

Marjorie Morningstar Study Guide

Marjorie Morningstar by Herman Wouk

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Plot Summary

Marjorie Morgenstern is a typical "Jewish princess," living in a large opulent apartment, overlooking Central Park. Her immigrant parents have provided well for their children and are looking forward to solid futures for their children—a profession for Seth and an appropriate marriage for their daughter. Marjorie, however, has plans of her own. Typical of most teenagers, she sees her mother as controlling and domineering, attempting to manage every aspect of Marjorie's social life, including "arrangements" of encounters with young Jewish men who are destined to become professionals and who have respectable parents of means. At Hunter College, Marjorie begins her dream of a career in the theatre, starring in rather amateurish productions in which she shines. Here, she meets Marsha, part of the production crew and a girl of whom Rose Morgenstern disapproves, and together they spend the summer as camp counselors. Marsha introduces Marjorie to the adult life of South Wind and to Noel Airman, a man with whom Marjorie becomes obsessed. Despite her parents' objections, Marjorie pursues Noel doggedly, discarding a host of "acceptable" potential husbands, while Noel experiences failure in virtually every aspect of his life. His one musical production is a complete failure, he is unable to maintain regular employment, and becomes increasingly unstable, as he moves in and out of Marjorie's life at will.

Unable to accept Noel's final departure from her life, during which he leaves for Paris to pursue the study of philosophy, Marjorie's obsession is ultimately accepted by her parents, and she is sent on the Queen Mary to locate him and bring him "back to his senses." During the voyage, she encounters Mike Eden, an older man who has discarded the teaching of psychology for the pharmaceutical business but who, in the course of his business, works for an anti-Nazi organization and successfully rescues Jewish families from Hitler's Germany. Though Mike does not discourage Marjorie from her quest to find Noel, and, in fact, locates him for her, he impacts Marjorie's life significantly. She now realizes that there is an entire world of people, especially men, who accomplish great things and have who have unselfish goals and purposes in life. When this realization is contrasted with the Noel she finds in a shabby Paris apartment, living off of yet another woman, it is easy for Marjorie to reject his marriage proposal, return to the States, and confront reality. For Marjorie, that reality is marriage to a lawyer, a move to the suburbs and the parenting of four children. In the end, as Wally Wronken, a man who has always maintained an unrequited love for her, so aptly states, Marjorie Morgenstern is a pretty, yet completely ordinary woman who has taken her appropriate place in life.



Part 1: Marjorie; Chapters 1-3: Marjorie, Prince Charming, George

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The reader is introduced to Marjorie Morgenstern in Chapter 1, a seventeen-year old Jewish girl living in the El Dorado, an apartment overlooking Central Park. Her immigrant parents have only recently moved here after many years in the Bronx. At 17, Marjorie is attending the free public college to become a teacher, but, after attending a party at Columbia University, has an epiphany and knows she is now destined for the stage. She is off to horseback ride in the Park with some friends from the previous night's party.

Chapter 2 is consumed by the horseback riding and Marjorie's continued infatuation with Sandy Goldstone, a friend of her date's from the previous evening. After a mishap, in which her horse throws her, Marjorie is carried by Sandy to a cab and then into her parents' home. Marjorie's parents, ever on the lookout for marriage prospects, are impressed with Goldstone and his background. Marjorie, however, is at this time, the rather regular date of George.

George and Marjorie have been dating for two years. Forced to put his graduate studies on hold, due to the Depression, George works in his family business and is thoroughly in love with Marjorie. Since her initial infatuation, however, Marjorie's feelings have waned, somewhat, and when George proposes marriage, Marjorie refuses. She is intent upon pursuing an acting career, not marriage. Chapter 3 ends with Marjorie's indecision and inability to tell George her true feelings.

Part 1: Marjorie; Chapters 1-3: Marjorie, Prince Charming, George Analysis

Marjorie Morgenstern is portrayed as a rather typical privileged Jewish girl, having moved from the Bronx to a better part of New York, thanks to her father's import business. Typical of traditional Jewish households, kosher regulations are followed, and it is clear that Marjorie, despite her newly-found desire to pursue a career in the theatre, is steeped in her upbringing, looking for love relationships in all the "right" places. While she is evidently bright and vivacious, her overwhelming appeal to others, especially men, is her beauty. Dating students from Columbia has obviously widened her horizons, so that now George, an older man still living in the Bronx, is far less appealing. In certain ways, the reader is given the impression that Marjorie is a bit self-centered, if not immature, with a life that seems to be centered around only herself and her desires.



Part 2: Marsha; Chapters 4-11: Marsha, Sandy's Ambition, Marsha Zelenko, An Eveing at the Zelenkos', The Uncle, The Bar-Mitzva, Mr. Klabber, Noel Airman

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Chapter 4 finds Marjorie in the heat of the New York summer, taking acting classes at NYU and Columbia. Sandy has returned to his previous girlfriend, and Marjorie's mother arranges for a stay at the lovely Prado resort, because she learns that Sandy and his parents are there as well. Marjorie, though livid with her mother, is, nonetheless, pleased that Sandy seems to have a renewed interest in her.

By the end of her Prado vacation, Marjorie remains in a quandary between Sandy and George. Sandy, it appears, has not the ambition of his Columbia classmates, his grades are mediocre, certainly not enough to get him into medical school, and he has little interest in assuming leadership of the family business. As the fall term begins, Chapter 5 ends, with Marjorie having secured a higher status among her classmates, once the "word" is out that she has been dating Sandy Goldstone.

Marsha Zelenko is introduced in Chapter 6, as part of the theatrical production staff at school. Marjorie has auditioned for a part in *The Mikado* and lands the leading role. She and Marsha become good friends, Marsha insisting that Marjorie has natural, inherent acting ability and should do nothing else with her life. The friendship between Marjorie and Marsha further develops, and, as Chapter 7 proceeds, Marjorie is a guest in Marsha's home, where she meets rather eccentric, but obviously intellectual parents, who freely discuss topics not familiar in the Morgenstern household. The Zelenko's are not well-off but certainly enjoy their lifestyle.

Chapters 8 and 9 reveal that Marjorie's younger brother, Seth, is about to undergo the traditional Jewish Bar Mitzva, his assent into manhood. Uncle Samson-Aaron, considered the family ne'er do well and a buffoon of sorts, is introduced. He and his son Milton will be attending the Bar Mitzva, and Marjorie also learns that she is to be seated at the same table with Sandy Goldstone and his parents, a prospect to which she does not look forward. Encouraged by Marsha, Marjorie sends an invitation to George, which he declines, informing Marjorie that he has found a new girlfriend, from the Bronx, who is much more suited to his life and ambitions. Marjorie takes this news without emotion. The Bar Mitzva is a splendid affair, and Marjorie is impressed with her brother's



performance. Uncle Samson-Aaron joins the Goldstone table, succeeds in getting both himself and Mr. Goldstone drunk, and displays his horrid table manners, much to Marjorie's embarrassment. However, her dismay is short lived, given that her star performance in *The Mikado* is about to unfold.

Chapters 10 and 11 provide the opening to Marjorie's theatrical ambitions. The school production of *The Mikado* is not stellar; however, Marjorie is a supreme hit, with three demand encores. Marsha is thrilled, because Mr. Klabber, owner of Camp Tamarack, is waiting to offer Marjorie a summer job as the creative drama director. For this, she will receive \$200, and mother finally agrees, after meeting Mr. Klabber and learning that he indeed runs a "tight ship," never allowing his camp counselors to visit South Wind, an adult summer resort of ill repute which lies just across the lake. Marsha, on the other hand, informs Marjorie that all of the counselors sneak over to South Wind after "lights out," and that the adult musical performances will put her in touch with important theatrical people. Once settled at Camp Tamarack, Marsha persuades Marjorie to canoe over to South Wind and watch a rehearsal for one of the adult performances. There, Marjorie is introduced to Noel Airman, the entertainment director, whose songs have been performed in some Broadway revues. She is completely infatuated with this older man, who invites her for a beer, along with other production members, and Marjorie meets Wally Wronken, a stagehand her own age whose ambition is to write plays. Marsha, on the other hand, has gone off with Carlos, an older man, and does not return until it is time to quickly canoe back to camp.

Part 2: Marsha; Chapters 4-11: Marsha, Sandy's Ambition, Marsha Zelenko, An Eveing at the Zelenkos', The Uncle, The Bar-Mitzva, Mr. Klabber, Noel Airman Analysis

Marjorie's character is somewhat more developed during this section of the novel. She is so self-absorbed, she appears to have been completely unaware of her brother's monumental accomplishment in preparing for his bar-mitzva until she actually witnesses his performance. As well, she seems strangely unconcerned when the man she has been dating for two years ends the relationship, not truly seeing that she has brought this about by her own shabby treatment of him.

The character of Marsha provides strong contrast to Marjorie. Overweight and somewhat unattractive, Marsha also comes from a family dynamic with which Marjorie is completely unfamiliar. The Zelenko's are almost bohemian in lifestyle and furnishings, and yet certainly more intimate than Marjorie's family. Marsha is also considerably looser regarding most everything, including sexual morality. She remains a zealous fan of Marjorie's, however, convincing her that the stage is her destiny. Flattered, Marjorie is willing to spend time with Marsha but becomes a bit disillusioned with the realization that Marsha's flamboyant insistence that she and her family are familiar with numerous Broadway stars is untrue, and by the fact that Marsha is continuously borrowing money which she never returns.



The experience at Camp Tamarack results in significant ambivalence on Marjorie's part. First, she is thrilled to have a paying job in drama, although planning productions for young campers is not particularly satisfying. The late night trip to South Wind, moreover, is certainly an experience that introduces her to the "world" of adult theatre. She is thrilled to see the rehearsal and to meet many of the performers and to mingle with them at the bar afterward but is certainly shocked by the behaviors she observes, specifically that of Marsha, who has disappeared with Carlos for an obvious sexual encounter. Marsha's response to Marjorie's shock is to inform Marjorie that she must "grow up" and see the adult world as it truly is.

The initial encounter with Noel Airman is brief, but Marjorie is enthralled with the idea of meeting a musical theatre director, a man who has published songs. She finds him wonderfully exotic, charming, and, in her own immature understanding of the theatre, thoroughly talented. Most of the evening she spends with Wally Wronken, however, a young man her age who has theatre aspirations himself but whom she finds rather dull and unexciting. One is beginning to realize that Marjorie finds risky behavior exciting and stimulating but, because of her own traditional upbringing, abhorrent as well.



Part 3: Sodom, Chapters 12-20: Wally Wronken, A Kiss under the Lilacs, Marjorie at South Wind, Shirley, The Red Glasses, The Rowboat, The Toreador, The South Wind Waltz, No Dishes to Vash

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Chapters 12 and 13 relate the successful efforts of Marjorie to obtain summer employment at South Wind for the next summer season. Maxwell Greech is a former lawyer turned manager of South Wind, and he is holding interviews with would-be candidates, specifically Wally Wronken and Marjorie Morgenstern. Wally, who has worked as a stagehand now wants to be a writer. Greech insists that Wally remain as stage manager, but allows him to submit shows on his own time and to bunk in the writers' cabin. The Depression has hit Marjorie's family, and she is now living in a cramped apartment with her parents. Greech agrees to take her on for the summer, for free, if she will also work in the office and pay her train fare to and fro. Marjorie agrees and leaves the office ecstatic. In preparation for her summer work, Marjorie adds stenography to her college coursework at Hunter College and joins the dramatic group at the Local "Y," participating in a new play every three or four weeks. This, she believes, will enable her to eventually land roles in the summer productions at South Wind.

The friendship between Marjorie and Marsha has cooled but they do meet one afternoon, during which time Marsha requests a letter of introduction to Sandy Goldstone, so that she can obtain a job at Lamms Department Store, owned by Sandy's father. In return, Marsha suggests that she re-introduce Marjorie to Noel Airman. Marjorie mentally muses about a potential relationship with Airman, still believing that he is a creative artist and terribly attractive. As it turns out, Marjorie does not need an introduction from Marsha. Wally Wronken has created a show to be performed at the Waldorf, and Marjorie agrees to attend with him. Noel Airman is in attendance as well, and she learns more about him. First, he is the brother of Billy Ehrmann, a former boyfriend, having changed his name, perhaps for stage purposes. As well, he has a



somewhat withered arm. When Marjorie informs him that she will be at South Wind for the summer, Noel seems nonplussed.

Marjorie has dates with both Billy Ehrmann and Wally Wronken during the remainder of the school term. From Billy, she learns that brother Saul (Noel), suffers from Erb's Palsy, the result of a forceps delivery, and is considered the "black sheep" of the family, having no particularly financially stable means of employment. Wally Wronken is obviously in love with her, courting her with numerous dates, finally gaining a kiss. Mrs. Morgenstern, for her part, is appalled at the prospect of her daughter working at South Wind, but Marjorie informs her that, if need be, she will move out in order to pursue her dramatic career.

Chapters 14-16 relate the development of a romantic relationship between Marjorie and Noel Airman during the South Wind summer. In the light of day, South Wind is far less like the idyllic vision Marjorie has held throughout the winter. While preparations for the season continue and the first production goes into rehearsal, the physical environment continues to improve. Marjorie has a small part in the first production but spends most of her time in Mr. Greech's office. To her dismay, however, she discovers that mother has sent Uncle Samson, who has taken a job as a dishwasher, in order to monitor her behavior. As the season gets underway, she performs primarily in chorus line numbers, and is surprised when Noel invites her for drinks and dinner. During this date, he offers her the additional task of stage lighting, which she gladly accepts. As the season continues, Marjorie succumbs to Noel's charms and finds herself spending more and more time in his room, "necking." She learns more about Noel's life, including his failure as a law student, the disappointment of his judge father, and his rather low opinion of typical West Side girls he has dated. His generic name for them all is "Shirley," a girl he describes as essentially dull and interested solely in finding a reputable husband who will provide well. Eventually, they both admit that they have fallen in love with one another, and they become the romantic item for the summer among the South Wind staff who would, Marjorie believes, be shocked to learn that sex has not been involved at all. Noel is obviously greatly experienced in that arena, but Marjorie's strict background remains steadfastly with her. She does, however, begin to see the other staff members as sophisticated adults, rather than immoral citizens of a modern Sodom, and the thought of an affair with Noel becomes more and more appealing.

Chapter 17 finds Marjorie anticipating an overnight visit from her parents, with some trepidation. They immediately sense the romantic relationship between their daughter and Noel and devise a plan to get her away from him and the sinful resort as quickly as possible. As a bribe, they offer Marjorie a western trip for the remainder of the summer, if she will leave the following day. Marjorie, of course, is rebellious and livid, refusing to accept her parents' counsel that her goal should be a life of marriage and children.

Chapters 18-20 revolve around the annual Mexican fiesta. Marjorie's parents remain for the day's activities, primarily because Uncle Samson is playing the role of a toreador in a comical bull fight, a hugely successful production, directed and produced by Noel. During the continuing evening's festivities, Marjorie and Wally have a serious conversation. She counsels him to stop wasting his talent writing coarse and vulgar



skits at South Wind and to progress to the more serious writing of which great playwrights are made. Wally, for his part, is drunk and angry, informing Marjorie that the entire staff is certain that she is sleeping with Noel and has come to dislike her intrusions into direction on the set. By evening's end, Marjorie has decided to accept her parents' offer of the western trip, informing Noel that she is departing the following day. Together, they decide to make love before she leaves. Their plan is interrupted, however, by the discovery of Uncle Samson floating in the fountain pool.

Despite the best efforts of everyone and the doctor, Uncle Samson is dead of a heart attack. Immediately, Marjorie telephones her parents, who return and oversee the removal of Uncle's body into a plain box, to be taken back to Long Island for a quick burial, as is Jewish tradition. Marjorie has determined that she will leave South Wind, and Noel is clearly unhappy. Driving home, Marjorie realizes that the death of Uncle is the only thing that stopped the loss of her virginity.

Part 3: Sodom, Chapters 12-20: Wally Wronken, A Kiss under the Lilacs, Marjorie at South Wind, Shirley, The Red Glasses, The Rowboat, The Toreador, The South Wind Waltz, No Dishes to Vash Analysis

This section of the novel presents some vivid symbolism which remains with the reader throughout the novel. Noel's name change clearly represents his rejection of all that a traditional life in affluent Jewish society entails. He has disappointed his father through failure at law school and deliberately chooses a rather vagabond lifestyle which, except for a few published songs, has not resulted in steady income, a respected profession, or a settled life of marriage. His deformed arm represents not only his family's opinion of him but, as well, perhaps some defect in his basic personality which is just beginning to unfold to the reader. While creative and successful at South Wind, Noel begins to exhibit some possible manic-depressive tendencies, as well as the tendency to drink far too much.

The casting of Marjorie in the role of Liza Doolittle in the production of *Pygmalion* can be viewed as symbolic of Noel's attempt to transform Marjorie from naivete to sophistication, including in the realm of sexual experience. His discourse on the generic "Shirley," the typical West End Jewish girl, demonstrates his distaste for the "type" and his firm belief that these women are trapped in an existence that is both dull and without contribution to humanity. Marjorie relates a tale of some apparently innocuous postcards from France which, when viewed through red glasses, turned the portraits of sordid nudity. Noel explains that the view through the red glasses is the real one, and Marjorie would do well to accept that fact.

Marjorie's parents clearly equate Marjorie's failure to comply with their wishes as severe disloyalty. Marjorie, for her part, staunchly defends her right to pursue her own goals, irrespective of her parents' wishes, and attempts to shred what Noel terms the "Jewish conscience." In the end, however, when events become upsetting, specifically the

revelation that she is disliked by the other staff members and the death of her uncle, she returns to the safety net of her parents and her life as "Shirley," relieved, as well, that she has not lost her virginity



Part 4: Noel: Chapters 21-27: Return of Marsha, Guy Flamm, The New Noel, The Engagement Party, Muriel, Sam Rothmore, The Seder

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Chapter 21: Marjorie graduates from Hunter College, having gained acclaim for her production of Pygmalion and with a possibility for a role in a Broadway show. Both Noel and former friend Marsha attend the ceremony, Noel much more subdued and Marsha much thinner. Marjorie admits to Marsha that no man she has met since her summer at South Wind can compare to Noel. She has been seeing him but simply is not experiencing the chemistry she once did. As yet, there has been no intimacy, and Noel has been unproductive, save for one show, Princess Jones, which has yet to be picked up by any producer. Marsha counsels Marjorie not to be resistant to Noel's advances and leaves the event hoping that the two of them might renew their old relationship.

Chapter 22: With her drama instructor's letter of introduction to producer Guy Flamm, Marjorie arrives to a rundown office for her appointment. Flamm is obviously impressed and immediately offers her a secondary role in a comedy he intends to produce. Taking the play home to read and promising to return the next day to provide a reading for the part, Marjorie is shocked to discover that it is perhaps the worst play she has ever read. As it turns out, Mr. Flamm is only looking for financial backers and has offered Marjorie the part only in the hope that she can convince her father to invest in the production. Thoroughly disgusted, Marjorie walks out. Arriving home dejected and depressed, she receives a call from Noel inviting her to the Ritz-Carleton for lunch.

Chapters 23-26: Marjorie learns that Noel has taken a job at the New York office of Paramount Pictures, with a handsome salary and the promise of advancement. He has not given up on writing but believes the job will allow him a good lifestyle until he sells a musical. Within three weeks, however, he becomes disenchanted, telling Marjorie that boss Sam Rothmore is only interested in the usual shallow scripts. As a reader of scripts for potential production, Noel is looking instead for those which carry important messages. When Rothmore takes Noel and Marjorie to dinner, this disagreement becomes a bit heated and Marjorie is concerned for Noel's future at the company. Her efforts to find acting roles, moreover, have led nowhere, despite her daily rounds of producers' offices.



Chapter 27: The first half of Part 4 ends with an invitation to Noel and his parents to attend Seder services at the Morgenstern's, a custom the Ehrmann's do not practice. Though Marjorie has some anxiety about the event, the evening is actually quite pleasant, and the judge and his wife enjoy themselves. Toward the end of the evening, Noel becomes uncomfortable with subtle hints from Marjorie's relatives about marriage, and he abruptly leaves.

Part 4: Noel: Chapters 21-27: Return of Marsha, Guy Flamm, The New Noel, The Engagement Party, Muriel, Sam Rothmore, The Seder Analysis

Marjorie's acting career is certainly not moving in the right direction, and, although a bit discouraged, she demonstrates solid determination and commitment. Her commitment and encouragement to Noel, while commendable, can be interpreted as an attempt to exert some control over him. Marjorie wants nothing more than for Noel to settle into a "real" job, so that he portrays a respectable image to her family and friends. He will then be suitable marriage material. Noel's conflict with Sam Rothmore and his abrupt exit from the Seder should tell Marjorie that he is not content, but she still lacks mature perception, and the ability to understand that she cannot transform him into her idealized version of a husband.

The continuing conflict between Noel and Sam Rothmore demonstrates again Noel's unsuitability for traditional work. It is the Depression, and Rothmore wisely realizes that people attend shows to be entertained, not to receive serious messages, as Noel would like. Sam knows what will sell; Noel does not and is unwilling to compromise his principles for the sake of making money. Though Marjorie is unable to see it, Noel is having serious doubts about steady employment and is obviously suffering an inner struggle about which she is oblivious. Again, Marjorie is shown to continue a self-absorption that does not allow empathetic responses to others. Her only confrontation with reality is the painful realization that a pretty face and pleasing personality will not land her onto the stage.



Part 4: Noel, Chapters 28-36: Imogene, Brief Career of an Evangelist, Noel's Theory, Dr. Shapiro, Dinner at the Waldorf, Princess Jones is Produced, Marsha's Farewell Speech, The Breaking of a Glass, Another Glass Breaks

Part 4: Noel, Chapters 28-36: Imogene, Brief Career of an Evangelist, Noel's Theory, Dr. Shapiro, Dinner at the Waldorf, Princess Jones is Produced, Marsha's Farewell Speech, The Breaking of a Glass, Another Glass Breaks Summary

Noel's abrupt departure from the Seder and his failure to telephone her for three days sends Marjorie into a tailspin of worry. She then receives a call from Sam Rothmore, looking for his employee who has not reported for work during the same three days. Agreeing to have lunch with Sam, Marjorie arrives at his office, only to be shown Noel's workspace, which is in complete disarray. During lunch, Sam recounts events that demonstrate a belligerent, slovenly, and rebellious Noel, an employee obviously "begging" to be terminated. According to Sam, while Noel has an excellent ability to identify "winners" among the many scripts sent in for consideration, his complete lack of responsibility cannot be ignored. For her part, Marjorie touts Noel's musical ability and requests that Sam consider Princess Jones for production. Rothmore is non-committal but informs Marjorie that, if Noel returns to work the next day, with a new attitude, he will keep him on.

Marjorie flies to Noel's apartment, only to find Imogene, an old friend of Noel's, staying there. Evidently, she arrived in town broke, and Noel has agreed to provide lodging until she is able to find work as a singer. To support herself, she models a bit. Though both protest that Noel is sleeping upstairs with a male artist friend, Marjorie is observant enough to realize that they are sleeping together. She is distraught, as Noel ushers her out of the apartment for something to eat, explaining that he has been working on a new piece for four straight days.

Chapter 29: Marjorie suspects that Noel has been drinking for the past four days, and he is continuing this activity as they sit in a bar. He informs her that he had an epiphany



upon leaving the Seder so abruptly and decided that he needed to immerse himself in the study of Judaism. He has read the entire Old Testament and purchased additional material, convinced that he would study to become a rabbi. Imogene's arrival and their subsequent conversations have brought him back to reality and his former conviction that all religion is mere fantasy. The world, according to Noel, is comprised of philosophers and regular folk, who work and play and try to make money. However, neither of these two groups, he claims, has the answer to life. Instead he has developed the theory that drives all human activity.

Chapter 30: Noel has decided that the force that moves people of the world is the desire for "hits." Accordingly, there are four rings of illusion surrounding human conduct—religion, philosophy, sex and money. When humans punch through the first two layers and get to sex and money, they stop, because they believe they have found all they desire. While they talk of nobility and morality of philosophy and religion, they focus on sex and money. Sex becomes an obsession for a while, so that a man can brag and a woman can acquire a "nest, a fellow, and clothes and furniture." However, sex gives way to the true thrust—making money—for money buys security, freedom and power. Even those individuals with billions continue on long after they are filthy rich, because they have reached the true answer to the the life force—a "hit"—a success, another triumph. The drive for the next "hit" governs human thought and behavior, once the four illusional layers are cast off. He now intends to write a book about his discovery and informs Marjorie that he is leaving for Mexico with a sculptor friend, to complete it. Marjorie has prepared herself for this eventuality and takes the news amazingly well. She gives Noel the advice that he should stick to writing musicals and shows, not serious literature. He retorts that she should get married to an appropriate Jewish boy, whom he terms a generic "Dr. Shapiro," have children, and direct the temple plays. Livid, Marjorie lashes out at Noel, and he professes the he has never loved anyone more deeply than her, but that she has nearly driven him insane with her middle-class rules. He must make a complete break with her. To achieve this, he informs her that he and Imogene have been engaged in sex for several days.

Chapter 31: Marjorie nurses her love wounds for a few weeks and begins to date again, albeit unenthusiastically. One suitor is an older gentleman, ironically named Dr. Morris Shapiro. She receives two letters from Noel, who is enjoying Mexico and recounting his travels and experiences. During this time as well, his song is published and becomes a hit. She responds to the second letter, informing him that she has managed to be accepted into what is considered the top summer stock theatre.

Marjorie's summer stock experience proves disastrous, and she quits, arriving home exhausted and with a horrible cough. The young, would-be actresses were primarily used to build sets and usher. Meeting Wally for dinner, she is surprised at his maturity but still cannot feel for him what he obviously does for her, and she determines to focus entirely on her career. Despite her diligent efforts to obtain paying acting roles of any sort, Marjorie fails miserably. Eventually, she takes a part-time position as a department store clerk, simply to earn a paycheck. This is short-lived employment, however, as she is harassed by a supervisor and simply walks out after a few weeks. Though her parents have counseled her to become a stenographer at her father's company,



Marjorie resists vehemently. Eventually, Morris Shapiro offers her a job at his hospital, and she accepts.

At the hospital, Marjorie learns of Morris's pioneering work in healing fractures and gains new respect for him. While the exciting chemistry is non-existent, the romance begins to blossom, much to Mrs. Morgenstern's glee. As it turns out, the two mothers had actually arranged their initial meeting at a temple lecture months before, and it now appears that Marjorie will settle into the life which Noel has predicted and for which her parents have prayed.

Chapter 32: The hospital staff holds a Thanksgiving party each year, and both Marjorie and Morris are to assist—Marjorie in food serving and Morris at the bar. Leaving the hairdresser for the party, Marjorie is shocked to see Noel across the street, and he recognizes her immediately. Back from Mexico, he is now financially solvent, due to royalty payments on his hit song, and is preparing to leave for Hollywood in order to find a producer for his show, Princess Jones. Unable to walk away, Marjorie accompanies Noel to the Waldorf, where he is staying, for drinks. One drink leads to more and then to dinner. Noel has changed little, professes his continued love for her, and agrees with Marjorie that their two "worlds" will never be compatible. Wishing him well, Marjorie grabs a cab and arrives at the hospital just as the party is ending. She admits to Morris that she has been with Noel but insists that the meeting only confirmed that she has been "cured" of him. Morris never calls Marjorie again, and she quits the hospital position shortly thereafter.

Chapter 33: While Marjorie's friends are marrying, she continues a whirlwind of dating, primarily to avoid being at home with her mother, who will not allow her to forget that she has thrown away the opportunity of a lifetime—marriage to Morris Shapiro. As well, she accepts non-paying acting roles with little theatre groups, in an attempt to network herself into something that actually pays. Wally Wronken remains in her life, via occasional dinners. He is working and writing plays in his spare time, although none have yet been sold. He informs her that Noel is back in New York, as Princess Jones is to be produced on Broadway, and Marjorie musters up the willpower to avoid seeking him out. As if by fate, however, Marjorie receives a note from Marsha Zelenko, inviting her to lunch at the Plaza. Marsha is now engaged to a wealthy 52-year old who, it turns out, has invested in Noel's show. Marsha is allowed to attend rehearsals and offers to take Marjorie along. Marjorie, however, remains adamant that she is through with Noel and has no desire to see him.

Chapter 34: Marsha is marrying Lou Michelson in his apartment at the El Dorado, the building in which Marjorie grew up. There, Marjorie meets Lou's law partner, Milton Schwartz, a young, good-looking man who is obviously attracted to her. As soon as Marjorie sees that Noel is in attendance, she readily agrees to go out for drinks with Milton following the wedding. Marsha, meanwhile, is having pre-wedding anxiety and, as Marjorie consoles her, Marsha launches into a lengthy dissertation. She knows that she is marrying Lou for financial security for herself and her parents, and that she is sacrificing many things that Marjorie can still have with Noel—mad love, adventure, excitement, and passion for life. She berates Marjorie for her failure to pursue Noel,



even if that pursuit fails to end in marriage. Marjorie will at least have joyous memories, something Marsha will never possess.

Chapter 35: Traditional Jewish weddings end with a ritual—the groom crushes a wineglass with his foot. Marjorie remembers that it symbolizes the destruction of the temple, from the Old Testament, though Noel believes it is symbolic of the man crushing his wife's independence. The reception is crowded and loud. Eventually, Noel ushers Marjorie from the apartment and into a cab. Though she insists she wishes only to be driven home, Noel invites her to the dress rehearsal of *Princess Jones*, and she cannot resist.

Chapter 36: The dress rehearsal exceeds all of Marjorie's expectations, and she is invited back to Noel's hotel room for a meeting among the producers and directors. After several hours of discussion and Chinese food, during which Marjorie breaks with tradition and consumes pork, Marjorie and Noel are left to themselves. Reasons give way to passion, and, following a lengthy conversation with herself in the bathroom, Marjorie joins Noel in bed. At age twenty-one, Marjorie Morgenstern has lost her virginity, and it has not been a pleasant experience. Noel assures her that sex will become more pleasurable with time. Marjorie can only cry, as she inadvertently knocks a glass off the nightstand, causing it to smash into pieces on the marble floor of the bedroom.

Part 4: Noel, Chapters 28-36: Imogene, Brief Career of an Evangelist, Noel's Theory, Dr. Shapiro, Dinner at the Waldorf, *Princess Jones* is Produced, Marsha's Farewell Speech, The Breaking of a Glass, Another Glass Breaks Analysis

Noel's behavior relative to his job at Paramount is predictable, for he is not one who can settle into reasonable, traditional employment. The scene in the bar, where he explains to Marjorie the past four days of his life, demonstrates a clearly unstable personality. In a short 96 hours, Noel has rabidly studied Judaism with the thought of becoming a rabbi, only to determine, within that period of time, that religion is indeed nothing but fantasy and to develop a philosophic theory which he now believes will govern the remainder of his life, including the writing of books on the subject. In his criticism of Marjorie's "archaic" and outmoded mores, Noel demonstrates that he clearly has no "roots" by which he lives. Whether he is truly seeking purpose and meaning to life is not clear. What is clear is that he is an unstable person, incapable of developing his life's purpose.

True to form, Noel manages to persuade Marjorie to spend time with him, though she is due at the Thanksgiving party, and Marjorie's impulsivity, specifically in the presence of Noel, results in the broken engagement to a man who promises the stable and



respectable life of a "good" Jewish girl. Morris's reaction, moreover, demonstrates a rigidity with which Marjorie would have had difficulty living, no doubt.

Marsha's attempts to reunite Noel and Marjorie include inviting both of them to her wedding, and she is adamant that Marjorie take the opportunity to be with Noel, no matter what the end result. To Marsha, the promise of passion and adventure far outweighs the security which she has obtained through a marriage to a man for whom she feels no passion. Marjorie's impulsivity again takes hold, as she leaves with Noel rather than Milton, being persuaded not only to attend the dress rehearsal but the after-meeting at Noel's apartment as well. Noel's hold on Marjorie is clear, a testament not only to her impulsivity but, as well, to her inability to resist the charm and magnetism of this man who has such an emotional hold on her.

The two instances of glass breaking are clearly symbolic. The first, during the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, symbolizes the "normal" chain of events in the respectable Jewish community of the time. Whether it represents the destruction of the temple or Noel's cynical interpretation is not the point. To the reader, it finalizes the marriage between two Jewish individuals who will spend the remainder of their lives together and who commit to their relationship. The decision by Marjorie to succumb to Noel's charms and to lose her virginity in the process has meant the surrender of one of the important principles of her own moral compass, and that surrender is symbolized by broken glass on the floor.



Part 5: My Object All Sublime; Chapters 37-45: the Nightmare, How to Discard a Mistress, The Bad Year, A First Class Ticket to Europe, The man on the Boat Deck, A Game of Ping Pong, the Premonition, In Pursuit of Noel

Part 5: My Object All Sublime; Chapters 37-45: the Nightmare, How to Discard a Mistress, The Bad Year, A First Class Ticket to Europe, The man on the Boat Deck, A Game of Ping Pong, the Premonition, In Pursuit of Noel Summary

Chapter 37: During her year-long affair with Noel, Marjorie has had a series of nightmares, during which she has searched for him through rooms and corridors but is unable to locate him. Now the nightmare has become real. Receiving a letter from him that he is leaving on the Mauritania, she rushes to the dock, up the gang plank, and begins to search the corridors around his empty stateroom. Finally, she must leave but catches sight of him on a deck, as she watches behind the fence. He appears to see her and waves, but he is standing beside a woman, and they are obviously engaged in conversation and laughter. Dejected, she returns home and telephones the theatre to inform the director that she will be late for rehearsal.

Chapter 38: Noel's letter shares the events of the past year with the reader. During this time, Marjorie and Noel have been engaged in a passionate affair. His show was a miserable failure and closed after five days, following ridicule by all reviewers. Noel blames Marjorie for his current state of desolation and failure. It was she, he states, who insisted that Princess Jones was a hit, back at South Wind, when he first wrote it. It was she who voiced continued belief in his ability to write; and it is she who saw the success of the musical as her ticket to marriage and a home in the suburbs. Noel criticizes her for refusing to move in with him, as so many other couples did in the "Village," all because of the "appearance" of it to family and friends. Still, Noel remained in New York, convinced by Marjorie to begin a new musical. Forced to seek employment again, he began work for an advertising agency and, most recently, lost a position as a radio script writer to Wally Wronken.

What Noel has ultimately decided is that he is not a writer but a philosopher. He is therefore going back to the Sorbonne to study, perhaps from there to Oxford, for the



next three years, and, at age 35, will then decide what his future will be. He has managed to save money from his advertising job, though he detested it, to finance his next venture of study. He insists that the passion for her has run its course and that he is cured finally of her hold on him. As well, he ridicules the small part Marjorie has secured in a Broadway play, claiming that the play stinks and that she will never be an actress. Her destiny, as he has always stated, is to marry a respectable man and raise their children—a future Noel cannot ever see for himself.

Chapter 39: The Bad Year is the name of the Broadway play in which Marjorie plays one of five whores in several short scenes. It is not a speaking part but she has to start somewhere. Ultimately, she is cut from the role for budget reasons, but also because she simply does not look the part.

Chapter 40: With her acting career a failure, Marjorie decides to work for her father, in order to earn money for a trip to Paris. She has concluded that Noel still loves her or he would not have written twenty pages to end their relationship. She has received a letter from him, stating that he has postponed his studies until the fall and is traveling with a woman named Mildred and another couple. Mildred is evidently paying for everything. While Marjorie saves money, her parents are busy dragging her to numerous social events, obviously "husband-shopping." She has lots of dates, of course, because she is beautiful, but there is simply no chemistry with anyone. She now pins all of her hopes on Noel, for she has nothing to offer another man but a "ransacked body and an empty heart," (p. 452).

As she reflects on Noel, she concludes that his flight to Europe is simply his last attempt to avoid "respectability," and that once she get to Paris, he will be ready to return and marry her. She muses about professions for him, deciding that he should be engaged in commercial writing of some sort, though she is willing to accept the lower income of an academic life if he truly wishes to teach philosophy. During this "dark" year of life, Marjorie turns twenty-two, discovers a few gray hairs, and receives occasional "jaunty and jeering" letters from Noel.

After taking a second job in a movie theatre ticket booth, in order to add to her savings, Marjorie spends most of the winter sick. Her parents have surmised that she is saving money to go to Paris, and her father insists on sending her now, first class, on the Queen Mary. If only Noel will satisfy her, then her parents will make the best of it. The bon voyage party on the boat is attended by Wally Wronken, who, having sold a play, proposes to her, knowing in advance that her answer will be "no" as always. He has been in communication with Noel, moreover, and informs Marjorie that he has not been well, having contracted some type of fever in North Africa. He does not, however, have Noel's current address in Paris.

Chapter 41: On the deck, as the ship departs, Marjorie meets Mike Eden, an older, obviously intelligent man, who travels to Europe often, especially to Germany, on business. They talk of Nazi Germany, and Marjorie discovers that there is indeed credence to the news stories regarding the horrific treatment of German Jews. As well, Eden confirms her belief that Germany is preparing for war.



Chapter 42: Marjorie lunches with Eden the following day and discovers more about him. Prior to the chemical business, he studied and taught psychology, even attending lectures of Freud in Vienna. He speaks more vehemently about Hitler and is livid that the Nazis have now occupied Czechoslovakia. As they eat, a blonde woman, named Hilda, seated at another table, continues to attempt to get his attention, and this seems to only increase his anger. They leave lunch for a ping pong tournament which Eden has entered. He is playing against a man who has been Hilda's companion, and Hilda, arriving to watch, begins a conversation with Marjorie. Hilda indicates that Eden is a Jew, and Marjorie immediately contradicts her, claiming that Eden grew up in the same neighborhood as she and that he went to church every Sunday. Hilda is obviously surprised, and leaves when the German opponent at the ping pong table is beaten by Eden. Marjorie confesses her lie to Eden, with the explanation that she has no idea why she would do such a thing, but he seems pleased. While Marjorie is certainly enjoying his company, he seems to become more and more mysterious, and she observes him taking drugs regularly.

A storm at sea brings Eden and Marjorie to her cabin where she shows him Noel's farewell letter. Coincidentally, he knows Noel, having met him in Florence and traveled with him and two other men, getting snowed in at one point in the Alps. Eden analyzes Noel's handwriting and "pegs" him rather correctly. It is also during this time that he explains his disenchantment with psychology, especially Freud, and his decision to leave teaching. He had a terrible marriage to a woman who would not agree to a divorce. Driving with her one night, he fell asleep at the wheel and ran into an embankment. He suffered a severe skull fracture, and his wife was killed. His guilt and Freudian analysis that his unconscious caused the accident resulted in a nervous breakdown and his exit from the field of psychology. Eden sought other employment and eventually began his own chemical business, related to pharmaceuticals.

Chapter 43: Marjorie's last few days aboard ship with Mike Eden are filled with pleasant moments and one disturbing evening on the last night. Returning to his cabin for late drinks, Mike is disturbed that he has left his cabin unlocked, and quickly rummages through his belongings, quite disturbed. He then has a panic attack which he treats by injecting himself with some type of medication. Marjorie falls asleep on his bed as he is reading aloud, but has the definite sensing that this man is Jewish after all and is perhaps involved in some type of undercover dealings.

Chapter 44: With Mike's assistance, Marjorie learns that Noel is vacationing in Switzerland, and she flies to Zurich with Mike, who has agreed to help her locate him. She is especially upset to see a large swastika flying from the German Consulate in Zurich, reminding her that fellow Jews in Germany are in trouble. After checking into separate rooms at a hotel, Mike disappears for three days, leaving her almost frantic and ready to depart, when he just as suddenly re-appears, claiming he had been called away on business. In the ensuing week, they drive from resort to resort, looking for Noel, eventually landing in Lucerne. Mike is able to discover that Noel is back in Paris, and arrangements are made for Marjorie to fly there the following day. That afternoon, Mike takes Marjorie far out onto the lake in a row boat, so that he may tell her that he is in the "rescue" business—assisting political dissidents and Jews to escape from



Germany. He must now return to Germany again, and this will be the last time they see one another. He explains how he came into this activity, running errands for a well-funded anti-Nazi organization and, in return, they allow him to bring Jews out, a few at a time. He focuses on families with children, for herein lies the future and perhaps the salvation of the Jewish people. He is convinced that God has chosen him for this work and, if nothing else, it is redemptive and therapeutic, though he himself is only one-quarter Jewish.

Part 5: My Object All Sublime; Chapters 37-45: the Nightmare, How to Discard a Mistress, The Bad Year, A First Class Ticket to Europe, The man on the Boat Deck, A Game of Ping Pong, the Premonition, In Pursuit of Noel Analysis

Marjorie's nightmares at the beginning of this section are obviously prophetic, as she lives them by running through the corridors of the departing ship, looking for Noel. His abandonment and the cruel letter launch the beginning of Marjorie's bad year, a fitting name for the play from which she is eventually dismissed. Her determination to find Noel and her rationalization that this is merely his final fling before settling down to a normal life with her is what gives her purpose to move forward, and all of her efforts are now directed in this effort. Her lack of maturation is apparent, not only in planning what will probably be a futile endeavor, but in literally planning Noel's career future once they return to the U.S. and become a respectable married couple. None of Noel's behaviors hint that he would surrender to her wishes, and still she pushes forward.

Though the plot is moving quite quickly now, the added complication of Mike Eden is critical in terms of Marjorie's maturation. Until this point, the reader is not presented with a young woman who has much depth. Marjorie's life appears to revolve solely around herself and her pursuit of an unstable man, who has abused her obsession with him and who himself cannot find true purpose in life. Mike Eden, however, in spite of his apparent addiction to drugs, is intelligent, productive, and, as one discovers, committed to the higher, altruistic purpose of saving Jews from certain death under the Nazis. He provides a sharp contrast to Noel, and as Marjorie begins to reflect upon the stark differences between this man and the one she pursues, she comes to realize that there are inherent qualities in certain people that make them valuable to the human race. It is quite possible that Marjorie could develop romantic feelings for this mysterious Mr. Eden, but his tragic history and his current activity are certainly not conducive to a relationship, and he encourages no movement in that direction. Still, his impact upon Marjorie is significant, and the reader wonders how the "new and improved" Marjorie Morgenstern will react to Noel once he is located.



Part 5: Chapters 45-48: Noel Found; The South Wind Waltz Reprise; The Man She Married; Wally Wronken's Diary

Part 5: Chapters 45-48: Noel Found; The South Wind Waltz Reprise; The Man She Married; Wally Wronken's Diary Summary

Chapter 45: Returning to Paris, Marjorie dresses in her finest suit and sets out to find Noel, having been given his address by Mike Eden. She meets him on his street, as he is returning with groceries, and he is obviously thrilled that she has come. He shares an apartment with a female photographer, of whom, he discloses to Marjorie, he has tired. He has spent the past year traveling, never having enrolled in school, and living on some songs he sold to an old friend in California. He is now broke and living off of the photographer, engaging in self-study of Marx and Engels. He now has a new "philosophy," which will be the subject of a book he intends to write, a project he believes will consume the next ten years of his life. He proposes that he return to the U.S. with Marjorie, and promises to obtain a position with an advertising agency while he continues his study and writing. Instead of an immediate affirmative response, Marjorie requests that he play some of the old songs from South Wind, as two candles burn on top of the piano.

Chapter 46: The candles have burned almost to their ends, when the photographer, Gerda, returns, turning on the lights and snuffing out the candles. Gerda is clearly upset, both because Marjorie is present and because the dinner dishes have not been washed. Noel suggests they leave for the Montmartre, the bar district, and, after several stops, Noel is drunk and raucous. At the final stop, over a large dinner, for which Marjorie pays, Noel proposes marriage. After waiting five years for these words, Marjorie calmly declines. She leaves Paris the next day.

Chapter 47: Marjorie makes several futile attempts to locate Mike Eden; unfortunately, she has no information about him nor his chemical company. She volunteers for a Jewish refugee organization, and brother Seth joins the Navy ROTC in college. War in Europe is imminent, now that Hitler has invaded Poland. She eventually telephones Wally Wronken, and they agree to meet at the St. Moritz Hotel for lunch. Having written a Broadway hit, he is now an established playwright. She prepares for the lunch with care, for perhaps there is now a future with Wally; however, he does not appear and, after waiting twenty minutes in the lobby, Marjorie leaves. Not until much later does Marjorie learn the reason for Wally's tardiness—he had stopped to purchase a new tie, in order to be impeccably dressed for her.



By the time Marjorie and Wally speak again, Marjorie has found a new love. In fact, it is Milton Schwartz, the young Jewish lawyer she met at Marsha's wedding. As the wedding plans are formed, Marjorie realizes that she must tell Milton about her affair with Noel, and, after a week of painful introspection, Milton determines that his love for her can override this "deformity." The wedding occurs without a hitch, and Noel attends the ceremony, without a word to say.

Chapter 48: It is 1954, and Wally is completing a diary entry. He has not seen Marjorie for fifteen years. Marsha's husband is backing his newest play, and, after visiting Lou at their home, Wally is driven over to Marjorie's by Marsha. He is not surprised to find Marjorie with graying hair, raising four children, and living the typical existence of a suburban housewife. They update one another on their lives, and Wally explains that Noel is living in Hollywood with his German photographer wife, who provides the main support. Noel is engaged in a bit of bad television writing. Wally ends his diary entry with the realization that Marjorie Morningstar is simply a rather beautiful yet ordinary girl he once idolized and loved, who has become just what she was always destined to become.

Part 5: Chapters 45-48: Noel Found; The South Wind Waltz Reprise; The Man She Married; Wally Wronken's Diary Analysis

For five years, Marjorie has wanted nothing else but marriage to Noel Airman, an unstable and clearly immature individual who has provided nothing but emotional pain to her. Throughout these years, Marjorie has convinced herself that, if Noel would simply settle into a life with her, she could provide the stability and support that would change him into the loving husband and provider she wants him to be. The combination of her chance meeting and relationship with Mike Eden and the final events of the final evening with Noel in Paris finally demonstrate to Marjorie that her "object all sublime" is, in fact, unworthy of her love and commitment. Noel remains an emotional cripple, a man who will continue to flail about in life, using others as he pursues whatever impulsive objective meets his fancy. Clearly, this is not a life mate for one who, having passed through her rebellious teenage period, has come to accept the futility of an acting career, and who is now ready for the stability and tradition in which she was raised. The waning candles on the piano, snuffed out by the returning Gerda, provide the symbolic finality of a relationship that was doomed from the onset. Whether Marjorie's eventual stability and traditional adulthood are provided by Wally Wronken or Milton Schwartz is truly not significant. Either of them would have "fit the bill." With Milton, however, one senses that romantic love is more clearly present, and fate provided that selection. Solace for Wally is found in the final words of his diary—Marjorie Morgenstern is simply a rather beautiful yet ordinary girl he once idolized and loved, who has become what she was always meant to become.



Characters

Marjorie Morgenstern

Marjorie is born into a traditional Jewish family living well in the fashionable "West End" of New York City and grows into a teenager filled with dreams of stardom. Beautiful and somewhat talented, she attends Hunter College, a free public university, and socializes with other well-to-do Jewish students, who primarily attend Columbia University. Her desire to pursue acting and singing take her into a somewhat different social set, introduced to her by classmate Marsha Zelenko. Through Marsha, Marjorie eventually meets Noel Airman, "black sheep" son of Judge Ehrmann. Marjorie becomes obsessed with Noel and spends five years of her life pursuing her idealized version of the man she believes, in her immaturity, that he can become. Surrendering her basic moral principles, she engages in a year-long affair with Noel, only to be ultimately discarded as Noel pursues another impulsive dream. Marjorie's efforts to secure a career in acting are thwarted by the fact that, as an actress and singer, she is not exceptional, nor is she willing to engage in loose sexual behaviors which might land her small parts on Broadway. She remains self-absorbed and immature, ultimately disappointing her parents by sabotaging marriage to an exceptional and talented surgeon. In a final attempt to capture Noel, Marjorie boards a ship for France, meeting the mysterious Mike Eden, a man who has a commitment much larger than his own personal well-being. The relationship with Mike changes Marjorie in such a significant way that, when she finally reunites with Noel, she is able to see clearly that he is a shallow, emotionally immature individual who will never change. Marjorie returns home, marries a young lawyer, and becomes the suburban wife and mother for which her tradition and upbringing have prepared her.

Noel Airman

The son of a prominent judge in New York, Noel Airman has changed his name, probably as an act of defiance against his father. Unable to meet the grade requirements to achieve a degree in law, Noel is a disappointment to his parents and has pursued a career in the theatre, writing musical shows for the summer resort season at South Wind, and selling a few songs which have become hits. He is a self-appointed "free spirit"—drinking, carousing, and having affairs with a variety of women. He is attracted to Marjorie, perhaps because of her beauty and virginity, and, as much as he is able, loves her deeply. Unfortunately, Noel is unable to become the stable wage-earning individual Marjorie needs, and he attempts to end their relationship on several occasions, only to be drawn back in each time they meet again. Ultimately, he engages in a year-long affair with her, one which ends abruptly when he decides to pursue another dream, this time as a philosopher, by studying abroad. His year in Europe is spent traveling at the expense of others, selling a few songs, studying philosophy only by reading the works of others, and living with a female German photographer, who obviously supports him. Eventually, Noel returns to the U.S., having



married the photographer, and lives in Hollywood, writing occasional television script. Noel Airman is portrayed as the stereotypical individual who is unable to find his niche. During his life, he has been a songwriter, a musical theatre aspirant, an advertising copy writer, a would-be philosopher, and, when all has failed, a rather ordinary television writer. Noel's emotional instability is portrayed through his impulsivity and his manic-depressive episodes, which govern his behavior throughout the work.

Mike Eden

Though present in only four chapters of the novel, Mike Eden's impact on Marjorie is critical to the outcome of her story. A former psychology professor, Mike is now in the business of pharmaceutical purchase and sale, primarily in Germany. As a younger man, he entered an ill-fated marriage to a woman who refused to give him a divorce. One evening, he fell asleep at the wheel of his car and struck an embankment, an accident which resulted in his wife's death. His guilt over this accident, along with his complete rejection of Freudian psychology, led to a nervous breakdown and the end of his teaching career. He sought employment elsewhere and now owns his own chemical company. He engages in a great deal of self-medication, one surmises, to treat his emotional difficulties, but is also involved with an anti-Nazi organization and uses his business access to Germany to complete errands for the organization. As well, he engages in rescuing Jewish families, getting them and their possessions out of Germany, convinced that Hitler's ultimate goal is complete destruction of the Jewish race. He sees himself as on a mission from God, for perhaps, among the families he rescues, there is a child who is to become a major leader of the Jews or in some other way contribute significantly to the human race. Through him, Marjorie is able to see that there are individuals with lofty missions in life, who commit to serving humanity in significant ways.

Marsha Zelenko

Marsha is a free-spirited Jewish girl, not having grown up with the privileges that Marjorie has enjoyed and who remains Marjorie's biggest supporter and advocate in her pursuit of a career in the theatre. Marsha introduces Marjorie to Noel Airman, once both girls have obtained summer jobs at a children's camp across the lake from the adult resort at which Noel is the entertainment director. Marsha lacks the beauty and cultural background of Marjorie and, ultimately, marries a much older man, an attorney who can provide financial security for herself and her parents. It is Marsha who arranges a dinner party to which she invites Marjorie and Milton Schwartz, a young lawyer in her husband's firm, hoping to find the correct husband for Marjorie. Her plan works. Though Marsha has not married a man with whom she shares a passionate love, she is, nevertheless, comfortable and secure in her suburban life.



Wally Wronken

Wally has the dream to be a successful playwright and, unlike Noel Airman, is willing to work steadfastly toward his dream. He first meets Marjorie when he is a stagehand at South Wind and immediately falls in love with her. Throughout the story, Wally re-appears in Marjorie's life, but she does not return the obvious adoration he has for her. Ultimately, Wally is successful, with a four-year play on Broadway and another in the works. He has had one failed marriage and, receiving a call from Marjorie after her return from Europe, is thrilled to have a lunch date with her. In his ridiculous attempt to be as impressive as possible, he stops to purchase a new tie, arriving late for the date and discovering that Marjorie is not there. Believing that she has been "stood up," Marjorie has already left. Wally does not see Marjorie again for fifteen years, and when chance provides the meeting, he realizes that Marjorie is a beautiful, yet very ordinary, person that he once idolized but who has become simply another suburban wife and mother.

Samson-Aaron Feder

Uncle to Marjorie, Samson-Aaron is a grossly overweight, rather crude individual, who is an embarrassment to the Morgenstern family, but certainly the life of any social occasion. He attends Seth's Bar Mitzva and succeeds in becoming quite drunk and using his gross table manners in the presence of Marjorie's current flame's family, the Goldstones. When Marjorie insists upon going to South Wind for the summer, her mother arranges for Uncle Samson to obtain a position as a dishwasher in the kitchen, in order that he may keep an eye on Marjorie. He is enlisted to play the toreador in a Spanish entertainment event, and dies later that evening from a heart attack. His death results in Marjorie leaving South Wind, just as she has agreed to surrender her virginity to Noel.

Rose Morgenstern

Mother of Marjorie, Rose is terribly concerned with both appearances and with finding the correct husband for her daughter, Marjorie. She is violently opposed to Marjorie's desire for a theatrical career and objects even more strongly to her relationship with Noel Airman. At all times, Rose plays the role of the stereotypical Jewish mother, continually arranging meetings and social engagements at which her daughter might meet appropriate eligible Jewish men.

Arnold Morgenstern

An immigrant, Arnold has established a successful import business in New York City. Hit by the Depression, he is forced to move his family to a smaller apartment, but still in an acceptable West End neighborhood. He truly desires the best for his daughter, although he has difficulty expressing his deep love for her and succumbs to his wife's schemes to



keep Marjorie and Noel separate. Eventually, he provides the boat fare for Marjorie to travel to France in search of Noel, stating that he only wants his daughter to be happy.

Sam Rothmore

Sam runs the New York office of Paramount Pictures, and employs Noel to screen manuscripts sent in by aspiring screenplay writers. He is a tolerant kind man but, ultimately, cannot abide Noel's lack of responsibility when he fails to appear for work for three days. Noel abandons this position in favor of a trip to Mexico, in order to write a book on his new philosophy.

Guy Flamm

A sleazy theatrical promoter and occasional director, Flamm is primarily responsible for securing backing for plays and musicals he attempts to get onto the Broadway stage. He offers Marjorie a role in a terrible play, if her father is able to assist in the financing of the venture.

Seth Morgenstern

Younger brother to Marjorie, Seth is not fully developed in the novel. In college, he joins the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps, becomes a World War II pilot and is ultimately shot down.



Objects/Places

West End

A section of New York City that is home to more affluent residents, housing a large Jewish community during the first half of the 20th century.

El Dorado

Fashionable apartment building in the West End, populated only by truly affluent individuals and families

Hunter College

Free public college in New York City, attended by Marjorie and friend Marsha

Lamms Department Store

Popular department store in New York City, owned by the father of Sandy Goldstone, one of Marjorie's early boyfriends

bar-mitzva

A Jewish ceremony for boys, usually when they reach age 12, which is their introduction into male adulthood

Vagabonds

A dramatic group that Marjorie joins in the hopes of networking herself into a paying acting position.

Camp Tamarack

Children's camp in New York, at which Marjorie spends a summer as the creative drama director

South Wind

Adult resort across the lake from Camp Tamarack, where Noel Airman is employed as the entertainment director and where Marjorie obtains a summer job.



Seder

A Jewish celebration, held on the eve of Passover, involving specific foods and rituals

Princess Jones

Name of the musical written by Noel Airman, which is a complete flop on Broadway

Mauritania

Ship on which Noel sails to Paris

Sorbonne

University in Paris at which Noel intends to study philosophy

equity card

An actor's union card, given after one gains a speaking role in a play, and ensuring a union wage for any ensuing work.

Queen Mary

Ship on which Marjorie travels to France



Themes

Generational Conflict

An old and almost overused theme in literature, author Wouk highlights the clash of generations as he depicts the ongoing conflicts between Marjorie and her parents, especially her mother. Stereotypical of Jewish mothers for decades, Rose Morgenstern has one goal for her daughter, that is, marriage to an appropriate Jewish boy, preferably a doctor or lawyer. Almost every young man who meets mother's expectations and approval, however, is ultimately rejected by Marjorie. She prefers the risky, somewhat morally bankrupt theatre crowd, specifically Noel Airman, the immature, self-centered, ne'er do well son of a prominent Jewish judge. Both mother and father would have Marjorie settle into some acceptable form of employment while she waits for the "correct" husband, but Marjorie, a forerunner of women's liberation, wants only a career in the theatre. The more Rose attempts to control Marjorie's life and future, in both direct and surreptitious ways, the more Marjorie rebels, until finally they let go and provide the financing necessary for her to travel to Europe, in order to locate Noel. In this letting go, however, they allow Marjorie the opportunity to gain her own sense of identity, through both the encounter with Mike Eden and the realization that Noel will always be the self-centered "user" of others, unable to find a purpose for his life. Ultimately, Marjorie returns to her "roots," however, as the majority of young adults do, adopting a lifestyle closely aligned with the upbringing of their earlier years. The lesson here may be for parents, who must come to understand that children must explore life and experiment on their own, making their own mistakes and reaping the consequences of their behaviors. For Marjorie, the eventual choice of a typical Jewish marriage and family is predictable and, in truth, rather anti-climactic.

Failed Dreams

Everyone has dreams for his or her future. As children age, these dreams become perhaps less fantastical, but may remain unrealistic, or, as realism unfolds, may require work and sacrifices not imagined. Wouk's novel is filled with characters whose dreams remain unfulfilled, and their personal strengths and weaknesses determine how they respond to these circumstances. Thus, the characters can be seen as a small slice of American society as a whole. Marjorie dreams of a stage career and pursues it avidly, with the support of friends such as Marsha and her college instructor. In fact, however, she is not exceptional as a performer. She pursues her dream by joining little theatre groups, taking a few acting classes at her college, and engaging in a short and unsuccessful stint at summer theatre stock work. The failure to realize this dream does not cause her ruination, however, because she has another dream—marriage to Noel Airman. Obsessed by what she cannot have, Marjorie spends five years of her young adulthood in pursuit of Noel, only to ultimately realize that the dream itself is flawed and unworthy of her. She moves on, apparently happy to accept the prize of an "appropriate" marriage and life in the suburbs. For Noel, multiple failures are often



blamed on others, for he is unable to admit his emotional instability and his lack of talent as a writer of musical drama. His lack of success causes emotional tailspins that serve only to push him forward to the next impossible pursuit, without the necessary introspection and reflection in which normal people engage. Indeed, he blames Marjorie for the disaster of Princess Jones, his father for his rigidity and lack of empathy, and religion for the misery of the masses. Without the capacity to recognize and accept his own incompetency and mental illness, Noel leads a life of non productivity, wanton self-destruction, and ultimate mediocrity. Today, he might be diagnosed as manic-depressive or bipolar. Marsha Zelenko dreams of a stage career, perhaps as a director or producer but is unable to pursue the study and work which might bring those dreams to fruition. The financial situation of her parents, moreover, forces her to find menial employment as a sales clerk and to enter an essentially loveless marriage for the sake of financial security. Marsha's response to failed dreams is compromise, and she has adjusted well to that compromise, given that she has obtained the affluent life of a suburban wife. Wally Wronken has two dreams—to be a successful playwright and to marry Marjorie Morgenstern. The first is realized, as he never loses sight of the goal, works a regular job so that he can support himself as he writes, and produces eventually successful Broadway plays. Unlike Marjorie or Noel, Wally is exceptional. The second dream, he ultimately discards, not without pain certainly, but with the eventual realization that Marjorie herself was simply a beautiful, yet ordinary girl that he had once idealized. Even Mike Eden suffers from failed dreams, but, unlike the others, and in spite of his obvious need for drugs, has found a loftier purpose than all of the others. While psychologists might see his risk-taking as a submerged death wish, he nevertheless is committed to saving children and families from ultimate destruction. His response to a failed career in psychology and subsequent nervous breakdown is to get outside of himself and to use his intelligence and passion in the service of others.

Coincidence and Timing

As the plot unfolds, and as the myriad of personalities are developed, one cannot help but realize the impact that coincidence and timing have on everyone's life. Religious individuals refer to this as God's plan for each of our lives; secular proponents may call it "fate" or accident. Nevertheless, every adult can look back upon his or her life and realize that each circumstance or event led to the next in an unending procession of experiences which have led to the present. If Marjorie had not met Marsha Zelenko and had not performed so well in the college musical, she would not have secured summer employment at Camp Tamarack. If not for Camp Tamarack, she would perhaps never have known Noel Airman, an individual who controlled five years of her life. Had she not run into Noel the afternoon of the Thanksgiving party at the hospital, she might have married Dr. Morris Shapiro. Had her father not insisted that she travel first-class to Europe on that specific ship, Mike Eden would not have entered her life, and she would perhaps have succeeded in bringing Noel back to the U.S. and married him. Marsha had to seek employment at Lamms Department Store in order to assist the family finances. In so doing, she saved enough to take her parents on a Florida vacation where she met and later married Lou Michelson. Had Noel Eden successfully obtained the divorce he sought, his wife might not have died, and he would have remained a

psychology professor and follower of Freud. Had brother Seth not chosen to join the Naval ROTC in college, he might have lived. Each decision, event, and experience, along with the unpredictable factor of timing, propels humans into their ensuing decisions and experiences and ultimately causes each of us to ask the question, "What if?"



Style

Point of View

Narration of the tale of Marjorie Morningstar is in the third person, with partial omniscience. Thus, the reader is privy not only to Marjorie's words but her most intimate thoughts and feelings about all that is occurring in her life. Given that insight, the reader is able to see Marjorie as rather self-absorbed and certainly immature, well into her adulthood. One wonders, for example, if Marjorie has any empathy for her parents or loving thoughts toward her brother Seth. Seth is barely in her thoughts, and she is rather shocked to witness his outstanding performance during his bar-mitzva; further, as she tells Wally of Seth's death in the war, there does not appear to be much emotion. Even in the death of Uncle Samson, though professing horrible grief, Marjorie's final contemplation of the matter is that it prevented her from losing her virginity to Noel. Marjorie's developing maturity and her acceptance of the flawed dream of a life with Noel is perhaps the first hint that she is moving into adulthood. Other characters become three-dimensional through their words, for, in all instances, the characters reveal their innermost selves through conversation. This is an effective tool for what is a fictional biography, as it allows the reader to gain complete understanding of each person in Marjorie's world. At the end, however, the author changes to a first-person narrative, through the journal entry of Wally Wronken, an effective manner to demonstrate the perspective of the one individual who has followed his original dream to success and who can now look back upon his lengthy relationship with Marjorie with realistic perspective.

Setting

The setting of New York City is critical to the unfolding story of individuals who have aspirations for careers in the theatre. As well, the disparity between the socio-economic class structure is more easily portrayed as the sections of the city, such as the Bronx, from which Marjorie has moved and in which George, her first love, remains, demonstrate the cultural differences between those who remain in the less affluent sections and those who move into Manhattan, in order to become a part of a more cultured and affluent social group. The Manhattan setting for Marjorie allows her to mingle with students from Columbia, children of lawyers and doctors, and allows her mother to form important connections in an effort to "arrange" an appropriate marriage for her daughter. To set the tale during the Depression and World War II and its aftermath is necessary as well, for it allows the credibility of much that occurs—the downturn of Mr. Morgenstern's business and the ensuing need to move to a smaller, less expensive apartment, the ability to inject the character of Mike Eden who is obsessed with anti-Nazi activities, and the death of brother Seth. Moving the plot to Europe, as Marjorie searches for Noel, allows the reader a cursory description of cities and landmarks, as well as the understanding of the future threat of the Nazi regime in Germany. Indeed, Marjorie is horribly upset to see the Nazi swastika flying in front of the



German embassy in Switzerland. The suburbs, into which Marjorie eventually settles are typical of post-war America, as the flight from urban congestion begins.

Language and Meaning

Era-appropriate language is utilized throughout the work, lending credibility to both the place and time of the plot. Perhaps some of the appeal of the work, and certainly a tribute to the mastery of Wouk's story-telling, is his commitment to use language that is appropriate for each character developed. Marjorie herself uses speech that is typical of a properly educated young woman, although her vocabulary may be a bit beyond her level of education at age seventeen. Still, she reads voraciously, and this lends some credibility to her vocabulary usage. Rose and Arnold Morgenstern are typical immigrant Americans, whose language is certainly less sophisticated than that of Judge Ehrman, for example. Noel has obviously grown up in the Ehrman household and has received sufficient modeling and schooling to have a sophisticated use of English and a vocabulary that exemplifies exposure to great literature. Likewise, Mike Eden's verbal descriptions of Freud and psychology in general are wholly appropriate for one who has taught the subject at the university level. Two somewhat comical characters require specific language for development. Typical of her background and upbringing, Marsha Zelenko's use of language is wholly credible. Terms such as "honey bun" and "West End babe," directed at Marjorie, are factors of her environment, and Wouk develops her character through this language. Uncle Samson-Aaron, with his thick accent, uses brash and obviously lower class language, and it suits him perfectly.

Structure

A chronological depiction of the life of Marjorie Morgenstern is the method by which this tale is told. The novel itself is divided into five sections, each recounting a significant stage in the life experiences of this protagonist. Section one treats Marjorie's late teen years, as she begins her college studies and continues a relationship with a young man from her former Bronx neighborhood, a relationship that is doomed to failure now that she is in Manhattan and exposed to Columbia boys. Section two, titled "Marsha," recounts Marjorie's college years and the friendship that develops between her and Marsha, ultimately leading to the first encounter with Noel Airman. Section three develops the relationship between Marjorie and Noel, as the summer at South Wind progresses, and the beginnings of insight into the instability of Noel, as well as the continued naivete of Marjorie. The fourth section, simply titled "Noel," allows the reader the greatest insight into this unstable man, whose behaviors continue to disappoint his family and devastate Marjorie. His manic-depressive tendencies and his egotism are unrecognizable to Marjorie, who, in her obsession with this man, lead to her loss of virginity, an event that impacts her significantly but for which Noel shows little empathy. Section five finds Marjorie continuing to plan and plot her capture of Noel, even adopting many of her mother's tendencies, such as planning what his career should be once she is able to get him back to the states and married. The encounter with Mike Eden, however, affects her far more than she initially realizes, and it is through knowing

him that she begins to see Noel as he truly is and is thus able to reject his marriage proposal. The return to her "roots" is inevitable, as Marjorie returns to a renewed social life in New York and, within a week of meeting Milton Schwartz, is engaged, cured of Noel and ready to assume a respectable position in Jewish society.



Quotes

Marjorie had about reached the conclusion that boys were on the whole more fascinated by sex withheld than by sex granted; and since this is nearly the sum of wisdom on the subject of young love, she managed for the time being to keep out of trouble. (Chapter 4, p. 45)

The rehearsal period after classes was like a birthday party that came every day. In a word, she was stage-struck. (Chapter 6, p. 57)

But Marjorie had little use for any version of the faith. She regarded it as a body of superstitious foolishness perpetuated, and to some degree invented, by her mother for her harassment. (Chapter 9, p.84)

All during the winter, and into the spring—while she dreamed of him, and wrote letters she never intended to mail and tore them up, and scribbled Mrs. Noel Airman on loose-leaf sheets which she instantly shredded into a wastebasket, and planned and plotted to make her way to South Wind, and finally made the appointment with Greech and won the job—all that time, for anything her parents or her brother knew, Marjorie was a girl without an aim or a care in the world. (Chapter 12, p. 140)

College was beginning to seem a worn-out game to her. She was bored, bored in her very soul, with the overheated classrooms, the scarred chairs with one bloated arm for writing, the gongs ringing at the dragging end of dragging hours, the smell of chalk dust, the cramping weight of textbooks under an arm, the corridors full of giggling freshmen and smeary lipstick, the frumpy teachers nagging forever about about number and words. (Chapter 13, p. 147)

Since her fifteenth year Marjorie had believed firmly that sex was the most important and perilous concern of her life; that she would be a damned fool to lose her virginity before her wedding night; and that a serious affair before marriage would be the worst catastrophe that could happen to her. Now, for the first time in her life, her certainty on these points began to break down. (Chapter 16, p. 183)

Only many hours later—when the funeral was over, and the cars were leaving the cemetery on Long Island where the Uncle had been lowered into the brown earth—did the thought at last strike Marjorie, through all the fog of shock and fatigue, that the death of Samson-Aaron had stopped her from having an affair with Noel Airman; and that nothing else in the world could have stopped it. (Chapter 20, p. 241)

You can't blame the human race for preferring some bright storyteller's dream or other to the black cold meaningless dark of the real universe. And if one has to make a choice among the durable fantasies, I don't know that your religion is worse than any, but I have an incurable temperamental preference for facts, however cold and nasty. (Chapter 29, p. 334)



She had sat like this by the window at seventeen, thinking that twenty-one was the golden time, the time when fame and money and a brilliant marriage would burst over her in an iridescent shower. It had seemed to her then that twenty-two was the start of the downward slope; that twenty-four was an autumn year; that thirty was decrepitude. She could remember these thoughts across the stretch of lost time and smile at them. (Chapter 34, p. 391)

When marriage didn't make a girl smug and sloppy like Rosalind Boehm, or tight-nerved and falsely gay like Marsha Michaelson, it could work just such a soft charming change; she had seen it make ugly girls into pleasant women, and pretty girls into stunning women. Here she was—pretty as any, over twenty-two, and in the ash can. (Chapter 37, p. 425)

Religious discipline is nothing but a permanent psychic shelter. You stay inside it, and you're less vulnerable to whatever horrors happen in life. (Chapter 41, p. 469)

From a Freudian viewpoint there are no accidents, you see. Or rather, accidents, mistakes, oversights, slips of the tongue, are icebergs poking above the water and showing colossal masses of motivation underneath. (Chapter 42, p. 480)

Outside that limited world, outside her perpetual little tug of war with Noel, outside her girlish dream of becoming Marjorie Morningstar, there was, there had always been, a roaring larger world in which men like Mike Eden moved; by chance, blindly pursuing Noel, she had stumbled into this larger world, and it scared and excited her. (Chapter 44, p. 499)

The only remarkable thing about Mrs. Schwartz is that she ever hoped to be remarkable, that she ever dreamed of being Marjorie Morningstar. She couldn't be a more run-of-the-mill wife and mother. (Chapter 48, p. 564)



Topics for Discussion

A significant factor in the story of Marjorie Morgenstern is the suggestion that coincidence and timing are the basis for all that occurs. Discuss this concept with specific examples from the work.

Noel Airman is a complicated character. In your opinion, is he simply a victim of arrested development or are there serious mental illness issues involved? Support your opinion with examples.

Marsha is a comical figure and yet, as well, a tragic one. Discuss both aspects of her personality and life.

Mike Eden has a definite "dark" side. Discuss how author Wouk develops this side of his personality and, at the same time, portrays him as an altruistic individual with a higher purpose.

Wouk seems to stereotype Jewish mothers in the character of Rose Morgenstern. Even though the novel is set between the 1930s-1950s, is this stereotype still in existence today? If so, in what ways?

Though this work can be seen as the "coming of age" of Marjorie Morgenstern, do you believe that Wouk portrays her in the end as a fully developed adult? Why or why not?

If you had the opportunity to change the ending of this tale, how would you do so? If you would not alter it, why not?