

Sabbath's Theater Study Guide

Sabbath's Theater by Philip Roth

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Plot Summary

Sabbath's Theater tells the story of aging puppet master Mickey Sabbath, who embarks in search of a suitable ending for his ignominious life's story. Sabbath, at age sixty-four, finds himself dispossessed of his job, his home and his wife through a series of poor choices driven by his aggressive libido and thirst for revenge. Sabbath sees life from the perspective of an author writing a black comedy. He takes nothing seriously. He chooses each action and word for its shock value, which Sabbath finds immensely entertaining. He sees life as a big show and himself as the puppet master pulling the strings. The purpose of his act is to shock and entertain, but he considers the misery of others entertaining. His purpose is to put on a show and he doesn't consider the pain he causes.

The turning point that propels Sabbath to write the conclusion of his own life comes when his beloved mistress of thirteen years, Drenka Balich, dies from cancer at age fifty-two. Drenka was the one woman of whom Sabbath never tired. Sabbath had shaped her character over the years through his patient tutoring, until Drenka became the wanton, loving whore of his dreams. She was the same age as his wife Roseanna, but despite the fact that Roseanna maintained her figure more carefully than Drenka, Sabbath sees Roseanna as too old for him. With the exception of Drenka, Sabbath likes his women young and he loses his teaching job at the local college due to his indiscretions with the female students. The resulting scandal rocks the local community and sends his alcoholic wife into a rehabilitation facility to dry out, but Sabbath, a man who has devoted his entire life to the pursuit of lust, is unrepentant about his actions.

Sabbath only realizes how much Drenka meant to him when she dies. He had refused her dying wish that he be faithful to her while she was alive and had encouraged her for years to seek out other lovers and report the carnal details to him. Her death finally stirs emotion in him and prompts a crisis in his life. Sabbath leaves his long-suffering wife and returns to New York City for the first time in thirty years to confront the demons of his past, most notably the ghost of his first wife, Nikki.

Nikki's fate remains a mystery to Sabbath. She simply vanished thirty years ago with no explanation or clue as to her whereabouts. Sabbath had nearly gone insane searching the streets of New York for her before he gave up and fled to his quiet mountain town with Roseanna. Now, the suicide and funeral of Linc Gelman, the man who had once produced Sabbath's Indecent Theater in New York, calls Sabbath back to revisit his past. Leaving Roseanna behind, Sabbath goes to stay with Norman Cowan, Linc's former partner and an old friend of Sabbath's.

In New York, Sabbath finds no trace of Nikki and Norman sees no trace of the man he once knew in Sabbath. Sabbath is undergoing some sort of breakdown, but he has toyed with life for so long that he's not sure if the breakdown is real or just another act. He gets himself kicked out of Norman's house after stealing his daughter's panties, coming on to Norman's wife, Michelle and stealing ten thousand dollars in cash that he finds hidden in the master bedroom.



Lost and friendless, apart from his mother's ghost who haunts him mercilessly, Sabbath decides to commit suicide, but he must see his brother Morty's grave first. Sabbath returns to New Jersey for the first time in countless years and uses the Cowan's stolen money to purchase a gravesite for himself in the Jewish cemetery that houses his deceased family members. He thinks about the death of his brother. Morty had been shot down in World War II and Sabbath's life had changed that day. His mother, once a happy, loving woman, became a hollow shell. Sabbath had fled after high school to escape the tragedy and had formed his character as a whore mongering, sex-obsessed man while at sea.

Sabbath drives back to the family homestead on the Jersey shore to stall the end of his life. He finds his old cousin Fish alive and living in the same house on the street where Sabbath grew up. Sabbath also finds his mother's old sideboard in Fish's home. When the old man steps out of the room, Sabbath ransacks the sideboard and discovers a box containing his brother's final effects. He steals the box and runs away to the sea shore to commune with his brother's possessions. Mickey wraps himself in the flag that had graced Morty's coffin and lovingly reviews every item in the box. Sabbath realizes that Morty's things give his life meaning. He feels a responsibility to keep them safe and decides against suicide after all.

With Morty's personal effects in the car, Sabbath reluctantly returns to Roseanna and the only home he knows. When he arrives home, he sees that he has been displaced in his own bed by Christa, a young blonde woman whom Sabbath and his mistress had once manipulated into their bed. Now she seems to have found love with Roseanna and Sabbath is out in the cold. He flees to his last refuge, Drenka's grave, where he pisses on her grave in loving memory of the kind of woman she had been. He is caught in the act by police officer Matthew Balich, Drenka's son. Gleefully, Sabbath thinks his life will end in suicide by cop, but Sabbath lacks the guts to resist arrest to carry out that plan. Instead, he ends the story along in the woods after Matthew releases him and drives away.



Book 1, Part 1

Book 1, Part 1 Summary

Mickey Sabbath's fifty-two year old mistress has issued him an ultimatum: be faithful or she will end their affair. Drenka Balich has been Sabbath's mistress for thirteen years, but their affair has never been monogamous. Sabbath claims to be shocked by her ultimatum and he reflects on their relationship as the novel opens.

Drenka is well known and loved as the local innkeeper's wife, a warm woman who showers her guests and employees alike with motherly hospitality. Mickey Sabbath, by contrast, is a failed puppeteer who missed his one big chance when he declined Jim Henson's offer to hire him for Sesame Street. Mickey's wife, Roseanna, frequently reminds him of this missed opportunity, but Mickey doesn't really care. He tells the reader he wouldn't have been happy wearing a Big Bird suit all these years. He also informs us that Roseanna had to be hospitalized for going on an alcohol bender back in 1989, after Sabbath was publicly charged with the gross sexual harassment of a young woman.

That, coupled with the fact that Sabbath has had a mistress for thirteen years, gives us our first clue that his marriage is not a success. Nevertheless, Sabbath presumes to give Drenka marital advice. He explains that the only reason she's not attracted to her handsome husband is the monogamous nature of marriage. Drenka looks mournful at Sabbath's initial response to her ultimatum. They hold this discussion in their lovers' hideaway, a private spot on a wooded hillside, enclosed by three large boulders and fed by a babbling brook.

In this romantic spot, Sabbath sits next to Drenka and considers their relationship's history. He describes Drenka as an Italian-looking Croatian, short like Sabbath, but as curvy and full-figured as the ancient fertility statuettes unearthed by archeologists. Drenka's parents had raised her with the ideology of their day and time, Communism. She, like every other Croatian child of her generation, was taught to love and fear their tyrannical ruler, Comrade Tito. The political climate of the day was tense in her homeland and people were often reported to Tito's government for speaking ill against the party.

Drenka met her husband, Matija, on vacation and found him different than the other men. Matija's grandfather had been sentenced to prison for openly questioning Tito's decision to break with the Soviet Union and Matija, who loved his grandfather and watched him become a broken man in prison, did not subscribe to the political views with which Drenka had been raised. When Matija and Drenka left together for their honeymoon, they simply didn't return. Matija, for political and economic reasons, wanted to move to America. Drenka, as she told Sabbath later, had wanted to go, too, but mainly for the adventure. Drenka's parents, strict Communists, were heartbroken by her scandalous defection to imperialistic, capitalistic America.



Sabbath tells the reader that he believes his is the only man whom Drenka has ever charged for sex. She only charged him once, on the occasion when he brought home a young, runaway German au pair named Christa as a sexual "offering" for Drenka. Drenka insisted he pay her five hundred dollars up front, which she knew he could ill afford. Arthritis has ended Sabbath's career as a puppeteer and he has made no attempt to secure alternate employment. He lives off Roseanna's modest salary. However, Sabbath felt he had taught her the art of licentiousness and owed it to her to pay her the money as she asked. Sabbath had encouraged her over the years to sleep with the inn's male customers and tell him about the details afterwards when the two of them were in bed. Drenka has made it a point of pride to become everything Sabbath ever wished her to be sexually and he felt it would be wrong *not* to use his wife's money to pay his mistress for the threesome.

Sabbath knows Drenka used the money to buy power tools for her beloved son, Matthew. Matthew is a married state trooper whom Drenka worries about constantly. She likes to listen to the police band radio at night so she can know when her son is out on a call. Every time Matthew's number is called over the police band, it reminds her husband, Matija, of how his son disappointed him by becoming a policeman. This is a sore point between father and son and Drenka only feels comfortable discussing her love of Matthew and Matthew's career with Sabbath.

Sabbath reflects on the changes time has wrought on Drenka's body. He tells the reader that Drenka is still attractive to him only because, at age sixty-four, he is so grateful to have his sexual capabilities that he is willing to ignore the fact that she does not have a young hard body anymore. These days, he reports, her breasts remind him of his mother and recall in his mind the happy days of his youth.

Sabbath's young days were filled with happiness. His mother adored him and his brother Morty. She was completely content with creating a wonderful family life, even during the dark days of the Depression. Sabbath recalls all the domestic tasks his mother performed, always with a song on her lips. She never stopped singing.

On December 12, 1944, when Sabbath's older brother, Morty, was killed in action in World War II. Sabbath's mother took to her bed for a year. Her depression was so acute that she ceased to be the same woman. No longer did she sing, bake or care for Sabbath. She spent all her time on the boardwalk talking to her dead son. In a similar fashion, Sabbath, has begun talking to her. This is a behavioral departure for Sabbath, who never before believed in an after-life. However, he feels his mother's presence surrounding him these days, even now in his lover's hideaway with Drenka.

Sabbath asks Drenka why she is issuing this ultimatum now, after all these years. She tells him he, not her husband, is the love of her life. Sabbath tells her he feels the same way about her, but as usual, he makes his words sound insincere. Sabbath doesn't know why he does that. He does love her, but he has always tormented her by refusing to stand behind his feelings for her. He asks her if she plans to be faithful in return. Drenka informs him that she doesn't want anyone else but him. Sabbath makes a spurious argument against monogamy and tells her he can't take her request seriously.



Drenka paces their hideaway distractedly, reminding Sabbath of his first wife, Nikki, performing one of her scenes in the play *The Cherry Orchard*. Drenka tells him she is suffering and asks why he is making fun of her. Sabbath says he is the one who is being wronged here. How can she ask him to be something he's not? He calls her a repressive puritan, says her request is inhuman and compares her to the dictator, Tito. Drenka says she knows he can outsmart and out-argue her, but she won't change her request. Sabbath continues to mock her to buy time while he considers why she might be asking him this now.

Sabbath thinks it is because Silvija, Matija's eighteen-year old niece, is coming back to town. The last time Silvija had visited, Sabbath had asked Drenka to bring him the teenager's underwear so Drenka could pretend to be Silvija in bed. Sabbath remembers her visit as a good time for everyone, including their spouses. Matija had enjoyed broadening his niece's horizons by showing her around and helping her improve her English, never once suspecting the depraved behavior his wife was involved in regarding the girl. Sabbath, meanwhile, had been so turned on by the Silvija adventure that "there were times now over breakfast when he not only pretended to inquire about her [his wife's] AA meeting but pretended to listen to her answer." (pg. 24) Sabbath had been looking forward to Silvija's return this summer and feels thwarted by Drenka's request.

Sabbath asks Drenka if she plans on being faithful to him. Drenka replies of course. Why, Sabbath wonders, would she want to change a situation that has worked so well for Roseanna and Matija? Drenka insists it is time he tells her he loves her and that she's the only woman he wants. "Why has it come?" asks Sabbath. "Have I missed something?"

"She was crying again when she said, 'I sometimes think you miss everything.'" (pg. 25) Sabbath disagrees. He doesn't think he misses anything. He points out that Drenka was too frightened to leave her husband when her marriage was at its worst because of her poor English and lack of financial prospects. He reminds her that despite her supposed love for Sabbath, she has never before suggested leaving Matija

Drenka replies that she's smart enough to know that Sabbath would have left her if she had even suggested dumping her spouse. Sabbath mocks this, asking sarcastically if she has stayed with Matija only to keep Sabbath happy. She insists she has. He asks about the other men and about Christa. She insists they were all for him. She reiterates her love for Sabbath and says she will do anything to make him happy, including becoming a depraved woman and sleeping with half the town. However, she can no longer endure his infidelities. The pain is too great for her to bear any longer.

Sabbath privately admits to the reader that he is already monogamous to Drenka, not by choice, but because at his age, other women no longer want him. He creates stories to tell Drenka about his sexual exploits and she believes him. He knows that Drenka's stories about her own sexual escapades are real, because she lets him listen in on her phone conversations, in which men tell her how good she was in bed. This makes Sabbath proud. In fact, despite his attraction to Drenka, Sabbath had made her sleep



with his friends to ensure they approved of her. Presumably, Sabbath would have felt forced to discontinue the relationship had she not met his friends' approval. Every single man she has slept with has told her, while Sabbath listened, that "there's no one like you." (pg. 26) Sabbath has taught Drenka everything she knows and this makes Sabbath glow with pride.

Now that Drenka, his only ally, is defecting from his depraved way of life, Sabbath refuses to admit that he's already being monogamous. His monogamy is not by choice and it goes against everything he believes. He feels like he's fighting for his life and he notices that she seems to be fighting for hers as well. Sabbath still feels his dead mother's presence and he wonders if she is putting words into his mouth. He casts about for a solution to his dilemma. Why not take the easy way out and tell Drenka he'll be faithful? He drops that thought immediately. It's not what he wants. He blames his upbringing for his inability to express his love for Drenka. Perhaps if his childhood had gone differently, if Morty hadn't died and if his supply of maternal affection had not been cut off so suddenly... Instead of capitulating, he tries to make a deal with Drenka. He'll be faithful to her if she agrees to give her husband oral sex twice a week. She sobs that this is serious. She has cancer. She'll be dead in a year, she tells him. She cries because she had hoped he would tell her what she wanted to hear without bringing up the cancer. Mercifully, Sabbath tells the reader, Drenka died within six months of this conversation.

Book 1, Part 1 Analysis

Sabbath shows his colors immediately by showing a complete lack of empathy for his mistress of thirteen years. By the end of the first paragraph, he is already feeling sorry for himself because she has the audacity to request a monogamous relationship. Sabbath claims this is like asking him to "turn himself inside out." He childishly maintains that this request is "wholly unforeseen," establishing himself as a man who believes in denying the fundamental human tendency towards growth, even in a loving relationship that has lasted thirteen years. (pg. 3)

Sabbath also reveals his basic hostility towards women when he says he is "the only man she would ever admit to having charged for the night." With this casual turn of phrase, he reveals his belief that all women are fundamentally wicked. Sabbath presumes that every woman he meets is guilty, which we will see again in later chapters. He sees the world through the lens of his own depravity and assumes every woman is a whore, every wife an adulteress and every young girl a willing victim waiting to be manipulated by a master puppeteer like Sabbath.

Sabbath views Christa as a willing victim, despite the fact that Christa will later hate him for manipulating, using and degrading her when she was young, a foreigner and at her most vulnerable. Sabbath also sees Christa as a gift for his mistress. He doesn't put two and two together when Drenka, who has always done everything he asked willingly out of her love for him, insists he pay her five hundred dollars for the threesome with Christa. This money and tryst symbolize the complete degradation of Drenka. She has



become a whore for Sabbath's sake. By charging him for this one night, she makes a point that Sabbath misses completely.

Sabbath has missed a lot of things. He is aware that Drenka reminds him of his happy childhood with his mother. He doesn't understand that he has developed a similar feeling of family, home and love with Drenka. Sabbath has no respect for his relationship with Drenka, or for Drenka herself and he fails to see the importance of his feelings for her. He still views life through the eyes of a little boy and she reminds him of his mother. He doesn't see the adult point of view that this is a woman who could have become family to him. Sabbath doesn't actively create anything in life. He reacts to the world as if it is here to please or annoy him and he sucks the life out of everyone around him.

As Sabbath discusses the change he saw in his mother after Morty's death, we begin to see from where his hatred of women stems. It seems Sabbath has never forgiven his mother for denying him her maternal affection. He has no empathy for her depression or for her loss. His memories deal strictly with how his brother's death cheated him of her love. He thinks of his mother when he suckles at his mistress' breasts and the reader gets the idea that Sabbath, at age sixty-four, is acting like an overgrown baby attempting to suck maternal affection out of his mistress' body. Sex, for the socially impaired Sabbath, seems to be the only way he knows to obtain human affection. Sabbath is oblivious to the fact that humans require affection, or that his obsession with sex is a substitute for it.

Sabbath doesn't understand that he needs affection and he doesn't bother to give affection to anyone else. To the people he cares about, like Drenka, he gives the gift of sex in place of love or affection. Drenka has accepted him on his terms and understands sex to be her only possible route to Sabbath's heart. Sabbath doesn't understand the cruelty of the position in which he has put Drenka. This is a woman who would do absolutely anything for his love and Sabbath takes full advantage of that. However, he does not consciously *choose to realize* that he's taking advantage of her love. He glories in the praise heaped upon Drenka by her other lovers, who tell her "there's no one like you." (pg. 26) Sabbath thinks that makes Drenka special. He hates all women and he needs a woman who is unlike all other women. Drenka has willingly become that to obtain his love, but Sabbath never realizes that the reason there is no one like her is because women, human beings, aren't really like that at all. Healthy, well-adjusted people do not behave in the ways he has patiently taught Drenka to behave. It's only a long-standing act that Drenka has assumed to live up to his unrealistic expectations.



Book 1, Part 2

Book 1, Part 2 Summary

Sabbath lies awake in bed next to his wife Roseanna. He is suffering from an emotion that he has never felt before in his life, jealousy. Now that Drenka is dead, he is tortured by the memories of all the men she slept with. All the details he loved to hear when she was alive now torment him in the dead of night. He wishes he could shake her and tell her to be with no one but him, but it's too late. Sabbath can no longer even accept the idea of her sleeping with Matija, which did not bother him before. Now the details Drenka had told him about her sexual encounters with Matija drive him mad with jealousy.

A couple of months after Drenka died, Sabbath had run into Matija at the Stop & Shop in Cumberland. He had introduced himself and asked Matija if his name meant anything to the widower. Matija said he did not recognize the name. Sabbath told him that Sabbath's wife, Roseanna, had been his son's high school art teacher. Sabbath is struck by Matija's dignity and composure, of which he had never before been aware. Sabbath had seen Matija in public only once before, when Matija made an important speech to the Rotarians club. Drenka had asked Sabbath to proof the written speech to ensure the English wording was accurate and Sabbath had rewritten the speech with the intention of making Matija sound like a long-winded fool with poor grammar. Innocent Drenka, with her limited command of English, hadn't realized what Sabbath had done. Matija never learned of Sabbath's involvement in the speech-writing.

Sabbath remembers arriving at the Rotarians club that day to witness the speech, having obtained an invitation from his friend Gus, who was a member. Gus picked him up in his pickup truck and regaled Sabbath with his usual litany of jokes, which put down women in general and the female body specifically, on the way to the luncheon. Sabbath thinks the trash-talking Gus is so cool that Gus is "just the man he'd like to see her [Drenka] fuck to be assured that she was as wonderful as he thought she was." (pp. 40-41) Sabbath had flirted with Drenka that afternoon as she tended bar for the Rotarians and he watched her cry as her husband made himself and their inn look ridiculous with his speech. She had paid Matija back for this disgrace by sleeping with four men, Matija being the fourth, in a single day.

The second time Sabbath saw Matija in public, at the Stop & Shop, he invited the widower to have a cup of coffee with him. Not really sure what he was doing or why, Sabbath led Matija to a coffee shop. Perhaps Sabbath intended to hurt him, as he couldn't shake the image of Matija lying on top of Drenka. Life is boring to Sabbath if he's not busy creating difficulties for himself and Sabbath figured it was time he met Matija. He played the part of the kindly neighbor over coffee. He gave Matija his condolences and asked about the inn, which Matija wished to sell because it held too many painful memories.



Matija mentioned he had received two hundred and fifty-six letters of condolence after his wife's death. Sabbath, jealous that he didn't receive a single condolence card for Drenka's death, is reminded of the sympathy letters he did receive when his first wife, Nikki, vanished. At the time, Sabbath was shocked to learn that so many people cared about Nikki. He assumed Drenka's letters came from men whom she slept with and wasn't surprised at the number. Sabbath pressed his luck during his encounter with Matija by asking about Silvija. Matija was surprised that Sabbath knew his niece and Sabbath claimed that his wife had told him about her. Sabbath's excessive interest in Silvija must have raised an alarm in Matija, who quickly ended their encounter with a formal politeness.

Five months after Drenka's death, Sabbath has taken to haunting her grave at night and imagining conversations with her. Tonight, he imagines her wearing Silvija's dirndl skirt, as she had once done for him in bed. Lying on her grave, he calls her a "filthy, wonderful Drenka cunt" and proposes marriage. In his imagination, her ghost replies that she is only good enough for him now that she's dead. He repeats his proposal and her ghost smiles invitingly, telling him first he must die. She raises her skirt to show him that she wears a garter and stockings but no underwear underneath Silvija's skirt. Despite the bitter cold, Sabbath has grown accustomed to masturbating over her grave. He can only visit at night for fear of running into her husband, her son or one of her many lovers. At night, he has privacy from everyone except his mother's ghost, which continues to haunt him.

The thought of Drenka's other lovers also haunts him, but he feels no jealousy when he thinks of their threesomes with Christa. These had continued for a period of two months before Christa turned against them and stopped answering Sabbath's calls. He recalls the last time he spoke with Christa. He had run into her on the street and was pretending not to have noticed her presence when she walked up to him and told him she didn't want to speak to him anymore. Christa had accused both him and Drenka of exploiting her. Sabbath countered by saying Christa had exploited them. In frustration, she cried, "You're an old man! I am twenty years old! I do not want to talk to you!" (pg. 53) Sabbath tried to argue with her, twisting her words to suit him, but she had walked off and left him on the sidewalk. Sabbath decides his mistake was not to have paid her for the sex.

Sabbath remembers first meeting Christa in 1989. He had driven by a young girl, standing on the shoulder of the road and gone back to give her a ride. In the car, he tried to seduce her with rhythm and blues music and he had asked about her life. Christa told him she had worked as an au pair in New York, but she didn't get along with the child and had run off, picking a town in the Northeast at random. Sabbath asked what else she was running away from and Christa admitted to having been hurt by her lifestyle and so-called friends in New York. She had worked briefly as a dancer in the clubs and was trying to escape her past. A German immigrant alone in this country, Christa was looking for the small time life. She hoped to make friends with some older American women who could provide her with motherly guidance. She came to Madamaska Falls five months ago to escape the harsh New York lifestyle, where she often felt used and didn't like how men always tried to hit on her. She proudly told



Sabbath she had learned the art of quilting and become a true American. Sabbath had responded by pretending to be interested in her quilts. He offered to buy one as an excuse to get her back to her house.

After the first threesome, Drenka had rocked Christa like a baby in her arms, thanking the girl repeatedly. Later, Drenka raved to Sabbath about how loving Christa was in bed. Drenka assured Sabbath she would never want to be alone with Christa or any woman. She needed a man's presence to become turned on. However, she later admitted that she had had sex with Christa alone on three different occasions.

Throughout this recollection about Christa, Sabbath has been masturbating over Drenka's grave. He notes that if he drops to his knees, he cannot be spotted by any passing vehicles. He rarely sees headlights pass by on the road next to the cemetery. He has become a regular visitor to her grave and finds, now that he has lost her for good, that his emotions run deeper than he had ever realized. He kicks himself for not imagining the possibility of leaving Roseanna for the woman he loved. He feels sorry for himself because no one in town would believe him capable of such feeling. He cannot believe it himself. He thinks of the townspeople who attended Drenka's funeral, including the young electrician, Barrett, who had been Drenka's last conquest. Barrett had arrived at the funeral with his wife and infant child, looking supremely uncomfortable. Sabbath remembers consoling Drenka after Barrett dumped her because she had told him about her cancer. Barrett hadn't wanted to get involved with Drenka's illness. He had a pregnant wife to deal with. Drenka, in her confused view of the world, had expected him to treat her more lovingly and she was bitterly hurt that Barrett didn't care about her as a person.

Sabbath's memories and orgasm are interrupted by headlights pulling up to the cemetery. A tall man approaches Drenka's grave. It is Scott Lewis, one of Drenka's former lovers, a credit card magnate whom she had picked up in an elevator and would often have sex with in the back of his limo. One night, he had summoned a call girl to their hotel room without informing Drenka. Drenka had explained to Sabbath that she had had to force herself to get turned on by the unwelcome situation. The hooker had been angry with Drenka for making her work so hard to arouse Drenka.

Sabbath remembers all the other lurid details of Drenka's encounters with Scott Lewis. He remembers how hard he had to work to train Drenka to give him detailed stories of her encounters with other men, but how she loved to tell him the stories once she had been trained. It excited them both. He is alternately furious and sorrowful as he recalls how she came to love telling those details that now infuriate him. He watches in horror from behind a stand of trees as Scott Lewis masturbates over Drenka's grave. When Lewis finishes, Sabbath tosses a large rock in his direction and the startled Lewis leaves quickly. Sabbath goes to the grave and picks up the flowers Lewis left behind. He realizes that the bouquet is sticky from Lewis' semen. He wanders into the woods behind the cemetery and under cover of the night sky, licks his sticky hands, shouting, "I am Drenka! I am Drenka! Something horrible is happening to Sabbath." (pg. 78)



Book 1, Part 2 Analysis

Part 2 reveals how different Sabbath's views are from the viewpoints of the people in his life. He does not see Christa's perspective. He cannot empathize with how a young woman, living alone in a strange country, hardly speaking the language, having no family or money to rely on and lacking parental guidance, might get caught up in a desperate New York lifestyle that is harmful to her. She might not yet fully understand its danger, but she knows enough to want to escape that lifestyle. When Sabbath asks her about her life and she begins to tell him about her difficulties in New York and her desires to leave her past behind, Sabbath can only pry for lurid details about the clothes she wore, the men she slept with and the drugs she did. Playing the part of a kindly man interested in helping her, he lures her even further into the lifestyle she left New York to escape. Should a man in his sixties have known better than to exploit her ignorance for his personal pleasure? Sabbath cannot relate to any of that. He thinks the mistake he made with Christa was that he didn't offer to pay her for her sexual services.

Christa's character could be a younger reflection of Drenka. When Sabbath met Drenka and began grooming her for a life of debauchery, she too was a foreigner, uncomfortable with English and in a vulnerable position. Her unhappy marriage was her only source of support in this foreign country; Sabbath was twelve years her senior. Perhaps Drenka saw something of herself in Christa and the abused becomes the abuser. Drenka spent two months grooming Christa to be Sabbath's sex slave just as Sabbath had taught her to be. It becomes clear in this chapter that Drenka doesn't engage in these sexual antics for personal pleasure, but rather to please Sabbath.

Drenka gives the readers a hint of this motivation when she lies to Sabbath about Christa. First she insists to him that she requires a male presence in order to get turned on with Christa. Later she tells him that she secretly visited Christa for sex three times without Sabbath. One of these two stories must be a lie. If the first was a lie, then she created it to appease Sabbath's ego. If the second was a lie, then she created it to turn him on. Either way, she's acting out of love for Sabbath, but she seems to have fooled both Sabbath and herself into believing that she's living her life the way she wants to live. Hints are dropped throughout the narrative that Drenka knows Sabbath well enough to realize that if she doesn't behave as he wishes, he will leave her. One major hint she gives is that Christa turned her on because she was loving in bed. Drenka talks about sex as if that were all she wanted from Christa and Sabbath, but she admits she got love from Christa. Love is what she wants from Sabbath and cannot have and she fools herself into believing she's the purely carnal woman of Sabbath's dreams. They have both thrown away their lives on self-delusion and are therefore a perfect match.

Meanwhile, Sabbath most admires and tries to live up to the view of Gus, who tells offensively derogatory jokes about feminine odor. Modern psychological research has demonstrated that men who perpetrate domestic abuse didn't become abusive because they were abused as children. According to statistics, most such men learned their abusive attitudes from peers who lacked respect for women. As Drenka's character proves, people often do what they're taught to do in life. Boys who grow up around



friends that disrespect women are much more likely to become sexual, emotional, financial and/or violent abusers of women. They aren't inherently violent, but they subscribe to a belief system that tells them they are better than women and have a greater right to happiness. Sabbath's admiration of his friend Gus reveals his true character as an abusive man who hates women.

The "boys will be boys" attitude of popular culture is quoted by experts who study domestic violence as creating the mindset that promotes abuse. This is a mindset of privilege. It is a form of narcissism that convinces the abuser that he's entitled to get whatever he wants and anyone who denies him is entitled to get what's coming to them. Mickey Sabbath refers to his narcissism throughout the narrative. He is aware of it, in a peripheral way, but fails to see that his own abusive mindset is at the root of his problem. No woman will ever be good enough to please him. Therefore, they all deserve to be mistreated. He has mistreated every woman in his life, as we will learn in greater detail as the story unfolds.

The woman of his dreams, who lives to satisfy and exceed his every sexual desire and expectation, does not exist in reality. People are not born with the mentality of slaves. Sabbath has to spend significant time teaching Drenka to be his perfect love slave. Drenka, out of love for Sabbath, becomes a star student who eventually eclipses even her master's licentiousness. In the end, she is still not good enough for Sabbath. This woman, who has utterly degraded herself to please Sabbath, is still not good enough to be his wife. She isn't even good enough for him to agree to be faithful to her when she issues her ultimatum. When she realizes she's dying, Drenka finally admits her truth. She wants no man besides Sabbath. However, she cannot admit that her former excesses were a mistake. She still pretends to champion them. Her character shows minimal growth in the book, but more than Mickey Sabbath's character. Sabbath remains in his abusive mindset until the bitter end.



Book 1, Part 3

Book 1, Part 3 Summary

The next morning, Sabbath learns that his old friend, Lincoln Gelman, has committed suicide. Linc's partner, Norman Cowan, calls Sabbath to tell him the news. Sabbath hasn't seen Linc in thirty years and is surprised to hear that his once animated friend had spent the past seven years depressed and ill. Norman assures him Linc's death is a relief to many people, especially at their office. The men had been partners for years. Linc had discovered Sabbath's puppet act and produced the Sabbath's Indecent Theater show during the 50's and 60's when Sabbath had been a small success as an artist on the Lower East Side. Linc and Norman had known Sabbath when Nikki had disappeared.

The funeral is tomorrow and Norman hopes Sabbath will come. Sabbath hesitates. Norman tells him that Linc always believed in Sabbath's talent. Linc had been disappointed when Sabbath left his puppet theater in New York to live in the Northeast. Norman also assures Sabbath that Lincoln never believed Sabbath had anything to do with the disappearance of his wife. Sabbath tells Norman that Linc was wrong about that. Norman says Sabbath is being his old perverse self and that he knows Nikki was an emotional basket case and vanished for that reason. Sabbath interrupts to say he definitely won't come to the funeral and hangs up the phone.

Sabbath appraises his wife, with her boyish haircut and denim jacket. He notices that since she stopped drinking she's getting her girlish good looks back. He wonders what she hates most about him. For a long time, she had hated him for refusing to have a child with her and he hated her "incessantly yammering" (pg. 84) on the phone to her sister about her biological clock. After her childbearing years passed her by, she began to hate him for many other reasons. She hated him now for the fact that he hadn't touched her sexually in ten years and she had always hated his "inexhaustible bitterness about his career." (pg. 85) For his part, he had hated her for her loud, aggressive behavior in public when she was drinking. Now that she had stopped, he hated her AA slogans and the way she learned to talk to him from her meetings. He states he can't own a gun because her constant use of the word "sharing" would make him want to use it on her. She has accused him of verbal abuse and he mocks her for that, deriding her miniscule suffering in comparison to the women in her group who get knocked around by their men. He admits she also hates him for the Kathy Goolsbee scandal that gave her a nervous breakdown. However, Sabbath won't accept her blame for that. If he hadn't caused her breakdown with the scandal, Roseanna might never have sought the help she needed for her drinking. He also realizes she hates him for not earning any money, but he hates himself for that too, so that doesn't count either.

Sabbath hates the way Roseanna speaks her mind now that she's sober. He misses no opportunity to belittle the things she "shares" with him about her AA meetings. She often tells him a maxim she learned at AA, "You're as sick as your secrets." "Wrong, he told



her...you're as adventurous as your secrets, as abhorrent as your secrets, as lonely as your secrets, as alluring as your secrets, as courageous as your secrets, as vacuous as your secrets, as lost as your secrets; you are as human as-" (pg. 88) At this point, she had cut him off and attempted to make her point again. Finally, in frustration, she had retreated to another room to study her AA literature in peace.

Sabbath is always amazed at the number of people Roseanna knows through AA. One day, Rosanna even waved to Christa on the street. Sabbath does like her AA meetings when she leaves for the weekend and he can be alone with Drenka. Roseanna tells Sabbath she thinks he preferred it when she was a drunk, because it was easier for him to control her and look down on her. Sabbath admits that might be true. In fact, Sabbath has grown impatient because, after four years of sobriety, Roseanna still hasn't worked up the courage to leave him. Sabbath feels Roseanna is using her history with her father, with his violent abusiveness and his ultimate suicide, as an excuse to delay leaving him. Sabbath doesn't feel her relationship with her parents had any impact on her whatsoever and that she's creating reasons to explain her alcoholism and her reasons for staying with a loser like Sabbath. Roseanna, angry at his denial, asks him to examine the patterns in his life. She points out that she and Nikki were similar. They both were looking for a savior and they both thrived on degradation. Isn't that a pattern? Sabbath replies flippantly, "A pattern is what is printed on a piece of cloth. We are not cloth." (pg. 91)

Roseanna, already dressed for her AA meeting in her denim jacket, lingers in the kitchen, intending for once to force him to take their marriage seriously. She demands to know why he stayed with her when she was drunk. Sabbath wonders if the moment has come to tell her about Drenka, something he has been considering since Drenka died and turned his life upside down. Instead, he tells Roseanna that he stayed because of her paychecks. She holds back her tears and suggests that Sabbath had stayed because he enjoys watching women destroy themselves. Sabbath asks when she intends to throw him out. He can tell by her reaction that she hadn't been ready to do so, but he tries to force her to evict him anyway. She cries, worried that he has nowhere to go, no money and no friends. She worries he will kill himself. He realizes that she could not endure it if he did and that makes up his mind. He decides to leave his wife that night. He will drive to New York for Linc's funeral.

In the car, Sabbath doesn't know if he'll ever return and decides to drive past Drenka's grave one more time. He reconsiders what he's doing. It wouldn't be hard to make things right with Roseanna. He could stop pestering her about AA, ask about her job as a teacher, show her affection, take her on a trip and even have sex with her. He remembers how much he had desired her in the beginning. She had seemed so capable and confident, the very opposite of Nikki.

Roseanna had been Sabbath's puppet partner. Before they met, she had known how to sculpt, paint and make ceramics and jewelry, all skills that served her well in puppet-making. She made excellent puppets for him, though he had to teach her not to make the puppets beautiful. Sabbath told her that puppets weren't children's toys. Their purpose was to manipulate and frighten people. Roseanna learned to use the sewing



machine and was soon producing puppets that met with his approval. Roseanna had assumed all of Sabbath's views as her own. She was young and naïve when they met and she hadn't learned to form her own opinions. She saw in Sabbath an opportunity to learn to be tough and to stand up to life. Roseanna was fifty-two before she sought out AA and began to develop her independence from Sabbath.

Sabbath's recollections about Roseanna lead to thoughts of his own youth. He idly thinks that he should have become a pimp instead of a puppet master. After all, isn't it the same thing? Both pimps and puppet masters manipulate *objects* for the entertainment of others. He recalls the events leading to his first experiences with whores. Sabbath and his best friend, Ron Metzger, hitchhiked to New York after high school, where they headed off to sea. Before Castro cut off access to Cuba, Sabbath was able to drop his American dollars on the carnal pleasures and gambling that thrived under the Batista regime. The men on the ship called it the "Romance Run." The ship went to Santos, Monte, Rio and B.A. "There were guys who spent their whole lives doing the Romance Run. And the reason, for them as for Sabbath, was whores." (pg. 99)

Sabbath tallies his finances as his car approaches the cemetery. He has seventeen dollars and a plan to empty Roseanna's and his joint checking account. He intends to cash a check first thing in the morning in New York City. He begins to worry about the consequences of his decision to leave his wife. Where will he get the medical insurance and medication for his arthritic hands? Where will he live? His thoughts give him heart palpitations. He tells himself to go home. Roseanna will never throw him out and he can prostitute himself by sleeping with her for her money.

Sabbath skirts the cemetery on foot with a flashlight, checking to see if the coast is clear. There's a pickup truck tonight, but no limousine. As he creeps closer, he thinks of New York and Nikki. Maybe he's returning after all these years to prove to himself that he's not to blame for Nikki's disappearance. He recalls her as an extremely high-strung, tense, nervous girl who jumped at the slightest provocation. She took prescription downers that didn't help. As an actress, she was as malleable as an arrogant young director's dream. On stage, she could tackle life with a confidence she lacked off stage. Sabbath thinks about how all the women in his life hated their fathers. Nikki's father owned a lumberyard in Cleveland. He had been more attached to drinking, gambling and other women than to being a husband and father. Her mother eventually moved with Nikki to London, where Nikki attended the High School of Performing Arts. She and her mother were alone in the world. Nikki's mother died in 1959, leaving Nikki completely on her own.

Sabbath can see Drenka's grave now. The man kneeling over it masturbating is Barrett, the electrician. Sabbath looks for another rock to throw. By the time he finds it, Barrett is concluding his business. Before Sabbath can throw the rock, he sees another man creeping up behind Barrett. The man clubs Barrett over the head with what looks like a large flashlight. As the assailant hops in his car and turns on the police lights, Sabbath realizes it is Matthew the cop, Drenka's son.



Book 1, Part 3 Analysis

Sabbath's list of hatreds for his wife demonstrates afresh his abusive mindset. The list is shocking and what's most shocking is that it's intended to be funny. It reads like a list of dirty jokes about women, but in this context, the jokes lose all humor. A joke can be both funny and politically incorrect if it is told in jest. However, Sabbath takes them seriously and bases his marital decisions on the wisdom imparted by them. In a line that's meant to be funny, Sabbath refers to Roseanna's discussions with her sister about her biological clock as "yammering." He doesn't say she nagged him to have a child. She handled her disappointment at his refusal by complying with his wishes and dealing with her feelings by discussing them with her sister. What more could he ask for? Her disappointment doesn't count. The only thing that matters is that her yammering caused him annoyance. Sabbath continues to invalidate every point Roseanna tries to make by belittling it. He is incapable of taking the conversation seriously. He also lists her disappointments, but he finds ways to remove their significance. He enjoys using his command of language to avoid true discussions by twisting the matter to his benefit. He belittles everything with his humor, which is a barely concealed cover for his hostility.

Sabbath's recollections of the Romance Run provide further insight in to the roots of his perversions. Peer influence is an important factor in developing an abusive mindset and it's significant that Sabbath spent the years after high school surrounded by men who had dedicated their lives to the Romance Run. The author has provided us this insight just after Sabbath leaves his wife. He is longing for the "delightful" times of his youth. Most people long for those days to some extent and the quality or content of those young years matter. These formative years are important to the development of our personalities and characters and Sabbath's was developed in an environment where women were purchasable property. Men dedicated their lives to the whorehouses of the Romance Run without attachment to home or roots. These men made an impression on young Sabbath and he speaks fondly of the inviting, exotic smell of the ships that carried cargo from the bohemian ports.



Book 1, Part 4

Book 1, Part 4 Summary

On the long night drive to New York, Sabbath tells us he thinks only of Nikki, but his thoughts are just as much on his mother. He recalls that his mother only spoke to Nikki a handful of times, despite Nikki's earnest attempts to make conversation with her mother-in-law in the beginning. Nikki's squeamishness about illness provided the appropriate excuse for Sabbath to visit his mother alone. Often, they would spend entire visits without exchanging more than a few words. Now that his mother is dead, Sabbath holds an almost continual conversation with her spirit. He believes his mother is telling him to end his life. His thoughts of Nikki center on death.

Nikki handled her mother's death in a manner that, to Sabbath, was grotesque. He flew to London to join his wife, who had arrived a few days earlier to spend time with her mother before the end. When Sabbath arrived, he found his wife visiting with the corpse, stroking her hair, kissing her face and holding her dead hands.

Sabbath senses his mother's ghost is not paying attention to Nikki's story. Mother is telling him how easy it would be to drown in that nearby stretch of river. Sabbath finally admits to himself that he's planning suicide. "Lincoln Gelman did it. Roseanna's father did it. Probably Nikki herself had done it and with a razor, a straight razor very like the one with which she had exited each night to kill herself in *Miss Julie*." (pg. 109) Sabbath had searched for that razor after her disappearance and found it with all the other stage props. He still thinks it might have given Nikki the idea that she could kill herself in the same manner as the character she played.

Sabbath continues to return to the same ground, rehashing his memories in greater and greater detail with each retelling. He recalls how Nikki had sat with her mother's corpse for three days, refusing to accept her death, until even the funeral parlor staff, which had kindly come to the house to embalm the dead woman, lost patience with her. Nikki responded to Sabbath's attempts to part her from the corpse with an anti-Semitic response that it is cold of the Jews to bury their dead bodies so quickly. Sabbath's recollection of the embalming is interrupted by a realization.

Matthew had meant to smash Sabbath over the head at Drenka's grave. It occurs to Sabbath that Matthew may have been observing his visits to the grave for weeks, or even months. Sabbath remembers how Matthew had let him out of a speeding ticket when he had first become a trooper, because Matthew had been close to his teacher, Roseanna, in school. Sabbath realizes he can never visit his mistress's gravesite again, or even return to Madamaska Falls.

Tucking that thought away, Sabbath resumes his narration of Nikki's mother's death. He recites the things he did to help with the funeral arrangements and his continued attempts to separate Nikki from her mother's body. The day after the funeral, Nikki was



like her old self. She had accepted her mother's death, but she continued to mourn every day until she disappeared. Sabbath muses that he couldn't endure her endless mourning, but he now has frequent discussions with his dead mother.

Sabbath's recollections digress six years to 1953, when Sabbath was twenty-four and first set up his puppet theater on the east side of Broadway and 116th in New York City. As a street performer, his gimmick was to perform with his naked fingers instead of using puppets. Sabbath could make his fingers appear shocking and phallic. He even had one skit where his middle finger was tried for lewdness and then put through a miniature meat grinder that spit raw hamburger out the other end. The skit that got Sabbath in trouble involved the same middle finger beckoning an attractive girl from the audience to approach the stage. Once in reach, his finger would carry on a conversation with the girl while his other hand snuck around and unbuttoned her blouse. On one occasion in 1956, he opened the blouse, freed a breast and caressed the young woman's nipple. He was arrested for public indecency.

It was during one such skit that Sabbath and Nikki met. She refused to approach the stage, but she lingered afterwards. She eventually became the leading actress of the Bowery Basement Players. Sabbath was given the opportunity to direct, or, in his words, "not only to play with his fingers and his puppets but to manipulate living creatures as well." (pg. 125) He had not directed before, but he was fearless, especially after getting off on the obscenity charges with only a suspended sentence and a fine. Sabbath had made enemies easily in the theater world. A number of professionals believed he was a brilliant raw talent but lacked the discipline to express his talent well. Sabbath thinks of the young man he left behind when he left New York. What happened to him?

Sabbath arrives in New York after midnight and parks his car a few blocks from Norman Cowan's house in Central Park West. The city looks much the same to him after thirty years. His eyes instinctively sweep the streets in search of Nikki. This is why he left, he reminds himself, because he was going crazy searching for his missing wife on the streets of New York. After moving to Madamaska Falls, he had told no one about Nikki. Roseanna knew because Sabbath had starting seeing her before Nikki disappeared. He wonders if Nikki had seen him with Roseanna that day and left because of it. He thinks of all the flyers he put out and how for years he had expected news of her each time the phone rang. She had vanished without taking any of her things and she didn't touch a penny of their joint bank account. Sabbath's searches for Nikki often led him to sleep with women he encountered on the streets and eventually he "searched" for her in whorehouses. There, he slept with exotic girls like Nikki, who represented the brothel life of the seaports and with American girl next door types, represented by the likes of Roseanne.

Sabbath recalls how Nikki's mourning became unendurable to him. He grew bored of his wife. It was only the actress in her that he wished to save. He remembers how bored he became with his sex life: "after a while he could enjoy fucking her only when they'd smoked a joint and then it needn't have been Nikki who was there, or any human thing at all." (pg. 131) These thoughts lead him to recall how he also quickly grew bored with



Roseanna in bed, although she excited him thoroughly at first. He thinks of the way in which both women climaxed and then compares their orgasms with Drenka's.

Sabbath remembers other incidents in his fruitless search for Nikki. One day, he realized he was acting like his mother, who spent all her time on the boardwalk waiting for Morty to come home after his death. Sabbath's attention had wandered from his directing and the magic was gone without Nikki as his leading lady. Only Lincoln, his now dead producer, who had the courage to tell Sabbath to accept the idea that Nikki had vanished to kill herself and was dead. He remembers how impulsive Nikki was. He wonders again if she had seen him fucking Roseanna that night and if that had led her to kill herself. Only a week before she vanished, he had come home smelling of Roseanna and Nikki had sniffed around under the blankets when she thought he was asleep. A woman who lives next door to a house Sabbath thinks might be Nikki's simply tells him to accept that she ran away because he beat her and that she probably has a new boyfriend by now who's beating her too. Some women are just like that. For the first time, it occurred to Sabbath that Nikki might have left to fuck someone else.

It is now April 12, 1994 and Sabbath still wonders if Nikki lived beyond November 7, 1964, the night she disappeared and left a full house of theater goers without a performance to watch. He snarls at his mother's ghost in frustration and asks her why he's so concerned about Nikki's disappearance after all these years. His mother replies, "'That's the thing you know best,' 'have thought about most and *you don't know anything.*'"

Book 1, Part 4 Analysis

Sabbath is attempting to re-enact Nikki's disappearance. He believes she vanished to kill herself and he now believes he wants to do the same thing. Sabbath is sifting through the detritus of his past now that he thinks he's approaching death. The muddled nature of his thought process is revealed by his strong belief that his mother's ghost is trying to drive him to commit suicide. He keeps re-covering the same ground, but he fails to put any pieces together. When the woman in Baltimore tells him she thinks Nikki left because he beat her, he doesn't grasp the idea that he might be abusive. What *he* gets out of that conversation is that Nikki has betrayed him for another man. It was easier for him to think of her as a suicide than to grasp that she might have been running away from him. He still has no understanding that his attitudes and mindset are abusive.

Public understanding of abusive behavior is generally poor and it's not only Sabbath who suffers from the misconceptions. The neighbor lady who suggests Nikki ran away because he beat her also insinuates that "some women is like that." (pg. 134) Modern studies of domestic violence indicate it is prevalent in all strata of society and that every woman is as vulnerable as the next. If the public didn't share some of Sabbath's misperceptions, he would have had no audience for his Indecent Theater of Manhattan. However, Sabbath's theater always went too far, which simultaneously attracted and repelled his audience and lost him the respect of his peers in the theatrical profession.

Ultimately, Sabbath is far more repellant than attractive, as he will learn over the next few chapters when he is turned away by his former supporter, Norman Cowan.



Book 1, Part 5

Book 1, Part 5 Summary

Sabbath sits at the kitchen table with Norman. He notices Norman's discomfort with Sabbath's presence and feels like a contrast to Norman's life, which appears satisfying and successful from the looks of his house. Despite the recent depression Norman had admitted to over the phone, he looks wonderful and hasn't aged a day. Sabbath sees himself through Norman's eyes. He sees charity and shock at Sabbath's unexpected appearance. Sabbath thinks Norman must have romanticized him over the years as a talented but twisted artist who went to the mountains to find spiritual peace. This Sabbath, the wretch who sits before him, is not what Norman expected. Norman's kindly eyes reflect his acceptance of his old friend's weakness, along with pity. Sabbath says that he is entertained to see himself so pitifully reflected in Norman's eyes. After all, Sabbath is a man who lives to shock others with his perversions.

Norman and Sabbath talk about Nikki. Sabbath tells him he left New York to stop trying to find her. He tells Norman that it bothers him sometimes that Nikki had no way of finding him after he left New York. Of course, if she found him, she would also find Roseanna. Norman asks if the mountain represents a place not to think about Nikki. He is trying, Sabbath notes, to ask intelligent questions about Sabbath's life. Sabbath feels that they miss the point and answers Norman's questions with general platitudes that might or might not be true. He's thrilled to be in his old producer's presence. He remembers Norman and Linc and their kindness and support of his art, which even extended to getting him a lawyer for his obscenity trial. Sabbath realizes that Linc and Norman, two financially privileged, Jewish Columbia graduates, received a certain thrill from producing an art show as illicit as Sabbath's. "Back in the fifties there was something thrillingly alien about 'Mick.'" (pg. 142)

Safe in Norman's cozy kitchen, Sabbath feels certain that Officer Matthew Balich had intended to split his head open. Something incriminating must have turned up in Drenka's belongings. He counts his troubles. His main complaint is that he suffered for art that he had never created. His suffering is meaningless. Sabbath breaks into tears. Norman reaches across the table to take his hand and Sabbath realizes he can parlay Norman's sympathy into at least a week's stay. Sabbath justifies to himself his habit of arming himself against betrayal by being a little suspicious of everyone's sincerity. He thinks of all his miseries and feels sorry for himself. Sabbath starts telling him about his brother's death and his mother's depression to milk Norman's sympathy and get Norman to ask him to stay. Norman patiently tries to talk through Sabbath's problems with him. He asks after Roseanna. Sabbath admits that he has left his wife and that she had been his sole source of financial support. Norman asks if he's contemplating suicide. Sabbath denies it. Norman doesn't believe him and insists he stay with him and see a doctor, or be hospitalized immediately. Sabbath allows Norman to lead him to his daughter Deborah's empty bedroom and wonders if he is really having a breakdown. Sabbath isn't sure, but it is the performance of his life.



After Norman leaves Sabbath alone in Deborah's bedroom, Sabbath immediately rummages through the drawers under the bathroom sink while he fills up the tub. He extracts a tube of vaginal lubricating cream and leaves it on the sink while he returns to the bedroom area to find a picture of Deborah that he can use to masturbate. Moments after he slips into the hot bath with her picture and the vaginal cream, Norman enters to ensure Sabbath isn't drowning himself in the tub. Caught, Sabbath tells Norman his daughter is "sweet." Norman stares at him in silence for a moment before telling Sabbath that it would be a shame if his daughter's picture got wet. Norman picks up the tube of vaginal cream and shuts it back in the drawer. He tells Sabbath that Mickey always fought being a human being. Before he leaves, he tells Sabbath he left him a glass of warm milk by the bed. The moment he's gone, Sabbath walks, dripping, back to the bedroom to retrieve the picture of Deborah. In the bathroom, he also retrieves the vaginal cream and resumes where he left off.

Sabbath wakes from a refreshing sleep. He slept in a groove in the bed he imagines was fashioned by Deborah. Waking up in the seventeen-year-old's room, Sabbath feels seventeen again. He remembers the wonderful smells of being on a ship on the Amazon: "Unbelievable. Cheap perfume, coffee and pussy." (pg. 153) He thinks he should tell Norman to send Deborah to these exotic seaports so she can have the time of her life having sex with the sailors. He thinks about the leading roles whores have played in his life. "The stewlike stink of those oniony parts. What has ever meant more to me?" (pg. 153) He eyes the window, considering throwing himself through it onto the pavement below. Sabbath tries to think of a reason to get out of bed. He finds his reason in Deborah's lingerie drawer. He ruffles through her underwear and then smells the pantyhose to find an unwashed pair. He takes it with him into the bathroom. Sitting on the toilet, his thoughts again turn to his youth at sea. Every ship and every man was headed for the whorehouses. He was completely immersed in an environment of sailors and women. On board, he jerked off to rage-filled books by Dostoyevsky. He kicks himself for choosing puppets over a career at sea and his precious whores.

Sabbath realizes he has left Deborah's underwear scattered on the floor. He chooses a pair of panties to carry with him in his pants pocket. He leaves the bedroom and goes to the kitchen, finding the house empty. A continental breakfast has been laid out for him on the kitchen table. He looks at the expensive food and asks himself why he has always looked down on such things. This morning, he has discovered that it's rather nice to wake up to a fine assortment of jellies and jams. He's disgusted with himself for having none of these trappings of success. Linc and Nikki flash across his mind as he thinks again of jumping out the window. He wonders if Nikki disappeared to be with a Norman of her own. Sabbath's mother tells him that he thinks like a failure. Sabbath reminds her that he is a failure, as he had told Norman last night. His mother replies that he has the ideology of a pimp and should have become one. She also tells him that he should have lead a productive life, with a family and a profession. She decries him for deliberately seeking to live on the wrong side of life. His mother's ghost finishes her arguments by telling him to take life seriously enough to die with dignity. Sabbath seems determined to disappoint her to the very end.



Sabbath finds a nicely typed note from Norman on the kitchen table, addressed to him. Norman tells him the funeral is at two and the cleaning lady, Rosa, comes at nine. He leaves his office number for Sabbath and encourages his old friend to call a psychiatrist Norman knows who has a cancellation that very afternoon. Norman and his wife send their regards and will see him at the service. He has clipped an envelope to the note containing ten fifty dollar bills for Sabbath. Sabbath had already made out a check for the entire \$300 in his account to Norman, but he thinks Norman will never cash it and take Roseanna's money. Now, Sabbath can go into town and cash another \$300 check against the joint account. Sabbath considers his financial gain a potential reason to live. His mother tells him he's making a farce of both suicide and life.

Sabbath eats a huge breakfast and then returns to Deborah's room to resume searching her drawers. This time he looks for the sexy Polaroid pictures he's convinced every woman hides. He finds her diary, her class notes, her recipe collection and many innocuous and homey items. His prolonged search is interrupted by the entrance of Rosa, the very pregnant cleaning lady. Rosa thinks Sabbath has a gun and begs him not to shoot her. She drops to her knees to pray and Sabbath thinks she might be trying to seduce him. He also wonders if she might be as mean as the Catholic whore, his first lay, who told him to get off of her the instant he finished. Sabbath remembers how his old high school friend Ron had chosen a pregnant whore and decides to see where the situation leads. Rosa offers to show him where the family hides their money if he will leave and let her live. He follows her into the master bedroom, where she pulls two nine by twelve envelopes out of a drawer containing Norman's wife's nightgowns. There is ten thousand dollars in cash inside the first envelope. He asks about the second envelope, but she says there's nothing in it.

Sabbath slips and calls Rosa by name, which startles her. Sabbath wonders if he should stop making her suffer, but then he convinces himself Rosa is manipulating him. He thinks sexual thoughts about Norman's wife Michelle and wonders how the female orthodontist could have come by this stash of cash. He concludes that it's related to sex. She came by the money the same way Drenka acquired the \$500 he paid her for the tryst with Christa. Fingering the fake gun in his pocket, he motions to Rosa to give him the other envelope. It contains sexy Polaroids of Michelle. Sabbath puts returns the contents of both envelopes to their hiding place in the drawers. He looks around the bedroom, considering whether it would be better to hang himself in here or in Deborah's room. He studies his useless, arthritic hands and wonders if he can even tie the knot in the hangman's noose.

Rosa notices Sabbath's hands and asks him in Spanish if they hurt. He admits they're very painful and again recalls Ron's conquest of the pregnant whore. Rosa reminds him more of the fat, old, decaying whores in the cheaper whorehouses. He orders her to come with him and takes her into Deborah's bedroom. He tells her that he promises not to tell the family that she betrayed them by showing him the money and the pictures. It will be their secret. Rosa promises not to say anything and he pulls one of the fifties Norman gave him from the envelope, motioning her to come take it. She refuses. He repeats his request that she forget everything and this time, to his delight, she takes the money. With his other hand, he produces a second fifty. She tells him no. He says it's a



"donación," the word the guys taught him to use when giving prostitutes financial gifts. She says no again and glares at him, which he interprets as a sign of her agreement to sleep with him for money. He pulls her towards him, holding her lower torso between his legs and tells her to take the money. Rosa does as he tells her. He wonders if he needs to secure her agreement to have sex with him with another fifty.

Instead, he looks around the messy room at the underwear he has strewn everywhere and tells her to clean it up. She breathes heavily in relief and he wonders if she kneel down and give him a blow job if he slipped her a third fifty. Sabbath explains that he created the mess while looking for his glass eye and that he's a friend of the family. Rosa hadn't heard that Lincoln Gelman had died, but comprehension dawns on her face as he explains he's here for the funeral. He tells her he lost the eye and it rolled into one of the boots in the closet while he was searching for it. He encourages her to touch his eye, to feel the "glass." She does, surprised at how real it feels. He surveys her and is highly disappointed with the quality of the woman he believes will be his last fuck. He thinks to himself that she is a pregnant, illiterate Mexican out of the slums who is as overweight as he is.

Sabbath drops onto Deborah's bed and is overcome with the shakes. Rosa kneels next to the bed and asks him if she should call a doctor. Sabbath calls out for his mother and Rosa holds his head to her bosom in a motherly way. Sabbath allows her to get close to him, but he's convinced she means to grab for his non-existent gun and shoot him. He is thinking of Roseanna. When the infamous news item erupted about a woman who had snipped off her husband's penis with a scissors and was let off by the jury, he had asked Roseanna if she had ever had similar thoughts. She told him yes, often. Sabbath had responded with a melodramatic accusation that she actually intended to cut off his penis and then he dared her to do it. Now he tells himself it was fear of her doing this that caused him to run away. It's also his justification for hating Rosa, who continues to comfort him as he weeps. She asks him how he lost his eye. He tells her he lost it in the war. She asks how he can cry out of it and he tells her it's well made. Finally, he calls out the names of Rosa, Mama, Drenka, Nikki, Roseanna and Yvonne. He begins to speak to his ladies, but Rosa tells him in Spanish that she doesn't understand what he's saying. It's all right, thinks Sabbath. He doesn't either. He's half sure, he says, that he's faking his collapse.

Book 1, Part 5 Analysis

Part 5 is an eerie trip into the mindset of an abusive man. Sabbath's experience with women is predominantly with whores, for whom he has no human empathy or respect. He earlier referred to them as puppets. He refuses to allow any contradictory experience with women to temper his abusive beliefs. No matter what a woman says or does, he sees her as an evil whore. Rosa's Hispanic ethnicity, her pregnancy and her Catholicism remind Sabbath of hookers he's known. He treats her like one, never considering she could be anything else. He threatens her life and terrorizes her with the possibility of being raped, but from his point of view, he's only seducing a whore with money. He has the arrogance to be upset that God didn't send him a nicer looking



where for his final tryst. When he falls ill and Rosa treats him kindly, he expects her to make a grab for his "gun" and kill him. He has convinced himself that all women are out to get him and that his abusive attitudes and behavior towards women result from his fear of being hurt by them. His thoughts fixate on a threat that Roseanna had once made against his genitals, a threat which he manipulated her into making in the first place. He blames this threat for forcing him to flee his home to preserve his physical safety. This pretense of fear for his life from these women is particularly absurd coming from a man who is contemplating throwing himself out a window.

Even Sabbath's thoughts of suicide are abusive. Psychologists lump all suicides into two broad categories, despair and revenge. By contemplating hanging himself either in Deborah's bedroom or in the bedroom Norman shares with his wife, Sabbath is clearly intent on creating harm through the act of suicide. He seems more interested in desecrating Norman's house, a house that symbolizes everything Mickey has failed to achieve, by leaving his rotting corpse swinging from the rafters. As with most revenge suicides, Sabbath doesn't have a real reason to seek revenge against Norman, who has been nothing but kind to him. However, the mindset of an abusive man convinces him that the world has and will continue to do him harm. He can always think of a reason to seek revenge. Mickey Sabbath, at the close of Book 1, is at his lowest point. The reader must read on with the flimsy hope that Sabbath may experience character growth as a result of revisiting his past in the events of Book 2.



Book 2, Part 6

Book 2, Part 6 Summary

Book 2 opens with Sabbath hitting the streets of New York for the first time in thirty years. He feels like Rip Van Winkle, having missed the transformation others have told him about, "of New York into a place utterly antagonistic to sanity and civil life, a city that by the 1990s had brought to perfection the art of killing the soul." (pg. 189) Sabbath doesn't believe in this characterization of New York. Unlike his neighbors in Madamaska Falls, Sabbath can appreciate any city that brings out the worst in people. He had considered moving back over the years, but never took any action to do so.

Suicidal thoughts accompany Sabbath on to the subway and he composes his own obituary during the brief ride downtown. In it, he lists his last act before plunging out of Norman's eighteenth story window to be the sodomization of Rosa, who he quotes as sobbing because he was not hard enough. He details his brief career and briefer scrape with the law and then quotes an aristocratic feminist as blaming him for Nikki's death just as Hughes was blamed for Sylvia Plath's and Fitzgerald was blamed for Zelda's death. In his obituary, Sabbath links himself to these eminent artists. He also writes about his first whore and his disappointment in the fact that she was "slightly mean." (pg. 194) How could a naïve kid have known that one out of ten whores would be mean like that? Finally, he ends his obituary with a brief, bitter family history, in which he implicates himself and Roseanna in Nikki's death and then states that he never did anything for Israel.

The next few pages are written without punctuation to convey Sabbath's confused mindset as he roams the streets of New York and purchases drugs from a street dealer. His rambling thoughts wander to his youth along the sea shore with Morty. He recalls the days before the war, when Morty was a lifeguard, as a happy time for him, before his life was ruined. This leads to thoughts of Nikki playing her starring role in *The Cherry Orchard*. About half an hour before the funeral, Sabbath becomes coherent again. He goes to the Astor Place train station with the intention of heading directly to the funeral. At the station, he watches street performers.

A beggar approaches Sabbath with a cup full of change and what feels like a knife pressing into Sabbath's flesh. The supposedly suicidal Sabbath, who not moments before was crying over his coming death, finds the will to push off the beggar and save his life. Only then does he realize that it was not a knife the beggar had pushed up against him, but the beggar's penis. Sabbath looks around. There are two other beggars, but neither noticed the incident. Sabbath watches as one of them attempts to convince an injured pigeon to drink some water. The pigeon does not do as instructed and the beggar gives it a swift kick. Sabbath applauds what he considers to be street art and has an epiphany. Sabbath had failed as a performer because he didn't go far enough in his quest for obscenity. Someone mistakes Sabbath for a beggar and drops a quarter into his coffee cup. Sabbath gets into the role and goes off to panhandle on the



subway, congratulating himself sarcastically on his new career. Wouldn't Roseanna be impressed to know he's earning an income for the first time since he got fired from his job at the college?

Sabbath recalls the fall of 1989 when the Kathy Goolsbee affair cost him his working man's status. Sabbath says he hated the job anyway. The only part he misses about teaching is having access to so many young girls. Kathy, with her flair for puppet design, had reminded him of Roseanna. One evening, she called him at home to advise him that she had the flu and couldn't turn in her project the following day. Sabbath asked about her boyfriend and when she responded by asking where his wife was, Sabbath knew he had her on the hook. He began to reel her in, asking leading questions about what she was wearing. The whole time, poor, trusting Sabbath had been unaware of what Kathy was plotting. She was taping the calls and somehow Kathy managed to leave a tape of their fourth phone call on the sink in the library, where it was sure to be found.

Sabbath was furious at Kathy, who assured him that it had been an accident. Sabbath had also secretly taped the conversation to add it to his collection of about thirty tapes containing sexual conversations with six previous students from his puppet workshop. Sabbath kept these tapes in a locked file cabinet as a testament to what he called his *art* - his ability to pervert previously innocent young women. "Yes, despite everything, he had the artistry still to open up to them the lurid interstices of life, often for the first time since they'd given their debut 'b.j.' in junior high. As Kathy told him in that language which they all used and which made him want to cut their heads off, through coming to know him she felt 'empowered.'" (pg. 213) Before the tape found its way to the dean's office, it was copied by an ad hoc committee on campus called Women Against Sexual Abuse, Belittlement, Battering and Telephone Harassment (i.e., Women Against S.A.B.B.A.T.H.). The tape was repeatedly aired publicly as a lesson for the young female students on how men like Sabbath could manipulate them into believing they're willing participants in his particular brand of humiliation.

At this point in the narrative, the author includes a detailed "transcript" of the conversation as a footnote that runs along the bottom half of the page for twenty-one pages. Meanwhile, the narration continues with Sabbath picking up Kathy in his car for a meeting, shortly after the scandal had broken. She sobbed and when he mocked her for it, and she offered him oral sex. Sabbath looked out the car windows and lamented his misfortune. How could he lose his job at a liberal arts college for teaching a twenty year old to talk dirty? He thought of all the authors, like Henry Miller, who have broken sexual barriers with their writing. He couldn't believe that he could get in trouble for breaking down Kathy's sexual barriers. He longed for the hookers of the Romance Run, which he first frequented when he was seventeen years old. And there were no "mollycoddling professors to keep me from getting clap, getting rolled, or getting stabbed to death, let alone getting my little ears molested. I went there deliberately to get myself molly-bloomed! That's what sevenfuckinteen is *for!*" (pg. 221)

Sabbath sat in silence, freezing out Kathy and thinking about Roseanna. The previous night, devastated by the Kathy Goolsbee scandal, Roseanna had left their house by car,



ostensibly heading to Kathy's house to confront her. Instead, Roseanna had driven the car into a boulder and then lain down on the road to wait for a car to run her over. Instead, she had been found by the local police and Sabbath had been awakened by a loud knock at the door as the officer returned her home. Sabbath hadn't even realized Roseanna wasn't in bed with him until Matthew the cop brought her back to the house. Sabbath had no patience left for Kathy. He was perturbed that his night's rest was so interrupted and further annoyed that he had spent six hours driving Roseanna to a psychiatric hospital that morning. On the drive, his mind had not been on Kathy or Roseanna, but on Drenka. In the car on the way to the hospital, he had played the Goodman music that he and Drenka loved to play during their trysts. Then he had driven back to Madamaska Falls to kill Kathy.

Kathy's offer of oral sex caused him to weaken. He began to believe she might not have deliberately set him up. After all, a man his age couldn't refuse a blow job from a twenty-year old woman. Sabbath felt compelled to accept her offer by his theory that if one is still able to do a thing, such as sleep with young girls, then one must do it. As Kathy sobbed on beside him, he remembered a puppeteer he had met in Italy who had boasted that his current mistress was fifteen, but he had known her since she was twelve. Twelve years old, mused Sabbath approvingly. Sabbath turned to Kathy and mustered all his powers of manipulation. He played on her sympathy. She was responsible for him losing his job. He wasn't doing anything wrong. The world has it in for American men.

Finally, taken in by his argument, Kathy asserted that she is of age and could do what she wanted. Encouraged by her response, Sabbath told her that "they" are telling terrible lies about men to children like Kathy. He explained that the lies are designed to make ordinary men like him and like Kathy's father into villains. "Because that is who they are against, honey-me and your dad." (pg. 237) Sabbath concluded his litany by explaining that he did Kathy a service by teaching her about the erotic mysteries. This was far better for her than leaving her to learn them on her own without proper guidance. Kathy told him again that she wanted to go down on him, but Sabbath was distraught to realize that his mind was on Roseanna. Sabbath remembered the details of checking her into the hospital and her anguished cry, and for the first time in his life, he found the strength to decline a blow job.

Sabbath told Kathy to go home or he would kill her and she wouldn't be the first woman he had killed. He reminded her about Nikki. Surely she had heard the stories around campus that he killed his first wife? Kathy didn't believe the stories and Sabbath gave her a detailed confession of how he strangled Nikki in their own bed while rehearsing a scene in Othello. Then Sabbath told Kathy what a perverse, psychotic degenerate she was for seducing a murderer. She insisted he tell her the details of the murder. He complied, but she still didn't believe him. He told her she was the first person he had ever admitted it to and he wanted to know which radical group on campus she intended to tell. Kathy said she wouldn't tell anyone, because it simply was not true. He demanded to know if she betray him as she did with the tape if it were true. Again, Kathy insisted that the tape's release was an accident. He continued to harangue her until she finally burst out of the car and fled down the road on foot in her Reeboks.



Sabbath waited in the car a while to avoid Roseanna calling the house. He pictured Kathy running straight to the dean with his murder confession. Sabbath thought of two homosexual men who were on the ship with him when he was a teenager. There was one who also frequented the whorehouses to sleep with women. Sabbath had never responded to his advances and he thought it odd that another man, openly gay, had never hit on Sabbath at all. The second man had been a self-educated loner who loaned Sabbath books by the likes of Yeats. Driving home, Sabbath wondered if he just chased away his last chance at twenty-year-old sex. He compared himself to King Lear and questioned if he confused the loyal Cordelia for her evil sisters, Goneril and Regan. Maybe Kathy hadn't betrayed him. Either way, he took comfort from the thought of having sex with Drenka every night for the next month while Roseanna was in the hospital.

After two weeks, he was allowed to visit Roseanna. She had sent him a note with the time and place. As he headed for the car, the phone rang. It was Roseanna and he thought she must be calling to cancel. He was already planning to phone Drenka to make a date when he learned that Roseanna only wanted him to bring her a three ring binder which she has locked away in a file. He got the file after toying with her mind on the phone, trying to get her to lose her grip. Halfway through the drive to the hospital, Sabbath stopped at a diner to read the contents of the binder. It contained the final letters written to Roseanna by her father before his suicide. The point of view of the letters mirrored Sabbath's earlier words to Kathy. The letters were a guilt trip, filled with self pity, in which Roseanna's father tried to convince her how badly she mistreated him.

Sabbath arrived at the hospital half an hour late. He saw his wife sitting and laughing with her new friends. He had not seen her in a good mood for many years. He was impressed with how good she looked. She recaptured her beauty after only fourteen days of sobriety. She introduced him to her friends and then led him away from the group like a child uncomfortable hanging out with her friends while a parent is present. Proudly, she showed him her room. Then, confusion overtook her and she began to cry. Roseanna told Sabbath that she was scared because she had to tell her story to the entire group the next night. For that reason, she needed her father's letters. She planned to admit the truth about her father for the first time in her life. She alluded to sexual molestation, but Sabbath didn't believe it. He thought she would have told him before if it was true.

Roseanna excused herself to her AA meeting, leaving Sabbath alone in her room. He spent the time reading the rest of her father's letters and Roseanna's personal diary. He thought of their marriage and wondered why either one of them stayed together for thirty years. Sabbath expected her diary to be filled with complaints about him and he was surprised that the entire diary focused on her father's alcoholism, his abusive attitude towards women and how he would come to her bed at night when he drunk. Sabbath finished the diary and grew bored waiting for Roseanna. In his own handwriting, he added one more letter to her from her father, easily mimicking the self-pitying tone of her father's real letters. It was a tone that Sabbath knew all too well.



Sabbath set out to find Roseanna on the hospital grounds. He encountered several of her friends, who seemed to have heard a great deal about Sabbath during group therapy sessions. One patient referred to Sabbath as "the great God Pan." (pg. 275) He made a pass at a young female patient and offered her vodka in exchange for having sex with him in his car. Sabbath raced off to the liquor store and returned with the vodka in twelve minutes flat, but the girl was gone. The hospital security guards busted Sabbath in the parking lot for bringing alcohol onto the premises. They escorted him off the premises and advised him they will be questioning his wife. If they had found that Roseanna had asked him to bring the alcohol, she would have been be kicked out of the program.

Sabbath arrived back in Madamaska Falls at one a.m. He drove straight to Drenka's and, despite the hour and tapped his horn - their signal. He opened the Stolichnaya and drank while he waited to see if she could get out of the house. She showed up, worried and asked him what was wrong. Sabbath asked for a blow job, but Drenka told him that it was too risky. Her husband might wake up before they were through. She told him to go home. On the ride home, he passed Matthew's cop car and drove recklessly, hoping to get pulled over while drinking and masturbating. His mind was on the fragile young woman he had hoped to sleep with at the mental hospital.

Back in the present, on the New York subway, Sabbath again thinks of King Lear, Nikki and the day Morty died. Sabbath thinks that the years between fourteen and sixteen were the most tragic period in his life. He remembers how Morty's death broke his father, turned him into a sad, passive old man. Sabbath felt like he lost a part of his own body when Morty died. He had tried to take over Morty's duties in the family, running deliveries for his dad and washing the floors for his mom. He remembers what a hero Morty had been in Sabbath's eyes. One day, he had buzzed the house in a B-25 and all the neighbors had come outside to wave to him. Morty had been shot down on December 12, 1944 and died three days later, on December 15.

Sabbath's reverie is interrupted when he notices a young woman dressed in black. She had been listening a few moments ago when Sabbath had quoted King Lear aloud. She recites the end of the quotation that Sabbath had been unable to recite fully from memory. Sabbath takes up the next line, pausing as if he can't remember that either. She finishes it for him. Sabbath is suddenly convinced that he is looking at Nikki's daughter. He asks her who her mother is and then announces that she is the daughter of Nikki Kantarakis. The girl pales and searches through her bag for money to get rid of the crazy bum. Sabbath touches her face and asks her where Nikki is hiding. She screams "don't touch me!" (pg. 303) A man in a business suit intervenes and tells Sabbath to get himself to a shelter.

The train stops and the girl escapes. Sabbath wanders off the train to search for her in the crowd. Unbidden, the suicidal words of King Lear echo in his mind. It is growing more difficult for him to believe that his breakdown is all an act.



Book 2, Part 6 Analysis

Sabbath seems stuck on his first sexual experience and has long been bitter from the whore's mean attitude towards him. It is bewildering that this man would have expected a loving experience from a woman he had purchased and cared nothing about. His lingering bitterness, still strong forty years later, that she did not satisfy his emotional needs is stupefying to the reader. Has he not, in all this time, learned that a loving sexual experience requires love? Sabbath has figured none of this out and he spends what he believes will be his final day on earth making crude, bitter jokes about whores, who are all women by his definition, including poor Rosa, the pregnant cleaning lady whom he has so recently terrified.

Sabbath acts like a little boy, alone in the world, desperate for love and attention. Like Roseanna's father, he is overcome with self pity at the destruction of his life, but he seems not to perceive that he is the author of his own destruction. Sabbath, in this chapter, shows his true colors as a predator of the weak. He does not understand that a man's character is defined by how he treats the most vulnerable members of society. Sabbath takes pleasure in corrupting the young and emotionally fragile. This is evidenced by his attempt to buy sexual favors from the patient by tempting her with her weakness for alcohol. He would have liked nothing better than to make her a whore by paying her for sex with vodka.

Sabbath reveals his anger more than anything else in this chapter. Anger underlies almost every one of his thoughts and deeds, although Sabbath sees himself as a humorist. He has repeatedly threatened to kill women throughout this and previous chapters. His provocation for these threats is the "touchy-feely" language they use. Admittedly, this type of language can irritate some, but for Sabbath to make "joking" threats to kill someone for their honest attempts to communicate goes well beyond the norm. This is a classic symptom of the abusive mindset. To justify in one's own mind that even the smallest annoyance deserves a death threat is exactly the kind of thinking that leads to domestic violence. Abusers have a set of mental attitudes that maintain their anger. It is not the external world that stimulates the anger. It is the internal attitude of the abuser. Regardless of how well the world might treat such a man, he will always find reason to take offense, to become enraged and to seek payback.

Sabbath's confessions of murdering Nikki are another display of his anger. He tells Kathy that he is a murderer in a parked car in the woods. The reader, like Kathy, remains doubtful about the veracity of this confession. True or not, his only motivation for making this confession is to make Kathy fear for her life, just as he enjoyed his little "joke" of making Rosa fear for her life in the previous chapter. The fact that he takes pleasure in threatening people's lives makes it clear that Sabbath is constitutionally capable of committing murder, if indeed he has not already. Sabbath's sense of humor thinly masks the truth of his character. He doesn't just joke about hating women. He hates them. However, by making his viciousness into a joke, Sabbath is able to fool himself into believing he's merely a prankster, or a man who has failed but retains his

sense of humor. He uses humor to hide the truth about who he is from himself. By joking about being human garbage, he can pretend that it's not the truth.



Book 2, Part 7

Book 2, Part 7 Summary

Michelle Cowan, Norman's wife, had gotten Sabbath's arthritis prescription filled for him during the day and Sabbath is in a wonderful mood that night at dinner. Norman had picked up spare clothes for him as well and to top off his evening, Michelle turns out to be better looking in person than in the Polaroids he had found. Sabbath appraises her and thinks she's about Drenka's age. He thinks that Norman is nothing like Drenka's boring husband, but after a while, don't all husbands become as boring as Matija? Norman had told Sabbath the night before that his anti-depressant medication was hard on his libido and Sabbath assumes that Michelle is cheating on him. He believes that the money in her dresser is either for being paid by men for sex, or for paying young men to have sex with her. Alternatively, perhaps she has stockpiled the cash so she can leave Norman.

Sabbath can tell that the marriage is in trouble from Michelle's laughter at his jokes over dinner and from the fact that Michelle permits him to play footsie with her under the table only ten minutes into the meal. He presumes that Michelle is unhappy and bored in her marriage and would give anything for one last sexual adventure before old age. Norman encourages Sabbath to tell Michelle the story of Sabbath's arrest for indecency. Sabbath wonders if Norman is trying to turn his wife on or off to Sabbath with this story. Before dinner, Norman had talked about how wonderful Michelle is and Sabbath could only assume this was an act. Norman showers his wife's work with praise and he is the kind of husband for whom Roseanna longs. However, Sabbath wonders if Norman is conspiring with Sabbath to put Michelle in Sabbath's bed. He knows that Norman was once attracted to Sabbath's taboo-breaking and Sabbath thinks Michelle will be, too. He can only assume Norman wants him to tell the story to stimulate Michelle.

Sabbath tells the story in great detail, remembering the names of all the players, though he pretends to have difficulty recalling them. He talks about the girl whose breast he liberated on the street and how she had stood up for him to the cop. He says she had told the police officer that she had permitted Sabbath to touch her breast as part of his show. The cop tries to tell her Sabbath took advantage of her, but the girl, a Barnard student named Helen Trumbull, told the officer that Sabbath had done nothing wrong. Michelle interrupts to say that the girl was brave and sounded a bit like her daughter, Debby. Sabbath resumes, telling them that the crowd of college students watching his street show that day all applauded Helen for standing up for artistic freedom and free speech.

Regardless, the cop had arrested Sabbath. Sabbath explains how he almost talked the desk sergeant into dropping the charges, but that the cop had insisted on arresting Sabbath. Norm and Linc had procured a lawyer for him and Sabbath insisted on enlisting the help of the ACLU. Helen Trumbull found herself in the center of a political battle. In 1956, says Sabbath, it took a great deal of courage for a woman to buck the



sexual conventions of that era. Michelle asks what happened to the girl when she testified. Sabbath tells her the girl got scared when she got up on the stand and Michelle again says the girl reminds her of her daughter. Sabbath runs with this and tells her the judge tried to establish that the girl was a whore. Sabbath intentionally calls Helen by Debby's name, telling Michelle across the kitchen table that Debby is a whore. He continues to use Debby's name in the story, even after Norman pointedly corrects him. Sabbath ends his story by telling Michelle he was convicted on the grounds of obscenity and disorderly conduct. The judge had given him thirty days, a suspended sentence and a hundred dollar fine, which his lawyer agreed to pay. Sabbath started a fight with the opposing attorney on the way out and received another hundred dollar fine that Linc and Norman ultimately paid.

Throughout the story, Sabbath continues to play with Michelle's naked foot under the table. Sabbath concludes by saying he could have had a tougher judge, someone like the Inquisition's infamous Savanarola. He mentally compares the dean at his college, a Japanese woman who had fired him over the Kathy Goolsbee scandal, with Savanarola. Sabbath feels persecuted by the intolerant people out there who don't want him to have sex. Sabbath looks at Michelle and sees that he has succeeded in entertaining her and that she must be thinking that Sabbath is just what she needs to give her aging sexuality a boost.

Sabbath, Norman and Michelle all go to bed early. Sabbath wisely decides to wait a few minutes before getting into Debby's underwear drawer again. Sure enough, Norman knocks on the door to give him a bathrobe and the New York Times to read. Sabbath accepts the papers, but says he has given up on the news because it so often reports the Japanese in a positive light. Sabbath rants about his hatred of the Japanese until Norman becomes worried. Norman finally gets Sabbath to settle down and wishes him a good night. Alone in the room, Sabbath continues to rant about his hatred of the Japanese, which he has proudly clung to since World War II.

A second knock sounds at the door. It is Michelle. She wears a Japanese kimono that covers her completely. Sabbath is momentarily horrified by the Japanese robe, but then he realizes that she wore it to seduce him. How clever of Michelle, he thinks. Sabbath knows she has sexier items in her lingerie drawer, but the kimono, which is feminine yet not obviously sexy, is the most she can wear for Sabbath without making Norman suspicious. Sabbath realizes that by donning the kimono, Michelle is signifying to him that she has decided to have an affair with Sabbath. Michelle gives him a second prescription she had had filled and she says she forgot to give it to him earlier. Then she asks for his clothes. Norman had suggested that Sabbath might like to have them sent to the cleaners. As he hands her the clothes, he thinks how easy it would be to push Norman out the window and take the house, the widow and the expensive marmalade.

Michelle asks Sabbath why he likes to look this way, indicating his filthy clothes. She tells him that Norman said that when Sabbath was young, people couldn't take their eyes off him. Sabbath had possessed a force, like a bull or a free spirit. Sabbath tells her Norman said that only to justify having invited someone of a lower social class to his dinner table. Michelle comments on his eloquence. Sabbath says his facility with



language takes people's minds off the fact that he's short. Michelle tries to tell him that Norman had adored Sabbath's brilliance as a youth and still thinks well of him. Sabbath replies that well-bred people like Norman often need to have a disgraceful friend to voyeuristically enjoy the seamy side of life without having to indulge in it personally.

Michelle asks about Nikki and Sabbath tells her he murdered her. Michelle replies that Norman said she disappeared, but Sabbath insists again that he murdered her. Michelle wonders why Sabbath always needs to put on an act and how much it costs him. Sabbath wonders if there is any other way to act. He tells her there is no stupidity that fails to interest him. Michelle again presses him for insight into why he antagonizes everyone and pushes them away. Sabbath mentions the Marquis de Sade, but Michelle is skeptical and says he's not that. However, she pursues his line of logic. If being so antagonistic has freed him from the desire to please others, what has that gained him? He asks what it has gained her. She says that she pleases people all the time. He asks who. She replies that she pleases teachers, parents, husband, children, patients, everybody. He asks if she pleases lovers and she admits that she does.

"Please me, Michelle," responds Sabbath as he tries to pull her into her daughter's bedroom. (pg. 334) She asks if he's crazy and he throws philosophy at her to convince her to enter. With a laugh, she asks him why he played footsie with her husband all through dinner. Sabbath says he's incensed that Norman is such a poor host, allowing him to play with his foot when it was his wife's foot that his guest craved. He makes an awkward transition into her work as an orthodontist and invites her into the room to check out his teeth. She says to him, "Not now." (pg. 334) They make a date for Saturday. She drops her forehead onto his and marvels that they could have come to this decision so quickly. Sabbath tells her adultery is necessary and that fidelity is a cruel mockery. He opens his robe and says, "Behold the arrow of desire." (pg. 336) This sends Michelle scurrying away.

That night, Sabbath is overjoyed at having procured another wanton Drenka. He thinks lustfully of Michelle and her daughter all night, but when he ventures into the kitchen in the morning, he finds that his stay at the Cowan residence has come to an end. Michelle had left for work, but Norman stayed behind to tell Sabbath he must leave after breakfast. In the clothes Sabbath had given Michelle the night before, she had found both the bag of crack he had purchased before the funeral and she found a pair of Debby's panties in Sabbath's pants pocket. Norman demands to know how Sabbath could take Debby's underwear. Sabbath protests that it's normal because he's sixty-four and Debby is a teenager. Sabbath can't believe that the panties would have turned off Michelle. He assumes she would have delighted in wearing her daughter's panties to bed to turn him on. In fact, he tells himself, "She's done it before, along with everything else." (pg. 340) As Norman questions him about his behavior, Sabbath mentally derides Norman for the way he dresses, thinking Norman dresses so well because he's a saint, or because he's a crooked sinner. In his mind, Sabbath mocks him as a successful, American Jew.

Norman asks why Sabbath wanted to play footsie with Michelle. Sabbath tells him he had intended to play footsie with Norman. Norman asks why Sabbath told Michelle he



had murdered Nikki. Sabbath gives him a vivid description of strangling Nikki, but Norman reminds him that Norman was there when it all happened and knows Sabbath didn't kill Nikki. Sabbath asks him how he plans to kill Michelle. Norman tells him not to degrade himself any further. Sabbath continues to attack and asks Norman how he thinks Michelle plans to kill him. As an orthodontist, he says, Michelle has the strength in her hands to strangle Norman while he sleeps. Sabbath says he had a strong grip from the puppeteering back when he strangled Nikki. He describes it again, in detail. Norman asks what has happened to Sabbath's mind. Sabbath explains that there is no protection in life and they are in constant danger. Norman seems to understand his philosophy, but he tells Sabbath that doesn't mean he should destroy his own life and intentionally seek danger. He tells Sabbath to get out.

Sabbath tells Norman that he showed his dick to Michelle. Norman stands, jaw clenched, as Sabbath tells him about the date he and Michelle had made for Saturday. Sabbath refuses to believe that he has been thrown out over Debby's panties. He believes he's being thrown out because Norman is afraid his wife will sleep with Sabbath. As Norman leaves to pack Sabbath's things, Sabbath thinks about how much he likes and admires Norman, the cuckolded husband. Sabbath wonders why Norman keeps Michelle and thinks it must be a lot of work to keep her from running around on him. He considers what Norman would lose if he called Michelle a whore and kicked her out. When Norman returns, Sabbath tells him that he lives in the world of real love. Norman asks Sabbath what world he lives in. He lectures his houseguest and tells Sabbath that the enormity of his isolation from society is shocking. Sabbath quips that isolation is the best preparation he can think of for death.

Norman tells him for the final time to get out. Sabbath artfully chooses that moment to pass out. He later tells himself he fainted because of his realization, upon discovering the beggar's cup still in his pants pocket, that he had lost his new mistress because she had seen the cup. When he wakes up a short time later in Norman and Michelle's bedroom, he hears Norman on the phone with the psychiatrist he had recommended, Dr. Graves. Sabbath tells himself that he must save Norman from himself. If Norman gets involved in trying to save Sabbath, it will destroy him. If Norman ever sees the cash or the Polaroids that his wife keeps hidden, that will destroy him, too. Nobly, Sabbath steals the ten thousand dollars and the dirty pictures and flees the apartment.

Book 2, Part 7 Analysis

Sabbath's theories on fidelity are difficult to believe coming from a man who has never given it a try. To him, sex is the only pleasure in life. When he gets bored of having sex with a particular woman, he blames monogamy. It never occurs to Sabbath that he's bored because he's missing out on everything in life except sex. He's bound to grow bored because he's a one dimensional creature. He uses sex to keep life and other people, at a distance. Michelle's character, authored by the same man who spewed Sabbath onto the written page, does a disservice to all women by agreeing to betray her loving husband for a cheap thrill. Michelle is not merely guilty of planning adultery, but she has planned it with a man whose sole purpose in life is to degrade women. One can



only hope that her complicity in this adulterous arrangement is entirely in Sabbath's imagination. He has no credibility as a narrator. He describes all women as sex-obsessed, deceitful whores and the reader can hope that his version of events with Michelle has been colored by his deceitful mind.

In this chapter, Sabbath has turned on his last living friend. Norman's repeated attempts to understand, forgive and help heal Sabbath's horrible behavior are much like an abused woman's attempts to understand, forgive and heal her abuser. If Norman had kept up on the modern psychological literature, he would have known better. The experts say that it is not the alcohol, the low self-esteem or the painful past that makes an abusive man abusive towards others. He might have low self-esteem, problems with substance abuse and a painful past, but many non-abusive people do too. It is his own bad attitude that causes him to lash out at others.



Book 2, Part 8

Book 2, Part 8 Summary

Sabbath's car reaches the sea shore. He is seeking the cemetery where his mother was laid to rest. He finds a supermarket in its place and asks the manager where they put all the graves. Sabbath finds no answers there and searches the area, but he cannot recall the name of the cemetery. It is only through the sheer luck of stumbling upon a funeral procession in traffic that he manages to locate it. Sabbath parks and approaches the office, where he finds two tethered dogs and several men wearing baseball caps. Sabbath approaches the boss, Mr. Crawford and tells him he needs to purchase a gravesite near his parents' graves.

Crawford tells Sabbath his timing is bad. He has a funeral starting in just a moment. Sabbath can see that the hearse, the mourners and the rabbi have arrived, but Crawford notices the crowd of mourners is still trickling in and gives Sabbath a minute before the funeral. As they walk towards the Sabbath plot, Sabbath learns that Crawford has been here for forty years. Crawford laments the lack of profit he has made in all that time, while Sabbath is flooded with memories of his heritage, recalling Jewish words and family members he hasn't thought of in years. Crawford tells Sabbath that his parents are in a part of the cemetery where four plots are sold together and there might already be an available space for him. Excitedly, Sabbath recalls that at his mother's funeral, there had been an empty space next to her, Mickey's father and Morty.

When Sabbath and Crawford arrive at the Sabbath plots, Sabbath finds that the fourth plot has since been occupied by his aunt Ida, his mother's sister. Sabbath his displacement from the family plot badly. "Why does life refuse me even the *grave* I want? Had I only marshaled my abhorrence in a good cause and killed myself two years ago, that spot next to Ma's would be mine." (pg. 359) Sabbath pauses in his self pity to read Morty's headstone. Mr. Crawford suddenly tells Sabbath that he remembers his family. Sabbath doesn't believe he's sincere, especially when Crawford tells him "the daughter or someone comes out" to take care of the graves. Sabbath has no sisters, but the graves have obviously been tended. Crawford returns to the funeral, leaving Sabbath to decide on a plot. Sabbath considers being buried next to Drenka instead, but decides he would feel more comfortable in a Jewish cemetery. The memories are flooding back now. He walks to the oldest part of the cemetery and locates his grandparents' graves after some searching. A mourner had placed pebbles atop their headstones and Sabbath wonders idly who had visited.

There is nothing earth-shattering in Sabbath's memories. They are the small details that make up a life, which often seem important only afterwards. He recalls Grandma cleaning the fish that he and Morty caught. He remembers how she would bake them whole and serve them with corn and large Jersey tomatoes. He remembers his job selling bananas when he was twelve and how he and Morty used to pluck chickens with Vaseline smeared on their arms to protect them. He remembers a childhood bully and



his pretty sister. Sabbath leaves the gravesite, but not before placing pebbles on the graves of his mother, father, Morty and Ida.

In Crawford's office after the funeral, Sabbath pays cash for the plot he has chosen and for the funeral service and related expenses. Crawford overcharges him, but he doesn't care. He's using the money he stole from Michelle. He leaves a sealed envelope with instructions for his epitaph, to be opened after he dies. The sealed envelope contains Sabbath's chosen text: "Beloved Whoremonger, Seducer, Sodomist, Abuser of Women, Destroyer of Morals, Ensnarer of Youth, Uxoricide, Suicide." (pg. 376) He leaves the cemetery and drives past his old neighborhood. He ends his tour at the house that had belonged to his old cousin Fish. He is drawn to it and stops to inquire about Fish. A neighbor lady informs him that she hasn't seen the old man for several days and thinks Sabbath ought to check out the house.

Sabbath barges in and finds Fish, looking crushed by the weight of the years. Sabbath tells him he's his cousin, Morty's brother. Fish doesn't remember at first, but the old man takes an interest as Sabbath reminisces about the vegetables Fish used to sell from his truck. He speaks kindly to Fish, visits with the lonely old man and helps him read his mail. Then he notices his mother's precious sideboard in Fish' house. He thinks Fish must have picked it up at her estate sale on the cheap. Sabbath convinces Fish to go into the kitchen to cook himself lunch and then searches the sideboard. He finds a box of Morty's personal effects and leaves with the box without another word to Fish.

Inside, Sabbath finds items of personal value, including the flag that decorated Morty's coffin and a patriotic yarmulke stitched together from red, white and blue satin triangles. Sabbath dons the yarmulke and takes the flag down to the beach. Wrapping himself in the banner, he cries for the loss he cannot get past. Two hours later, he returns to the car to find a packet of envelopes that had fallen out of the carton. They are the last five letters which Morty sent home. Mickey rereads them all. The last one is dated the day before Morty died.

Book 2, Part 8 Analysis

For a few moments during this chapter, the reader has hope for Sabbath's redemption. As he begins to recount the memories of his young life, we finally see that there is something he cared about once. We are steeped in the details of his boyhood, including the importance of his family, his neighbors, his recreational pursuits and part time jobs, his memories of an older brother whom he admired and his experience as a young Jewish man in a neighborhood defined by ethnicity. Could we possibly grow to like Sabbath? If Sabbath reconnects with his roots, perhaps it will be a positive turning point in his life. We watch him be kind and patient with his cousin Fish. We see him find the precious box of Morty's memories.

Then Sabbath steals the box and walks out on Fish without another word. In that action, Sabbath reveals that he has no empathy for Fish. The only reason he had been kind to Fish was to get the man to talk about *Sabbath's* memories. It is still all about Sabbath.



The moment the old man is no longer useful, Sabbath simply walks out, never to return. Sabbath plainly sees how lonely Fish has become, but Sabbath, Fish's first visitor in a very long time, can't summon up the courtesy to leave politely, much less to share his discovery of Morty's things. If he hadn't treated Fish so poorly, Sabbath's self-pitying visit to the beach might have elicited sympathy from the reader. However, his treatment of Fish implies that even Sabbath's tears over Morty are not about Morty at all. They're about what Sabbath lost when Morty died. The final irony that the author uses to emphasize this point about Sabbath's selfishness comes in the form of the letters. These five final letters from Morty, which carry such great emotional importance to Sabbath, are evocative of the final half dozen letters Roseanna received from her father. In Sabbath's eyes, Morty's letters matter because they mean something to him, but Sabbath had treated Roseanna's meaningful letters spuriously. They only mattered to her, not to Sabbath personally and he didn't treat them with respect.



Book 2, Part 9

Book 2, Part 9 Summary

Sabbath drives away from the beach, still wrapped in Morty's flag and wearing the yarmulke. His mind reviews every detail he had ever learned about the B-25 bombers that Morty had flown and their corresponding Japanese counterparts. Sabbath is returning home. Now that he has Morty's things, he feels he cannot kill himself. He laments the fact that something always came along to force him to keep living. Now, Morty's things are too important to keep anywhere but in his own home. He blames Morty's things for forcing him to return to Roseanna.

As Sabbath drives, he finally allows himself to think of Drenka's death. He had not known that her last night would be the last. It was like every other night of her hospital stay. Sabbath arrived half an hour after visiting hours, when he could be certain he would find her alone. He had grown accustomed to the oxygen tube, the morphine drip and her increasing fragility. Sabbath thought they could go on this way indefinitely, but the nurse who had been helping him sneak in called his house one morning to tell him it was over. A peaceful end, said the nurse, Jinx. Drenka's final words had been in Croatian. There was nothing more Jinx could tell him.

On what had turned out to be her last night, Drenka had called Sabbath her American boyfriend. She told Sabbath that the love in his eyes always made her less fearful, less like an outsider in this country. Drenka recalled her fondest memories of her youth by the sea and later, of dancing with Sabbath. She told him that to her, he *is* America. She recalled her fear of the huge sights and sounds of the highways, but she knew she would have enjoyed traveling with Sabbath. If only they could at least have had a weekend on the Jersey shore, she would have loved to have seen where he grew up. She had begged him to tell her more about it and that night Sabbath had spoken of his youth along the shore.

Sabbath told her it was unexciting. He wasn't in with the in crowd. He said he and his friend Ron Metzner sat around wishing they could get laid, with anyone. He did swing several part time jobs, most notably as a lifeguard where he could check out the girls. He and Ron delivered cigars on their bikes for Ron's dad, a Dutch Masters salesman who loved dirty jokes. Sabbath worked as a shoe salesman with an older man who used to lift up the ladies' feet so he and Sabbath could see under their skirts. Sabbath used to sniff the shoes they had tried on in the stockroom. He and Ron also used to park cars, skimming half the profits off the top. Then Morty got killed. Sabbath ran away to sea and that, he says, is when he fell in with the wrong crowd.

Drenka started crying, wishing she had been there with Sabbath. Then she received a morphine boost and the smile returned to her face. After the morphine, she talked about the time Sabbath had urinated on her. She remembered he had asked and she had thought she would be happy to do anything to please him, but she wanted to know what



he remembers. Had he been the one to initiate it? She remembers tasting it and how excited she had become. She had masturbated herself to a climax while he urinated on her working hands. She says afterward she felt like she had passed a test. It had been a rite of passage for her and Sabbath. She had feared she would be ashamed afterward, but instead she felt completely connected to Sabbath, having given herself to him in a way she couldn't give to anyone else. Her final words are, "I give my heart, I give myself, in fucking." (pg. 429)

Sabbath can see the lights in his house from the bottom of the hill where he stops the car and reconsiders his plan. It's the closest thing to a home he has and he needs a home for Morty's things. Sabbath remembers the ten rules of marital advice he had given Drenka because she had been so unhappy in her marriage. The first rule of any marriage, according to Sabbath, is not to forget the benefits of their stupidity. He thinks he can get Rosie to take him back. Maybe he could even have sex with her. "Now, this was an odd thought to have. He could not, on reflection, remember thinking anything more aberrant in his entire life. When they'd moved up north, of course, he used to fuck Rosie all the time, into her up to the hilt all the time. But when they'd come up here, she was twenty-seven. No, first thing was to keep her from cutting off his dick. Trying to fuck her could even work against him. Modest goals. You're just looking for a home for you and Mort." (pg. 430)

Sabbath imagines her in the living room, reading and masturbating. He sees it in vivid detail, from memory. He thinks of his home, his wife, Morty's things, *his life*. He realizes it's perfect for him. He's the biggest scandal in town and that house on the hill is Sabbath's Indecent Theater.

However, Sabbath is still parked at the bottom of the hill an hour later, watching the living room darken and the bedroom light up. He drives towards the house as slowly as possible, feeling dead, forever trapped in a gravelike bed with Rosie. Then he sees a pickup truck parked in the carport next to Rosie's car. He peers into the bedroom window and sees Roseanna in bed with Christa watching a show about gorillas on television. When it's over, they turn out the lights and pray together. Under cover of darkness Sabbath can hear them begin to make love. Then he smells the "odors that exist only within women" wafting out the open window. Sabbath explodes. He beats on his chest like the gorillas on the show and creates a ruckus. Returning to his car, he flips on the headlights and notices that the smell he had attributed to Rosie and Christa was actually the smell of the garbage cans overturned by raccoons.

Sabbath retreats to Drenka's grave. He parks the car and begins to make out a will on the back of a repair bill. He leaves funds for a scholarship to be awarded annually to the female student who sleeps with the most male faculty members. He leaves his tape recorder to Kathy Goolsbee and the dirty pictures of Dr. Michelle Cowan to the State of Israel. He signs and dates his will April 13, 1944. Realizing his mistake, he crosses out 44 and writes 94. On the back of another repair bill, he leaves instructions for his brother's things to be buried with his naked body. He puts this into an envelope for Mr. Crawford. He next considers his suicide note, but decides not to write one.



Sabbath gets out of the car and stumbles to Drenka's grave, where he proceeds to urinate on it. Behind him, a voice calls him "Sir" and tells him to stop pissing on his mother's grave. Sabbath is swung around by his beard and commanded to holster his offending organ. Sabbath refuses. Matthew demands to know what Sabbath is doing pissing on his mother's grave, wrapped in an American flag and wearing a yarmulke. Matthew tells Sabbath the family has found Drenka's diary and that Matija has read it. They know everything. They know how he made her drink urine and how they involved Silvija in their fantasies. Matthew accuses Sabbath of depraving his mother and orders him to put his hands in the air. Sabbath bows instead, introducing himself as "Necrophilio, the nocturnal emission." (pg. 448)

A young officer in training helps Matthew cuff Sabbath and toss him in the back of the squad car. In the car, Sabbath thinks that Matthew intends to kill him. He tries to defend himself by explaining that what he was doing was very serious, a sacrament, really. The trainee explains that Sabbath is causing everyone pain. Matthew screams for his partner to stop the car. They pull over in a wooded area. Sabbath realizes that he hadn't killed himself because he is waiting to be murdered and now Matthew will kill him. All the pieces have fallen in place. However, Matthew merely releases Sabbath with a warning never to utter his mother's name in public. Sabbath suggests that Matthew go ahead and kill him. Matthew, sickened, screams a few insults at Sabbath and then takes off in the cruiser. Sabbath is left standing alone in the woods. He realizes he can't kill himself after all, because everything he hates is right here in this world.

Book 2, Part 9 Analysis

Sabbath winds up lost and alone in the woods. His plan to commit suicide was, after all, a part of his act. In fact his whole life has been a farce. The novel itself is an attempt at a modern day, Shakespearean style, tragic-comic farce. Sabbath imagines himself to be a larger than life protagonist like King Lear or the Marquis de Sade, but the twist is that his character is more like a court jester who imagines he is a king. By writing this novel with a jester-like Sabbath as the protagonist, Philip Roth has created a unique twist in the time-tested themes of Shakespeare. Shakespearean elements abound in the story line. For example, Matthew's surprise attack on the wrong suitor at Drenka's grave is a scene that could have come straight from Hamlet. The author also plays up the farcical elements at every opportunity, such as when Rosa mistakes Sabbath's engorged male member for a gun in his pocket. In that instance, Sabbath decided not to correct her mistake, but rather to let the scene play out for its entertainment potential. It's as if he's authoring the plot twists and petty dramas in his life. The author himself seems to have taken the same approach to writing *Sabbath's Theater*. He creates ridiculous, farcical situations filled with miscommunication and misunderstanding and sees how it all plays out. To his credit, the author plays it out faithfully by leaving Sabbath homeless, wifeless and alone at the end. It is the inevitable conclusion to the novel.

However, Sabbath is too small-minded to achieve any grand dramatic scale and so Philip Roth has limited the value of his work by his chosen premise. The novel cannot transcend a creature as base as Sabbath. Although it is designed as a farce, some



humor can be a thinly veiled form of anger and the novel seems more like a long, angry rant than a hilarious farce. Perhaps the author intended to explore the anger underlying such base humor. He certainly gives Sabbath his comeuppance at the end. Humor and attitudes that so thoroughly disrespect women, if taken literally, could create a life like Sabbath's. In a sense, the author has merely extended the punch line of a dirty joke into a 451 page novel.



Characters

Mickey Sabbath

There is little one can say about Mickey Sabbath that he hasn't said about himself. He enjoys regaling his audience with long diatribes about how unfair life has been to him. Sabbath seems to lack human empathy and is unable or unwilling to see any situation from the perspective of another. His own perspective is both selfish and self-serving. He is aware of his faults, including his lack of empathy and civility, but he expresses no interest in growing beyond them.

Sabbath is the character upon whom the entire farce is based. A court jester on testosterone, Sabbath acts his way through life, always going for the killer punch line. He hides inside his mental puppet theater and watches the audience's reactions from behind the curtain. He sees all of life as a performance. Everything he does is for entertainment value and he claims to be acting for his own entertainment. He has turned his life into a collection of stories that would have given his old friends on the Romance Run a big laugh. Perhaps that is the goal of his character. If so, one can only thank the author for writing down these bawdy tales rather than living them.

Roseanna Sabbath

Roseanna is an interesting character to whom the author devotes quite a few pages. Sabbath, however, has no interest in Roseanna anymore. She had been his mistress when he was married to Nikki and he couldn't get enough of her long-legged beauty back then. After Nikki disappeared, Roseanna became his partner in life and in puppetry. She was a skilled artisan who could create any puppet Sabbath required for his show. Sabbath squashed her instinct to create beautiful puppets, however, by instilling her with his philosophy that puppets were supposed to make people uncomfortable.

Roseanna is an earnest woman who moved away from the city with Sabbath to lead a peaceful, artistic life filled with children, love and serenity. However, Sabbath didn't agree with her dream. In fact, he never accepted their life together at all. How could he? He never bought into his own life. At AA, Roseanna finally learns not to take it personally, although that's easier said than done for a woman who takes her life and marriage seriously. Despite her former alcoholism and depression, Roseanna constantly strives to build a better life for herself and this makes her the most psychologically healthy character in the book. Sabbath's views of Roseanna are so disrespectful and harsh that the reader must ignore Sabbath's words and look instead to her actions to appreciate her character. If she manages to free herself from Sabbath, Roseanna will likely live out her days in happiness and peace.



Drenka Balich

Drenka is Sabbath's mistress of many years, to whom Sabbath is more faithful than he pretends. She is the idealization of Sabbath's perfect woman, an ideal shared by the dozens of men who slept with her. In Drenka, Philip Roth has created a living, breathing blow-up doll with a heart of gold. She is a woman who is a devoted wife, caring mother and talented member of the business community on the surface, but who leads a double life of adultery, pseudo-incest, pornography and orgies. Willing to degrade herself for his gratification, she completely subsumes herself to his every desire. Drenka is even willing to sleep with Sabbath's friends, so that Sabbath can prove to them that he tells the truth about his mistress. Drenka loves him passionately and maintains that she is completely satisfied as long as she is satisfying him.

Helen Trumbull

The Barnard student whose breast Sabbath touched during one of his Indecent Theater performances. Helen had stood up for Sabbath's artistic freedom in court, but she changed her mind based on what the judge had to say to her.

Ron Metzner

Sabbath's best friend in high school. They grew up in the same seaside community in New Jersey and escaped together after graduation. We never learn what became of Ron after their days at sea together, but Sabbath thinks often of the times they shared on the Romance Run.

Matthew Balich

Drenka and Matija's son. Matija resents Matthew for deciding to become a police officer instead of learning to run the family business and he doesn't take Matthew's police work seriously. Drenka, on the other hand, is a very proud mother and often speaks to Sabbath about Matthew's successful career. When Matthew learns of his late mother's affair with Sabbath, he begins haunting the cemetery. Sabbath believes Matthew wishes to catch him and kill him, but we learn that Matthew only wants to protect his mother's grave and her reputation from Sabbath. Matthew is the Americanized form of Matija.

Matija Balich

Drenka's cuckolded husband, a Croatian man who moved to America and made a handsome living running an inn with his wife.



Norman Cowan

As Lincoln Gelman's partner, he helped produce Sabbath's Indecent Theater show, as well as some of the plays Sabbath directed in the 1950's in New York. Norman Cowan was Jewish, like Sabbath, but unlike Sabbath, he grew up as the privileged son of wealthy parents, while Sabbath was the product of a poor but loving immigrant family. Norman fulfilled his own potential in life as a theatrical producer, husband and breadwinner. He serves the function of Sabbath's alter ego. He is decent, kind and successful, everything which Sabbath is not. He is also Sabbath's link to the past and Norman's lingering fondness for the man Sabbath once was gives the reader a more rounded view of Sabbath's life. We only hear about failures and doom from Sabbath. Norman, however, always saw Sabbath's talent and potential. The echo of his unfulfilled potential that Sabbath sees in Norman's eyes is an affront to Sabbath. It shows him that his failure wasn't written in the stars, but rather authored by his own hand. Perhaps this is the reason why Sabbath cannot rest until Norman, too, has lost his illusions about his old friend.

Lincoln Gelman

Norman Cowan's partner. He, even more than Norman, was the young Sabbath's champion. It was Linc who retained Sabbath's lawyer for his indecency trial and it was Linc who took Sabbath and Nikki in after the death of Nikki's mother. The Lincoln who Sabbath remembered was a vital, animated man. However, Sabbath learns from Norman that Linc, in later years, succumbed to disease and despair. According to Norman, not even Linc's closest friends could bear to be around him for the last five years of his life and Linc's suicide came as a relief to everyone. For Sabbath, Lincoln's death is the catalyst that prompts him to return to New York after thirty years and confront the ghosts of his past.

Nikki Sabbath

Sabbath's first wife. He thinks of Nikki as a fragile, frightened Ophelia-type. Nikki had clung to her husband and allowed him to direct her in every way. As an actress, she was incomparable, according to Sabbath. Sabbath's characterization of her as Ophelia betrays his belief that she, like Ophelia, killed herself because of the cruel antics of her lover. However, Sabbath is no Hamlet and so Nikki could not be his Ophelia. Her disappearance may have been suicide or murder, but most likely it was her first, last and only rebellion against Sabbath's overpowering control of her life.



Objects/Places

Avenue C

The street in New York City where Sabbath used to set up Sabbath's Indecent Theater.

Madamaska Falls

The small northern mountain town where Sabbath and Roseanna go to escape from the city life of New York.

Sabbath's Hands

Arthritic to the point of debilitation, Sabbath's hands were once extremely strong and gifted at the art of puppetry. Hands, in both dream symbolism and literature, often symbolize one's power or ability to act in the world. Couple that symbolism with author Louise L. Hay's statement* that arthritic fingers symbolize "a desire to punish. Blame. Feeling victimized," and we have an apt description of Sabbath.

*Heal Your Body, Fourth Edition, 2003, Hay House Publishing; pg.15.

Deborah's Dresser

This is a garden of delights for Sabbath. As a voyeur, he enjoys rummaging through Norman's daughter's dresser drawers in search of lingerie and any other secrets she may have tucked away underneath her intimate clothing.

Themes

Sex and Death

In the face of death, humans often cling to life in the form of sexual activity. Sabbath's aging body has been showing his own mortality for many years and Sabbath's response has been to clutch more desperately at his mistress' spreading haunches. Sex with Drenka made him feel alive. In fact, for a man like Sabbath whose entire life is based on sex, sex in the face of death is even more poignant to him. Sex means life and when his wanton mistress Drenka dies of cancer, it is the loss of sex, more than the loss of Drenka, that affects Sabbath and makes him feel like his time is up.

This is how Sabbath justifies pocketing Debby's panties and taking them to Linc's funeral. As Sabbath later explains to Norman, those panties signify hope for Sabbath. Sabbath is not alone in that belief. Several of Drenka's former lovers mimic Sabbath's belief system by masturbating over her grave at night. This highly evocative visual image is a clear tribute to the life-giving power of carnality.

The Americanization of Immigrants

The Americanization of Immigrants is a minor theme in the novel, rarely mentioned, but it is important to the main character's development. When Sabbath returns to the cemetery where his family lies, he tells the proprietor that his last name, Sabbath, was historically spelled Shabas, before his ancestors changed it to sound more American. He says this without comment, but he had lamented the fact that his parents were so quick to cover up their Jewish ethnicity earlier in the novel. Perhaps he would have done well to spend more time contemplating the issue, because the self-hatred which inevitably follows the denial of one's heritage undermined Sabbath's self-esteem. Parents that deny their roots send the message that one is inherently and genetically flawed.

Those who suffer discrimination, be they Jews, women, African Americans or any other minority group, cannot be blamed for wanting to fit in society. Women may feel the need to dress and act in masculine ways to be accepted in the work force. Jews may feel the need to acknowledge Christmas by jazzing up their Chanukah celebrations and incorporating more gifts. Fear of losing out or not being accepted because we are different is a common emotion for humans. To some extent, there's nothing wrong with this, hence the time-honored expression, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." However, it is also possible to go too far and deny or hide one's roots. This practice promotes feelings of shame. If I must hide who I am, I must be something shameful. That message would ring particularly strong in a child such as Sabbath during the World War II era. At the time he would have been unable to grasp the complexities of the political climate in an era when Jews must have felt like targets. Imagine a dolphin trapped in the middle of a shark feeding frenzy. Pretending to be a shark would greatly



increase the dolphin's chances of survival. Had Sabbath spent more time contemplating this topic, he would have better understood that the sharks were the ones who should be ashamed of their cruel behavior and he might have been more forgiving of the world's dolphins.

Escapism

Mickey Sabbath is an escape artist the likes of whom we haven't seen since Houdini. However, unlike Houdini, Sabbath is escaping love, responsibility and even life itself. Sex is Sabbath's primary means of escapism. It is his panacea against the world's ills. Sabbath finds self-esteem by losing himself in carnal pleasure. He is powerless in his life, but the conquest of women makes him feel powerful. Ironically, Sabbath is only powerless because he has never attempted to take control of himself. He doesn't try to clean up any of the messes he has created. Instead, he simply escapes it all.

By having both a wife and a mistress, Sabbath escapes the need to invest himself in either relationship, but he retains the benefits, including the house, Roseanna's paycheck and the medical insurance she provides. This is a pattern he established early on, when Roseanna was his mistress and Nikki his wife. His antagonism towards all women assures him that he will never be trapped in the bonds of love. His escapism isn't limited to his emotional life. Professionally, he accomplished the same thing with his hostility towards co-workers. Sabbath's inability to work with others lost him many professional opportunities. He responded by escaping the New York theater scene. Sabbath sees his life as a farce and it is filled with the comedic entrances and exits of a typical farce. Sabbath doesn't really see himself as an escape artist. He sees his life as a show and his exits are meant to keep the audience laughing.



Style

Point of View

Sabbath's Theater is written as if it were in the third person with an omniscient narrator. However, the third person narrator is actually Sabbath in disguise. The book reads as if Sabbath were speaking of himself in the third person, which makes sense when one considers that Sabbath's entire life has been a show. As the author of the play, he narrates it himself and plays the lead role. The story is not a true autobiography and would lose some of its power if Sabbath narrated in the first person. Sabbath is not merely recounting the story of his life. His life *is* a story, a show he has created to entertain the audience.

Sabbath's point of view as a narrator is highly unreliable. The other characters in the book, seen through the rheumy lens of Sabbath's depravity, are portrayed as living jokes. Their deepest hopes and dreams are revealed as small and unworthy in Sabbath's eyes. The glaring oddity in the narration, however, is the contradiction between the distance Sabbath creates by speaking in the third person and the personally introspective tone of the narrative. Had the author truly intended to create a humorous farce, he would not have fleshed out his characters in such vivid detail. By making his characters seem real to us, Philip Roth makes it impossible for us to laugh at the gross comedy inflicted upon them. Had he made his characters one dimensional, we could have watched impassively as Sabbath bungled his way through their lives. The author has created an interesting experiment in fictional farce, but like many experiments, this one fails to deliver the expected results.

Setting

The book is comprised of three major physical locations. Madamaska Falls is the quiet mountain town that Sabbath escaped to after Nikki's disappearance. To his wife, Roseanna, this setting had once represented a fresh start. She and Sabbath would fill their peaceful home with the laughter of children. They would trade in their lives as street performers for the more stable income that teaching art and theater provides. Madamaska Falls represented, to Roseanna, a respectable lifestyle away from the excesses of the city. However, she hadn't thought that Sabbath would bring his excesses with him. Sabbath has turned their life in Madamaska into a scandalous show befitting the lewd puppet master's character.

New York City symbolizes Sabbath's youthful promise, which he squandered away and lost, much as he lost his first wife, Nikki. When he travels to New York, he is traveling into his past and seeking to quiet the ghosts that haunt him. Those same ghosts lure him further into the past, to his childhood home on the Jersey shore. When Sabbath unearths Morty's things, kept safely for him in his cousin's home all these years, he is



finally reunited with his boyhood self after fifty years. He finds the Sabbath that existed before the degradation and decadence that became his life.

Language and Meaning

One of the author's characters tells Mickey Sabbath that he has great eloquence at his command. This compliment fits the author as well. *Sabbath's Theater* demands a great deal of eloquence, because its main character thrives on verbal interplay. One might even say he thrives on verbal combat. Sabbath can take any topic and twist it to either further his own agenda of seduction, or to attack and insult anyone who tries to get close to him. He uses words as his armor and his weaponry. His verbal assaults keep the other characters off balance and confused, which is how Sabbath likes it. No one is able to penetrate his act to discover the true man inside.

Despite Sabbath's eloquence, his dialogue is crude and bulky. The author pulls no punches with Mickey's verbal acrobatics, which are designed to cause offense to the other characters. Most of the dialogue is, in fact, monologue. Sabbath rarely allows others to speak, unless he can convince them to discuss sex. He is a master at soliciting sexual verbalization from the women he seduces. For the most part, he controls every conversation, carrying on long tirades that erupt like verbal storms and, once the words have dissipated, leave carnage and destruction in their wake.

Structure

Sabbath's Theater is divided into two halves, or books, containing a total of nine separate parts, to which the author does not assign chapter numbers. Each part is further subdivided into smaller pieces, usually broken wherever there is a shift in time or space. The first book is entitled "There's Nothing That Keeps Its Promise," and it details Sabbath's adventures leading up to his return to New York. This first half of the book introduces Sabbath, his life and to some extent, via flashback, the past he left behind in New York.

Roth titles Book 2 "To Be or Not To Be," and this is not his only reference to Shakespeare. Roth refers to Hamlet and King Lear in his narrative and he has structured his novel very much like a Shakespearean farce. It includes elements of mistaken identity, scheming, gossip, rumors and misplaced affection. The second half of the book specifically details his quest to unearth the demons of his past, taking him from the streets of New York back to the Jersey shore of his childhood.



Quotes

"Licking those sizable breasts, whose breastish reality seemed no less tantalizingly outlandish than it would have when he was fourteen, Sabbath told her that he felt the same about her, allowed it while looking up at her with that smile of his that did not make entirely clear who or what precisely he had it in mind to deride-confessed it certainly with nothing like her declamatory ardor, said it almost as though deliberately to make it appear perfunctory and yet, stripped of all its derisive trappings, his 'Feel the same way about you' happened to be true." Book 1, Part 1, pg. 19

"Well, this truck driver, whenever he goes away, his wife, she gets cold and lonely. So when he comes back from a trip he brings her a skunk, a big, furry skunk and he tells her that next time he goes away she should take it to bed with her and when she goes to sleep she should put it between her legs. So she says to him, 'What about the smell?' And he says, 'He'll get used to it. I did.'" Book 1, Part 2, pg. 39

"You must devote yourself to fucking the way a monk devotes himself to God." Book 1, Part 2, pg. 60

"What he loathed the way good people loathe *fuck was sharing*. He didn't own a gun, even out on the lonely hill where they lived, because he didn't want a gun in a house with a wife who spoke daily of 'sharing.'" Book 1, Part 3, pg. 85

"He wanted to do what he wanted to do. This was his cause and it led to his arrest and trial and conviction and for precisely the crime he'd foreseen in the meat-grinder skit." Book 1, Part 4, pg. 123

"Whores. Played a leading role in my life. Always felt at home with whores. Particularly fond of whores. The stewlike stink of those oniony parts. What has ever meant more to me?" Book 1, Part 5, pg. 153

"She thinks I've got a gun. Let's see where this leads us. Last time he had anything like as much fun was watching Matthew split Barrett's skull open instead of his own." Book 1, Part 5, pg. 169

"Anyone with any brains knows he is leading a stupid life even while he is leading it. Anyone with any brains understands that he is destined to lead a stupid life *because there is no other kind*." Book 2, Part 6, pg. 204

"The most monstrous feature of God, my friends, is the *totalitarianism*. This vengeful, seething God, this punishment-ordaining bastard, is *ultimate*! Mind if I have a Pepsi?" Sabbath inquired of Donald." Book 2, Part 6, pg. 278

"A world without adultery is unthinkable. The brutal inhumanity of those against it. Don't you agree? The sheer fucking depravity of their views. The *madness*. There is no punishment too extreme for the crazy bastard who came up with the idea of fidelity. To



demand of human flesh fidelity. The cruelty of it, the mockery of it, is simply unspeakable." Book 2, Part 7, pg. 336

"Could this be everything Sabbath thought it was? It wasn't considered characteristic of him to extend himself this way. But he hadn't had as interesting a conversation-barring last night's in the hallway with Michelle-in years. The first man I've met since going to sea who doesn't bore me stiff." Book 2, Part 8, pg. 386

"And something funny is superfluous-suicide *is* funny. Not enough people realize that. It's not driven by despair or revenge, it's not born of madness or bitterness or humiliation, it's not a camouflaged homicide or a grandiose display of self-loathing-it's the finishing touch to the running gag. He would count himself an even bigger washout to be snuffed out any other way. For anybody who loves a joke, suicide is indispensable. For a puppeteer particularly there is nothing more natural: disappear behind the screen, insert the hand and instead of performing as yourself, take the finale as the puppet. Think about it. There is no more thoroughly amusing way to go. A man who wants to die. A living being choosing death. That's entertainment." Book 2, Part 9, pg. 443



Topics for Discussion

Do you believe Mickey strangled Nikki as he claims? Why or why not?

Discuss Michelle's motivations for making a date with Sabbath. Do you agree with the narrator's point of view, or did she have some other motivation for her actions?

In the novel, Sabbath cannot tell if Kathy Goolsbee betrayed him intentionally, or if it was an accident as she claimed. What do you think?

Imagine you are Mickey Sabbath. From his perspective, discuss how Kathy Goolsbee and Christa both betrayed him.

Why do you suppose Sabbath is jealous of Drenka's male lovers, but not her female lovers?

At the end of the book, Sabbath is alone but alive in the woods. Where do you imagine he will go next?

Do you think Sabbath truly enjoys being the neighborhood scandal? Why or why not?