

The Loved One Study Guide

The Loved One by Evelyn Waugh

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Contents

The Loved One Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
A Warning and Chapter One.....	4
Chapter Two.....	6
Chapter Three.....	8
Chapter Four.....	10
Chapter Five.....	12
Chapter Six.....	14
Chapter Seven.....	16
Chapter Eight.....	18
Chapter Nine.....	19
Chapter Ten.....	21
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	27
Themes.....	29
Style.....	31
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Plot Summary

Evelyn Waugh's novel, *The Loved One*, is a pitiless satire on the shallowness and pretensions of British expatriates and Americans in post-World War II Los Angeles. The action is set principally in two funeral parlors, one for humans and the other for pets. Most of the characters either work in one of the funeral homes or are employed by a Hollywood film studio. Waugh portrays the Los Angeles denizens as part of a culture that fosters and encourages the selfish pursuit of petty goals. In the book, almost everyone is striving to gain or maintain a place in society that they seem to believe is important because other people might envy them for it. The principal character, a young Englishman named Dennis Barlow, is a poet-cum-screenwriter who leaves his job at the studio, which he hates for its bureaucracy and lack of imagination. He takes a job at a pet cemetery, scandalizing his fellow Englishmen in Hollywood, particularly an actor named Sir Ambrose Abercrombie, who believes the expatriate British have a reputation and an image to uphold. When an old screenwriter and fellow Brit named Sir Francis Hinsley is fired from the film studio and commits suicide, Sir Ambrose enlists Dennis to take care of funeral arrangements. At a well-known funeral home called Whispering Glades, Dennis meets a young woman named Aimée Thanatogenos, who is a cosmetician in the embalming rooms. Aimée, a thoroughgoing product of Los Angeles, is empty-headed yet yearns for higher things, although she cannot really say what this means to her. Dennis becomes enamored of her. A rival for Aimée's affections is Mr. Joyboy, the chief embalmer at Whispering Glades, who is widely considered to be a stylish and cultivated man, although he actually is a rather perverse momma's boy.

Dennis, a dishonorable fellow, initially wins the contest for Aimée's heart, in part because of love poems he filches from famous writers and leads her to think are his own. When Mr. Joyboy discovers this fraud, he exposes Dennis to Aimée. At the same time, she learns Dennis's other secret, that he works at the pet cemetery, which the employees of Whispering Glades consider to be a degraded establishment. Aimée breaks off her private engagement to Dennis and quickly becomes publicly engaged to Mr. Joyboy. When Dennis reminds her that she made a promise to marry him, from which he refuses to release her, Aimée becomes distraught and commits suicide. Mr. Joyboy, afraid that the scandal of his fiancée's suicide will ruin him professionally, goes to Dennis for help. Meanwhile, Dennis is approached by Sir Ambrose, who is so appalled at Dennis's pet cemetery job that he pays him to go back to England. Dennis enlists Mr. Joyboy to help him cart Aimée's body to the pet cemetery for a secret cremation. The plan is that everyone will think Aimée ran away with Dennis, who will move back to England. Dennis extracts money from Mr. Joyboy for the financing of this plan, adding it to the payoff from Sir Ambrose. As the novel ends, he sits back with a book at the pet cemetery to await the finish of Aimée's cremation.



A Warning and Chapter One

A Warning and Chapter One Summary

The Loved One, by Evelyn Waugh, is a satire of bad taste in post-war America that takes place principally in two Los Angeles funeral homes. One of these facilities is for humans and the other is for pets. A young Englishman who had worked as a screenwriter takes a job at the funeral home for and eventually develops a crush on a young woman who works on human corpses as a cosmetician at the other funeral home. The title page provides the subtitle, "An Anglo-American Tragedy." A paragraph that appears before Chapter One, titled, "A Warning," describes the story as fiction and "a little nightmare." The author warns that readers who are easily upset should return the book to wherever they got it. Chapter One begins with a description of the ocean, foothills, and palm trees, but does not say where the action is taking place. Two Englishmen who are described as exiles sit in run-down surroundings drinking whiskey and soda. The elder one notes that a man named Ambrose Abercrombie will arrive soon, although the purpose of his visit is unknown. The elder man, whose name is Sir Francis Hinsley, begins talking about Americans, whom he praises as decent people who do not expect a person to listen to them, because they are talking for their own enjoyment. Sir Ambrose arrives and accepts a drink from the young man, whose name is Barlow. Sir Ambrose, who is just under age sixty, admonishes the elderly Sir Francis to stay in better touch, because the Englishmen in this place must stick together.

As the two older men talk, it becomes clear they are in Los Angeles and they work for a film studio called Megalopolitan Pictures. Sir Francis once was the studio's chief script-writer, the only knight in Hollywood, and the cream of English society there. Eventually, he descended to the publicity department and his home, where the three now are meeting, became dilapidated. Sir Ambrose was a leading actor who apparently still gets some roles. The two talk shop, mostly about an actress named Juanita del Pablo, who the studio is trying to remake from a siren into a sweet leading lady. It turns out that Barlow has quit his job as a screenwriter, and Sir Ambrose advises him to sit tight for a while.

When Sir Ambrose leaves, the other two wonder if he has found out something, but they do not say what he might have discovered. Barlow, whose first name is Dennis, goes to work, where he starts reading poetry. The phone rings and he answers, saying "The Happier Hunting Ground." He learns of a death and says he will be there soon. At a house, he produces an aluminum container and talks to the residents about what sort of services they would like to have, including whether they want a memorial card sent to them every year that says Arthur is wagging his tail in heaven. Barlow puts a dog in the box and takes it away, to the effusive thanks of the residents. He puts the body in a refrigerator at the funeral home and resumes reading.



A Warning and Chapter One Analysis

Evelyn Waugh signals his intentions in his note before chapter one when he warns the reader that the story to come is like a bad dream. When the story opens, the expatriate Englishman at the dilapidated bungalow in the hills is soon sketched as an amusing version of the cliché British colonial. Sir Francis Hinsley sees himself as an exile, even though it becomes clear that he lives in Los Angeles rather than in a British colony in Africa or India. He talks about Americans with the same good-humored condescension that the British of the nineteenth century stereotypically had for the natives of their far-flung colonies. The young Englishman, Barlow, mostly listens and serves the older man, who is soon joined by Sir Ambrose Abercrombie, another classic colonial. When it is revealed that these two men work in the Hollywood film industry, their air of superiority becomes all the more laughable. They see themselves as upholders of standards higher than those that could be reached by the Americans, although exactly what those standards might be is a mystery. Their discussion of how to recast the image of an actress named Juanita del Pablo is a scathing commentary on the disingenuous and manipulative nature of the Hollywood star-making system. After Sir Ambrose leaves and Dennis goes to work, it becomes clear that his job is at a pet cemetery. The services for a dead dog that he offers to its owners are a parody of human burial rites. The husband is willing to do whatever Dennis considers to be the most socially acceptable thing, showing that his interest is not in his pet but in what his peers might think of him. Dennis seems unquestioning and content with all this.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Weeks pass and Dennis is happy at his job, which he thinks has variety, unlike when he was in the British army's Transport Command in Italy during the recently-ended World War II. That was when his first and only book of poetry appeared, which he wrote during the boredom of his non-combatant service. The book won literary prizes and, after the war, Dennis came to Hollywood to write a screenplay on the life of the renowned English poet, Percy Shelley. He hated the studio and quickly quit. Now he is happy working at the pet funeral home for Mr. Shultz and Dennis's colleague, Miss Poski. He has seen not just cats, dogs, and birds, but even a pet bear and a chimpanzee.

Meanwhile, Sir Francis is having trouble with Juanita del Pablo's makeover. Instead of being Spanish, she is now supposed to be Celtic, and the biography of her that Sir Francis creates is poorly received by the studio heads. They tell him to take time off. When he leaves, they dismiss him as washed-up. His secretary no longer comes to his home office, he cannot get a studio car to go to work, and when he takes a cab there, Sir Francis finds that a young man has taken over his office. His immediate superior refers Sir Francis to the next highest boss, who informs him that he has been dismissed and that a formal letter is being prepared.

In the next scene, English expatriates are talking at their cricket club in Los Angeles about Sir Francis, who has died suddenly. The unnamed speakers say that Dennis Barlow, whose contract was not renewed at the studio, is taking care of arrangements. They say that Sir Francis killed himself because his contract was not renewed. Sir Ambrose arrives and praises Sir Francis as the first ambassador to Hollywood of the English expatriates. He confides that Sir Francis was fired because Dennis, who lives in Sir Francis's home, took a job at a pet cemetery, which caused Sir Francis to lose face at the studio. Sir Ambrose says he actually feels sorry for Dennis and has left all the funeral arrangements in his hands to keep the young man's mind off the tragedy. As the sun sinks, Sir Ambrose begins a speech about rallying the English around the flag and getting as many distinguished Hollywood people to attend the funeral as possible.

Chapter Two Analysis

This chapter offers a brief background summary of Dennis's life before he came to Los Angeles, although it only goes back a few years, to his war service. The author's objective is to establish that Dennis wrote a well-received book of poetry and that he disliked the tedium and bureaucracy of army life, which he later equated with his job at the film studio. Dennis likes the variety of the work at the pet cemetery, but for the bizarre reason that he sees different species of dead animals. This is the first hint in the book of an obsession or morbid interest in death that many of the characters hold. The next such example comes later in the chapter, when Sir Francis reacts to his firing by



hanging himself. His dismissal had been handled so offhandedly that nobody even bothered to tell him he had been replaced.

Waugh has begun to build a devastating picture of the callousness of life in Los Angeles. The colleagues of Sir Francis are probably right that he killed himself because his contract was not renewed, which is a sad commentary on the poverty of his life; without the job, he had nothing for which to live. The bluster of Sir Ambrose at the Cricket Club is transparently self-serving, as he extracts himself from doing any work to arrange the funeral of his supposed friend. Instead, he talks about getting high-profile Hollywood people to attend the service, because that will make the British film community look good. The soullessness of these characters would be depressing if they were not such ridiculous figures.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Dennis Barlow is a sensible man of twenty-eight years of age who had never seen a corpse until he came home and found Sir Francis hanging from the rafters, but the sight did not greatly disturb him, because his generation has a familiarity with death via the war. He drives to a funeral home named Whispering Glades. The prospect of this visit fascinates him, because he has read about Hollywood dignitaries being buried there, and because the Happier Hunting Ground has patterned itself on Whispering Glades. At the entrance, foot-high letters carved into a marble slab that looks like an open book tell of a dream of happiness dreamed by Wilbur Kenworthy, which inspired him to start the funeral home. Whispering Glades is described as a sumptuous building with gables, chimneys, and weather-vanes. Barlow reflects that when he first visited Hollywood film sets, he had found it difficult to believe that the structures were mere facades, but at Whispering Glades, he finds it hard to believe the building is three-dimensional. A plaque describes it as a reproduction of an English manor.

Heading for Reception, he must pass through several florist rooms, into which the "Hindu Love-song" is being piped. A woman leads him to another room, where he hears a recorded nightingale's song. The receptionist describes various ways that bodies can be entombed or cremated, and various zones on the grounds where burials cost different amounts, depending upon how close they are to "Works of Art." They decide on putting Sir Francis in Poet's Corner. The receptionist asks if Sir Francis was white. Dennis assures her that he was, but then he sees a vision of Sir Francis looking red and purple as he hung from the rafters. They choose a coffin, a shroud, a room for the body to lie in state, and a church for the funeral. Dennis pays a deposit. The receptionist tries to sell a plot to Dennis for himself, but he declines.

Dennis then meets a cosmetician, to whom he is immediately attracted because she looks "decadent." She has dark hair, pale skin, and greenish eyes that hold a wild glint. They talk in detail about how exactly the hanged man should look when he is transformed, including his expression, hair, whether he should wear a monocle or hold anything, and even if he had dentures. She says repeatedly that someone named Mr. Joyboy will make the Loved One look wonderful. Dennis asks when he will see her again and she says in two days, but she does not tell him her name. She says only that he should ask for the cosmetician of the Orchid Room.

Chapter Three Analysis

Dennis has been living at the home of Sir Francis, but his reaction to the suicide of his host is extremely mild. He seems more moved by the prospect of a visit to Whispering Glades than he is by the death of his friend, which suggests that something is emotionally wrong with him. The Whispering Glades leaves no doubt that it is a hokey



place, a counterfeit of an English manor, and a business built on false piety. Again, the distaste this description would be likely to evoke is buried by Waugh's humorous style. It is easy to be contemptuous of that which is ridiculous, but hard to hate it. The bad thinking that underlies the place is brought out most forcefully when the receptionist asks Dennis if the deceased was white. Waugh adds a sardonic counterpoint to this moment of racism by having Dennis picture the purplish visage of the strangled Sir Francis. Dennis's response to his first sight of Amiée could have been a human moment, had not Waugh deliberately undermined it by having Dennis be drawn to her "decadent" look. Their discussion about Sir Francis is macabre, but they both seem quite easy with it. Their entire encounter seems utterly weird, although neither of them thinks it is. Of course, that makes it even more weird.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Dennis gets a leave of absence from work for three days to make the funeral arrangements for Sir Francis, but his boss, Mr. Schultz, is not pleased, because the Happier Hunting Ground is very busy. Dennis says he will get some good ideas from Whispering Glades, but Mr. Schultz replies that he does not need ideas, he needs hard work. Sir Ambrose asks Dennis to find a passage from something Sir Francis wrote that can be read at the funeral, but Dennis has never seen anything Sir Francis wrote. Sir Ambrose tells him to write it himself if he cannot find anything. Dennis discovers that Sir Francis wrote several small books, but no copies of them seem to be at the house. In a sock drawer, he finds a magazine that has a glowing review by Sir Francis of a book of poems written by a woman, which he cuts out and sends to Sir Ambrose.

Dennis decides to write something, and the scene shifts to the embalming rooms at Whispering Glades. Mr. Joyboy is delivering the corpse of Sir Francis to the cosmetician, Aimée Thanatogenos. Mr. Joyboy is described as a plain and paunchy man with a lovely voice who came to Whispering Glades as a highly regarded embalmer and quickly became a star at work, admired by every girl there. Aimée thinks that Mr. Joyboy's work on Sir Francis is wonderful, and he remarks that each time he knows a corpse is going to her, he cannot help but put a smile on its face.

Aimée goes to work, shampooing, shaving, and manicuring the body before she paints it, which takes about two hours. She and Mr. Joyboy later discuss the body's right eyelid, which kept opening, and how she solved the problem with a little cream. A porter announces that the bodies of a woman and infant have arrived. Mr. Joyboy asks if they are mother and child, and when he hears that they are not related, he gives the woman to another mortician and takes the baby, as always, for himself. He explains to Aimée that infants bring out the best in him, because he is only human. Aimée has Sir Francis dressed in a shroud, and then calls Mr. Joyboy to pose the body for photographs, because it is beginning to get stiff. He does so, and then returns to the baby.

Chapter Four Analysis

Dennis is already fascinated by the cosmetician, but he also has an obvious interest in Whispering Glades. The clear implication is that services for humans after death are a step up, in Dennis's mind, from disposing of pets. Mr. Schultz has a more practical view of the business, which seems to dismay Dennis a little. His inability to find any of Sir Francis's books in his own home indicates an unusual lack of ego for a Hollywood person, and it makes the ill treatment of the studio's former head script-writer all the more understandable. The magazine review of a lady's poetry, saved in Sir Francis's sock drawer, is obviously about a romantic episode in his life, but Dennis simply cuts it out and sends it to Sir Ambrose, a callow act, when that was all he could find of the



man's writing. His decision to write something himself rather than taking the time to go to the library is indicative of Dennis's self-involvement.

At *Whispering Glades*, the revelation that Mr. Joyboy puts a smile on the face of every corpse he hands over to Aimée is unnerving, but darkly funny. Aimée's surname, Thanatogenos, is a compound of the Greek words for "death" and "origin," symbolizing in a humorous way her professional and personal interests. The practical discussion the two colleagues have over the little problem of an eyelid that will not stay closed shows how removed they are from thinking of the corpse as once alive. Mr. Joyboy's eagerness to work on the infant who has died is nothing less than creepy. By now, the "little nightmare" that the author foreshadowed at the book's outset seems to be taking shape.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Dennis calls at Whispering Glades the day before the funeral is scheduled. He is shown to the Orchid Room, which is full of flowers and contains the Cricket Club's trophy of crossed bats and wickets. A door leads to the Slumber Room, where the body is reposing. Dennis pauses with his hand on the doorknob, sensing another hand on the other side. He opens the door to see Aimée, just as a recorded song breaks out, titled, "Oh for the Wings of a Dove." Dennis sees that the second room is also filled with flowers. The coffin sits a few inches above the carpet on a small base covered in flowers. He looks at the face of the smirking corpse, which seems to him more horrific and inhuman than the memory of Sir Francis hanging from the noose. He gasps, which Aimée interprets as admiration of the work.

People who knew Sir Francis come and go all day to view the body, although Dennis knows that the most important studio figures will not come until the interment on the next day. Sir Ambrose drops by to make sure everything is proceeding well and to check on seating arrangements for the funeral. Dennis goes to University Church, a small stone structure on the Whispering Glades grounds where the funeral will be held.

On the porch, Dennis switches on a recording that describes the famed Church of St. Peter-without-the-walls in Oxford, and explains that University Church is a reconstruction of it, with improvements, such as side aisles made of steel and glass. The recording says Dr. Kenworthy, the founder of Whispering Glades, visited St. Peter-without-the-walls and was told that it was so named because in the old days, a wall separated it from the city center. Dr. Kenworthy found the original church dark, and decided that his replica would be full of sunshine and, in a sense, would have no walls.

Dennis goes inside and puts printed name cards on the benches to designate seating. He still has not written the verses for the funeral, and walks among the graves, where he sees odd statues, such as a bearded magician, a football, and a marble Mickey Mouse. At a lake he sees a small boat ferrying young lovers to Lake Island. He buys a ticket to the island, where he lies down under bushes at the family plot of the founder of Kaiser's Stoneless Peaches. He writes a ridiculous verse about Sir Francis and then hears footsteps. A girl begins to lie down beside him and then notices him. It is the cosmetician. He explains that he is writing a poem, which interests her immediately. He asks about her work, and how she got into it. She says she studied Beauticraft at college, along with psychology, art, and Chinese. During the war, she worked in a beauty parlor. When a client died, Aimée was asked by Whispering Glades to do the woman's hair, and subsequently was hired as a trainee cosmetician. Dennis asks what she thinks of when she comes to this place, and Aimée says death and art. Dennis quotes a line from John Keats about being "half in love with easeful death" that Aimée has never heard, and he lets her think he wrote it. She asks to read his poem when it is finished, and introduces herself. They leave together.



Chapter Five Analysis

Waugh's sardonic take on the overwrought rituals of death in America intensifies in this chapter, as Dennis visits the prepared corpse of Sir Francis at Whispering Glades. Amid a profusion of flowers that itself seems cloying, the cricketing trophy reposes like a bad joke, as if the thing of principal value in this man's life was a social game. The Slumber Room is another tasteless touch, with its intimation that people should think of the corpse as merely having a nap. Dennis's sense that another hand is on the other side of the door, and the music that wells up just as he opens it to Aimée, are a funny parody of romantic fiction and films, soon followed by the horrifying smirk on the corpse of Sir Francis. When Dennis gasps at the sight and Aimée interprets his reaction as admiration, the oblivion of her bad taste is so trenchantly satirized that the reader feels like squirming.

Even the church where the service will be held has been tastelessly commercialized by Whispering Glades, with its recorded message trumpeting its steel-and-glass imitation of an ancient English church. Dennis walks past appalling statues in the cemetery to an island where, of all things in this place of death, lovers go to smooch amid the gravestones. Where better for Dennis to have his first romantic interlude with Aimée? The strange mix of subjects she studied in school show the unfocused and haphazard nature of her education, the effects of which are demonstrated when Dennis quotes Keats and Aimée has never heard the famous passage, thinking Dennis wrote it. This foreshadows the hoax that Dennis will perpetrate on her by letting her think he authored many verses written by famous poets. Already, the purity of their attraction to one another is compromised by lies and manipulation.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

This chapter begins with a description of Mr. Joyboy's confident and accomplished work, as he cuts out a piece of cardboard and places it underneath the lips of a corpse to help fashion a smile. In the cosmetic rooms, the other girls are becoming jealous of Aimée because the faces of her dead bodies have better smiles than theirs do. Aimée is nervous, and she has written to a local newspaper advice columnist called Guru Brahmin to ask if she might be in love with Mr. Joyboy. His reply is that she probably is not yet in love, but it might happen. This occurs before she meets Dennis, but now, six weeks later, she writes to Guru Brahmin again. She tells him that Dennis is not admirable or cultured, although he can be sweet and loving, and he has written some wonderful poems to her, but he also can be unethical. Meanwhile, Dennis is busy at the Happier Hunting Ground, but he finds time to steal poems from an anthology of English verse to send to Aimée. She recognizes none of them, although a passage from Shakespeare strikes her as familiar, and she occasionally thinks a poem is risqué. At Whispering Glades, Mr. Joyboy tells

Aimée during a work break that he has spoken to Dr. Kenworthy (also known as the Dreamer), and Aimée has been chosen to be trained as the company's first female embalmer. She is thrilled, but when he asks her to celebrate, she says she has a date. He insists, saying he wants to introduce her to his mother.

Aimée meets Dennis after work to tell him she is going to dinner with Mr. Joyboy, which does not bother him. Dennis wonders how much she will be paid as an embalmer. He says it should be enough for her to take care of him, so he proposes marriage. Shocked and outraged, Aimée leaves. That evening, dabbing on a perfume called Jungle Venom, she feels ready to accept a marriage proposal from Mr. Joyboy, but his home turns out to be shabby and his mother is crabby and demanding. For dinner, the mother serves a can of noodle soup for dinner. The only living thing she seems to like is an almost bald parrot named Sambo. She insults Aimée, who cannot wait to get out of there. Mr. Joyboy assures her that his mother really liked Aimée, but that night, Aimée writes another letter to Guru Brahmin.

Chapter Six Analysis

Mr. Joyboy's obsession with making corpses smile for Aimée is a bizarre symbol of his love for her, because he chooses dead people as his silent messengers. For her part, Aimée is so confused about what love is and how it should be expressed that she accepts these macabre overtures as flattery, and then asks an advice columnist about her own feelings. Aimée's description to the columnist of Dennis shows that she senses something inadequate or wrong in him, but she has no capability to understand or articulate this vague feeling, except to say he is sometimes "unethical." By that, she



means his conduct does not seem to follow proper rules of decorum. Such surface impressions are what Aimée's culture has taught her to interpret as ethics, even though they often mask defective character, as in the case of Mr. Joyboy. Aimée only begins to have doubts about Mr. Joyboy after visiting his home and meeting his vicious mother. At his house, Mr. Joyboy can no longer fully conceal the travesty of his life, as he can at the funeral home by doing his work with confidence and ease. Now Aimée is so confused that she turns again to her only available source of counsel, a newspaper columnist working under a pseudonym whom she has never met.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

It turns out that Guru Brahmin is two gloomy fellows and a secretary. One man writes the column and the other, named Mr. Slump, responds to letters from readers who wish to keep their correspondence private. Mr. Slump smokes incessantly and has a terrible cough that can only be relieved by whisky. He responds to Aimée's latest letter by saying he is a little worried, because her friend was being honorable in taking her to meet his mother, while the poet obviously has character defects. Mr. Slump wonders if his response is too terse, and advises his secretary to make it softer. Meanwhile, Aimée reads her latest love poem from Dennis, which makes her cry, and which she again does not realize is stolen. At the Happier Hunting Ground, Dennis tells Mr. Schultz he is thinking of getting married and wants a raise, but Mr. Schultz refuses, saying the business does not earn enough to warrant giving raises. After the Reverend Erroll Bartholomew reads a silly service for an Alsatian, Dennis tells him that "a friend" wants to know how one goes about becoming a non-sectarian minister. Bartholomew explains that no ordainment is necessary. If one hears the call, one must rent a building and develop a radio congregation, but he warns that the competition is growing stronger all the time. Dennis asks if a non-sectarian minister and an embalmer are social equals, and Bartholomew says they certainly are.

A few days after her disastrous dinner with Mr. Joyboy, Aimée takes Dennis to a place on the Whispering Glades grounds called the Lovers' Nook, comprising two granite seats and a stone slab with a heart-shaped hole in it. An inscription says the site is made from imported Scottish stone and the aperture is an ancient symbol called the Heart of the Bruce. Traditionally, Scottish couples pledge themselves to each other at such a site, and kiss through the heart-shaped hole to seal their promise. The oath they pledge is a verse from the great Scottish poet, Robert Burns. The place is very popular. Dennis reflects that it was lucky he did not steal a poem from Burns for Aimée. The two wait their turn among the couples, make the pledge, and kiss through the window. That night, Aimée writes to tell Mr. Joyboy and Guru Brahmin of her decision. Mr. Slump tells his secretary to send the usual letter of congratulation, even though the secretary complains that Aimée is marrying the wrong man. The next morning, Aimée receives from Mr. Joyboy a corpse whose expression is one of such terrible sadness that it pains her heart.

Chapter Seven Analysis

Not only does it turn out that Guru Brahmin is three people, but the one who has been writing to Aimée is an ill-tempered, chain-smoking, hard drinker. The author's point is that Aimée could hardly have picked a less useful confidant. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Slump gives her bad advice, which Aimée ignores after Dennis sends her another stolen poem. Waugh has placed Aimée between two unsuitable men, and has given her no abilities to



figure out what to do. The implication is such situations occur when nobody is acting ethically, because nobody understands or really cares about the meaning of ethics. While Aimée struggles with what to do next, Dennis turns a chance meeting with Erroll Bartholomew into a plan to become a non-sectarian minister, solely as a way to impress Aimée. Dennis has no interest in religion, but even as Waugh underscores his character's unscrupulous nature, Aimée decides to pledge her love to Dennis. Again, it is weird and hilarious that lovers come to the grounds of a funeral home to promise their lives to each other. In continuing to match love with death, the author implies that people who are ill-prepared to truly appreciate the finer sentiments in life are doomed to failure in their relationships. When Mr. Slump has a form letter of congratulation sent to Aimée, it shows his complete lack of concern about her fate. Mr. Joyboy chooses to convey his unhappiness by manipulating the face of a corpse, thus making a mockery of that individual's death, although Aimée reacts to this perverse message with the sadness for which Mr. Joyboy would have hoped.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Mr. Slump is in a foul mood and tired of getting letters from Aimée. In this letter, she recounts her engagement three weeks ago to her British friend, but she writes that he has not yet become a minister, as he had planned to do. Also, her friend at work has become morose and even mean, which bothers her, while her British friend seems unnaturally interested in the details of her work. Mr. Slump interrupts his reading to comment that women never can let any man go. At work, Aimée keeps receiving lovely poems from Dennis that salve the wounds of their arguments from the previous night. On one of them, she writes a note to Mr. Joyboy, saying that he should try to understand, and she slips the poem under his door. Mr. Joyboy goes out, but after lunch, he comments to her that the poem was a beautiful thought, and she says her fiancée wrote it. He asks if her fiancée is the English fellow Mr. Joyboy saw her with the other day, and she says yes. Mr. Joyboy asks to see more of his poems. He says he knows a literary person who might be able to help Aimée's fiancée, and she replies that she has kept all the poems and will gladly show them to him.

Aimée is happy that Mr. Joyboy is being civil to her again, and she asks after his mother's health. He says his mother is unhappy at the moment because of the recent death of Sambo, her pet parrot. He says that was why he went out earlier, to arrange for Sambo's disposal at the Happier Hunting Ground. He asks if Aimée will come to the parrot's funeral on Wednesday, and she agrees. This is how, at last, Aimée makes her first visit to the Happier Hunting Ground.

Chapter Eight Analysis

In this chapter, Waugh stirs his plot elements to thicken the mixture. First, he shows Mr. Slump getting increasingly weary of letters from Aimée. This is dangerous, because it could foreshadow particularly bad advice from him if he gets too cranky. Next, Waugh shows that Aimée is impressed by Dennis's plan to become a minister, just as he had hoped. Even so, Waugh is careful to insert Aimée concern about Dennis's excessive interest in her work, as a way of showing that she is still not fully confident in her relationship with him. Waugh creates an opening for the exposure of Dennis as a fraud when Aimée tries to mend fences with Mr. Joyboy by showing him a poem that she thinks Dennis wrote, and Mr. Joyboy asks to see more of Dennis's work. Waugh immediately widens this opening when Mr. Joyboy announces that his mother's parrot has died, and asks Aimée to attend the funeral. Waugh has quickly stitched together these plot components to create tension that he will resolve almost as fast it was created. The reader senses that Waugh has sustained his satire almost as long as he wishes to do so, and has now deftly arranged for a conclusion to the story.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

In his authorial voice, Waugh asserts that Aimée, raised and educated in Los Angeles, owes the shaping of her brain and body to the effects of southern California, but her spirit is more lofty than that. Upon the exposure of Dennis as a fake and a liar, she has no doubt about what she will write in her final letter to Guru Brahmin. Mr. Slump, badly shaven and scarcely sober, is in danger of losing his job but does not know it. He is disgusted to see another letter from Aimée, and when the secretary explains that Aimée has been duped by her fiancée, Mr. Slump just says to tell her to marry the other guy, which Aimée already has decided to do. Her engagement to Dennis had not been formally announced, but the engagement of Aimée and Mr. Joyboy gets a big play in journals of the morticians' trade and in the house publication of *Whispering Glades*.

Aimée avoids Dennis, who lies in wait, and follows her to a Nutburger café. Dennis finds his first nutburger shockingly tasteless, but presses on, reminding Aimée that she promised to marry him. She points out that it was under false pretenses, because all the poems he sent her were plagiarized. He denies this, because he never told her that the poems were his; she simply assumed they were. He argues that he should be offended, because she did not recognize some of the best-known poetry in the English language. She complains that he has been secretly working at the horrible pet cemetery, and he argues that he is merely working his way up the ladder. He reminds her of her pledge at the Heart of the Bruce, and this makes a big impression. She asks to be driven home, and he can see that the pledge bothers her greatly.

Alone in her apartment, Aimée is full of doubt. She telephones Mr. Joyboy and asks him to come over, but he declines, saying his mother has a new pet bird, and he must stay with her tonight. She calls the local newspaper and asks to speak with the Guru Brahmin. She is told that the guru is two people, and the one she wants, Mr. Slump, will not be working there after tomorrow. She could try to reach him at the saloon. Mr. Slump, heavily drunk, takes a call on the saloon's phone, and Aimée tells him the whole story. He puts down the phone and does not listen. At the end, he tells her to jump off something high. Aimée takes a sedative, but wakes up very early. She goes to *Whispering Glades*, enters the building through the night staff door, and goes into Mr. Joyboy's work room. She finds a bottle and syringe and injects herself.

Chapter Nine Analysis

At the start of this chapter, Waugh plainly states Aimée's problem, which is that the assumptions and values underpinning society in Los Angeles have ill-equipped her to understand or nurture the vague longing she has for life's most sublime experiences. As if to underscore this point, Aimée again writes to the hapless and disinterested Guru Brahmin to air her troubles and declare her latest intentions. No sooner does she do this



than Dennis reminds her that she pledged her troth to him, and she is again thrown into a quandary. Her sense of honor will not allow her to go back on her word, and Dennis refuses to release her from the promise. Still, she knows that she could never marry him now, not only because of the hoax concerning the poems but because she considers his job to be beneath her dignity.

Dennis tries to wiggle out of his predicament by stressing a detail, which is that he never actually said the poems were written by him, and he is quite surprised to see that what works is the promise she made to him at the Lovers' Nook. Dennis is so removed from considerations of honor that he could not even conceive that Aimée's pledge would hold her. Indeed, his interest in the marriage increasingly looks like a game he wants to win, simply because winning is good. When a distraught Aimée telephones Mr. Joyboy, she gets exactly what she would have expected, had she been a more insightful person. He is busy with his mother, and it is not convenient for him to see her, even though he can tell that a visit from him is important to her. Once again, Aimée resorts to Guru Brahmin for advice. She discovers that he is actually two people, and she foolishly calls Mr. Slump at a bar. He tells her to do what she may well already have decided to do. The young woman is so outlandishly silly that it is very hard to feel any sympathy for her.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

That morning, Dennis is training his replacement at the Happier Hunting Ground when Mr. Joyboy arrives. Dennis sends the trainee out of the room, and Mr. Joyboy begins to cry. He says Aimée has killed herself, and Dennis is responsible. Dennis questions Mr. Joyboy, discovering that she injected cyanide. Mr. Joyboy, who keeps calling Aimée his "honey-baby," much to the disgust of Dennis, says that Dennis must help him to figure out what to do. Mr. Joyboy fears that his career will be ruined by the scandal, and Dennis realizes that the man wants help in disposing of Aimée's body. Dennis says he must think and sends Mr. Joyboy away, telling him to come back later.

Sir Ambrose then arrives at the pet cemetery, and says he received a card from Dennis announcing that he planned to become a non-sectarian minister. Sir Ambrose says that for Dennis to enter the business of religion is too public and will damage the credibility of Englishmen in Hollywood. He urges Dennis to go back to England. Dennis says that he has been rethinking his plans but he has no money, and Sir Ambrose replies that the Cricket Club anticipated this problem. The members have contributed to a coach-class airfare home for Dennis, and Sir Ambrose hands him a check.

When Mr. Joyboy returns a few hours later, Dennis tells him they can cremate Aimée that night at the pet cemetery. Explaining her disappearance should be no problem, because she was about to marry Mr. Joyboy, but people knew that she once was engaged to Dennis. If Dennis were to disappear, everyone would assume she eloped with him. Dennis extracts a thousand dollars from Mr. Joyboy to execute his plan, and gives Mr. Joyboy the check from the Cricket Club. He tells Mr. Joyboy to cash it, add the extra money to the sum, buy a first-class ticket for Dennis back to England, and bring the leftover money to him with the ticket. That night, the two load Aimée into the largest container the pet cemetery has, and cremate her at the Happier Hunting Ground. Dennis recites a poem from Edgar Allen Poe, which prompts Mr. Joyboy to object that it is stolen, but Dennis points out that the words are quite appropriate. Mr. Joyboy leaves, and Dennis makes a note for the company to send him a card every year that says his little Aimée is wagging her tail in heaven. Dennis thinks himself privileged to be bringing back to England a deep well of experience, so important to the artist. Waiting for his loved one to finish burning, he picks up a novel Miss Poski had left on his desk and begins reading it.

Chapter Ten Analysis

Waugh makes certain in two ways that Mr. Joyboy's grief over the death of Aimée cannot be interpreted as genuine. First, Mr. Joyboy immediately blames Dennis, even though Aimée called Mr. Joyboy and pleaded with him to see her, which he refused to do. Anyone who truly cared about Aimée would be wracked with guilt. Even worse,



Dennis quickly realizes that Mr. Joyboy has come to him for help in quietly disposing of the body, to avoid any taint of scandal on Mr. Joyboy's career. Her death represents a threat to Mr. Joyboy, who is more frightened for himself than he is grieving for her. After Dennis tells Mr. Joyboy to come back later, Waugh interjects a final plot element with the arrival of Sir Ambrose.

In earlier chapters, the author had set the stage for a payoff to Dennis by showing Sir Ambrose's concern about the young Englishman's job choice, and it follows that a non-sectarian ministry might be just too much for the older man. Waugh gets in another dig at the manipulative Dennis by having him extract an extra thousand dollars from Mr. Joyboy and upgrade Dennis's ticket to first class. The explanation Dennis gives for how people will react to Aimée's disappearance is perfectly plausible, especially considering the natures of the characters in this novel. Dennis and Mr. Joyboy have been rivals, and the ego-driven nature of their struggle is highlighted by the petty joke of Dennis arranging for Mr. Joyboy to receive an annual card saying that Aimée is wagging her tail in heaven. From the reader's viewpoint, though, it is a funny and a neatly wrapped ending to this tongue-in-cheek tale. The final reflection of Dennis, as Aimée burns, that he has gathered a trove of valuable material for an artist is yet another indicator of how the emotional content in the lives of these characters is constantly turned to self-interest.



Characters

Dennis Barlow

Dennis Barlow is a twenty-eight year-old Englishman who has come to Los Angeles after writing a well-received book of poems while he was in a non-combatant posting with the British armed forces during World War II. Barlow is hired by a Hollywood studio to write a screenplay for a film on the life of the poet Percy Shelley, but he quickly becomes disillusioned by the tedium and lack of imagination in the studio system. Apparently, he quit the job, although later in the novel, other characters suggest that his contract was not renewed. He takes a job at a pet cemetery, which is regarded by others in Hollywood's British film community as an embarrassment for all of them. Dennis is not high-principled and sees no problem at all with his job. He becomes enamored of a young woman named Aimée Thanatogenos, who works at a funeral home, and plagiarizes famous love poems to impress her. When Aimée, who is trying to decide between Dennis and another suitor, becomes depressed and commits suicide, the reaction of Dennis is exceedingly mild. He professes love for her but seems quite undisturbed by her death, and he even helps his rival to secretly dispose of her body to avoid scandal. Dennis then extracts money from his rival and goes back to England. He is cavalier, untruthful, self-seeking, and a cad, but in a comic novel such as this one, the incredible shortcomings of Dennis's character cannot be taken seriously. This is why he actually is quite likable. The author's portrayal of Dennis invites the reader to chuckle at his dishonorable behavior, because as a satire, the book is meant to be outlandish.

Aimée Thanatogenos

Aimée Thanatogenos is the young cosmetician at the Whispering Glades funeral home who Dennis wants to marry. She is described as a product in mind and body of the Los Angeles educational system and popular culture, but her spirit tries to soar above what the author clearly regards as the city's debased society. Aimée is not intellectually equipped to analyze her situation with an aim to improve it, but she longs vaguely for something more "ethical." She sees the chief embalmer at Whispering Glades, Mr. Joyboy, as a paragon of taste and refinement, until she visits his shabby home and meets his horrific mother, who lives with him. Aimée is often moved by the poetry Dennis sends her, but she recognizes none of it as stolen. She also regards some of the more daring verses he sends her as crude, and is appalled by his carnal interest in her before they are even married. She mentions in the novel that her father left her mother, who was an alcoholic. Without relatives, Aimée writes to a local newspaper columnist for advice concerning whether she should marry Dennis or Mr. Joyboy. Eventually, the drunken columnist tells her to jump off a roof, and she responds by injecting herself with a fatal dose of cyanide. In a serious novel, her story would be sad, but she is such a hapless creature, so befuddled by life and with such a weird interest in the corpses she manicures and colors for a living that the author manages to make even her suicide



seem ridiculous. Aimée is a victim for whom Evelyn Waugh encourages us to feel no sympathy.

Mr. Joyboy

Mr. Joyboy is the chief embalmer at Whispering Glades and the rival of Dennis for Aimée's hand. A plump and plain man, he nevertheless captivates the young women at the funeral parlor because of his skillful work, his high standing in the company, and his melodious voice. He is regarded as symbolic of the dignity and artistry of the services performed at Whispering Glades. In reality, Mr. Joyboy is childish, peevish, and hen-pecked by his domineering mother. He has a frightening fascination with dead bodies, particularly those of infants, and he plays with the corpses by putting smiles on their faces as little tributes from him to Aimée. Clearly, Mr. Joyboy is disturbed, and the joke in the novel is that he is so widely admired. When Aimée visits him at home, away from the false grandeur of his position at work, she gets a notion of his real self, but an even worse picture emerges later, when Mr. Joyboy will not leave his mother to visit a distraught Aimée when she calls him for help, not long before she commits suicide. Typically, Mr. Joyboy blames Dennis for Aimée's death, never once considering that he could have saved her himself if he had reacted responsibly to her plea. The way he quickly interprets her death as damaging to his career, because he and Aimée were engaged, is craven. Even worse, he immediately agrees to Dennis's plan to cremate her at the pet cemetery, which effectively will make her disappear. Mr. Joyboy is an appalling creature, yet everyone except Dennis seems to love him.

Sir Ambrose Abercrombie

Sir Ambrose Abercrombie is a British actor living in Hollywood who made action pictures when he was younger, although he is now close to sixty as the novel opens. One of the leading figures among the English film community in Hollywood, Sir Ambrose is obsessed with keeping the standards of his expatriate countrymen high. Sir Ambrose's definition of those high standards is shown by the contempt he has for Dennis Barlow's work at the pet cemetery, especially because Dennis once worked as a screenwriter at the studio where Sir Ambrose works, Megalopolitan Pictures. Sir Ambrose is a back-stabber, as indicated by his friendliness to the face of his fellow knight, Sir Francis Hinsley, who he denigrates to their colleagues at the Cricket Club.

After Sir Francis dies, Sir Ambrose leaves all the funeral arrangements to Dennis, contending that it will keep the young man busy, although it is plain that this is an easy way for Sir Ambrose to avoid any work involved in preparing a send-off for his old companion. Sir Ambrose's main interest is in getting studio bigwigs to attend the funeral because such attendance will make the British film community look important. Late in the novel, Sir Ambrose organizes contributions from the Cricket Club as a bribe to send Dennis back to England, because Dennis is intending to become a non-sectarian minister, which Sir Ambrose finds too public, and out of the question for an Englishman in Los Angeles. Sir Ambrose is the ultimate snob and a buffoon to boot.



Sir Francis Hinsley

Sir Francis Hinsley works in the public relations department at Megalopolitan Pictures, although he once was the chief screenwriter there. An old man when the novel begins, his former fame has faded to nothing and his house in the Hollywood hills is in disrepair. He is having a hard time at work, and when he fails to create an interesting "back story" for one of the starlets, he is summarily fired. Sir Francis hangs himself. Dennis, who was befriended by Sir Francis, tries to find books written by the old man earlier in his life, from which Sir Ambrose can read at the funeral, but Sir Francis has kept none in the house. It seems he was entirely without self-regard or ego. A dotty old fellow, he is a charming sketch of the mildly eccentric Englishman, which is a literary stereotype that the author appears to be satirizing through his portrayal of Sir Francis.

Guru Brahmin

Guru Brahmin is actually two men and a secretary who collaborate on an advice column for a Los Angeles newspaper. Mr. Slump, who handles private correspondence from readers with questions, is the key figure, and the only named one, of the Guru Brahmin team in this story. Mr. Slump is a gloomy, hard-drinking, chain smoker with a bad cough. He reads and responds to a series of letters from Aimée about her relationships with Dennis and Mr. Joyboy, but Mr. Slump tires of her waffling, and eventually advises her to go jump off a high place. At this point, he has been fired from his job and is drunk at a saloon. Not long after she gets this advice over the phone from Mr. Slump, Aimée commits suicide.

Mrs. Joyboy

Mrs. Joyboy is the mother of the embalmer, Mr. Joyboy. She lives with him and dominates his life. She complains, criticizes, demands, and seems to do nothing to make his life easier or more pleasant. She is the classic harridan.

Mr. Schultz

Mr. Schultz is the owner of the pet cemetery where Dennis works. He is a profit-hungry businessman who seems jealous of the success of the Whispering Glades funeral home for humans. He speaks with an indeterminate accent that suggests foreign origins. He likes Dennis but refuses to give him a raise.

Dr. Wilbur Kenworthy

Dr. Wilbur Kenworthy is the founder of Whispering Glades. Sometimes called the Dreamer, especially by Mr. Joyboy, he is presented as a great thinker of almost mythical



proportions, although he is still alive. Evelyn Waugh has great fun with the self-styled grandeur of Dr. Kenworthy, who never actually appears in the novel.

Juanita del Pablo

Juanita del Pablo is the actress for whom Sir Francis tries to create a new biography after the executives at Megalopolitan Pictures decide that her dark, Spanish style must be replaced for a more family-friendly, Celtic personality. She does not appear in the story, but her situation provides the opportunity for Evelyn Waugh to satirize the Hollywood star-making system.

The Reverend Errol Bartholomew

The Reverend Errol Bartholomew is a non-sectarian minister who comes to the pet cemetery to give a ridiculous eulogy for an Alsatian dog. Dennis questions the reverend about how to become a non-sectarian minister, and from this conversation, Dennis hatches the plan to take up such work himself as a way to impress Aimée.

Miss Myra Poski

Miss Myra Poski is the secretary at the pet cemetery. She does not have a big part in the novel and seems to exist mostly to lend authenticity to the portrayal of Dennis's workplace.



Objects/Places

Los Angeles

Los Angeles is the city in which all the novel's action takes place. Specifically, Beverly Hills is mentioned early in the book, although the exact location is never given of the two funeral homes where much of the story is set. Los Angeles is not described, except for the foothills as seen from the home of Sir Francis Hinsley, and the grounds of Whispering Glades.

Whispering Glades

Whispering Glades is the funeral home where Mr. Joyboy and Aimée work. It is described as a reproduction of an old English manor. A stone plaque in the shape of an open book sits at the entrance. On it is inscribed a pretentious and silly statement about the funeral home. The grounds apparently are vast, because they contain numerous graveyards, a lake, at least one church, a florist, and the rooms where bodies are prepared, displayed, and either cremated, entombed, or buried.

Sir Francis Hinsley's Home

Sir Francis Hinsley's home is a bungalow in ill repair, apparently in Beverly Hills. Its verandah offers a view of scrubby foothills, although the ocean cannot be seen. The swimming pool is cracked, empty, and overgrown with weeds.

The Happier Hunting Ground

The Happier Hunting Ground is the pet cemetery where Dennis works. It appears to consist of not much more than a few desks and phones, a waiting room, a van, several sizes of containers for dead pets, a large refrigerator, and a powerful furnace.

The Embalming Rooms

The Embalming Rooms are where Mr. Joyboy and the other morticians work on the second floor of the manor at Whispering Glades. They are all tile, porcelain, and shining steel, full of slabs and smelling of formaldehyde. Near the novel's end, Aimée goes here, specifically to Mr. Joyboy's work room, to commit suicide.



The Orchid Slumber Room

The Orchid Slumber Room is where Sir Francis Hinsley's body lies in state before his funeral. It actually consists of two adjoining rooms at Whispering Glades. The first room contains nothing but flowers. The second room is also full of flowers, but also has an open cask on a small stand near the floor that contains the prepared corpse of Sir Francis.

The University Church

The University Church is where the services are held to be for Sir Francis, on the grounds of Whispering Glades. It is an updated reproduction of a church in Oxford called St.-Peter-without-the-walls. Dennis visits there before the funeral.

Lake Island

Lake Island is an island within a lake on the grounds of Whispering Glades where Dennis goes to try to write a verse for the funeral of Sir Francis. He meets Aimée there, and they have a conversation that begins their romance.

Lovers' Nook

Lovers' Nook is a spot on the grounds of Whispering Glades where couples go to pledge themselves to each other. It has granite chairs and a slab with a heart-shaped aperture, through which the lovers kiss after pledging their troth. Aimée takes Dennis there for this impromptu ceremony.

Mr. Joyboy's Home

Mr. Joyboy's home is a rather shabby little place somewhere out in the suburbs of Los Angeles. He lives there with his mother, and when Aimée goes there for dinner, she is taken aback by how comfortless it is.

Aimée's Apartment

Aimée's apartment is described by the author only as "concrete cell." Near the novel's end, she is there while she agonizes over Dennis and Mr. Joyboy, shortly before she goes to Whispering Glades and commits suicide.



Themes

Beware of Vulgarities

As a satirist, Evelyn Waugh's main goal is to point out people's false assumptions, pettiness, and misdeeds. Rather than addressing the question of how to repair whatever goes wrong between people, he skewers their pretentiousness and silliness. In this novel, much of the behavior he attacks is the result of vulgarity. The expatriate British and the American characters are equally guilty of being vulgar, which is to say they have abandoned or never did pursue the refinements of experience, in favor of common and tasteless preoccupations. Even Dennis Barlow, a poet whose first book was widely praised, writes ridiculous doggerel in the novel's only quotation from Barlow's work, part of a poem he writes upon the death of his friend, Sir Francis Hinsley. Aimée Thanatogenos aspires to finer considerations, but her American education was so vulgarized that she cannot even recognize some of the most renowned poetry ever written in English, all of which she thinks was written by Dennis. Mr. Joyboy is presented by the author as an exemplar of taste and refinement, but he turns out to be a base, emotionally damaged, cowardly man. Nobody in the book is truly refined, except, the reader suspects, the author. Waugh's message is that failure to learn how to appreciate beauty, or the failure to continue to appreciate it because of a preoccupation with lesser values, will lead to debased behavior. People who are vulgarized become incapable of treating each other decently, because they have lost touch with truth and beauty, or never were in touch with them. Vulgarity, in Waugh's book, is a crime against compassion, well-deserving of ridicule.

Bad Ambition Corrupts

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treating each other decently because they have lost touch with truth and beauty, or never were in touch with them. Vulgarity, in Waugh's book, is a crime against compassion, well-deserving of ridicule.

Love is Misunderstood

This satirical novel's title is apt, because nobody in it gets a proper form of love. Even in death, people are mistreated by their survivors. For that matter, even pets are subjected to all manner of humiliating treatment after their deaths. The characters are oblivious of the nature of real love. Instead, they indulge in hysteria, possessiveness, and cruelty in the name of love. In this novel, love is about taking rather than giving, and about obsession with self-image rather than about surrendering oneself to the loved one. It's all an act, which, of course, is perfect for a novel set in Hollywood. The trouble is that these characters are unaware of their own delusions and clearly have no idea of what real love means. They are so self-centered that they seem incapable of giving, which is why the customers who come to the funeral parlors are much more concerned about what other people think about them than they are about how to give a dignified and loving send-off to their family members or, indeed, to their pets. Waugh's theme is that any place where self-love is the only kind of love is bound to become loveless. As is often the case with satires, this book presents the plight of its loveless characters in ways that are often darkly funny, but the theme itself is perhaps as serious as any message concerning human interactions could be. Those who don't understand love, the author is warning us, lead sham existences.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told from the third-person, dramatic point of view. The author occasionally comments on the proceedings, but he does not enter into the thoughts of the characters. When he wants to indicate a character's frame of mind, he does so by showing what that character does, rather than describing what the individual is thinking. Accordingly, characters will raise their eyebrows, or shudder, or say something to indicate their emotional state. This avoidance of entering a character's thoughts is a good choice for a satirist to make, because Evelyn Waugh's intention in the book is to make fun of all the characters, even though terrible things happen to some of them. If he were to assume the viewpoint of a character, the reader inevitably would begin to either sympathize more with that individual or grow to dislike the person. By keeping out of his characters' minds, Waugh holds the reader at a distance from them, which makes his satirical treatment of them easier to enjoy. The characters do not take on fully developed emotional lives, and this brings them close to caricature. They become types rather than fleshed-out individuals, and therefore are fodder for ridicule that does not seem cruel, as it might if the reader identified with the characters as "real" people. This is not to say that the characters in the novel are like cardboard cutouts. They still have heft, but they are without the warmth, contradictions, and complications of more lifelike characters. This lack of dimensionality, which comes in large measure from Waugh's refusal to enter into their thoughts, makes them appealing comic characters, because the terrible events befall them are easier for the reader to witness.

Setting

The book is set exclusively in Los Angeles, but the city itself plays almost no tangible role in the story. Instead, the city as a setting is important only as a cultural symbol. Los Angeles, and Hollywood, are emblematic in this novel of how misplaced values, dishonorable conduct, greed, and envy can degrade people, creating a debased culture. Evelyn Waugh clearly sees Los Angeles as a vulgar place, but he chooses to couch his criticisms of it in satire. He does this by focusing on the effects on people of the city's society and values. A challenge for his satire is how he can attack Los Angeles through descriptions of its worst physical characteristics, because it is hard to make such descriptions funny. He solves this problem by focusing on a specific setting within Los Angeles, which is Whispering Glades. Waugh does a terrific job of sending up the pomposity and false sanctity of the funeral home, not only through descriptions of the absurd excesses at Whispering Glades, but also by pairing it with the even more ridiculous activities at the Happier Hunting Ground pet cemetery. These two settings become microcosms of all that is most lamentable, in the author's opinion, about the failure of the Hollywood set to understand and properly value important things in life. By showing how his characters react to the ends of lives, whether those of people or pets, Waugh is able to comment indirectly and humorously on what's wrong with these



people's thinking. His choice of the funeral homes in which to set most of the book's action is a master stroke.

Language and Meaning

The vocabulary in *The Loved One* is a good indicator of the author's mastery of the art of the novel. Evelyn Waugh is not afraid to employ unusual words, but such usage never seems forced. He follows the dictum of using a large word only when a smaller one is not precise enough to do the job. His fluid and economical sentences display a keen mind at work, and his intention with the language in the novel is unfailingly to amuse. Indeed, the author's voice is the strongest one in the book. He does not intrude himself, as Evelyn Waugh *per se*, into the story, but the stylish, erudite, and funny language he uses is a major presence in it. Another aspect of the language in this novel is the difference between the speech of the English and the American characters. The Englishmen (there are no Englishwomen in the story) speak as if they would like to have been born to the manor, but probably just got a solid, middle-class education. The Americans are blunt and a bit crass. The speech of both nationalities is satirized, but perhaps funniest to the American ear is the occasional, surprising insertion of a rather tasteless remark by an American in the midst of an otherwise genteel conversation. Waugh, who was English, demonstrates a fine ear in this novel for the tendency, even in educated American speech, to occasionally lack decorum in comparison to well-bred British conversation. Through the dialogue in this book, Waugh makes gleeful fun of American vulgarity.

Structure

The structure of *The Loved One* is simple. Just as Evelyn Waugh used a basic, third-person point of view, apparently to focus his subtleties on other aspects of the story, he likewise does nothing exceptional with the storyline. The novel has ten numbered but untitled chapters, the first of which is preceded by a short author's statement. The book has no Table of Contents or supplementary material of any kind. The plot progresses chronologically, covering perhaps a few months in time. There is no backtracking or flash-forwarding in the book. The closest Waugh comes to a shift in time is when he describes events of one evening and morning for a particular character, and then starts another chapter by describing the events of that same morning for a different character. In one chapter, he creates a brief "back story" for his main character, Dennis Barlow, by summarizing his wartime experiences prior to his arrival in Los Angeles, where the novel's action is set. This is a brief section of the chapter, however, and does not constitute a change in the chronological structure of the story. Waugh's lack of concern about structural complexities serves the purpose of his satire, by helping to isolate the characters in a particular time and place. By not moving the characters back and forth in time, or making any other structural diversions to fill out details of their lives, the author creates an impression that they exist outside other realities. They stand out in relief against the world, as if their small lives were all of existence. Such a naive

misconception on the part of his characters is very appropriate to Waugh's satirical intent.



Quotes

"It's the secret of social ease in this country. They talk entirely for their own pleasure. Nothing they say is designed to be heard."

Chap. 1, p. 5

"I've always had two principles throughout all my life in motion-pictures: never do before the camera what you would not do at home and never do at home what you would not do before the camera."

Chap. 1, p. 9

"In Africa, if a white man is disgracing himself and letting down his people the authorities pack him off home. We haven't such rights here, unfortunately."

Chap. 2, p. 35

"She left the room and Dennis at once forgot everything about her. He had seen her before everywhere."

Chap. 3, p. 53

"It was as though there was an amplifier concealed somewhere within him and his speech came from some distant and august studio; everything he said might have been for a peak-hour listening period."

Chap. 4, p. 67

"And the face which inclined its blind eyes towards him—the face was entirely horrible; as ageless as a tortoise and as inhuman; a painted and smirking obscene travesty by comparison with which the devil-mask Dennis had found in the noose was a festive adornment, a thing an uncle might don at a Christmas party."

Chap. 5, p. 75

"Aren't you the friend of the strangulated Loved One in the Orchid Room? My memory's very bad for live faces."

Chap. 5, p. 87

"They sat silent for ten minutes until the raucous stream of misinformation gave place to a gentler voice advocating a brand of toilet paper."

Chap. 6, p. 113

"Mrs. Joyboy had small angry eyes, frizzy hair, pince-nez on a very thick nose, a shapeless body and positively insulting clothes."

Chap. 6, p. 114

"Her heart was broken perhaps, but it was a small inexpensive organ of local manufacture."

Chap. 9, p. 135



"The sobs ceased, and the ensuing silence told Dennis that intellectual processes were at work in the exquisite dim head in the corner."

Chap. 9, p. 142

"Tomorrow and on every anniversary as long as the Happier Hunting Ground existed a postcard would go to Mr. Joyboy: Your little Aimée is wagging her tail in heaven tonight, thinking of you."

Chap. 10, p. 163



Topics for Discussion

How do you interpret the disapproving attitude Sir Ambrose has toward Dennis's job at the pet cemetery and his later plan to be a minister? What do you think of this reputation of the British in Hollywood that Sir Ambrose is trying to uphold?

Dennis seems to drift, or perhaps skate, through the entire novel. He seems almost unattached from everyone, even Aimée. What do you think his attitude means, or says about him?

Aimée complains about Dennis being unethical, and seems quite taken with Mr. Joyboy's debonair style at work. What is wrong with her assessment of people? What is missing in her analysis of these two men?

Mr. Joyboy seems fascinated by the corpses upon which he works, and he manipulates their expressions as a way of showing how he feels toward Aimée. What do you think the author is suggesting about Mr. Joyboy in portraying this morbid side of him?

Evelyn Waugh attacks everyone and everything with his satire in this novel. What do you think is his main target, and what is your reasoning?

Why do you think the author titled this book, *The Loved One*? Bearing in mind that it is a satire, what is the importance of this title?

Imagine that the author were to write a serious book about the same characters. Generally, how would he have to change them to keep our interest, compared to his depiction of them in this humorous book?