

Once Is Not Enough Short Guide

Once Is Not Enough by Jacqueline Susann

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Social Concerns

Once Is Not Enough is Jacqueline Susann's most overtly Freudian novel. In *Valley of the Dolls* (1966), Neely's mammoth insecurity is a result of her early deprivation of a mother and father but this is only one small facet of the book. In *Once Is Not Enough*, January Wayne's obsessive love of her father (her mother commits suicide when January is seven), her overblown Electra complex, is the center and soul of this fiction. January is not attracted to men of her own age.

Her first encounter is with a steamy Italian and her response is icy, in part because she is young, but mostly because she only loves her father. Later, after her father remarries Dee Granger, to January's extreme disappointment, January tries to fall in love with David Milford. She even makes love with him but it is a horrible experience and she withdraws from men even more. It is not until she meets Tom Colt, a macho writer and a man several years older than her father, that she finally falls in love. She doesn't even mind that his penis is the size of a thumb and that he is mostly impotent. There are several older women with young male lovers in the book, but the attraction isn't as overtly Freudian.

January, as a result of her father fixation, is a relatively old-fashioned girl. She doesn't go so far as to believe in sex only after marriage, but she does believe that sex should be accompanied by love. None of the other characters feels this combination to be mandatory.

January's values are out of date.

Susann's fictional world is the freewheeling world of the 1960s. It is a time of nudity, even fornication on the stage. In *Valley of the Dolls* it seemed that the only people who abused drugs were the ones with the fame to need them, and the money to afford them.

Drug abuse in *Once Is Not Enough* is much more democratic. January is displaced in this world because of her traditional values, but this time the displacement is even more extreme.

The alienation of Anne, for example, in *Valley of the Dolls*, resulted because she was still encumbered by small town values in a privileged world where they no longer worked. In *Once Is Not Enough*, the topsy-turvy moral universe of the privileged class has filtered down to the masses. Interestingly, January is the freak. Her values are the result of a major neurosis. Susann does not condemn the other characters for their flexible moral codes; she accepts it as they do. Characters like Linda Riggs, an editor in the novel, may suffer some for their free-wheeling lives, but not as much as January.

There is none of the traditional retribution awaiting them at the end of the novel either. They continue. Still, if January were set up as some sort of moral touchstone one might condemn the others, but she isn't. She's simply bewildered. Like nearly all of Susann's major protagonists, January is victimized for buying into the traditional images of



women. Linda, the career woman, who may in some small way long for marriage, etc., is not a victim.

She survives, shallowly perhaps, but with gusto.

Like Valley of the Dolls, *Once Is Not Enough* is notable for its absence of real villains. No one is evil. There is plenty of deception but the deceptions are usually perpetrated in the name of a higher love. No one is with the person he or she loves. It's like a *No Exit* in a mass fiction art form. Hell is loving other people, all of whom are unavailable.

Techniques

Once again Susann uses multiple, shifting third-person point-of-view to tell her story. The story is seen mainly through the eyes of January Wayne, but also through David Milford's, Dee Granger's, and Karla's eyes. Susann no longer sets off the changes in narrator under chapters bearing the appropriate character's name. She will shift for a page or two or as many as she needs to tell her story. The reader is never in doubt as to who is narrating. There is a confidence to her use of the technique though she loses something of the little distinctiveness the different narrators had in *Valley of the Dolls*.

This novel has the strangest ending of any of Susann's novels: January is carried off by a beautiful alien from another planet. It is quite an unexpected denouement given the realistic texture of the rest of the book. Yet subtly, in her own way, Susann has prepared the reader for it. Hugh Robertson, a retired astronaut, has several conversations with January about the probability of life on other planets.

Hugh tells her that there is probably life similar to humankind, some civilizations more advanced, some less, in the universe. Susann returns again and again to the imagery of the stars (the heavenly variety, not the fan magazine type, though there are plenty of those too). Finally, January repeatedly dreams, with particular intensity after her father's death, of the being who rescues her. Susann nudges the reader toward the ending, taking him through January's experiences with hallucinogens. The reader is not sure the ending is real until the novel is over.

Susann was a science fiction fan and had written her unpublished science fiction novel, *Yargo*, during the 1950s.

The creature that saves January sounds suspiciously like the *Yargo* of her previous book. Susann, who didn't like to waste anything, probably couldn't resist using him. Possibly, it was also the closest she felt she could come to writing a science fiction book given the type of audience she had amassed.

Themes

Susann's treatment of homosexuality in this novel is more tolerant than it was in *Valley of the Dolls*. In her first book she freely acknowledged its presence but gay men were still referred to peripherally and derisively as "fags."

In *Once Is Not Enough* one of the main characters, Karla, is an aging, reclusive Garboesque movie star. She is a lesbian. Throughout the novel she has an affair with David Milford and at one point makes the traditional recant that she really wasn't a lesbian after thirtyodd years or so of being one. But near the end of the book Karla's female lover, Dee Granger, is redeemed from her frivolous life as a socialite by her love for Karla. Dee decides to leave her husband and lead an honest life.

Thematically, it is also an interesting ending. This is not as bleak a book as *Valley of the Dolls*. There is the dark strain. Dee Granger and Mike Wayne die in a plane explosion just as both have resolved to change their lives for the better. But David Milford does wind up with Karla. January meets her dream man. True he is an alien, but nothing is perfect. What is interesting is that January's salvation has to come from another world. Like the main characters in *Valley of the Dolls*, January's salvation isn't possible in the world as it exists. It isn't so much that January is too good for this world, as she is too alienated for it.

Adaptations

In 1974 *Once Is Not Enough* was made into a film. It starred Deborah Raffin as January, David Jansenn as Tom Colt, Kirk Douglas as Mike Wayne, Alexis Smith as Dee Granger, and Melina Mecouri as Karla. Brenda Vaccaro won a Golden Globe for her role as Linda Riggs. Susann had a cameo as a T.V.

newscaster. She was like a little Hitchcock, putting in an appearance in all of the movies made of her books. The film was relatively successful, but created nothing like the furious ticket-buying for *Valley of the Dolls*. The critics, as usual, were less than kind.



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