

Valley of the Dolls Study Guide

Valley of the Dolls by Jacqueline Susann

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Plot Summary

The Valley of the Dolls is a novel about the friendship between three women, the perils and rewards of fame, and chemical dependency. The story spans twenty years, from 1945 to 1965, and is set primarily in New York City. Anne Welles, Neely O'Hara, and Jennifer North become friends and roommates, find fame, get married and take lovers, and turn to drugs to cope with problems they encounter.

1945

At age nineteen, Anne Welles leaves her hometown of Lawrenceville for the excitement of New York City. She goes to work at the theatrical law firm of Bellamy and Bellows, and quickly becomes indispensable to its head, Henry Bellamy. She rents a modest room at a boarding house, where she meets the teenage Ethel "Neely" O'Neill, a struggling dancer. Anne is courted by Allen Cooper but falls in love with Lyon Burke, a former employee of Henry Bellamy's who has returned from fighting in World War II. Jennifer North, a model who breaks into acting despite the fact that she cannot sing, dance, or act, is a client.

Neely is hired as a dancer in a show starring Helen Lawson, a famous actress who is also a client of Bellamy and Bellows, but ends up as the understudy to a major role. Helen Lawson decides that the actress in that role is drawing attention away from her and manages to get her to quit. When Neely takes over, she is a critical success; her career takes off.

Allen Cooper reveals to Anne that he is a millionaire who kept his wealth secret to make sure the woman he proposes to says yes for him and not for his money. Anne does not want to marry him but he talks her into wearing his ring and considering marriage. Regardless, Anne and Lyon Burke become lovers on a business trip. A misunderstanding between them leaves her stranded away from home. When she turns to Jennifer North for help, the two girls become friends.

The three women enjoy a moderate success and become roommates. Neely leaves first to marry and move to California to pursue a film career; Jennifer marries the famous singer Tony Polar and moves to California with him and his sister. Lyon will not marry Anne until he can support them both as a writer, but they spend all their nights together. All three relationships dissolve. Neely leaves her husband for her costume designer. Jennifer, bored in California while her husband advances his career, starts to take drugs to pass the time and help her sleep. She learns that her husband is retarded from a condition he will pass on to any children, and aborts the child she is carrying. Anne inherits her mother's house and Lyon wants to move there to write, but Anne hates Lawrenceville so much that she will not consider it. He goes to England to write a book about the war.

1948



Anne leaves her job at Bellamy and Bellows to be the exclusive representative of Gillian Cosmetics. She is the "Gillian Girl", and the position makes her rich. She ends up in a passionless affair with the much older Kevin Gillmore, the owner of Gillian Cosmetics. Jennifer takes up with a French director and goes to Europe to act in adult-themed movies that show her nude. Still unable to act but fluent in French, she becomes famous for her beautiful body.

1950

Pressured by the demands of fame, Neely turns to drugs and alcohol to help her stay thin, sleep, and cope with stress. She sleeps through her twin sons' first birthday party and ruins her second marriage, too. She is dropped by her studio because she delays production so much that her films are not profitable (even though they are popular). She attempts suicide as a way to manipulate the studio into keeping her at star status, but finishes her contract without making any more movies.

1957-1961

Jennifer falls in love with a senator and looks forward to starting a family. A gynecological checkup reveals that she has breast cancer; she is advised to have a mastectomy and a hysterectomy. She starts to tell her fiancé that she can never have children because of the cancer, but he cuts her off. He tells her that he considers her breasts his babies. She commits suicide rather than be disfigured. Neely comes for the funeral and stays with Anne. She loses the ability to sing for psychological reasons. In a moment of self-pity she attempts suicide again. This time, Anne has her committed to a psychiatric institution, where Neely will stay for several years.

Lyon Burke returns to New York City from London for a writing assignment and encounters Anne. They decide to spend as much time together as possible, despite the fact that Anne is engaged to Kevin. Anne makes no attempt to hide her renewed interest in Lyon. Kevin finally breaks it off with her. With her friend Henry Bellamy's help (and without Lyon's knowledge), Anne manages to secure some longer-term writing projects for Lyon that keep him in New York City.

Henry's retirement from Bellamy and Bellows enables Anne to keep Lyon in New York City permanently. Anne secretly gives Henry enough money for him to loan to Lyon (under the pretense that it is his money) so Lyon can afford to buy Henry's share in the business. Lyon gives up writing to resume his position at the renamed Bellamy, Bellows, and Burke, assuming that Henry is helping him so the firm will not be bought by a rival.

1962-1965

Anne and Lyon marry and have a baby girl. Neely is released from Haven Manor and becomes a client of Bellamy, Bellows, and Burke. She demands more and more of Lyon's time, so Anne and the baby spend much of their time alone. A newspaper item alerts Anne that Lyon and Neely are having an affair. Neely tells Lyon about how Anne really is the one who bankrolled his purchase of the company. He vows to Anne that he will pay her back every dime but that he will no longer be controlled by her. Anne turns



to Henry for support; he tells her to stick it out and gives her pills to help her cope. She finds work on a television program and keeps busy during the day; she takes Seconal at night to sleep.

Lyon and Neely carry on for several years, but break up when she becomes too demanding for him. Neely leaves Bellamy, Bellow, and Burke for a rival. Anne discovers Lyon and a young client kissing in a bedroom during a party, and realizes that although she still loves him, with every affair she will love him less until there is nothing left.



Anne, September, 1945

Anne, September, 1945 Summary

The Valley of the Dolls is a novel about the friendship between three women, the perils and rewards of fame, and chemical dependency. The story spans twenty years, from 1945 to 1965, and is set primarily in New York City. Anne Welles, Neely O'Hara, and Jennifer North become friends and roommates, find fame, get married and take lovers, and turn to drugs to cope with problems they encounter.

The novel begins with a poem about how the road to "success" often leaves you too tired and sore to appreciate the goals you achieve, and that achievement is sometimes less rewarding than a struggle.

Anne Welles leaves Lawrenceville, Massachusetts for New York City at the age of nineteen to escape a life she perceives as stagnant and unfulfilled. She hopes for a life that she imagines will be exciting and glamorous. Her mother is critical of Anne's decision and suggests that Anne should settle down with Willie Henderson, the respectable son of a respectable family. Anne does not love Willie Henderson, but her mother says that ladies should not care about things like sex and love. She predicts that Anne will come running home after spending a few weeks in the city.

Anne rents a shabby room in a boarding house run by a kindly man. She finds work as the personal assistant to Henry Bellamy of Bellamy and Bellows, a theatrical law firm (George Bellows is the partner). Bellamy handles high-profile celebrities. Anne becomes Bellamy's indispensable employee, and Bellamy becomes her father-figure and friend.

Anne, September, 1945 Analysis

This first chapter establishes the tone and structure of the novel. The book is written in a straightforward, non-descriptive style with many changes of perspective. The opening scene is of New York City on a hot day. Newcomer Anne Welles is nonetheless completely enraptured by the city, and much of the chapter contrasts her life in New York to her hometown of Lawrenceville.

The reader learns that Anne is beautiful, hard-working, and honest. She is entering an environment in which women are fighting over access to men (the large number of enlistments for World War II has altered the balance of the singles scene). The background information that is revealed about Anne and her family will later provide insight into the decisions she later makes about men and marriage.

Henry Bellamy is Jewish, but changed his last name of Birnbaum to a more Anglican name for professional reasons. This small deception does not stand out, perhaps, in the world of celebrity and stage names that the book's characters inhabit, but it does alert

readers to the fact that appearances mean everything—as well as the fact that a person can remake him- or herself no matter what life he or she was born to.



Anne, October, 1945

Anne, October, 1945 Summary

Anne makes friends with Ethel "Neely" O'Neill, a seventeen-year-old girl who lives at her boarding house. Neely is a member of the Gauchos, a dance trio that is trying to make it big on Broadway. Anne is being courted by the unassuming Allen Cooper, a salesman she meets when he mistakenly stumbles into her office. Anne is not in love with Allen, although she is fond of him. She also meets Lyon Burke, a former employee at Bellamy and Bellows. Burke left the firm to fight in World War II, but has returned to work. Bellamy asks Anne to scout out an apartment for Lyon. Lyon jokes about giving up work to write a best-selling war novel, and Anne tells him he should not give up before even starting.

Henry Bellamy's top client is Helen Lawson, a Broadway star whose new show, *Hit the Sky*, is opening in New York City in January. Neely asks Anne to use her influence to get the Gauchos into the show.

On a date at a quiet restaurant, Allen cryptically remarks that the time has come for Anne to leave Bellamy's employ, and that he has found the perfect apartment for Lyon Burke. The apartment is luxurious, and then Allen takes Anne to another one that is even more so. He tells her that both apartments are his, and that he would give up the first if she likes the second—and that it matters if she likes the second because he wants her to marry him. Anne discovers that Allen is extremely wealthy, and has been pretending to be of modest means to see if she loved him for him and not for his fortune.

Henry Bellamy and George Bellows both warn Anne not to trust Allen Cooper. Lyon Burke says that Anne is capable of choosing her own friends. Allen introduces Anne to his father, Gino Cooper, and then announces to his father that he and Anne are engaged. Anne says that she has not agreed to marry him, but Allen and Gino act first as if they did not hear her and then as if she does not mean it. Anne accepts and wears his engagement ring.

The Gauchos are selected to perform in *Hit the Sky*. When Anne tells Neely about Allen and her reluctance to marry him, Neely says she is crazy to turn down this chance to strike it rich.

Anne, October, 1945 Analysis

In this chapter, Anne forms relationships that will direct the course of her life; she befriends Neely and falls in love with Lyon Burke. This chapter establishes Anne's strengths and weaknesses. Anne is very sincere and generous, and wants to help her friends, but she often hurts herself to please others. She also inadvertently hurts others because she does not speak up for herself. Even though she tells Allen she will not



marry him, she wears his ring and is seen with him socially. Her actions give him no reason to believe her words.

Because Anne always looks for the good in someone, she ignores character assessments and advice given to her by people with far more experience than she has. For example, Anne perceives that she and Lyon have long heart-to-heart talks about his war experience, but he really treats her like a therapist. She spends so much time listening to what other people want that she cannot reasonably determine what she wants. She has no character of her own.



Anne, November, 1945

Anne, November, 1945 Summary

Anne Welles's engagement to Allen Cooper makes headlines in the newspapers, and Henry Bellamy assumes that Anne is going to quit her job soon. Anne explains to him that the engagement is a misunderstanding, and accidentally reveals that she may have more than a crush on Lyon Burke. Henry counsels Anne to postpone wedding plans rather than cancel them.

Allen and Anne meet Gino Cooper and his date, Adele (a chorus girl), at a popular nightclub for a show by the famous singer, Tony Polar. Also at the nightclub are Lyon Burke and the starlet Jennifer North, who is famous for her beautiful face and figure and has a small part in *Hit the Sky*. Tony Polar serenades Jennifer during the show; the next morning headlines proclaim Jennifer and Tony are "Broadway's Newest Romance".

Neely comes to the office and tearfully tells Anne that she has been kicked out of *Hit the Sky* because she has been kicked out of the *Gaucheros*—Helen is dancing with the two others, but not Neely. Lyon calls the producer of the show and convinces him to put Neely in the cast somewhere; he then helps her choose the stage name "Neely O'Hara". Neely ends up with three lines and the position of understudy to one of the main roles.

Anne meets the star of the show, Helen Lawson, when Henry (Helen's lawyer) sends Anne to deliver some paperwork to Helen at a rehearsal. Helen is very friendly to Anne, and ends up accompanying Anne on a date with Allen and Gino. Helen decides she is interested in Gino and asks Anne to help her win his love. After the date, Allen tells Anne that Helen really is not welcome. Anne defends her. When Neely finds out that Anne and Helen are friends, she warns Anne that Helen is using her in some way—probably to get to Gino. Anne insists that Helen is a nice person despite her abrasive and bossy persona.

When romance with Gino does not immediately spark, Helen pesters Anne for advice on how to make him like her. Anne tells her that Gino has been busy, and promises Helen that he will come to the Philadelphia opening of *Hit the Sky*. Allen presses Anne for a wedding date, and she tells him again that she does not want to marry him because she does not love him. He says that she is just afraid of sex and that he can teach her to like it, and then like him, and that he always gets what he wants in the end.

Anne, November, 1945 Analysis

Sex is the overriding topic of this chapter; sex as an act of love or a means of getting ahead or just a form of entertainment. The chapter also debates whether female frigidity is a sign of something wrong with a woman or something wrong with the man. Anne and

Neely are both virgins, but Anne is ignorant of how sex pervades the world she now inhabits. Anne's complete naiveté underscores just how sheltered her life has been.

This chapter sets the stage for the loss of Anne's innocence. Despite warnings about Helen, Anne still refuses to think that her friend has ulterior motives. The frigid debate between Anne and Allen foreshadows that Allen is not the right man for her, and establishes her dreams of having a home and family in the future.

Neely is a big fan of the novel *Gone with the Wind*, and takes her stage name "O'Hara" from the main character, Scarlett O'Hara. Scarlett O'Hara is famous for putting financial interests ahead of family interests. Her choice of a stage name foreshadows the choices she will make later.



Anne, December, 1945

Anne, December, 1945 Summary

Anne Welles, Henry Bellamy, and Lyon Burke travel to New Haven, Connecticut to attend the premiere of *Hit the Sky*. Anne talks to Neely before the show; Neely is excited about appearing onstage and that she lost her virginity to her boyfriend, Mel Harris. Anne is shocked by the specific details Neely provides. After the show, Anne, Henry, and Lyon meet with Gil Case, the show's producer, to discuss it. They agree that Helen was excellent but that Terry King—the actress playing the second female lead (the role that Neely understudies)—is too attractive and that her success will upset Helen. At a party after the show, Helen demands that Terry be cut from the production because she does not want to be used to launch some upstart's career. Terry has a contract, though, and firing her would not be cheap.

Lyon and Anne leave the party together, and he kisses her on the street. They end up in his hotel room. Anne admits that she loves him but she wants more than a weekend fling. She decides to spend the night with him. When Lyon realizes that Anne is a virgin, he pulls away from her in a moment of confused chivalry. Anne insists that they continue and finds herself more in love than ever.

In the morning, Anne is scolded by Neely for not saying hello after the show. She has her first conversation with Jennifer North, and learns that the beautiful actress has a sweet and generous disposition. Jennifer, who is married to a Prince Mirallo, is frank about the fact that she has no talent and can only depend on her looks for as long as they last. Henry meets with her briefly about her upcoming divorce hearing and proposes Anne as a character witness to testify that the Prince is denying Jennifer children. Anne protests that she would be lying under oath, but the conversation ends abruptly when Terry King arrives.

Anne watches in horror as Gil, Henry, and Lyon gang up on Terry King and bully her into quitting the show. Neely takes over the role, to good reviews. Helen approaches Anne about Lyon Burke, and chides her about conducting an affair with Lyon when she is engaged to Allen. Lyon tells Anne that he might not ever love her as much as Allen does and that she should carefully consider what they are doing. Anne tells Lyon that the only thing she will ever need from him is love.

Anne telephones Allen and tells him that she is returning the engagement ring. She declines to say why at first, but then tells him she is in love with Lyon Burke. Allen responds with great bitterness, and says she has ruined things for herself and that Helen can kiss her chances with Gino good-bye. He refuses to take the ring back. When Helen learns that Gino did not come to see the show because Allen did not come, she is very upset. She insists that Anne stay with her to talk instead of going home to New York City with Lyon as Anne and Lyon had planned. Lyon leaves without her, hurting Anne's feelings terribly.



When Helen learns that Anne has broken her engagement to Allen (and therefore removed any access to Gino), she calls Anne a tramp. She tells Anne that Lyon Burke is not to be depended on. Their friendship ends abruptly, and Anne has nowhere to spend the night. She goes to Jennifer's room out of desperation and tells her the whole story. Jennifer tries to comfort Anne about the loss of Helen's friendship and her sudden insecurities about Lyon. That night, Anne receives word that her aunt has died; she returns to Lawrenceville immediately for the funeral. She sends a poorly worded telegram to Henry to alert him of her absence from work. Henry and Lyon both assume that Anne has eloped with Allen.

When Anne returns, she and Lyon talk about the future. He does not like himself in the entertainment business and says that he would like to write a book about his experience in the war. He invites Anne to move into his apartment, but not to marry him. He believes that a man should support his wife, but that writing full-time cannot support two people and working full-time at the firm makes him a bad spouse. He promises to marry Anne if his book is a success. Anne refuses to move into his apartment but spends every weekend there.

Despite her fears about committing perjury, Anne testifies on Jennifer's behalf at the divorce hearing. They talk about their romances. Jennifer says Anne did the right thing by not moving in with Lyon, and says that she is in the same situation with Tony Polar: They have no marriage plans, but Tony asked her to move in with him. The two women decide to ask Neely to go in on a nice apartment for the three of them. Jennifer tells Anne that Henry Bellamy is a good financial advisor and that she should sell the ring and let him invest the money.

Anne, December, 1945 Analysis

This chapter portrays the ups and downs of the celebrity business. Anne experiences the excitement of putting together a show, but also the ugly way that stars and producers manipulate cast members. Neely experiences how luck and timing trigger fame or ruin a career. Jennifer is fleshed out as a character. How her divorce is handled illustrates how carefully and callously a celebrity's image is created and controlled.

Anne loses her virginity to Lyon in almost the same scene that she witnesses the bullying of Terry King, and both events mature her. They do not, however, make her wiser. Anne dedicates herself to Lyon's happiness even though he does not offer her the family and home that she wants. Anne forms a friendship with Neely because they are neighbors and because Anne is affiliated with a show Neely wants to be in. Anne and Jennifer become friends after Anne turns to her for help. These differences in how friendships were formed influence how the friends treat each other as they grow up.



Jennifer, December, 1945

Jennifer, December, 1945 Summary

During the Philadelphia run of *Hit the Sky*, actress Jennifer North accepts the attention and gifts from Robby, a Philadelphia lawyer. When he buys her dresses and coats, she can afford to send more money to her mother in Cleveland. Jennifer wishes she had someone to love as much as Anne Welles loves Lyon Burke. Jennifer good-naturedly reflects on her one date with Lyon to the nightclub show where she met the singer Tony Polar. She had wanted to enjoy Lyon's company, but when Tony turned his attention to her, she made the business decision to choose the more famous man.

After a date with Robby, Jennifer rigorously performs her beauty self-assessment and maintenance. She knows that her body and looks are her only assets, and does what she can to make them last as long as possible. Her mother calls to complain that she did not send Jennifer to Switzerland to meet a prince only to still end up poor. Jennifer retorts that she would have been happy to be poor if she had married Harry Johnson, the boy she loved at home. The two women discuss Jennifer's possible future with Tony Polar. Her mother warns that gaining weight ruins large breasts; Jennifer complains that Tony's sister is overprotective and will not let Tony alone long enough for Jennifer to get him to marry her.

After the phone call, Jennifer cannot sleep and paces the room, smoking and remembering Maria. Jennifer met Maria at boarding school in Switzerland. The two girls became friends when Maria comforted Jennifer after Jennifer got news from home that Harry had married another girl. They talk about sex and Maria invites Jennifer to spend the summer with her in Spain. When war breaks out in Europe, however, Maria's father advises her to remain in Switzerland. Jennifer and Maria become lovers.

Jennifer enjoys sex with Maria, but is still attracted to men. Jennifer reluctantly accompanies Maria to Spain (instead of returning to the United States), aware that she is putting herself in Maria's power but hopeful that she will meet a wealthy man there. She finds herself a prisoner in Maria's home. The day the atomic bomb is dropped on Japan, Jennifer escapes to town and sends a message to her mother. Following Jennifer's instructions, her mother sends a telegram that says she is ill and that Jennifer must return right away. She travels to New York City and changes her name. Three weeks later, she meets Prince Mirallo, her first husband.

Jennifer, December, 1945 Analysis

This chapter serves two purposes: establishing Jennifer's personal history and establishing the importance of beauty. Jennifer is ostensibly motivated by her mother's greed, and they both obsess over her looks as a source of income. Jennifer is not a victim, however. She blames her mother for her money troubles but she is a compulsive



spender. She is a good friend to Anne, but she blatantly uses men for the power and prestige they can bestow upon her. She says she will give up her career for a home and family, but the first act of her adult life is to abandon the boy she wants to marry in search of someone rich.

Jennifer knows that she has no talent and accepts her role as a sex symbol. Her treatment of her sexual partners parallels how the public in general treats her. Like Anne, Jennifer makes bad decisions that affect her future, although she believes at the times that her decisions will advance her career (in contrast to Anne, who makes decisions based on how they will affect others). Jennifer is lying about her age, which compounds her stress about staying beautiful. Her persistent insomnia enhances her interest in taking drugs when the opportunity arises.



Neely, January, 1946

Neely, January, 1946 Summary

Neely O'Hara is having a wonderful year. She is a critical success in her role in Helen Lawson's show, *Hit the Sky*. She shares a luxurious apartment with Anne Welles and Jennifer North. She and her boyfriend Mel Harris are each earning two hundred dollars a week (although she spends her money as fast as she gets it). People are starting to recognize her when she goes places, too. On New Year's Eve, Mel suggests that they get married. Neely agrees, but asks that they wait until the lease runs out on her apartment in June.

Neely, January, 1946 Analysis

This chapter showcases what it was like to be a young, successful, and single woman in New York City just after World War II. Anne, Jennifer, and Neely are friends who enjoy each other's success. Neely's reason for postponing her wedding until the lease runs out makes sense, but it is the first time Neely puts her business interests ahead of her personal relationships. This behavior will become a pattern.



Neely, February, 1946

Neely, February, 1946 Summary

Neely O'Hara signs on with Johnson Harris. They arrange for her to have her own show in addition to her role in *Hit the Sky*, and start grooming her as a star. She is assigned to a musical producer/arranger who only works with very famous people. He trains her voice and rehearses her relentlessly, and replaces all her clothes. Neely says that she still plans to marry Mel Harris in June and will always put her marriage ahead of her career.

Neely, February, 1946 Analysis

This chapter contrasts Neely's excitement about the personal attention she is getting and what it means for her career to her stated goals to work for a while and then get married. Her fiancé, Mel, has been personally promoting her, but it is never clear if he is affiliated with the Johnson Harris firm or if the name is a coincidence.



Neely, March, 1946

Neely, March, 1946 Summary

The opening of Neely O'Hara's own show is a huge success. When Helen Lawson, the star of *Hit the Sky*, starts treating Neely badly, Neely leaves the show. She signs on with Century Productions to make movies for \$1,000 a week, which requires a move to California. Her fiancé, Mel Harris, does not want to leave New York City because it will mean sacrificing his own career as a radio writer. Neely promises that she will quit in five years after making her money, and says that she will not go to California if he will not go with her. Mel agrees to go.

Neely, March, 1946 Analysis

Neely is famous enough that Helen Lawson—a show business legend—considers her a rival. Neely is confident enough to pursue her own shows instead of appearing in shows made popular by other people. Mel sacrificing his career to support hers does not bode well for their marriage, especially because he only reluctantly (if willingly) agrees. A tan is the only thing he expects to gain for himself.



Jennifer, December, 1946

Jennifer, December, 1946 Summary

Jennifer North and Anne Welles live in a hotel suite together. Jennifer is still seeing Tony Polar the singer and Anne is still with Lyon Burke; neither couple has any immediate marriage plans. Anne is hopeful that Lyon's manuscript will find a publisher soon. Jennifer is worried that Tony will leave for California to do a radio show without marrying her first—and all her plans for future security hinge on being his wife.

Jennifer considers Tony's protective older sister Miriam to be the greatest obstacle to marriage. Miriam runs Tony's life because even though he is a musical genius he is mentally a child, but the public does not know this. Miriam also suspects that Jennifer has been lying about her age. Tony thinks Jennifer is twenty but she is actually twenty-six. She still suffers from insomnia. A friend gave her some Seconal pills—"dolls"—to help her sleep, but Jennifer has been leery of trying them. When she finally does, she feels so refreshed that she finds out how to get them without a prescription.

One night, when Anne is visiting Lyon, Jennifer lures Tony away from Miriam by asking him to pick her up at her hotel room. She greets him at the door wearing nothing but a robe. She teases him by stripping and caressing herself, but does not let him touch her unless he agrees to leave that night for Maryland, where they can elope without a license.

Just as they are leaving, Jennifer receives a telegram for Anne. She calls Anne at Lyon's apartment to tell her. Anne asks her to open and read it; it says that Anne's mother has died. During this phone call, Tony forces himself onto Jennifer and has sex with her. Satisfied, he has no reason to go with Jennifer to Maryland anymore. Jennifer decides to accompany Anne to Lawrenceville for the funeral. They leave that night without Jennifer letting Tony know.

Anne inherits her mother's house but has no intention of ever living in Lawrenceville again. Jennifer returns to New York City and to a distraught Tony who is anxious to see her and have sex with her. She puts him off for another day, deliberately implying that she has been with other men. Two days later, he takes her to Maryland himself and they marry. Afterwards, he is stricken with fear over how Miriam will react and blames Jennifer for the marriage. Jennifer realizes how difficult life will be with Tony and Miriam, but considers the position of Mrs. Tony Polar worth it.

Miriam is as angry as Tony feared she would be. She has nothing against Jennifer personally, but she has tried to keep Tony out of long-term relationships in order to try to keep secret the fact that he is retarded. Miriam and Tony's mother, Belle, lived her adult life jumping from man to man, with no family but her children. Belle died giving birth to Tony, so the fourteen-year-old Miriam took on the responsibility of raising him. He had convulsions throughout infancy and childhood and it became apparent in second grade



that he would never fully mentally develop. Miriam is able to hide Tony's deficiencies from the world because he is a musical genius. When Tony's relationship with Jennifer became serious, Miriam considers telling her the secret but decides it is too risky. Instead, Miriam vows to follow them everywhere and take care of Tony as she has always done.

Jennifer, December, 1946 Analysis

The Jennifer known to the world is not real Jennifer, and this chapter from her point of view is about another person who is not who he pretends to be. Tony Polar is a good singer, but he is only successful because his sister manages his image. Supposedly sweet Jennifer is ruthless in her pursuit of Tony as a husband. She explicitly uses sex to control his emotions and takes advantage of his hampered mental state. In fact, she interprets the sudden death of Anne's mother as an opportunity to make Tony want her more. When Jennifer does turn to drugs, it is to get an artificial peace.

Even though she does not love Tony, Jennifer legitimately wants to marry him. She is as attached to the idea of becoming his wife as Anne is to the idea of marrying Lyon. The friends support and encourage each other throughout their unsatisfying relationships.



Anne, December, 1946

Anne, December, 1946 Summary

After Jennifer North marries Tony Polar, Anne Welles reflects sadly on her own relationship with Lyon Burke. She asks Lyon to marry her and he puts her off again because his future as an author is still too uncertain. He pays her a visit in Lawrenceville, where she is sorting through the details of her mother's estate. Lyon is charmed by her house and the town, and offers to marry her if they could live there while he writes. Anne finds Lawrenceville a stifling reminder of her unhappy past and begs him to consider some other small town. He cuts his visit short. A week later, Anne receives a letter from Lyon in which he expresses his love for her but says that he needs to focus on his writing career. He has a house in England and says he will marry the first British girl he can find to cook and clean for him. He thanks her for a wonderful year.

Anne, December, 1946 Analysis

Anne is unmoved by the death of her mother, and does not want to claim the estate she inherits because of her hatred for Lawrenceville and the life she had there. On the surface, her childhood was quite comfortable; her virulent objections to living there—even with Lyon—underscore just how stifled Anne felt there. Anne has described her feelings, but it is easy for the reader to attribute her dislike of the town to her dislike of her mother. When even Lyon cannot make the town attractive, Lawrenceville is revealed as a desolate place indeed.

Lyon's behavior towards Anne when she refuses to live in that single small town for his sake (despite offering to live anywhere else) is selfish and unsympathetic. He abandons her for no good reason, and breaks off the relationship by letter—a letter in which he mentions how he would have no compunctions about replacing her with any woman who will do his housework. Lyon is as hard and hurtful as Henry and George warned Anne he would be.



Jennifer, May, 1947

Jennifer, May, 1947 Summary

Jennifer North, now Jennifer Polar, finds life in California as Tony Polar's wife and Miriam Polar's sister-in-law boring. She has a nice home, but no spending money, no career, and no new clothes. She is a frequent visitor at the home of Neely O'Hara and Mel Harris, but Neely is busy making films. Jennifer wonders if Mel wastes as much time by the pool as she does.

When Jennifer does catch up with Neely, Neely is full of excitement about her work and Ted Casablanca. Ted is a top designer who is creating another new wardrobe for Neely. Mel assumes that Ted is gay but Neely confesses to Jennifer that she is having a sexual affair with him behind Mel's back. Neely is so busy that she has no time to sleep, so Jennifer tells her about Seconal pills. Neely has the film studio doctor write her a prescription for them immediately.

Mel wants Neely to have a baby, but Neely puts him off because she wants an even bigger film career than she has now. Jennifer becomes elated at the thought of having her own baby. She has always wanted children and she believes that a baby would bring Tony closer to her.

Jennifer, May, 1947 Analysis

Jennifer finally gets what she has said she wanted—a nice house, a husband, and time to relax—but she is unhappy because she does not have as much money as she anticipated. She had looked forward to stopping work, but relaxing is dull. Neely's husband also finds a lack of career dull. Both have famous spouses and little personal contact with them; marriages are destined to fail when husbands and wives spend so little time together.

Family is another obstacle to a career, and babies are tools for manipulation. Neely's complaints that her husband is trying to have a baby give Jennifer the idea to have a baby to wrest control from Miriam. Having a family is not really her goal.



Jennifer, September, 1947

Jennifer, September, 1947 Summary

Jennifer Polar is thrilled to be pregnant and rushes to tell her friend Neely O'Hara. Neely is divorcing her husband Mel Harris in order to marry her wardrobe designer, Ted Casablanca. When Jennifer gives her the news, Neely recommends green pills that will help Jennifer restore her figure after the baby is born, and mentions some yellow pills she has also been using.

Jennifer publicly announces the baby at a cocktail party at her home. Tony Polar is pleased with the news, but Miriam is not—she tries to talk Tony out of letting the pregnancy continue but Tony wants the baby. Jennifer tells Tony that she is tired of Miriam running their lives, and says that Tony must choose between his sister and his wife. Tony refuses to do so, so he and Jennifer legally separate with plans to divorce when the baby is born. Jennifer relies completely on Seconals—the red "dolls"—to get any sleep at all.

Jennifer, September, 1947 Analysis

Jennifer's plan to supplant Miriam's power over Tony is not successful: Tony still clings to his sister. Jennifer has gambled an entire year of her irreplaceable youth and has lost. Separating from Tony is a way to cut her losses so she can find another wealthy man while she still has her looks.

The exchange between Jennifer and Neely about which pills solve what problems suggests that drug use probably is common among celebrities. It demonstrates how image is so important that women turn to drugs to stay thin and keep up with long work and social hours. Instead of judging characters for using of drugs, the novel presents drugs as a solution—albeit a temporary solution—to some of the real problems that actresses have.

Jennifer, October, 1947

Jennifer, October, 1947 Summary

Tony Polar's sister Miriam approaches Jennifer Polar and tries to pay her to have an abortion. Jennifer says that she wants the baby to love and care for, and Miriam apologizes for misjudging her intentions. She bluntly explains the history of Tony's mental condition. She tells Jennifer that it is genetic and that the baby will probably be retarded and eventually go insane, just like Tony will. Miriam again offers Jennifer money, but Jennifer does not take it. She has an abortion, regains her figure, buys a new wardrobe, and resumes her modeling career.

Jennifer becomes seriously involved with a French film producer, Claude Chardot. She decides to go France to make sexy movies—not pornography, but films with adult themes that show nudity. She wants a change of scene.

Jennifer, October, 1947 Analysis

The conversation between Jennifer and Miriam reveals that they have been each underestimating the other. In other circumstances, the sisters-in-law might have been friends, but their individual goals make them antagonists. Their vastly different physical appearances reinforces that they are not on the same side. Celebrity undermines friendships, especially women's friendships.

Jennifer's reaction to her abortion is not what a reader would expect from a woman who has claimed that all she wants is a baby to love. Her readiness to return to show business could be a strategy for coping with grief, or it could be a way to earn enough money to buy new clothes. It is fitting that she turns to film nudity as a career. Jennifer's market appeal is only in her body. When she reveals more of her body, she earns a lot more money.



Anne, January, 1948

Anne, January, 1948 Summary

Anne Welles meets Kevin Gillmore, the owner of Gillian Cosmetics, at the going-away party for French film producer Claude Chardot. Kevin wants her to represent his product exclusively. Anne does not want to leave her job with Bellamy and Bellows, but Jennifer North (Polar) suggests that she is only keeping it as a link to Lyon Burke. She breaks the news to Anne that Lyon was in New York to see his publisher but returned to England without contacting her. Henry Bellamy helps her draft a lucrative contract for her new position.

Anne, January, 1948 Analysis

Kevin Gillmore's explanation for why he prefers Anne's natural good looks to Jennifer's carefully crafted beauty is an example of how advertisers manipulate the public. In the world created by the novel, even ordinary women are responsible for creating and maintaining a beautiful façade.

Lyon does not contact Anne because he is more interested in his career than love, but Anne is as heartbroken as ever. Anne leaves Henry's employ but maintains his friendship; they go from being relative equals in the workplace to adopting a father-daughter relationship. (Anne's father died when she was still a girl; she is probably relieved to have an experienced person to help her.) Despite the fact that Anne has no romantic partner and is beginning a new career, she is more dependent on men than she has ever been—she lets Henry direct her career and her finances. Success makes Anne infantile.



Anne, February, 1948

Anne, February, 1948 Summary

Anne Welles and Henry Bellamy each receive a letter from Jennifer North. Henry remarks on Jennifer's irresponsibility with money; Anne remarks on Jennifer's sweet personality and her desire to be loved. Henry says that Lyon and Jennifer are quite alike because they only ever look out for themselves. Anne says that she still wants to find a man and have a baby, although she will never love anyone as much as she loves Lyon Burke. Henry warns her to give Lyon up. He was once in love with Helen Lawson, and wasted most of his life waiting for her to reciprocate.

Anne, February, 1948 Analysis

Henry equates Jennifer and Lyon because they both fulfill themselves first and then give what is left to other people. Anne's refusal to believe that about Jennifer does not matter very much, because Jennifer is in France and is not really accessible as a friend anyway. Anne's refusal to believe that about Lyon demonstrates that she has let stubborn devotion blind her common sense. She is still ignoring the advice given to her by people she trusts and is still learning nothing. She is still unprepared to have a real romance.



Neely, 1950

Neely, 1950 Summary

Neely O'Hara lies in her bed, drinking Scotch and taking sleeping pills, feeling sorry for herself after missing her twin sons' first birthday. Neely is unhappily married to Ted Casablanca; she once found him kissing another man and swallowed an entire bottle of pills (her stomach was pumped).

Jennifer North appears nude in French art-house films that are popular in the United States, too. Anne Welles is about to do television commercials for Gillian Cosmetics, and rumors say she is dating Kevin Gillmore, the company founder. Television is making a stir in the film industry, and Neely considers herself fortunate to have a five-year contract when less famous stars are being cut loose by the movie studios.

When the pills do not put Neely to sleep, she gets out of bed for another bottle of Scotch. She sees Ted naked in the swimming pool with a beauty queen. Neely bursts outside and starts a fight. Ted says he cheats on her because the two of them no longer have sex, and accuses her of turning him gay because he did not think he was desirable to women anymore. Neely tells him to send the girl home, and she goes inside. She puts on lingerie to seduce him and remind him of the good times they used to have. Ted never comes upstairs, though, and when Neely goes to check on him she finds him gone.

Neely, 1950 Analysis

Anne, Jennifer, and Neely lead very different lives now. The three women represent three centers of art and culture: Hollywood, New York City, and Paris. Their personalities epitomize stereotypes about each locale. Neely is dramatic and unpredictable. Anne is cool, glamorous, and on the cutting-edge with a television career. Jennifer is sexy and adult. Her films come with subtitles; subtitles relate the plot of a movie but not textual subtlety. Compare that to how people view her: they see only her body so it does not matter if she can act or not.

Neely is so accustomed to taking pills that she has to add alcohol to increase their effectiveness. As she becomes more and more dulled by pills, her life becomes more and more chaotic. She does not just have a baby—she has twins. Her husband is not just having affairs—he is having affairs with men. Her husband is not pretending to love her—he has sex with young women in the family swimming pool. When Neely drunkenly confronts him, he leaves because she tells him to. She has gotten everything she wished for, which is reminiscent of those folk tales and ghost stories that curse characters by granting them their hearts' desires.



Neely, 1953

Neely, 1953 Summary

For three years Neely O'Hara has stuck with a failed marriage to Ted Casablanca because the head of the movie studio that employs them does not want the bad publicity a divorce would bring. The night Neely wins an Academy Award, Ted is at her side and she believes that their troubles are behind them. He leaves her at home, however, to spend the night with a girlfriend. This is the last straw. Neely insists to the studio head that she be allowed to divorce and that they cancel Ted's contract. The studio complies.

Neely starts abusing her position as a money-making star. She bullies directors, blows off rehearsals, and in general delays production of her movies. One film actually lose money because she drove costs up so high. Her director compares her unfavorably to Helen Lawson by saying that no matter what Helen did, she always acted like a professional and never showed up late.

Neely explains that her psychological issues are what makes her a star. John Stykes tells Neely that he just wants to make a movie on time and on budget. He nicely warns her that stars who undermine profits no longer get work, even if they have millions of fans.

Neely tries to buckle down and learn her lines, but is too drunk to concentrate. She is hungry, but worried about gaining weight. She cannot sleep, so she takes some pills, although they are losing their potency because of her tolerance to them. She fantasizes about having a romantic affair with her director and telephones him, but he is out with his wife. She eats caviar out of a jar with a spoon, brings a new bottle of Scotch to bed, swallows a few more pills, and calls in sick for the next week.

Neely, 1953 Analysis

Image is once again the focus of a chapter. Neely and Ted pretend to be married because the studio thinks it is good for their image. An adoring public buys millions of tickets to her movies, but she prevents the studio from profiting from them. The effort Neely makes to keep up her image (pills to sleep, pills to diet, participating in a sham marriage) has caused so many problems in her life that her actual, visual image—on film—may not ever appear to the people she was supposed to impress.

Neely has passed the point of self-control. She tries to be disciplined but reverts almost immediately to bad habits. Still confident of her talent and youth, she does not realize that the "washed up" Helen Lawson is still working because Helen is disciplined and hard-working. At the halfway points of the novel and Neely's career, it is no longer a given that Neely will have a successful future.



Anne, 1957

Anne, 1957 Summary

Anne Welles and Kevin Gilmore, the man that made her famous as the Gillian Cosmetics Girl, are lovers. Kevin, a widower with adult children, is at Anne's home when she receives a phone call from her friend, the actress Neely O'Hara. Neely wants to leave Hollywood to stay with Anne in New York City; Anne is worried about how desperate Neely seems, especially in light of some rumors that are circulating.

Kevin asks Anne if she is in love with him or if she is still in love with Lyon Burke, her former lover. Anne tells him that kind of passionate love is for schoolgirls and that she enjoys his company, she enjoys him in bed, and she enjoys working for him. "Perhaps this is love", she explains. At the beginning of their relationship, Anne had wanted to get married and Kevin would not. Now, Anne does not see how marriage would enhance their relationship, particularly because Kevin does not want more children.

Neely arrives and her slovenly appearance shocks Anne. The change of scene suits her, though, and in a few weeks Neely has lost weight, regained her sparkle, and cut back to three pills a night. One night, when she is out with Anne and Kevin, she is swamped by adoring fans. Kevin suggests that Neely do a television special for him. Neely refuses on the grounds that television would make her look heavy and that she does not need the money.

The three attend a show starring Helen Lawson, who has been living in Jamaica for six years but is staging a comeback. She looks middle-aged and she is not a success. The nicest thing people say about her is that she still has the good legs and long black hair that were her trademarks. After the show, they see Helen at a restaurant. Neely gives an impromptu singing show and the crowd goes wild. In the powder room, Helen approaches Neely to say hello, and the conversation dissolves into an argument; Helen insults Neely's children and Neely insults Helen's talent. Neely grabs Helen's hair and discovers that it is a wig. She shoves the wig in a toilet and flushes it, abandoning Helen in the restroom with a crew cut. Caught up in the moment, Neely agrees to do the television show.

The day of the live performance starts well. The rehearsal runs smoothly until Neely sings into the wrong camera. On her film sets the camera always follows Neely, but in a television studio Neely has to pay attention to the cameras herself. She becomes so rattled during the next few hours that she tries to quit the show. Quitting the show would violate her contract and she would never get film or television work again. She takes enough pills to make her too sick to perform and is suspended for one year.

Anne is very busy with work. Although she still loves New York City, her sense that it is a "fairyland" has disappeared. Neely's behavior makes her reflect on how people change, and how she personally has changed. One evening, she runs into her former fiance



Allen Cooper and his new wife. The encounter makes her sad about how much time has passed, and Anne is glad that Lyon lives in England so she can never run into him in the same way.

Anne, 1957 Analysis

Anne's romance with Kevin Gillmore is lackluster. She pines for Lyon, but Kevin does not care because Kevin does not want to marry her or have children. Anne has chosen to spend ten years with a man who will not give her the home or children she wants. It is a strategy that allows her to keep her love for Lyon intact because she has made herself unavailable to a meaningful romance. She is spared the necessity of growing up; she has two father figures to spend time with now.

Anne probably allows Neely's trouble into her life because it prevents her from thinking about how she is wasting hers. Neely is a person she can direct and nurture in place of the children she might have had if she had given real love another chance.

Neely and Helen Lawson make their professional competition a physical one in the most equalizing of places: the bathroom. Neely humiliates Helen by destroying the wig she has been wearing, but Helen's career is essentially unaffected. She continues to perform but Neely flakes on a contract for a television show and is suspended for an entire year.



Jennifer, 1957

Jennifer, 1957 Summary

Jennifer North is a success in Paris but a million-dollar, three-picture deal is luring her back to California. She is frightened of returning to Hollywood because of the scrutiny that will be placed upon her (she is thirty-seven years old but is passing for twenty-seven). The year before, she overdosed on Seconal pills. Her director, Claude Chardot, insists that she have a facelift before presenting herself to the press. She is put into a medically supervised, week-long sleep to lose weight and receives a series of hormone shots to maintain the firmness of her breasts.

The treatments are successful and Jennifer is more beautiful than ever. She visits her friend, Anne Welles, in New York City before traveling to Hollywood. In a heart-to-heart conversation, Anne wonders aloud about if she and Lyon Burke would still be together if she had tolerated living in her hated hometown of Lawrenceville so he could write his book. Jennifer wishes she could find someone to love and to give her a child.

Jennifer, 1957 Analysis

Jennifer is stunningly beautiful, but she is not considered good enough to appear in the United States. She is still being judged by her looks, and her lies about her age demand extreme measures in the present. The way her director controls her body represents how men control women's sexuality in general. Her insecurity about her appearance parallels her insecurity about finding someone to love her and help her raise a family.

Anne refuses to hear the truth about Lyon, even when Jennifer states as baldly as possible that he never cared about her. Anne consistently plays the part of the patient and faithful and it becomes a real possibility that she will waste her whole life on a dream. In fact, Anne is so caught up in this role that she is starting to question the one honest decision she has made in her adult life—her refusal to live in a city that suffocates her.



Anne, 1960

Anne, 1960 Summary

Kevin Gillmore, Anne Welles's lover, has a heart attack. During his recovery, he begs her to marry him again and this time she acquiesces. Why not? At age thirty-five, she considers that she has already lost her big chance for romance and children. She counts her blessings that she is wealthy enough to stop working whenever she wants, unlike her friend Jennifer North, who must send money home to her family and who relies completely on her aging looks.

Anne plans to quit working when she marries and hopes to spend part of their honeymoon to search in Spain for a missing Neely O'Hara. The first film Neely acted in when her suspension ended was scrapped after losing the studio half a million dollars in a few weeks of shooting. She had unexpectedly arrived in New York City at Anne's apartment with no money. She was arrested for disturbing the peace but ignored advice to seek help. She fled to Europe and blew through money she got from the sale of her house. Anne kept in touch with Neely until she apparently disappeared.

Anne, 1960 Analysis

Just when Anne decides to throw away her romantic life and settle on a loveless, sexless marriage, childless marriage to Kevin, Neely arrives. The damage she does to Anne's schedule, apartment, and peace of mind is a small price to pay for the excuse it gives her for postponing her commitment. It even gives her a distraction from her husband during their honeymoon.



Jennifer, 1960

Jennifer, 1960 Summary

Anne Welles has set a February 15 date for a wedding to Kevin Gillmore. Her friend, Jennifer North, calls to catch up and reveals that she is also engaged to be married. Jennifer is in love with Senator Winston Adams. "Win" Adams wooed Jennifer in an old-fashioned way and Jennifer is thrilled to finally plan a family. Her joy fills Anne with a sense of dread about her own upcoming marriage and she wonders yet again why she has no true feelings for Kevin.

During a wedding shopping trip, Jennifer asks Anne if she has an aspirin, because Jennifer is having shooting pains she attributes to menstrual cramps. She admits that she has been getting her period every two or three weeks. Anne asks when she last saw a doctor and Jennifer says that it has been since her last abortion—about four years. Anne gives her a recommendation for a gynecologist so Jennifer can see someone before her wedding.

The doctor suggests that she spend the night at the hospital to have some polyps removed from her uterus. It is a routine procedure, but the anesthesiologist discovers a lump in Jennifer's breast (while monitoring her heart rate) that turns out to be a malignant tumor. A mastectomy is recommended. Jennifer is also told that she must never get pregnant because the hormones might take cancer out of remission, and the doctors suggest a hysterectomy.

Win flies home from a business trip and Jennifer tells him the bad news. She starts to say that she will never be able to have any babies, but he reassures her that he does not mind—he is too old to be excited about having children and he values Jennifer's breasts as much as children. He refers to her breasts as his babies and says that as long as he has them he will be happy. When he sees the bandage from the biopsy, he panics about the possible scar. He fondles her breasts and leaves.

Jennifer escapes from the hospital and writes two suicide notes: one to Anne and one to Win. She does her hair and makeup, dons her best dress, and deliberately overdoses on sleeping pills. Jennifer's death triggers a three-week media circus. Neely appears for the funeral, looking slim and beautiful, and launches a comeback. Anne postpones her wedding for two months.

Jennifer, 1960 Analysis

Jennifer dies because her beauty dies. She has spent so much time cultivating her outward appearance that she has no inner strength to rely on in a crisis. She has always said that her goal was to have a family and have babies, but none of her past actions suggest that she really wanted those things. She could have easily found a man to love and marry her but she pursued wealthy men who would give her money or



clothes because of her looks (and sexual skills). She had four abortions—three probably for the sake of her career. Anne and Kevin, people she has known for years, tell her that she does not need a uterus to be a mother, or two breasts to be beautiful. But when a man who she has known for just a short time tells her he loves her breasts more than anything else, she kills herself. When Jennifer's beautiful body disappears, everything that was Jennifer disappears. She leaves no legacy. It is like she never existed; in a way, she never did.



Neely, 1961

Neely, 1961 Summary

Neely O'Hara theorizes that Jennifer North, a beautiful actress with no talent, killed herself because she was losing her looks. She comforts herself with the fact that, even if she loses everything else, she can always count on herself and her talent. When Neely loses her voice three weeks later, however, she is hysterical with worry.

Psychiatrists and medical doctors tell Neely that her singing troubles are just a matter of nerves, but Neely despairs of her voice ever returning. She tries to kill herself with pills and alcohol, and by slitting her wrists. The blood scares her and she calls for her own ambulance. Anne Welles and Kevin Gillmore visit her at the local, public hospital that admitted her; the doctor there insists that she needs at least a year of residential psychiatric care.

Neely is released to the care of Anne and travels with her to Haven Manor, an exclusive private facility. Doctors can legally compel her to stay thirty days; Anne could have her legally committed for longer. Anne agrees to do so, but assumes the cost of treatment. She postpones the wedding again so she can keep working; her job as the Gillian Girl will cover the monthly expenses.

Neely is expecting a "sleep cure" treatment and does not know that she has been committed. She is escorted to Building Four, the Adjustment Building. When nurses take away her matches (she has them for smoking) and her watch, Neely starts to panic. She suspects that the treatment she anticipated is not the treatment she will receive. She refuses to eat in the dining room with other patients and tries to leave. She is restrained by nurses and put under guard in her room. She cries for an hour and then decides to start screaming. She is muscled into a warm bath and held there by a piece of canvas that covers the tub with just a hole for her head. She tears the canvas but is forced back into the tub. She screams and cries for four hours, until she is sedated.

When Neely sees her own clothes, neatly packed and labeled, she realizes that Anne knew all along what would happen when Neely was checked in. Neely meets the other patients, women of all ages who seem normal. They share tips for getting around the rules and explain how they all found themselves at Haven Manor. Neely resigns herself to a thirty-day stay (she does not yet know that Anne has had her committed for longer) and begins talking to her doctors. She chafes at the rules but tries to follow them, and envies the patients who can pretend their stay is just a visit to some resort. When a seemingly normal patient has a paranoid outburst, Neely finally understands that the people around her are actually very sick and she starts to be afraid for her future.



Neely, 1961 Analysis

Neely shows up at Jennifer's funeral for the attention it will bring to her rather than to pay respect to her friend. It does put her back in the spotlight, though, and her confidence in her abilities as a performer is not unfounded. Still, just like how Jennifer had no inner self to guide her through troubled times, Neely has used drugs to cope for so long that she can no longer handle the pressure that performing puts on her. She "forgets" how to sing. In the face of a possible failure, she develops a medical condition (an echo of her behavior at the film studio). This strategy resembles Anne's strategy of settling on an inappropriate (but safe) man instead of risking loss with true love for someone new.

This time when Neely attempts suicide, she is away from home (and the Hollywood doctors that cater to her). When help arrives, she is so far gone that she cannot tell them she is famous and she is brought to the closest hospital instead of a hospital that treats the wealthy and well-known. It is at an ordinary public hospital that a regular doctor finally points out how sick Neely is. He treats the public; he is not a studio doctor paid to keep her on the job rather than in good health.

At Haven Manor, Neely comes partway to the realization that she is seriously mentally ill. She learns that people who seem normal can be profoundly disturbed but she does not identify herself with them. She is, however, afraid of them, probably because she subconsciously understands why she has been institutionalized.



Anne, 1961

Anne, 1961 Summary

Anne Welles visits her friend, Neely O'Hara, in the psychiatric institution that Anne committed her to. Neely pleads with Anne to sign release papers but Anne commits her for another three months. The second visit is much better: Neely is happy that she has been moved to a different level of care ("promoted") and thinks she is practically normal compared to everyone else, but she does have some setbacks. Anne's relationship with her fiancé Kevin Gillmore is strained by the time she spends with Neely and by his general boredom during retirement.

One day, Kevin meets Anne's former lover, Lyon Burke. He brings Lyon to see Anne so he can see how she reacts. Anne and Lyon congratulate each other on their respective successes, and then Lyon asks to see Anne while he is in New York City. She agrees to meet him the next evening. Later, Kevin asks how their encounter went and Anne does not lie. Kevin begs her not to see Lyon, and although she will not agree to that request she does promise that she will never leave Kevin.

At dinner, Anne and Lyon try to figure out what went wrong between them. They spend the night together. Kevin is waiting at Anne's apartment when she gets home; she explains that her feelings for Lyon have nothing to do with her feelings for Kevin, and points out to Kevin that they have been celibate since his heart attack. Anne promises again not to leave him, and then promises not to see Lyon again.

At a restaurant with Kevin, Anne sees Lyon with a young, beautiful girl. Kevin taunts her with the fact that the girl is young enough to be her daughter. His rant continues and he calls off the wedding, demands that she quit her job, and says that he is going to enjoy watching her decline. He forces her to call Lyon to prove that Lyon has found a better girl but the plan backfires. Anne goes to Lyon that night and her fourteen-year relationship with Kevin ends.

Anne and Lyon make declarations of love to each other but Lyon refuses to continue their relationship once he finishes his business in New York. He plans to return to England. When that date approaches, however, he hints that he misses New York and that she might also be welcome in London. She confides in her friend (and Lyon's former business partner) Henry Bellamy. He says he will try to help her by arranging some projects to keep Lyon in the United States for as long as possible.

Anne keeps visiting Neely at Haven Manor. Neely is nearing full recovery and is able to sing again. She tells a story about one of the hospital social events. Neely decided to perform with a three-piece band some other patients had formed. An incurable male patient joined her with the best harmony she had ever heard. It was Tony Polar. Anne realizes why Jennifer had her first abortion and Neely promises to keep her knowledge about Tony a secret (which she actually does).



Neely has many career offers lined up for after her release and she can update Anne on some news about Henry Bellamy's firm. It is going to be acquired by a long-time rival when he retires. Anne makes an arrangement with Henry to get Lyon to buy it: Anne will front the money, but Henry will pretend to give a personal loan to Lyon so Lyon can take over the business Henry spent so long building.

Anne, 1961 Analysis

Anne and Lyon's accidental reunion is only partially accidental. Kevin, out of a mix of jealousy and curiosity, brings Anne and Lyon together when he realizes his business associate Lyon Burke is Anne's Lyon. Kevin is looking for a reason to start trouble with Anne and he does not have to look very hard. That Anne openly tells Kevin that she and Lyon are having sex is just the last straw for him. She has been postponing their wedding and honeymoon plans to tend to Neely, a woman Anne is hardly friends with anymore. Anne, meanwhile, is open about her relations with Lyon just to provoke Kevin. They spent fifteen years going nowhere together and the relationship wore itself out.

Anne and Lyon fall instantly back into their old romantic habits. Anne will do anything to be with him and he makes no promises about the future. As Lyon's stay extends again and again, Anne convinces herself that all the advice she has received over the years about how Lyon does not really care for her has been wrong. Deep down inside, though, she is insecure about Lyon loving her enough to stay. Her anxiety that he will one day return to London and not let her go with him is behind her plan of tricking him into buying Henry's business. Henry warns Anne that Lyon will eventually find out and that he will not be happy about it, which alerts readers to anticipate Lyon's reaction when he does find out.



Anne, 1962

Anne, 1962 Summary

Lyon Burke becomes the vice-president of the law firm Bellamy, Bellows, and Burke. He marries Anne Welles the next day. Henry, who had conspired with Anne to enable Lyon to purchase the business, warns Anne that her secret will be revealed at tax time. They do not know how Lyon will react.

Lyon abandons his writing career to build the business. George Bellows, the president of the firm, wants to sign on Neely O'Hara when she is released from the psychiatric hospital. He suggests that they book her for one-night shows and accepts that she has gained weight instead of slimming her down for appearances. Lyon has reservations about her reliability but agrees.

Anne gets pregnant. Neely's show is a success at venues across North America. When the show is a success in New York City, Neely falls into her old star habits and becomes difficult again. She refuses to travel anymore and entertains offers by other agencies. Lyon wants to let her go but George does not—Neely is on the verge of signing some very lucrative contracts. George cannot get her to cooperate with touring, however, so Lyon gives it a try.

Neely agrees to travel again only if Lyon accompanies her, but Lyon will not leave his very pregnant wife and will not consider leaving a newborn. Neely tries to talk Anne into going with them and later leaving the baby with a nurse. She threatens to claim laryngitis unless Lyon travels with her. Lyon refuses to be blackmailed by Neely.

The next day, Lyon abruptly forces Anne to decide if he should stay or go—he is angry that Anne fronted the money for him to buy his share in the business. Neely had heard from the retired partner Henry what Anne had done and Neely told Lyon. Lyon tells Anne that he will earn her investment back for her but that he will put the business ahead of all other things. He announces that he is not a man to be controlled by his wife.

Anne, 1962 Analysis

Neely has learned nothing about stardom in her time at Haven Manor, except that she has a great voice and puts on a good show and will always be popular. She tries very hard to stay off of drugs and alcohol; because her looks do not matter for her comeback tour, she manages quite well. Neely is still not used to thinking for herself, though, and demands the attention of Lyon and his partner George. She depends on them for every little thing—she has replaced drugs with staff.

She has also gotten everything she needs from Anne, from an apartment to crash in during her rock-bottom days to companionship during her stay at the institution (and payment for treatment). It does not matter if she hurts Anne now. Neely wants Lyon to



help her on tour and does not care about his personal commitments. When Lyon resists, Neely tells him that Anne financed his share of the business and lied to him about it. It works. Lyon essentially demotes Anne in his list of priorities and makes sure she knows it. Anne's plan to fool Lyon into marrying her has backfired because he no longer treats their relationship like an intimate partnership. She set herself up for this when she did not show Lyon enough respect to tell him the truth. She schemed behind his back so she could enjoy the fantasy she had cultivated for a decade and a half. The image of romance was more important to Anne than knowing the real Lyon.



Anne, 1963

Anne, 1963 Summary

Baby Jennifer Burke is born to Anne and Lyon Burke on New Year's Day while Lyon is in Los Angeles on tour with his client Neely O'Hara, the singer. Lyon comes home when the baby is one month old; he has been gone for six weeks. After a quick visit, he goes to the office to take care of business. Anne dresses up for their planned dinner together and anticipates the first sex they will have since her seventh month of pregnancy, but Lyon unexpectedly leaves for Washington that evening.

Lyon sees the baby a total of four days during the first three months of her life because he is busy coordinating Neely's travel and performance schedules. She allows no one else from the firm to take his place; she brings in enough money to make catering to her demands profitable. Anne's old friend and advisor, Henry Bellamy, tells her that she will get used to his absences. When Anne suggests to Lyon that she come with him on some of his trips, he tells her it would upset Neely and that they have to accede to her wishes.

When the baby is six months old, Anne tries to call Lyon at his hotel and learns that he checked out the week before and left no contact information. Anne then reads a gossip column in the newspaper that links Lyon romantically to Neely. She turns to Henry for comfort and he tells her that he has known about this affair for a while.

Henry tells Anne that if she wants to keep Lyon she needs to keep secret that she knows. He suggests that Anne sit quietly until the real Neely—the selfish, vindictive Neely—comes to light and drives Lyon back to Anne. Anne is daunted by the challenge and wonders if she should take a Seconal to help her cope. Henry gives her a bottle containing a two-month supply.

Lyon seems surprised that Anne does not wonder about his unexplained absences. It takes all of Anne's will to play innocent but she does—with help from the red pills. Anne's acquiescence emboldens Neely and the affair with Lyon becomes, for all intents and purposes, public. Henry telephones Neely and advises her to stop carrying on with Lyon in order to preserve her career. Anne listens in on another extension. Neely suggests to Henry that if washed-up, talentless Anne really loved Lyon she would give him his freedom.

Anne and Lyon reconcile when baby Jennifer has a medical emergency. When Jennifer comes home after a ten-day hospitalization, Neely calls the Burke household and demands that Lyon spend the night with her. Lyon tells Anne that Neely needs him more than she does and goes. Anne finds work on a television show to keep her mind off things.



Lyon continues to put Neely ahead of his family, but Anne still thinks they have a chance to be happy together. The night before the baby's first birthday, Anne listens in on a phone call between Lyon and Neely, and hears Lyon lie about Anne refusing to grant him a divorce. The topic had never even come up between them.

Anne, 1963 Analysis

Neely has taken Lyon from Anne and flaunts it. She is behaving just like the Helen Lawson of younger days, who squashed her rivals and openly displayed her lust for men to the world. Neely once took Helen's wig; Neely now takes Anne's man. Neely warned Anne about being friends with people like Helen, but Anne did not learn from those experiences and is suffering the consequences.

Henry believes that Neely will eventually drive Lyon away, so he counsels Anne to pretend nothing is happening. If Lyon believes that Anne is ignorant of an affair, he will not have to do the honorable thing and divorce her. Anne is very good at pretending that her love for Lyon has been real, but she cannot easily pretend the opposite; she turns to pills for help. Lyon continually demonstrates that he only cares about himself; he even neglects his daughter to prove his point about committing to his business instead of her. Anne enjoys the appearance of a marriage but does not have one.



Anne, 1964

Anne, 1964 Summary

Lyon Burke and George Bellows congratulate themselves over acquiring the young actress Margie Parks the day before she became a musical success in the latest Broadway show. Margie recognizes Anne Burke, Lyon's wife, from her previous work as the Gillian Cosmetics Girl and her current work on television. Anne feels old.

The performer Neely O'Hara has moved to California and Lyon travels back and forth from New York to take care of business and visit her. One night, he and Anne are watching television in bed and a news bulletin announces that Neely attempted suicide; Lyon rushes to her in the middle of the night. At the hospital, Neely tells Lyon she swallowed pills when she learned how much time Lyon had been spending with Margie Parks. She tells him to dump Margie as a client if he wants to keep her. Lyon takes the next plane back to New York.

Lyon tells George that he has written the final check to pay off the money that Anne used to buy his business, so he feels like any risk he takes affects only him. He suggests that they drop Neely as a client because Margie and other clients will more than make up for the money she brings in. Neely signs on with a rival firm. Anne wonders what the future holds for Neely and Lyon says that she is likely to have another breakdown but she is always going to make a comeback.

Anne, 1964 Analysis

Lyon is probably tired of Neely's antics, but he takes up with the young Margie Parks because she is the new cornerstone of their client list and because she is fresh and beautiful. Lyon perceives his philandering with clients as a business investment. Neely sees it—rightfully so—as competition. Anne sees only how old she has gotten since she first fell in love with her husband. That Anne and Lyon can talk so civilly about Neely's fate is a sign that Anne has given up on her romantic love for Lyon and sees him now as a partner. They are partners in parenting and partners in business, and sometimes when Lyon is home they are still partners in bed.

Lyon once again runs out on a woman the moment she asks for something he does not want to give. He is not a good man to love.



Anne, 1965

Anne, 1965 Summary

Anne and Lyon Burke host a New Year's Eve party in their home. Anne steps away from the party to check on her sleeping daughter and lies down in a dark, empty bedroom with a headache from the noise. Her husband Lyon enters it with his client, Margie Parks. They kiss without seeing Anne. When they leave, Anne takes a pill and freshens up before returning to the party. She reminds herself of all the nice things that she has to keep her busy in the daytime and of the pills she can take to help her get through the night.

Anne, 1965 Analysis

Of all three women, Anne has come closest to achieving the goals she set twenty years ago. She has a child, a reliable (if faithless) husband, a nice home, an independent fortune, and a successful career. She has not wasted her life, but has she really made any progress? If she had known she was going to end up with a steady husband who was not particularly lovable, she could have stayed in Lawrenceville—without taking pills or enduring headaches. The novel closes on a disturbing note. Anne is thinking as fondly of her pills as she does of her baby girl. The reader has to decide to which she is likely to give most of her attention from now on.



Characters

Anne Welles

Anne Welles is a small-town girl who makes it big in New York City. She is the only child of a well-off family in Lawrenceville, Massachusetts. Her father died when she was a young adolescent, and she has a cold relationship with her mother and her aunt. Anne finds Lawrenceville stifling and repressive. Everyone in town knows everyone else's history, and gossip is rampant. Anne does not believe she can make her own choices there and leaves before she is trapped by the life everyone expects her to have (specifically to marry Willie Henderson and raise a family there).

Anne has an Ivy League college education and a polished, reserved manner. She has classic good looks, with blond hair, blue eyes, and a natural style. She arrives in New York with five thousand dollars, but prefers to work rather than live off of her savings. She eventually amasses a fortune. She is beautiful enough to model but chooses a career in an office at first. She has no close friends in Lawrenceville and makes only a few in New York City. Her great desire in life is to fall passionately in love and participate in a grand romance. She remains committed to this desire throughout the novel. She gets married once to Lyon Burke (her great romance) and has one child.

Neely O'Hara

Neely O'Hara is the stage name of Ethel O'Neill. Neely was in foster care until she was seven years old when her older sister married a dancer and claimed her. Neely accompanied her family's dance trio as they traveled from show to show. She has no formal education, but friendly people in show business took her under their wing; she can read and write and do math. Neely replaced her sister in the dance trio when her sister had a baby; the dancers are settled in New York at the start of the novel. She has been performing illegally (she is a minor child) by lying about her age and, although she is a virgin at the start of the book, she is very knowledgeable about the world and about men.

Neely has curly brown hair, brown eyes, and freckles. She has talent and charisma, and a one-track mind about her career. She believes and behaves as if she were entitled to accolades, fame, and riches because she has so much talent and because she has worked so hard. She is not very wise, however, and makes quick decisions that are only ever short-term solutions to the inevitable problems of celebrity. She is a movie star when the studios were not sure how television would affect their business, and is put under tremendous pressure to work long hours, be seen frequently, and keep up a glamorous image. Pills and alcohol help her cope at first, but she ends up struggling to cope with the pills and alcohol. She is a lifetime addict who attempts suicide several times. She is institutionalized, drops out of show business, and makes a spectacular comeback. She is married twice (to Mel Harris and Ted Casablanca) and divorced twice,



and has twin boys (with Ted). She frequently gains and loses weight, despite trying to control her appearance with drugs. Her appearance does not negatively influence her career when she makes a comeback. She has a long-term affair with Lyon Burke, the husband of Anne Welles.

Jennifer North

Jennifer North was born Jeannette Johnson in Cleveland. Her father died and her mother remarried, and Jennifer works to support both her parents and her grandmother. Jennifer abandoned her high school sweetheart to attend school in Switzerland, where her mother thought she could leverage her beauty to marry a wealthy man. World War II traps her in Europe and she becomes the mistress of a possessive Spanish woman. She escapes to New York City, changes her name, and marries an impoverished prince. When Jennifer learns that Prince Mirallo has no money, she divorces him. She works at various jobs as a model and actress to send money home. She also accepts gifts in return for sex and companionship. Jennifer has no qualms about leaving one man immediately for another if she believes it will be to her advantage.

Jennifer is tall and blond with dimples. She lives a luxurious life but has no savings. She spends her money on clothes and justifies it on the pretense that they are investments in her image and therefore her future. She undergoes elaborate beauty regimens and plastic surgery to maintain the appearance of youth. She takes pills to help her sleep. She admires Neely's talent but it is Anne that she is really friends with. She describes herself as an old-fashioned girl who just wants to get married and have lots of babies, but she is twice divorced and has four abortions. She commits suicide when she learns that the only way to treat her breast cancer is to remove a breast.

Lyon Burke

Lyon Burke worked at the theatrical law firm Bellamy and Bellows until leaving to fight in World War II. He is the son of an American lawyer (father) and British musical comedy star (mother). He has American citizenship but lived in England from age five to adulthood. He is an object of much female interest when he returns to New York City; Anne falls in love with him despite warnings that he will break her heart. He and Anne are lovers for a year, have a fourteen-year separation, and then get married.

Lyon is a very savvy theatrical representative, but war has made him rethink his priorities. He gives up his career to become a writer. He is a proud man who will not allow a woman to support him. He also does not believe that a person can have a successful career and a successful home life. He is moderately successful as a writer, but gives it all up to return to Bellamy and Bellows and marry Anne. When he learns that he was tricked into marrying her, he takes first Neely as a mistress and later a younger woman who is a client of his firm.



Henry Bellamy

Henry Bellamy is a theatrical lawyer and the owner of Bellamy and Bellows, a firm that represents entertainers. He gives Anne her first job in New York City, and they are lifelong friends. He offers her personal and financial advice. He is Jewish by birth but changed his name from Birnbaum to Bellamy because he thought an American-sounding name would be better for business.

Helen Lawson

Helen Lawson is a musical theater legend and a client of Bellamy and Bellows. She is as famous for her exploits as she is for her stage presence. She has been married and divorced many times, and is fiercely competitive. She refuses to work with actresses who might draw attention away from her. She performs well into middle age; Neely gets her first big break in a Helen Lawson show.

Allen Cooper

Allen Cooper is a millionaire who courts Anne under the pretense of being a poor, unsuccessful insurance salesman. He wants to make sure the girl he marries is attracted to him and not just his money. Anne does not want to marry him because she does not love him. Allen tries to bully her into saying yes. When she takes a lover during their engagement, he breaks it off and lets her keep the ring.

Kevin Gillmore

Kevin Gillmore is the owner of Gillian Cosmetics, and hires Anne to be their spokeswoman and model. He and Anne have a lengthy, if passionless, affair. He declines to marry her because he already has grandchildren. After suffering a heart attack, however, he changes his mind. Anne agrees to marry him, but is reunited with her first lover, Lyon Burke. Kevin ends the relationship with great bitterness, but is unable to fire Anne as the "Gillian Girl".

George Bellows

George Bellows is the nephew of Jim Bellows, the man who founded Bellamy and Bellows with Henry Bellamy. When Jim dies fighting the war, George takes his place. Later, George and Lyon Burke take over the firm and rename it Bellamy, Bellows, and Burke (keeping "Bellamy" in the name even though Henry Bellamy has retired).



Mel Harris

Mel Harris is Neely's boyfriend and first husband. A journalist by trade, he uses his skills and contacts to promote her career. He gives up a chance to be a radio writer to follow Neely to California for five years when she contracts with a film studio. He is bored in California because he has nothing to do and Neely is busy all the time. They divorce.

Ted Casablanca

Ted Casablanca is a famous costume designer who does Neely's clothes. He is definitely bisexual but possibly homosexual. He and Neely have an affair and then marry after her divorce. They have twin sons. Neely neglects her family and Ted takes lovers, male and female. They do not divorce immediately because the head of the studio thinks it would be bad publicity. Ted gets custody of the children when Neely loses control.

Cyril H. Bean

Cyril H. Bean is the head of Century Productions, a smaller production company that wins Academy Awards; Neely signs a five-year contract to make movies for them. "The Head" controls every aspect of his actors' lives, from finding them houses and doctors, to allowing or forbidding divorces and marriages.

Tony Polar

Tony Polar is a popular singer and musical genius. His career is managed entirely by his sister because he is retarded and has the mental abilities of a ten-year-old, but nobody knows. He is sexually attracted to Jennifer and has to be lured into marriage with her. He and Jennifer conceive a child, but Jennifer aborts the baby when she learns that Tony's condition is heritable. They divorce. Tony eventually ends up permanently institutionalized, coincidentally at the same clinic that treats Neely O'Hara.

Miriam

Miriam is Tony Polar's manager, sister, and foster mother. She is fourteen years older than her half-brother and raised him alone, in poverty, after their mother died. She is in complete control of his image and his career. She resists his marriage to Jennifer because she does not know if Jennifer can be trusted to keep his secret. She tells Jennifer the truth about Tony's condition so Jennifer knows what the future could be like for her unborn child.



Maria

Maria meets Jennifer at boarding school in Switzerland and seduces her. They are lovers for several years, until Jennifer starts to chafe under her possessiveness and leaves.

Prince Mirallo

Prince Mirallo is Jennifer's first husband. He has a legitimate title but deceives Jennifer about how wealthy he is. They get an annulment when Jennifer lies about him not giving her children.

Claude Chardot

Claude Chardot is a French film producer who makes art house films that include nude scenes. Jennifer goes to France with him to star in them. They are lovers for a while but their professional relationship lasts longer. He controls her appearance, scheduling for her diet therapies and plastic surgery, and possibly her abortions.

Senator Winston Adams

Senator Adams is engaged to Jennifer. Jennifer plans to start a family immediately after marriage, but is diagnosed with breast cancer. The senator tells her he does not care if she has children because her breasts are the only babies he really wants. Jennifer kills herself rather than undergo a mastectomy.

Gino Cooper

Gino Cooper is Allen Cooper's father. Helen Lawson befriends Anne when Anne is engaged to Allen because Helen is interested in Gino. When the engagement ends, Helen blames Anne for ruining her chances and terminates their friendship.



Objects/Places

Dolls

Red, yellow, and green pills that put you to sleep, energize you, help you lose weight, and are generally addictive.

New York City

Anne, Neely, and Jennifer meet in New York City. Anne remains there for the duration of the novel but Neely and Jennifer establish careers that take them other places. When Anne was deciding to leave home, she thought that New York was the most exciting fantasy land she could go to.

Lawrenceville, Massachusetts

Anne grows up in Lawrenceville as yet another member of yet another generation of the Welles family. She is not sorry to leave town and resolves never to return. Lyon is charmed by her hometown and offers to marry her if they can live in her childhood home. Anne's refusal to stay in Lawrenceville triggers their break up.

Hollywood, California

Both Neely and Jennifer live in Hollywood, for a while concurrently. Hollywood is where the movie studios are. It is a very, very exciting place to live if you are working in the entertainment industry and a very, very dull place to live if you are just married to someone who is.

Haven Manor

Haven Manor is a luxurious, private, residential psychiatric hospital. Neely is committed there after her second suicide attempt. She regains her singing ability after an impromptu performance for other patients. Tony Polar is a permanent resident there after his mental disability incapacitates him.

Hit the Sky

Hit the Sky is a Broadway musical starring Helen Lawson. Neely's career begins when she lands a role in the production; Jennifer also appears in a small role.



New Haven, Connecticut

Before opening in New York City, Broadway shows open in New Haven, Connecticut so producers can see what changes might need to be made. Anne and Lyon become lovers in New Haven when they are there for the opening of Hit the Sky.

London

Lyon Burke leaves New York City for England to focus on writing. He eventually settles in London.

The Persian Room

The Persian Room is a nightclub in New York City. After Neely has become famous, she and Helen Lawson get into an argument that ends in fisticuffs in the bathroom.

La Ronde

La Ronde is the nightclub in New York City where Jennifer meets Tony Polar and decides to pursue him.

Bellamy and Bellows

Bellamy and Bellows is a theatrical law firm that represents actors and other performers.

Johnson Harris

Johnson Harris is another theatrical management firm that rivals Bellamy and Bellows.

Gillian Cosmetics

Anne is the "Gillian Girl" who represents Gillian beauty products in print and later on television.

Bellamy, Bellows, and Burke

Lyon Burke and George Bellows take over Henry Bellamy's firm when Henry retires, but they retain his name as a tribute and because it is already well known.



Social Concerns And Themes

Susann said that one of the purposes of her novels was to show the average woman that money and fame do not equal happiness. All three of Susann's heroines in this novel want a man, children, respectability. Their careers as high fashion models and highly paid actresses and singers are either a diversion until Mr. Right comes along, or a means of making money until they can settle down, have the kids, lead a rather high-style version of a housewife's life. They all fail.

Jennifer North, after one possessive lesbian affair, two disastrous marriages, and an intervening career as an actress in European art films, finally meets her knight in the form of a senator, but discovers she has breast cancer and kills herself. Neely O'Hara whines throughout the novel that all she really wants is one good man, that her success is hollow without one. But her devouring star's ego destroys both of her marriages. Anne Wells, after a long, lackluster affair finally tricks the man she really loves into marriage, but is paid back with his infidelity when her trickery is discovered.

The three main characters are done in by ideas of perfection. Jennifer commits suicide because, after her mastectomy, she will no longer embody an ideal of beauty. She believes her fiance will not marry her. If Neely could admit that she loves herself and her career more than anyone she would be happier. Anne resorts to deception to trap her own true love. All three are victims of traditional images of women, images of perfection that they do not realize are unattainable, and given their lives, are undesirable. Anne could have her great love, Lyon, had she been willing to move back to her small town. But she was not willing.

She had, without realizing it, already rejected one stale image of woman solely as helpmate, in favor of a career, excitement, the city. The one role model they might have had, Helen Lawson, a huge success on Broadway, is seen as something of a failure because she can only get "fags" as escorts. Susann's prose is at its most unbelievable when she writes about love.

It would be tempting and easy to say that Susann simply doesn't believe that a woman with a career and a woman with a family mix. However, the images of the woman who stayed in small towns, and had children and husbands, are even worse: shrill, frigid, bored, grasping. These women are depicted through the characters' mothers. Jennifer's mother only loves money. Anne's mother was frigid and never really loved. Anne's aunt led a boring, undesirable life.

Susann was sometimes criticized for her pessimism but it is finally the most interesting part of her work. She introduced a new bleakness into popular fiction and with it casual drug abuse, frank language, casual sex, and an acknowledgement of the prevalence of homosexuality, which titillated her readers. Susann's first novel did not just flirt with despair as did most popular fiction. She said her work was about how life and loneliness changed people. Everyone is punished simply by virtue of being alive.

Techniques

Susann tells her story chronologically and from three different thirdperson points of view: Anne's, Neely's, Jennifer's. The novel begins with a terrible poem announcing its themes. It is then broken up into sections labeled with the names of the heroines. These sections are divided into smaller sections, establishing a time frame such as February, 1948, or simply 1956.

Susann's use of point of view is relatively sophisticated. The characters relate their stories through each others' eyes. This shifting point of view allows readers to see the characters through their own eyes and those of observers at the same time. It adds depth. Readers would probably be less disposed to care about Neely at the end of the novel if they only saw her and listened to her from her own strident point of view. Anne's point of view softens Neely. Readers also learn more about secondary characters than they would if only one point of view were used.

Tony Polar is more intelligible through Jennifer's perspective.

Though the voices of each section are relatively similar, Susann does try to make each section distinctive. She infuses some of Jennifer's lost quality into the prose of Jennifer sections and it is easy to identify coarse Neely's by the word "Geez." Anne's sections are the most romantic and contain some of the slushier prose.

The novel doesn't really end in the conventional sense for anyone except Jennifer, who's dead. Neely will continue to careen between success and disaster but readers don't know which side of her will finally be the victor in her emotional civil war: whether she will survive, like Helen Lawson, or destroy herself. Anne says she will eventually not love Lyon, but the question remains, will she become a drug addict and end badly or will she restore herself and eventually leave him?

Susann leaves her characters' fates up in the air. Again, Susann is showing her peculiar and perhaps unwitting modernity.



Themes

Celebrity and Expectations of Beauty

Valley of the Dolls was written at a very turbulent time in history, politically and socially. The Civil Rights Movement of the previous decade had caused Americans to rethink the idea that what people looked like indicated their worth. The "hippies" were at the front of a wave of opposition to the traditional family dynamic (working father, housekeeping mother, up-to-date kitchen, happy children). They emphasized the needs of an individual over the need to keep up appearances. On a lighter note, perhaps, was the sudden widespread broadcast of color television. In 1965, NBC filled its prime-time lineup almost entirely with programming in color and kicked off the demand for color television sets in private homes. TV looked more than ever like real life, and stars needed more than ever to distinguish themselves from real people.

The three main characters in the novel, Anne, Neely, and Jennifer, are attractive women even as girls. In the 1940s, they are mostly happy with themselves and their accomplishments. Neely is an actress who is always viewed from the distance of a stage by the limited number of people who can purchase tickets in one city to see her. Public appearances she makes are in small nightclubs to exclusive crowds. Her name is famous thanks to newspapers and her voice is famous thanks to records and radio, but her image is not yet a product of mass consumption. Anne works with and for celebrities; any scrutiny placed on her is for how well she is doing her job. Jennifer models. She wears clothes well, but it is the clothes that are the primary focus of her work. The pressure to be more beautiful and glamorous than every other woman is not present. Neither Anne nor Neely obsesses over her appearance or takes extreme measures to maintain it. When Neely gets a makeover after signing on with a management firm, she is given voice lessons and new clothing. Anne's beauty is certainly an asset, but her poise and manner are her real strengths.

Jennifer goes to great lengths to keep up her beauty, but that is more because she is 1) lying about her age, and 2) using her beauty to get very close to individual men and showing them her entire body. Jennifer is also the first person to turn to drugs to manage her appearance. In an era when cigarettes had no particularly negative connotations, Jennifer is a chain smoker whose habits are remarked upon by her roommates; cigarettes do curb your appetite. She has insomnia and risks looking fatigued; she takes depressants just to get some sleep (and then because they are addictive).

As time passes, each of the women finds work in increasingly visible roles. Neely starts making Hollywood films; suddenly, her studio demands that she lose a significant amount of weight. She is kept busy on the set and by a semi-professional social life. Jennifer starts doing nude scenes and turns to drastic medical treatments—facelifts, induced comas, abortions—to keep up her looks. Each woman values her public persona far above a healthy life. Neely is so reliant on fame, drugs, and alcohol that she



is unable to function in the regular world. She vanishes to Spain, she vanishes to a mental institution, and she is expected to vanish again after the book closes. Jennifer's obsession with looks eventually kills her.

Anne manages her public role far more successfully, perhaps because she has a theatrical manager (Henry Bellamy) as a mentor. He has changed his name to portray an Anglican rather than a Jewish image, and has worked with celebrities so long he can help Anne conduct her affairs without being overwhelmed. Anne's career does depend on her looks, however. As the face of Gillian Cosmetics, she is responsible for staying beautiful. She abandons her natural appeal and adopts a showy hairstyle and sophisticated make up. When television commercials loom on the horizon, she takes elocution lessons to lose her Massachusetts accent. Anne does succumb to drug addiction, but not over her physical beauty. She struggles to maintain the appearance of having a beautiful family, and chooses the escape of drugs (to help her believe in the illusion) instead of the scandal that would result if she was honest with herself and divorced her husband.

Competition and Friendship

Women cannot be friends, or so *Valley of the Dolls* tells us. The novel contains no examples of real female friendships. Women certainly form friendly alliances, but they do not interact with each other in any meaningful way. Women that have a lot in common who seem like they might become friends end up in competition with each other; women who are dissimilar and have nothing to fight over are never able to meet.

None of the three main characters—Anne Welles, Neely O'Hara, and Jennifer North—are shown enjoying friendship at any point during their lives. Neither Anne nor Neely grows up with any friends and Jennifer never thinks about any. None of the women cultivate any friends during the twenty-year span of the book; the relationships they form with each other are based on how one person can help the other get ahead.

The tone of competition is established immediately. When Anne appears at the employment office in the first chapter of the book, the receptionist tells her that the women in New York City are going crazy trying to catch men. Anne and Neely become friends after Anne starts working for an entertainment firm; Neely asks for help getting into a show and Anne ends up facilitating it. Helen Lawson befriends Anne to get closer to a man that interests her. Jennifer attaches herself to people who might introduce her to more influential people. After Neely finds fame, she treats every woman she meets as a professional threat or a personal rival—because the women she meets are often both.

There are certainly outward manifestations of friendship, which is why the women continue the relationships. They are not overtly adversarial and often a lot of fun. The three women enjoyed sharing an apartment, and expressed genuine enthusiasm about each other's success. Jennifer and Anne seem like friends, but there is a level of competition even between them. They were both interested in the same man (Lyon Burke), they both worked as models, and they both wore the same articles of clothing.



Jennifer tends to Anne at Anne's mother's funeral, but she goes with her to make Tony want her and she finds a doctor to prescribe pills for her there. They stay in contact as time passes, but communicate mostly through letters and apparently mostly discuss work and the progression of their marriage plans. They continually disregard the advice they give to each other. Anne takes care of Neely because she has no one else to take care of. Neely accepts what Anne gives her, and takes what she wants from Anne with no remorse. Anne loves her daughter and is highly motivated to be the mother she never had, but the novel ends with the suggestion that baby Jennifer will have to compete with her mother's drug addiction for attention.

Valley of the Dolls was published in 1966, at the start of the radical feminist movement. Its characters are strong, independent, wealthy women that contrast with the prevailing stereotypes of sweet women who supported their men. The "modern woman" strove to reach top of the career ladder (the poem at the beginning of the novel refers to Mount Everest as the pinnacle of achievement), but there was only room for one woman at the top. A fully actualized "modern woman" would have to be lonely. Friends distract people from their ambitions because they come with obligations; friends also make sacrifices for each other. Women who want to succeed either lose their friends through neglect or drop them.

Balancing Work and Family

The main women characters of Valley of the Dolls, Anne, Jennifer, and Neely, all profess to value having a family as much as having a career. They constantly refer to their dreams of being wives and mothers, even when their work takes them further and further away from realizing their dreams. They dream of having the kind of family that none of them experienced as children, but they lack role models to learn how to integrate their professional and personal lives.

Broken homes are rampant throughout the novel. Both Anne and Jennifer's fathers died. Jennifer has a stepfather and a stepmother, to whom her own father left most of his money. Neely has no parents at all, and spent the first half of her childhood in foster care. Lyon Burke's father died when he was five. Tony Polar's father abandoned him before birth and his mother died during childbirth. The people who could have acted as mentors do not have successful families, either. Helen Lawson is a serial wife, who has gone through at least six husbands, and Henry Bellamy has never married or had children at all.

Neely's early childhood in foster care put her in homes in which she may have been welcome, but she was just a temporary guest. Her sister's household was directed by the career demands of the dance trio, which included traveling but no formal schooling. Neely had peers instead of parents. Her sister might have been an example of balancing work and home life, but she gives up dancing when she has a baby. Neely's brother-in-law cheats on his wife when he is out of town and does not bother to hide it from Neely. The third person in the trio, who is for all intents and purposes Neely's third surrogate parent, is gay and presumably single. He has only his career to focus on.



Neely learns from her brother-in-law that it is acceptable to leave a spouse at home while advancing your career and that it is acceptable to fool around with other people. She has learned, probably from foster care, that babies do not really need mothers and that it does not matter if you miss birthdays or live away from your children. Before Neely marries Mel, she does sincerely want to create a real home, but without examples to draw from she relies on the destructive lessons from her childhood.

Jennifer's mother is attracted to wealth and tells Jennifer that her father was rich but a bum. She uses Jennifer to get wealth from men, no matter what the men are like (readers assume that she did the same thing before she married Jennifer's father). Jennifer pays lip service to the idea of family but dedicates herself to the pursuit of money. She has at least two chances to settle down with men that would give her a home and children—Harry the mechanic and Prince Mirallo—but she walks away from the opportunity. She gets pregnant, but has abortions so she can keep working. She kills herself when the possibility of disfigurement implicitly threatens to end her career, even though she has said all along that she wants to quit work so she can raise children. The way she has structured her professional goals completely prohibits her having a family at all.

Valley of the Dolls does provide some positive images of family. Anne, for the most part, is a good mother. She balances her work and family to the extent that it is within her control (although her turn towards drugs on the last page of the novel undermines this image of her). She has a job but she spends lots of time with her daughter, and she has a husband she loves (who is also very good in bed). On the other hand, her husband Lyon explained to her long before they married that being successful at work prevents you from forming personal relationships because it takes so much time to be successful—there is not enough time to have both things. Her husband Lyon spends so much time building the business that she bought and tricked him into running that he has no time for her. Anne does not have a successful family because she did not pick a good person to start a family with. She is so determined to prove to her dead mother that you can have great sex with a husband that she overvalues the great sex and overestimates Lyon's suitability for her. She built a fortune by throwing herself into her work when she could not have Lyon instead of looking for a man who could provide a home.

Mel Harris is one significant character in the novel with an intact family. He visits them every Friday night. He is also the nicest person in the book, who is more concerned about making his wife happy even though he has ambitions of his own. His divorce from Neely is not detailed, but it is probable that he left her for the simple reason that she was cheating on him. His stable family background gives him the wisdom to recognize what a real marriage is and the backbone to tolerate nothing less. Readers also hear in passing about the boy Jennifer left in Cleveland. Her mother reports that Harry has a steady job, a wife, and three children. Neither family, however, is wealthy. The lesson of the novel is that domestic happiness can only be found in the middle and working classes. Anne, Jennifer, and Neely give up their chances for domestic happiness in order to gain fame and fortune.

Style

Point of View

The novel is presented from the points of view of the three main characters: Anne Welles, Neely O'Hara, and Jennifer North. The narrative voice is the same whether it is an Anne, Neely, or Jennifer chapter. All three main characters appear in all of the chapters, even if only in reference or passing thought.

All of the narration is presented in the third person. Readers learn not only what happens, but how the main characters react to and feel about events; the narration enables readers to share Anne, Neely, and Jennifer's thoughts. Most of the narration is expository, but there is a significant amount of dialogue. Dialogue is almost always about events as they unfold, but occasionally characters will ponder the meaning of what is happening, or muse about the themes of the novel.

The novel begins and ends in Anne's point of view. Of the three main characters, she is the one readers follow the most. Readers understand the perils of drug use and fame through her eyes, by following her development from an earnest and innocent newcomer to a jaded, sophisticated mother and famous millionaire.

Setting

The main setting of the novel is New York City, with several forays to Hollywood, California and an extended visit to Haven Manor. New York City is seen through a succession of boarding houses, hotels, nightclubs, restaurants, theaters, and offices; all the action in this novel takes place indoors, without scenery or weather. This use of interiors suggests that life in New York City is one long series of appointments and dates. Anything that happens in the book could happen at any time of year, but so many places are named that only New York City is big enough to contain them all.

In contrast, the action in California generally takes place in backyards or under the bright lights of a film studio. Everything is exposed to scrutiny in a literal and figurative way. Image is far more important than location in California. The swimming pool stands out as a symbol here, partly of wealth and status but also as a manifestation of how something as big and turbulent as the ocean—the adventure that is human life—can be captured and diminished for the sake of someone else's amusement.

Readers know that Haven Manor is luxurious by descriptions of the patients and the cost of the bills that Anne pays for Neely's treatment. Haven Manor is a setting that shows off how rich Anne is and how influential Neely is; it has no personality of its own. Similarly, Lawrenceville, Massachusetts, the town that motivates Anne to move to New York City, is an unremarkable small town. It is Anne's feelings about her family and opportunities there that matter. She explains to Lyon that all small towns are



interchangeable and that it is history—not the setting—of this one that she finds hateful. Lawrenceville (a representation of every small town) has no personality of its own.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is blunt. It primarily describes action and thoughts, with very little attention to visual details or imagery. Each of the main characters is given a sparse physical description, usually about their complexion and hair color. A few of Neely's outfits are described in detail, especially her purple taffeta dress (which is only described so the reader can understand that it is awful; high fashion and tasteful clothing is merely noted.) An interior location will be identified without a hint of atmosphere. The author is writing for an audience that is already familiar with nightclubs and hotel rooms, and so focuses the text on what takes place rather than the setting. The lack of descriptive detail creates the sense that the reader is an insider learning juicy gossip about real people and that the book is a tell-all.

The language is also shockingly straightforward. Characters discuss sex, oral sex, drug use, betrayal, and ambition without euphemism or embarrassment. The novel was published in 1966 and was considered scandalous at the time. Modern readers are still taken aback by the language. This jarring effect comes not so much from the presence of sex and drugs in the novels but from the way the characters talk about these subjects in the same tone of voice that they talk about rents and train schedules. Adding to the salaciousness is the placement of some of these conversations twenty years in the past. It is a popular idea that the decade one lives in has looser morals than earlier decades. The novel portrays premarital and adulterous sex as commonplace, drugs as readily available, and show business as cutthroat, even in kinder, gentler, more civilized days.

Structure

The plot of the novel spans twenty years, from 1945 to 1965. It was published in 1966, so the characters were contemporaries of the first generation of readers. The chapters are named for the perspective of the characters they focus on; the first chapter, for example, is "Anne" and follows Anne during her first few months in New York City. Although the novel jumps between characters at uneven intervals, the events unfold chronologically.

The first third of the novel covers only a few months, but it contains all the details that establish character personalities, relationships, and the book's themes. After that, the novel leaps ahead by the year instead of by the month. Much of the novel is concerned with decline, but decline is not apparent from day to day. Jumps in time allow the reader to better understand how characters have changed.

Anne is the dominant character because most of the pages fall within chapters named after her. Of the three women, she is the one that has the most ordinary life. As Kevin Gillmore says, the average woman could not see themselves becoming as beautiful as



Jennifer (or as talented as Neely). Anne achieves wealth and fame that most people will not experience, but she has an average upbringing and becomes a wife and mother. Anne is the character readers can relate to, and because she is friends with the exotic Jennifer and Neely, readers can personally relate to them, too.



Quotes

"Love is companionship, having friends in common, the same interests. Sex is the connotation you're placing on love, and let me tell you, young lady, that if and when it does exist, it dies very quickly after marriage." Anne, September, 1945, p. 9

"Look, I'm a virgin, but I do know that sex and love are two different things for a man." Anne, October, 1945, p. 25

"If I work real hard for years, what will I end up with? Money, position and respect. That's it. That's all there is." Anne, October, 1945, p. 48

"Age settled with more grace on ordinary people, but for celebrities—women stars in particular—age became a hatchet that vandalized a work of art." Anne, November, 1945, p. 75

"All at once she knew—this was the ultimate in fulfillment, to please a man you loved. At that moment she felt she was the most important and powerful woman in the world." Anne, December, 1945, p. 126

"There are many Henrys who are married and who wind up on top alone. They have to be alone, because they've alienated everyone along the way. In this rat race you whore, lie, cheat and use every trick you can employ to get up there where Henry is. This business demands it. And that's what I'm ranting against. Not Henry personally, but what everyone turns into if he sticks in it long enough." Anne, December, 1945, p. 160

"A man must feel he runs things, but as long as you control yourself, you control him. Get him to put a ring on your finger, then be the slave girl if you wish." Anne, December, 1945, p. 161

"We like one another. I want to make you know about sex, to feel thrilling climaxes—not let you learn about it by being mauled by some brutal man. We are doing nothing wrong. We are not Lesbians like those awful freaks who cut their hair and wear mannish clothes. We are two women who adore one another and who know about being gentle and affectionate." Jennifer, December, 1945, p. 174

"I'm twenty-six, Anne—I haven't that kind of time or future. Tony is impressed with my clothes, and the newspapers call me glamorous. I think about this as an investment. I'm putting all my money on the line and rolling the dice for Tony. If the number comes up marriage, I'll be independent for life." Jennifer, December, 1946, p. 190

"She opened the bottle of pills. She took two of them. One worked—but two! It was the most beautiful feeling in the world. She put her head on the pillow gently. The soft numbness began to slither through her body. Oh, God! How had she ever lived without these gorgeous red dolls!" Jennifer, December, 1946, p. 202



"Oh, we use sex—but in a subtle kind of way. Anne is beautiful. But she has the type of beauty women can identify with. A college girl or young matron will think she can look like Anne if she uses our product, but she would never think she could look like Jennifer. You're selling escapism in pictures—I'm selling a product. Anne is right for my product. People won't stop to think that it's her fine bone structure that does it, or the way her eyes are spaced, or the thickness of her own lashes. They'll think if they use the same product it will happen to them." Anne, January, 1948, p. 247

"Lyon is like Jennifer in a way. They fall in love, the Lyons and the Jennifers, but they can walk away unscarred. Because Number One always comes first. Remember it, Anne, you're young. Keep those eyes wide open. And when you meet another guy who's for real, grab him and run for the hills. Don't hang around the glamour belt too long." Anne, February, 1948, p. 253

"I enjoy your company, Kevin. I enjoy you in bed. I enjoy working for you. Perhaps this is love." Anne, 1957, p. 287

"Sometimes at midnight she'd leap into her car and head for a bar. There she'd stand, with a bandana around her hair and no makeup, unrecognized, lost in soft anonymity, sipping her beer, happy to be with people. She didn't care; she had enough money; she could sit out the year. It would blow over, and then she'd get back into shape and maybe do a Broadway show. That would be fun. She'd show them. Meantime she could eat anything she wanted . . . and drink. There were always the wonderful red and yellow dolls—and now there were even some new blue-striped ones!" Anne, 1957, p. 306

"I'm not self-destructive. Everything just went wrong. Look, when you have a studio treating you like you were Jesus Christ for so many years, taking care of everything, I guess it becomes a big mother image. They do everything—get you plane tickets, write your speeches, take care of the press . . . they even fix traffic tickets. And you gradually fall into a way of depending on them. You feel like you belong, like the studio is protecting you. Then, when you're thrown on your own, it's like a big rejection. It's scary." Neely, 1961, p. 366

"How much did she really owe Kevin? Her relationship with him had been far from thrilling. Yet throughout the entire time she had never given him cause for jealousy or concern. There had been many chances—many men younger and more attractive than Kevin—but she had ignored every advance. She had given him fourteen years of happiness—shouldn't that balance any obligation she owed him?" Anne, 1961, pp. 381-382

"She knew now there would always be a Neely, or a Margie . . . but each time it would hurt less, and afterward she would love Lyon less, until one day there would be nothing left—no hurt, and no love." Anne, 1965, p. 442

Adaptations

Valley of the Dolls, the 1967 movie, is now considered a camp masterpiece by many. It opens with Mr. Vesuvius sideways pumping out pills. The silly costumes and glitzy sets, especially the commercials Anne appears in with their allusions to great art, and the Calderesque set Helen Lawson swings around on in her Broadway show, belting out her pseudo-show-stopping number, are sublimely bad. They come full circle and become art again. The whole movie has the glamorous look of a third-rate imagination running wild within the confines of its limitations.

The dialogue, for which Susann must take some credit, is preposterously self-serious. Susan Hayward as Helen Lawson hams it up. Patty Duke as Neely whoops it up (her final scene in which she screams her own name on a deserted New York street is jaw-dropping in its excess). Barbara Parkins as Anne has two expressions, dewy when she isn't on drugs, and not-dewey when she is. Sharon Tate as Jennifer feigns innocence. It is all as intoxicating as heavy perfume.

Susann was furious when she saw the movie. She felt the subtlety of her characterizations had been trampled upon. After she saw a preview she told the director Mark Robson that she thought the movie was "a piece of shit." The critics agreed. Her public, however, didn't. It grossed over seventy million dollars and set box office records that were not broken until Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid was released a year later. The theme music became a best-seller in its own right and remains a popular favorite.

The only people who seemed to understand the great awfulness of the movie were Roger Ebert and Russ Meyer. Ebert wrote the screenplay for Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (1970). Meyer directed it. They took the excesses of the original and soared with them, creating for example, a male director, who gets himself up in a kind of bizarre drag for sex, and calls himself superwoman. Susann, unfortunately, couldn't see their achievement. She felt betrayed and thought her good title was being used to sell pornography.

The courts agreed with her, though Susann never knew. Her suit did not come to trial until after her death and was finally settled for 1.4 million dollars.

Later, Valley of the Dolls was made into a CBS television mini-series, with the late Susann's husband as executive producer. It was not well received.



Topics for Discussion

Jennifer has dedicated her entire adulthood to pursuing fortune. When she separates from Tony—even without having a baby—she is offered enough money to make her rich for the rest of her life. Why does she refuse the money Miriam offers her to have an abortion?

Anne is wealthy, independent, intelligent and successful, but she frequently makes poor decisions and gets herself into trouble. Why does she consistently ignore advice given to her by wiser friends?

Neely and Helen Lawson are very alike: talented, famous, overtly interested in men, and competitive. Helen is not necessarily aging gracefully, but she keeps in control of herself and her career. Neely relies on drugs and alcohol, and is mentally unstable. What differences in the two women, or their careers, contribute to these vastly different outcomes?

The novel paints a very unflattering portrait of wealthy men; the few brief glimpses readers get of middle class men are positive in contrast. What is it about the wealthy men that makes them bad husbands? Alternately, what effect does money have on a man's suitability for marriage?

Valley of the Dolls was written more than forty years ago, but is still in print. In what way does it speak to modern audiences?

Are the celebrities of today different from the celebrities (Anne, Neely, Jennifer, Helen Lawson, Margie Parks, Tony Polar, Terry King) in Valley of the Dolls? How do you come to this conclusion?

Would Jennifer's life be different if she had never taken drugs? If so, in what way?

Would Anne have been happier if she had stayed in Lawrenceville and married Willie Henderson? Would Neely have been happier if she had stayed in New York with Mel (and without a film contract)? Would Jennifer have been happier in Cleveland married to Harry? Why do you think so?

Both Lyon Burke and Mel Harris are theatrical managers who want to get into writing. Both are involved with famous women. Both are good-looking. Does one seem more successful than the other? What achievements qualify a person as a "success"?

Is there any character you find admirable? Why do you admire that character? Alternately, why do you not admire any character? Admirable and despicable traits aside, which character do you like the most? Why?

If you could change one decision that Anne, Neely, or Jennifer makes, what would it be? How would that change the outcome of the novel?

Overall, would you say this book has a message or that it is just titillating and scandalous?



Literary Precedents

Susann's most immediate precedent is probably Harold Robbins. In fact Elliot Fremont-Smith in the New York Times Book Review described *Valley of the Dolls* as a book that might have been written "by a slightly bashful fan" of Robbins. But there are older traditions from which Susann is working.

One is that tradition which pits the purity of the pastoral life against the corruption of urban living. This idea flourished in the nineteenth century and was one of the hallmarks of Romanticism. Another tradition Susann was working through was that of the romance or love story whose most recent incarnation is "pulp" gothic romances. This is a fiction geared toward women. The protagonists are usually women and the plot centers on lost and found love. Erich Segal, scholar and popular author himself, has said that these kinds of stories have existed since early Greek culture.

Yet Susann does not merely continue these traditions: she gives them a modernist spin. Irving Mansfield gives this description of *Valley of the Dolls* in *Life with Jackie*: "In fact, in this book, almost nothing ever works. Success corrupts.

Power destroys. Love fades. Marriage breaks up. Money undermines. Health fails. Youth and beauty erode away.

Only death and pills prevail." It is this bleak sensibility which transforms the traditions Susann is working from. The city is still corrupt, but it is also glamorous and stimulating. The country is still pure but it is also stifling. Susann changes the choice to one between corruption and stultification, which is hardly a choice at all.

The same is true of what she does with the love story tradition. The heroines still dream of a knight in shining armor (one of its medieval manifestations) but this time they are destroyed by their longing. The forever-and-always love usually awarded to the heroine after her trials and tribulations is withheld from Susann's characters. It isn't possible in the fictional world she creates.

It is this dark vision which gives Susann another interesting set of literary ancestors, those modernists for whom despair was the only reasonable response in a century they perceived as foul. In a corrupt world there are no possible choices but corrupt ones. The values which sustained people are useless and beside the point. To long and strive for those values is perverse and ultimately destructive since they cannot be attained.

Susann probably did not consciously choose literary antecedents like Samuel Beckett, whose *Waiting for Godot* is considered by many to be the quintessential existential play of the 1950s, but he is there. The Godot her heroines are waiting for is perfect love, the ideal husband, angels for children (Anne is rewarded with at least one of those).



Seen from one perspective, Susann's readers had so fully internalized the alienation Beckett's radar had sensed some years before, that what they were in part responding to was her illustration of it in a popular fiction art form.

This helps to account for her incredible success.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

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