

Tony and Susan Study Guide

Tony and Susan by Austin Wright

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Contents

Tony and Susan Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Pages 1 – 66.....	4
Pages 67 – 129.....	9
Pages 130 – 209.....	13
Pages 210 – 275.....	18
Pages 265 – 326.....	22
Characters.....	25
Symbols and Symbolism.....	27
Settings.....	29
Themes and Motifs.....	31
Styles.....	35
Quotes.....	37



Plot Summary

Note: This study guide specifically refers to the November 2016 Grand Central Publishing trade paperback edition of *Tony & Susan* by Austin Wright.

Tony & Susan is a literary thriller mystery by Austin Wright in which Susan reads the manuscript *Nocturnal Animals*, written by her ex-husband Edward, in which a man named Tony seeks revenge against the three men who raped and killed his wife and teenage daughter. *Tony & Susan* flashes back and forth between chapters of *Nocturnal Animals*, and Susan's life, thoughts, and reflections on the past—especially with Edward and how she came to marry her second husband, Arnold, with whom she has three children.

When the novel begins, Susan receives the manuscript in the mail from Edward, who has been attempting for years to be a writer without commercial success. Susan has not heard from Edward in years, so she is very intrigued as to why he would want her to read the manuscript. She commits. *Nocturnal Animals* has a very simple premise: mild-mannered mathematics professor Tony, his wife, Laura, and their daughter, Helen, are on the way through northern Pennsylvania to their summer house in Maine. Three thugs—Ray, Turk, and Lou—play a game of cat-and-mouse with Tony late at night on the road and end up forcing him off the road. They then separate Tony from his wife and daughter, dropping off Tony in the middle of the woods while they rape and murder Laura and Helen. Tony attempts to find them, but hides from Ray when he comes back looking to kill Tony.

Tony is devastated by the loss of Laura and Helen, but with help from Bob Andes of the State Police, spends the next year searching for and building up a case against the three thugs. The three men later push their luck in a shootout with police during a botched supermarket robbery. Turk is killed, Lou is captured, and Ray escapes. Based on Tony's identification of Ray, Ray is arrested. While there is sufficient evidence against Lou for the murders, not enough can be found on Ray. Andes and Tony take the law into their own hands. Andes kills Lou while Tony tracks down Ray. In a fight, Tony manages to shoot and kill Ray, but also accidentally shoots himself. Tony ultimately bleeds to death waiting to be found by the police.

Susan is startled by her reading of the novel, because it has forced her to rethink her own life. She thinks about the lines between reality and fiction, and realizes just how much of himself Edward has put into the novel especially the character of Tony. She also thinks about how she has invented a story about her past to ease her guilt in the present. She cheated on Edward with Arnold, but convinced herself that her misstep was because of Edward's struggling career. The novel has unsettled Susan to such an extent that she cannot relax. When Edward stands her up for a dinner over which they are presumably to discuss the manuscript, Susan is annoyed. To seek revenge, she writes him a letter saying that if Edward wants to know what she thinks of the novel, he will have to ask her.



Pages 1 – 66

Summary

Susan's ex-husband, Edward Sheffield, sends her a letter asking her to read his latest manuscript, entitled *Nocturnal Animals*. Susan agrees amid all the daily demands she faces, but finds it difficult to start. The idea of reading the manuscript also brings up worry and old memories and causes Susan to reflect on how they loved each other, then hated each other, and how the hate faded over time. She wonders what the novel could be missing for Edward to write to her to ask her to read it. Susan learns that Edward will be visiting Chicago, and she knows he will want to talk about the manuscript. She finally commits to reading.

In the first sitting, with her second husband Arnold on a business trip, Susan seeks to read the manuscript, but she still feels worried for some unknown reason. She finally begins.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 1, Tony and Laura Hastings, along with their daughter, Helen, are traveling east from Ohio through northern Pennsylvania toward their summer cottage in Maine. It is night. At Helen's insistence, Tony, a mathematics professor, chooses to drive all night provided Laura and Helen share the driving. They come upon a hippie-like hitchhiker with a guitar case and a sign reading BANGOR, MAINE, which encourages Helen to insist her dad pick the man up. Tony refuses, saying the man is a stranger. Down the road, an old Buick with a dented left fender and three passengers jockeys for position with Tony, leading Tony to bump the back of the Buick, which finally lets him pass. The Buick then speeds up, and forces Tony onto the side of the road. Both cars stop as another passes by. Laura tells Tony to stay in their car.

Susan wonders about the characters, and how much of Edward is in Tony. She forces herself to remember that fiction is fiction. She thinks about how Edward ultimately went from trying to be a writer to selling insurance before apparently returning to writing. The worry Susan felt before beginning reading has now seemed to disappear.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 2, the driver of the Buick comes to Tony's car, telling him it is illegal to leave the scene of an accident. Laura tells him they were going to report it to the police, while Tony tells the driver they had reason not to pull over and trust him. The driver, Ray, calls "Turk," and the other two men in the Buick get out and bend down in front of Tony's car. The two men report that Tony has a flat tire. Ray says he and his friends will change the tire, then they can all go report the accident to the police. Against the wishes of Helen and Laura, Tony gets out to open the trunk to move suitcases out of the way to get to the spare tire. Ray tells Tony to get Laura and Helen out of the car, and they reluctantly agree to get out. Tony watches carefully as Ray oversees his two friends working on the tire.



In three, Susan thinks about how she, Arnold, and the children once drove all night to Cape Cod, and wonders how Arnold would have handled Tony's situation.

In Nocturnal Animals 3, Ray is angry, repeating fuck you over and over again. He then asks Tony where they were headed. Tony carefully explains they are on their way to Maine. Tony's reluctance to talk angers Ray, which in turn brings Helen to Tony's defense. The situation quickly gets out of hand as Ray advances on Helen, causing Laura to get in between. Tony goes after Ray to protect his wife and daughter, but Ray hits Tony in the face and pushes down Laura. He calls them sons-of-bitches and says he and his friends are only trying to fix the tire. They return to talk of the police in the nearby town of Bailey, but anything Ray suggests means Helen or Laura would be with them. Ray grabs Helen and puts his hand on her breast, leading to another near physical altercation, and causing Helen to go running down the road where she collapses onto a rock and cries. When a pickup truck appears, Helen rushes out to wave it down. At the wheel is a hard-of-hearing old man who Tony and Helen seek for help, but when the old man notices Ray with a tire iron, he drives off. Ray and one of his friends then gets in the car with Helen and Laura and drive off. When Tony attempts to go after them, the third of Ray's friends, Lou, knocks him to the ground and tells him to get into the Buick.

Susan thinks Tony and Laura should have driven down to Laura, picked her up, and sped off before Ray and his thugs could have reacted. She wonders how Edward could write such a story, but then realizes this kind of thing goes on every day. Susan is annoyed with Tony Hastings, but wonders how she would have responded in such a situation.

In Nocturnal Animals 4, Lou forces Tony to drive. They come to an exit for Bear Valley and Grant Center, but Tony does not see any signs for Bailey. Lou has no real idea where they seem to be going. They come to a place called White Creek where Tony sees his car parked near a trailer near a church. Lou denies it is his car, saying Tony's car is a four-door. He tells Tony it is best to humor Ray. He brings Tony down a dead-end dirt road where he sees a fox dash into the darkness. Tony wants to know what is going to happen. Lou says it is up to Ray, but that Ray hasn't killed anyone yet. Tony is panicked as to what has become of his wife and daughter. Lou forces Tony out of the car, then leaves.

Susan reflects how, in the early days of wanting to be a writer, Edward was happy to write beautiful things in his cabin in the woods. His current manuscript has none of that.

In Nocturnal Animals 5, Tony attempts to get his bearings in the darkness, working his way through the woods, and hoping Laura and Helen are safe at the police station in Bailey. Tony alternates between feelings of anger and fear at what is happening. He even begins to consider revenge. When the car finally returns, Tony hides. He hears someone calling out to Tony that his wife wants him, but Tony is well-hidden. When the car leaves, Tony gets up and continues on. (Susan's reading is here interrupted by a phone call.)



Arnold calls from New York to say he has gotten in safely, and will interview at Cedar Hall Institute for Cardiac Research and Practice in Washington the following day. Susan resumes reading.

Back to the manuscript, Tony wonders if he has not made a mistake by going out to meet whoever came looking for him. Tony continues to panic about what will become of his wife and daughter, and prays to God it will not be bad. When a second car can be seen, Tony decides to be brave and confront it in the middle of the road. When the car begins to approach, Tony panics and hides once more.

In Seven, Susan continues reading.

Back on paved roads, Tony does not remember which direction Lou brought him in Nocturnal Animals 6. Tony's plan is to find a telephone and call the police. He comes upon cornfields and farm country. All the houses he passes have no lights on, and he worries about farmers and shotguns. A car passes here and there, but none stop when he gestures. At last he comes to a house with a light on, and knocks. An elderly couple answers and allow him in to use the phone. Tony explains what has happened, and the couple discuss who should be called because they do not know who would be awake at this early hour. Despite their concern, the elderly couple cannot understand how Tony would just let men drive off with his wife and daughter. Tony does not know how he can make them understand.

Susan continues reading, wondering what will happen next and how disaster can be avoided.

In Nocturnal Animals 7, Tony tries to be as logical as the math he teaches when he calls the State Police. A man named Morgan answers, who then transfers Tony to Sergeant Miles. Tony explains he is at Jack Combs's house in Bear Valley, and explains the situation. Miles asks questions, then says a man will be over to pick Tony up. In the meantime, Jack's wife offers Tony some food. By the time Officer Talbot arrives for Tony, it is daylight. Talbot confirms there is no Bailey police station, and no Bailey. Talbot brings Tony to the local State Police station. Miles is off-duty. Lieutenant Graves has taken over. He explains an alert has been put out for the cars. Tony decides to stay at the motel across the street while the police continue to look. Graves calls a short time later to reveal that Tony's car has been found in the river at Topping, with no bodies inside. Lieutenant Andes is going to head up the case, and will pick Tony up and look around.

Analysis

Writers put more of themselves in their work than readers often suspect. Susan knows this from having been married to a writer and because even early in Nocturnal Animals, she can detect parts of Edward in the characters. For example, Edward's meekness can be found in the character of Tony, while his impatience can be found in the character of Ray. Things familiar and well-loved by writers often make appearances in their words –



and Susan notes that many of the places in Edward's life, such as Cincinnati, appear. Readers will also note that Cincinnati was the home of Austin Wright upon reading his biography at the end of the book. Wright gently mocks himself with good-natured humor, by proving the thematic argument in his book that writers put more of themselves in books that readers often realize.

In addition to writers inserting elements of their own reality into what they create, Wright argues that fiction is a mirror to truth. In other words, fiction reflects our own world and causes us to remember the truth about that world in which we live. Tony's novel appalls Susan because of what is happening to Tony and his family, wondering how anyone could write such horrible things –only to be reminded that such things actually do happen every day in the world. The reader of *Tony & Susan* itself is reminded that such things actually do happen every day in places like America. Chillingly, what happens in this book could happen to anyone.

Human beings themselves are animals, but they are rational animals as the Greek philosopher Aristotle explains. Nevertheless, Wright counters, human beings are animals, and even reason cannot always help them in a very primal situation. Consider how Tony's rational mind is unable to help him in the present in dealing with three thugs –three animals –late at night. The three thugs have reverted to their utter, basic, animal selves, raping (and as readers will learn in coming chapters, murdering) and harassing good people. When Tony is taken down the dirt road, he sees a fox dart into the darkness. Foxes are predatory nocturnal animals, and in turn symbolically reflect the fact that their true animal selves come out at night (the night symbolically brings truth), such as the three thugs (Ray, Turk, and Lou). Readers should remember the predatory fox through the novel, as Tony will ultimately come to play the role of a nocturnal animal. At the same time, readers should note that Susan is doing all of her reading at night. The night brings truth. Susan is unnerved by something about the novel –and this is that it will ultimately force her to confront the truth of her own past with Edward, and to reinforce the thematic argument that fiction is a mirror to truth.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Susan believe Tony has sent her his latest manuscript? Why does she commit to reading it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Susan question the motives and actions of Tony in *Nocturnal Animals*? What does it force Susan to admit about herself? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Susan so concerned about how much of himself Edward has put into his novel? What does this in turn cause Susan to reflect on? Why?

Vocabulary

dignified, pompous, hitchhiker, diminuendo, peculiarity, sadistic, vestibule



Pages 67 – 129

Summary

In Nine, Susan continues reading as her son's Monopoly game ends, and his friend, goes home.

In Nocturnal Animals 8, Tony meets Lieutenant Bobby Andes and a driver outside the motel. Andes asks Tony to attempt to retrace his steps from the previous night, beginning with the Combs's house. Tony agrees. Along the way, Andes asks questions about the night before, and Tony does his best to answer while retracing his steps. He successfully brings them to the wooded mountain road where Lou left him. He finds the trailer and the church from therein. Andes then directs the driver back to the mountain road.

Susan continues reading as she hears Dorothy showering upstairs.

In Nocturnal Animals 9, Tony is wary about going back up the mountain road but confident that he has two police officers with him. Further up the road, they discover the naked, dead, Laura and Helen. Tony is stunned and horrified.

Susan is stunned that Edward has had Laura and Helen killed off, and that those chapters comprise the end of Part One. Part Two is next. Susan cannot help but continue to read.

In Nocturnal Animals 10, Tony goes through denial as more officers arrive at the scene. An officer named George brings Tony back down the mountain. Tony wonders if, in his horror and panic, he has correctly identified his wife and daughter. George explains there will be one more identification to be done in the morgue. Andes later tells Tony that someone else has called in from Topping to report being harassed on the Interstate the previous evening, and to provide a license plate number. The number, Andes explains, was traced to a stolen car that had been junked. Tony also agrees to be fingerprinted because some prints were found on the car trunk. As Andes learns more details about Tony's experiences the night before, Andes becomes enraged at the three thugs and promises they will get them. Andes also wants to go public, hoping that any witnesses, such as the old man in the pickup, may come forward. Tony speaks by phone with his sister, Paula, to let her know what has happened. Paula invites him to her place on the Cape, but Tony delays, saying he has arrangements to take care of, first. Tony learns the next day that both his wife and daughter were raped before being killed, and that the trailer where Tony saw his car was indeed the scene of the crime. The trailer was broken into, and belongs to a man who only comes around during hunting season. The prints lifted from the car are now being checked, Andes explains.

Susan wonders where Edward will take Tony next. She wonders if Tony will pursue the murderers or examine his own soul, or something else. Susan reflects on being a harsh



critic with respect to Edward's early work, saying no one cared about his feelings while Edward argued no one ever wrote about anyone but themselves. It causes Susan to recall a vague memory of a boy and a girl in a rowboat at the shore.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 11, Tony's entire world has been shattered by the deaths of his wife and daughter. Tony arranges to have the bodies shipped to Cincinnati, says goodbye to Andes, and heads home. The wet luggage of Laura and Helen is in the trunk. As he drives, Tony's mind replays the events of that night over and over again, and wondering what the final moments of the lives of his wife and daughter were like. Tony is devastated to think about it all. At home, Tony is overcome by the emptiness and loneliness of the house. Tony receives a call from an unknown person saying "it" had been seen in the newspaper, and asking if Tony got home alright. Later, Lisa McGregor of the *Tribune* phones for an interview, but Tony refuses. A local television news crew attempts to talk to Tony about the death penalty, but Tony does not want to talk. Paula and Alex (their brother) arrive that evening for a memorial service at church. The next morning Tony and Paula fly to Cape Cod.

As Susan closes the chapter and prepares to turn in for the night, she wonders how much of himself Edward has put into the novel. She has a feeling like she knows something she shouldn't know. She thinks of Edward being fussy, prim, neat, impatient, and living in Cincinnati like Tony. She also thinks of being in a boat with Edward when they were younger.

In the *First Interlude*, each day is a routine for Susan, but tonight is different because Arnold is out of town. She also faults herself for her shoddy memory about many things.

Susan reflects on how her family took Edward in when he and Susan were both fifteen, as Edward's father died that year of a heart attack, and Edward had no family that could care for him nearby. This was done so that he could finish out his time at Hastings High School. Susan remembers how they lived on Edgar Lane, the site of a Revolutionary War battle, and how at first, she hated Edward being around and ruining the family's privacy, but that eventually, she began to get used to him, went to a school dance with him, and welcomed him on the family vacation to Maine.

Susan recalls not seeing Edward again until graduate school in Chicago, when he was already there and she was just beginning, and the past anger she had toward him was gone. By this point, she recalls, Edward had been engaged to a girl named Maria who left him for someone else. Susan recalls how, eventually, things turned romantic between them, and they went to bed together, after which Edward confessed his love of writing.

Susan recalls her mother being thrilled about her being together with Edward and wanting to marry him. She remembers staying at Edward's cousin's cabin in upstate New York, and listening to Edward write on a typewriter. She recalls Edward giving up his scholarship to write, and how she was the only source of income for them both for a long time. The lack of money and lack of Edward's success, Susan remembers, became a source of trouble for them both. She remembers her criticism of his writing sending



him off to write alone, still without success. She remembered considering Edward was a phony, and she was gullible, which in turn led to the end of the marriage. In the present, Susan knows she was too hard on Edward in the past, and wishes him good luck now. She looks forward to reading more of his manuscript tonight.

In *The Second Sitting*, Susan returns to the novel, her mind distracted by many other things, such as the affair Albert had three years before with Marilyn Linwood, and people who sued Albert with false accusations of medical malpractice. Susan forces herself to focus on the novel.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 12, Tony comes to stay with Paula, her husband, Merton, and their kids Peter and Jenny on the Cape. The family does its best to rally around Tony, but Tony is heartbroken and withdrawn. Tony stays for two weeks. Upon leaving, Paul kindly suggests seeing a psychiatrist. When he returns home, Tony finds a letter from Bob Andes, noting one of the fingerprints from the car matched a fingerprint from the trailer and belongs to a criminal from Los Angeles named Steven Adams who is currently being searched for. Tony does not recognize the mugshot of Adams included with the letter and tells Andes this on the phone. Tony must force himself to get through each day. He replays the events of that night in mind over and over, wondering what he could have done differently to help his family. He sits in Helen's room, looking at a stuffed panda she owned, wishing that Helen could tell him her side of what happened.

Analysis

As Tony discovers his wife and daughter have both been raped and murdered, Tony is at a crossroads. Susan wonders if he will pursue justice, or if the novel will be used as a way for him to recover and heal his soul. Tony's dilemma also causes Susan to reflect on her own situation in life –fiction, as readers will recall, is a mirror to truth as Wright thematically argues –in that Albert cheated on her some years before. Readers can only wonder what Edward did that caused the marriage between him and Susan to dissolve, as whatever it was, it must have been worse than a sexual affair because clearly, Susan has no intention of leaving Albert based on his affair. Readers are given only a glimpse of the past between Susan and Edward, with the blame for the divorce appearing to be two-sided more so than just Edward's fault. Interestingly, Susan is still attempting to project more of the blame for their divorce on Edward than on herself.

Whether it is dealing with divorce, an affair, or a rape and murder, life must go on, the author argues. Tony must deal with the aftermath of the immediate investigation, and must tolerate the knowledge that the full-scale investigation may take much longer. Tony wants the villains caught, and Susan applauds this because Tony is seeking justice. The introduction of justice in the novel ultimately creates, in Susan's mind, the idea about just what justice is. She considers this by way of the crossroads Tony finds himself at: if he pursues the killers, is justice to be done legally at the hands of the law, or illegally by revenge at the hands of Tony? As such, is this vengeance or mere revenge? If it is revenge, could it be actual justice as well? Wright will spend the later part of the novel pursuing these thoughts further.



Through Susan and her comparisons to Tony and the other characters in Edward's novel, Wright begins to lay the foundations for the thematic argument that much of our lives –both past and present –consists of inventions or fiction. Tony's return to his house includes a mental conversation with the deceased Helen, wanting to know what her side of the story was while Tony considers the stuffed panda Helen left behind –with the stuffed panda symbolizing both sentimentality and Helen herself. Susan, meanwhile, is forced to continue considering her own past, and the more she does, the less faulty her memory appears: Susan's memory is not faulty but concocted to block out the worst parts of the past. Already, she has moved from being a victim in her marriage with Edward to someone attempting to project blame on Edward by focusing on his flaws and his issues. Readers will see in coming chapters how Edward's novel forces Susan to confront the truth of their own past.

Discussion Question 1

What is the terrible conclusion to the encounter between Tony, Helen, and Laura on the road with Ray, Turk, and Lou? How does this affect Tony himself? Why?

Discussion Question 2

How does reading Edward's manuscript alter Susan's own life in the present, and her perception of the past? Why does this seem to be the case?

Discussion Question 3

How does Tony react to the murder of his wife and daughter? Do you believe his reaction is appropriate? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

prudish, reiterating, deviation, mirth, deplores, avidly, victimization, audacious, innate, antagonism, nostalgia, chaste, platonic, uncongenial



Pages 130 – 209

Summary

Susan thinks about Arnold's career and how, if he gets the new job, it means leaving their current home.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 13, Paula visits in September, and helps go through Laura and Helen's things to throw out or give away. Tony continues to do his best to recover, even going to a party held by a colleague. Another colleague, a married French professor named Francesca Hooton, urges revenge against the killers. The police, meanwhile, report no leads in their investigation. A graduate student named Louise Germane expresses her sympathies to Tony at school. Slowly, over time, Tony begins to find hours where he does not constantly think about that night. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year come on. Tony struggles through. He meets a girl in her thirties at a bar, and she brings him home, but nothing happens as Tony is too caught up in guilt again over that night. The girl is disturbed, so Tony leaves.

Susan is bothered by the manuscript at this point because she draws parallels to Arnold's suggestion that, if he took the job in Washington, D.C., he could commute home on the weekends. Tony sought a sexual encounter with the girl from the bar.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 14, Tony Hastings flies to Albany to meet with Bob Andes to look at some guys the police have taken in. From Albany, Andes and Tony head to Ajax, twenty minutes away. There, they meet with Captain Vanesco and look at a lineup. Tony recognizes only one of the men, who might be Turk but who now looks different because of glasses and facial hair. It is a start. On the road, Andes tells Tony the man who Tony said might be Turk is Steven Adams. The Adams of now does not even resemble the Adams of the photograph Tony has seen.

Susan continues to read, feeling as if there is an undertow of thought that will not go away.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 15, at three in the morning, Tony gets a phone call from an unknown caller who just wants to hear his voice. Tony also begins to hear the conversations others around him are having about him –such as those expressing resentment that Tony has not improved much. However, Louise is encouraging, and says she and others are pulling for Tony. She encourages him to seek help. Tony is displeased to see the beautiful Louise spending time with the greasy and bearded Frank Hawthorne, but Francesca warns Tony not to get involved with a graduate student. Louise goes for a ride with Tony to a river overlook, but she seems bored and so Tony does not pursue anything with her. At home, Tony writes to Andes, telling Andes he is now certain the man from the lineup was Turk. He also tells Andes to continue on with the search. He promises to cooperate in any possible way.



Susan is glad to see the book now transition from Part Two to Part Three. She feels as if she has been bruised not only by the book, but by her life as well. She wonders now if Tony will be destroyed or redeemed, and whether the ending will be good or bad –and if good, how a good ending could possibly come out of such a story.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 16, Tony writes again to Andes, who has not responding, pressing the case for justice. It soon becomes the core focus of his days. Francesca observes with approval that Tony has finally become angry about what happened. Tony grapples with his rage at home alone, asking invisible beasts rhetorical questions about the difficulties of life. Andes finally calls, asking Tony to come to another ID, this time in Grant Center. Tony agrees. In Grant Center, Andes explains that three guys botched a robbery of a supermarket in Bear Valley Mall. One guy was caught, one guy was killed, and one guy got away. Tony learns the dead guy is Steven Adams, who jumped bail in Ajax. Tony positively identifies Lou as the man captured by the police. When Tony talks about that night, Lou looks terrified by denies any involvement. Tony says he will swear to Lou being Lou in a court of law under penalty of perjury. Tony is then taken to the morgue, where he is fairly positive Turk is the man killed during the holdup. Andes says he will now work the case up against Lou while keeping an eye out for Ray, who was more than likely the man who escaped.

Susan is glad that Tony and the police will go after the bad guys.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 17, Tony reveals the news of Lou and Turk to Francesca over lunch at the school. Francesca asks him if they should receive the death penalty. Tony says he does not know what punishment he wants, yet. Tony wants Lou and Ray to know what they have done, however. Tony wants to hurt and kill both Ray and Lou. Francesca realizes that Tony wants Ray and Lou to know they cannot hurt someone like Tony and get away with it. Tony and Francesca talk about the difference between revenge and justice. Francesca tells Tony that it is he, not Ray, who is civilized. Andes calls and asks Tony to make another trip. Tony agrees, and the two meet at a local rec baseball game. Andes reveals he got information from Herman's, a bar in Topping, revealing that Lou came East with Steven Adams (Turk), that Lou's ex-wife is glad she has not seen Lou in a year and-a-half, and that Lou's current girl, Patricia Cutler, confirmed Lou and his associates were not in California last year.

Andes reveals that Patricia also explained Lou went around with a real jerk, but she does not remember his name or what he looked like. It was also through Herman's bar that information about Ray was found –including his last name, Marcus, and his place of origin, Hacksport. He has one rape charge against him that was dropped, Andes explains. He believes Lou came back to the area because of Patricia, and that Ray has been around the area all along. Andes and Tony now look at player number 19 –Ray Marcus. After the game, Tony and Andes go down to get a better look. Tony and Ray glance at each other. Ray does not seem to recognize Tony, but Tony recognizes Ray immediately, and tells Andes so.

Seven – Susan knows she would gladly go to jail after seeking revenge on anyone who harmed her family. She wants Ray to be tracked down.



Nocturnal Animals 18 – With Andes driving, Andes and Tony (in Tony’s car) follow Ray to his house on a street lined with small, two-family homes. Andes tells Ray to get in. Ray reluctantly does. Andes gets in the back seat with him, directing Tony to drive and where to go. Andes begins saying that they have a friend of Ray’s in custody in Grant Center named Lou Bates. Ray denies knowing Lou or Turk (Steven Adams). Andes presses Ray on being the third robber of the supermarket that got away. Ray denies this, says he has done nothing wrong, and says he wants a lawyer. Andes continues on, talking about the car in which they are now driving. He asks Ray if he recognizes either the car or the driver. Ray says he does not remember Tony, but Tony says he does remember Ray. Andes then asks Tony to recount the events of that night, which Tony does. As he tells Ray what happened, Tony’s anger grows. Andes directs Tony on to Grant Center’s police station. Tony drives with angry joy.

Eight – Susan reads on.

Nocturnal Animals 19 – Ray is booked. The next morning, Tony, Andes, George, and Ray head out to revisit the different places associated with the crime of the previous summer. Ray continues to play dumb and insist on his innocence. As they get closer to the scene of the crime, Ray begins to betray little panicked looks, but he denies knowledge of anything, including when they come to trailer. Tony takes the lead, demanding to know what happened, demanding to know what Ray did to his wife and daughter before he killed them. Ray continues to deny everything. Ray’s eyes mock Tony. Tony punches Ray in the face, and Ray, bloodied, falls to the floor. Andes grabs Tony while George draws his gun and handcuffs Ray. Andes is impressed by Tony, who feels wild and thrilled.

Second Interlude

One – Susan thinks about what she has read before, and how writing is the putting of thoughts into language. Because of this, she thinks, everybody writes. Susan has always enjoyed writing, but never believed she could actually be a writer. She also knows that she had other priorities in life, like family. She also knows she did not write because anything she wrote would be altered, or contaminated, by anyone who read it, such as a Hollywood producer.

Two – Susan berates herself because she should have known reading Edward’s manuscript would have this kind of effect on her. She begins remembering the past again, writing it in her own mind. She thinks about how Arnold was married to Selena, both of whom had an apartment above her and Edward. She thinks about how Selena was not mentally stable, and how she had to help Arnold during one such episode which ended up with her in the hospital and Arnold living alone. Susan recalls feeling badly for Arnold living alone and dealing with a crazy medical work schedule (while Edward was away trying to write), which in turn led to Susan making Arnold dinner, which led to another, and which led to Susan wanting more.

Three – Susan reflects on soon after beginning a sexual affair with Arnold, torn between lust and guilt. Susan Only in the present does Susan attempt to blame Edward for the



affair by wishing he would have settled down rather than tried to be a writer. Susan reflects on Arnold telling her that Selena found out about their affair, and reflects on trying to make things work with Edward as she attempted to figure out a way to tell Edward about the affair. She recalls how Edward at first seemed in denial, which made Susan believe their marriage could be stronger.

Analysis

Writers put more of themselves in their work than readers often suspect. Tony's attempts to move on are startlingly real and unnervingly personal, implying that Tony now represents Edward's own attempts to move beyond his failed marriage to Susan. This can be determined given the intertwining of the thematic argument that fiction is a mirror to truth. Susan is enraged that Edward's novel has disturbed her deeply as to accurately, this time, recall the past. The demise of the marriage found its catalyst not in Edward's struggles as a writer, or his personal flaws (after all, Susan could stomach still being with Arnold after his having an affair), but because of her affair with Arnold in the first place.

Much of our own lives, Wright argues, consists of invention –including when Susan laughably thinks the affair could make her marriage to Edward stronger –and novels can be a mirror to the truth that in turn reminds people of what the truth actually is. Clearly this is the case for Susan as she reads at night. The night remains a harbinger of truth. Susan herself considers the truth that everyone, in a sense, writes: they invent aspects of their lives through their thoughts and forced perceptions of things, both past and present. Susan's narrative about her own life has been, ironically, smashed apart by fiction –which, Wright continues to argue, serves as a mirror unto truth. Indeed, fiction can sometimes be even more truthful than the lives people construct for themselves. As French philosopher and writer Albert Camus explained, if one wishes to be a philosopher (a seeker of wisdom and truth), one should be a novelist.

At the same time, Wright resurrects discussions of justice, vengeance, and revenge in this section of the overarching novel, *Tony & Susan*. Tony leaps at the chance to dispense justice by working with Andes to try to find Ray after Turk (Steven Adams) was killed (and Lou captured) during a botched supermarket robbery. Tony is glad that Turk is dead and Lou is in prison, but wants Ray taken as well. He personally identifies Ray so that Andes can follow through and begin the process for Ray to face justice. As the slow but steady wheels of the legal system begin to move toward justice, Tony feels as though a massive weight has been lifted off his shoulders –especially after punching Ray in the face. It is a defiant act of revenge, one which Andes conveniently ignores for the sake of Ray. It is a small act of revenge, but readers are forced to ask themselves two questions: Is this actually justice or merely revenge? Does this incident presage a future, even more dramatic event relating to revenge?



Discussion Question 1

How does Edward's novel finally force Susan to confront her own past with Edward? What is the truth?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Tony travel to visit with Andes so frequently concerning the outcome of the investigation? Why does this matter to Tony so much?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe Tony's punching Ray in the face is an act of vengeful justice, or only revenge? Why?

Vocabulary

bravado, bereaved, anarchic, sordid, extradited, dismay, bewildered, superficial, insoluble, discomfiture, fictitious, feigned, exhilarated, intermittent, impropriety, austere, aggrieved



Pages 210 – 275

Summary

In Four, Susan does not remember much about the year between Edward finding out about the affair, and her marriage to Arnold. She remembers how Edward stopped talking about writing, and would not let her see anything he was working on. She recalls the affair with Arnold flaring up again and again, and how she resolved to leave Edward and then went back on her decision. She recalls Edward finally telling her he expected too much of her, and that she should pursue a divorce. Susan reflects on crying about everything, waiting for Arnold to divorce Selena and to marry her; and she remembers how Edward later remarried to a woman named Stephanie. In the present, Susan knows her marriage will outlast any affairs Arnold has, and she is ready to move if his career needs it. She sympathizes with Tony, who depended on his dead wife; but she also finds that Edward's book continues to disturb her for unknown reasons.

During The Third Sitting, Susan returns to reading the manuscript for a third night.

In Nocturnal Animals 20, Tony is thrilled driving home after the hearing for Ray and Lou, with the trial itself coming in at least two months. He is so happy, he agrees to attend a student party where Louise is in attendance. The students are glad to have him there, and they are even more amazed to finally hear the entire story about what happened to him. Louise asks Tony for a ride home so that she does not have to go with Jack Billings. She explains she wanted to go with Tony. She invites him in to her apartment. There, Louise admits she wants Tony, but worries Jack may come over because Jack thinks more of her than she does of him. Tony decides to bring Louise to his house instead. Louise is excited by this idea. Outside, Jack drives by, but Louise says she will handle him tomorrow. Louise and Tony make love in the guest bedroom, and both want her to stay the night. Tony can see himself marrying Louise.

Susan sees that Part Four of Nocturnal Animals comes next, and keeps reading, realizing the book is taking her outside of herself and causing her to think about sex with Arnold.

In Nocturnal Animals 21, Andes calls Tony with bad news in the morning: District Attorney Gorman is dropping charges against Ray citing lack of evidence. Andes needs Tony back in Pennsylvania, before Ray leaves the state. Tony heads out the next morning rather than leaving that night. Tony has a sense of disaster. Andes and Tony meet for lunch in Topping. Andes explains he has cancer, and has six months left to live. Tony is stunned by this. Andes goes on to explain that Gorman and Ray's lawyer worked out a deal, and Gorman has been trying to prove Andes is incompetent. The case against Lou, thanks to the fingerprints, is still on. Tony says it is no good without getting Ray, too. Andes goes on to say that Ray's woman, Leila Whozis, and her aunt, both have given Ray an alibi, and that Tony's uncertainty in identifying Turk the first time casts doubt on his ability to identify Ray. Andes goes on to tell Tony it is a question of



how serious Tony is about wanting justice to be done, such as helping the law by acting on behalf of the law by coming with him when he brings Ray out to his camp to work him over a bit. Tony says that if Andes can make Ray confess, it would be a good thing.

Susan can see that Andes and Tony are going to be taking the law into their own hands. She can also see shades of Edward in all of the characters he is writing.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 22, three cars head to Andes's hunting camp. One is Tony's. One is Andes's. One is a police car with two officers and Ray. A woman named Ingrid is present at the camp house, which throws Andes off a little for a moment. He hands Tony his gun and runs outside to throw up. Ray realizes what is going on is not legal. When Andes comes back in, he takes his gun back from Tony. He says Turk has confessed, but Ray is doubtful. They handcuff him to a cot frame, then put on leg irons. Andes says he is going down to the gas station to make a call, and leaves Tony with his gun. While he is gone, Ray calls Andes crazy. Tony calls Andes a good man. Tony and Ingrid get to talking. Tony learns Ingrid and Andes have not had a happy marriage, but Ingrid is happy to hear Tony had a good marriage. A car pulls up, and a woman walks in named Susan. Ingrid is surprised to see her. Susan says Leslie kicked her out again, so she has come to spend the night. She is taken by the situation she now finds herself in at Andes's house. At Ray's begging, they remove the leg shackles and allow him to sit in a chair. Ingrid is growing worried, wondering what could be keeping Andes.

Susan is taken by seeing her own name appear in the story, but does not stop to consider this for long.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 23, Susan explains she is Andes's cousin, and learns from Tony that Ray killed his wife and daughter. Tony considers what power he is supposed to have in the situation as he holds the gun in his hands. Andes then returns with Lou Bates. Andes is not happy about Susan being present. Susan learns who Lou Bates is as well while Andes brings Ray out back to use the bathroom. Ray and Andes return a moment later. Ray and Lou protest their treatment, saying Andes is supposed to be an officer of the law, but Andes does not want to hear it. Andes appears to be weak and struggling, but he talks tough, telling Ray and Lou they were not tough raping and murdering two innocent females. Andes tells Tony he has been studying legal torture. Now that revenge is within his grasp, Tony is uncertain. While Andes's back is turned working on something with a knife and two wires, Ray and Lou make their move to escape. Andes rushes after them. Lou is shot and wounded by Ray escapes into the woods along the river. Andes tells Tony they must go after Ray. He then shoots Lou in the head, then shoots the door spring.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 24, Ingrid and Susan are upset by the situation, but Andes says he has it all under control. Andes leaves Tony and a gun with Ingrid and Susan, while he personally goes out after Ray. Andes returns to the cabin, and says he will have to go to town. He tells everyone present what the story is, meaning they will have to lie when questioned: Ray shot Lou Bates because Lou Bates had agreed to testify. Ingrid and Susan are not happy about this, but realize they do not have any real options. Tony finds it strange that Ray should be on the right side of the law at the moment. Andes



then instructs Tony they must go out and find Andes before he gets out of the area, because he may escape before backup arrives.

Analysis

Life must go on, even in tragedy, argues Wright through this section of the novel. Readers see that Tony continues to try to move on—something made much easier for him now that Ray is behind bars, and because Tony has punched Ray in the face. Notice that with the past now seemingly behind him, and justice seemingly ahead in the present, Tony is able to focus on his own life now. He begins seeing his much younger graduate student, Louise, and even contemplates a life with her in the future. This is to be seen in contrast—fiction being a mirror to truth—with Susan's own life, as Arnold's affair seems almost a measure of justice against Susan for what she did to Tony. Readers should also note that Susan resentfully regards Edward's second wife, Stephanie, whenever Susan thinks of Stephanie—meaning that Edward has moved on while Susan has not because of her own guilt regarding the past.

In this section of the novel, the theme of justice moves to the heart of the novel. With the legal system fouled up by lawyer politics, Ray walks free—and Andes and Tony decide they must take the law into their own hands. Scene where Tony holds the gun symbolically allude to great, base power over life and death—the same kind of animalistic, base power that Ray and his thug friends once held over Tony and his family. Andes is determined to make Ray and Lou suffer before killing them—as Andes himself now behaves as a man who has accepted his own impending death—and even the presence of Ingrid and Susan, and their minimal protestations—do nothing to dissuade Andes. Andes and Tony have now become the predators: they are the foxes, now: they are the nocturnal animals. Tony does not want to become like Ray—but he wants justice done against Ray.

Readers should note the interesting and even jarring introduction of a young woman named Susan into the plot. Susan's sudden introduction nearly derails Tony's plans.. Susan's affair with Arnold suddenly derails Edward's life. The character of Susan in *Nocturnal Animals* is a clueless woman who wanders into things much the way Susan—Edward's ex—has stumbled into his plan of revenge through writing the novel to disrupt Susan's current life and to force her to think about the past. As Susan in the present had deliberately made herself clueless about the past with Edward and her role in her marriage's demise. Susan almost ruins the plans of Andes and Tony; and Susan almost ruins Edward's life with the divorce. Nevertheless, things do not work out as expected by Susan or anyone else: Tony and Andes must really take the law into their own hands when Ray and Lou escape. Andes shoots Lou to death, and then sets out after Ray.

Discussion Question 1

Is Andes justified in shooting and killing Lou? Is Lou's killing to be seen as murder or revenge? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why is Susan so disturbed by the introduction of a character into *Nocturnal Animals* named Susan? What possible meanings could this have?

Discussion Question 3

Is there anything of justice in Andes and Tony taking the law into their own hands, especially with regards to the failure of the legal system? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

scriptural, rhetoric, paradox, idyll, diffidence, immolating, peremptory, euphemism, melancholy, eliding, remedies, ostensible, melodramatic



Pages 265 – 326

Summary

Susan knows there are only a few chapters left in *Nocturnal Animals*. Her time is running out as Arnold is due home soon.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 25, on the road to George's house to get him to help at Andes's instruction, Tony sees Ray walking along the road. Tony drives past and stops, wondering how he should handle the situation. He wonders if he should drive on, being cowardly, or be courageous but do something illegal by trying to deal with Ray. Tony is suddenly annoyed at Andes for getting him involved in everything going on. Tony drives on, and learns George is at work, and not at home. Tony then returns the way he came, wondering if he will now confront Ray. On the way back, Tony stops at the trailer where everything went down a year before, and finds Ray asleep inside. Ray startles awake, realizing only Tony confronts him. Ray tries to talk and weasel his way out of the situation, but Tony will not let him go. Ray admits to remembering Tony from the year before. Ray says he has rights. Tony says Ray has no rights, and that he has been waiting a year for this. Ray says Tony doesn't have it in him to kill, that one has to kill first to get over the hump. Ray says he kills for fun, and that Lou and Turk just did not get it. Ray then advances on Tony. There is a loud noise and Tony passes out.

Susan knows Edward and Arnold are both coming.

In *Nocturnal Animals* 26, when Tony comes to, he discovers he has killed Ray. Tony looks at Ray and knows he and Ray are now even: Ray killed his wife and child, and now Tony has killed Ray. Tony is blinded, however, and cannot see. As he struggles to get up, he accidentally shoots himself in the gut, and bleeds to death. The police arrive a short time later.

Nocturnal Animals has ended. Susan is shocked as she returns to real life, to the sounds of her family around her. The book has been very real to Susan, and she knows there are loose ends –such as whatever became of Andes and his story.

In "After," Susan picks Tony up at O'Hare to bring him home. Susan tells Arnold about the book and Edward's coming visit, but Arnold is distracted. That night, they have sex, but Susan's mind is elsewhere. She is thinking about Tony and his lack of backbone, before realizing she would not have been able to do anything differently than Tony. She also compares Arnold to Tony.

Susan wonders if the novel is some kind of revenge against her, written by Edward. When Edward does not call to confirm dinner, her mind wanders over this idea. She also wonders if Arnold has been seeing Marilyn Linwood again. Edward ultimately stands Susan up, so she writes him a long letter to tell him what she thought of the book. She then tears the letter up and writes him a brief note instead to punish him,



telling him to drop her a line if she wants his opinion. She wants to punish Arnold as well, and decides if she needs to, she will make him read the book –though he probably will not understand anything about it.

Analysis

Ironically, Tony kills himself after killing Ray, though Tony's own death is accidental. Tony's blindness is symbolic of his having fallen away from the light, or the truth, of things. It is no longer night in *Nocturnal Animals*, but because of Tony's act of revenge, which is not in this case a true form of justice, it is now night forever for Tony by way of blindness. Tony has become the fox –the predator. His actions have blinded him to the innocent life he had before, so he can no longer see the truth. The night might be a harbinger of truth, and the day itself might actually be the truth, but Tony can no longer see the truth. His accidental self-killing may in turn be seen as a Divine intervention of sorts, in which a metaphysical justice is pursued against Tony by the taking of his life on Earth, but the restoring of life to him in Heaven. Readers should note that Laura and Helen are there to welcome Tony as he crosses over into Heaven.

Reading by night has exposed the truth in daylight for Susan. Her life has changed because of the novel she has read –demonstrating, clearly, that fiction is a mirror to truth, and that writers put more of their lives (and the people in them) into their novels than many suspect. She has been forced to confront her own guilt from the past, and her own mistakes. Because the novel has unsettled her, and because Edward has perhaps had a measure of revenge by standing Susan up for a dinner over the novel, Susan believes she is going to exact revenge against Edward by deliberately telling him he must ask her for her opinion on the novel. What Susan does not entirely grasp, however, is that Edward has already had his revenge through Tony and Susan in *Nocturnal Animals*. Susan ruined Edward's life years before; now, Edward has upended Susan's life in the present. She can now never return to her cleverly-constructed fiction about her own life.

Discussion Question 1

Is what becomes of Ray to be considered real justice? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Upon concluding the novel, what is Susan's reaction, especially with respect to real life?

Discussion Question 3

Who has the final revenge in *Nocturnal Animals*? Why?

Vocabulary

rectify, discrepancies, absurdity, insolent, unnaturally, archetypal



Characters

Edward

Edward Sheffield is a writer and insurance salesman, is the author of *Nocturnal Animals*, and is the ex-husband of Susan. Edward has not achieved the commercial success he has hoped for with his writing, and he is fussy and particular. Now remarried to a woman named Stephanie, Edward sends his latest manuscript, *Nocturnal Animals*, to Susan to read. He does not explain why, but it can be surmised he is seeking some kind of revenge against her for cheating on him and wrecking their marriage.

Susan

Susan Morrow is the forty-nine year-old ex-wife of Edward, the current wife of Arnold, and the mother of Dorothy, Henry, and Rosie. Susan, to deal with her guilt from cheating on Edward and destroying their marriage, concocts a fictional past where she blocks out much of the year between her affair and marriage to Arnold by projecting blame for the end of the marriage with Edward on Edward. Susan's current life is disrupted by Edward, who requests Susan read *Nocturnal Animals*, but does not say why.

Tony

Tony Hastings is a character in *Nocturnal Animals*. Tony is a mathematics professor, is the husband of Laura, and is the father of Helen. Tony and his family are on the way to summer in Maine when they encounter Ray and his thugs in northern Pennsylvania. Tony, meek and mild, is unable to stop the three men from their savagery, so Tony seeks justice against them, first legally through working with Andes, and then illegally by going after the thugs. Tony kills Ray, but accidentally kills himself in the process. Edward places much of his own meekness in Tony's character.

Laura

Laura Hastings is a character in *Nocturnal Animals*. Laura is the wife of Tony and the mother of Helen. She and the family are on the way to their summer house in Maine when they encounter Ray and his thugs. Laura is very practical, and recognizes danger in Ray and his buddies immediately. Laura is ultimately abducted by them, raped by them, and killed by them.

Helen

Helen Hastings is a character in *Nocturnal Animals*. Helen is the teenage daughter of Tony and Laura. Helen is beautiful, sweet, and intelligent. She and the family are on the



way to their summer house in Maine when they encounter Ray and his thugs. Helen, along with her mother, is abducted, raped, and killed by Ray and his thug buddies.

Ray

Ray Marcus is a redneck thug from northern Pennsylvania. Ray is a cruel and vindictive man who has killed before, admitting to enjoying the killing. Ray and his buddies, looking for a good time, play cat-and-mouse with Tony and his family until they gain the upper hand. Ray and his buddies then attack, abduct, rape, and murder Laura and Helen. Ray is later tracked down by Tony and Andes, and is killed by Tony while trying to escape.

Lou

Lou Bates is a redneck thug and friend of Ray's. Lou is described as stupid and is the one who drives off with Tony while Ray and Turk head off with Laura and Helen. Lou later joins Ray and Turk in the raping and murdering of both Laura and Helen. Lou is ultimately captured by police trying to flee a botched supermarket robbery, and is shot in the head by Andes after being brought to his hunting camp.

Turk

Steven Adams, AKA "Turk," is a California native who comes East and falls in with Ray and Lou. Turk is ruthless and cruel, and his ex-wife wants nothing to do with him. Turk, along with Ray and Lou, abducts, rapes, and murders Helen and Laura. Turk is later killed after a botched supermarket robbery.

Bob Andes

Robert "Bob" Andes is a State Police officer who personally heads up the investigation into the murders of Laura and Helen. Andes is a goodhearted but no-nonsense workaholic cop who is dying of cancer. When the legal system fails to deliver justice against Ray, Andes takes the law into his own hands by killing Lou and seeking to go after Ray. Andes's ultimate fate is not revealed.

Louise

Louise Germane is a twenty-something graduate student who, beautiful and intelligent, has long harbored romantic feelings for Tony. Shortly before his death, Louise begins a romance with Tony. She hopes the romance will blossom into something even more.



Symbols and Symbolism

Edward's request letter

Edward's request letter symbolizes the beginning of a journey. Edward writes to his ex-wife, Susan, asking her to read his latest novel, *Nocturnal Animals*. This brings her to reflect on her own past with Edward, and forces her to confront the truth of the past.

Nocturnal Animals

Nocturnal Animals is symbolic of the very worst of human, animalistic nature. *Nocturnal Animals* is the name of the thriller written by Edward Sheffield, which Edward in turn asks his ex-wife, Susan, to read. It involves a trio of thugs attacking and kidnapping a family, and the surviving husband seeking justice. It serves to be a mirror unto truth, as Susan is forced to confront her own past and her own previous animal nature (her sexual affair with Arnold).

Night

Night symbolizes both truth, and the portending of truth. It is only at night that characters of both the meta-novel, and the interior novel, are confronted by truth. In daylight, they must deal with the repercussions of truth. The true nature of Ray and his thug buddies, for example, can be seen at night by Tony and his girls when they are nearly driven off the road by Ray.

Fox

A fox symbolizes a nocturnal animal, and symbolizes a predator specifically. The fox is reflective at first of Ray, Lou, and Turk preying on Tony, Laura, and Helen. The fox is later symbolic of Tony becoming the predator against Ray in revenge.

Phone call

The phone call symbolizes false hope. Tony makes a phone call to the State Police from the Combs's residence. Tony is hopeful the police will be able to intervene, help, and save his wife and daughter. However, this turns out not to be the case. Readers have already surmised Helen and Laura will die –and the next morning, Tony and the police discover the naked corpses of Laura and Helen.



Empty house

An empty house is symbolic of everything that Tony has lost. Following the rape and murder of his wife and daughter, Tony must return home. The house is quiet and lonely without them. It reminds him constantly of what he has lost.

Stuffed panda

A stuffed panda is symbolic of sentimentality and Helen. The stuffed panda, owned by Helen, still sits on her bed. It causes Tony to remember Helen and his happiness with her, which makes him sentimental in the process.

Lineups

Lineups symbolize the promise of justice. Tony is called in twice to identify men arrested who fit the description of the three men who raped and killed Laura and Helen. Tony is too unsteady to handle the first one, but during the second he positively identifies Lou.

Tony's bad feelings

Tony's bad feelings are an omen and symbol of disaster to come. Tony experiences these feelings of disaster to come when he is driving back to Pennsylvania after learning the district attorney will not be prosecuting the case against Ray citing a lack of sufficient evidence. The bad feelings about impending disaster turn out to be very accurate.

Gun

A gun symbolizes control and power. Tony is given a gun by Andes when Andes leaves the camp to go and collect Lou Bates. Tony recognizes he has the power to save and end lives with the gun he now holds. It ensures he is largely in control of the situation he finds himself in. Tony later uses the gun to end life and bring about death for Ray, and for himself.

Blindness

Blindness symbolizes a departure from true justice, truth, and a man's true nature. Tony is blinded after shooting and killing Ray. He can no longer see the light of day, or the truth that breaks apart the night because he has committed an unlawful act by killing Ray. He is blinded from his true nature –which is that of a gentle man, hence he has lost his innocence and his sight of the good things.



Settings

Northern Pennsylvania

Northern Pennsylvania is where much of the novel takes place. Described as primarily rural, wooded, and mountainous, northern Pennsylvania is populated by small towns, hunting roads, and plenty of wildlife. Tony and his family are crossing through northern Pennsylvania on their way to Maine when they encounter Ray and his thugs. It is in northern Pennsylvania, along the interstate, that Ray and his buddies separate Tony from his loved ones, and later kill Laura and Helen. Tony returns time and time again to northern Pennsylvania to help the State Police with their investigation. Northern Pennsylvania thus becomes a place of sadness, anger, and revenge for Tony.

Grant Center

Grant Center is a small town in northern Pennsylvania where the local State Police barracks is located. Described as a small town –but big enough to include a motel – Grant Center is where Tony ends up spending much of his time in northern Pennsylvania in particular. It is in Grant Center that Tony and Andes meet and discuss the case, and where Tony is happy to learn that Ray and Lou are put in holding cells.

The mountain road

The mountain road is where Lou drives Tony to get him away from Laura and Helen, and to leave him until Ray comes back to kill Tony. The mountain road becomes symbolic of the journey that Tony undertakes which transforms him from helpless victim to predator by the end of the novel. Tony's emergence from the road is his emergence from the tragedy of that night –and the slow but sure beginning of his transformation.

The trailer

The trailer is located not far from the small town of White Creek. Owned by a man who lives out of state and used only during hunting season, the trailer is broken into by Ray and his thugs to rape and murder Laura and Helen. Tony later confronts Ray in that same trailer in order to kill him.

The hunting camp

The hunting camp belonging to Andes is located not far from White Creek, and actually rests along the river. Consisting of a cabin and a small patch of property surrounded by forest, the camp becomes the final setting for *Nocturnal Animals*. It is to the camp that Andes brings Ray and Lou for the purposes of exacting revenge through killing them. It

is at the camp that Andes kills Lou, but Ray escapes along the river. It is also at the camp that Edward suddenly introduces the character of Susan, denoting perhaps his true intent to have some form of revenge against the meta-Susan of Tony & Susan.



Themes and Motifs

Writers and Their Work

Writers put more of themselves in their work than readers often suspect, argues Austin Wright in his novel *Tony & Susan*. This is because writers write what they know: the things they love and know only naturally end up in their writing, as writing is most often a labor of love. The things writers love or know, they write about.

When Susan begins reading *Nocturnal Animals*, her first thoughts pivot to how much of Edward she will find in his novel. She reflects on being young and accusing him of putting too much of himself in his early novels, and remembers Edward defending the practice as natural. In the present, Susan wonders how much of the other aspects of Edward's life she will find in the novel.

Immediately, Susan finds many similarities and parallels. Tony is meek and mild like Edward. Tony is a mathematics professor, relying on reason and logic by way of numbers, which parallels Edward, a writer, who relies on emotion and thought by way of words. Susan finds parts of Edward's impatience manifested in Ray, while she later finds aspects of herself manifested in the actual character of Susan in *Nocturnal Animals*.

Susan continues to find more about Edward and Tony, so much so that it even becomes a gently mocking game of humor between characters and writers extending to the author of *Tony & Susan* himself. Austin Wright, familiar with and a fan of Cincinnati, Ohio, ensures that his character, Edward, will have such experiences, who in turn ensures his character, Tony, will have such similar experiences as well. Wright proves his own thematic argument with this case-in-point alone –let alone that Wright writes about a writer and writing, and that Wright, a professor of English, should write about a professor of math through a writer who loves the English language, bringing the entire theme full-circle.

Fiction Mirrors Truth

Fiction is a mirror to truth, argues Austin Wright in his novel *Tony & Susan*. A novel fictionalizes reality to make points about reality, and causes us to question our assumptions about not only the books, but about reality itself. Fiction can cleverly disguise truth with metaphors to make it apparent as well as to directly reflect truth itself. Fiction serves as a mirror unto truth in many ways in the novel.

As noted in the previous theme, among Susan's first thoughts beginning *Nocturnal Animals* is how much of Edward's own true life he placed in the novel itself. Much of Edward (Wright) is in *Nocturnal Animals*, from his mild mannered nature to his work to the place he lives. Susan questions how Edward could write such a heartbreaking and



murderous story, but then realizes the novel is only accurately reflecting the kind of thing that goes on every day in the country.

Fiction reflects reality in other ways. Susan imagines she would be braver than Tony initially was in the novel, such as when Susan questions how Tony handled his situation, only to realize herself she probably could not have handled it any differently. In Tony's overall situation, Tony feels helpless as Susan realizes anyone in such a situation would feel helpless. Tony's beginning of a new relationship with Louise causes Susan to angrily think about and reflect on how Arnold had an affair with Marilyn Linwood.

It also takes the novel to jolt Susan out of her everyday life and the past she has constructed for herself with respect to her divorce from Edward. Susan has created her own fictional novel, in a sense, about her past. There is great irony in the fact that Susan's constructed, fictional reality is smashed apart by *Nocturnal Animals*, a constructed, fictional reality, within a meta-novel (Tony & Susan). Susan, because of the truth brought about by the mirror of fiction, must confront the fiction of her own past to acknowledge the truth.

Tragedy

Life must go on even in tragedy, argues Austin Wright in his novel *Tony & Susan*. Tragedies take many forms in the novel, including divorce and murder. Yet, in each instance, the characters struggle on to begin new phases in their lives. It is all about recovery and returning to life as normal as possible.

Following the murders of Lauren and Helen, Tony is devastated. He can barely function, and requires his sister to step in and help him navigate the next few weeks. He does his best to focus on getting through each day until work resumes at the end of the summer, then focuses on getting through class each day. His students are encouraging and supportive. Over time, Tony even begins to enjoy parts of his day again, and to even forget about what happened to his wife and daughter. Only when Ray is put in jail does Tony realize he can begin to live again, to heal, and to recover.

Edward reels after he learns that Susan has cheated on him. At first, he tries to exist in denial. He then tries to work through Susan's affair. When the affair continues, Edward knows there is no hope left. Following his divorce, Edward struggles to get by. Beyond this, much of his life is unknown, except that he eventually does move on: he remarries and recommits to writing. Life continues to go on despite this tragedy.

Susan is devastated when she learns that Arnold has cheated on her. Susan decides to work through her marriage rather than allowing the marriage to end because of this. It is partly this why she constructs a fictional alternative past, in which she is not to blame for the divorce with Edward, so that she might feel better about her present situation. Part of her considers she deserved being cheated on, while part of her argues she did not – though this part is undermined by her cheating on Edward. Only over a few years does



Susan largely return to life as normal, though she constantly worries Arnold has resumed the affair.

Justice and Revenge

Justice and revenge are not the same thing, argues Austin Wright in his novel *Tony & Susan*. Justice is traditionally regarded as the moral, legal, and proper dispensation for earned punishments for committed crimes. Revenge is the delivery of a punishment in retaliation for a committed or perceived wrong. Justice is always revenge, but revenge is never justice, Wright argues.

Wright sets the stage clearly in two ways, using both a murder and an affair and divorce. The murders, coming after rape, are heinous acts committed against two innocent females, Laura and Helen, by three horrendous males –Ray, Turk, and Lou. Susan has an indefensible affair with Arnold while married to Edward, which in turn brings about divorce between Susan and Edward. Edward and Tony both respond to their respective situations in different ways.

At first, Tony wants justice to be done. He does not know if this means finding a way to personally get back at Ray, Turk, and Lou, or allowing the law to handle the situation for him. Tony is a good guy with a clear conscience. Initially, he lets the law proceed to take justice. But when a backdoor deal allows Ray to get off without being tried, Tony knows the legal system has failed and seeks to administer his own form of justice –revenge. By killing Ray, Tony has his revenge, but Wright argues this cannot be justice because the retribution Ray faces is not morally or legally sound given the situation.

Edward, meanwhile, attempts first to work through Susan's affair, but this does not work as Susan resumes her affair several times. Bad feelings naturally occur between Edward and Susan during their divorce, but Edward goes his own way. He exacts a form of justice against Susan by going on to have a happy life in remarriage, and in recommitting to writing. However, Edward comes back with a plan of revenge by disrupting Susan's life with the novel *Nocturnal Animals*. There is no cause for this, except purely as a measure of revenge. And this kind of revenge, Wright reaffirms, is not justice.

Invention

Much of our own past lives consists of invention, argues Austin Wright in his novel *Tony & Susan*. This is because, for various reasons, people look at their lives and the world the way they want these things to be, rather than what they are. Writing, Susan contends, is putting thought into language, or action. As a result, everyone writes. As a result, everyone tends to invent. This is especially true with Susan.

Reading *Nocturnal Animals* ironically forces Susan to confront her own fictionalized past. Early in the novel, readers would believe that Susan was terribly wronged by Edward. As Susan's thoughts evolve as she reads, readers discover that Susan was



annoyed with Edward wanting to be a writer, and his refusal to do real work led to friction which led to the divorce. This also turns out to be untrue, as Susan at last concedes her repeat-affairs wrecked the marriage, and that being married to Edward was not so bad.

Susan has invented her past for three reasons. First, she bears guilt for the past, and by forgetting the past and rewriting it, she is able to handle her guilt by projecting more blame on Edward than appropriate. Second, Susan is not someone who likes to be proven wrong or to be on the wrong side. Her refusal to admit the truth of the past is demonstrative of this, and her fictionalized version of the past allows her to be in the right. Third, it is important she never wronged anyone in the past, so that she could play the part of the woman wronged in the present, as Arnold has had an affair. By admitting she was wrong in the past with Edward, Susan opens herself up to criticisms of just-deserts and justice in the present.

The invention of alternate realities also occurs with Edward. Edward's decision to write much of himself into Tony allows him to live vicariously through the life of a character, exacting a kind of revenge against those who have wronged him. However, Edward's fiction does not actually dictate how he lives his own real life as it does Susan. Likewise, Tony invents different outcomes –most focusing on revenge –as he struggles to escape the mountain road on which Lou has left him, and later as time passes when he wants the legal system to do justice against Ray and the others.



Styles

Point of View

Austin Wright tells his novel *Tony & Susan* in the third-person limited-omniscient narrative mode. This is done for a few different reasons. The novel essentially deals with a woman reading a novel, and the events of that novel and how they affect the life of the woman within the novel she has been written into. The third-person narrator, in both meta-novel and inter-novel, provide a sense of continuity and a reliable narrator as the meta-novel weaves back and forth between Susan and *Nocturnal Animals*. The third person allows the reader to be an observer of everything going on, both in Susan's world and in *Nocturnal Animals*, just the way that Susan is an observer of everything going on in *Nocturnal Animals*. The narrator is limited in terms of his or her omniscience, and does not know everything. The narrator only reveals things as the plot of each novel unfolds. Readers and characters are therein on the same page in terms of knowing what comes next, or knowing what is going on in the present. This keeps the reader guessing, and builds suspense which is consistent with a thriller mystery.

Language and Meaning

Austin Wright tells his novel *Tony & Susan* in language that is casual, simple, and straightforward. The novel was written, and takes place in the early 1990s, a time when casual and simple language were common among Americans. It is only natural that a novel set in the 1990's should be reflective of the kind of language used by Americans at that point in time. The use of such language creates a realistic and authentic atmosphere, as well as creating a strong sense of verisimilitude for that time period. Additionally, readers should take note that the novel itself is a literary thriller mystery. While the novel addresses some philosophical concepts –such as those regarding writing, and inventing pasts –the novel itself primarily focuses on the mystery and thrill of avenging the deaths of Laura and Helen. As such, to create an atmosphere of urgency, the brevity of the language –by way of simple and straightforward writing –is critical. This allows Wright to build to a crescendo of revenge in which Tony finally takes the law into his own hands.

Structure

Austin Wright structures his novel so as to be composed of multiple parts, chapters, and subchapters. Wright principally divides his novel into seven major alternating parts. The first part of the book is a prologue, and the last part is an epilogue. The five middle parts alternate between three “sittings” –periods where Susan sits down to read the novel *Nocturnal Animals* –and two “interludes” which deal with Susan recalling her past with Edward, and thinking about her own life. Each of these five parts is divided into chapters and subchapters. Each chapter briefly deals with Susan in her process of reading. Each



chapter then has a subchapter which is a chapter of Nocturnal Animals. Additionally, the epilogue features two chapters which relate the events of Susan's life following the finishing of Nocturnal Animals, and how she responds not only to finishing the novel, but to dealing with Edward.



Quotes

He had written a book, a novel, and would she like to read it?"

-- Narrator (Before)

Importance: Very early in the novel, Susan –remarried and with kids –hears from her ex-husband, Edward. Edward wants to know if Susan would be willing to read his latest manuscript, *Nocturnal Animals*. Susan's decision to read not only worries her, but sets off the events of the novel itself.

Help us, please.

-- Helen (*Nocturnal Animals* 3)

Importance: When Tony and his family are run off the road with a flat tire by Ray and his thugs, things quickly get out of control. Ray sexually touches Helen, hits Tony, and knocks Laura to the ground. A passing pickup truck stops when Helen waves to it, and she screams and begs the driver for help. The driver continues on when he sees Ray has a tire iron in his hand.

Once again the fright warning, hide in the ditch. He resisted. You must face them, ask them, he said. You must not be so intimidated. He stood in the road and waited.

-- Narrator (*Nocturnal Animals* 5 (continued))

Importance: After Tony is let out at the end of a road in the middle of the woods, he tries to find his way out. When a car comes back for him the first time, he hides. When he thinks he sees a second car, he refuses to hide. But when the car comes toward him, he decides to hide once more.

There's no doubt: it's risk time for Edward, an intersection, where to go. Whether to pursue the evil men and be a mystery, or pursue Tony's soul and be something else.

-- Narrator (Twelve)

Importance: Here, Susan knows Edward has brought the character of Tony to a standstill point. Tony now has at least two paths down which to proceed: he can seek out revenge or seek out his own soul. Susan has no idea what will happen, but it causes her to think about how harshly critical she was of Tony's early work.

The writer's economy, using what you know: Tony lives in Cincinnati, like Edward. It gives Susan an odd feeling of knowing something she shouldn't know.

-- Narrator (Twelve)

Importance: As Susan reads, she begins to wonder how much of himself Edward has put into the book. She begins to draw parallels between Tony and Edward –for example, both living in Cincinnati. It makes Susan feel as if she has discovered something she should not know. It gives her a disturbed feeling.



I promise to cooperate in every possible way, for I am more determined than ever to bring them to justice.

-- Tony (Nocturnal Animals 15)

Importance: Tony, nine months after the death of his wife and daughter, is now more determined than ever to find the killers. He is no longer second-guessing himself in the same way as before, as his confidence is building, his depression is weakening, and his anger is growing. Tony wants justice, and he wants it done soon.

On the question of revenge, Susan's own answer is simple: I'll kill anyone who harms my children.

-- Narrator (Seven)

Importance: In considering vengeance and justice, Susan draws no line between them. She would gladly risk jail to kill those who harm her children. Susan sympathizes with Tony, and knows that, in his situation, she would pummel Ray and kill him. This underscores how much the novel is making Susan think, and consider her own life.

Something terrible is going to happen. A disaster coming.

-- Narrator (Nocturnal Animals 21)

Importance: As Tony heads out for Pennsylvania after learning the district attorney will not prosecute Ray, he has a bad feeling about the future. He senses disaster coming – something very, very bad. This sense of doom is ominous: things will soon become very bad.

He kept thinking about what this power he was supposed to have depended on.

-- Tony (Nocturnal Animals 23)

Importance: Tony waits at the camp with Ingrid, Ray, and Susan while Andes goes to get Lou Bates. Tony considers the situation he is in, realizing the power he now has in his hands because of the gun. He realizes he now has the power of life and death in his hands over Ray, when the situation was reversed with Ray over a year before. Tony does not know what will happen next when Andes returns.

The question was when?

-- Narrator (Nocturnal Animals 25)

Importance: While out trying to handle the situation with the escaped Ray, Tony actually drives past Ray. Tony realizes that, sooner or later, he will have to confront Ray. He does not stop on the way to George's. He can be a coward and try to let the law handle a situation it has already bungled, or he can take the law into his own hands and do something illegal.

You have no rights. I've been waiting a year for this.

-- Tony (Nocturnal Animals 25)



Importance: Here, Tony finally confronts Ray in the trailer. Tony will not let Ray go. Ray says he has rights, but Tony says Ray gave up his rights when he murdered Laura and Helen. Ray now has no rights, he argues. This puts the situation in clear perspective for readers: Tony has indeed stepped forward to take the law into his own hands.

He thought, Now we're square. You took my wife and daughter and blinded me, and I killed you.

-- Nocturnal Animals 26 (Tony)

Importance: Here, Tony believes he has not had revenge on Ray by killing Ray, so much as he believes he has brought vengeance and justice to Ray. Tony's act ultimately leads to his symbolic blindness and his own death. Effectively, Wright uses Tony's death to argue that revenge is not justice, though justice is always revenge.