A Sport and a Pastime Study Guide

A Sport and a Pastime by James Salter

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Plot Summary

The story's narrator—who remains anonymous throughout the novel—moves to a small French town named Autun where he is unexpectedly joined by the brilliant though unconventional Philip Dean. The narrator quickly comes to admire him. When Dean becomes involved with a young French girl named Anne-Marie he starts to obsessively piece together—from facts and his own feverish imagination—their time together. Dean ultimately leaves everything in France behind for America but dies in a car accident not long after his return.

As the story opens, the narrator, still living in Paris, is dreaming about living in Autun—or anywhere outside of the bustle and distraction of urban life. His friends, Cristina and Billy Wheatland, have a house there which is seldom use and he takes advantage of their offer to move into it. Philip Dean, who has heard of his move, arrives not long after. The two do not really know each other very well; they met for the first time shortly before the narrator left Paris. The two travel and carouse lavishly until Dean meets Anne-Marie. They first see her flirting with some soldiers at a nightclub in Dijon but Dean, somehow, manages to find her again. The narrator, already impressed by Dean's strong character and bold attitude towards life, follows their relationship closely, as much through his own fantasies as whatever facts he has access to.

Their relationship develops slowly, but from the beginning there is a heavy sexual element. They are passionate and frequent lovers and rarely a night goes by without some kind of sexual encounter. Dean, perpetually unemployed and always on the verge of financial ruin, lives off the generosity of his rich father who lives in Paris. Anne-Marie and Dean's emotional progression is mirrored by their progression through various sexual acts—first coitus, then oral sex, then, marking the peak of their emotional intimacy, anal sex.

The two lovers have completely different attitudes towards the relationship. Anne-Marie, a simple girl who is completely in love with Dean, wants nothing more than to settle down and start a family with him; she wants a normal life, just like everyone else she knows. Dean, on the other hand, alternates between despising her and adoring her. His main interest in her is his ability to utterly dominate her, emotionally and sexually. She fulfills his narcissistic desire to completely possess someone while, at the same time, not at all being possessed. He realizes, with sadness, that their relationship cannot last forever, for there is nothing to sustain. Thus, he savors each moment realizing that they are being led inevitably to a messy end.

They wind up getting married on a summer road trip but, once again, each takes a unique perspective on it. For Anne-Marie, it is the beginning of a long marital bliss. For Dean, it is a desperate and temporary measure to patch together a fundamentally dysfunctional relationship. It is not a long-term solution and, indeed, when he returns to Autun after the road trip he prepares to return to the United States, supposedly to finish school. He promises the narrator that he will return to Autun and, contradictorily, he promises Anne-Marie that he will fly her out to America. There is no time for his

promises even to go unfulfilled, though. He is killed in a car accident shortly after he arrives in America. Anne-Marie is eventually able to move on and have the normal life she wanted all along. The narrator, however, who was in some ways even more enraptured by Dean's impressive personality, cannot help but continue to think about him.

Chapters 1 - 3

Chapters 1 - 3 Summary

Chapter 1:

The narrator describes traveling out of Paris, a city he loathes for its artificiality and bustle, into the French countryside. His destination is a small rural town named Autun. On the train ride he remarks on the people around him: a French man with a mismatched blue suit and a chubby women with conspicuous, purple birthmarks. He drifts to sleep for awhile and wakes up in time to see Autun's characteristic spire extend into the sky. His stop arrives and he is one of only a few people to exit. He sees the house he will be staying in, a house owned by his friends, the Wheatlands. It is a large stone house with enormous windows showing obvious signs of its old age.

Chapter 2:

He wakes early in the next morning and begins his daily life there. He finds himself becoming quickly accustomed to life there but is held back by his imperfect French. He dreams of one day not only mastering the language but also completely erasing his accent. He strolls around the town, learning the streets and taking in the beauty and simplicity of village life.

The narrator snaps back to reality—he has not really moved to Autun (though he has visited), but hopes to do so soon. He is with the Wheatlands—Cristina and Billy—in a hotel room in Paris. Cristina is the well-traveled daughter of an ambassador who has come to detest her home country, America. The narrator is not sure how she met Billy but knows it was while she was still finalizing her divorce with her first husband. Billy is a retired hockey player and, evidently, he was quite good at his sport. He tells the narrator that he is welcome to go to his house in Autun whenever he pleases, but warns him about how small it is. The narrator is not deterred, though, and reassures him that he will take up the offer. He then falls back into his reverie and finds himself traveling the small streets of Autun again. He recalls some of the people he met when visited, especially a waitress named Madame Picquet, about whom he reminds himself to ask Billy.

Chapter 3:

The narrator and the Wheatlands are at an upscale party that is attended by, among others, a few French celebrities. He is discussing the guests with Beneduce, a journalist, who is intimately familiar with the Parisian social circles. Billy is talking to Beneduce's wife across the room, an attractive women who, the narrator figures, could never have an affair because any potential suitor would be too intimidated by her husband. The narrator wanders around the very large apartment trying to find some place quieter. He situates himself by a window lined with a variety of plants. Cristina

comes up behind him and startles him accidentally. She wants him to meet her friend, Isabel, who is marrying a Frenchman who, evidently, is not present. As they weave their way through the guests, she remarks that he, the narrator, is the only one of Billy's friends that she likes. The comment sits uneasily with the narrator and he chooses not to respond to it. He meets Isabella and a man named Philip Dean who has just returned from traveling through Spain. They discuss their various Spain-related experiences and, much later, at three in the morning, the five of them—the narrator, Cristina, Billy, Isabel, and Philip-decide to stroll around town. They pass by a slaughterhouse which is still in operation. They see the entire process: cows being decapitated, gutted, and disposed of. They hurry away to a restaurant that is still serving food and have a very late dinner. Afterwards, Philip goes his own way and they drop Isabel at her apartment. Cristina and the narrator are left alone in the car—Billy takes Isabel to her door—and Cristina asks, rhetorically, whether the narrator would not like to be young again. He playfully responds that he really is not that old, even if he does feel quite old. She asks what he was like when he was young and, once again, he dodges the questions and jokes that he was the "idol of my generation" (24). Billy returns and, despite the fact that it is five in the morning, they decide to continue drinking.

Chapters 1 - 3 Analysis

Though the story is narrated in the first person, very little is known about the narrator; even his name has not been given. The reader's impression, then, must be based entirely upon the narrator's action. He is obviously somewhat of a dreamer, given his elaborate daydreams about escaping urban life for the idyllic countryside. Why Paris is so loathsome to him is not entirely obvious, but it seems at least partially related to the fact that he is not an incredibly social man. He seems quite content, for example, to escape to his own little corner of the party and is not thrilled by the prospect of meeting one of Cristina's friends. He is uninterested in small talk and social rituals in general. For some reason, he does not seem to like talking about himself or sharing his own experiences; he seems hesitant, for example, to share the notes on photographs of Autun which comprise the first chapter and a half. He does not seem to think very much about Billy for when Billy is talking to Maria Beneduce he wonders what they are talking about and concludes that "it's nothing because I've had a thousand conversations with him myself, but still he can hold her there somehow" (17). If he does not like Billy it seems only natural to conclude that he socializes with the Wheatlands because he likes Cristina and, indeed, there are some signs of playfulness and flirtation between the two. He seems reluctant to encourage it, however, perhaps sensing the dangerous tension that is developing between them.

Chapters 4 - 8

Chapters 4 - 8 Summary

Chapter 4:

The narrator has finally realized his dream and has moved to Autun. He walks around town and wanders into a soccer game being played by some of the town's youth. He sits by himself and does not really pay attention to the game but is annoyed by how long it takes. Afterward, he goes to a cafe which he has hitherto only seen at night. He remarks how different it seems in daylights; its blemishes are much more visible. At night, he goes to a hotel bar that has music. Among the people there gathered are four youths he has seen before. One of them, a seventeen-year-old or thereabouts, is particularly good looking. The narrator wonders if he has started seducing women yet and imagines that he will be quite good at it. The thought of seduction makes his mind wonder to Claude Picquet, the attractive waitress he recalls from his first visit. He imagines turning a corner and casually running into her. They talk for awhile before going back to one of their houses and making love. He is not sure exactly what he would say, but he guesses, or hopes, that the words would come if the situation were ever to arise.

Chapter 5:

Philip Dean arrives in Autun unexpectedly. He shyly asks if it would be a bother for him to stay for awhile and the narrator assures him that it is not a problem. They take a ride in Philip's car, a very fancy, expensive, and fast car that attracts a lot of attention. They stop at a cafe and have a few drinks. Dean sheepishly admits that he does not have a lot of money but the narrator, who is generous, wealthy, or both, tells him not to worry about that. They head back to Autun and have dinner at the hotel where Claude Picquet works. The narrator watches her and notes her attractive, feminine figure. He has learned that she is a divorcee; her husband left her for another woman. The narrator and Philip talk freely over dinner; the two do not really know each other yet. Philip was once enrolled at Yale but wound up quitting because he found it too boring and easy. He is, evidently, an incredibly bright man and his rebellious, free spirit makes the narrator feel a bit of regret over how practically he has lived his own life.

Chapter 6:

Philip stays in Autun for sometime and the two of them travel extensively. The narrator recalls one time when they went to a cafe and Dean showed obvious signs of being attracted to the waitress. Though she gives no so sign of interest, the narrator encourages Philip and tells him that she likes him.

Chapter 7:

They have dinner with the Jobses, some friends of Billy. The wife remarks that Philip looks like some B-list French actor he has never heard of, though evidently the comparison is a compliment. Henri, the husband, is originally from Lyons and now works in a glove factory in Autun as a manager, a position of some importance. After dinner, they show the narrator and Philip some slides of their recent visit to Austria. This goes on for some time and the narrator becomes rather bored and senses that Philip is, too. He imagines that if Philip went on a trip, he would not do it this way. He is not sure whom Philip would take, but he knows he would travel with someone. Perhaps he would take some prostitute he met in Paris who got along well with and who was impressionable enough to do exactly what he said. After they leave the house, around eleven in the evening, they decide to go to Dijon, the nearest major city. On the way to the car, Philip mentions that he feels sorry for Madame Jobs; he thinks that she is trapped in a dull, confining relationship to a very normal and boring man. The narrator remarks, half-joking, that maybe she needs Philip and points out how flirtatious it was when she compared him to a film star. They arrive in Dijon after a long trip in the foggy night. They go to a bar and sit by themselves watching the people dance and socialize. The narrator notes a group of black, American soldiers flirting with a very young French girl wearing a skimpy dress. He does not think poorly of black men and, indeed, notes that he has heard many good things about them. The girl goes off with a group of the men. They leave Dijon very late at night and the drive back takes hours for the darkness and the fog have only gotten worse.

Chapter 8:

The narrator sees Claude frequently but rarely gets to talk to her; it is difficult to have a conversation while she is working. That does not stop him from fantasizing about her, though. He comes back from the cafe one day and Dean informs him that he has a surprise. They go out to a restaurant with the girl they saw with the black men in Dijon who names is Anne-Marie. Apparently, she and Dean are seeing one another now. Afterward, they drop her off at her apartment. Dean is reluctant to talk much about her and the narrator guesses that it is because he is afraid what he might be asked. The chapter is closed with a description of a scene in the Ann-Marie's bedroom; it is unclear whether the event actually happened or the narrator simply imagined it. The girl is standing by the heater waiting for her pajamas to warm. When they are done, she takes off her shirt and Dean pulls her towards him, kissing him. She pulls herself away, dresses and gets into bed. Dean leaves.

Chapters 4 - 8 Analysis

One of the most interesting parts of this chapter is the paragraph found on page 47. The narrator discusses the inconsistency of memory. Some things he remembers as they were but many things are altered and interpreted by what happens later. Memory is not a direct result, in other words, of what actually happens, but the product also of one's own beliefs and psychology. Obviously, such a statement is a crucial interpretive key for now the reader must constantly be reading the narrator's psychology into the depiction

of events. Given that it precedes the introduction of Anne-Marie as Dean's lover, the depiction of those events should be especially scrutinized.

Indeed, already the narrator's attitude towards Dean, and to some extent his relationship with Anne-Marie, has already been introduced into the text in some noteworthy ways. The narrator, for one, seems to truly admire Dean. Dean is obviously a very brilliant man but perhaps what attracts the narrator the most is unconventional Dean is. Leaving Yale would seem like insanity, or at least idiocy, to most people, but Dean does not seem to really care about doing what is normal and expected. He lives how he sees fit and the narrator laments that he never had the courage to do the same thing. It is probably in part because of this admiration that the narrator decides to be completely honest with Dean. For one, he respects Dean but he also doubts whether his lies would have the intended effect on him. Dean is too smart and suspicious to be easily fooled and the narrator realizes that.

These chapters also highlight a pattern already seen in the first three: how carnal the narrator's descriptions are. Almost every female he encounters is described in sexual terms. For example, he talks about Maria Beneduce's breasts beneath her sweater in chapter three; he talks at length about his sexual fantasies involving Claude Picquet. He describes the dress of the anonymous waiter in chapter six as dividing her into two "erotic zones." Though it is ambiguous, it is probably not gratuitous to think the depiction of Anne-Marie and Dean in her bedroom is a daydream—perhaps a fantasy—of the narrator; after all, he could not know possibly know what happened there, a fact which he seems to lament when he mentions that her room is a "room I am never to visit" (50). There is perhaps an element of misogyny in this pervasive sexualization, for women become reduced to sexual objects and little more.

Chapters 9 - 12

Chapters 9 - 12 Summary

Chapter 9:

The narrator explains the sources for his stories about Dean and Anne-Marie. He sees himself as a kind of collector of information. Some he gets through direct conversation; some he gets through less direct routes; some is even his own imagination. It is impossible to sort out what is what and, he says, it is in some sense not important. Dean and Anne-Marie plan a trip in Paris together. He picks her up from her house and, when she gets in, she informs him that she has told her father "everything." He told her just to be careful. When they arrive they shower together. Dean notices that she has some red blemishes on her back and assures her that they will go away if she washes enough. After the shower they have sex. Dean leaves the next day to visit his father who lives in the city. He begs for money but refuses to say what he needs it for. His father asks him to come with him to dinner first but Dean declines and, once again, refuses to explain himself. His father capitulates and Dean, money in hand, goes back to the hotel. Before they have sex, he reaches for a condom but she tells him that he does not need one. They have sex and she bleeds but hides the towel she used to clean herself up. Dean finds it later. When Dean returns, he tells the narrator some, but not all, of the details, but the narrator is almost too distracted too listen. He is enthralled that Dean would trust him so much to tell him such things.

Chapter 10:

The narrator's thoughts continue to revolve around Dean and Anne-Marie even when he tries to think of other things. He seems to be able to sense something different about Dean after he has made love to Anne-Marie.

Chapter 11:

Dean and Anne-Marie have made plans—wildly impractical, perhaps—about a home they will buy together in the future. Anne-Marie is starting to have doubts about the relationship, though, and wonder if Dean really takes it seriously. He has little to say to her expressed anxieties but tries to deny that he plans to ever leave her. During dinner, Anne-Marie invents a childish story about the origin of crayfish which Dean at least pretends to listen to attentively. Afterward, they return to their hotel and make love several times. While she is bathing, he roughly scrubs her back where the red blemishes are.

Chapter 12:

Dean is starting to get bored with Anne-Marie. He is weary of speaking French and her English is beginning to grate him. Besides, nothing she says ever interests him anyway.

Now winter, the narrator spends almost every day at the cafe at which Claude works. He brings his camera—he is an amateur photographer—and discreetly takes pictures of patrons and passersby. He returns to Paris and gets together with Cristina and Billy. Their relationship, apparently, is going through a rough period and Cristina openly complains about how little sex they are having. Cristina has taken up painting again, a hobby she was forced to give up when she married her first husband. She is taking painting classes with Isabel, though, at least in Cristina's opinion, she is not very talented. Billy and Cristina get into a fight after dinner. Billy wants to go dancing but Cristina thinks that it is stupid and unfashionable. Instead, they wind up going to a dark little bar—which the narrator refers to as a "cave" (72)—where, in the din music, Cristina tells the narrator once again that she is the only friend of Billy's that she likes. She tells him she ought to be a painter and says it is not so different from photography. He argues that it is, because photography does not change what is being captured, but she objects. They go back to the Wheatlands' home and sleep.

Chapters 9 - 12 Analysis

The fact that the narrator is a photographer, at least in his spare time, is a highly significant fact. It is both fitting and perhaps even symbolic of his personality and role in the story. He is an observer, a passive gatherer of facts. This is especially true in his almost perverse interest in Dean and his lover, but his curiosity has been present even since the opening chapter when he analyzed the appearance and demeanor of the birth-marked girl on the train. As Cristina points out, photography is not an entirely objective art; the photographer has as much artistic liberty as a painter does. This is because the photographer both chooses his subject and how to portray it—from which angle, which object to foreground, and so on. In the same way, though ostensibly an objective narrator of events, it is important to realize that everything in the story is inextricably linked with his own psychology and desires. This is especially true of Dean's relationship with Anne-Marie which, as has been noted, is strangely interesting to him.

Chapters 13 - 17

Chapters 13 - 17 Summary

Chapter 13:

Dean meets Anne-Marie's friend, Danielle. They have a brief lunch together and during most of it Anne-Marie and Danielle speak to each other in French and Dean does not pay attention. He is annoyed by Danielle because she is a tangible reminder that she has a life outside of her relationship with him. Danielle leaves and the two go Anne-Marie's room and climb into bed, naked, with each other. Anne-Marie compliments him on his hair, but he does not care. Dean was not Anne-Marie's first lover; though she was very young when they met, she had already been with several men. Though she has not told him, Dean knows he is not the first but does not think much about it. He, too, is not what he seems. He is perhaps not even what he seems to be to himself. Life was once very easy for him: He was the student who knew everything and could pass any test. Now, everything is uncertain, ambiguous. His mother committed suicide when he was very young. Her suicide was an example, and not a very good one, of commitment and dealing with adversity; as a result, he is a wanderer, going from place to place with no plan or direction. His father tries to make him be more practical, but it is useless. This time of wandering is inevitably followed by the time of uncertainty, the stage into which he is now entering. The third stage which comes at the end—which, perhaps, he will die before he ever sees—is the stage of escape, wherein one abandons the world when it becomes too much to bear. Dean does not know where he is headed, though, at least not yet. He plunges himself back into the body of Anne-Marie and, for the moment, everything seems right and good.

Chapter 14:

Dean and Anne-Marie are driving and get pulled over for driving on the wrong side of the road. Dean feigns not speaking French and gets off with just a warning. They go back to their hotel and Anne-Marie wants to go shopping. Dean says it is too cold but, after complaining, acquiesces. He buys her a pull-over and is annoyed when it turns out to be more expensive than he thought. They go to their room, make love and go to sleep.

Chapter 15:

Anne-Marie, who was conceived only after much difficulty, was born in 1944, during the last years of the war. Her father left her mother before Anne-Marie was born but they remain on good terms. He moved to Scandinavia and re-married. Anne-Marie's mother sometimes takes care of their son. In her armoire, behind a family portrait, Anne-Marie keeps a box with her savings in it. It is not much, but the narrator is shocked by the fact that, if Dean asked for it, she would probably give it to him. He feels almost as if he ought to intervene and warn her, but he is uncertain whether Dean would ever ask such

a thing. They see each other almost everyday now. One night, Philip is almost asleep in bed but she wants to have sex. She climbs on top of him but he warns her that he will have trouble getting an erection when he is this tired, but they make love anyway.

Chapter 16:

Dean and Anne-Marie go out to dinner. A group of three people—a man, his wife, and his mother, probably—are seated near them and captivate Dean's attention. Anne-Marie is confused and the dinner passes silently and awkwardly. Afterward, he gets annoyed with her for ordering more food than she can eat. After they leave, she gets sick and throws up. She is recovered by the next morning and they have sex. After seeing a movie, they take a walk along the river. He is absorbed by the thought of his future and decides that he does not want to marry her, but the question of what he would do if she became pregnant haunts him.

Chapter 17:

Dean takes a job as an English tutor for the Jobses. It gives him enough money to get away on the weekends with Anne-Marie, weekends filled with sex, as usual. The narrator interjects himself briefly and wonders aloud whether he could have possibly had Anne-Marie, but then dismisses the analysis halfway through because he thinks he is just fooling himself. He fantasizes about her body and how she looked when he first saw her in Lyons. At the same time, he curses her, claiming that his lust for her makes him miserable. He wishes he could be more comfortable in solitude a state which, he thinks, is ultimately superior to being with another person, even if it is more difficult at first. For the moment, though, he is going through a period of tribulation and finds himself constantly haunted by thinking, examining, and analyzing everything Dean and Anne-Marie do. Dean and Anne-Marie, on one such weekend, plan a road trip somewhere. She is on her period and asks Dean to stop so she can fix her tampon.

Chapters 13 - 17 Analysis

These chapters help illuminate the motivation behind the narrator's obsession with Dean and Anne-Marie. It would not be entirely correct to simply say that it is the result of loneliness, for that would imply that the narrator was actively looking for a companion but simply always failed. In fact, the narrator seems to be committed to the idea that being alone is superior to being with someone else. The misogynistic undertones that have been expressed in the novel so far, particularly his crude sexualization of almost every woman he comes across, are likely a part of this. However, it is also seems that he is incredibly arrogant and elitist. He thinks most, though not all, people are completely beneath him and, therefore, it is no wonder that he would want to be alone; there is no one worthy of his company.

This attitude is heavily projected onto Dean's relationship. Dean does not really value Anne-Marie as a person or anything more than a body to have sex with. This attitude is seen rather starkly in the blatant contrast between how he acts and feels when they are

having sex and when they are not having sex. When they are in public, he is cold, annoyed, and even mean to her. His mind is filled with all kinds of unpleasant thoughts about her and he secretly dreads the prospect of her getting pregnant, for it would probably mean some kind of commitment to her. Yet, when they are having sex, all of these problems go away and suddenly "[t]here is nothing about her he does not adore" (79). To what extent these attitudes really characterized Dean and to what extent they characterize the narrator's invented version of him is unknown and, indeed, intentionally unknowable.

Chapters 18 - 23

Chapters 18 - 23 Summary

Chapter 18:

While Anne-Marie gets ready to go out, Dean pages through one of her magazines and complains that she should not read such things. She agrees and says that she should perhaps read books instead and mentions that she has read Proust, a French writer popular among intellectuals. Dean is surprised and hesitant to believe her. He tells her to wear less lipstick and they go to a shop to purchase a bra for her. Dean feels a little awkward, for he is the only man in the store. She takes him into the changing room with her and tries on several in front of him, leaving it up to him to determine which is the best. They go back to their room and, after she changes into her new clothes, she performs oral sex on him for the first time.

Chapter 19:

One afternoon they are walking around together and talk about the various ways to have sex. Dean tries to casually bring up the subject of anal sex, something they have not tried before. She fears that it will hurt but says that they can try it. When they return to their room, they engage in some sexual replay: She is the secretary and he is the boss. Both remark afterward that it was the best sex they have ever had.

Chapter 20:

The narrator is engaged in the rather immense undertaking of trying to document everything about the town. His focus is not so much on the inhabitants but on the structures and the landscape, the aspects of Autun which will last the longest. He notes, with some disappointment, that he will not be able to watch Claude Picquet swim during the winter. He has heard that she is engaged to marry, a fact which he regards, more or less, with indifference, even relief: If she has been seeing someone all along, he cannot take his failure with her personally.

Meanwhile, Anne-Marie has gone to the store while Dean is still sleeping. He is not dreaming, for a man like him does not dream or, if he does, his dreams are what constitute his reality. Dean has the incredible ability to extend his dreams for as long as he wants. "Duration is everything," the narrator notes, but duration means two different things for each of the lovers. Anne-Marie is only happy insofar as she believes this love is just the beginning; she looks forward to a long, marital bliss. Dean, on the other hand, sees every passing minute as another step towards the inevitable end. Another night, after going out during the day and returning early, they have sex. She goes out into the hallway of the hotel wearing only her underwear. Dean protests but she ignores him. When she returns she starts to fondle him and he asks her, rather abruptly, if she has

ever considered going to America. She is taken aback but says that she has. He thinks to himself that that is what they will do and starts to plan their new life in his head.

Chapter 21:

Dean and Anne-Marie are having lunch in a cafe when a car full of black American soldiers pass by. The narrator imagines one of them getting out, angrily approaching the couple to demand his lover back, but it does not happen. Dean and Anne-Marie go back to her apartment and pass some young, Corsican boys on the way back, who, Anne-Marie remarks, are quite handsome. Dean has sheepishly smuggled some lubricant with him to the room. They have anal sex for the first time and both seem to enjoy it quite a bit.

Chapter 22:

They have entered a new stage in their relationship, the narrator remarks; they are now lovers. Anne-Marie is eager to please him in whatever way he likes but he seems reluctant to say exactly what he wants. Dean is starting to get very attached to her and is frightened by the prospect of being without her. At least part of this attachment is due to her total submission to him, a subordination which delights him. She asks him to meet her mother and he reluctantly accepts.

Chapter 23:

Dinner with Anne-Marie's parents is unsurprisingly awkward. Dean is silent for most of it, as if her step-father. Anne-Marie and her mother talk in French most of the time and Dean constantly assures them that he understands what they are saying, but they speak too quickly. He desperately avoids making eye contact with her solemn step-father. The next day they meet the narrator for dinner. This time, Anne-Marie is the quiet one while Dean, much more at ease, drinks and talks freely. The narrator mainly listens and tries to understand Anne-Marie's captivating sexuality. Anne-Marie then decides to compare herself aloud with other women in the restaurant. Dean agrees that she is prettier than them and asks her whether she thinks each one has sex.

Chapters 18 - 23 Analysis

The nature of Dean's attraction to Anne-Marie seems to center around domination. He does not really love her for who she is. He, indeed, frequently finds himself annoyed with or even revolted by her, like when he finds her cheap magazine and complains about her reading something so pedestrian. It is probably safe to assume that her claim to have read Proust is made up to impress him. Ultimately, though, he does not care because she is someone who loves him so much that she is willing to completely subordinate herself to him and do whatever he wants. He sees her as a work-in-progress that can gradually be molded into the person he wants; this process is symbolized by how he scrubs her back trying to erase the ugly, red bumps. There does seem to be some vague premonition in him that such a relationship will not ultimately work out and yet he finds himself become more and more attached to her. Things seem

to be getting out of control and it is difficult to see how they can be resolved in any way that makes both parties happy. She will be satisfied with nothing but marriage and he sees them racing towards some inevitable end. Dean's aversion to commitment is partly due to the fact that he does not really love her—what would be left for him when she becomes old and loses her beauty?—but there is probably just a general reluctant towards commitment, too, a lingering effect of his mother's traumatic suicide.

Chapters 24 - 27

Chapters 24 - 27 Summary

Chapter 24:

Dean and Anne-Marie get a room at a castle-turned-hotel in a small village named Prangey. While they make love, Dean watches other hotel guests through the window. Afterward, they go to Dijon and dance at the nightclub where he first saw her. The narrator is surprised that she would be willing to do such a thing, for he imagines that she would want to avoid the past. They go back to their room and, before making love, Dean admires himself naked in the mirror.

Chapter 25:

The narrator looks over some excerpts from one of Dean's diaries. It is a list of cities, potential places he and Anne-Marie might spend the summer. They decide, ultimately, to drive across the countryside. Before they leave, Anne-Marie visits her mother who is doubtful about her daughter's relationship. She is worried that it will not last but Anne-Marie, blinded by love, will not listen. On their summer road trip the couple stops at a theater where they see a performance by a woman who purports to be a mind-reader. She answers questions—two francs each—of anyone in the audience. Anne-Marie tries to ask a question but the mind-reader just tells her what month she was born in and moves onto the next person. They try to figure out her trick by examining one of the letters she uses—they stole it from a basket—but are unable to crack the code. They go back to their hotel and have anal sex again and, once again, both enjoy it tremendously. The narrator remarks that this moment, and moments like it, frequently came to mind after Dean died, though he does not explain why.

Chapter 26:

The narrator is back in Paris with Cristina and Billy. They want to introduce him to their friend, Alix. All three are trying to figure out why he spends so much time in Autun and Alix coyly concludes that it must be a woman. He insists that it is not, though he is a bit embarrassed to be single. They return to Billy and Cristina's house. The narrator helps Billy make eggs but no one really wants to eat any since they are brown and rancid. Billy insists that there is nothing wrong with them, though, and is annoyed when anyone suggests otherwise. The narrator rides in a taxi with Alix back to her apartment, but just to drop her off. After she is inside, he walks home by himself.

Chapter 27:

The narrator struggles to free himself from thoughts about Dean and Anne-Marie. As he imagines them playing with one another in bed, he reflects on how much of an outsider is, how he seems so distant from their intimacy, an intensely uncomfortable feeling. Dean and Anne-Marie drive to the countryside to go swimming. On the way, they pass

the wreckage of a serious car accident. A Citroen collided with a motorcycle; blood streaks the pavement. They reach the lake and get in. Anne-Marie stays in the shallow end because she cannot swim. She asks Dean to teach her but changes her mind when he tells her that she needs to get her wet. Dean is annoyed by her disobedience and they walk through the woods in silent. She mentions that she would like to have sex in the woods sometime. He says okay and mentions that he has done it before; it is quite nice, he says. She asks if she likes to fish and he says that it is cruel. She objects that the fish will probably get eaten anyway by other fish. Dean says that if he were a fish, he would be one of the predators and would avoid ever getting caught. She says if that were so, then she would be his companion. This pleases Dean and he gets over being annoyed with her. They go back to their hotel and as they make love, Dean wishes he could slow down time so he could better savor these last moments of their affair.

Chapters 24 - 27 Analysis

The story is subtly coming to its conclusion. The narrator has been gradually foreshadowing the inevitable end to their relationship but in chapter twenty-five he announces a new, shocking detail: Dean will die. It is interesting that he mentions death in connection with the couple having anal sex. That particular sexual act seems to be the most intense, for both of them. It is likely that he associates Dean's death with those moments of intense passion because he sees death as the ultimate and fitting conclusion of a life so recklessly dedicated to lust. Dean has no plans—for anything. He has no job or ambition to have one and he has no idea what he is going to do with Anne-Marie. He stays with her only to satisfy his pride and his sexual appetites and cannot pull himself away even as it becomes increasingly clear that their relationship cannot be sustained. He is like a match that burns violently for a few moments but must ultimately die out.

The narrator's interaction with the Wheatlands' and Alix help clarify his psychology. Though it has been obvious that he has been lonely all along—he has said as much—he has generally dismissed it as merely a difficult phase as he adjusts to his life of solitude. In chapter-twenty six, though, the fact that he is single is a source of embarrassment. One must wonder whether all of his talk about the superiority of being alone is simply a psychological delusion to help him cope with his inability, or at least perceived inability, to attract women. One has seen a similar defense mechanism already, namely, when he diminishes the significance of Claude Picquet's engagement. His interaction with Alix does seem to imply a desire to be with a woman; though he does not admit it openly, it certainly appears that he is frustrated that he is not able to more effectively engage her in conversation.

Chapters 28 - 31

Chapters 28 - 31 Summary

Chapter 28:

Dean and Anne-Marie go to a festival but it is canceled on account of rain. They wait inside a cafe to see if the rain will let up. With them is a sad acrobat, dressed in his garish clothing. They finally give up and drive back to their hotel. On the way back, Dean gets a sharp feeling that everything is going to come to an end, that someone will "find" him and take him away. The feeling lingers all the way back to the hotel and even persists while they have sex. In the morning, they have anal sex during which Anne-Marie reads a magazine.

Chapter 29:

The narrator spends some time with Anne-Marie while Dean is in Paris visiting his sister. It is a little awkward for the narrator; he never knows what to say and what he feels is far more than what he can express. She is worried that Dean's father and sister will not like her but the narrator—basing his opinion on nothing—assures her they will. She tells a joke about the prudishness of the English which the narrator finds amusing.

In Paris, meanwhile, Amy, Dean's sister, is trying to relay some messages from their father. She wants Dean to turn his life around and become more directed. He claims that he is, that he finally knows what he is going to do, but she is skeptical. She tells him that their father told her not to give him any money and he lies and insists that he does not need any; in fact, money is the only reason for his visit. They go out to dinner and Dean insists on paying even though the bill takes everything he has. When they return, he reveals that he does, in fact, need money—three hundred and fifty francs to be exist. She is reluctant to give him anything and she only has one hundred francs anyway. He convinces her to borrow the rest from Donna and takes the hundred francs she has. He drives back to Autun where Anne-Marie is waiting for him.

Chapter 30:

Now married, Dean and Anne-Marie drive to Angers and go on a tour. They pass by a road where Protestants were executed by hanging. Anne-Marie is revolted and Dean jokes, saying that he wishes he had been there to see it. They find a small hotel and get a room. As Dean lays in bed, he anxiously calculates his uncertain finances in his head. He only barely has enough money to cover their planned expenses. After dinner, they stroll along shop windows and look at refrigerators. Oblivious of their dire financial situation, Anne-Marie idly remarks on what refrigerator she would like for their new house. Dean looks at the price tags with horrors and tries to hurry away from them. They go dancing instead. When they get back to the hotel, Dean does not want to have sex but she insists; it is the first night of their marriage. He submits and it is not

particularly enjoyable for either of them, but she goes through with it almost as if she were administering medicine. In the morning, she kisses his penis and says that it is hers now.

Chapter 31:

The couple gets a hotel room somewhere along the coast of France, a room too expensive for their tight budget. At dinner, Anne-Marie sees a family next to them and starts to plan aloud their first child's life, his name, where he will go to school, and so on. Dean provides only limited input. After sunbathing on the beach, they return to their room and make love. Her period is coming soon, she tells him. Their last few days at the hotel are spent in exactly the same way; they eat three times a day and have frequent sex. When the vacation is finally over, they pack their bags and drive away.

Chapters 28 - 31 Analysis

Though Dean has a strong premonition that everything is coming to an end, they get married. It is probably a desperate measure on his part; he hopes marriage will somehow salvage a relationship that has been dying for sometime. Of course, it is difficult to think such an imprudent and hasty decision can have any good outcome, but Dean, of course, is not characterized by long-term thinking or responsibility. Indeed, his incredible short-sightedness is finally starting to catch up with him. He is on the verge of financial ruin though tells nothing to Anne-Marie, probably because he is unwilling to diminish his status in her eyes. She sees him as a great, invulnerable man who is always in control; of course, she is only in love with an illusion.

Chapters 32 - 37

Chapters 32 - 37 Summary

Chapter 32:

Dean and Anne-Marie are now driving in the night trying to figure out where to go next. They stop at a restaurant, intending to keep going, but the meal takes so long that they just stay at the adjoining hotel. After a movie, they make love in their hotel room, but Dean is still struggling with his strange premonitions of doom. Reality seems to be unraveling for him. They fall asleep during intercourse.

Chapter 33:

They return to Autun on Sunday. The narrator finds Dean in the house. He notes how much tanner Dean has become. He listens to an account of the whole trip and Dean's tone almost makes it sound like a confession. Dean plans on going back to America soon. He has thought about the direction his life is going, he says, and has decided that he wants to go back to school. Unfortunately, he cannot afford the money and the narrator, reluctant at first, supplies it. He assures him that he will be back soon to pay it back, a promise which, the narrator notes, contradicts his plans to finish college. The narrator says that he is surprised by this sudden decision and Dean infers that it is because of Anne-Marie; the narrator thought they were getting married. He says that he did think about it and is even still thinking about getting married. He leaves it at that and the two go get something to eat. On the way, they run into Anne-Marie.

Chapter 34:

Anne-Marie, now talking with Dean back in her room, does not believe that Dean will come back. Even when he swears on the head of his mother that he will send for her she retains her doubts. They nap together and, afterward, they undress and have sex. They then drive to her mother's house who is happy to see Dean; no one mentions that he will soon be leaving. When they return to her room, they make love as if for the first time. They lay quietly for awhile afterward and when he touches her face, he finds it is covered in tears.

Chapter 35:

The day has arrived for Dean's departure. He drops Anne-Marie off at work and they say their last goodbye. He returns to the Wheatland house and gathers his last, few things. The narrator goes with him to the train station and sees him off. He phones the narrator from Paris and promises to write a "long letter" (180) when he arrives in America. The narrator goes to dinner that night with the Jobses but passes by Anne-Marie's apartment first. He sees her walking awkwardly in high heels with a suitcase. The narrator's mind follows Dean as his plane takes off for America.

Chapter 36:

Some time after Dean's departure, Anne-Marie and the narrator meet at a cafe. Dean has been killed in a car accident back in America. The lunch is silent and awkward; neither knows what to say. Anne-Marie, unsurprisingly, is crushed. He asks her what she will do, but she does not not know. She thinks she will stay in Autun but he offers to help her travel somewhere else, like home, if she wants to. He asks her if she would like to meet for dinner, but she declines. He does not take this to mean that she will not come, though, for she knows that, at least with Dean, she was willing to do anything and go anywhere.

Chapter 37:

The narrator wanders around his apartment looking through the random reminder of Dean's time there. He finds the list of places to go that Dean and Anne-Marie had drawn up before their summer trip; only one of the names is in Anne-Marie's handwriting. He finds a letter she wrote for him which begs him to let her be his, even if he will not be hers. Dean's father sends him a letter asking for him to forward Dean's personal effects but Cristina Wheatland takes care of that. Dean's car sits outside the house, rusting. The narrator's life is now filled with silence, a void created by Dean's departure from the world. In a way, though, it as if Dean never died, inasmuch as Dean was a product of the narrator's own desires and imagination. Anne-Marie gets married and starts a family. She has that life which "we all agree is so greatly to be desired" (185).

Chapters 32 - 37 Analysis

Though Dean's death is the result of an accident and not directly related to his way of life, it is, in a certain sense, a natural part of the series of events which led up to it. Dean had no direction in his life; he had long ago forsaken any kind of normal path when he dropped out of Yale. While a reader might consider his life, from beginning to end, to be a tragedy, the narrator really does not see it that way. In fact, in Dean's rebelliousness—against the normal lifestyles society imposes upon its members—there is at least the appearance of power. There is a certain boldness in being able to live exactly how he wants without any regard for fitting in or conforming; the narrator wishes that he had that same boldness.

While Dean's story is, in many ways, an unhappy one, it would probably be wrong to conclude that the book, therefore, is a tacit endorsement of the normal way of life—even though the final sentence of the book states "we all" want the very typical life Anne-Marie has after Dean leaves. The normal way of living is certainly a safer and more stable way of living but it is probably not incorrect to sense a bit of elitism in the story. Dean's way of life is only possible for a particularly powerful and intelligent kind of man; someone like Anne-Marie, certainly, who is "not too intelligent" (182), could never aspire to the kind of greatness someone like Dean was able to. Indeed, they would never think such a thing is desirable, for they would judge his life from its consequences—they would see a life live continually on the verge of financial disaster, a life filled with

deception and manipulation, a life which is ultimately concerned only with the satisfaction of its own desires. Only someone like Dean—or, perhaps, the narrator—could "appreciate" that all of those mundane anxieties are nothing compared with the joy of being truly free.

Characters

Philip Dean

Philip Dean is an American whom the narrator first meets at a party in Paris with the Wheatlands. In the narrator's eye, Dean is an incredibly impressive character, almost a Nietzschean uebermensch. He lives free of all of society's norms and instead does what he likes when he likes. This attitude is summarized in his inconsistent academic career. He was smart enough to get into Yale and, indeed, the courses were even incredibly easy for him; in some cases, he could even take the courses final without ever having attended a single lecture. Its easiness made it boring for him and he took leave several times before finally dropping out for good. He moved to Paris where his rich father lived and enjoyed an itinerant, capricious lifestyle, moving from place to place without any direction or goal in mind. Part of his appeal to the narrator is his assertive willfulness: He does whatever he wants, even if it means treating other people poorly. As such, Dean is an incredibly exploitative and deceitful person though he generally manages to mask it with his disarming charisma.

Above anything else, the narrator is fascinated by Dean's relationship with Anne-Marie. In some ways, he lives vicariously through Dean's sexual exploits. The relationship is fundamentally and irreparably unequal. Anne-Marie is, more or less, a normal girl. She wants a man who loves her, a happy family, and a comfortable income. Dean, on the other hand, who feels himself superior to such mundane ambitions, is interested purely in domination. He wants to make Anne-Marie completely his but he wants to give nothing of himself in return. Dean knows such an unequal relationship cannot last long and thus it is characterized, especially towards the end, with a sense of impending doom.

The Narrator

The story's narrator, who remains anonymous throughout the novel, is mainly a passive force in the story's narrative. Even in the scenes where he is actually present—which is the minority—he tends to recede into the background and just watch and examine what others do. It is fitting, then, that he is an amateur photographer, an art which is ostensibly dedicated to just seeing things as they are.

As Cristina Wheatland points out, though, a photographer changes his subject as much as a painter does and such is true of his style of narration in general. He openly says at several points in the novel that his narration of what happens between Dean and Anne-Marie is as much a product of his own imagination and fantasies as it is reflective of reality. Indeed, it would be difficult for him to know a great deal, though there is the indication that he is willing to violate others' privacy in order to indulge his sometimes perverse curiosity. The narrator is an extremely carnal man. All of the women he meets are analyzed in terms of their sexual appeals and his descriptions of the sexual relations

between Anne-Marie and Dean are often quite graphic. However, it does not seem that his interest in the relationship is primarily sensual. He is attracted to Dean, but not in an erotic way; he admires the power expressed in Dean's bold denunciation of social norms. Dean is, in the narrator's mind, something greater than just an ordinary person. It is important to always keep in mind, though, that the Dean as depicted by the narrator is not necessarily the Dean that is supposed to actually exist. The narrator is strangely conscious of how he has invented much about Dean in order to fit him into his own idealized perception of the world.

Cristina Wheatland

Cristina Wheatland is one of the narrator's closest friends. She is married to Billy Wheatland.

Billy Wheatland

Billy Wheatland is a former hockey player. He owns the house the narrator uses in Autun.

Claude Picquet

Claude Picquet is a waitress in Autun whom the narrator finds attractive but never makes any serious attempt to woo. She winds up getting married.

Anne-Marie

Anne-Marie is a French girl the narrator and Dean first see at a night club in Dijon. Dean manages to find her again and the two have a passionate but ultimately dysfunctional relationship.

Isabel

Isabel is one of Cristina's friends. She goes out with the narrator, the Wheatlands, and Philip Dean after the party in the story's opening chapters.

Danielle

Danielle is one of Anne-Marie's friends. Her existence annoys Dean, who wants Anne-Marie to have nothing in her life except him.

Philip's Father

Philip's father is a wealthy, retired man living in Paris. He desperately wants his son to learn some discipline and follow a more practical path through life.

Amy Dean

Amy Dean is Philip Dean's sister. She echoes her father's concern about Philip's future but winds up enabling him by loaning him money.

Objects/Places

Paris

The story opens in Paris. The narrator and Dean both hate it because it is too crowded and, they think, not representative of the "real France."

Autun

Autun is a small French town. The narrator moves there from Paris.

The Wheatland House

The narrator moves into a house in Autun owned by the Wheatlands.

Dean's Car

Dean has a very expensive car. How exactly he came to possess it is unclear, though he says it is owned by a friend.

Dean and Anne-Marie's List of Hotels

Dean and Anne-Marie make a list of hotels to visit on their road trip. Anne-Marie makes only one contribution to the list, symbolic of her lack of power in the relationship.

America

Dean leaves Autun for America.

Yale

Dean is a Yale dropout.

Trains

Train is the most common form of long-distance transportation in France.

Dijon

Dijon is the only major city near Autun. While at a night club in Dijon, the narrator and Dean see Anne-Marie for the first time.

Angers

Angers is one of the several cities Dean and Anne-Marie visit on their road trip.

Themes

Dean as Dominator

The relationship between Dean and Anne-Marie, though certainly passionate, is ultimately dysfunctional because of the fundamental inequality which is at its root. Dean is, at least in the narrator's mind, a superior human being, a kind of Nietzschean superhuman who is above the fray of normal social conventions and morality. Anne-Marie, on the other hand, is an average girl whose life goals are incredibly normal. All she wants is to be in love and have a happy family. Dean, however, can hardly be satisfied by those things; he would likely scoff at them as mundane, something beneath him. However, he is a keen observer of others—a necessary tool for his manipulative behavior—and therefore he is all too willing to dangle the prospect of it in front of Anne-Marie in order to get what he wants: domination. Though an intensely sexual man, Dean's desire for Anne-Marie is not primarily physical. Rather, he wants to be with someone who will give herself completely to him and, at the same time, give nothing of himself in return. This very sentiment is recognized, to an extent, by Anne-Marie herself, as indicated in the letter the narrator finds in Chapter 37. Dean's attitude towards Anne-Marie is largely dictated by the extent to which he is successfully dominating her. When, for example, she refuses to get her hair wet when she is trying to swim, he becomes cold and even hostile towards her. On the other hand, when she submits to his sexual urges, especially his desire to engage in anal sex, his love and reverence for his nearly unlimited.

The Narrator's Fantasies

Throughout the story the reader must always keep in mind what the narrator himself mentions on several occasion: The story of Dean and Anne-Marie is an uncertain mixture of reality and the narrator's own imagination. Though he initially appears somewhat normal, it is clear that the narrator has a strange and even disturbed psychology; if one does not understand how his neuroses affect both the form and content of the story, the novel will be completely misunderstood.

At the root of the narrator's psychological issues is his failure with women. At several points in the novel, he finds himself attracted to this or that women but unable to do anything about. It seems to be a certain amount of shyness which keeps him back. The most clear failure of this sort is his lust for Claude Picquet, the waitress at one of the cafes in Autun. He does practically nothing to pursue her; at most, he engages her in polite conversation. She ultimately gets engaged and marries and the narrator tries to rationalize his failure by pointing out that if she was with someone then he would have been wasting his time pursuing her anyway. His psychological defense against his loneliness is his belief that being alone is, in principle, superior to being in a relationship. The pain he feels is, he says, merely a rough phase which, in time, will pass.

The narrator, in other words, feels that, at least as regards women, the world is out of control. It is no wonder, then, that he would be so attracted by Dean's character and particularly interested in Dean's relationship with Anne-Marie. Dean exercises a total control over Anne-Marie. As the narrator notes several times, she would do quite literally anything for him: If he asked for her life savings, she would hand it over. The narrator envies this kind of control because, at least unconsciously, he yearns for it but feels that he can never have it. Therefore, he invents Dean and his passionate affair with Anne-Marie as a kind of prolonged sexual fantasy.

Carnality and Misogyny

One of the most obvious, and perhaps more shocking, features of the novel is its frequent use of graphic depictions of sexual acts. Salter makes no attempt to tone down or whitewash the act and he even freely uses various slang words such as "fuck" and "prick" to describe the scenes. These scenes are, however, not at all gratuitous but indeed give the reader much needed insight into the psychology of the story's narrator.

As the narrator himself frequently eludes to, the story is largely influenced by his own psychology—he says as much, for example, on page 47. At the heart of his psychological problems is his sexual frustration. He is very unsuccessful with women; an almost oppressive shyness holds him back from pursuing Claude Picquet, for example, despite how attractive he finds her. A symptom of this sexual frustration is an over-sexualization of the world around him. Nearly every female character in the story is analyzed in terms of her physical attractiveness. In chapter 3, for example, he remarks on the way Maria Beneduce's breasts move under her knit sweater. In chapter 5, he describes, at length, what exactly he finds attractive about Claude Picquet. In chapter 6, he describes an anonymous waitress' dress as dividing her into "two erotic zones." Of course, his depictions of the sexual relations between Dean and Anne-Marie are often quite graphic.

The effect of all of this is a kind of misogyny. Women are reduced to nothing more than their sexual beauty. This is a logical consequence of his frustration with him: The narrator lashes out at the feminine sex for rejecting him—that is, he perceives that he is rejected—by devaluing everything about them accept how they can satisfy his most basic, biological needs. It would be incorrect, one must note, to attribute this misogyny to Salter himself, though, for he makes it quite explicit that the narrator is a character in his own right, quite independent from the author.

Style

Point of View

The story is told in the first-person perspective, usually in the present tense. (Past-tense is used to differentiate what happened prior to the "present" of the story, even though the entire story, seemingly, is told some time after Dean's death.) The narrator, though anonymous, is a vitally important part of the story. As he himself says explicitly on several occasions (cf. 47) the story is a product both of actual facts and of his own fantasies. Therefore, the story is as much of a reflection of the narrator himself as the characters involved.

The narrator's fascination with Dean—and, therefore, the impetus for the entire story—stems from his frustration with women. He is a shy, lonely man who feels powerless when it comes to women. Dean, on the other hand, at least the version of Dean that he has invented, is a symbol of sexual power. The narrator fantasizes about having a relationship like Dean has with Anne-Marie, one in which he has total control and can make the woman do whatever he likes. His sexual frustration is expressed in the several rather graphic sexual scenes that permeate the book; indeed, hardly a chapter goes by that does not involve the Dean and Anne-Marie engaging in some kind of sexual act.

Setting

The entire story takes place in France. As it opens, the narrator and Philip Dean are both living in Paris, though neither of them particularly likes the city. It is too busy and too artificial; it is not, as they say, the "real France." It is for this reason that the narrator goes to Autun, a small town in the French countryside, several miles outside of Dijon. The population of Autun is probably around 20,000—the narrator objects when Billy Wheatland says it is only 15,000—and its main source of employment are its several factories.

The narrator's decision to move to Autun is puzzling to his friends. The Wheatlands, wealthy American socialites living in Paris, cannot imagine why someone would want to move to such a quaint, boring town. The narrator, though, is a bit of a loner and even if he is not uncomfortable in social situations, he at least does not seem to particularly care for them. Autun, then, is a refuge from the crowded streets and constant social interaction represented by Paris. Indeed, when he moves there, he makes little attempt to know anyone; before Dean arrives, it seems as if he really only knows the Jobses and does not even particularly like them.

Dean's motive for moving to Autun is probably a bit different. It might be wrong to even say that he has any particular motive; Dean seems to just go wherever he feels like. He

knows he can impose himself upon the narrator and so he drives there unannounced, naturally using a car he borrowed from a friend.

Language and Meaning

The novel's language is, in many ways, indicative of the literary period in which it was published, the 1960s. For one, his sentence structure shows that he is not beholden to the typical grammatical and literary conditions which were a strictly enforced orthodoxy until well into the 20th century. For example, he makes frequent use of short, staccato sentence fragments to achieve certain emotional and thematic effects. Though the story is basically linear and chronological, the flow of time is unclear from one scene to the next. The effect of this is that the story seems to pass almost drunkenly—one moment passes into another, the reader not understanding how one thing leads to the next—an appropriate tone for a story about a passionate and irresponsible love affair.

Salter's graphic sexual descriptions also clearly show that the work was conceived in the late 20th century. Prior to the sexual revolution of the 1960s, such language would be considered probably obscene and it is unlikely such a work could be published; indeed, even in the more permissive atmosphere of the 1960s, the novel caused quite a bit of controversy.

Structure

The book is divided into thirty-seven short chapters. There is no particular formula by which Salter differentiates the content of one chapter from another. Often he includes only a single scene or day in a chapter but there are several exceptions to that.

The book is arranged in a more or less chronological order, though the passage of time is intentionally obscured in order to make the relationship between Dean and Anne-Marie pass by in an almost drunken state, in which the reader loses track of what is happening when and why. Indeed, many of the scenes between them could be rearranged without introducing any inconsistency into the story. This is largely because in many of the scenes, nothing really new happens; frequently, they just go out, come back to their hotel, and have sex.

As the events are narrated, the narrator himself occasionally interjects his own reflections and, more rarely, mentions what happens later, as when he foreshadows Dean's death in 25. The narrator's tangents in the book are important for understanding the significance of the events. In a certain sense, the book is really only about the narrator; Dean and his relationship are to a large extent—as the narrator himself even admits—a product of the narrator's own disturbed fantasies.

Quotes

"These are notes to photographs of Autun. It would be better to say they began as notes but became something else, a description of what I conceive to be events. They were meant for me alone, but I no longer hide them. Those times are past." (11)

"His wife is a lynx. Even from across the room she imposes her assurance, her slow smiles. She's a friend of Cristina's. I know her from afternoons on the boulevard. I see her leaving cafes. She favors knit suits, her breasts moving softly within them, but I don't think she meets men." (17)

"Finally we emerge at the roaring, iron galleries where meat is handled. It's like coming upon a factory in the darkness. The overhead lights are blazing. The smell of carnage is everywhere, the very metal reeks with an odor denser than flowers. On the sidewalk there are wheelbarrows of slaughtered heads. It's right out of Franju and that famous work which literally steams of it. We stare down at the dumb victims. There are scores of them. The mouths are pink, the nostrils still moist. Worn knives with the edge of a razor have flensed them while their eyes were still fluttering, the huge, eloquent eyes of young calves." (21)

"He [Dean] describes it [dropping out of Yale] casually, without stooping to explain, but the authority of the act overwhelms me. If I had been an underclassmen he would have become my hero, the rebel who, if I had only had the courage, I might have also become. Instead I did everything properly." (33)

"I see myself as an agent provocateur or as a double agent, first on one side—that of truth—and then on the other, but between these, in the reversals, the sudden defections, one can easily forget allegiance entirely and feel only the deep, the profound joy of being beyond all codes, of being completely independent, criminal is the word." (51)

"When she is in the tub, he begins to scrub her back. She complains. It's too hard. . . . He runs his fingertips lightly over the skin. 'It looks better,' he says." (65)

"I am not telling the truth about Dean, I am inventing him. I am creating him out of my own inadequacies, you must always remember that." (79)

"Solitude. One knows instinctively it has benefits that must be more deeply satisfying than those of other conditions, but still it is difficult. And besides, how is one to distinguish between conditions which are valuable, which despite their hatefulness give us strength or impel us to great things and others we would be far better free of? Which are precious and which are not? Why is it so hard to be happy alone? Why is it impossible? Why, whenever I am idle, sometimes even before, in the midst of doing something, do I slowly but inevitably become subject to the power of their acts." (94)

"A feast of love is beginning. Everything that has gone before is only a sort of introduction. Now they are lovers. The first, wild courses are ended. They have founded their domain. A satanic happiness follows." (113)

"They've asked her to dinner because of me. I'm uncertain how to take her though. She's beautifully dressed in a blue silk suit and she seems to be completely unaffected by my presence. At first, in fact, she ignored me, but her attention is worse." (131)

"The more clearly one sees this world, the more one is obliged to pretend it does not exist. It was strange how I found myself almost completely silent when I was with her." (148)

"In the back of a drawer I find the lost portion of the list they made in Nancy, names of hotels. It fits the other piece exactly. On it, the curious, dead words: Obelisk. Suez. Tous les Oiseaux du Monde. There is just one in her writing: Ritz." (184)

Topics for Discussion

Explain the role the narrator's psychology plays in the telling of the story.

Why does Salter leave the narrator anonymous?

Explain the narrator's relationship with women.

Why does the narrator admire Philip Dean so much?

Why does Philip Dean like Anne-Marie? What does he get from the relationship?

Why does the narrator say Philip Dean's death in a car accident is "expected?"

Why does the narrator want to move to Autun in the first place?