Peyton Place Study Guide

Peyton Place by Grace Metalious

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This controversial novel was originally published in America in the late 1950s, a time of pervasive artistic and moral conservatism. The book's frank and unapologetic look at abortion, sexuality and small town (im)morality was considered shocking, scandalous, and ultimately notorious, although today its language and subject matter would probably be considered relatively tame. As a large cast of vividly defined characters plays out a complex network of stories, the novel takes an unflinching, if sometimes overwhelming, look at themes relating to the relationship between truth and illusion, femaleness, frank sexuality, and religious conflict.

Peyton Place is divided into three books. The first is set in 1937, just as the Depression is ending in America. The narrative focuses on the lives and relationships of two unlikely friends, the middle class Allison Mackenzie and the lower class Selena Cross. Both girls are outcasts from the rest of their classmates, Allison because she is the child of a single mother (Constance) and Selena because she comes from a poor, looked-down-upon part of town. In the first section, while simultaneously exploring lives lived by other inhabitants of the town, the narrative is anchored by explorations of the girls' relationships with their parents, both of which are challenging. Specifically, Allison's fantasies about her father (whom she believes to be a wonderful man) are painful for Constance to deal with, since Allison's father was in fact a married man whose relationship with Constance was emotionally clandestine and morally frowned upon. Selena, for her part, grows up (and struggles against) an environment of physical, emotional and sexual abuse at the hands of her step-father. Both girls, by the end of Book one, vow that they will someday escape those lives.

Book two takes place two years later, and again has a narrative anchored by the experiences of Allison and Selena, while at the same time exploring parallel stories about other people in the town. The girls' experiences are more sexual in nature, and include Selena, made pregnant by her abusive step-father, having an abortion. Meanwhile, the sexual, emotional, spiritual, and moral awakenings of the two girls are counter-pointed by similar experiences in the life of Constance, who enters into a teasing and at times confrontational relationship with Tomas Makris, the new school principal. The latter part of Book two is taken up with a narrative of a series of tragic incidents that strike Peyton Place as a fire rages outside the boundaries of the town. Selena's mother commits suicide, Constance impulsively and brutally confronts Allison with the truth of her (Constance's) relationship with her father, and Allison's best friend is seriously injured in an accident at a carnival.

Book three takes place four years later. As World War II rages in Europe, the citizens of Peyton Place continue with their complicated, gossip-ridden lives. Against the background of small town judgment and comment, Constance and Makris have, by this point, entered into a happy and fulfilling marriage. Allison, partly as a resentful result of the marriage and partly because she's still angry with the way her mother told her the truth about her father, moves to New York and strives to establish a career as a professional writer. Meanwhile, Selena attempts to get on with creating a new life, her

struggles deepening when her abusive step-father returns to her life and she is forced to kill him in self-defense. Her trial causes a sensation, and causes Allison (newly out of a relationship with a married man) to return to Peyton Place. Selena is ultimately freed when the doctor who performed her abortion reveals the truth of her abusive relationship with her step-father. Meanwhile, Allison resolves her pained relationship with her mother and with the town itself, coming to realize that Peyton Place, with all its flaws, has taught her how to live.

Book 1, Part 1

Book 1, Part 1 Summary

The novel opens with a description of the town and a list of the major buildings of the town. It is mid-afternoon on a Friday. Some of the old men make crude statements about Kenny Stearns as he walks by on his way to ring the bell at the elementary school. Kenny is frustrated with his wife Ginny and desperate for a drink. His last thought spoken aloud is overheard by Miss Elsie Thornton and her class of eighth graders. Miss Thornton looks at the vulnerable Allison MacKenzie, the worldly Selena Cross, the bullying Rodney Harrington, the under-sized Norman Page, and the compassionate Ted Carter. She wonders why she bothers teaching when most students live very small lives but then recalls why she bothers.

Book 1, Part 1 Analysis

These introductory chapters are essentially just that—introductions to the book's key elements.

First, the small town setting is eloquently sketched in, with the descriptions of both the town and its inhabitants vividly defining the sense of enforced and often unwelcome intimacy—of people watching each other, being watched, and of being judged. This last element is evoked with particular effectiveness not only in terms of the comments passed by the gossipy old men, but also by the description of the two churches, watching and judging from their opposing positions on the street. Second, the narrative introduces its central characters through the eyes of the watchful Miss Thornton—Allison, Selena, Norman, Rodney and Tom (particularly Allison and Selena) are all central characters in the tapestry of story and relationship woven by the author throughout the book.

In terms of narrative style, the key element here is the way in which storylines entwine, the way in which a character's actions (such as those of Kenny Stearns) lead the reader's attention from one set of circumstances to another. The author uses this technique to great effect not only within chapters but from chapter to chapter—in other words, a character/narrative line is introduced at the beginning of one chapter, intersects with another character/incident, and that second/character/incident moves on to become the focus of the next chapter or chapters. This narrative line reinforces the authorial perspective that in small towns in general, and in this small town in particular (perhaps even in life itself) everything and everyone is connected.

The final element to note about this section is the way in which several references reappear at the end of the novel in a similar form—the reference to Indian summer, Kenny Stearns's journey through town, and his interaction with Miss Thornton's class in particular. This bookending of narrative elements suggests that on some level the

author is interested in exploring the idea of circularity, of simultaneous beginnings and endings, perhaps even of life itself (as opposed to merely lives in Peyton Place) being an endless cycle of starting, stopping, and moving on.

Book 1, Part 2

Book 1, Part 2 Summary

Allison walks to one of her favorite places in town where area is marked with a sign that says "Road's End." She reflects on how lonely and immature she feels. Walking home, she passes through Allison's favorite section of woods. Along the way, she encounters a group of boys from school who taunt her. Doing her best to ignore them, she rushes down the street towards home.

Born and raised in Peyton Place, Allison's mother Constance was determined from a very young age to get out as soon as she could and marry a rich man. She did leave and become involved with a wealthy man, but he was married. Constance became pregnant, and she and her mother changed the dates on the baby's birth certificate to avert gossip. When Constance's lover died, he left her a significant amount of money and she started the Thrifty Corner Apparel Shoppe, the most successful and most fashionable ladies clothing store in Peyton Place. Constance is thinking about how she never loved nor misses Allison's father, but one day she'll have to tell Allison the truth about him. She discovers Allison reading Sleeping Beauty. Allison is uncomfortable with the more sophisticated way she and her mother talk at home compared to the way people talk around town. After dinner, Allison comments on how handsome her father was and later goes to bed fantasizing about him as her prince.

Book 1, Part 2 Analysis

This chapter both introduces new and important narrative elements at the same time as it develops elements previously established in Part 1. The most important of the latter is the idea of endings and beginnings, developed here in Allison's visit to Road's End. In terms of the former, the most significant elements introduced here are Allison's imagined relationship with her father and the true nature of that relationship as defined from Constance's perspective in chapter four. The tension between what Allison believes and what Constance (and the reader) knows to be true forms the basis of one of the most dramatic and suspenseful narrative threads in the book. An additional important element to be considered in this context is the first appearance of the framed photograph of Allison's father, a symbol of both Allison's immaturity and her reliance on fantasy to sustain her.

This section also contains two examples of how the author incorporates small but telling details, images glimpsed in passing that can be seen, upon closer inspection, to have significant metaphoric meaning. The Thrifty Corner Apparel Shoppe, for example, can be seen as an embodiment of one of Constance's essential characteristics—in the same way as clothing covers vulnerable nudity, Constance covers up her vulnerable emotional and/or sexual self. Another example is the fact that Allison reads Sleeping

Beauty, notable because as the book eventually comes to suggest, she is something of a sleeping beauty herself.

Book 1, Part 3

Book 1, Part 3 Summary

The inhabitants of the wealthy, influential Chestnut Street are described, and include Leslie Harrington (wealthy widowed father of the bully Rodney), Doc Swain, Seth Buswell, and others. The men of Chestnut Street are playing a poker game that's interrupted by Seth Buswell announcing his intention to start a campaign in his newspaper to clean up the tar-paper shacks scattered around town. Harrington opposes him, calmly at first and then angrily as Seth insists that healthy standards have apply to the shacks as they apply to other homes. Later, after Harrington leaves, Seth comments that he sometimes wonders whether the town would be better off without the citizens who live in those shacks, Swain comments that "there is nothing dearer than life . . . even the lives being lived in our shacks".

Swain passes the shacks on his way home and is shocked to hear drunken arguments from the home of Lucas Cross and his family. Lucas's daughter Selena, prevents him from intervening telling him he would only make things worse. She takes her brother Joey out of the house to keep them both safe. She pleads with Doc Swain to not say anything to anyone, especially to Allison MacKenzie, her best friend. Doc Swain agrees and goes home—reflecting that Joey said nothing.

Lucas Cross' history as a migrant woodsman and talent as a cabinet maker and carpenter are described. "He drank, beat his wife, and abused his children, and he had one virtue which he believed outweighed all his faults. He paid his bills. . ." This latter characteristic is what enables New Englanders, social workers, and politicians to ignore the pain-filled lives of men like Cross and his family.

Book 1, Part 3 Analysis

Aside from painting a vivid picture of the uneasy relationship between rich and poor in Peyton Place, these chapters introduce several narrative elements that play an important role later in the action. One of these the domineering presence of Leslie Harrington in both the private and public lives of the town, a presence that interestingly enough is echoed in that of the dirt-poor Lucas Cross. Another is the reference in chapter seven to the societal condition of poor people like Lucas—his role, his status, and the way he's viewed. This is one of the few instances in which the novel takes on a deliberate, obvious aspect of social consciousness. The author here seems interested in making a sharp point about the way the less-advantaged are simultaneously taken advantage of and kept in their place by those who have wealth, power, and self-interested influence.

The most significant element introduced in this section is the character of Doc Swain, the individual who serves as a kind of moral compass for both the town and the novel,

but who finds his sense of personal morality challenged by the circumstances (asked to perform an abortion) in which he later finds himself. His comment on the value of lives lived in the tar paper shacks is particularly noteworthy, in that it seems to form the basis of his reasoning for performing that abortion—without actually saying so here, he recognizes the value of Selena's life, a value he acts to reinforce and uphold when he performs the abortion on her. In other words, the reference here to the value of life in the shacks is foreshadowing of his later decision.

Book 1, Part 4

Book 1, Part 4 Summary

Selena is beautiful and desperate to get out of the life she's leading. In the one-room shack she shares with her family, she listens to her father having sex with her silent mother. Selena cries herself to sleep vowing she will never be like her mother.

Allison always waits outside for Selena to come out of the house for their regular Saturday stroll during which they fantasize they are movie stars' wives or wealthy citizens of the town. They pretend o gossip about some of the town's citizens, but the woman at the soda counter became angry and warned them that gossip can be dangerous.

Allison yearns to show Selena her favorite spot at Road's End. Along the way, the girls encounter Ted Carter, whom Allison says is after Selena. Selena says she doesn't mind, and the two girls each realize that there's something unusual about the other. Selena wonders why Allison is so dreamy about her dead father, as Selena's own father is just as dead—Lucas is actually her stepfather. Selena cannot see the beauty and solitude of Allison's beloved Road's End. The tension between them eases while they have ice cream sundaes.

At the Shoppe, Allison becomes bored with Selena's minute examination of all the beautiful clothes. Constance, seeing the desire in Selena's eyes allows her to try on one of the party dresses. When Selena comes out of the changing room, both Constance and Allison realize that she's beautiful, but only Constance realizes what that beauty means. As Selena walks home, she fantasizes about the life of grace and beauty she'll have someday, just like Constance MacKenzie. She also fantasizes about Ted Carter, who is lying at home in bed fantasizing about her.

Book 1, Part 4 Analysis

Again in this section several important elements are introduced that are developed further later in the book. First is the close but sometimes tense relationship between Selena and Allison, very different girls but in some ways (loneliness, desperation to live a new life, absence of a caring father figure) very much the same. Second is the appearance of Ted Carter, who becomes Selena's boyfriend and eventually her fiancé. He is the focus of Selena's dreams for leaving Peyton Place and the life of the tar paper shacks. The third important element introduced here is the way in which the lives and experiences of Constance Mackenzie and Selena Cross parallel each other. The most telling example of this is the way Constance in effect recognizes herself in Selena—Constance was, in fact, an "expensively kept woman". The stories of these two women continue to parallel each other later in the book when Selena, like Constance, becomes

pregnant outside of marriage. The two pregnancies, however, go in very different directions, as the narrative later reveals.

An ironically humorous element of this chapter is the reference to gossip—specifically, the reference by the woman at the soda counter as to how dangerous gossip could be. The book portrays the town as being riddled with gossip, and it might not be going too far to suggest that the book, with its clearly autobiographical elements, is itself a very sophisticated form of gossip.

Book 1, Part 5

Book 1, Part 5 Summary

Doc Swain is a dedicated doctor and confirmed bachelor, universally liked and respected by everyone in town in spite of his too-plain speaking. The only person with whom he doesn't get along is Marion Partridge, a minister's daughter who is married to one of Swain's best friends, Charles Partridge, a lawyer. Marion has a fussy, demanding, image-conscious personality. Doc Swain refused to acknowledge her lies about her age and to agree with her gossipy complaining about Constance MacKenzie.

Book 1, Part 5 Analysis

This chapter is one of several in the book that seems to not quite fit with the book's overall narrative intent. Yes, it's useful and interesting to explore the character of Doc Swain, who is after all one of the author's most engaging and complex creations. And yes, the portrayal of Marion Partridge is a vividly etched picture of a character common to communities large and small—the ambitious, judgmental matron. The fact remains, however, that nothing in this chapter really moves the story forward. It's essentially a diversion, entertaining but without substance. It is, in a word, gravy —or applesauce, depending on one's gastronomic tastes.

Book 1, Part 6

Book 1, Part 6 Summary

Allison experiences a strange feeling discontent and is eager to get older but is reminded by Constance that time passes all too quickly. Constance plans a birthday party for Allison, who is disgusted when she begins to menstruate. When it finally happens, Allison "wept that she was not, after all, going to be as unique as she had wanted to be."

While Allison has her birthday party in the living room, Constance hides from the noise and the music upstairs in her room. When the noise suddenly ends, Constance realizes the kids are playing a kissing game. She worries about what might happen to Allison but realizes Allison isn't participating in the kissing, but is directing who will kiss whom. Downstairs, Selena is enjoying the kissing game, particularly when she gets kissed by Ted Carter. After the game is finished, Rodney Harrington says Allison is old enough to be kissed, roughly takes her in his arms, and kisses her hard. Allison kicks him in the shins and runs upstairs sobbing, thinking of him and of what happened as "hateful."

Allison goes to pick up Selena on Sunday as usual but learns Selena is busy. Joey shows Allison the family's new lambs and pet lizard. As she's looking through a hole in the shed to see the lizard, she sees into the Cross house and is shocked to see the grime and the lack of space. She also sees a drunken Lucas waiting as Selena makes coffee for him. He comments on how mature Selena is, and when Selena tries to make him take his hands off her, he slaps her face. Selena throws the coffee pot at Lucas. He grabs her, slaps her repeatedly , and calls her names such as bitch, slut, and whore. Selena hits him back. He rips off her blouse, revealing her bare breasts. At that moment, Joey runs in and tries to stop Lucas, but Lucas knocks him aside and goes after Selena. Allison doesn't see what happens next—she falls away from the shed, nauseous with fear and disgust.

Book 1, Part 6 Analysis

The essential narrative action of this section is the portrayal of Allison's introduction to a wider life outside of her imaginative mind. Being kissed by Rodney, having her first period, questioning traditional thoughts —all are steps along Allison's journey away from childhood. She has, it seems, reached a metaphorical "Road's End"—no longer a girl but not quite a woman, she is entering the next phase of her journey, adolescence.

By far the most traumatizing element of Allison's introduction to the larger world is her witnessing of the sexually violent relationship between Lucas and Selena. For the first time she, and the reader, become fully aware of the dark side of being human that lurks between the apparently serene but occasionally spiky surface of Peyton Place. It might not be going too far to suggest that this is, in fact, one of the author's thematic points

about life in general, not just about life in Peyton Place—that beneath humanity's surface veneer of sociability lies its dark, destructive, animalistic side.

The final key element of this section is the reference to Joey's cherished lambs and their pen, which play a key role in Book three when the pen becomes the setting for Lucas' hastily scraped together grave. In fact, both the description of the pen and of Lucas' attack on Selena foreshadow the sequence in Book three when Lucas returns, attempts to again assault his step-daughter, and is killed and ignominiously buried for his trouble.

Book 1, Part 7

Book 1, Part 7 Summary

Winter has arrived in Peyton Place, and the gossipy old men have moved into Tuttle's Grocery StoreThey're interrupted by the arrival of Norman Page who becomes the new subject for gossip as to whether Norman's father Oakleigh deserved the trouble he ended up with.

Norman encounters Allison, who fills his impressionable mind with frightening stories that suggest Hester is insane, a witch, or both. Norman hurries home, more scared of Hester than of going up to the Peyton place. Allison realizes she could write a scary story about Hester Goodale and goes home to try. She's not happy with her first effort and realizes she has to write about people she really knows, the start of her "career."

Hester Goodale, an elderly spinster, once had a suitor who was chased away by her father.

Evelyn Page quizzes her son Norman about his friends, weeps when she thinks he likes women other than her, and manipulates him into saying that he loves only her.

Book 1, Part 7 Analysis

The four chapters in this section take a wider perspective on Peyton Place, exploring the stories and situations of characters other than the four central ones (Allison, Selena, Constance, and Doc Swain).

Epic and/or historical novels are often described as being "sprawling", covering long periods of time, involving large numbers of characters in its plots, and exploring a considerable expanse of emotional and/or thematic territory. In that context, it's possible to see Peyton Place as a kind of small town epic, in that its narrative tends to "sprawl" in all the ways described above. The negative aspect to this narrative perspective is that it sometimes seems as though the aftermath of important incidents, such as that which ended the previous section (Lucas's assault on Selena) is ignored or delayed at the point at which the reader is most intrigued to know what happened next. While it's possible to interpret these kinds of narrative diversions (such as those encountered in this section) as creating suspense, it's also intriguing to consider the thematic and/or narrative links between actions and events in the main (i.e., Selena and/or Allison) plot and events in the sub-plots (the Kenny Stearns, Hester Goodale, and Norman Page subplots). In other words, what is the Selena plot ultimately "about", and how does that connect to what the sub-plots are "about"? One answer might be isolation —Selena is isolated from the rest of Peyton Place by her abusive relationship with Lucas, a relationship that bears clear similarities to the emotional abuse perpetrated on Norman Page by his mother, on Hester Goodale by her father, and on Kenny Stearns by his addiction to alcohol. It might not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the other main

characters are also struggling with isolation, or that in fact, Peyton Place is, as a whole, concerned with exploring ways in which different sorts of people break out of different sorts of isolation.

Book 1, Part 8

Book 1, Part 8 Summary

Kenny Stearns and his drunken friends are all passed out in Kenny's basement. Kenny and Cross hallucinate, Kenny imagining his wife with a well-dressed, wealthy man from the city. He tries to follow them, but can't. He tries to hack his way out the door, but cuts his foot badly. Kenny again loses consciousness.

Kenny and the other men are taken to the little Peyton Place hospital by Doc Swain. Mary tells Lucy not to take Swain's jokes seriously. A crowd gathers and gossips as Lucas is brought out, still hallucinating the bugs. Selena is furious and humiliated as her father thrashes his way into the ambulance. Ted Carter appears and offers comfort, which she angrily rejects. He offers it to Joey, who accepts. At the Cross' shack, Joey goes in to tell Mrs. Cross what happened. Ted takes Selena in his arms, and she releases her anger in the form of tears. He continues to hold her, saying he loves her. They sit on a nearby bench, where Ted, still saying he loves her, tells Selena he wants her to be his girl and promises to marry her before he goes off to law school.

Book 1, Part 8 Analysis

Here again, as the narrative seems to be diverted from its focus on the central characters, it's interesting to look for/at links between the subplots and main plots—in this case, the subplot involving Kenny Stearns and his cronies. On one level this subplot develops the previously discussed emphasis on isolation (in this case the physical isolation in the cellar and the emotional isolation triggered by alcoholism). Here another level is added—a depiction of the self-destructive potential of such isolation, portrayed here as being both physical (Kenny cutting his foot), psychological (Lucas's hallucinations), and relational (the attack on the man with the hidden bottle). It's important to note, however, the juxtaposition between these illustrations of the dangers of isolation with an equally potent illustration of the healing power of connection—in this case, the loving tenderness between Ted and Selena. But given that "Peyton Place", even at this relatively early stage in the narrative, seems intent on focusing on the darker side of human nature, it's also possible to see the author's poetic description of the snowfall snapping the tree branches as foreshadowing of how the "weight" of gossipy opinion eventually "snaps" the "branch" of Ted Carter's tender love.

The interlude at the hospital serves two functions. The first is to introduce the character of Mary, who has a significant role to play later in the novel when she assists Doc in performing Selena's abortion. The second is to illustrate the multiple facets of Doc's complicated personality through the narration of his particularly off-color joke—whatever his reasons for telling it, his flawed-ness juxtaposed with his evident and unconditional compassion makes him one of the most fully rounded, fully more fully human (i.e., contradictory) characters in the book).

Book 1, Part 9

Book 1, Part 9 Summary

Allison dislikes winter. Her friendship with Selena becomes less intense the more Selena becomes involved with Ted Carter. Allison develops a friendship with Kathy Ellsworth, a new girl in town. The school board replaces the deceased high school principalby a man named Tomas Makris. Some reactions to the man's Greek ethnicity are somewhat racist. The only positive reaction comes from Miss Thornton, who looks forward to the new principal bringing in some new ideas.

Tomas Makris arrives and is tall, strong, physically and sexually attractive, blunt, and possessed of both a violent temper and a sharp tongue. Doc Swain greets Makris, who thinks that Swain is about the only person he's met so far who looks like a real person. Harrington greets Makris heartily. Makris he is not someone who's going to be pushed around. Harrington takes Makris to see his new apartment, but Makris sees Constance and demands to be introduced. His immediate thoughts about her are sexual.

Book 1, Part 9 Analysis

There is the sense here, as in a number of other chapters, that the narrative is in something of a holding pattern. Significant events, as well as developments in the aftermath of previous significant events, seem to be less important to the narrative than foreshadowing future events. References to Allison going to the dance with Rodney Harrington, the lengthy introduction of Tomas Makris, and the hints about the story of how Peyton Place got its name all fall into this latter category. Upon closer inspection, however, it's possible to see subtly defined developments in the major narrative lines—the passing reference to Selena and Ted, for example, suggests that Selena is continuing to seek and find comfort in Ted's arms, eyes, and heart. Another example of this subtle form of developing the main plots is the way in which Allison is described as entertaining Nellie with stories. This moves Allison along on her coming-of-age journey of transformation, from imaginative child to independently thinking writer. Meanwhile, it's important to note that the story of the Peyton Place eventually turns out to be more relevant to theme than to plot—the eventual suggestion that the existence of the entire town town is, on some level, based in isolation.

Finally, some mention must be made of the casually discriminatory use of the term "nigger". It must be remembered that Peyton Place was written during a period (the late 1950s) when the term was still in common usage, particularly by old men such as Clayton Frazier, the character who uses it here and who could still remember slavery. In the '50s , the first stirrings of the Civil Rights Movement were only beginning to make themselves felt throughout the country—it was still several years before the broader raised consciousness of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X emerged. In short, the use of the term was appropriate for both the time and the character—it is worth mentioning,

however, that Frazier is the only character who uses the term, and that the author goes to great pains to depict him as unsavory and small-minded. Given the author's apparently liberal perspective on other matters (such as abortion), it seems reasonable to suggest that that the use of the term reflects the mind of the individual portrayed using it, not the attitude of the author.

Book 1, Part 10

Book 1, Part 10 Summary

Constance reacts to Tomas Makris' arrival with a sense of disquiet and unease. When Makris comes into her shop, she disappears into the back and leaves him to Selena. Makris hascome to see Constance and goes out without buying anything. When Constance comes out of the back room, they talk briefly about Makris, but Constance changes the subject to Selena's dress for the spring dance. Constance suddenly asks how old Selena thinks "he" is. Selena knows immediately who she's talking about and says "he" is thirty-five.

Selena is furious to discover that the money she's been saving to pay for her dress is gone. She assumes Lucas has taken it, but Joey tries to convince her he didn't. Nellie, however, says she saw him do it. Selena demands that Lucas give her money back. They taunt and argue back and forth until Lucas throws Salena's money at her.

On the night of the dance, Rodney Harrington waits unhappily at the Mackenzie house for Allison. Allison comes downstairs and they go to the dance. Constance reflects on Allison's father but is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Makris. Constance invites him in, and he assures her she's got no reason to be afraid—he's going to be "around for a long time."

Book 1, Part 10 Analysis

These chapters focus on Constance's reaction to the presence of Tomas Makris, and also serve as a prologue to events on the evening of the Spring Dance. The first element to note about this section is the way it develops parallels between Constance and the two young women with whom she shares her life, Allison and Selena. She clearly sees echoes of her own experience in the lives of both girls, although her reaction to those parallels is different for each girl. With Allison, she is terrified that her sexual mistake (e.g., falling in love with the wrong man, having a child out of wedlock) is going to be repeated. This, combined with her fear of sexuality in general and of her own sexuality in particular, is what makes her so irritable with her resentful daughter. With Selena, by contrast, Constance is encouraging and supportive, almost loving. She sees herself and Selena as equals, disadvantaged women struggling to improve themselves and free themselves from living lives under the oppressive shadow of male control. In other words, for Constance, she and Selena are allies, while she and Allison are adversaries.

The second, but not unrelated, noteworthy element about this section is its emphasis on sexuality—Allison's desire for sexual experience (illustrated by her eagerness to date Rodney), Constance's fear of sexuality in general (illustrated by her fear for Allison and anxiety about Makris), and Selena's disgust at Lucas's sexual interest (illustrated in her

physical rejection of him). Here again is an example of how Peyton Place challenged traditional thinking and was therefore regarded as immoral. For centuries, women have been regarded, generally, as men's sexual playthings, expected to submit unquestioningly to their whims and desires, even for other women. Peyton Place suggests that women have sexualities of their own, desires and dislikes and responsibilities. It's not going too far to suggest that in its own way and for all the soap opera melodrama of its narrative, it was an opening salvo in the feminist war against male moral and sexual oppression.

Finally, there are several important elements of foreshadowing in this section—of events at the dance in the following section, of Nellie's continuing mental deterioration that continues over the next several chapters and over the next several years to the point where she commits suicide, and perhaps most importantly the development of the relationship between Constance and Makris. This last is one of the most important of all the relationships in the book. Not only is it the source of some of its most sexually stimulating and emotionally intense scenes, it's also the relationship that most vividly embodies the book's thematic focus on the dangers of isolation and the importance of breaking down masks and revealing/living personal truth.

Book 1, Part 11

Book 1, Part 11 Summary

At the dance, Miss Thornton watches and worries as Allison first dances with Rodney and then sits beside her when Rodney disappears. Both Allison and Miss Thornton think to themselves how beautiful Selena looks, and how in love she and Ted seem. They also notice lonely Norman Page, brought to the dance by his mother and who attempts to comfort the obviously distraught Allison by asking her to dance. Allison is too heartbroken to accept the comfort he's offering. Rodney tries to get Betty to have sex, but she refuses and suggests he do it with Allison.

Miss Thornton experiences a complexity of feelings about the June graduation exercises. As she leaves the auditorium, Miss Thornton's wave of sadness goes away.

Book 1, Part 11 Analysis

Because this is the final section of Book one, it's valuable to consider how events here might be considered a kind of climax. In this context, the first point to consider is that in spite of its detours into the lives of Rodney Harrington and Norman Page, the prime focus of this section is on the emotional growth of Allison Mackenzie, as experienced by her and as watched by Miss Thornton. The fact that Allison's disappointment and pain are her most intense emotional experiences, to this point, on her continuing journey away from childhood, make her experiences at the dance the emotional climax of her journey of transformation so far. On another level, the book's thematic exploration of the relationship between isolation, masks and truth also reaches its climax. Allison is isolated by the pain she feels at Rodney's rejection, masks her true feelings, and feels more isolated than ever. By contrast, Selena, comfortable and safe in Ted's arms, no longer feels isolated by her life at all, and feels comfortable enough to express her true feelings. For her too, the dance is a climax, but of happiness as opposed to Allison's climax of pain.

While the section, and indeed the first part of the book, ends on Miss Thornton's hopeful vision of the future, it must be remembered that this is Peyton Place. Here it sometimes seems as though the sufferings of every real life individual in every real life small town have been crammed into one work of fiction, and where every expression of hope is in fact a foreshadowing of suffering. The ending of this chapter is no exception—while there are more promising children to come, there is also more tragedy and more drama. Much, much more.

Book 2, Part 1

Book 2, Part 1 Summary

In the two years since graduation, very little about Peyton Place has changed. Allison is more confident, imaginative and curious, and less emotional. She's also developed a friendship of sorts with Nellie Cross. One summer day Allison encounters Norman Page. They talk and laugh together and realize they have much in common; then they kiss.

That same afternoon Seth Buswell and Doc Swain gossip about events in the town—specifically, about Rodney Harrington getting kicked out of private school but still getting an expensive car from his father. As they watch Allison walk home with Norman, they talk about how Norman's mother Evelyn is so possessive, and how Allison might be good for the pale and gentle Norman.

Selena watches the Doc from the window of The Thrifty Corner Apparel Shoppe where she still works. Selena believes she is pregnant. Selena decides to take Constance up on her offer to have the rest of the day off, and goes to see Doc Swain. Selena advised Constance to tell Allison and Makis, who she is to marry, the truth about Allison's birth. Selena confides in Doc that Lucas Cross is responsible for her being pregnant and asks for an abortion.

Book 2, Part 1 Analysis

The events of a day in summer, two years after graduation, are the focus of the story in this section. On one level, this section kicks all three of the book's main narrative lines into higher gear. Allison's growth from childhood to adulthood, Constance's growth from sexual/emotional frigidity to sexual/emotional fulfillment, and Selena's growth from victim to determined survivor all take significant steps forward in this section. Here again the parallels between the three women's experiences are clear, as they each in their own way have experiences that take them further along the road towards freedom from isolation and untruth.

Additional parallels in the characters of Constance and Selena can also be seen in this section. Both women are unwed mothers, and isolate themselves from their children—Constance emotionally, Selena physically. Both women see men as the only people they can trust with their truths—Makris (for Constance) and Doc Swain (for Selena). And finally, both women are victimized by men they don't love and who don't love them—Constance is used (albeit with some degree of complicity on her part), by Allison's father, while Selena is used (resisting with every fiber of her being) by her stepfather.

Finally, this section sees the introduction of what was probably the most controversial element of the novel, the abortion. It's clear throughout the development of this narrative line that the author's sympathies are with Selena. Her pregnancy exists as the result of rape, the baby's father is a horrific human being, and the clearly portrayed context of the

decision, for both Selena and Doc Swain, is that a striving life with clear potential could easily be derailed if a baby came into it. An argument could easily be made that the latter point is at least irrelevant and at worst wrong headed, in that Selena has no way of being certain that Ted Carter would react in the way she fears (but given his later reaction to her killing of Lucas Cross her suspicions here would probably have proven correct). It could also be argued, however, that Selena's misreading of the situation, or the potential for such misreading, isn't the author's point.

Arguments in favor of abortion have, throughout the history of the debate, been anchored by the belief that a woman has the right to control her own body and her own destiny. There is the very clear sense that this argument is at the core of the author's narrative choices here. Selena, like Constance and Allison on their own respective journeys, seems determined to be free, to live a life based on her choices rather than those imposed upon her by men and or society; or, to put the point in relation to the novel's thematic context, free from the isolation imposed by social opinion and/or male perception and/or power. The choice to have an abortion may very well be seen as a somewhat extreme example of this determination, but it is an example nonetheless, and must be regarded as a clear statement of the author's thematic and narrative intent.

Book 2, Part 2

Book 2, Part 2 Summary

Doc Swain has an internal debate as he considers whether to perform an abortion on Selena. Finally, he goes upstairs and tells Selena he's going to take care of her.

Constance and Makis leave town on a dinner date as Doc is performing the abortion on Selena.with him. Constance thinks about her developing relationship with Makis and how he virtually raped her on one of their first dates.

Back in the present, when they return to Peyton Place after their date, Constance is told by a neighbor that the hospital's been trying to reach her. Constance rushes to the hospital worried for Allison, but learns that Doc Swain had to perform an emergency "appendectomy" on Selena.

Book 2, Part 2 Analysis

In its examination of Doc Swain's tortured contemplation of Selena's situation, and of the situation she has put him in, the narration of chapter four can clearly be seen as containing the core of the book's thematic perspective. This is that each human being must be free to live his/her own life on his/her own terms without impositions of conditions. On one level, this is a fundamentally conservative, individualist, self-determinist philosophy, which makes the exploration of it here deeply ironic—in other words, the novel makes a conservative point through support of a so-called "liberal" value, the right of a woman to manifest her individuality through abortion. That being said, Doc's point (that in taking the life of her baby, he is protecting Selena's) is definitely arguable, but the fact remains that in a novel written in the profoundly conservative 1950s, the author dares to make the suggestion that abortion might not, in and of itself, be wrong. In other words, art (i.e., the novel Peyton Place) challenges life, as most theorists would claim art should do. While most of those same theorists would probably say that Peyton Place is too much a work of popular fiction to be considered art, the fact remains that millions of people read the book and somewhere, somehow, were challenged to think—which, again, theorists would claim is art's purpose.

Meanwhile, it's important to consider what, if any, thematic and/or narrative parallels can be drawn between Doc's and Constance's experiences. On one level, such parallels might simply be defined in terms of both Doc and Constance experiencing a broader aspect of their humanity. On another level, however, their experiences break through the kind of moral, personal and/or sexual isolations that the book consistently suggests are barriers to living true, fulfilled lives. On yet another level, their experiences also suggest that such breakthroughs can only emerge through violence—the moral violence done to Doc's belief systems, the physical violence done to both Selena and her baby, the sexual violence done to Constance.

Other important elements at work in this section include is the somewhat heavy handed metaphor contained in Makris's reference to the "blot" in Constance's ledger. This can clearly be seen by the reader (and is just as clearly seen by Constance herself) as a reference to what she perceives as the blot on her moral ledger—her unwed motherhood, and her lying to Allison about her past. Finally, the extended narrative of Constance and Makris's swimming date foreshadows the similar, but less sexually successful, swimming date taken by Norman and Allison in Book two chapter eleven, and the equally similar and sexually successful swimming date taken by Rodney Harrington and Betty Anderson in Book two chapter twelve.

Book 2, Part 3

Book 2, Part 3 Summary

Nurse Mary, a devoted Catholic and the nurse Doc Swain used to assist him in Selena's abortion, debates the morality of keeping quiet about the doctor performing an illegal abortion. She wonders about confessing to her priest. When she receives a call about Selena, she verifies the appendectomy and realizes she's made her choice.

Doc Swain forces a written and signed confession from Lucas, who verifies that Salena was a virgin when he forced her to have sex. Doc tells Lucas to get out of town. Nellie is heartbroken over hearing the conversation.

Book 2, Part 3 Analysis

These chapters focus on events in the immediate aftermath of Selena's abortion. There are several noteworthy elements in this section. The first is ironic reference to the careful way in which Nurse Mary "spreads her thighs", a somewhat unsophisticated but nonetheless effective counterpoint to the rough way in which Selena presumably had her thighs spread by Lucas. The second noteworthy element here is the narrative's pointed commentary on Catholicism in Peyton Place and in society in general. Specifically, Nurse Mary's decision to remain silently complicit in Doc Swain's lie can be seen as another manifestation of the book's thematic point that humanity transcends imposed morality. In her respect for power, and in her pride in being recognized by that power, Mary is being all too human, and in illustrating that humanity illustrates this thematic point.

Meanwhile, other noteworthy points include the tortuously visceral way in which the confrontation between Doc Swain and Lucas Cross is written. The horrifying details of Lucas's feelings/actions towards Selena and Doc Swain's emotion-churning reaction to those details are narrated with stark, sinister clarity. Another important point about this section is the confession Doc forces Lucas to sign, which plays an essential role in resolving the key narrative line in Book three, Selena's trial. The final important point here is the shattering revelation of Nellie's presence, horrifyingly evocative in its own right and also a vivid foreshadowing of Nellie's mental deterioration and eventual suicide. This passage contains one of the sharpest examples of irony in the book—specifically, the suggestion that the writhing of Nellie's body is like the writhing of the woman in childbirth. This is ironic because Selena has recently aborted the child that might have been born as the result of Lucas's hatefulness.

Book 2, Part 4

Book 2, Part 4 Summary

Ted Carter and his parents have a confrontation over his intention to visit Selena in the hospital. Ted's mother had married the town doctor (before Swain) for his money. In his misery, the doctor killed himself, left his money to his widow, who soon married Carter and had Ted.

Ted considers how his parents have approved of everything he's ever done except for his relationship with Selena. His parents say that folks will talk about his being with Selena, but Ted knows the town talks about his parents and they seem to do alright. Ted leaves the hospital full of joy and tells the minister that he will be in church on Sunday.

Book 2, Part 4 Analysis

This section narrates events in the aftermath of Selena's abortion, with a focus on Ted Carter and his family.The book's exploration of the dark side of humanity, begun in the previous section with its depiction of Lucas Cross's sexual brutality and Doc Swain's emotional brutality, continues here with the narrative of the Carters and their emotional/financial brutality towards Doc Quimby. Again there is the sense that in writing the novel, the author is interested in exploring just how brutal human beings can be to each other, and is offering the Carters as yet another example. It would be easy to argue that the author and the book are both misanthropic—that is, they both hate humanity. It would also be easy to argue that because of the number and scope of the various "dark deeds" committed by the inhabitants of Peyton Place, its more affirming moments (Constance's conversion to happy domesticity, Allison's maturing into wisdom, Selena's freedom from the tyranny of her father) become both technically outnumbered and emotionally outweighed. There doesn't appear to be a specific and/or clear answer to this sense of tension between the negative and the positive, but then again this might be the author's intent.

On a technical level, this section contains a vivid example of the author's previously discussed narrative technique of traveling focus—the way in which the character at the heart of the action of one chapter (Ted) encounters a character (Rev. Fitzgerald) who becomes the focus of the action in the following section. As previously indicated, this creates both a strong sense of narrative flow and an equally strong sense of inter-relationship between the inhabitants of the town.

Book 2, Part 5

Book 2, Part 5 Summary

After encountering Ted Carter, Rev. Fitzgerald goes on home and goes upstairs to visit with Makris, where they have their same argument/discussion about Protestantism versus Catholicism.

The next morning, as he leaves his apartment, Makris is surprised to see that Fitzgerald isn't working in his garden but decides it's none of his business and continues on his way to meet Constance, reflecting on how much in love with her. He notes that Allison is there, talking with Seth Buswell. When he gets to Constance's shop, they have coffee and donuts, flirt with each other a little, and discuss Allison's ambitions to be a writer—Constance describes it as foolish, but Makris tells her Allison has real talent. Mr. Buswell, the newspaper editor offers Allison a job writing stories about the people and the happenings of the town. Allison is thrilled and Buswell adds that it is a paid position.

Book 2, Part 5 Analysis

There are several key points to note about this section. The most obvious, and perhaps the most important, is the introduction of Allison's writing career. On one level, this serves to move her character decisively forward on her journey away from childhood. On another level, it foreshadows the point later in the narrative when she becomes so disillusioned with Peyton Place (because Seth refuses to publish an article condemning the town's condemnation of Selena after the killing of Lucas Cross) that she (Allison) decides to leave.

The second noteworthy point here is the way it develops the novel's thematic consideration of religious conflict, for example, between Protestant and Catholic. It's interesting to note here how the author interweaves internal and external aspects of the conflict—the tension between the churches and their belief systems—(which manifests later in the book as the conflict over what to do with Nellie Cross's body after she commits suicide) as manifested in the soul of the lingeringly Catholic Reverend Fitzgerald.

The third noteworthy point here is the way in which the narrative again seems to start a new narrative thread (the strange absence of Rev. Fitzgerald from his garden) but never follows through. This occurs throughout the book, and on one level might very well be frustrating to the reader accustomed to having loose ends tied up. On another level, however, it might also be seen as evocative of the way human beings, even in a nosy, gossipy small town like Peyton Place, never really know everything about what their neighbors are doing.

The final noteworthy element here is the unexpected, and perhaps even somewhat incongruous, revelation that Makris is in love with Constance. Up to this point, there has

been the clear sense that he has regarded her as a sexual conquest and nothing more - but here, it seems, the relationship is going deeper. On one level this particular revelation, and the apparent mutual comfort and pleasure in their relationship, foreshadows their eventual marriage and domestic contentment. On another level, it seems somehow strange that Makris, whose initial sexual relationship with Constance is based on undeniable ruthlessness, almost brutality, can have feelings of the sort he seems to have now. In fact, a reader might well be justified in finding a disturbing parallel between the experience of Constance and Nellie. Constance's first intimacies with her husband-to-be were sexually violent but she came to love him deeply, while Nellie continued to love her husband in spite of his physical brutality, and who in fact saw that brutality as a manifestation of his love for her.

Book 2, Part 6

Book 2, Part 6 Summary

Allison excitedly tells Nellie about her new job. Nellie expresses her faith in Allison and also her concern about Norman's relationship with his mother. Upset, Allison leaves a mess in the kitchen, which Nellie cleans up, while worrying about whether Lucas gave her syphilis.

Allison and Norman enjoy their picnic and talk about sex, which Norman says he has read about. Allison kisses Norman, but finds the kiss uninspiring. When she sees Rodney on their walk home, she thinks about how he is a much better kkisser.

Rodney, despite his bragging, is still a virgin. That day, he and Betty went skinny dipping and she manipulated him into sex without a condom. Several weeks later, she claims she is pregnant and Rodney is worried about what his dad will say.

Book 2, Part 6 Analysis

The first noteworthy element about this section is the way in which the author develops parallels between the two couples. Both go swimming, and both end up having sexual (or near-sexual) intimacies that frustrate the young women and excite the young men—the reader is left to assume how Norman feels about the intimacies with Allison, but given that the narrative doesn't say he was bothered, it's reasonable to assume that he at least got some pleasure out of it. Another aspect to these parallels is that there are also parallels here with Constance, who earlier in the book also went swimming and also had a sexual experience—which in her case, in spite of the violence associated with it, turned out to be a positive one.

At this point, it's interesting to consider the character of Norman Page. As portrayed throughout the book, Norman seems to have all the 1950s hallmarks of being homosexual—absent father, controlling mother, feminine features, being emotional, and an anal fixation (narration makes a vivid point of how he relies on enemas from his mother to restore his emotional equilibrium). Later in the book he is discharged from army service for being emotionally unfit (a euphemism of the period for being gay). It's important to note that the author never portrays him as having sexual attraction to other males, but for readers of the period, brought up on the idea that gay men were sissies and mama's boys, reading between the lines could only result in one understanding of the kind of boy Norman really is. It's also important to note that the book offers no judgment on the subject—he's judged for being weak and for being a liar, but not for being homosexual (if he truly is, but the author's intention seems unavoidably clear). Might this be seen as another, if fairly quiet, manifestation of the author's generally liberal perspective?

Book 2, Part 7

Book 2, Part 7 Summary

When Rodney tells his father of the situation with Betty, the father, who employs Betty's father, calls Betty's father in and gives him money for Betty to have an abortion; failure to do so would end his employment. Later, Betty comes and yells at Rodney for not being willing to marry her.

The entire town talks about Betty and Rodney's situation. Constance and Makris talk of it and of Allison and Constance's hope that Allison would not have sex at such an early age. Makris pressures Constance to announce their marriage plans to Allison and to marry him sooner rather than later. Constance wants to wait a while longer.

Book 2, Part 7 Analysis

The first noteworthy element here is the second appearance in the narrative of an abortion, and the contrast in the way this one is handled to the way Selena's is dealt with earlier. This contrast is most vividly defined by the fact that Selena receives compassionate support from Doc Swain, while Betty and her father are brutalized by Leslie Harrington. It could be argued that Betty's father goes to bat for her where Selena's "father" (Lucas) doesn't, but it must be remembered that Betty seems to have been beaten by her father in response to her news, so perhaps her relationship with her father isn't that different. But perhaps the most interesting point about this aspect of the novel is that abortion is presented in such a matter-of-fact way, as though it goes on all the time (which, illegal or not, it probably did). Once again, the author of Peyton Place opens what had hitherto been a secret door, letting out what readers and governments and censors of the day saw as a Pandora's Box of sin and immorality.

It may very well be that Makris's comments about adolescent sexuality were seen, at the time, as being part of that immorality—specifically, the idea that adolescents not only had sexual feelings but acted on them. Here again the author writes in quite a matter-of-fact way, with Constance's shocked reaction perhaps manifesting the reaction of many readers to such a comment. It can't be denied, however, that even today, Makris's point is a valid one, perhaps even more so in contemporary society with its continuing condemnation (and simultaneous promotion) of youthful sexuality. Meanwhile, Constance's reaction to the idea that Allison might have sexual thoughts foreshadows her reaction in the following section to the possibility that Allison might actually be having sex.

Book 2, Part 8

Book 2, Part 8 Summary

A traveler passing through Peyton Place on his way to Canada feels tension in the air at the cafe where he stopped for lunch. The men tell him that everything is dry and there is serious danger of fire. Allison and Kathy argue and say unkind and unmeant things to each other; Allison blames her mood on Nellie talking about Norman and his mother. After they leave, Nellie, in a syphilis-induced hallucination goes and hangs herself in Allison's bedroom, while believing that Lucas is there still in love with her. She vaguely remembers something about Lucas and Selena's pregnancy.

When Constance comes home from work, she notices the house is a mess and neither Allison nor Nellie are there. Allison's bedroom door is open, which Constance closes without looking inside. Constance learns from Kathy that Allison is out with Norman. When Constance calls Norman's mother, she accuses Allison of corrupting her son. Evelyn comes over to Constance's house and the two woman scream accusations at each other.

At one point, Constance goes so far as to call Evelyn a bitch. At that point Makris intervenes, trying to get them to calm down—and at that point, Allison walks in, followed shortly by Norman. The two mothers and children argue and Contance tells the two young people to leave, but Allison makes a parting remark.

Allison tells her mother Allison is embarrassed by Constance's behavior, who reacts by slapping Allison and in anger and revealing the truth about Allison's birth and father. Makris is glad to know the truth, although he wishes it had been revealed in a better way. Allison runs up to her room and sees Nellie's body hanging from the light. She screams in terror just as Joey Cross comes asking for his mother, Nellie.

Book 2, Part 8 Analysis

This section marks the beginning of the narrative's lengthy focus on what comes to be known as "Peyton Place's Bad Time", the summer of 1939. The first part of this section is almost painfully heavy-handed in its use of foreshadowing, as the questions of the traveler and the writing in the narration combine to hit the reader over the head with the idea that something really bad is about to happen. There is also a more specific piece of foreshadowing here, with the appearance of the traveler foreshadowing the appearance of other travelers in Book three, who bring with them news of Lucas Cross that throws Selena into a life-changing crisis similar to that faced by Constance and Allison here. Finally, the narrative at the beginning of chapter sixteen is laced almost as heavy-handedly with foreshadowing of events at the end of the chapter when Allison finally discovers Nellie's body. Suspense builds throughout this section, as the reader becomes more and more aware with each passing word that everything is taking place

with a body hanging in the closet upstairs. It may be that the secret in the closet is in fact a metaphoric representation of the secret in Constance Mackenzie's life, with Allison's traumatized responses to the discovery of both secrets echoing and reinforcing each other. It might not, in fact, be going too far to suggest that the body in the closet is a key metaphor for a situation in the lives of many of the book's main and central characters. This is the idea that there is a secret somewhere inside their spiritual/emotional/physical home that, when that secret's presence finally becomes known, serves as a trigger for an intense spiritual and/or emotional catharsis.

The book's heightened sense of drama, almost melodrama, reaches a near-climactic pitch in this section. In some ways, and specifically in terms of at least one of the principle plot lines, this section is a climax. Constance's journey towards freedom reaches its point of highest intensity here, as her deeply seated and deeply hidden desire to live a true and free life breaks free of the mask she's been wearing for so long and erupts, albeit in the most devastating way possible. From this point on, Constance's story is essentially denouement, or falling action, as she relaxes into domesticity and freedom. It's interesting to note, however, that while Constance is on her way to "happy ever after" territory (even though she doesn't know it yet), Allison is nowhere near the same place. It's important to note, however, that she could not become the wiser, more fully rounded near-adult that she becomes by the end of the book if she hadn't gone through what she goes through here.

Book 2, Part 9

Book 2, Part 9 Summary

As Doc Swain and the Sheriff rush to the Mackenzie home, they notice that nearby Marsh Hill is on fire. They continue on their mission, however, and discover that Selena has arrived at the Mackenzie home. As Doc oversees the removal of Nellie's body, he's confronted by Selena, who asks whether Nellie's knowledge of Lucas' doings was a factor in her death. Doc lies and says she had cancer, and immediately realizes that Selena knows he was lying. As Nellie's body is taken out of the house, Doc thinks to himself he has destroyed the entire Cross family. Doc notices the fire raging, and "entertain[s] the fanciful thought that perhaps the fire was a symbol. The purging of evil by fire, he thought, and laughed to himself."

Neither the Catholic nor Prostestant church want to allow Nellie to be buried on church grounds. Rev Fitzgerald because of his prior Catholic upbringing. The church members protest his refusal and the minister of The Peyton Place Pentecostal Full Gospel Church conducts the service and buries her body on their grounds. Rev Fitzgerald resigns his pulpit.

Book 2, Part 9 Analysis

These chapters focus on events in the aftermath of Nellie Cross's suicide. The first element to note about this section is the appearance of the fire, which in the novel's usual (and somewhat heavy handed) way serves both a literal and metaphoric purpose. In terms of its literal nature, it adds stress to the lives of the inhabitants of Peyton Place—over the next few chapters they are literally living in a pressure cooker, a situation that adds intensity to their emotional, physical and spiritual dilemmas. In terms of the fire's metaphoric value, the first question to consider is whether Doc's interpretation of the fire's meaning is valid. There may very well be, in the reader, the sense that he is—a lot of unhappiness is in fact being burned away in the people of the town. But there is also the sense that Doc's interpretations of the fire aren't going far enough. Yes, evil is being burned away, but what kind of evil—and what is doing the burning? Given the novel's overall thematic focus on the value of removing (burning away?) masks and living a life of truth, it may be that the evil being burned away is that of lies, and the fire itself is integrity, truth, and genuine human dignity/humility. In that sense, it's possible to see that Nellie's life was destroyed not by Lucas' degradedness but by her blindly loving denial of that degradedness. The growing cancerous-ness of that denial, given form in her hallucination, is what ultimately kills her. Meanwhile, Fitzgerald's self-denial of his true Catholic nature is burned away, and while his external life is ruined he, like Nellie (and like both Constance and Allison early in the novel) is forced to acknowledge and live with who he truly is. This metaphoric process of cleansing by fire continues in the following sections, as the true natures of several characters are revealed through the mask-destroying power of flaming, inescapable truth.

Book 2, Part 10

Book 2, Part 10 Summary

Doc Swain visits Allison, who confesses her conviction that her nastiness is what killed Nellie. Doc tells her what he told Selena, that Nellie had cancer—Allison doesn't pick up on the lie the way Selena did. Doc then gently tells Allison that time will help her forget everything that's happened to her. She protests, but Doc insists, in some way insisting that he believe it himself.

Norman's neighbor, Mrs. Card invites him over for a snack. Because of the other neighbor's cat's meowing, Norman believes that neighbor, Miss Hester Goodale, is watching them. He sneaks into Miss Hester's yard and watches as Mr. Card makes love to his wife. Miss Hester, who has returned from her walk, is sitting in her rocker also witnessing the sex between the couple. Norman is trapped in the bushes because he is afraid he'll be seen by Miss Hester if he moves. He suddenly realizes that Miss Hester is too quiet and discovers she is dead with her hysterical, yowling cat leashed to her rocker. Norman strangles the cat to silence it.

In the aftermath of Hester's death, and as Seth Buswell is commenting to Doc Swain that maybe now the trouble in Peyton Place will be over, and as Doc Swain is commenting that all deaths come in threes, Norman lies to his mother about where he got the cuts on his hands. "On the hills beyond Peyton Place", the author writes, "the fires raged, unchecked and uncontrollable".

Book 2, Part 10 Analysis

In this section, another kind of truth burns its way into the lives of at least two characters in Peyton Place; however, although the fire here burns more gently, its power is no less penetrating. This is the truth spoken to Allison by Doc Swain, as he burns away her self-recrimination with the quietly flaming assurances that time and forgiveness will heal her suffering, and his. It's interesting to note how this moment, one of the few moments of genuine positive affirmation and transcendence in the book, is juxtaposed with another such moment—the loving intimacy between Mr. and Mrs. Card, glimpsed by Norman and Hester. The metaphoric image here is one of hope in the midst of horror, grace in the midst (and perhaps as the result) of flaming, torturous anguish.

There is, however, another burning truth about human nature on display here—its tendency towards sudden, irrational violence. This manifests in Norman's near-hysterical destruction of Hester's cat, and might even be the core of Norman's lies to his mother—lies throughout the book (and perhaps even, according to the author, in life) being as spiritually, morally, and emotionally destructive as the physical violence perpetrated on Selena and Nellie.

The final moments of the chapter can be seen as another example of the novel's journey along the fine line between creating suspense and heavy-handed foreshadowing. The writing here certainly triggers the reader's interest, but there's some question of whether it's the result of genuine concern about/involvement in the lives of the characters, or the result of curiosity about what nasty thing the author is going to do to her characters now.

Book 2, Part 11

Book 2, Part 11 Summary

The men of Peyton Place fought the fires as best they could, but didn't get any closer to extinguishing them. Leslie Harrington insists upon opening his carnaval as usual, in spite of the fires. And, in spite of the fires, everyone in town turns out to have fun, as Harrington predicted they would. Allison is there with Constance and Makris, in spite of feeling ill. She's also reconciled with Kathy Ellsworth, with whom she goes into the fun house (which is also a house of horrors). Suspense builds in the narration as the author offers a long description of the fun/horror house and explains the chain of events that leads to Kathy falling through a usually covered hole and into the machinery operating the mechanisms. Allison runs outside to Constance and Makris, laughing and crying hysterically. Makris tries to get the untrained mechanic to stop the machinery, but the mechanic doesn't know how. At that moment, rain begins to fall, and the fires surrounding Peyton Place begin to weaken.

Book 2, Part 11 Analysis

The lies/evil burned away in this chapter are perhaps less obvious than those in the other chapters of this section, but are no less telling. The truth revealed here, to the people of the town as well as to the reader, is the truth of Leslie Harrington's ruthless greediness. Up to this point it had been common knowledge but swept under the table, the town's dirty secret that everybody knew. With the incident in the funhouse, however, that truth is graphically and unavoidably revealed, with the life-damaging qualities inherent in it (as represented by what happens to Kathy) being equally unavoidable. It's important to note that the specifics of what Kathy suffers are not revealed until later, another manifestation of the author's apparent determination to make sure the reader keeps turning the page. Meanwhile, rain brings to an end the torturous fires, but also represents a metaphoric beginning of the novel's exploration of how revelation of the truth sets people free physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Book 3, Part 1

Book 3, Part 1 Summary

Kenny makes his usual, semi-drunken way to school to ring the bell, and the gossipy old men (including Clayton Frazier) make their usual comments. At school, Miss Thornton reflects on what had happened to the Cross .family—after Lucas' disappearance and Nellie's suicide. Someone alerted social services and the kids hid at Constance's house. Their older brother, Paul and his wife, came and took over raising them and enlarged the house, cleaning it up.

Constance and Makris have been married for four years. Allison is a successful writer in New York and participated in a lawsuit by Kathy Ellsworth's family against Leslie Harrington after the accident at the carnival.

Constance recalls the evening in 1939 when she blurted out the truth about Allison father. After doing so, Constance no longer felt guilty when having sex and Allison decides to leave Peyton Place.

Drunken Seth Buswell recalls how he told Leslie Harrington, on the night the verdict in the Ellsworth's lawsuit against him was read, that he (Leslie) was no longer welcome in his home. Allison had written an article condemning Harrington, but Buswell refused to print it in the name of "tolerance." Harrington rigged the jury and got off with a tiny settlement. Buswell says that Harrington "will get his comeuppance so good that he'll never forget it".

Book 3, Part 1 Analysis

These three chapters pick up several narrative threads left dangling at the end of Book two. The first element to note about this section is its focus on exposition, or description of the context in which the action to follow is taking place. In this particular case, a great deal of narrative time is spent tying up dangling narrative threads—whether Kenny Stearns survived the incident in the cellar, how the relationship between Constance and Makris progressed, what happened to Selena and Joey after Nellie's death, and what exactly happened to Kathy Ellsworth in the funhouse. Even in the midst of all this exposition and explanation, however, it's possible to discern glancing explorations of some of the novel's key themes—in particular, the idea that the destruction of illusion leads to revelation of truth, which ultimately leads to fulfillment.

That fulfillment is most evident here in the contentment of Constance and Makris, who both discovered the genuine emotional and spiritual core of who they truly are once they had broken through their respective masks—Constance's mask of coldness, and Makris's mask of "the sexual conqueror". Fulfillment is also evident in Seth Buswell's comments about Leslie Harrington. Finally, after years of masking his dislike in "tolerance", the truth has burst loose and he (Buswell) at last feels free to reveal his true

feelings for his so-called "friend". An intriguing question at this point, and in this context, is whether Seth's comments about his other friends (specifically, his contention that they all hate Leslie because of their own inadequacies) is equally true. Given the novel's thematic and narrative focus on the power of, and necessity for, removing the masks of lie and illusion, it would be reasonable to see the answer to that question as "yes". This, in turn, would suggest that part of the author's intent in focusing on this issue is to suggest that the process of exploding illusion and lies is not only essential, but ongoing and essential for everyone.

On the other hand, it's also important to note that fulfillment and contentment are still some distance away for some of the other characters—Allison has yet to come to terms with the truth with which she was confronted, while Selena hasn't yet fully confronted her truth (i.e., the destructiveness of her relationship with Lucas). That is yet to come.

Finally, the reference to the eventual (hoped for?) comeuppance of the Harrington's foreshadows the sequence in Book three, Part two, chapter six when Rodney is killed, and later sequences in Book three in which Leslie's influence has obviously waned in the wake of his son's accidental death (a circumstance which many in town see as the long-awaited comeuppance).

Book 3, Part 2

Book 3, Part 2 Summary

The gossipy men of Peyton Place relish repeatedly talking about the war. Selena, who now manages Constance's clothing shop, worries about Paul who's off fighting in the war, and is genuinely happy in her life with Joey.

On a stormy night in November, Selena is woken by the arrival of Lucas who tries to force her to have sex. She beats him off with a poker and in a rage, kills him. Her brother Joey talks her out of calling the police; instead, they bury Lucas in the sheep pen.

Joey Cross had sold his prized sheep to a butcher; neither the butcher nor Joey felt they could rely on Kenny Stearns to help in the butchering, since Kenny was on one of his drunken benders. Kenny locks himself into his shed and refuses to come out for anyone, convincing himself that his wife Ginny had had sex with his father. He drunkenly leaves the shed to find her but gets lost, eventually making his way into the Peyton Place Pentecostal Full Gospel Church where he collapses, mumbling incoherently. The minister believes him to be "speaking in tongues," the language of prophets. His congregation takes some convincing but soon comes to believe the same thing. As a result of that night, Kenny becomes a minister in the church, and Ginny soon follows his spiritual example. "Peyton Place," the author writes, "never recovered from the shock of seeing the ex-town handyman and ex-drunkard walk rapidly down Elm Street . .. carrying a Bible under his arm." The town had been so taken up with talking about Kenny that nobody paid much attention when a pair of navy investigators came looking for Lucas and soon left again, having been told by Selena and Joey that they hadn't seen him since 1939.

Book 3, Part 2 Analysis

Contrasting portrayals of truth and illusion, as well as explorations of how one can lead to the other, anchor the narrative and thematic explorations of this section. Truth, in the form of Lucas Cross's drunken appearance on her door, shatters Selena's (and Joey's) illusions of happiness, only to trigger a surge of personal truth in Selena—because she, deep in the essence of herself, is still determined to keep Lucas's destructiveness away from her, her action in destroying Lucas's life is an action of fulfillment, setting herself and her brother free. Ironically she and Joey then create the illusion that they're safe by burying Lucas's body. Only later in the book, when she faces the legal consequences of what she did, does that particular illusion get dispelled by Doc's public revelation of the truth of their relationship. And only then is she truly free, a process that nevertheless begins in violence here.

On the other hand, the narrative then includes a portrayal of willing illusion, or embracing of a lie. This is the pastor's, and eventually Kenny's and Ginny's, transformation of Kenny's alcoholic ravings into a manifestation of Godly spirit. On one level, the writing of this chapter explores the foolishness of exploring and sustaining illusions. On another level, however, there is the sense that perhaps surprisingly, the author is suggesting that sometimes illusions have value—there can be little denial that Kenny and Ginny both, for the most part, live healthier lives as the result of buying into the church-bred illusions about their spirituality. It must be noted, however, that in spite of suggesting the possibility of positivity, the author makes the specific point that their sexual life is as violent as it was before—in other words, while illusion might have some positive value, the negative still exists in all its darkness and potential for both destruction and corruption. This aspect of the novel's thematic focus is explored again in the following section, in the story of Norman Page.

Book 3, Part 3

Book 3, Part 3 Summary

Norman Page is treated like a hero when he returns from the war with a wounded leg. Doc Swain becomes suspicious and proves to Seth Buswell that Norman's wounds are faked—Norman was, in fact, discharged from military service for being unfit. Doc theorizes that Evelyn Page was behind the plan to bring Norman home. Evelyn had plotted with Norman to have him come home as a hero. Norman settles into a quiet job at the newspaper, and continues to be haunted by dreams of the war and of Hester Goodale, all of which end with him taking refuge in his mother's arms. "At such times," the author writes, "Norman awoke to warmth and wetness and a sense that his mother had saved him from a terrible danger".

Norman's "heroism" and subsequent behavior, as well as Kathy Ellsworth's stoicism and courage, are triggers for the town's deepening disgust with Leslie and Rodney Harrington. As Kathy copes with being a mother having only one arm, the town becomes more and more condemning of Leslie for not giving her a larger financial settlement. Also, with Norman Page being an unexpected hero, Rodney is shown up as an indulged near-coward. The Harrington's are losing their status—but Rodney, it seems, neither notices nor cares as he picks up his latest girlfriend, Helen. They go for a drive, and on their way to get some food Helen, flirtatiously shows Rodney a bare breast and begins to stimulate herself. Rodney is so enthralled that he doesn't notice a trailer truck bearing down on them.

At the annual town meeting, which has on its agenda, as it has for the last several years, a question relating to zoning—specifically, what kind of buildings can be built on what property is brought up. For each of those years, Leslie Harrington has blocked any kind of zoning restrictions, but at this meeting, much to the surprise of everyone, he says nothing. As the debate over what zoning will do escalates, Selena Cross suddenly asks whether it means that the sheep pen in the back of her house (under which Lucas' body is buried) would have to be eliminated. When she's told yes, she moves to strike the question from the record. She is voted down, and the town votes to approve zoning. New-to-town lawyer Peter Drake, smoking outside with Makris, comments that the old order is changing in Peyton Place. Makris reminds him that Harrington has lost his son, and he's a different man. He adds, however, there's enough of the old Chestnut Street gang left that they can still run the town the way they used to.

Book 3, Part 3 Analysis

Here again in this section, more facets of the complicated relationship between truth and illusion, freedom and constraint are explored. First there is the story of Norman and Evelyn's collusion to get Norman out of the army, a lie/illusion calculated to sustain what they both believe to be a truth (that Norman is happiest with his mother) which is in fact

an illusion, since Norman, like Allison and Selena, ought to be free from his parent in order to be free as a person. The interesting thing here is the parallel between Norman and Rodney who, like Norman, lives a life completely dominated by his parent and who ends up destroyed as a result—Rodney is destroyed physically while Norman is destroyed emotionally and spiritually. An additional point to note here is the way in which the description of Norman's life, and basically his presence in the book, comes to an end. The narrative of his dreams, without actually saying so, is actually a narrative of a wet dream, a situation in which a man, while dreaming, experiences sexual stimulation and ejaculation. The implication in this particular case is that Norman expresses his sexuality through closeness with his mother, another subtle (but for the period unarguable) piece of evidence suggesting that the character is homosexual.

Meanwhile, the relationship between truth and illusion also manifests in the life of Leslie Harrington, who evidently suffers a profound change in character as the result of the destructive revelation that his son was a waster, and in the life of Selena Cross. She, at the town meeting, takes action to sustain the illusion that all is well at home—in other words, if the zoning regulations go through, the painful secret truth at the core of her life will be revealed. She, therefore, is determined to preserve the illusion keeping the secret, little knowing that once the secret is revealed by Doc Swain later in this section, she will in fact end up freer than she has ever been, perhaps freer than she ever thought was possible.

Book 3, Part 4

Book 3, Part 4 Summary

A chance encounter starts an investigation into Lucas' Cross' disappearance and evidence turns up implicating either Joey or Selena or both. Joey wants to confess but Selena refuses to let him and she tells the sheriff the story.

A sensational headline in a small newspaper "PATRICIDE IN PEYTON PLACE" attracts massive media attention to the town. One particular reporter, Thomas Delaney, arrives and manages to ingratiate himself with gossipy Clayton Frazier, eventually getting around to asking him about the origins of the town's name. Clayton shows him the Peyton Castle and tells him the story of how it was named "for a friggin' nigger"—an escaped slave, Samuel Peyton. Peyton, Clayton says, made his way to England, made a fortune in shipping, married a white woman, tried to settle in Boston (where he proved to be unwelcome), and ended up making his home in the town that came to be called Peyton Place, where he imported a castle brick by brick from England and set it up on the hill. Clayton describes how Peyton and his wife moved in and never left, how the railway was constructed nearby, how people always used to ask about the castle and were told it was the "Peyton place", and how that came to be the town's name. Clayton concludes his tale by saying that both Peyton and his wife died isolated in the house. He offers to get Delaney inside. Delaney refuses, asking why the relatively tolerant Clayton refers to Peyton as a "frigging nigger". Clayton says that Peyton sold weapons to the South in the Civil War, and that "'If Samuel's skin had been of a different color, I'd say he was a friggin' rebel. But Samuel was a nigger.'" Later, Delaney writes a story that begins "'In the tragic shadow of Samuel Peyton's castle . . . another tragedy has taken place".

Book 3, Part 4 Analysis

These chapters narrate events when the truth of what happened to Lucas Cross comes to light. Chapter eight contains developments in both the novel's narrative and thematic through-lines. In terms of the former, the Selena/Lucas plot moves forward as the narratively inevitable revelations of what happened to Lucas become closer and closer to the surface. In other words, the illusion so carefully constructed and maintained by Selena and Joey is about to break down, the way illusions have throughout the book and will continue to be throughout its remainder. In terms of the latter (the book's thematic through-line), the novel here repeats its thematic point that the emergence of truth is inevitable. It remains to be seen in the following sections what the result of that emergence will be but even here, in spite of the author's evident attempts to generate suspense about the outcome of the situation, the thematically astute reader will have come to the conclusion that Selena will ultimately be set free.

Chapter nine, meanwhile, finally presents the explanation of why the story of "The Peyton Place" has been referred to so mysteriously throughout the book. The explanation lies in the fact that the builder of the Peyton place is an escaped slave—it seems that no-one in the ultimately conservative town really wants to be associated with its origins in the life and world of an ex-slave (i.e., a "nigger"). Here again there is an exploration of truth versus illusion, the idea that the town is creating for itself an illusion to hide an uncomfortable truth. This means that the Peyton Place is a powerful, visually oriented metaphor for the moral/spiritual state of the town, of those who live there, and of those in the world who live lives isolated by illusion.

Finally, the reference to the headline written by Thomas Delaney foreshadows its appearance later in the novel in which the headline is revealed to be the trigger for Allison to finally come home to Peyton Place from New York.

Book 3, Part 5

Book 3, Part 5 Summary

Constance vows to pay Selena's legal bills, even while protesting that if Selena did kill Lucas, she was justified. Makris comments that Selena's not helping herself by not saying why. Ted decides to abandon Selena and Doc Swain drinks himself into the decision to bear all.

That same night, Allison arrives back in Peyton Place, hoping that Selena's trial will turn out to be a good story for her to write. Allison carries the burden of learning her lover is married. When she walks into her home, makris and Constance are thrilled to see her but notice she is upset. When he and Constance offer to help, Allison bursts into tears, tells them to leave her alone, and rushes upstairs to her room.

The trial opens sensationally with Selena entering a plea of "not guilty." Doc Swain is called to the stand, sworn in, and tells the court everything about Lucas and Selena's history, including the abortion. He offers Lucas' written confession, and apologizes for not going to the Sheriff in the first place. After deliberating for less than ten minutes, the jury (which includes Leslie Harrington) comes back with a verdict of not guilty. Later, outside the courtroom, the Chestnut Street gang (including Buswell, Partridge, and Harrington) walks protectively with Doc Swain to his car. Thomas Delaney wonders whether Doc will be criminally charged, or at least barred from practicing medicine, and is told that Peyton Place loves Doc too much to do anything like that. He also asks what will happen to Selena and is told to leave it all alone.

Book 3, Part 5 Analysis

These chapters continue the narration of events in and around Selena's trial. There are several significant elements in this section. First, this sequence of chapters is intended to be the high point of the action, the point at which suspense is at its highest—not only will Selena be found guilty, but will she tell the truth about her relationship with Lucas? In terms of the latter, the novel's thematic focus on the importance and value of living freely in truth is embodied not by Selena but by Doc Swain. It's extremely telling that both he and Selena go free as a result of this revelation, a situation that makes the author's thematic point unequivocally and truthfully, that personal truth and integrity are more powerful than legal truth and/or imposed morality. In short, this sequence is also the novel's thematic climax, the point at which it makes its thematic points most clearly. Meanwhile, this climax to the Selena portion of the narrative foreshadows the similar climax in the Allison portion of the narrative that follows, a climax that carries similar thematic and emotional weight but which is much less melodramatic.

Other important elements in this section include Ted Carter's abdication of his love for Selena, which proves he's more like his parents than he or Selena or his parents, for

that matter, believed, and the pointed narration of the thoughts of Marion Partridge. These can be seen as embodying what the author seems to see as the general small-mindedness of society.

Book 3, Part 6

Book 3, Part 6 Summary

Allison and the now-happy Kathy Ellsworth have a conversation, in which Allison comments that she and love don't mix well. Later, she grieves over the love and the people she'd lost—Rodney to Betty Anderson, Norman to his mother, Constance to Makris. "I thought it would be different in New York," she thinks. "Where did I go wrong? What's the matter with me?"

Upon arriving in New York she had immediately found a roommate, Steve "Stephanie" Wallace. She experienced a tedious, crushing process to find an agent, and she eventually connected with Bradley Holmes, with whom she'd fallen desperately in love. Holmes had helped start her off on her career, selling stories to magazines and encouraging her to write a novel, and became aware of Allison's growing infatuation with him and tried to head it off by introducing her to young men like David Noyes, an author like herself. David, in turn, confronted her with the dangers of her feelings for Brad and her dismissing her life in Peyton Place. He also introduced her to ballet and other art forms, and Allison found herself enjoying his company, "but still", the author writes, "when she thought of love at all, she thought of Bradley Holmes".

Allison talks to Constance and Makris about whether Ted ever really loved Selena. Allison speaks dismissively of him and his feelings, but Makris tells her to be compassionate. Allison becomes upset, again runs upstairs, and again recalls her tortured feelings for Bradley.

In New York, Allison had been excited at finishing her novel. She was so desperate to share it, and herself, with Brad that she invited herself along on his weekend retreat. Brad reluctantly agreed, insisting that she leave the manuscript at home. Steve shared Allison's excitement at finishing her book, but warned her not to get her hopes up too high for Brad.

Late at night, Allison goes downstairs and makes a fire. As she watches it burn she starts to feel more of a connection than ever with her mother, and her memories of her time with Brad become less distressing and more of a simple curiosity.

Book 3, Part 6 Analysis

The final section of the novel focuses on what has happened to Allison since leaving Peyton Place. The first noteworthy element about this section is the way it moves back and forth between past and present. More than at any other point in the novel, narrative focus shifts frequently back and forth between then and now. This is perhaps the most vivid manifestation of a narrative perspective that has threaded its way throughout the book—for Allison here, as it was for her mother earlier, the past is very much alive in the present.

The second noteworthy element is the way Allison, without intending to and without knowing she's doing it, is on the path to doing exactly what Constance was afraid she would do—get involved with a married man and, in effect, re-creating her (Constance's life). The point must be made that neither she (Allison) nor the reader knows, at this point, that this is what's going on—it will, however, become clear in the following section.

The third important element in this section is Makris's comments about love, comments which at first seem out of character for both him and for the book. As previously discussed, Makris's transformation from sexual conqueror to devoted and loving husband seems to be somewhat underdeveloped in comparison to the detail with which the transformations of other characters are explored. This is what makes his words here somewhat incongruous. Also, as a whole the book is, for the most part, quite cynical about human relationships—partly because the "true love" that seems to bloom between Constance and Makris seems to be somewhat under-motivated, and partly because the book's view of humanity in general, let alone in relationships, seems bitter and jaded. Yes, there is the brief but tantalizing view of the love that exists between Mr. and Mrs. Card. Ultimately, however, there is the sense that if the novel (and the town) had had just a little more room in it for portrayals of positive values, the comments on love made here might have felt more like they belonged.

The final important element in this section is the narrative description of Allison's contemplations taking place in front of a fire in the fireplace. There is the sense that the fire here performs a similar metaphoric function to the fire at the end of Book two—as a manifestation of the burning power of personal truth to destroy illusion and isolation.

Book 3, Part 7

Book 3, Part 7 Summary

Allison reflects on her time with Brad. At his country cottage, they made love and had a wonderful time. As they make their way back to New York, however, Brad makes the casual comment that he's married with children and that he thought she knew. Back in her apartment, Allison confesses to Steve that Brad is married. Steve asks whether she's okay, but Allison coldly tells her she's fine, not responding when Steve tells her Constance called for her. The next day, Allison sees the headline about Selena and decided to go home.

A few days after being back in Peyton Place, Allison decides to return to New York and writes notes to Brad and to Steve to tell them. She is surprised to learn that she's able to write Brad's name on the envelope very calmly. "It is done, she thought, and yet she felt none of the calm satisfaction which she had generally associated with the tying up of loose ends".

A few weeks later Allison and Makris walk up to the castle. Allison tells Makris she wants to reconcile with Constance. Makris tells her it's easier to read or write about an event than to live it. Allison says that reading and writing are less painful, but then realizes that people don't really have a choice but to live. Later, the simple gesture of Allison removing the picture of her father from the mantelpiece is enough to let Constance know that she's been forgiven—although Makris makes a joke about how there should have been a big emotional scene between the two women.

Two weeks later, Indian summer again returns to Peyton Place. Allison walks through town up to her favorite hiding place, Road's End. She recalls Doc Swain and her other friends "who were part of Peyton Place", realizes she feels a happy connection to the town, the sky above it and the land around it, but realizes she no longer needs the comfort they offer in the way she once did. "I love every part of you", she thinks. "Your beauty and your cruelty, your kindness and ugliness. But now I know you, and you no longer frighten me . . . I love you and I am not afraid of you". She runs back into town, passing her mother's shop. Constance calls out that David is waiting for her at home. She runs down Elm Street to her house.

Book 3, Part 7 Analysis

The first point to note about this section is the simultaneous similarities and differences between the experiences of Allison and her mother Constance. Their first sexual relationships are both with married men, but while Constance continues hers, Allison ends hers. Both eventually come to find pleasure in sex, but Allison finds hers soon after her first experience while Constance has to wait for several years and her sexual relationship with Makris before finding pleasure. Finally, Constance builds a mask-like

wall of illusion around her relationship, while Allison uses hers as a springboard to a wiser and fuller understanding of how life works. In other words, for both women enjoyment of sexuality seems to be a trigger for a fuller understanding of life and of self—and here, perhaps, is another reason why the book, at the time of its being published, was so scandalous. As previously discussed, for centuries sex was, for women, a duty to procreate, as far from a pleasurable and/or illuminative experience as possible.

The second noteworthy point here is the fact that Allison's book about the Peyton place proves to be a failure. This isn't so much a comment on her talent, which according to the narrative is significant, but is much more a comment on her subject matter. The Peyton place is, as discussed, a symbol of isolation brought on by illusion. This suggests that for Allison, choosing to write about such a symbol is itself a symbol of the futility of aligning one's life (and presumably one's creativity) with illusion as opposed to truth.

The third point to consider here is the author's use of language. Words, phrases, sentences and images in the final paragraphs of the book clearly, specifically, and in some cases exactly echo those of Book one chapter three, the first chapter to focus exclusively on Allison. At both points in the narrative, she experiences a sense of childlike grace, a pure connection to nature that can be seen as a pure connection to her natural self. The point must be made that language at the end also refers to the experiences that give that connection a flavor not of cynicism, but of wisdom and deeper grace, an awareness of the value of life in all its wonderful pain and painful wonder. The truth of life—found by Selena in her violent escape from Lucas, by Constance in Makris's violent embrace, by Doc Swain in his violent struggle with his conscience, and by all of them in their escape from wrenching and oppressive morality—is inescapable and transcendent, even in Peyton Place, as thickly threaded with human darkness as it is.

Characters

Allison MacKenzie

Allison is one of the novel's three central characters. The book follows her from her days as a gawky, secretive, dreamy eighth grader to her first years as an independent woman struggling to make her career as a writer in New York City. For most of the novel she is emotional but repressed, naïve, and idealizing of the man she thinks of as her father, critical of her mother, and almost pathetically eager for friendship. Her aching need to not feel alone, to be recognized and valued, is a core aspect of her personality, and is perhaps a part of why she pursues a career as a writer. Peyton Place never makes the point explicitly, but there is the sense about Allison that she believes that if someone reads, likes, and understands her stories, even if it is an anonymous someone somewhere that she doesn't even know who is reading them, then she feels valued and recognized. All that said, it's essential to note that on some level, the author clearly intends Allison to be perceived by the reader as the same person at the end of the novel as she is at the beginning. Not only does Allison's final appearance take place in the same geographical location (the part of Peyton Place where she feels safest, truest, and most herself), the narration describing her presence there uses almost exactly the same words to describe her experience of being there. The suggestion here is that on some level, in spite of everything she's been through, Allison has re-connected with her own innocence and joy, which (as narration indicates) is in turn connected to her experience of nature, not only of the world but her own essential nature as a writer and as a human being.

Constance Mackenzie

Constance is Allison's mother, and the second of its three central characters. Throughout much of the book she is portrayed as being disconnected from her essential personality—she has, for various reasons explored in the narrative, created a mask for herself that covers and keeps safe from the world, her emotional, sexual, and spiritual feelings. Over the course of the novel, this mask is eventually broken down by Allison and, perhaps more importantly, by Tomas Makris, to the point where she becomes fully and freely herself. It's interesting to consider how Constance's journey of transformation as a character essentially takes her from being an independent, self-supporting and self-reliant career woman to being a domestic homemaker. No longer does she run her clothing shop, but rather stays home to care for her husband and family. From a contemporary perspective, this might be seen as a message of anti-empowerment, of feminine regression into traditional roles. On the other hand, the author clearly takes great pains to suggest that Constance makes this transformation because she loves Makris, wants to be with him, wants to take care of him and cherish him. Loving, for Constance, becomes about giving in a way she could never really love her daughter and give to her.

Selena Cross

Selena is the third of the book's three central female characters. She is, on just about every level, a vividly portrayed contrast to Allison—dark where Allison is fair, poor where Allison is relatively affluent, openly emotional where Allison keeps her thoughts and feelings to herself, having siblings while Allison has none. At the beginning of the novel their friendship seems unlikely, but their mutual sense of isolation, of being different from everyone else, draws them together, and a bond is formed that sustains them through periods of separation and brings them together at the time when Selena needs Allison the most. On the other hand, Selena also has a great deal in common with Constance, Allison's mother—both are determined to better their lives, both are prepared to do whatever it takes to make that happen, and perhaps most tellingly, both face the challenges of single motherhood. Their ways of handling their respective situations seem, on the surface, to be very different, but it could be argued that on some level they're quite similar. Each essentially acts as though her child doesn't exist—Selena has an abortion, while Constance treats Allison as though she's little more than an extension of her (Allison's) father. Neither has any real connection to the child in their lives. Finally, it's interesting to note that once Selena's trial for murder begins, she essentially disappears from the narrative. She isn't even an active participant in the trial's events, given that the whole procedure essentially begins and ends with the appearance of Doc. Swain on the witness stand. On the one hand this might be seen as a manifestation of the author's occasionally annoying tendency toward leaving intriguing narrative lines undeveloped. On the other hand, perhaps by the time the trial begins the character of Selena has made her thematic point—truth (in Selena's case the truth of freedom from sexual and emotional oppression) has set her free emotionally, and at the trial it's up to Doc to make that point legally.

Lucas and Nellie Cross

Lucas is Selena's alcoholic, abusive father, and Nellie is Selena's victimized mother. The most noteworthy aspect of their relationship is Nellie's oft-repeated contention that Lucas wouldn't have beat her if he didn't love her—in other words, the physical beatings meant he cared enough to discipline her. As distasteful as this perspective may seem to contemporary readers, it must be remembered that this was the prevailing philosophy for battered women, not to mention the men who beat them, for centuries . . . and in some cases is still present today.

Joey Cross

Joey is Selena's younger brother, perhaps less victimized by Lucas than she is (although he does come in for his share of beatings, and is a terrified witness to Lucas's drinking and violence) but no less traumatized. He and Selena are allies in their struggle against the world, first fighting to keep themselves and each other safe from Lucas, and later desperately striving to keep themselves and their hard-won security safe from the law

Ted Carter

Ted is Selena's boyfriend throughout her teen years. He is portrayed in almost a stereotypical, too-good-to-be-true way—an athlete, good looking, popular, academically successful, from an affluent home. At first his unwavering devotion to and love for Selena is one of the better parts of her life, and is indeed one of the most appealing aspects of the book. Later, however, he realizes his potential for success in life might be compromised by his association with her, and he leaves the relationship. This, essentially makes him no better than his parents, Harmon and Roberta Carter.

Harmon and Roberta Carter

Ted Carter's parents. They appear briefly and irregularly, and are portrayed on these occasions as ambitious and insensitive. They are, however, the focus in chapter seven of Book four, in which the story treatment of Roberta's first husband reveals just how malicious and greedy their ambition made them. They are, at this point, clearly intended to be perceived as a vivid contrast to their son, but as Ted's later actions in relation to Selena reveal, he's not really all that different.

Tomas Makris

Makris is one of the book's central male characters, his essential purpose being to shake things up. In some ways this aspect of his character seems somewhat under-developed—it might have been interesting to see, for example, his effect on the school—the narrative suggests he's the best principal the school ever had, but doesn't ever go into why or how. There are also tantalizing hints of a confrontational relationship between Makris and Leslie Harrington who, according to the narrative, has had the town under his socio-political thumb for a long time. Again, however, these hints never become a full-fledged sub-plot. Where his essential function plays out most dramatically is in his relationship with Constance Mackenzie, whom he desires the minute he sees her on the street and eventually falls in love with, forcibly seduces, and marries. He is perhaps an externalization of the force of truth, with his actions in relationship to Constance dramatizing the truth of that old saying, "the truth shall set you free". This aspect of his character also manifests in his relationships with Allison (whom he eventually forces into facing the truth of her relationship with the town of Peyton Place) and Reverend Fitzgerald, whom he confronts with the truth of his (Fitzgerald's) true religious perspective.

Rodney and Leslie Harringon

Leslie Harrington is Peyton Place's most wealthy and powerful citizen, and Rodney is his spoiled, selfish, insensitive son. Their shared attitude is one of ruthless, self-righteous greed—to them the world and everyone in it exists to give them what they

want. Acting on this attitude eventually destroys Rodney's life at a young age, a situation which in turn seems to destroy Leslie's own desire to live according to those beliefs.

Norman and Evelyn Page

Norman is a sensitive, lonely boy in Allison and Selena's class at school, and Evelyn is his domineering mother. Norman eventually becomes Allison's best friend and erstwhile boyfriend, but is never able to escape his mother's influence. There are very clear indications that Norman is intended by the author to be perceived as homosexual, with the relationship between him and his mother manifesting the dominant belief at the time the book was written that homosexual men existed as the result of a combination of absent father and over-controlling mother.

Kathy Ellsworth

When Selena starts spending more and more time with Ted Carter, Kathy becomes Allison's best friend. Worldly and outspoken, Kathy is a vivid contrast to Allison's naivete and reticence. Later, as a young adult, Kathy loses her right arm in an accident, with her triumph over this adversity serving as another manifestation of the author's thematic contention that with courage and determination life can be fulfilling and truthful even under the most challenging circumstances.

Dr. Matthew Swain

Doc Swain serves as the moral center for both Peyton Place the town and Peyton Place the book. Described throughout as a good and moral man, non-judgmental and compassionate, he is clearly intended by the author to be seen as a positive, life affirming counterpoint to all the at times unspeakable darkness of the humanity around him. This aspect of his character, and of the book, is most evident in the section in which Doc confronts Lucas. This is, in essence, a confrontation between good and evil, between the life affirming and the life destroying, the selfless and the selfish. It could be argued that because Doc performs an abortion he is just as life destroying as Lucas, but while the author raises the point, she also makes it very clear that she's on Doc's side. "I am protecting life", the author has him think to himself, "this life, the one already being lived by Selena Cross". His protection of that life continues on the witness stand at her trial, an action which could conceivably end his own career. This moment, combined with his performance of the abortion, suggests that from Doc's perspective, and perhaps from the author's, the struggle to live a good life well must be supported, no matter what the cost.

Seth Buswell, Clayton Frazier, Kenny Stearns, Marion Partrid

These characters appear at times throughout the novel—some (Seth, Clayton, Kenny, Elsie) more frequently, others (Marion, the Page sisters, Hester, Fitzgerald) less so. Each, however, at one point or another, receives a chapter's worth of individual attention, making the secondary thematic point that even in the midst of the large tapestry of life being lived in the world every day and every night there are individual threads of emotion and passion lived and lost.

Mr. and Mrs. Card

These characters appear infrequently and don't even get the chapter's worth of attention received by the characters listed above, but they are nonetheless extremely important. The pregnant Mrs. Card and the loving Mr. Card are the sole examples of simple affection, uncomplicated devotion, and unconditional grace in the entire book. The fact that Mrs. Card is about to give birth takes the point a step further, making the suggestion that grace and affection are always possible, that the potential for them to be born and to exist is there even in the midst of the sometimes unspeakable horrors of man's inhumanity to man.

Steve (Stephanie) Wallace, Brad Holmes, David Noyes

These three characters appear late in the book, and only in the context of Allison's life in New York—Steve is her roommate, Brad her editor and (married) lover, and David her friend. They teach her that life outside of Peyton Place isn't all that different from life inside, and therefore that life inside Peyton Place, with all its foibles and frailties and horrors, can't be feared, but rather must be embraced.

Samuel Peyton

Peyton is the individual after whom the town of Peyton Place is named, an escaped slave who made a fortune in Europe, attempted to bring that fortune (and a white wife) to America, found he was unwelcome, and eventually shut himself up in a cold stone castle (the "Peyton Place"). The lonely, isolated deaths of Peyton and his wife, locked within the walls of their self-imposed exile, can be seen as manifestations of the book's thematic point relating to the dangers of emotional isolation, such as that initially experienced by Constance. Her life, Peyton's death, Selena's abortion, Makris's insistence,l and Doc Swain's testimony in court, all proclaim that one's truth must be fully and openly lived no matter what the cost.

Objects/Places

Peyton Place (the book)

When Peyton Place was first published in the late 1950s it was immediately perceived as at best a sensational expose of small town life, and at worst a gratuitously graphic portrayal of immorality that was itself immoral. It was probably not a coincidence that the book was also a best seller. Peyton Place was notorious, banned from libraries and even countries (an introduction recounts how the book was at one time banned in Canada), and roundly condemned in many circles as having no artistic or moral value. The point must be made here that the strongest words in the book are "bitch" and "crap", there are no explicit narrations of sexual activity, and no one is murdered. It's certainly true that the book's inclusion of an abortion, not to mention the fact that both the doctor and the woman involved not only escaped legal consequences but are portrayed as actually doing something morally just, contributed to the controversy. It may also be that frank discussions of female sexuality, perhaps even the references to women actually enjoying sex, were part of the book's notoriety. And it may be that for the most part America at the time (and perhaps still does) considers itself above and beyond the more dark-sided actions of its characters. All things considered, however, Peyton Place (the book) is an unsparing, if at times over-wrought, portrayal of many aspects of humanity—at its worst, at its most complicated, and at its best (at times all in one character).

Peyton Place (the town)

Peyton Place is a small town in conservative New England (the northeastern United States). Many of the streets are named for trees (Elm, Maple, Chestnut) and the lives lived on those streets are in many ways stereotypical of those lived in other literary small towns. Everyone knows (and wants to know) everyone else's business, almost everyone is keeping a secret of some kind, and the smallest incident/word/look can be, and often is, perceived as being loaded with meaning. It's an arguable point whether Peyton Place the town is, as portrayed in Peyton Place the book, archetypal or stereotypical, or a combination of both.

The Peyton Place (the castle on the hill)

The Peyton Place, built by an escaped slave exiled from the southern United States and from Europe, where he made his money, is actually a rebuilt English castle. It sits on top of a hill overlooking the town, with its stone walls representing the stone walls of reputation, fear, and belief constructed by so many people, in the town and in life, to protect the deep truths at the core of their emotional being.

Road's End

This isolated end-of-the-road on the outskirts of Peyton Place is an area of raw natural beauty, and is Allison Mackenzie's favorite place in town. Not only does she experience it as a place to connect with the sky and the land, it's also where she can disconnect from the coldness of her mother and the taunting of her peers. Its name is symbolic of endings—at the beginning of the book, it represents the ending of childhood innocence. In the middle of the book (when Allison visits it with Norman), it represents the ending of her belief that she's alone in the world, and finally at the end of the book (when she again visits it on her own), it represents the end of her fear not only of Peyton Place but of living life.

The Thrifty Corner Apparel Shoppe

This is the clothing store established and run by Constance Mackenzie when she moves back to Peyton Place after living in New York. On one level it represents her new life, a symbolic value it also takes on when Selena Cross takes over as manager and moves toward her own new life. On another level, however, it also represents (at least for Constance) the restrictions of her beliefs about herself and who she has to be—that is, clothing comes to symbolize a hiding, a vulnerability. It's interesting to note that around the same time as her self-imposed mask begins to break down, Constance becomes less and less involved in the running of the shop, to the point at which she leaves the running of it to Selena after falling in love with and sexually submitting to Makris.

Chestnut Street

This is the street in Peyton Place where the rich and influential live. Leslie Harrington and Doc Swain are among the men who make their homes here.

The Cross Shack

This is the ramshackle dwelling, with walls of tar paper rather than wood, plaster or brick, where the Cross family (Lucas, Nellie, Selena, and Joey) live. Another Cross sibling, Paul, returns to the shack after the deaths of Lucas and Nellie and renovates it into an attractive and roomy home. This represents and embodies the author's thematic perspective that even the worst experience can be transformed into something positive.

The Mackenzie Home

In direct (deliberate?) contrast to the Cross home, the house where Constance and Allison Mackenzie live is portrayed as roomy, nicely decorated, well kept, and much more homey. It's interesting to note, however, that in both cases the inhabitants of the

two dwellings, particularly the two daughters, are unhappy in their homes—they are places of secrets, of pressure, and of unhappiness. Both, however, are eventually transformed (the shack physically, the Mackenzie home emotionally) into places of warmth, harmony, and relative peace.

The Photo of Allison's Father

This large framed photograph sits on the mantelpiece over the fireplace in the Mackenzie home. It is the focus of Allison's fantasies about her past, specifically her beliefs about the loving relationship she believed existed between her father and her mother before her father (apparently) died. Her removal of the photo at the end of the book represents not only her determination to move on with her life free from the fantasies of the past, but also Constance's freedom from the fear and self-loathing associated for her with Allison's father.

The Fun House at the Carnival

The fun house functions on two levels. On a literal level, it's the setting for one of the novel's more tragic sequences, the accident that causes Kathy Ellison to lose her arm. On a symbolic level, the ramshackle funhouse (and perhaps the accident that occurs there) can be seen as representing the ultimate, inevitable, and destructive corruptness of Leslie Harrington and his self-serving philosophies.

The Bundle of Lucas's Belongings

After Selena kills Lucas, and after she and Joey dispose of his body, she and Joey gather his coat and other belongings and attempt to burn them. The items later turn up as evidence in the court case against her, representing the way that an unresolved past can come back and create damage in the present.

New York City

This is where Allison escapes to after leaving what she sees as the stifling environment of Peyton Place. In its own way, however, it proves to be just as destructive, and therefore not the haven she imagined (wished? dreamed?) it to be.

Fireplaces

Fireplaces appear in several homes, and at several key points, throughout the book. There's one in the Mackenzie home, in the remodeled Cross home, and in the country cottage to which Allison and her New York lover retreat later in the book. Important scenes of confrontation take place in front of each of these fireplaces, confrontations that lead to uncomfortable experiences of truth.

Party Lines

In the early days of telephonic communication, households were hooked up to the network in sequence, rather than parallel. In other words, several homes were on one line, the "party line", as opposed today when every home has its own line. Being part of this system meant that individuals in one household could listen in on the conversations being had by phone in another household. Listening on party line conversations were a great source of gossip, particularly in small towns. There is the sense in Peyton Place that the occasional references to party lines and to people listening in on them represented the way everyone in the town, even without listening in on each other's phone lines, knew each other's business.

Social Sensitivity

In many ways Peyton Place is one of the most important social novels of the 1950s. Although naive in its approach, the novel is one of the most insightful examinations of social mores of the mid-1950s, especially sexual mores, that was published during the decade.

One of the reasons for the book's success is its uncanny accuracy when addressing issues such as the place of women, the importance of work, the social stratification of society, and the hypocrisy which exists between public and private behavior. More than such social chroniclers as John O'Hara and J. P. Marquand, Metalious touched on truths that Americans were afraid or ashamed to admit. It was this element of disclosure which earned Peyton Place its reputation and made of its author a social and literary embarrassment.

Metalious was not only concerned about depicting the various strata of small town life, those who controlled the money, society, or morality, but she also was concerned with these issues from a very new perspective. There have been "women's novels" for almost two hundred years but Peyton Place cast a special modern look at the genre. The novel, in spite of its steamy sex scenes (which now seem quite mild) and its aura of naughty expose, is basically a study of power, especially women's power, or more accurately, lack of power, and how various women in a confined environment and over several generations cope with their position within society. Looked at from this broader perspective and with a bit of distance, Peyton Place takes on a significance quite different from the sniggering prurience originally accorded the book. Viewed from a feminist perspective the book becomes not a steamy sex novel but a tragic and deeply felt cry against sexual oppression — less a piece of repressive pornography and more a volume of liberating expression.

Techniques

Peyton Place is constructed through overlapping individual biographies arranged roughly along a chronological continuum with ample margins provided for flashbacks and often lengthy asides from the direct unfolding of the story of Allison MacKenzie's life and maturation. This method provides for the distinct characterizations which distinguish the novel, although since the blocks of stories are carefully linked, there is little discontinuity in the plot. The asides and often extended biographical detail and history add immeasurably to the background texture of the environment that creates a density often missing in works of popular fiction where surface tensions are frequently suspended over a void.

Just as her technique for constructing the novel gives it substance and variety, so too does the author's use of sex and profanity form a secondary function beyond the usual values of shock and titillation. The direct language seems to announce the presence of a different kind of woman writer, one who can take the risks and deal with the same subjects as say James Jones or Norman Mailer. The highlighting of the sexual theme, both more explicit and uninhibited than achieved before by female writers, also points to the broader feminist notions which form the emotional core of the fiction. Just as Metalious was more open and frank about sexual matters, repression and exploitation, she was more open about matters of economic and social exploitation of women as well. The directness of her language underlines her toughminded approach to the plight of the powerless. There is an intensity in the writing which reflects the desperation of her own badly exploited life in the same way that the violence of her profanity seems to reveal the frustration she experienced trying to voice the inarticulate injustices she felt and witnessed.

Themes

Truth versus Artificiality/Isolation

This is the novel's key theme, manifesting on two key levels, narrative and symbolic. On a narrative level, that is, in terms of plot and action, several of the novel's key storylines explore ways in which artificiality is stripped away, allowing truth to emerge and therefore allowing the individual who had hitherto lived an artificial life to live fully and honestly. The most obvious example of this is Constance, who through her emotional and sexual involvement with Tomas Makris is forced to encounter her true self (sexual, emotional, historical) and embrace the kind of life that, the narrative suggests, she was meant to live. Somewhat less obvious examples of this narrative motif can be found in the story of Allison (forced to let go of her artificial dreams and understandings of her father and live a more honest life), and Selena (forced to face down the imposed, "artificial" life imposed upon her by her mother and step-father and live according to her own desires). A socially relevant manifestation of this motif can be found in the story of Doc Swain; specifically, his inner debate about whether to perform an abortion for Selena and his later, even more tortured, inner debate about whether to testify in her behalf. This latter point is perhaps equally evocative of the theme as Constance's story. There is some suggestion in the novel that by telling the truth in court (i.e., that he performed the abortion) Doc is potentially ruining his life and career. But the novel clearly points out that even though he has committed a crime (albeit for reasons that were dictated by his soul-searching conscience), he faces no consequences. In short, Doc made a choice based on both a personal truth, and what he (and apparently the novel) believes to be a fundamental human truth . . . and therefore, not only escapes consequences, but thrives, if only in his own soul.

On a symbolic level, the main manifestation of the book's thematic focus on the relationship between true and artificial lives can be found in the presence of Samuel Peyton's Castle. It's artificial for two reasons. The first is that it's actually British and doesn't belong in America—as the narrative points out, it was imported from England and re-constructed brick by brick. The second reason it's artificial is that it enabled Peyton to live an artificial life, isolated with his wife from the rest of the world, unable to publicly celebrate his economic success and his emotional happiness. In other words, his situation was essentially the same as Constance's. Meanwhile, the repeated references to the castle "looming" over the town suggest the idea and presence of artificiality, walls, masks, and the unhappiness within is pervasive throughout the town and in the lives of the individuals living there. This idea is developed further in Allison's final confrontation with Makris, in which he challenges her to face the truth about her relationships with her mother, her town, and her own dreams. This confrontation takes place outside the walls of the castle, suggesting that Allison is confronting her own walls, and is perhaps becoming able to live a fulfilled, truthful life in ways that Peyton and his wife never could.

Femaleness

Females dominate the various narrative lines of Peyton Place. Its three central characters, Allison Mackenzie, Constance Mackenzie, and Selena Cross, are all women, as are several of its key supporting characters, Nellie Cross, Kathy Ellsworth, Evelyn Page, Betty Anderson, Hester Goodale, Elsie Thornton, and Marion Partridge. A key component of the journeys of several of these women is sexuality. Allison, Constance, and Selena (and, to an extent, Nellie, Evelyn, Betty, and Hester) all confront truths of who they are as sexual women, an aspect of the novel that's particularly important given the era in which it was published. This was the late 1950s, an era in which American women were viewed, for the most part, as extensions of the men in their lives (fathers, husbands, brothers) and little more. In other words, the women of Peyton Place (both the book and the town) lived lives of a kind of self-awareness and self-determination many women of the period, and since, never experienced. It may be, in fact, that this radical (for the time) portrayal of femininity was one of the reasons the book was regarded as scandalous.

But the presence of femaleness goes beyond the number and relative narrative importance of the novel's female characters. Femaleness plays a significant role in the books narrative and symbolic imagery. Specifically, and perhaps most tellingly, its opening phraseology describes Indian summer as a woman, sensual and capricious and fickle. The image recurs throughout the book, creating a sense that femaleness in nature is inescapable, and must be embraced if life is to be enjoyed and fully lived. This sense is reinforced by other occasions in which nature is described in female terms.

Religious and Moral Conflict

The first notes/images of this conflict are sounded in the book's opening description of the town of Peyton Place, which positions two churches (Catholic and Protestant) at either end of Main Street—in literal, spiritual, and metaphorical opposition to each other. While the specific conflict between the two religious/moral perspectives is perhaps surprisingly muted throughout the book, it does flare up at two key points. These are in relation to Selena's abortion (Doc Swain and his nurse each have a chapter devoted to their catholic/protestant perspectives on religion), and to the burial of Nellie Cross. It's interesting to note that these two conflicts are grounded in the earthly manifestations of faith and religion, as opposed to the faith itself. It's also interesting to consider the character and situation of Father Fitzgerald, who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism but ultimately found himself unable to leave his first faith behind. The character and his story suggest that the author is making the thematic point that ultimately, all religion is the same—focused on dogma rather than on humanity.

This theme is developed further through the way in which moral conflict in Peyton Place is played out on the realm of the personal, as opposed to the institutional (e.g., through the churches). Characters decide what is right and wrong, and act on those decisions, for the most part, outside of the influence of the church. In other words, the people of

Peyton Place tend to live and pass judgment according to Peyton Place's moral code, as opposed to the code imposed by either church. It's important to note that this occurs in both positive and negative ways—Doc Swain, for example, bases his choice on whether to abort Selena's baby on his own personal beliefs and experiences, not those of the church. When she kills her abusive step-father, Selena does what is morally and essentially right and necessary to ensure her survival, an action that the religious code of the church would condemn. However, in doing so,she is set free. In other words, the narrative passes the judgment on both her and Doc Swain (who, according to church law, should also be punished but is also set free) that acting according to the guidance of one's own moral compass is, to return to the book's primary thematic point, the only true truth.

Significant Topics

Perhaps the main theme of Peyton Place is the hypocrisy which lurks below the surface of the picturesque small town which is the setting for the novel. Through the interlocking stories of the various characters are exposed the truths of their lives which have been glossed over by their public persona. Apparently respectable matrons have odd sexual hang-ups and the richest man in town has little control over his family or his own fears. Such themes provide the main reasons for the book's scandalous reputation, because much of the hidden truth is sexual in nature and often taboo.

An additional theme and ultimately one of far more importance is the question of control over one's life. This had a special resonance with the female characters who, more often than not, have little control over their own destiny. It is this theme which also sounds the deeply felt feminist subtext of the fiction. Through this theme, too, the author is able to connect the various female characters on a sliding scale of repression, and to separate the generations, allowing the younger women to partially escape, at least, the restrictions of their mothers. It is this exposure of the negative plight of women which modern feminist critics contend is also responsible for the book's slighted reputation and for its author's persecution as an artist. It was not the sexual themes which were threatening, they have argued, but rather the far more deeply feared recognition of the oppression of women which forms the book's unsettling quality.

Finally Peyton Place also deals with an equally unpopular American theme, namely that of the presence of a very real class system, one which is basically unbroachable in spite of the public pronouncements and conventional wisdom of the culture. And since the determining factor within the social scheme is often money, which one acquires not necessarily through goodness or worth or hard work but usually through guile or inheritance or luck, the novel was doubly labeled as cynical. Such a social stratification does much to undercut the American dream of a classless society with its endless possibilities and open opportunity.

Such ideas are often associated with more "serious" fiction but rarely with popular novels and also contribute to the ambivalent nature of the reception of Peyton Place.

Style

Point of View

There are two key aspects to consider about the point of view of Peyton Place. The first is purely technical, or craft based. It's narrated from the third person objective point of view, and shifts from person to person depending on which character is in narrative focus. In other words, when the chapter is focused on Allison, her thoughts and feelings and reactions are known and examined by the narrative voice—when it's Norman, the same happens for him, or for Selena, or even minor characters like Elsie Thornton, Marion Partridge, or Kenny Stearns. The author gets into the minds and hearts and experiences of all her characters. It might not be going too far to suggest that by doing so, she in fact gets into the mind and heart and soul of the town.

The second key aspect of point of view to consider here can be found in the introduction's suggestion that several aspects of the book, in particular the story of Allison Mackenzie, are autobiographical. That is to say, there is the sense that in writing about Peyton Place the author was/is writing about towns she knew, people she knew, lives she knew (lived?) and, perspectives she understood. This may be an important factor in creating the sense existing throughout the book, that with all its narrative sprawl, all its many entwining stories, the book is an almost uncomfortably intimate look at life as it's truly lived. Yes some of the narrative elements are melodramatic, and it's sometimes doubtful that even in the most Gothic of small towns the secrets and lies and complications of Peyton Place all exist with the same city's boundaries. The fact remains, however, that people do behave to each other in the way the people of Peyton Place behave. The author knows that, understands that, and is unafraid of that—and here again may be a reason why the book was so scandalous when it was first published. There aren't many authors, then or now, so unapologetic about seeing and/or understanding that sometimes human beings are monsters.

Setting

There are three key components to note about the setting of Peyton Place. The first is geographical; specifically, the placement of the town and the stories of its inhabitants in the northeastern part of the United States, a corner of both the country and the world in which conservatism, tradition, and moral rectitude have all taken very deep root. For an author interested in exploring the dark side of human nature, there probably isn't a much better location for creating and exploring moral conflict. The second key component is related to the first, in that the book's geographical setting lends a certain air of solidity and permanence to its moral setting. In other words, the town's physical smallness and constricted-ness has a direct effect on its moral smallness and constricted-ness, with the result that people who strive to break away from what Peyton Place (and, in Peyton Place's mind, the world) expects face a greater series of hurdles than merely finding a way to get physically out of town. This sense of entwined moral and physical setting is

particularly evident in the character of Allison, who by the end of the book has come to realize not only that such entwining really does exist, but that it exists within her, and while it can't be eliminated it can be transcended.

The third key component of the book's setting relates to the time in which it's set. It's opening chapters take place in the late 1930s, a time when America (and indeed the world) is just beginning to emerge from the financial and spiritual bleakness of the depression. Humanity is beginning to search for positive truths about itself in the same way as Allison, Constance, Selena, Makris, and several other characters both search for and find those truths. This process is echoed in the book's later chapters, set as they are during World War II. Confrontation with individual truth and integrity took place on many levels in that war. This is true of the young men struggling to survive on the fields of France (like Norman), and the older men desperate to serve his country but unable to because of medical restriction (like Makris). It's also true of the women left alone with themselves to survive (as most of the principal female characters are, not just in the later sections but throughout the book). In short, the war against Hitler's artificial (and cruel) suppression of fundamental human truths (i.e., the right to freely exist) can perhaps be seen as an externalized metaphor for the internal struggle of the inhabitants of Peyton Place to live their own truths free of moral oppression.

Language and Meaning

There is relatively little crudity or explicit language in Peyton Place. For the period in which it was published, what depictions of sexuality there are in the book were undeniably blunt, tantalizing, and to some readers perhaps even shocking. In comparison to much of today's popular literature (particularly the so-called "chick-lit" genre, to which Peyton Place if published today would undoubtedly be consigned), the "action" and the words describing it is notably tame. This is not to say that it's ineffective—it is, on the contrary, an example of the saying "less is more". A few telling details are often enough to create an evocative, accurate picture of what's going on between the characters, a narrative spareness that carries through most of the book in spite of its at times undeniably melodramatic narrative events.

This spareness, however, can sometimes make it difficult to discern the author's underlying intention. It's inescapable that one of her preoccupations is with "man's inhumanity to man", and there are times in which that inhumanity is narrated with such immediate, searing prose (the confrontation between Doc and Lucas Cross is a vivid example) that its effect is incredibly powerful. Deeper meaning, however, sometimes proves elusive—there is occasionally the sense that an event, or an exploration of character, has been inserted into the narrative for its own sake—it's almost as though the author is saying "You thought that was bad, look how awful THESE people are!" Again, such moments are emotionally, narratively, and thematically evocative—but a reader (and possibly an editor) might, at the latest revelation of human nastiness, be justified in asking whether they're all truly necessary.

Structure

The novel is structured in three sections that, in total, cover a period of approximately six years. Book one essentially focuses on the childhoods of its main characters (Allison and Selena). It could be argued that it also focuses on the emotional childhood (i.e., immaturity) of the other central character, Constance Mackenzie, and also on the immaturity of the town. Book two focuses on the late teen years of Allison and Selena, their emotional and sexual maturing. Here again, it could be argued that in Book two Constance also comes to emotional and sexual maturity, while the town comes to a kind of moral and political maturity—it's in this section that it finally, albeit slowly comes to realize that the dominant force in the town (Leslie Harrington) is not an ideal source of inspiration. Book three focuses on the young adulthood of the three central characters—physical (Selena, Allison, Rodney and the other young people), physical and emotional (the young people plus Constance), and moral (everyone in the town). In other words, in Book three, Peyton Place and at least some of the people who live there (or, in the case of Allison, who used to live there) grow up. This structural technique seems to make the narratively and thematically relevant suggestion that time can, and perhaps inevitably will, enable the truth to be revealed—not just personal truth (such as that manifested in the lives of Allison, Constance and Selena) but also factual truth (the killing of Lucas Cross, the abortion of Selena's baby).

Quotes

"Those grown old, who have had the youth bled from them by the jagged edged winds of winter, know sorrowfully that Indian summer is a sham to be met with hard-eyed cynicism. But the young wait anxiously, scanning the chill autumn skies for a sign of her coming. And sometimes the old, against all the warnings of better judgment, wait with the young and hopeful, their tired, inner eyes turned heavenward to seek the first traces of a false softening." Book 1, Chap. 1, p. 3

"If I can teach something to one child, if I can awaken in only one child a sense of beauty, a joy in truth, an admission of ignorance and a thirst for knowledge, then I am fulfilled. One child, thought Miss Thornton . . . and her mind fastened with love on Allison MacKenzie." Book 1, Chap. 2, p. 14

"Slowly, a wonderful feeling of being the only living person in the world filled [Allison]. Everything was hers, and there was no one to spoil it for her, on one to make anything less peaceful and true and beautiful than it was right at this moment." Book 1, Chap. 3, p. 20

"If at any time [Constance] felt a vague restlessness within herself, she told herself sharply that this was not sex, but perhaps a touch of indigestion." Book 1, Chap. 4, p. 25

"'Dead folks can't hurt you none. It's the ones that are alive you have to watch out for.'" Book 1, Chap. 9, p. 51

"The bright leaves on the trees, beaten loose by cold wind and rain, fell to the ground like tears wept for a remembered past." Book 1, Chap. 11, p. 65

"The two sisters bit off these words [the bastard son of a whoring woman] as crisply as if they had been chewing celery, and the fact that these same words in print would have been an occasion for book banning and of shocked consultation with the church did not bother them at all, for they had the excuse of righteous indignation on their side." Book 1, Chap. 15, p. 85

"Nailed to the front of the building . . . was a blue and white enameled sign. PEYTON PLACE, it read. POP 3675. Thirty-six seventy-five, thought Markis . . . sounds like the price of a cheap suit." Book 1, Chap. 22, p. 134

"Spring was ungentle that year, so that it was hard to think of her as a time of tender leaves and small delicate flowers. She was a fury, twisting and beating, a force obsessed with the idea of winning the land in a vicious contest with winter. Only after she had won was she smiling and serene, like a naughty child after a temper tantrum." Book 1, Chap. 23, p. 150

"At sixteen, Selena had a maturity which some women never achieve. She knew her own mind, and she knew her own heart. She loved Ted Carter and knew that she

always would, and to imagine him looking at her with his heart breaking for all to see was more than she could bear." Book 2, Chap. 1, p.192

"What will you do now, when it is time to put your fancy theories to the test? Nothing dearer than life, eh, Matthew? What is this thing you are thinking of doing if it isn't the destruction of what you have always termed so dear? . . . the struggle he fought with himself now would leave its mark on him for the rest of his life, and he knew that no matter what his decision, he would always wonder if he had made the right one." Book 2, Chap. 4, p. 199

"[Doc] wanted to crush [Lucas Cross], to crush and grind with his heel; to degrade and humiliate and break. He looked at the pile of broken pieces that more than thirty years of honorable medical practice made when it came tumbling down, and he looked at [nurse] Mary Kelley's good, Irish Catholic face, overlaid now with a certain hardness made by the cynical knowledge of crime committed." Book 2, Chap. 6, p. 219

"the doctor fought down his desire to put his hands around Lucas' neck and choke him. It took a long time for the sickness and the rage that come to a man when he realizes how thin the layers of civilization on another man can be to abate in Dr. Swain." Book 2, Chap. 6, p. 222

"when [Makris] looked at Fitzgerald, he wondered at the powerful, destructive tendency in humanity which drives a man to painful extremes in order to maintain the picture of himself which he has manufactured for the rest of the world to look upon." Book 2, Chap. 9, p. 247

"When an adolescent forgets something as romantic as a picnic with another adolescent in the excitement generated by the thought of writing for money, it is difficult to regard it as foolishness any longer." Book 2, Chap. 10, p. 258

"Rodney was weak in the terrible, final way in which only those who are protected and surrounded by powerful externals are weak . . . strength was all around him, ready made to protect and shield him. Nor was Rodney driven by a compulsion to succeed as was his father . . . before he was ten years old, he knew that there was nothing worth winning that involved effort, for without effort he could win anything from his father." Book 2, Chap. 13, p. 286

"It was as if each of them sensed vaguely that the Saturday afternoons of youth are few, and precious, and this feeling which neither of them could have defined or described made every moment of this time together too short, too quickly gone, yet clearer and more sharply edged than any other." Book 2, Chap. 15, p. 314

"although the closets of small-town folk are filled with such a number of skeletons that if all the bony remains of small-town shame were to begin rattling at once they would cause a commotion that could be heard on the moon . . ." Book 2, Chap. 17, p. 333

"It was not until much later that Constance realized fully what Tom had done for her. In the weeks which followed it was as if she were a new and different person who walked freely and unafraid for the first time. It was never again necessary for her to take refuge in lies and pretenses . . ." Book 3, Chap. 2, p. 386

"The child, a boy of about twelve, who had brought the parcel into town claimed that he had found it just as the men saw it now, in a pile of rubbish at the town dump. The boy's next remark had to do with the question of a possible reward." Book 3, Chap. 8, p. 452

"Editors dispatched their best reporters to cover the trial of Selena Cross, and Peyton Place took on the aspects of a large, open air, lunatic asylum." Book 3, Chap. 9, p. 454

"[Ted] pictured the hill that he and Selena had looked at, the one where they would build a house that was made up almost entirely out of windows . . . he remembered all the years when it had been only Selena, when the thought of life without her had been like thinking of being dead." Book 3, Chap. 10, p. 467

"And now the destruction has come full circle, [Doc] told himself, staring down into his full glass . . . in the beginning I destroyed life and now I must pay with my own." Book 3, Chap. 10, p. 469

"in very small towns malice is more often shown toward an individual than toward a group, a nation or a country." Book 3, Chap. 11, p. 480

"'There is such a thing as love not meeting a test, but that does not mean that it was not a kind of love to begin with. Love is not static. It changes and fluctuates, sometimes growing stronger, sometimes weaker, and sometimes disappearing altogether. But still, I think it is difficult not to be grateful for the love one gets.'" Book 3, Chap. 13, p. 498

"Allison sat for a long time in her secret place, and reflected that even if this spot were not as secret as she had once believed, the things it said to her were still secret." Book 3, Chap. 13, p. 514

Adaptations

Metalious sold all of the Peyton Place rights to Jerry Wald, a producer at Twentieth Century-Fox. In the deal Wald acquired movie and television rights, even rights to the name "Peyton Place," which allowed Wald to control all of the subsequent Peyton Place properties. Metalious never received a dime, over the original purchase agreement, of the millions earned by the movies and television syndication.

Because of its subject matter and the sensational publicity it had received, the novel was a natural for screen presentation. In 1957 Mark Robson directed a fairly decent movie version of the book, although the plot was much changed before the filming. Constance MacKenzie was played by Lana Turner with Hope Lange as Allison.

The soap opera qualities of the original book were emphasized in this and subsequent film versions of the story.

It really was not Metalious' book brought to the screen. Whatever punch the book possessed was so toned down for the movie and further softened for the television series, that all of her hard-hitting criticism of American hypocrisy, the frank sexuality, and even the mild satire on small town life was either eliminated or emasculated for the media presentation. In 1961 a second Peyton Place film was made from Return to Peyton Place; this one was neither as well directed nor as well cast as the first and is as weak a sequel as was the novel from which it was made.

The media version which was the most successful was the twice-weekly television series starring Mia Farrow as Allison and Ryan O'Neal as Rodney with Dorothy Malone as Constance MacKenzie. However, there were further changes in the characters and story line. Michael Rossi became a doctor and Matt Swain became the newspaper editor. The episodes and characters were only loosely based on Grace Metalious' originals. The name said it all; Peyton Place had become a generic term for describing any small town which was subject to sexual expose. The scripts were written by Irna Phillips, the "Queen of the Soap Operas," and they took on a flavor quite alien to that created in the initial novel.

Public acceptance of the series was enormous and international syndication brought the show into millions of households. Metalious' characters and place of mind became known worldwide.

Also, Pocket Books issued a series of nine "Peyton Place" books which were filled with sex and violence and updated various minor characters from the original tale. With such titles as Temptations of Peyton Place, Secrets of Peyton Place, The Evils of Peyton Place, Pleasures of Peyton Place, and Thrills of Peyton Place, they played on the now accepted stereotyped notions of what Metalious' book was all about and did much to solidify in the mind of the public that "Peyton Place" deserved to be a synonym for cheap sex and lurid prose.

Key Questions

1. If members of the group are old enough to have read Peyton Place when it first came out in the mid-fifties, they might discuss the word-of-mouth gossip about the novel at the time.

2. Peyton Place in many ways is "the" novel of the 1950s and contains many of the concerns and contradictions that the post-war culture grappled with durin the decade. What do these issues seem to be?

3. Critics have described the film version of the novel as perhaps the "quintessential" small-town movie of the period. How was Peyton Place, the movie, quintessential?

4. David Halberstam in his book The Fifties discusses Peyton Place as a novel which overcame its sensational reputation and now can be read for its prescient depiction of women during the period. What does the book say about gender?

5. In what other ways can the sensational elements of the book, which were tame in comparison with other more serious novels at the time, be read now as containing serious social commentary?

6. The phenomenal sales of the novel in paperback did much to boost the power of the reprint market and to solidify the financial prospects of paperback books. Were there other books which contributed to this growth in novels in paper?

7. In many ways the small town has come in for a real drubbing in twentieth-century American fiction. How does Peyton Place compare with similar modern novels like Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, Sinclair Lewis' Main Street, or others that the group has read?

8. The enormous success of Peyton Place helped to modify censorship, especially of a sexual nature, of American fiction, a battle which had been going on since the late nineteenth century. Think of how contemporary novels treat sex and compare them to this original.

9. The idea of Peyton Place became so pervasive that it now stands for any expose of small town life. Examine how the group thinks about the term in contemporary language.

10. Compare the style and content of the original novel with the many offspring on both television and screen which it spawned.

Topics for Discussion

Constance Mackenzie's journey of transformation as a character sees her start out as an independent, successful career woman and ends up with her being a happily domestic homemaker. Discuss whether this is a valid portrayal of the way love affects people, or whether its apparent anti-feminism in fact makes this manifestation of love oppressive.

Consider the number of scenes of confrontation that take place in front of fireplaces (see "Objects/Places"). Specifically examine Book one chapter eleven (Allison's confrontation with her beliefs about God), Book two chapter four (Constance's confrontation with Makris),

Book two chapter sixteen (Constance's confrontation with Allison), Book three chapter five (Selena's confrontation with Lucas), and Book three, chapter thirteen, part two (Allison's confrontation with Brad). What is the symbolic value of the fireplaces, and the fires therein, in these confrontations? What thematic connection is there between these confrontations?

In what ways do the lives of the secondary characters of Peyton Place (Norman and Evelyn Page, Hester Goodale, Kenny Stearns, and others) reflect the symbolic value of the Peyton Castle and the sense of isolation evoked by its looming presence (see "Themes—Truth and Artificiality/Isolation").

"The bright leaves on the trees, beaten loose by cold wind and rain, fell to the ground like tears wept for a remembered past". In what way is this quote, taken from a relatively early point in the book, foreshadowing? Consider both events in the story and the narrative's thematic points/perspectives.

Consider the quote about masks from Book two, chapter nine, p. 247. In what ways do the tendency and dangers described here apply to other characters, both principal and supporting?

Consider the quote about love found in Book three, chapter thirteen, p. 498. Discuss who loves, and who is loved, and the ways in which love expresses itself. Consider not only Constance, Allison, Selena and Makris, but also Evelyn Page, Doc Swain, the Cards, Nellie and Lucas Cross, and others.

In what way might the book be considered a "coming of age" story? Consider the narrative journeys not only of the younger characters (Allison, Selena, Norman, Rodney, Ted) but also adult characters who might be coming of age late in life. Discuss what is meant by coming of age.

What are the similarities in the relationship between Rodney Harrington and his father and Selena Cross and hers? What are the differences?

Consider comments made in the analysis of Book one, part seven in relation to the sense of isolation experienced by many of the characters. In what ways might Allison, Constance, Doc Swain, Rodney Harrington, and other characters be considered isolated?

Discuss whether Makris's treatment of Constance in Book two, chapter four, might be considered rape. If yes, does it invalidate Constance's later experience of deep fulfillment and true freedom in her marriage? If no, how does the undeniable violence of the experience relate to that fulfillment and freedom?

Discuss whether Doc Swain's merciless moral and verbal assault on Lucas Cross is as much a manifestation of the worst of humanity as Lucas's equally merciless physical and sexual assault on Selena. If yes, why? If no, why not?

Consider the events in Book two, part ten, chapter twenty—specifically, the circumstances of Miss Hester's death. Why might she be watching the Cards in the first place? Given the fact that she dies while watching them, what is it about the things she sees that contributes to her death?

Literary Precedents

The literary expose of the small town has a long and distinguished tradition in America since the turn of the century. Authors such as Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and even William Faulkner were predecessors of Metalious. However, the one novel Peyton Place clearly most resembles is Henry Bellamann's 1940 best seller King's Row.

Besides sharing several character-types, the emphasis in Peyton Place on sexual maladies as a motivator for the characters is also central to Bellamann's novel. Metalious acknowledged her indebtedness to King's Row, but it is important to notice how much further Peyton Place goes in using sex to reveal the hypocrisy of small town life. In this regard Peyton Place could be only a postwar novel.

As with Sinclair Lewis, Metalious uses a certain ironic angle at times to satirize her characters, especially the pompous and hypocritical ones. Her attacks never reach the level of frenzy achieved by Lewis and Metalious always endows her characters with understanding. There is warmth and compassion in Peyton Place which distinguishes it from the work of most of her predecessors, and yet the novel lacks the sentimentality present in other small town portraits in popular fiction such as in the novels of Booth Tarkington. Metalious achieved a curious balance between revelation and restraint which contributes to the novel's significance.

Related Titles

Metalious wrote or rather co-wrote a sequel to Peyton Place called Return to Peyton Place (1959), in which many of the original characters from her first novel make a reappearance. Allison, now a full-fledged author, has her book published and made into a movie.

Her trials with a charismatic publisher and among the fleshpots of Hollywood form the general plot line of the sequel.

Of more interest than Allison's progress, however, is the continuing saga of Selena Cross, Leslie Harrington, and the Rossi's.

After further tribulation Selena is finally wed to the trial lawyer who defended her at the murder inquest of her stepfather. Leslie, now softened by time and his approaching mortality, searches out Betty Anderson and offers to help raise his grandson in the manner to which the Harrington's are accustomed. Betty agrees but extracts a sizable price in both money and humility from Leslie. Lovable Doc Swain and Seth Buswell are also present to provide wisdom and comic relief. The novel, however, does not hold up and in fact was only partly sketched out by Metalious, herself, and completed by another hand. The critics panned the second Peyton Place book, discovering all of the original book's redeeming qualities missing in Metalious' second effort.

Return to Peyton Place is a real slapdash job, written quickly for money and to capitalize on the first book's enormous popularity and on the huge success of the film version. The sequel does not have the tenderness and texture of the first and although it sold reasonably well, the excitement of Peyton Place could not be recaptured either by the public or the critics.

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Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994