first of several appearances by characters who, throughout the novel, seem to be important (i.e., vividly described and given significant emotional weight) but who actually have little to do with the story. This is a manifestation of one of the narrative's important sub-themes: The Appearance of Importance.

Another important point in this section is the question of whether Hank is actually going to write the screenplay which, as the narrative soon makes clear, is answered in the affirmative in spite of Hank's assertion at the end of chapter one. The question of why Hank ultimately does write the screenplay is never directly addressed by the narrative. Possibilities for his decision include money (his ten thousand dollar fee), curiosity (to see whether he can actually do it), ego (being flattered into it by the obviously sycophantic Pinchot), and memory (a desire to re-connect with his past). While none of these appear to be the single defining factor in his decision to write the screenplay, all play roles in defining Hank's experiences and reactions throughout the narrative.

Finally, there is the introduction of the character of Francois Racine, who may or may not have an obvious parallel, and whose melodramatic excesses of personality, which recur throughout the narrative, can be seen as a sub-plot illuminating and

counterpointing the similarly intense (but somewhat less eccentric) excesses of other personalities within the Hollywood community.

Part 2 - Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Part 2 - Chapters 5, 6 and 7 Summary

Chapter 5 - At a popular Hollywood bar called Musso's, Hank encounters a potential backer of the film to be made from Hank's screenplay. When the producer reveals the name of the film he just produced (on the life of writer Mack Derouac), Hank ridicules it, and the producer walks away. Shortly afterward, Sarah rejoins Hank, who tells her he may have just messed up a potential deal with the producer. When Sarah says he should apologize, Hank refuses, suddenly having the idea he (Hank) should write a screenplay about himself.

Chapter 6 - Pinchot takes Hank and Sarah to a Beverly Hills hotel to meet Jean-Paul Sanrah, a potential investor in the film. At Sanrah's hotel room, they are introduced to Jon-Paul Modard, a genius French filmmaker. After being roused from sleep, Sanrah throws a series of tantrums and then goes back to bed. After he's gone, Modard starts talking, referring to Hank's work as genius. At first Hank is flattered, but quickly becomes bored and increasingly drunk, tuning Modard out. The next morning, Hank is awakened by a phone call from Pinchot, who excitedly congratulates him for getting Modard, who never talks to anyone, to talk for as long as he did. He then reveals that Sanrah will fund the film only if Pinchot has "suffered". After Hank hangs up, he attempts to go back to sleep, but is awakened by Sarah's cat.

Chapter 7 - That night, after a couple of drinks and a few cigarettes, Hank sits down to write, but nothing comes. He calls Pinchot and says that he (Hank) accepts Pinchot's offer of ten thousand dollars to write the screenplay, adding that he wants the money up front. Pinchot agrees to put the check in the mail. After hanging up, Hank puts down the first line of his screenplay and is off and running. His work is interrupted by a phone call from his German agent and translator who tells Hank a crude joke and then reveals that he (the agent) has just negotiated a highly successful publishing contract for Hank. When Hank hangs up, and after commenting in narration that "thirty years of starvation and rejection were starting to kick in", he gets back to work. The narrative then shifts into screenplay format, narrating a scene between a young man ("who sits on a barstool as if he had been there for eternity" and a bartender) that includes the crude joke from Hank's telephone conversation and a story told by the young man about a story he wrote in school. That story, the young man says, was about his "most memorable experience", and was so successful when it was read in class that he decided he wanted to be a writer. At the end of the scene, Hank finishes work for the day, adding in narration that he doesn't remember going to bed, but woke up there in the morning.

Part 2 - Chapters 5, 6 and 7 Analysis

Several important elements are introduced in this section. Primary among these is the novel's contemplation and/or examination of the process of writing, said contemplation

being one of the book's secondary themes. That theme is introduced in two different ways. First, there is the appearance of the actual screenplay, the vehicle through which Chinaski, the author, and the reader all explore how creative writing both happens and functions. Specifically, because the screenplay is defined as being significantly autobiographical (in the same way as the book itself clearly is), the writing process is defined/portrayed as a mining and exploration of memory and identity, which (in turn) is a manifestation of another of the narrative's secondary themes, the relationship between reality and fiction. The second way in which the book's thematic consideration of writing is explored is through Chinanski's comments on the process, comments that, again because of the novel's thinly fictionalized nature, can reasonably be interpreted as representing the views and experiences of the author. The first of these comments can be found in the quote from p. 37, and while this quote in particular can be seen as referencing the screenplay in particular, several of the other references in the novel to the nature of writing can be seen as applying to the screenplay and to the process in general.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to consider the role of money in the creation of the screenplay - the fact that, after agreeing to a fee, hearing the fee is forthcoming, and hearing from his agent about a lucrative contract, Chinaski's creative floodgates suddenly open and he is able to write. There is the sense here that Chinaski, in spite of his perspective on the process as being something personal, artistic, and free of commercialism he is, on some level, already becoming what he later says he fears - part of the money-making story factory that is Hollywood.

Part 3 - Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11

Part 3 - Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 Summary

Chapter 8 - Hank and Sarah meet with accountant Vin Marbad, who convincingly lists a number of ways (including buying a house and setting himself up as a corporation) Hank could save money. As Sarah supports Marbad, Hank worries in narration about "becoming what [he's] always hated". He decides to play along with Marbad, just for a joke, and the three of them (Hank, Sarah, Marbad), continue drinking, "celebrating something".

Chapter 9 - After Hank and Sarah's first attempt at house shopping is met with rejection and disdain from the young representative of Twenty Second Century Housing, they drive to another part of Hollywood to continue their search. They drive past a bar with the intriguing name of Apes Haven, go inside, and are met by a vacant-faced crowd of bikers who all, it seems, have read Hank's work. As Sarah nervously urges Hank to leave, he accepts both the congratulations and the insults of the bikers, realizing how pathetic they are and fighting down the urge to help them. As he and Sarah leave, Sarah wonders whether any intelligent people read his work, and Hank comments that he hopes so, adding that he's remembering his only friend in school, and wondering what happened to him.

Chapter 10 - Hank and Sarah pull into another real estate office. The hard-smoking, rough talking agent takes them to a house at the end of a potholed, rutted road, badly maintained and badly decorated house with a yard as potholed as the road. Left alone to consider their options, Sarah suddenly realizes the house was once owned by serial killer Charles Manson, and becomes desperate to get out. As she and Hank leave, they tell the Realtor they'll keep her contact information and let her know their plans.

Chapter 11 - Back at home, Sarah opens wine as Hank opens two envelopes that came in the mail. The first is an angry, curse-filled letter condemning him for having sold out his talent and sending him some (profoundly self-indulgent) poetry to review and send to a publisher. The second envelope is from Vin Marbad, and contains a statement of conditions and policies for the setting up of Hank's corporation. As Hank reads it, he becomes increasingly angry about the judgmental restrictions it places on him and his behavior, eventually refusing to sign it, commenting that "Charles Manson is not the only killer", leading Sarah to comment in turn how "others do it from a distance and seldom get caught." They resolve to drink until the sun comes up.

Part 3 - Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 Analysis

A particularly intriguing aspect of the narrative is how it appears, in many ways, to be highly episodic in nature, describing incident after incident without obviously linking at least some of those incidents to the overall story. The point is not made to suggest that

in this case there is NO story - there clearly one, and one that skillfully unites both plot (the making of the movie), themes (primarily the shallowness of Hollywood's creative process), and character (Chinaski's self-exploration as the result of living through the circumstances defining theme and plot). That said, however, the fact remains that some of these incidents (including, in this section, the encounter with the bikers, the details about the house hunt, the letter from the angry poet) seem, at first glance, to have relatively little to do with that story. Certainly, the detailed way in which the incidents are described creates both a vivid image and a degree of entertainment value, which is not necessarily a bad thing and which, in fact, may in fact be a further evocation of the novel's thematic consideration of "The Appearance of Importance". Ultimately, however, it's possible to see something even more significant at work in these apparent narrative detours - Hank's on-going quest (both conscious and unconscious) for some kind of value to both his life and his work.

Part 4 - Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15

Part 4 - Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15 Summary

Chapter 12 - In narration, Hank describes the apartment he's leaving behind (defining it as a safe place to drink, have hangovers, and have a lot of sex) and the neighborhood in which the apartment is situated (now over-populated with Central American immigrants). He says his choice to move was NOT "white flight", but rather the result of Vin Marbad's suggestion that he buy a house. He concludes the chapter with a description of the two-story home he and Sarah eventually bought, suggesting that once he sat down with his typewriter, everything still worked. "Don't let anybody tell you different," he writes. "Life begins at 65."

Chapter 13 - Shortly after moving into the house, Hank receives a call from Jon Pinchot, explaining saying that Francois has gone to Europe to make a film and that their house is about to be bulldozed. Hank invites him to stay in the downstairs bedroom, and Jon accepts. Sarah warns Hank that having Jon around will drive him crazy, but Hank says it will only be for a few days. After Jon moves in he, Hank and Sarah spend a couple of nights drinking and telling stories, with Jon saying how he's known for years that he was going to work on a screenplay written by Hank, and describing the intense, extreme at times off-putting, lengths to which he's gone in order to get the money to do so. At the end of one of his stories, Sarah asks why he puts himself through such suffering. Jon tells her that he does it because he loves making movies.

Chapter 14 - At Jon's suggestion, Hank and Sarah attend the screening of a movie set in a community of down-and-outs. They arrive late, having first rushed to get a couple of bottles of wine. Hank comments in narration that the film (in which the characters all celebrate how Christ transformed their lives), its sets, and its characters all seem incredibly artificial. Some of these comments he also whispers to Sarah, much to the displeasure of the other people in the audience. When the film ends, he and Sarah leave, realizing that the audience was entirely composed of members of Alcoholics Anonymous. They get in their car and, as Hank says in narration, head back "toward reality".

Chapter 15 - At his desk, Hank struggles to move forward with the screenplay, knowing that Jon is downstairs listening for the sound of work. Instead of working, however, Hank writes a letter to a friend analyzing his (Hank's) system of betting on horses and commenting on how he doesn't like to do the same thing for too long. After the letter's finished, he goes downstairs and apologetically tells Jon that he (Hank) can't work with Jon in the house. Jon says he was planning to leave anyway - Francois got fired from his job and is coming home. Jon then asks if he can read the little of the screenplay Hank has written, and Hank agrees. After Jon has finished, they drink late into the night, and the next morning Hank discovers that Jon has gone, leaving behind a note congratulating him on the quality of the screenplay and saying he'll let him know how to contact him later.

Part 4 - Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15 Analysis

A new motif, or repeated image, appears in this section - that of home, developed throughout the novel in a variety of ways. Specifically, Hank's movement to a house represents and manifests important shifts/transformations in his life (increased creativity, working in a new literary medium, increased domesticity with Sarah), shifts that emerge almost in spite of the fact the purchase of the house was/is inspired by purely financial concerns. The ultimately positive value of these shifts (highlighted by the contrasting description of the somewhat debauched life he lived in his apartment in his younger days) is summed up by Hank's comment in narration at the end of chapter twelve which indicate that he is starting fresh, the domesticity of life in the house representing the grounded-ness in reality that he truly wants and values. This is in direct opposition to the insecurity-defined flightiness of life in the film industry by which he is intrigued, into which he is drawn, and out of which he gets as soon as he can.

On another front, the motif of "home" also appears in Jon's life, specifically in leaving of his home and moving into a new one (which takes place in the following chapters). The circumstances of that new life metaphorically highlight and/or reflect the sort of life he feels comfortable living - one of danger and uncertainty, arguably appropriate to a movie producer/director. As such, Jon's life forms a clear and defining contrast to the sort of life that Hank, in moving into the house, seems to becoming increasingly comfortable living - one of settled-ness, domesticity, and solitude when required.

Meanwhile, the action of chapter fourteen develops the novel's examination of the differences between reality and fiction, with Hank becoming powerfully aware not only of the nature and extent of those differences but of his own growing determination to downplay and/or lessen such differences in the narrative of his life that he is channeling into his screenplay. In other words, he wants it to feel as real to the audience as it did to him living it and still does as he remembers it.

Part 5 - Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19

Part 5 - Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 Summary

Chapter 16 - In the middle of a productive run of work on the screenplay (which, Hank comments in narration, is about a character based on his younger self), he receives an excited phone call from Jon inviting him (Hank) and Sarah to see the place he and Francois have found in a ghetto area. Hank is reluctant, but both Jon and Sarah are insistent. Later, as Hank and Sarah drive through the ghetto, Hank reflects on the very apparent racial tension in the area. When they arrive, Hank and Sarah discover Jon trying to calm a drunken Francois, who is angry about the constant incursions of young black men, particularly their repeated (and occasionally successful) attempts to steal the chickens he keeps in the back yard. Hank, believing that Jon needs a better place to live, offers to refund Jon's payment for the screenplay, but Jon refuses. Later that night, back at work, Hank realizes that the world he's writing about is neither as strange nor as wild as the world he's now living in.

Chapter 17 - After commenting in narration on how writing had never felt like work, Hank describes the completion of the screenplay, his celebratory call to Jon, and Jon's invitation to a party. He and Sarah make their way down to the ghetto, where Jon excitedly takes custody of the screenplay. Hank comments in narration on the shallowness of many of the party's guests, passes his inedible food to a couple of lingering (and very hungry) black children, and leaves quickly when faced again with Francois' despair. On their way home, Hank tells Sarah he wants Francois to play the lead character in the film, commenting that he doesn't think anyone would ever want to see a film about the life of a drunk. He and Sarah then go home to drink more wine.

Chapter 18 - Hank comments in narration how Jon busily sent the screenplay around to several producers and actors, but only got two statements of interest - from actor Tom Pell and director Mack Austin (who is married to pop star Ramona). Jon and Austin, it turns out, hate each other, and at a meeting intended to come to some kind of agreement (at which Austin is the only person not drinking), end up refusing to compromise their positions. Jon reacts with fury, even calling his lawyer in Paris to add a paragraph to his will, stating that if he died, any director in the world could take over the direction of Hank's screenplay (now identified as "The Dance of Jim Beam") ... any director, that is, BUT Mack Austin. Hank concludes the narration of this chapter with a comment on how difficult it always was to get his cats to come in from outside.

Chapter 19 - Hank, Sarah and Jon visit another actor, Jack Bledsoe, interested in playing the lead in "Jim Beam". Hank comments in narration on the rivalry between Bledsoe and Pell, and describes how Bledsoe, for some reason, has a towel plugging his sink. Conversation about the film now includes a reference to actress Francine Bowers who, according to Bledsoe, is interested in playing the female lead. As he's leaving, Hank asks Bledsoe about the towel, but Bledsoe appears to not know what he's talking about.

Part 5 - Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 Analysis

There are several noteworthy points about this section. Structurally, the main plot continues to move forward, with the completion of the script and Jon's efforts to both find funding and interest actors. This last is also a noteworthy point in another way, with the actors introduced here all have very obvious real-life parallels. This circumstance, in turn, is another manifestation of the very thin line between fiction and reality both the novel and the screenplay-within-the-novel are walking.

Meanwhile, the "home" motif returns in this section, with the desperation of the other citizens of Jon's home community echoing and reflecting both his own desperation (to get the movie made) and that of Francois (to claim at least some element of security in the middle of chaos). Francois, in fact, even in his extremity and apparent irrationality, can be seen as manifesting and/or embodying one of the narrative's main points, also manifesting in Hank ... the desperation for, and importance of, a sense of identity and integrity in an increasingly insane world. This desperation, manifest in Francois' "craziness" and Jon's determination, manifests for Hank in his increasing desire for refuge at the track and his growing contentment in a life of routine at home.

Other returning motifs and/or thematic considerations include the narrative's contemplation on the nature of writing and the nature of Hollywood, specifically its shallowness and/or emptiness as referenced in Hank's commentary about the party guests, a foreshadowing of similar perspectives commented upon in similar circumstances in chapter forty-five. Another returning motif is the narrative's occasional attention to suddenly important but ultimately meaningless detail - in this case, Hank's narrative reference to the towel in Bledsoe's sink, the significance of which is never explained and which, therefore, can be seen as another, multi-leveled example of the novel's thematic focus on "The Appearance of Importance".

Finally, chapter eighteen concludes with the first of several references to Hank and Sarah's cats..

Part 6 - Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23

Part 6 - Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23 Summary

Chapter 20 - After a few weeks, Hank learns that Francine Bowers has agreed to do the film, and that Firepower Productions (headed by Harry Friedman) have, on the strength of the commitment of Bledsoe and Bowers, agreed to produce. Jon invites Hank to Friedman's birthday party, which Hank and Sarah plan to attend. On the night of the party, they are invited to stop off at a hotel to meet renowned novelist Victor Norman, who is also invited and who wants to meet Hank. After more wine is ordered, Norman and Hank compare notes about how difficult they're finding it to write.

Chapter 21 - Hank, Sarah and Norman are among the first to arrive at the party, and are seated at separate tables. Hank immediately starts drinking heavily, and becomes aware that Norman is continually staring at him. As the party fills up, Jon arrives, joining Hank and Sarah at their table. When Hank returns from a brief visit to the washroom, Sarah tells him that Norman mentioned to her how glad he was that Hank hadn't commented on his work. Hank congratulates himself for being a good boy. Meanwhile, Friedman arrives, and dinner is served. Hank comments that Friedman looks like a baby. After dinner, Hank watches as Friedman circulates among his guest, unaware that he has a piece of pasta dangling from his lip. When he finally reaches Hank's table, Hank reaches up and pulls it off. After he goes, Jon comments that Friedman is similar in many ways to Lido Mamin. Meanwhile, Sarah compliments Hank on how "nice" it was that he took the pasta off Friedman's chin when no one else would, and teasingly asks him what else he's done lately that's nice. As a waiter comes by with more wine, Hank realizes that he couldn't think of anything.

Chapter 22 - Jon calls Hank with some bad news - Friedman wants to fire two of the co-producers working on the film, people Jon has contracts with and worked with for a long time. Jon also tells Hank that he (Jon) has arranged a meeting between Friedman, Jon and a lawyer that he (Jon) believes has the reputation and the power to make Friedman back down. At the meeting (to which Hank is invited by Jon) Friedman loses his temper, insisting that he has no money and that the two co-producers are bloodsuckers. The lawyer is eventually shouted out of the room. Jon remains behind, and attempts again to negotiate with Friedman. Friedman insists he has no money, suggests that both Jon's and Hank's fees be reduced, and then shouts that because the film is an "art film", everyone should work for nothing. Jon and Hank leave the office.

Chapter 23 - Hank and Sarah pay another visit to Jon and Francois in the ghetto. As the drinking starts, Jon tells Hank that pre-production on the movie is going ahead, in spite of the frequent complications caused by Firepower's unreliable financial practices. As the conversation continues, Francois goes out to count his chickens. Jon talks about how people in the neighborhood don't regard Francois as dangerous, just crazy. When Francois returns, Hank suggests they go to the race track and try out his (Hank's) new betting system. Before Francois can answer, the phone rings. Jon answers it, and is

shocked to learn (and to reveal to the others) that Harry Friedman has canceled the film.

Part 6 - Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23 Analysis

The first point to note about this section is how the plot functions, simultaneously (and perhaps paradoxically) moving forward at the same time as it spins its wheels. Specifically, the struggle to get the film produced continues, but because that struggle seems to be about Jon encountering similar sorts of opposition over and over and over again, it feels as though the plot is not actually going anywhere. Another way to look at it: two steps forward, one step back, with narrative structure imitating and/or manifesting narrative content. Another point to note: the appearance of Victor Norman, an evident stand-in for renowned author Norman Mailer and another example of how a character / incident is given a lot of narrative weight/presence in a particular moment, but actually turns out to be meaningless. Also in relation to the appearance of Norman, Sarah's comment on Hank's apparent "niceness", and Hank's subsequent reaction, can be seen as an important moment of self-awareness, an effective contrast to the self-absorption which is the novel's primary focus and perhaps also an important component of Hank's emerging sense of grounded-ness, settled-ness, and domesticity.

Then there is the appearance of Friedman, who quickly becomes one of the narrative's primary antagonists and is, it could be argued, as much a portrait of Hollywood executives in general as of one executive in particular (in this case, the head of Cannon Productions, the company that produced "Barfly", said company serving as the model for Firepower Productions here). Hank's action in removing the pasta from Friedman's mouth, meanwhile, can be seen as another manifestation of the "niceness" referred to earlier. It could also, however, be seen as Hank attempting to curry favor (i.e., suck up) to the man who could potentially fund the making of the film.

Finally, there is the reference to Francois and his chickens, specifically to his going out and counting them. The reference here is quite obvious, to the proverbial warning against "counting chickens before they're hatched" (anticipating results before the action triggering the results has even taken place). In this context, the metaphorical warning applies to Jon, convinced that pre-production is going to happen (counting his chickens) before the money is even in place (before the eggs are hatched). The final moment of the chapter bears out the validity of the warning, although at this point in the narrative, the reader would be forgiven if s/he assumes that the phone call actually means nothing, as so many previous phone calls have. Meanwhile, the chicken reference also raises an interesting question about the balance between actual and invented events in the narrative. So much of what happens in the book can be seen as grounded in reality, but one can't help but notice that the anecdote about counting the chickens seems much more "written" or "invented" than actually lived.

Part 7 - Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27

Part 7 - Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27 Summary

Chapter 24 - As Hank continues work on a poem he's been struggling with, he receives a phone call from Jon telling him that instead of confronting Friedman about canceling the movie, the two made a verbal deal that covers Friedman's expenses if production was taken over by another company. Jon then reveals that there IS another company and that the process of transfer is well underway. A few days later, however, he calls again with news that Friedman has backed out of the verbal agreement. Jon goes on a hunger strike and presents Friedman with two options - honor the agreement, or Jon will start cutting off body parts and mailing them to him. When there is no response from Friedman, Jon (accompanied by Hank) goes shopping for a fine-bladed chain saw.

Chapter 25 - Hank accompanies Jon to a meeting with Neeli Zutnick, Friedman's lawyer. As Jon plugs in his chainsaw, Zutnick attempts to turn his attention to a revised contract. Eventually Jon reads it, and demands that a particular clause be removed. When Zutnick balks, Jon turns on the chainsaw. Zutnick has the clause removed, and when the contract is signed by all parties (Hank referring to himself in narration as "the writer"), the three men drink a toast. Jon can now go back to shopping for producers.

Chapter 26 - Jon calls a few weeks later to say the movie is back off, reporting to Hank that everyone he talks to about the movie likes the idea but hates the screenplay. After talking with Jon, Hank goes back to playing on the floor with his cat. "The cat", he commented in narration, "liked to chase this piece of string." Later, Jon calls back with more bad news - a lawyer affiliated with director Hector Blackford claims that Blackford purchased the legal rights to the name and the character Hank Chinaski (the name of the character in Hank's screenplay) when he (Blackford) purchased the rights to ANOTHER of Hank's books. Hank, who knows Blackford personally, calls him and arranges for him to call the lawyer off. At the conclusion of the conversation, Blackford assures Hank that he still intends to make the movie he committed to. Hank then calls Jon with the good news.

Chapter 27 - Jon calls one more time with news that Friedman and Firepower are back on board with the film, and explains that Friedman didn't want anybody else making profit off his bare-bones budget. Later, once shooting has begun, Jon tells Hank about demands made by the film's stars, including new scenes. Hank agrees to create the scenes as requested, commenting in narration that he's been expecting this kind of compromise. At the end of their conversation, Jon and Hank discuss Francois who, Jon says, is having a better run of luck with his roulette practice. Hank comments in narration that there are "three things a man needed: faith, practice, and luck."

Part 7 - Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27 Analysis

The first point to note about this section is the extremity (no pun intended) of Jon's actions in fighting to get the contract with Friedman. There is, at this point, a sense of madness about the action, about the character, and about the situation that seems to suggest the narrative is no longer based in reality, but has become an exaggeration of it ... in other words, that the narrative has suddenly gone into a more extreme form of satire. On the other hand, because the narrative is so clearly and thoroughly grounded in real-life circumstances and situations, the reader can't help but wonder. "Did he REALLY do that?" Meanwhile, chapter twenty-six contains a much less intense reference to Jon's situation - Hank's comment about the cat playing with string, which suggests that Jon (in playing with the "string" of arguing with Friedman) actually enjoys what's going on.

Then, at the end of chapter twenty-five, Hank makes a comment in narration that, upon casual reading, might go unnoticed. This is his reference to himself as "the writer", one of several references in the book to how "the writer" is generally, at least in Hollywood, regarded and/or treated as an afterthought, a spectator to the process of production (as opposed to the initiator of the process of creation). The reference suggests that Hank is starting to feel excluded from the life being taken on by his screenplay, a suggestion developed and reinforced by the demands made on him by the actors (demands which, it seems, have more to do with ego than with the actual narrative content of the film's story). Reinforcement also shows up in later, similarly oriented comments about the writer's place in the Hollywood scheme of things. Ultimately, though, this somewhat negative aspect of Hank's experience is only a facet of the novel's overall thematic consideration of the nature and practice of writing in general and is another of the "truths" about the film industry commented upon, albeit indirectly, throughout the book.

Finally, there is the reference to the run of luck experienced by Francois at his home-made roulette wheel. On one level, Francois and his activities can be seen as mirroring what's going on in Jon's life - the crazy environment, the initial failure the rewards for persistence. On another level, however, the parallel has a less positive aspect - since Francois isn't really playing roulette but only practicing, and on homemade equipment, there is the sense that Jon's success isn't real either - there is every likelihood that Friedman will once again be temperamental and through a wrench in the production's works. And then there's the fact that the next time he wants to make a movie, Jon is probably going to have to go through exactly the same process all over again ...

Part 8 - Chapters 28 and 29

Part 8 - Chapters 28 and 29 Summary

Chapter 28 - Hank and Sarah tour the film's locations, and are struck by the accuracy and effectiveness of the sets. At a bar where several scenes are to be shot, they hang out with some of the real life barflies drinking there, and after lunch are called to watch some filming. Both are moved by the accuracy and intensity of Bledsoe's performance, and congratulate him. Back in the bar, conversation with the barflies reveals that they are being evicted from their various homes and hangouts. Hank describes in narration how he and Sarah, on the way home, worried about what was to happen to the barflies. At the house, they go through the routine of caring for the cats and then preparing for bed, the whole while worrying about the barflies and feeling some kind of connection with the shooting they saw in the afternoon.

Chapter 29 - Hank muses in narration on the futility of both the movie business and the culture of the racetrack (his favorite distraction). Then one night, as the shooting of the film continues, he gets a panicked phone call from Jon, telling him that he's been getting phone calls from someone making death threats. Hank invites him to take refuge at the house, but Jon refuses. Hank then calls Francois, who reveals there has been a fire that destroyed his house, that the black neighbors fought to save it but failed, and that he is determined to go back to France and act again, leaving his beloved chickens behind. After hanging up, Sarah asks "What's new?"

Part 8 - Chapters 28 and 29 Analysis

The novel's thematic and narrative contemplations of the differences between fiction and reality reach a particular intensity in this section, with the lines between the two in fact becoming quite blurred. At this point, it's interesting to note that in the production of "Barfly", actual barflies were used as extras in the film, along with author Bukowski. In other words, reality was mined as a source for art, in the same way as the fictional Chinaski uses his reality as material for his screenplay and as Bukowski used his reality as material for his book. Meanwhile, the narrative develops yet another layer of meaning to its central thematic consideration by contrasting the "reality" of Hank's life with Sarah to the "fiction" of the filmmaking world, which is becoming less and less real to both of them.

This section also contains another example of an event given intense significance that ultimately turns out to be narratively irrelevant - in this case, the threat to Jon's life. As is the case with other, similarly treated events and characters, this particular event is portrayed with vivid intensity, as though it's not just profoundly important in the moment but in the context of the narrative as a whole, but then completely and utterly dropped.

Part 9 - Chapters 30, 31, 32 and 33

Part 9 - Chapters 30, 31, 32 and 33 Summary

Chapter 30 - Hank and Sarah attend a party in the hopes of finding out when Hank and Jon are going go get paid. While there, Hank works (at Jon's request) on cutting portions of a scene in the screenplay, commenting to the passing Friedman that he's being made to work at a party and being congratulated for it. Francine Bowers arrives to great applause and attention, which Hank initially resents. He also comments in narration on how Sarah, who he values humanity more than he does, makes people more interesting to him. Later, Jon points out one of Friedman's lawyers, and Hank and Sarah go over to talk about Hank being paid, their attention drawn to the lawyer's wife, sitting rigid and cold because, as the lawyer reveals, she's quit drinking. The lawyer assures Hank he's going to get paid, and they drink a toast to "an honest world".

Chapter 31 - A week later, on a visit to the set, Hank and Sarah learn from Jon that the checks weren't cleared by the bank, that he went to confront Friedman, and that Friedman came up with a string of excuses for why he couldn't pay. As they walk to where the next scene is to be shot ("the bathtub scene"), Jon tells Hank of his plan to get Friedman to pay, involving an ad placed in a prominent trade paper, captioned positively or negatively according to whether the checks came through. Jon gets Hank to pose with him for a quick photograph that Hank realizes will be used in the ad.

Chapter 32 - Hank comments in narration that he once lived in the very building where all the scenes featuring Francine Bowers, playing a character (Jane) based on a woman in his life, are being shot. Meanwhile, the bathroom where "the bathtub scene" is being shot proves too small for Hank and Sarah to fit into, so they wait in another room, where Hank is occasionally interrupted by crew members asking him to autograph one or another of his books. Late in the day, Jon rushes in, frantically worried about problems with the scene. Hank rewrites a troublesome line, and Sarah relaxes the nervous Francine with a drink. As Jon is shooting one last take of the scene, Hank reflects in narration on the wildness of the life he led in that building. Jon returns to say the scene was completed beautifully. Hank and Sarah then decide to go to Musso's, where they reflect on how they used to go there and complain about how shallow everyone in the film industry was.

Chapter 33 - As he watches the shooting of a night scene (in which "Jane", as played by Francine, drunkenly raids a corn field and is chased by police), Hank reflects on how the scene is being shot in the place where the incident in his life (that the scene is based on) actually took place. He also reflects on the differences between film truth and real truth, reflections being interrupted when there's a technical problem and everything for the shot has to be reset. This, in turn, leads to reflection on how much time on a movie set is wasted, time now filled for Hank by a pair of interviews with European journalists, in which he comments on his dislike of movies and how empty they seem. At the

conclusion of the interviews, he goes to find Jon to tell him to reconsider the just-shot scene.

Part 9 - Chapters 30, 31, 32 and 33 Analysis

The primary narrative and thematic point of this scene is its contemplation/portrayal of the complicated relationship between reality and fiction, with the former triggering the latter and the latter triggering, at least for Hank, recollection and reconsideration of the former. It could be argued, in fact, that one of the book's key narrative lines involves Hank's coming to believe that the past was the past and, while it remains valuable for insight into the present and a guideline for the future, it is still the past, and cannot be recreated.

Another aspect of the book developed further in this section, both narratively and thematically, is its examination of/commentary on the nature of Hollywood - in this case, its hypocrisy, manifest here in the blatantly hypocritical comments by the lawyer about the "honesty" of Hollywood, Hank's comments to the reporters, and the questions of the reporters themselves.

Finally, this stage of the narrative seems like a good place to pay particular attention to the character of Sarah. Throughout the narrative, and particularly in this section, she comes across as grounded, calm and secure, a model of moderation and compromise in an environment where it almost seems as though both are to be avoided at any cost. She is, in many ways, a welcome (and to Hank necessary) breath of reality in the windy world of hot air and artificiality that Hank is striving to stay clear of. It's particularly interesting to contrast Sarah, with her warmth, humor, practicality and compassion, with the cold, apparently uptight lawyer's wife, whose appearance at the party, described in such intense detail, can be seen as another manifestation of the novel's thematic focus on "The Appearance of Importance". Finally, in relation to this theme, there is in the character of media-savvy Francine Bowersa mirror image of this idea: the importance of appearance.

Part 10 - Chapters 34, 35, 36 and 37

Part 10 - Chapters 34, 35, 36 and 37 Summary

Chapter 34 - Jon calls with news that the film has been canceled yet again. Firepower, he says, has completely run out of money. Hank takes refuge at the track, describing in narration (and at length) how he came to substitute gambling at the track for drinking, how he eventually started drinking AND gambling, and how he developed his various systems for winning, and how he came to mistrust those systems even when they worked. He then goes home, where for a short time he celebrates his quiet domestic routine with Sarah.

Chapter 35 - A while later, Jon calls to say the film is back on - Firepower, he tells Hank, has sold some assets and gotten a loan from some (possibly shady) investors. The next day, on set, Hank and Sarah are joined by respected and popular film critic Rick Talbot, who displays an innocent enthusiasm about the shoot. He remains as Hank and Sarah are visited first by Francine (who asks Hank for details about the real life Jane), and then by eccentric Russian film director Illianovitch, who praises Hank's work and who, as Hank leaves to watch the shooting and much to his dismay, seems to have adopted some of Hank's hard-drinking, hard-smoking characteristics.

Chapter 36 - The scene being shot is a street fight between the "Hank" character in the screenplay/film and a bartender. As he describes to Bledsoe how the fights used to be in reality, Hank reflects in narration on how dangerous they were, and on how lost he (Hank) always felt afterward. After the first take, Jon asks for his opinion, and Hank tells him how to make the fight seem more real. The second take is better, and Hank leaves the set. Francine returns, asking for information about Jane's death. Hank describes how Jane drank herself to death, and how "she was the only person [he'd] ever met who had the same contempt for the human race as [he] did." After Francine leaves, Talbot comments that Hank doesn't seem like a vicious man.

Chapter 37 - When noted photographer Corbell Veeker arrives for a photo shoot with Francine, Hank is invited to participate. As Veeker shouts instructions to his two nervous assistants, Bledsoe also joins the shoot. Later, as Hank and Sarah are drinking in the bar (with the now more reserved barflies), Jon tells them that Bledsoe has refused to give permission for the photos in which he appears to be published. After Jon goes, Hank and Sarah both consider why Bledsoe might act the way he did, with Hank concluding that actors are just different.

Part 10 - Chapters 34, 35, 36 and 37 Analysis

In the middle of continued complications with the production of the film (which the reader might be getting tired of, like Hank), several motifs and thematic considerations recur. There are continued contemplations of the relationships between past and

present (as manifest in conversations between Francine and Hank), as well as between reality and fiction (as manifest in the conversations about fighting. There is another manifestation of the "appearance of importance" theme (as manifest in the appearance of Veeker and of Illianovitch), and continued growth in Hank's contentment with his newly emerging domesticity with Sarah. Finally, there are also further explorations of Hollywood's shallowness and excesses (manifest here in Veeker's eccentric, domineering attitude and in Bledsoe's mercurial decision to not sign the photo release), contrasted vividly with the apparent joy and respect manifesting in the character of Rick Talbot (who seems to be a portrait of the late Gene Siskel, a much respected, film critic).

Perhaps the most important element of this section is the apparent frankness and honesty with which Hank refers to his feelings about humanity - specifically, his self-described "contempt" for the human race. There are a couple of points to consider here. First, is this how he truly sees himself, or is he making the comment for effect? Both are possible. Second, at this point in his life, does he still feel contempt for the human race, or is he learning both compassion and how to reserve his contempt for situations (i.e., Hollywood) that really deserve it? This, in turn, leads to an interesting point to consider about the book as a whole.

While there are times that the author's narrative and thematic intentions are clear, there are other times when he, with both casualness and deliberateness, raises important issues and questions without answering them. In other words, at the same time he is making the reader laugh and/or cringe, he is also making the reader think, which is arguably, along with laughter, one of the aims of good satire. In other words, the truths being explored in the narrative not only have to do with the thinly disguised truths about character identity and other source material, but also fundamental human truths. The obsessive attitudes and behavior of the Hollywood characters can be seen as pointing up the fundamental foolishness and/or dangers of such behavior in general. At the same time, Hank's discovery of the various aspects of the relationship between past and present, as well as the blurred line between (fiction? fantasy? imagination?) and truth, can be seen as a fundamental, archetypal human experience

Part 11 - Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 41

Part 11 - Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 41 Summary

Chapter 38 - After shooting on the film finishes, Hank and Sarah attend the wrap party, where Hank resists the clingy attentions of people who think they know him, or have a right to know him. Meanwhile, Jon invites him to sit in on the film's editing process, and Hank accepts. As well, Bledsoe and his biker friends arrive, adopting stances at the bar that suggest to Hank that they're posing as bikers rather than behaving as real ones. Jon comments, meanwhile, that the reason Francine isn't at the party is that there are no photographers. As the party, described by Hank as pretty dull, draws to a close, Hank and Sarah go home, with Hank feeling a sense of loss about the film being over. "We were moving back toward everyday normalcy," he comments in narration, "and in a way I liked it and in another way I didn't."

Chapter 39 - Hank goes to a small-screen viewing of the film and for the most part is pleased, but has an intense reaction to a scene in which the character played by Bledsoe behaves in a way that he (Hank) says a real alcoholic would never behave (putting aside a half empty bottle of beer). Jon agrees to re-edit the film, and later comments that everyone involved in the shoot seemed aware of Hank's influence. He then takes Hank and Sarah to eat at a new restaurant. Hank comments in narration on how the film came into being.

Chapter 40 - Hank spends more time at the racetrack, musing in narration on what he and others see in the life that goes on there. After a couple of weeks back in his racetrack and writing routine (still focusing on his long poem), Hank is invited to a public screening of the film. He and Sarah make their way to where the film is to be shown and, after Jon runs and grabs them some beer, settle in to watch. The film's opening sequence trigger memories in Hank of the real-life experiences those sequences were based on.

Chapter 41 - Memories continue to emerge as the movie continues. Hank reveals in narration some of the details behind a circumstance only glimpsed in the film (involving his relationship with a wealthy female entertainment executive). After the screening finishes, Hank and the others involved congratulate each other, then he and Sarah go home, commenting that the film was good, not great. As they talk about going home to take care of the cats, Sarah reveals that she and Hank have been invited to travel to the Cannes Film Festival.

Chapter 42 - While Jon and Friedman (who all have high hopes for the film) are at Cannes, Hank stays home and gives a series of interviews, eventually stopping partly because he's tired of them and partly because a comment about an actor he admires gets blown up into a big drama. At one point, Jon calls from Cannes to say that Bledsoe is staying in his hotel room and refusing to do interviews, Francine is celebrating being a star again, and Friedman is becoming simultaneously more feared and hated. Hank

comments in narration that time passed, "the track was still there", he kept writing poetry, and he and Sarah continued in their (mostly) contented domesticity.

Part 11 - Chapters 38, 39, 40, 41 and 41 Analysis

While most narratives (literary, filmic, recounted around a campfire) have a climax, or high point, there are also narratives in which the high point is in fact an ANTI-climax, a let down after a substantial build up. The narrative at the heart of "Hollywood: A Novel" is one such narrative, the energy of both story and characters starting high and building ever higher, all with the idea that the completion of the film and its release are going to be ... well, the climax, the payoff for hard work, investment of time and money, stress, and risk. What comes across narratively, however, is that for everyone, the film's completion and release are something of a let down, that the excitement and anticipation don't really pay off in the various sorts of satisfaction and fulfillment that the characters all seem to have been striving for. Yes, Francine gets her picture taken. Yes, Jon actually gets the film done. Yes, Hank is ultimately left in peace. Ultimately, though, it all seems as though the purpose of the whole experience, the eventual creation of the film, is never really completed to anyone's full satisfaction. Nobody is really happy. This sense is supported by the way in which the various post-production parties are described, with atmosphere and activity both described as though the participants are going through the motions rather than experiencing any real sense of celebration.

What's particularly important to note here is that for Hank, the climax of his part of the journey seems to have come early in the narrative with the completion of the screenplay. His part of the film-making process is complete, all that's left is watching and waiting. It's also important to note, however, that in terms of his personal process, his journey (and therefore the overall journey of the narrative) is less about the completion of the film than about what the entire experience means, or results in. In Hank's case, the true meaning and of the experience are measured and/or defined by the awareness and contentment he discovers in his life with Sarah.

The other important point to note about this section is the continued exploration of the relationship between reality and fiction. The "posing" of Bledsoe and his biker buddies and Hank's in-depth narration of experiences only glimpsed in the film are both manifestations of that exploration. A far more intense manifestation, perhaps the most intense in the book, is Hank's volatile reaction to Bledsoe's putting aside the beer, the explosiveness of said reaction indicating that true portrayals of reality are profoundly important to Hank and, by extension, to the author (who is in fact, it must be remembered, the author's very thinly disguised self-portrait). This, in turn, suggests that most, if not almost all, the circumstances, characters and events portrayed in the novel are as close to the truth as the author dares (legally? creatively?) to take them.

Part 12 - Chapters 43, 44, 45 and 46

Part 12 - Chapters 43, 44, 45 and 46 Summary

Chapter 43 - After a bit more editing, the film is ready for release. Hank asks the surprised Jon to put together an official premiere, including a white limousine for himself and Sarah. On the night of the premiere, Hank is somewhat put out by the casual indifference of the chauffeur and worried when traffic seems to slow because of heavy rain, but he consoles himself with wine, with Sarah's beauty, and with the fact that he, as he describes it, has "left the park bench behind".

Chapter 44 - As they walk into the theater, Hank and Sarah are met by Jon, who leads them past ranks of photographers and reporters shouting questions about the film and about Hank's views on drinking. After watching Francine Bowers regal interactions with the press, Hank and Sarah go into the theater, where they overhear a couple of young women talk about how disgusting they think Hank Chinaski is. Hank and Sarah's view of the screen is obscured and the sound is bad, so they spend most of the screening focusing on their wine. After the screening is finished, Hank visits the washroom, where he teases a drunken patron by saying he is his own brother. The chauffeur (Frank) meets Hank and Sarah outside the washrooms and takes them to the post premiere party.

Chapter 45 - When they arrive at the party, Hank and Sarah are first shown into a room downstairs in which they feel uncomfortable, since they're with awkwardly desperate people, and drink bad wine. An assistant realizes that a mistake's been made and shows them upstairs, where they still feel uncomfortable and still sense they're with awkwardly desperate people, but have better wine. They encounter Jon and Francine, both excited and busy with the party, and Hank comments in narration about how glad he is to see people come out the end of a difficult situation. An old friend of Hank's, poet John Galt, is shown in. He and Hank reminisce, with Hank commenting in narration on how Galt has never quite been recognized as either successful or talented. Meanwhile, the atmosphere of awkwardness and desperation has become so intense that Hank wants to leave early. Sarah wants to stay, but agrees to Hank's wishes. Frank the chauffeur drives them home, accepting the offer of a drink of their wine. As he drinks from the bottle, Hank and Sarah laugh. The night had just become interesting.

Chapter 46 - Hank describes encounters with people at the racetrack who recognize him and from whom he flees. He also describes the film's reviews (some good, some bad), and how he and Sarah attend a public showing at which they count the number of people leaving the afternoon show and also the number going into the evening show. Hank comments on the film being the story of his life. Unperturbed by the uneasy reactions of the young couple in front of him (who, in spite of their discomfort, stay to the end), Hank and Sarah go home, watch the (bad) news on television and the uneasy, somewhat false humor of late night comedy television. When Sarah asks Hank what

he's going to do next, he says he'll spend time at the track, and "write a novel about writing the screenplay and making the movie."

Part 12 - Chapters 43, 44, 45 and 46 Analysis

The narrative's sense of anti-climax continues into this section as, in spite of all his efforts and intentions, Hank's desire to experience the completion of the film as a big deal, to in effect CREATE a climax to his experience, seem to lead more to dissatisfaction than to fulfillment. If there is any sense of the latter, it arises less from the fact of the film's completion than from the fact that he has "left the park bench behind". In other words, he has moved beyond the truth and experience of his profoundly troubled early life (so recently recalled, written about, and portrayed by the film) and into a new life that is far from untroubled but which is, in fact, grounded in a stronger sense of self, truth and identity than his previous life ever was. This is another layer of larger, archetypal human truth concealed beneath the novel's veneer of semi-memoir, satire, and borderline gossip - that such truths can, and often do, emerge from the unlikeliest, yet somehow the most appropriate, circumstances (i.e., circumstances necessary to learn that particular truth).

Meanwhile, several of the book's narrative and thematic motifs reappear here. These include its portrayal of Hollywood's shallowness and desperation (evident in Hank's comments about the guests and atmosphere at the party) and its attention to "appearances of importance" (the conversation with the drunk in the washroom - it's not the drunk that's important, it's the event that seems more significant than it actually is). Then there is the appearance of poet John Galt, which at first can be seen as another example of "appearance seeming important" but is, in fact, significant - as a trigger for Hank's narrative contemplation on the role good fortune plays in success (he had it, Galt didn't), and for an ironic commentary on the nature of success. Specifically, John Galt is also the name of the central character of "Atlas Shrugged" by Ayn Rand, the leading proponent of the philosophy of objectivism, which advocated (among other things) absolute individual freedom. In that context, the character of Galt in this book, who experiences success where his friend and colleague (Hank) experiences failure, can be seen as ironically embodying the mirror image of Rand's John Galt, who was portrayed as heroically successful and self-fulfilled. Both Galts can be seen as contrasting with Hank, who has a degree of success that his friend Galt does not, but who doesn't glory in it and/or preach about it in the way Rand's Galt does.

Finally, it's important to look at the narrative's final moments. The public screening of the film is, in many ways, the goal (climax?) of the entire writing and film-making process, to get the story in front of an audience. Again, however, the reaction of the audience is ANTI-climactic, leaving Hank and Sarah with only the rewards and contentment of their home life. The safety and security of that life, however, is undermined by what Hank (the author?) suggests are unavoidable presence of suffering and falseness. That undermining, however, is itself undermined by the author's final act of entwining reality and fiction - Hank saying he is going to write the novel that author Bukowski has just finished presenting to the reader. On one level, this sequence of events suggests that

the purpose of fiction (Hank's book) is to escape and/or transform reality (bad news, unfunny television). On another level, the sequence is the final statement in the novel's thematic consideration of the process of writing - that writing, and perhaps by extension the art of creation in general, is an essential, perhaps even inevitable, response to reality ... transformative, illuminating, and evocative of the truths that, in day to day life are, perhaps paradoxically, both elusive and unavoidable.

Characters

Hank Chinaski

The novel's central character is a self-portrait of acclaimed author Charles Bukowski, a portrait so thinly fictionalized that the book might almost be termed an autobiography, or at the very least, a memoir. In his mid-sixties as the narrative begins, Chinaski (Bukowski) is portrayed as a heavy drinker and a habitual gambler, in the process of reforming himself and his life with the help and support of his wife, Sarah. The action of the narrative, in fact, simultaneously counterpoints and triggers the journey of transformation Chinaski is undergoing personally, recognizing his high-risk past for what it is (the past) and placing it where it belongs (in the past) in order to embrace and/or engage with a calmer, more secure, more domesticated present and future. While it can't be argued that he continues to drink heavily and gamble (without really referring in the narrative to how much he actually wins or loses), the narrative clearly communicates the sense that he is doing so with a somewhat better sense of balance and honesty than in the past. He is, in other words, more self aware and less self destructive.

In terms of his work on the screenplay, Chinaski regards his adventure in the screenwriting trade as just that, an adventure, a diversion from both his usual work and from his life. The point is not made to suggest that he regards either as being particularly bad - on the contrary, as the narrative begins, he seems more content than ever with both. On the other hand, there is the very clear sense that unlike so many of the other characters in the narrative, making movies is not the driving force in his life. He has much less at stake, either in terms of livelihood or identity - in other words, his sense of self is not dependent upon success in the movie industry. As such, he comes across as much as an observer of the action as much as a participant in it.

Sarah

While she appears in almost every chapter of the novel, Sarah at first glance comes across as relatively undeveloped, without the vivid and/or extreme personality of most of the other characters, even those with only cameo appearances. Upon closer examination, however, this can be seen as both deliberate and important, in that the characteristics she does display (patience, calmness, nurturing, domesticity, practicality) are a clear and defining contrast to the high energy intensity of so many of the other characters, cameo or principal. Those characteristics also define her function in her life with Hank, influencing him towards health, grounding, sanity, and a connection with reality. The irony, of course, is that she drinks almost as much as he does, but with the apparent intent of keeping him from getting as embarrassingly drunk as he did in the past. Ultimately, however, the calmness, practicality and domesticity she brings into his life prove to be goals that Hank didn't really know he had, embodying and defining a reality which, he discovers over the course of the narrative, is at least a part, and an important part, of what he wants his life to be.

Jon Pinchot

Jon Pinchot is the name given to the character based on real-life film director Barbet Schroeder, director of the film "Barfly". Volatile and passionate, Pinchot is driven by his intense desire to work with Chinaski, whom he (Pinchot) sees as something of a literary idol. Pinchot's tenacity and determination are a vivid contrast to Chinaski's relative calmness and even-temperedness, in some ways making them a good team and in other ways making each other crazy ... which, it could be argued, is something good teams often do.

Francois Racine

Racine is Pinchot's roommate, an intensely emotional, volatile actor (whether he has a real-life parallel like so many of the other characters is unclear, but it would be a reasonable assumption for the reader to believe that he does). Eccentric to the point of appearing somewhat insane, Racine is self-involved to the point of delusion, and as such can be seen as an extreme manifestation of the Hollywood-central self-absorption the author seems interested in satirizing.

Harry Friedman

Friedman is the film executive who eventually agrees to produce (i.e., fund) Pinchot's film based on Chinaski's script. He is apparently based on Menachem Golan, one of the partners in Cannon Films (here referred to as Firepower Productions), the real-life producers of "Barfly". A large man and a bully, volatile and self-indulgent, controlling and insensitive, Friedman can be seen not only as a portrait of a particular individual, but might also be seen as a satirical portrait of development executives in general.

Jack Bledsoe, Francine Bowers

Bledsoe and Bowers are the actors contracted to play the leads in Pinchot's film of Chinaski's screenplay. Bledsoe is based on Mickey Rourke, while Bowers is based on Faye Dunaway. While both characters are portrayed as talented and committed, and both are portrayed as having an interest in details about the real-life experiences upon which their characters are based, each is also a portrait of the sort of Hollywood self importance satirized throughout the narrative. Both are self indulgent and demanding, and both are portrayed (albeit to different degrees) as posers, with Bledsoe taking clear steps to ensure he is perceived in a particular way, and Bowers literally posing for press cameras at every available opportunity. In other words, both are manifestations of one of Hollywood's key principles - it's not who you are that matters, it's how you're perceived.

Jane

Jane is the name of Chinaski's real-life drinking partner whose life and experiences formed the basis of the character played by Francine Bowers in the film. She is portrayed by Chinaski as being angrier and more violent in her feelings and actions than he is, and is also referred to as being the only person in his life who had the same contempt for the human race as he had.

Frank (the chauffeur)

In the novel's final chapters, as Hank attends the grand premiere of the film based on his screenplay, he is driven to and from the event by a chauffeur who, in a fashion that Chinaski finds amusing, speaks irreverently about both Hank himself and the Hollywood life in which they are both peripheral participants. At on point, Frank (note the similarity of names) drinks from a bottle of wine while driving, making the evening (as Hank calls it) "interesting". In short, Frank represents a spirit of rebelliousness, of independent thought and action that Hank, in spite of his evidently increasing sense of domesticity, still enjoys in others and (to a lesser degree) in himself.

Rick Talbot

Also in the narrative's final stages, Hank Chinaski has a couple of revealing conversations with film critic Rick Talbot, apparently based on well known and industry-respected critic, the late Gene Siskel. Specifically, conversations between Chinaski and Talbot make reference to Chinaski's emerging experiences of self and of compassion. Also, Talbot's enthusiasm for the movies and interest in the process of making them provides a telling contrast to Chinaski's cynicism and casualness.

Wenner Zergog, Lido Mamin, Tab Jones, Mack Derouac, Jon-Luc

Several times throughout the narrative, characters appear with names that, without a lot of subtlety, indicate the real-life individuals upon whom they're based. For the most part, these characters are referred to glancingly, but with a vividness of description and establishment of context that defines them, in no uncertain terms, as targets of satire just as much as the more narratively and/or thematically significant characters.

The real life counterparts of the characters listed above are film director Werner Herzog, Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, performer Tom Jones, writer Jack Kerouac, director Jean-Luc Godard, philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, author Norman Mailer, actor Sean Penn, pop star Madonna, and film director Taylor Hackford

Vin Marbad, Mack Austin, Neeli Zutnick, Corbell Veeker

Several times in the narrative, characters appear, play an important role in a chapter or two, and then disappear. These characters are generally not directly connected to the more publicly viewed aspects of Hollywood filmmaking, and as such don't seem to have as clear and/or as obvious a counterpart to some of the more celebrity-identified characters. However, given the close relationship between character and counterpart in the rest of the novel, it would be reasonable to assume that these characters (accountant Marbad, director Austin, attorney Zutnick, photographer Veeker - all intense, all demanding, all to one degree or another self-important) are themselves portraits of real-life individuals.

F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a famous novelist who, equally famously, was a spectacular failure at screenwriting. Zelda was his wife who, just as famously, went insane. Both Scott and Zelda were hard drinkers and hard partiers, an evident parallel to the lives and experiences of the hard drinking (but somewhat less hard partying) Hank and Sarah. On another level, there is the sense that on a sub-textual level, Fitzgerald's failure is something Chinaski fears.

Objects/Places

Hollywood

The filmmaking capital of the United States, and some would argue of the world, is simultaneously the setting for the novel's action.

Barfly

The writing and producing of this film is the source material for the novel's narrative and characters. Originally made in the 1980's, "Barfly" received average to good reviews and did below average to average business at the box office.

Hank's Screenplay

Throughout the novel, Hank's screenplay is the focus of narrative action and intention. For the first several chapters, it is the center of Hank's creative attention and Pinchot's personal attention, which once it is actually complete becomes both creative and financial, not just for Pinchot but for almost every other character in the book. "Jim Beam", meanwhile, is the name of a popular brand of bourbon, or corn whisky. The title, therefore, can be seen as an evocation of the influence of alcohol, a partner in the "dance" of alcohol-triggered pleasure and addiction alike.

The Racetrack

Hank's refuge from his life and his work, not to mention from the near-insanity of the people surrounding him, is the racetrack, where he can focus his time and attention on something completely different, where he can relax and not think about anything associated with what might be loosely (not to mention ironically), described as "his real world".

Hank's

Throughout the narrative, as Hank writes (first on his screenplay and then on the poem that occupied his creative energies before the screenplay came along), he refers to his "typer" as playing a significantly important part in his creative process, as almost having a consciousness. As such, it is a primary component of the narrative's thematic consideration of the nature of writing.

White Flight

Referred to in chapter twelve, "white flight" is a shorthand term used to describe the rapid departure of white residents of a community, any community, becoming popular with immigrants and/or other non-white populations. It is a term grounded in, and connected to, a sense of racism, expressed either indirectly or openly.

Hank's House

Hank's purchase of a house, initially triggered by the insistent suggestion of an enthusiastic tax accountant, eventually becomes a place of refuge for both Hank and Sarah, simultaneously a catalyst for and manifestation of their shared experience of increased, affirming, nurturing domesticity.

Hank and Sarah's Cats

The domestic, and at times professional, lives of Hank and Sarah are frequently defined throughout the narrative by the needs of their five cats to be cared for. The cats can therefore be seen as a symbolic representation of the life of relatively quiet domesticity being embraced by Hank at this (late?) stage of his life, an aspect of his life that grounds him in reality in the midst of all the self-absorbed, ego-defined, film-making craziness going on around him. Hank and Sarah are engaged, at least to some degree, in ensuring the well-being of others, while so many of the characters around them are far more engaged in ensuring that of them-SELVES.

Musso's

Hank and Sarah often retreat to this popular restaurant/ bar when life gets too overwhelming. It's also, according to narration, a popular place for the citizens, celebrities and deal makers of Hollywood to see and be seen. At one point, Hank comments in narration that in his earlier, harder-drinking days, that's exactly the sort of thing he would come to Musso's to do, but that now, as both he and his life have matured, he's much less interested in that sort of thing.

Firepower Productions

This is the fictionalized name given to Cannon Films, the real life production company that produced "Barfly". Firepower, run by the power-obsessed Harry Friedman, is portrayed as being almost constantly on the verge of financial collapse, and as such is a source of significant insecurity for Jon Pinchot as he makes his long dreamed-of film.

Jon and Francois' House

In contrast to the relative calm of Hank and Sarah's quiet home, the house Jon shares with Francois is noisy, dangerous, and anything BUT calm. The house, and the kind of life lived there, can be seen as representing the kind of high intensity life that people like Jon and Francois (i.e., active in the film industry) seem simultaneously drawn to and also seem to have no choice but to live.

The Film Sets

The various places where the film is being shot are generally portrayed, throughout the narrative, as being detailed and evocative, clear and effective representations of Hank's past. On several occasions, however, they are also portrayed as almost infecting reality with artifice, undermining the truth and effectiveness of the past they represent with a sense, experienced most often by Hank, that they exist in service of a truth and intention no longer his own.

The Cannes Film Festival

Commonly referred to in shorthand just as "Cannes", the film festival is one of the most famous film industry-related events in the world, viewed as both a center of artistic and/or creative integrity and of deal-making opportunities. The presence of Pinchot's film at Cannes is, in that context, very important to the characters (i.e., holding out the promise of both artistic and deal-defined success), with the fact that it doesn't do particularly well there equally important, albeit for very different reasons (i.e., representing a clear degree of failure in both areas).

Themes

The Nature of Hollywood

Hollywood: A Novel is a portrait of the spirit and manifestations of excesses that have defined Hollywood from its beginnings, and of the unease with which those excesses coexist with the day-to-day ways of life inhabited by artists like Hank Chinaski, who simply want to practice their creativity in an atmosphere of relative serenity. As portrayed in the novel, Hollywood is a place of exploitation - of those with an excess of ambition, ego and drive exploiting the dreams and talent of others, and the desperate reality and longing for escape of the public at large. And because the book is so provably grounded in experiences of reality, there is also the strong sense that the spirit of exploitation is as barely fictionalized as the names of the characters ... in other words, that it's ultimately just as real as they are.

This sense of excess and of the exploitation it triggers is the book's primary thematic focus, anchoring and defining action, narration, and characterization. Each of the narrative's major relationships is defined by how intensity of desire (for power, for success, simply for being known) leads to both exploitation and excess. That intensity, however, is effectively counterpointed and therefore highlighted by the quietness and relative peace of Hank's home life, the true value of which he eventually comes to both discover and value.

The Relationship between Reality and Fiction

Throughout the book, the author thematically and narratively explores relationships between various layers of illusion and reality, and the truths about human nature revealed by, and manifesting in, both. This exploration occurs on both the stylistic and narrative levels. In terms of the former, the most evident example is the thinness of the disguises given to real life individuals (the fact that so many of the characters and situations were directly inspired by real life is a matter of public record). On a purely practical level, there is the sense that names have been changed (to paraphrase a famous Hollywood saying) in order to protect the guilty, and in all likelihood to protect the author from potential lawsuits. Second, when the novel's connections between reality and fiction on the level of character are so evident, it would be reasonable to assume that connections on the level of incident are equally as close. While the extremity, excess, and intensity of some of the incidents and characters portrayed in the narrative seem simply too unlikely to be true, the context in which those incidents are portrayed (i.e., a narrative grounded in apparent truth) seems to suggest that they too are grounded in reality.

On the narrative level, the lines between reality and fiction are referenced and/or dramatized through the various references to how the fictionalization of the film both is grounded in, and triggers memories of, reality ... but at the same time is NOT reality.

Hank's frequently realizations of this fact, the resulting experiences of disappointment they trigger, and Hank's turn to domesticity in response to that disappointment, all combine to make the apparent narrative and thematic suggestion that reality is to be preferred over the empty illusions of Hollywood. Those illusions, in turn, are another manifestation of the nature of Hollywood (see above) and, as Hank often suggests in narration, are to be viewed with suspicion, if not outright contempt.

The Appearance of Importance

Another aspect of the nature of Hollywood portrayed throughout the narrative is the idea of image, of appearance being important and the importance of appearing important. This manifests in several ways. On one level, there is the sense that simply to be seen and visible is an important component of success, at least on Hollywood's terms. This is particularly exemplified in the character of Francine Bowers, portrayed several times as being concerned about being both photographed and photographed in a certain way. On another level, the relationship between appearance and importance is manifest simply in the way characters appear. For example, in Part 1, the character of Renoir is given a depth and vividness of portrayal that seems to suggest he is about to play a major role in the narrative to come. Ultimately, however, he disappears from the narrative immediately after his appearance. Other incidents and characters treated in the same way (apparent importance that ultimately leads nowhere in terms of story) include the towel in Bledsoe's sink (Part 5), Hank's encounter with Victor Norman (Part 6), and his encounter with John Galt (Part 12). These incidents, in which characters and situations are defined with apparent importance and then forgotten can be seen as another manifestation of the novel's central thematic consideration of the nature of Hollywood, and specifically of the exploitative way in which Hollywood functions. The important are only important for a moment, and intensely so for as long as they can be used, and then abandoned.

The Nature and Practice of Writing

An examination of the process of writing is one of the novel's secondary thematic concerns, referenced on several occasions. There is the sense that for Hank, the process involves elements of inspiration, memory, and pure hard work, and ultimately of shaping elements of all three into a creation that is ultimately fiction, but which is grounded in both reality and truth. Over the course of the narrative, and as the result of his involvement in the fictionalization of his life (not to mention the fictional nature of the Hollywood life), Hank comes to realize that both reality and truth are ultimately more relevant to a fulfilling life than fiction. He also comes to realize, however, that fiction, if regarded and related to properly, has the capacity to awaken the reader (or, in the case of a movie, the audience) to a broader perspective and/or experience of truth. This is the meaning of the comment he makes on p. 237, the idea that he only wanted to show the world the truth about a side of life that (many? most?) might not ever have experienced first hand and only might have passing knowledge of. (It's interesting to

note that this comment appears at the very end of the book after Hank's involvement in the Hollywood fiction machine has essentially ended.)

In any case, there is the strong sense about the book that while Hank's comments on writing refer, in most cases, to the specifics of alcoholism and to the circumstances arising from his work on this particular project, he is also referring to the practice and theory of writing in general. The intent of both practice and theory, at least according to Hank Chinaski (revitalized, at the novel's conclusion, in both life and art) is to expose an audience to a truth/reality they may not have ever known.

Style

Point of View

The narrative is written from the first person past tense point of view. This functions to draw the reader immediately and intimately into the perspective of narrator/protagonist Hank Chinaski, That perspective comes across in different ways at different times. Often Hank presents events and circumstances in a fairly straightforward way, essentially saying "This happened then that happened", leaving room for the reader to come to his/her own conclusions about the meaning and significance of events and situations described. At other times, there is the sense that while Hank is essentially telling the truth about what happens, and is offering his insights into why it happened, he doesn't really believe it IS the truth. In other words, without actually coming out and saying "it's only a movie", there is the very strong sense that this is Hank's general attitude ... and, because Hank is and/or can be so closely identified with author Charles Bukowski, the further sense that this is the author's attitude as well. There's an undercurrent of incredulity, of "I can't believe these people are doing this" in both what the author includes (in terms of both character and action) and in how he portrays it.

Some might call the novel a "satire", a comic exposure of a particular aspect or aspects of human behavior that makes its point about the foolishness of that behavior by exaggerating it. The point must be made, however that, as previously discussed, the novel's characters, situations and events are all so thoroughly grounded in and defined by reality that they can't be satire. In other words, satire takes reality and expands upon it. This means that "Hollywood: A Novel" can't, by definition, be considered a satire simply because it is reality, a thinly disguised reality to be sure, but ultimately reality as the author experienced it.

Setting

The novel's setting, Hollywood, is profoundly and inescapably connected to its subject matter and its themes. From the earliest days of its existence, the movie-making capital of America (and arguably the world) has been a magnet for individuals (artists, entrepreneurs, moguls, and crooks) with an excess of dreams, creativity, talent, ambition and energy. Also since Hollywood's earliest days, those excesses have often (but not always) existed alongside an insensitivity (to put it mildly) to the well-being of others with less talent, ambition or resilience, not to mention for the audiences for whom Hollywood manufactures its products (the money those audiences spend is another matter). Nowhere else could the specific events of this story be played out by these sorts of characters with the same sort of result, that result being the realization that reality is to be preferred over illusion, however intensely that illusion might be believed in by those who pursue it or those who pay to see it screened before them.

The aspect of setting also plays a role in defining and manifesting one of the narrative's key themes, that being the relationship between reality and illusion. Specifically, Hank is surprised to see that the film based on his screenplay (the illusion based on his memories of reality) is being shot in the exact locations where the reality upon which he based the events of the screenplay took place. When he watches the actual shooting, however, he is surprised and disappointed to see that the realities portrayed by the actors (who are, after all, only interpreting the events portrayed in the screenplay) are little more than shallow representations of reality (another manifestation, it could be argued of the essential nature of Hollywood). In other words, the settings for the film (i.e., reality) define the film as illusion.

Language and Meaning

A particularly intriguing, and engaging, aspect of the narrative is the way it uses language to both conceal and evoke truth. The use of pseudonyms for the reality based characters is, perhaps, the most obvious example of this - in chapter one, Wenner Zergog is hardly a pseudonym at all for director Werner Herzog, a truth both concealed (albeit barely) and evoked.

That said, at the same time as it explores the ways of illusion grounded in the very identity and nature of Hollywood, the novel also reveals truths in occasionally surprising, often straight-ahead but at times almost poetic, ways that undermine the frailty of the illusions Hollywood both manufactures and is driven by. In other words, the use of language is as an additional development of, in fact a technical and metaphorical manifestation of, the novel's thematic focus of the relationship between reality and fiction/illusion, simultaneously defining and puncturing the illusion.

Another important application of language is the use of vocabulary unique to the film industry, incorporated just enough to give a sense of reality or verisimilitude to the situation but not too much to be overwhelming and/or confusing. In other words, Hank the narrator uses such vocabulary to the extent that Hank the author of the screenplay understands it. He's not trying to impress anybody, least of all those reading his story (unlike many of the book's other characters, who seem to be all about impressing others. This sense of understatement also applies to the narrator's commentary on his home life, the value of which is referred to most of the time in passing but with such distilled clarity of image and feeling that the meaning's reference cannot be mistaken - home is where the heart is.

Structure

For the most part, the narrative is structured in a straightforward, linear fashion, with the action moving from narrative point to narrative point in a clear portrayal of the relationship between character, cause/effect, and plot. There are occasional, at times, lengthy diversions into the past (such as in Part 11, Chapter 41) which, when they occur, serve to illuminate and/or trigger Hank's insights into the relationship between

past and present (how the truth of the present is informed by, but separate from, the truth of the past). Meanwhile, and as previously discussed, there is a sense of anti-climax about the novel (as opposed to climax) that is as much the result of structure as it is of character. Specifically, the narrative builds in momentum and energy in ways that suggest, as they would when applied in most traditional narratives, a climax or high point is on its way. Certainly, Hank, as he's telling the story, seems to be building to such a point. However, rather than reaching that point, the narrative achieves an anti-climax, a moment when instead of reaching a moment of emotional intensity, of realized dreams and achieved goals resulting in celebration and catharsis (i.e., release of feeling), reality and circumstance become a let-down. The realization of the dream (in this case, Jon's dream of having a film made and Hank's dream, albeit a vicarious one, of success in Hollywood) are both limited in intensity and scope, far limited than the dreamers had hoped. The result: a sense, for both characters and reader, that those dreams were in fact as much of an illusion, as much a facsimile of the truth (as opposed to a realism) as the film they strove so hard to make.

Quotes

"Somehow, most of them had apparently escaped the daily grind of living. They had never been caught up in that grind and never would be. Such were the rewards of the Chosen in the land of the free."
p. 9

"At one time I used to refer to Sarah and me as Zelda and Scott, but that bothered her because she didn't like the way Zelda had ended up. And I didn't like what Scott had typed. So, we had abandoned our sense of humor there."
pp. 10-11

"I was really only interested in the poem and the short story. Writing a screenplay seemed to me an ultimately stupid thing to do. But better men than I had been trapped into such a ridiculous act."
p. 12

"I never knew who anybody was. I could meet you the night before and not remember you the next day. If they dug my mother out of her grave I wouldn't know who she was."
p. 24

"The gods had sent Sarah to add ten years to my life. The gods kept driving me toward the blade, then, at the last moment, lifting my head off the block ... now they were driving me to write a screenplay. I had no appetite for that. Of course, I knew if I wrote it it would be a good one. Not a great one. But a good one. I was hot with words."
p. 30

"Life was good. All you had to do in their little world was be a writer or an artist or a ballet dancer and you could just sit or stand around, inhaling and exhaling, drinking wine, pretending you knew what the hell."
p. 31

"Often with humans, both good and bad, my senses simply shut off, they get tired, I give up. I am polite. I nod. I pretend to understand because I don't want anybody to be hurt. That is the one weakness that has led me into the most trouble. Trying to be kind to others I often get my soul shredded into a kind of spiritual pasta."
p. 34

"All you needed was the first line, then everything followed. It was always there, it only needed something to set it running."
p. 37

"I let my mind go along with it: you're a wheeler dealer. You're slick ... drive a BMW. Have a view of the harbor. Vote Republican."
p. 44

"Now I was looking for a house I didn't really want and I was going to write a screenplay I didn't really want to write. I was beginning to lose control and I realized it but I seemed unable to reverse the process."
p. 46

"I knew that would finally lead nowhere except to ridicule and humiliation, for myself and for them. The world had somehow gone too far, and spontaneous kindness could never be so easy. It was something we would all have to work for once again."
p. 49

"Now, after decades, I was a writer with a desk. Yes, I felt the fear, the fear of becoming like THEM. Worse, I had an assignment to write a screenplay. Was I doomed and damned, was I about to be sucked dry? I didn't feel it would be that way. But does anybody, ever?"
p. 63

"While the time had not been an unhappy time, it had been mostly a time of void and waiting ... I saw each face again, the bodies, heard the voices, the conversations ... I knew that there was a whole civilization of lost souls that lived in and off bars, daily, nightly and forever, until they died. I had never read about this civilization so I decided to write about it, the way I remembered it."
p. 82

"Poor blacks hated. Poor whites hated. It was only when blacks got money and whites got money that they mixed. Some whites loved blacks. Very few, if any, blacks loved whites. They were still getting even. Maybe they never would."
p. 84

"It had been the same for as long as I could remember: turn on the radio to a classical music station, light a cigarette or a cigar, open the bottle. The typer did the rest. All I had to do was be there. The whole process allowed me to continue when life itself offered very little when life itself was a horror show."
p. 88

"[w]hat made the whole thing smell was that many of the rich and the famous were actually dumb cunts and bastards. They had simply fallen into a big pay-off somewhere. Or they were enriched by the stupidity of the general public. They usually were talentless, eyeless, soulless, they were walking pieces of dung, but to the public they were god-like, beautiful and revered. Bad taste creates many more millionaires than good taste."
p. 92

"I didn't like to think of myself as a writer. Maybe I had met too many writers ... they were fidgets, gossips, old maids; they bitched and knifed and they were full of vanity. Were these our creators? Was it always thus? Probably so. Maybe writing was a form of bitching. Some just bitched better than others."
p. 94

"[Friedman] had large round eyes and the eyes were sad and full of suspicion. Alas, to live in the world ... he looked like a big baby who had somehow gotten loose, grown real fast, and almost turned into a man. There was charm there, but it could be dangerous to believe in it - it would be used against you. "
p. 111

"Lawyers, doctors, plumbers, they made all the money. Writers? Writers starved. Writers suicided. Writers went mad."
p. 114

"'The whole town says 'no'. The moment they see the screenplay they say 'No'. Here's a film with 2 great actors and a budget so low that there is no way this film isn't going to make money. Yet the whole town says 'No'. It's unheard of.'"
p. 134

"I was a little sad that I wasn't young and doing it all over again, drinking and fighting and playing with words. When you're young you can really take a battering. Food didn't matter. What mattered was drinking and sitting at the machine. I must have been crazy but there are many kinds of crazy and some are quite delightful. I starved so that I could have time to write."
p. 144

"Having seen the movie made that afternoon we were now somehow different, we would never think or talk quite the same. We now knew something more but what it was seemed very vague and even perhaps a bit disagreeable."
p. 149

"I never realized that there were so many movie magazines or magazines interested in the movies. It was a sickness: this great interest in a medium that relentlessly and consistently failed, time after time after time, to produce anything at all. People became so used to seeing shit on film that they no longer realized it WAS shit."
p. 150

"The writer was the blood and bones and brains ... in these creatures. The writer made their hearts beat, gave them words to speak, made them live or die, anything he wanted. And where was the writer? Who ever photographed the writer? Who applauded? But just as well ... the writer was where he belonged: in some dark corner, watching."
p. 156

"[a]fter thirty years the place looked just about the same. Only the people I'd known had all died. And the lady had died three decades ago and there I was sitting drinking a beer in that same building full of cameras and sound and crew. Well, I'd die too, soon enough. Pour one for me."
pp. 164-65

"I was not fit for the world and the world was not fit for me and I had found some others like myself, and most of them were women ... I adored them, they inspired me, I play-

acted, swore, pranced about in my underwear telling them how great I was, but only I believed that ... those ladies from hell, those ladies in hell with me."
p. 167

"It was all right, it was good but it wasn't quite right... I knew that it wasn't the same, that it could never be the same. Francine was an actress. Jane had been a mad drunk. Properly and finally mad. But one doesn't expect perfection from a performance. A good imitation will do."
p. 171

"The best part of a writer is on paper. The other part was usually nonsense."
p. 173

"I needed to talk to Jon, to tell him to make Francine drunker, madder, with one foot in hell, one hand yanking corn from the stalk as death approached, with the nearby buildings having faces out of dreams, looking down on the sadness of existence for us all: the rich, the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, the talented and useless."
p. 174

"[w]hen you spend many hours, many years pretending to be a person who you aren't, well, that can do something to you. It's hard enough just trying to be yourself. Think of trying very hard to be somebody that you're not ... at first, you know, it could be exciting. But after a while, after being dozens of other people, maybe it would be hard to remember who you were yourself ..."
p. 193

"The credits rolled. Then there was my name. I was a part of Hollywood, if only for a small moment. I was guilty."
p. 200

"It was just one day at a time, day after day and then there it was."
p. 201

"[t]here is only one bet, and that bet is to win ... simplicity is always the secret, to a profound truth, to doing things, to writing, to painting. Life is profound in its simplicity. I think that the racetrack keeps me aware of this."
p. 202

"The film didn't win anything at Cannes. And Sarah began planting new flowers and vegetables in the garden. And our five cats watched us with their ten beautiful eyes."
p. 213

"I liked to watch the fights. Somehow it reminded me of writing. You needed the same thing, talent, guts and condition. Only the condition was mental, spiritual. You were never a writer. You had to BECOME a writer each time you sat down to the machine ... you had to be in condition to endure what was trying to kill you."
p. 217

"Was it worth it? Wasn't it better not to be in show business? No, no. Who wants to be a gardener or a taxi driver? Who wants to be a tax accountant? Weren't we all artists? Weren't our minds better than that? Better to suffer this way than the other."
p. 231

"I had seen most of my movies as a kid, all very horrible movies ... those movies shook and rattled your brains, left you without hope or energy. I sat in those movie houses, sickened in the gut and soul."
p. 236

"I only wanted to show what strange and desperate lives some drunks live and I was the one drunk I knew best."
p. 237

Topics for Discussion

Discuss ways in which the various aspects of the narrative can be seen as evoking and/or manifesting Hank's conscious and/or sub-conscious search for validation, as a human being and as an artist. Factors to consider include his decision to write the screenplay in the first place, his search for the house, his encounters with fans and barflies, his visiting the track, and his growing domestic contentment.

Consider your own creative writing. In what ways have you mined and/or explored past experience for truths to include in your own work? Discuss ways in which creativity is shaped and/or defined by past experience.

Discuss ways in which the novel's primary relationships dramatize its thematic emphasis on the exploitative nature of Hollywood. Consider, for example, the Jon/Hank relationship ... the Jon/Friedman relationship ... the Hank/Bledsoe and Hank/Bowers relationships ... and the Hank/industry relationships. Comment on the ways the one exploits and/or makes use of the other, keeping in mind that it's entirely possible for both parties in such a relationship to each be exploiting the other.

What is your experience of being intensely involved in a project (either creative or otherwise) that, like Hank's story, turned out to be anti-climactic? What parallels exist between your experience and his? What did you learn about the relationship between reality and/or illusion from your experience?

What is your opinion of Hollywood moviemaking/storytelling? Do you agree with Hank that most of what Hollywood produces is "shit"? Explain your answer.

What do you think the function and/or purpose of a movie is? Is that different from the function/purpose of art in general? What would you define that purpose as being?

Discuss your experiences of returning, as Hank did, to the scene of important events in your past. Was the setting as you remembered it? Did any differences between the place of the past and the place of the present trigger any changes in memory? In feeling about the incident? In feeling about the place?

In the quote from p. 237, Hank suggests that the process of creating the screenplay, and perhaps of creation in general, involves revealing a lived, uniquely experienced truth to those who might not have an awareness of it. What unique truths and/or experiences in your life might you want to reveal to others?

Write a story based on a unique truth and/or experience. Are you able to communicate the truth exactly as it happened? What aspects of the experience are you inclined do you enhance/change in order to make the point of your story clearer and/or more effective?

In your experience, how much of fiction is truth? How much truth ought a writer, or other artist, use in the act of creation? How much invention?

Is a creation grounded in truth but shaped into art truth, fiction or both?