Women Study Guide

Women by Clare Boothe Luce

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Clare Boothe Luce's social satire *The Women* was a smash hit when first performed on Broadway in 1936 and has enjoyed several revival productions during the 1970s and 1990s.

The Women is set in the world of high society wives in New York City during the height of the Great Depression. Mary Haines, the protagonist, learns from a gossipy manicurist that her husband, Stephen, is having an affair with a shop-girl named Crystal. After the news of Stephen's affair is published in a gossip column, Mary decides to divorce him. To obtain her divorce, she travels to Reno, Nevada, where liberal divorce laws attracted many society women wishing to downplay any potential for scandal. While she is in Reno, Mary learns that Stephen has married Crystal. Two years later, Mary, now living back in New York with her children, learns that Crystal has been unfaithful to Stephen. With the help of her friends, Mary sets out to expose Crystal's infidelity in order to win Stephen back.

Although men are at the center of the lives of the women in *The Women*, no male characters appear in the play, which is set in such locations as beauty parlors, women's clothing stores, and other predominantly female environments. *The Women* addresses themes of the modern woman, marriage and divorce, female friendship, beauty standards, gossip, and socioeconomic class.

The Women has been criticized over the years as a work that portrays women as shallow, conniving, "catty" creatures whose lives revolve around their efforts to look beautiful so as to obtain and hold onto wealthy husbands. Others, however, have regarded *The Women* as a feminist text that addresses lasting issues about women's status in society.

Author Biography

Ann Clare Boothe was born April 10, 1903, in New York City. Her father abandoned the family when she was eight years old, and her mother was left to support them. Despite the family's poverty, Boothe's mother managed to send Boothe to private schools, with the hopes of grooming her to marry a wealthy man.

At twenty, Boothe married forty-three-year old George Brokaw, a wealthy businessman. Six years later, she divorced Brokaw, in part because of his severe alcoholism. Boothe received a settlement from the divorce that allowed her to continue living in comfort. Her experience of a "Reno divorce" informed her later writing of *The Women*.

Boothe's second marriage was to Henry R. Luce, the well-known publisher of *Time* magazine, who later founded *Life* magazine. At this point, Boothe changed her name to Clare Boothe Luce. During the 1930s, Luce worked in the publishing industry as both an editor and a journalist. She served as an editor for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* from 1930 to 1934. She also contributed short satirical sketches about New York's high society, which were later collected in *Stuffed Shirts* (1933). During the early years of World War II, Luce worked as a war correspondent for *Life*. Her experiences during the war are portrayed in *Europe in the Spring* (1940).

Luce's first play to be produced was a failure. However, her second play, *The Women*, was a great success. *The Women* satirizes the lives of the high society women that Luce knew so well as both a socialite and a journalist. She wrote of the society women who inspired her writing of *The Women*, "I did *not* like these women. I liked them so little that I put them into this small Doomsday Book, in order to rid myself once and for all of their hauntingly ungracious images."

The Broadway success of *The Women* resulted in a 1939 screen adaptation of the same title. Luce's plays *Kiss the Boys Goodbye* (1938) and *Margin for Error* (1939) were also stage successes that were adapted to the screen as major motion pictures. After her only child, a nineteen-year-old daughter, was killed in a car accident, Luce became interested in Roman Catholicism and converted in 1946.

Beginning in the 1940s, Luce became very involved in politics. She was elected to the House of Representatives, serving two terms as a Republican from Connecticut. From 1953 to 1956, she served as United States ambassador to Italy. Luce was active in the Republican party throughout the rest of her life, supporting politicians and sometimes serving political appointments for Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan. Luce was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1983. She died of cancer on October 9, 1987, in Washington, D.C.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

The Women opens with Mary Haines's circle of high-society friends playing bridge at her Park Avenue apartment in New York City. When Mary walks out of the room, Sylvia relates that she has learned from a manicurist named Olga that Mary's husband Stephen is carrying on an extramarital affair. When Mary returns, Sylvia encourages her to make an appointment for a manicure from Olga.

Act 1, Scene 2

A few days later, Mary goes to Michael's beauty salon to get a manicure from Olga. Olga, who does not know that Mary is the wife of Stephen Haines, relates the gossip that he is having an affair with Crystal Allen. Mary informs Olga that she is Mrs. Stephen Haines and gets up to leave, asking Olga not to continue gossiping about this matter.

Act 1, Scene 3

An hour later, in Mary's bedroom, Mrs. Moorehead (Mary's mother) arrives and Mary tells her about Stephen having an affair. Mrs. Moorehead advises Mary to do and say nothing about it. She says that all married men, including Mary's father, have such affairs and that it is in the wife's best interest to pretend not to notice. Mrs. Moorehead persuades Mary to go on vacation with her to Bermuda in order to get away and let the affair blow over. Just then, Stephen calls to say he will be working late again and will not be home in time for dinner.

Act 1, Scene 4

After a two-month vacation in Bermuda with her mother, Mary returns to New York. At a women's clothing store on Fifth Avenue, she finds herself trying on clothes in a fitting room right next to one in which Crystal Allen is trying on clothes. Encouraged by her friends, Mary enters Crystal's dressing room and confronts her about Stephen. Crystal appears unthreatened by Mary and tells her that Stephen plans on marrying her. Feeling humiliated by Crystal, Mary walks out.

Act 2, Scene 1

Two weeks later, at Elizabeth Arden's beauty salon, Mary's friend Edith confides to her friends Sylvia and Peggy that she unthinkingly told a well-known gossip-columnist about Stephen's affair with Crystal and about Mary's confrontation with Crystal at the clothing store.

Act 2, Scene 2

A few days later, Mary's maid and her cook discuss the fact that Stephen's affair with Crystal was published in a gossip column of a tabloid newspaper and that Mary and Stephen are in the midst of a quarrel over the affair. Stephen claims to have ended the affair, but Mary still will not forgive him for it.

Act 2, Scene 3

A month later, Mary is preparing to travel to Reno, Nevada, where she can obtain a divorce from Stephen. Mrs. Moorehead (Mary's mother) tries to persuade her to take Stephen back, but she refuses. Mary explains to her daughter, Little Mary, that she and Stephen are going to get divorced.

Act 2, Scene 4

A month later, Mary's friend Peggy visits her friend Edith, who is in the hospital with a newborn baby. Peggy says that both she and Sylvia will be going to Reno to obtain divorces. Sylvia knows that her husband wants to marry another woman, but she does not know who the woman is.

Act 2, Scene 5

A few weeks later, Mary and several of her friends discuss their divorces while staying at a resort in Reno. The Countess de Lage, one of Mary's friends, announces that she is considering marrying Buck Winston, a young cowboy. After Sylvia learns that her husband is divorcing her in order to marry Miriam, she and Miriam get into a hair-pulling fight, which Mary tries to break up. Stephen calls for Mary and informs her that he and Crystal have gotten married.

Act 3, Scene 1

Two years later, Crystal is taking a long bubble bath in the New York apartment where she lives with Stephen. While bathing, she talks on the phone to Buck Winston, with whom she is having an affair. Buck Winston is now married to the Countess de Lage, who has helped him to succeed as a movie star. Mary's daughter, Little Mary, enters and overhears Crystal's conversation with Buck, although she is not sure what it means. While Crystal is still in the bathtub, Sylvia comes to visit her in her bathroom. Sylvia sees a key to the Gothic Apartments, which is known as a location for conducting extramarital affairs.

Act 3, Scene 2

That night, Mary has a dinner party□"a memorial reunion for old Renoites"□with her friends and their various new husbands to celebrate the two-year anniversary of her divorce from Stephen. The Countess mentions that she suspects Buck Winston is cheating on her. Mary's friends invite her to join them at a late-night party on the Casino Roof, but she declines.

After the guests leave, Little Mary inadvertently provides Mary with the information that Crystal is having an affair with Buck Winston. Mary immediately dresses to go to the party at the Casino Roof, where she knows that Crystal, Buck, and Stephen are in attendance.

Act 3, Scene 3

Late that night, in the ladies restroom of the Casino Roof, Mary and her friend Miriam discuss how to go about revealing Crystal's affair with Buck Winston so that Stephen will find out about it and decide to divorce Crystal. When Crystal enters the ladies room, Mary and her friends trick her into admitting to the affair. Mary goes off to tell Stephen about Crystal's affair, confident that she will win him back for herself.

Chapters 1 through 6

Chapters 1 through 6 Summary

Henry Chinaski is an aging white male alcoholic who gains fame as a poet. He performs various readings, pursues alcohol with a vengeance, and meets various people along the way. Henry finds men largely uninteresting and chooses to focus nearly all of his attention on women—and for Henry, women equate nearly entirely with sexual intercourse. Over the course of the novel, Henry describes sexual relationships with a variety of women in a variety of circumstances that, eventually, become monotonously repetitive.

Henry Chinaski, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, is fifty years old. He has been divorced once, has a six-year-old daughter with whom he has virtually no contact, and is an alcoholic. Henry has not had sex for four years and although he looks at women and masturbates, he holds out no hope of a successful sexual engagement. Henry is an ex-postal clerk and currently a somewhat successful writer who enjoys a limited circulation of novels and poetry—his success pays the rent but he is definitely not a literary superstar, though his notoriety is on the rise.

After the prologue of the novel, Henry meets Lydia Vance, a thirty-year-old mother of two. They meet at Henry's first poetry reading. Henry is immediately sexually attracted to Lydia, although Henry is immediately sexually attracted to any woman. Lydia has long brown hair and an attractive body; her eyes are slightly different colors. She usually wears very tight Levis and is originally from Muleshead, Utah. Lydia and Henry are introduced by Peter, the owner of the bookstore where Henry reads. Henry reads some of Lydia's poetry and considers it to be very bad. A few days later Lydia stops by Henry's apartment, a day later Henry visits Lydia at her apartment. Lydia begins to sculpt Henry's head out of clay. As she sculpts, she asks questions and makes small talk. Henry meets Glendoline, Lydia's sister, and immediately dislikes her. Henry buys a new shirt to impress Lydia and their visits continue as she continues to sculpt. After the first few visits, they begin drinking whiskey together and their tentative kissing becomes ardent kissing, then groping. Finally, Henry accuses Lydia of having what he refers to as "a big pussy" (p. 14) because she has had two children, in this he infers that her physicality is a tragedy. Lydia defends her sexual ability by demanding Henry have sex with her, which is interrupted by Lisa, Lydia's five-year-old daughter.

In the meantime, Henry is an assistant editor for a local little magazine. The magazine holds a collating party at Henry's apartment to assemble the copied pages. Henry invites Lydia to attend the party and she does. There are many men and only two women—Lydia and April—at the party, and Lydia overtly flirts with the other men; April appears again later in the narrative. When the party ends, Lydia accuses Henry of being mean, and he flatly states that he does not like people and is a recluse. Alone, they smoke and drink, then kiss and then have sex. Lydia instructs Henry to practice *coitus interruptus*; he agrees, but then does not comply and Lydia leaves in anger. A few days

later, they go for a drive in Henry's car and end up at the beach where Lydia watches younger, healthier men in bathing suits and compares them to Henry's old, flabby, white body. Several days later Lydia demands oral sex—a skill at which Henry is inexperienced. Lydia draws a picture and explains the process and Henry satisfies her. A few days later, Lydia and Henry attend a party and Lydia dances with and flirts with several younger men. Henry drinks heavily, gets irritated, and leaves early. On the drive home, they argue between pulling over so Henry can vomit.

Chapters 1 through 6 Analysis

The construction of the novel makes it obvious that the primary timeline will consist of approximately the six previous years. The period of time considered examines the abortive relationship between Lydia Vance and other women and Henry Chinaski; the novel's primary timeline begins with Henry's first poetry reading when his literary star is just beginning to rise. Thus, Lydia attaches herself to Henry before a startling series of propositions from young literature fans begins. The introductory chapters provide the basic characterization of Lydia and Henry, which will develop only minimally through the remainder of the novel. Henry is withdrawn, selfish, and a devoted alcoholic. He lives like a bum in a filthy apartment, and eating solid foods usually makes him ill. He vomits frequently and drinks heavily. He becomes easily irritated but not overtly angry and appears to be in control of his emotions more due to a genuine lack of feeling than any self-mastery. His personal cleanliness appears to be abominable and he describes himself in very unflattering terms. Lydia, on the other hand, is described as young, attractive, and vivacious. While Henry hates having company, Lydia loves to attend parties. Lydia is very jealous and protective, but conversely enjoys suggestive dancing and open flirting with many men in front of Henry. Needless to say, their relationship is offbeat and established to be difficult—it continues throughout approximately the first third of the novel. Henry's vituperation of Lydia's vaginal qualities is echoed in chapter 27 when he contemplates Mindy's vaginal qualities.

The first six chapters also establish a sense of place and the tone and texture of the entire novel. Henry is successful enough as a writer to pay the bills, but at the beginning of the novel he is virtually unknown. As the novel progresses his notoriety increases until he is fairly routinely contacted with various offers and adulation. Henry lives in Los Angeles and has no desire to leave the city. His infrequent forays into other areas confirm his opinion that Los Angeles is the only sensible place in the world. He lives in a variety of cheap apartments amidst his own squalor, rarely bathes or changes clothing, leaves butts and empty cans and bottles where they fall, and drinks continually. Lydia usually lives somewhere nearby, although her life appears much more balanced in most traditional ways; at least, she is a semi-capable mother and maintains relationships with her sisters and others. Early on she exhibits tendencies toward what will become overt jealousy coupled with the unfortunate tendency to openly flirt and flaunt her sexuality—not a particularly lovable combination of traits. The sculpted head, once completed, is discussed in later chapters.

Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Henry flies off to perform several readings around the United States. His first is in Kansas City where a man named Frenchy picks him up from the airport. Due to road ice, Frenchy crashes the car and the unlikely pair then thumbs a ride with a beer dealer to the college where Henry vomits and then performs his reading. Unfathomably, Henry is billeted in the girl's dormitory and he spends a few hours screwing up his courage with alcohol before making the rounds, pounding on every locked door in the dormitory and demanding immediate sexual gratification. Obviously, the girls have been forewarned, and Henry eventually passes out, frustrated, in his own room. The next day he wakes up completely disoriented, telephones Lydia, gets ready, and returns to the airport.

Henry subsequently gives a reading in Arkansas. As usual, he is sick before and after the reading and gulps down vast quantities of alcohol during his performance. At a post-reading party, Henry's sponsor points out the virtues of the young female guests and explains that due to Southern hospitality Henry can take his pick of the crowd. He selects Lilly, a bucktoothed youngish mother, and they leave together. Lilly lauds his literary skill and briefly interviews him about women before they have sexual intercourse. Henry is unable to perform and passes out; in the morning, he again attempts sexual intercourse and this time is successful. In the evening, Henry performs another reading at a minor venue.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Chapters 7 and 8 provide the first brief interlude in Lydia and Henry's tumultuous relationship. Henry's literary fame has obviously become appreciable; he is paid to read at various universities and he is feted as something of a figure in spite of his obvious alcoholism and his repulsive behavior. Henry also exhibits an unusual sexual magnetism and many younger women appear eager to engage him in sexual activities. Prior to Henry's readings, his relationship with Lydia is described in generally positive terms. Although she irritates him from time to time, he believes he loves her and they spend generally constructive time together—this begins to change in subsequent chapters and thus chapters 7 and 8 provide a minor turning point in the narrative. They also contain the first instance of Henry's infidelity to Lydia—infidelity becomes a recurrent theme throughout the remainder of the novel. The major significance of these few chapters is in the departure from the previous single-relationship theme of the text.

Chapters 9 through 20

Chapters 9 through 20 Summary

Lydia and Henry fight and then break up. One evening Henry's friend Bobby drops off his wife Valerie, ostensibly because she had insulted his parents and couldn't stay with him for the time being. Henry and Valerie go out for drinks and Henry speculates about having sex with Valeria. Unfortunately for Henry, Lydia chooses this time to return and runs into the erstwhile couple just as they are returning to Henry's apartment. Lydia displays her rage by chasing off Valerie, yelling at Henry, and then shoving him over and driving away. The next day April—the chubby girl from an earlier party—visits Henry. He eyes her body and decides she isn't that fat after all. She holds an incoherent conversation with Henry and then tells him she has a vaginal yeast infection. Henry convinces her to have sex anyway and they have sexual intercourse. He then drives her to her parents' house and drops her off.

Henry then patches up his relationship with Lydia and begins to spend time at her house. Their relationship becomes fairly intimate and Lydia spends a lot of time picking pimples and blackheads off Henry's face, chest, and back. One evening Henry tires of Lydia's constant exuberant and somewhat irrational vocal outbursts and simply walks out of the house. Lydia follows, screaming and threatening, and then beats on Henry's car as he drives away. Their fight continues through the next day as Lydia telephones Henry to shout obscenities and make vague threats. She then visits his apartment where she smashes all his alcohol and they fight in a sort of wrestling match.

They patch up their relationship. One day Henry drops off an article at a local magazine. Exiting the magazine office, Henry and Lydia bump into Dee Dee Bronson, an old acquaintance of Henry. Dee Dee is a successful businesswoman; she gives Henry her number, and as they drive away, Lydia begins again to fight with Henry. The fighting continues, and after a few days, Henry goes to the horse racing track where he wins nearly one thousand dollars and gets drunk. The same evening, Lydia visits Marvin, one of Henry's friends, and has sexual intercourse with him. In the morning, Lydia calls Henry to let him know she has cheated on him. Henry goes to her apartment intending to break up with her but instead suffers from an automotive breakdown. In the end, the two characters resolve their differences.

A few days later Lydia is evicted from her apartment. Henry helps her relocate to his own apartment building in a separate unit. She lives there for about three weeks until Henry gets drunk one day and goes to the racetrack in spite of Lydia's insistence that he remain at home for sexual intercourse. When Henry returns to the apartment, he discovers Lydia has moved out—she has thoughtfully left him a pair of blue panties with a note instructing him that they are for masturbation.

Henry quickly calls Dee Dee and then visits her. They drink expensive wine and talk about old times. Henry tells Dee Dee that Lydia has returned to Utah and then they

retire to bed. They next day they have breakfast in an exclusive restaurant and the wealthy Dee Dee pays for everything. They stop at a bar and Henry gets drunk while Dee Dee compliments his oral sex technique. After the bar, they spend a few hours wandering the Hollywood cemetery. A few days later Dee Dee's son Renny returns home from vacation. Renny appears to be nearly an imbecile and the seventeen year old behaves and speaks about half his age. Dee Dee realizes that her son is ridiculous but asks Henry to give a wide allowance. The days go by and Henry and Dee Dee continue to develop their relationship.

One day Henry receives a call from Lydia, who is indeed in Utah. Dee Dee subsequently takes Henry on an expensive vacation to Catalina. While Dee Dee has fun, Henry instead sulks, ogles young girls, and drinks. After they return, Lydia again calls Hank, explains she has had her own affair, and states her desire to return. Henry states his desire to have her return and they arrange to resume their relationship. Dee Dee attempts an unsuccessful overdose that night. Lydia returns and finds an apartment and a few days later Henry visits Dee Dee to see how she is doing. Dee Dee momentarily assumes Henry is returning to her but he quickly insists he is not. Thus, Lydia and Henry resume their formal relationship.

Chapters 9 through 20 Analysis

Chapters 9 through 20 narrate the first major dissolution of the relationship between Henry and Lydia, a theme that becomes increasingly recurrent throughout the first half of the novel. As Lydia returns to her native Utah, Henry remains in Los Angeles and pursues a brief relationship with Dee Dee Bronson, an influential person in the music and arts industry. The relationship between Lydia and Henry continues via telephone for several weeks. It remains turbulent even as Henry pursues his relationship with Dee Dee. It is clear to both Henry and Dee Dee that their relationship is simply a dalliance for Henry—he remains seemingly in love and partially devoted to Lydia. Dee Dee nevertheless allows herself to be carried away by the relationship and when Henry announces plans to leave her, she despondently and tentatively attempts suicide. As is typical, this segment of the novel does little to advance the plot but does round out the tone of the novel and add to the characterization of Henry and Lydia. Although Dee Dee is an interesting and memorably character her role in the novel is fairly minor, particularly outside of her immediate presentation. At the end of chapter 20 Lydia has returned to Los Angeles, where she resumes her relationship with Henry. The lengthy interlude, however, does little to normalize their behavior or mutually destructive actions. Although it is not immediately obvious from the construction of the novel, these chapters also establish a pattern that will be repeated throughout the remainder of the novel; that is, Henry engages in a series of sexual escapades with various younger women who simply 'drop by' his apartment with the apparent intention of having sex.

Chapters 21 through 29

Chapters 21 through 29 Summary

A woman named Nicole begins to write to Henry and they exchange letters. As she lives in Los Angeles, Henry visits her during a lull in his relationship with Lydia. Nicole is heavily interested in literature, widely read, and widely traveled. She apparently views Henry as an up-and-coming poet and finds his writing raw and powerful, comparing it to a sledgehammer. Their first visit is cordial but charged and Henry finds her sexually attractive. Lydia's sister Angela visits from Utah for a few days. Lydia decides to introduce Angela to Marvin, Henry's poet friend. Angela and Marvin hit it off; however, on the drive home Henry begins to accuse Lydia of having had sex with Marvin on a previous occasion. Lydia denies the charges and a fight ensues which culminates in Lydia ejecting Henry from the automobile. He walks around until he finds a telephone and calls a cab. He has the cab drop him at Nicole's apartment where he drinks until he passes out. In the morning, he has sexual intercourse with Nicole and their sexual relationship continues for several weeks. Henry avoids Lydia's questions through the alibi of visiting the supermarket. One afternoon, however, Lydia follows Henry to Nicole's apartment where she smashes various objects including the entrance windows, accosts Henry, vituperates Nicole, and makes a general scene. Nicole begs Henry to take Lydia and leave; he does, and they patch up their relationship.

Henry then begins to receive letters from a woman in New York City named Mindy. They too exchange letters and then telephone calls. Mindy sends some photographs and Henry asks her to fly to Los Angeles and vacation with him. She agrees and the trip is planned. Desiring to escape entanglement with Lydia, Henry deliberately starts a fight with her just before Mindy is to arrive. He accuses Lydia of being clinging and needy; she retaliates by calling him an insufferable boor. Within minutes, they are shrieking and Henry walks out. Henry picks up Mindy at the airport and is amazed at her stunning beauty and good looks. Henry finds Mindy's eyes remind him of an animal peering out of a forest fire. After a few drinks, they return to Henry's apartment and Lydia calls and screams at Henry. Mindy and Henry continue to drink and then get in bed. Henry is too drunk to achieve an erection and he passes out. In the morning, they wake up and have sexual intercourse. Their relationship continues for a few days, but Henry is devastated because his penis is not a good fit with Mindy's vagina—the lack of any friction prevents him from completing the sex act. Mindy does not seem to mind. After a few days, Lydia storms into Henry's apartment and physically beats Mindy. Henry, stumbling drunk, tries ineffectually to intervene. Lydia beats Mindy until she flees the apartment and then pursues her, attacking her down the stairs. When the police show up, both women are gone. The next morning Bobby calls and tells Henry that Mindy is staying with him. Henry wonders if Bobby and Valerie had sex with Mindy; at any event, she reclaims her belonging and bids Henry a tearful goodbye.

Chapters 21 through 29 Analysis

Henry's fame continues to spread and he begins to receive correspondence from a variety of women, all of which seem eager to engage him in some form of sexual manner. Meanwhile, he continues to struggle along in his relationship with Lydia Vance. Their relationship is probably best characterized by a series of short relationships interrupted by periods of violence and separation. Lydia appears nearly insanely jealous and begins a long series of violent attacks aimed at Henry's various lovers. The section also narrates Henry's brief sexual relationships with two additional women—Nicole and Mindy.

Nicole is fairly wealthy—for Henry's circle, she is very wealthy. She is also incredibly well read and has traveled extensively. Her interest in Henry appears to be nothing more than the pursuit of sexual involvement with literary figures; when Lydia shows up and starts smashing things Nicole is instantly disinterested in anything further to do with Henry. Nicole advances the plot of the novel, however, because she represents a fundamental sea change in Henry's fortunes. Although Henry does not realize it, Nicole is on the leading edge of a new sort of woman who will enter his life. Before Nicole, Henry's experiences had been with young college women without worldly experience. Wide-eyed with excitement over becoming intimate with a rising poet they responded immediately to his advances. Nicole, however, is educated and clearly better connected than most and her interest in Henry thus signifies a broader literary success. Lydia's rampage at Nicole's apartment is the first instance of her accosting another person in such a violent and public manner.

Mindy is interesting primarily in contrast to Lydia. Henry viewed Lydia as an attractive woman, but she was not remarkably attractive-Lydia's provocative behavior accounts for much of her sex appeal. Mindy, on the other hand, is remarkably attractive in spite of her timid and withdrawn behavior. Mindy's physical appearance is contemplated at some length in the novel and Henry makes it quite clear that she is incredibly good looking. This contrast serves as the background for their comparison. Prior to having sex with Lydia, Henry had commented that her personal 'tragedy' was having a loose vagina because of having two children. Lydia demonstrated this was not necessarily so by having sex with Henry—in fact, Lydia appears to be able to easily satisfy Henry and one of his frequent complaints about Lydia is her obsession with sex. Mindy, on the other hand, despite all of her physical beauty and lack of children, does have a loose vagina—Henry says of Mindy "I was astounded and dismayed to find she had a large pussy. An extra large pussy" (p. 78). So large he is unable to climax with her. Lydia and Mindy's contrast is culminated when Lydia barges into Henry's apartment in a jealous rage and physically beats Mindy and then pursues her out of the apartment and into the street. This is the first instance where Lydia physically attacks another person. Coupled with her earlier attack on Nicole, Lydia's attack on Mindy signals a rapidly degenerating situation.

Chapters 30 through 40

Chapters 30 through 40 Summary

To calm Lydia's fears, Henry accompanies her to Muleshead, Utah, where they camp with Glendoline and Angela. Henry despises the experience of being out of doors and sleeping in a tent. The three sisters discuss sex and read sex books. Henry finds the conversation trivial and irritating. On the second day, Glendoline becomes drunk and begins shouting out for a wild man. Henry, disgusted, walks away. He writes some poems and walks around the Utah wilderness alone. Swarmed by flies and mosquitoes he comes upon a small waterfall and notes it is the first he has ever actually seen. He continues to wander and then realizes he is hopelessly lost. He continues to wander, stumbles across a dam and then a road, and finally finds a remote house. Lydia is waiting for him at the house and escorts him back to camp. Henry does not discuss the camping trip further.

Several days or weeks later Henry is back in Los Angeles and is preparing to depart for Houston to give another reading. Henry is falling-down drunk and stumbles across a bed frame, falls into the metal frame, and receives a severe wound to his leg. Instead of seeking medical attention, he walks around the apartment bleeding on everything and even ashes his cigarette into the wound. Eventually he seeks medical attention and then flies out to Houston. At the after-reading party, Henry meets Laura Stanley, a twenty-two-year-old woman. He describes her as the most-beautiful woman he has ever seen and routinely refers to her as Katherine Hepburn. Katherine accompanies Henry from the party to the place where he is staying, and he is overjoyed when she performs fellatio.

Henry returns to Los Angeles and Lydia picks him up at the airport. On the drive home, she starts talking about sex and Henry become irritated and argumentative. Lydia's driving is highly erratic and she drops Henry off at his apartment and drives away. Henry telephones Katherine and arranges a meeting, stating that he has broken up with Lydia and that she has moved to Phoenix. Later, some friends stop by Henry's apartment, including Joanna Dover, a very tall and very wealthy businesswoman. Joanna, an acquaintance of Katherine, purchases some of Henry's paintings, everyone drinks, and when Joanna and Henry are left alone, they climb into bed and have sex.

The next day Katherine calls to tell Henry when her plane will be landing. He confesses his one-night-stand with Joanna; Katherine is upset but ignores it. The next day Henry picks her up at the airport. While he waits for the plane to land, he eyes a woman in the airport and decides to approach her and offer her money in exchange for sex. He is prevented by the accidental intervention of another man. Katherine arrives and they return to Henry's apartment. Katherine puts on rubber gloves and scrubs the apartment, focusing on the bathroom. After Katherine cleans and Henry drinks, they have sex and Henry remarks on her sexual ability. In the morning Henry asks her if they can get married and she glibly brushes him off by noting "It's just *sex*, Hank, it's *just sex*!" (p.

100). Henry takes her to a boxing match where his automobile is stolen. The next day he takes her to the racetrack where all the old standbys try to pick her up. They return to the apartment and have sex even as Henry realizes that Katherine has summed up his life and found it tawdry, unappealing, and insufficient. Over the next few days Henry and Katherine spend time with Bobby and Valerie, make small talk, and sit around the apartment while Henry drinks and Katherine is bored. They have sex, then Henry drives her to the airport, and she flies home.

Chapters 30 through 40 Analysis

This segment of the novel nearly entirely closes the relationship between Henry and Lydia. His visit to Utah is a disaster and he realizes that he hates being in the country. Although obviously fairly settled—there are roads, houses, fences, and dams—Henry finds Vance Pastures to be an intolerable and incomprehensible wilderness. Aside from disliking the outdoors, Henry realizes that he hates being anywhere except Los Angeles. Besides his dislike, there is also a large amount of fear involved, because Henry does not understand his circumstances and cannot make an intelligible interpretation of events beyond his hometown. When he returns from Utah, his relationship with Lydia is irreparably damaged and effectively is over.

Henry then engages in sexual intercourse with two women—one young, beautiful, and inexperienced, the other older, imposing, and very experienced. Of the two women, Joanna Dover is the more-interesting character but Henry obviously focuses his attentions on the younger, sexier Laura Stanley. He refers to her as Katherine Hepburn, presumably because they look alike. In the novel, she is therefore referred to nearly exclusively as Katherine. Both of these women are attracted to Henry because of his notoriety and literary fame. After a brief fling, Joanna temporarily dismisses Henry. It takes the young and napve Katherine longer to realize that Henry has nothing substantive to offer. The chapter also continues to demonstrate that Henry's relationship with his neighbor Bobby is long-term and amicable.

Chapters 41 through 53

Chapters 41 through 53 Summary

The night after Katherine leaves Henry sadly sits in his apartment, drinking and trying to write. He receives a telephone call from a woman who wants to meet him. Arlene and Tammie, sisters, arrive within a few minutes. Arlene is thirty-two years old and Tammie is twenty-three years old. Arlene has long black hair; Tammie has a perfect body and long red hair. Both sisters are high on drugs and Tammie offers to sell sex to Henry for cash—he declines. After a few hours, they leave. A few days later Tammie returns for another visit. A few days after that Henry visits Tammie at her apartment where he learns she has a six-year-old daughter named Dancy. Henry and Tammie talk, drink, and take drugs. A few days later Tammie visits Henry. While she waits in his apartment, he runs out and purchases a new mattress. While they wait for the mattress delivery, they drink and take drugs. When the mattress is delivered, they have sex on it.

A few days later Lydia calls Henry from Phoenix where she has been living. She tells him about several men she has slept with and notes that she is pregnant and doesn't know who the father is. When Henry mentions Tammie, Lydia flies into a rage and screams at him. Lydia calls Henry the next day to argue with him again, but he hangs up the telephone. The next evening Lydia lurks about Henry's apartment until she catches him outside, then she destroys much of his personal property, hurls insults, and rampages around the apartment complex. Eventually the police arrive and haul her away, though Henry declines pressing charges. A few days later Tammie is evicted from her apartment; Henry helps her get an apartment in the complex where he lives. She moves in and then begins rather overt sexual flirtation with Bobby. For example, during one visit, she shoves her hand down his pants and grabs his genitalia. Tammie flirts in similar ways with other men who visit Henry. Several weeks go by while Henry drinks and Tammie uses drugs and begins, apparently, a sexual relationship with Bobby while Valerie is off at work. One evening Henry calls Joanna Dover and arranges to visit her. Without informing Tammie, Henry leaves to visit Joanna.

Chapters 41 through 53 Analysis

The chapters in this portion of the novel are very brief—and are often only a paragraph or two in length. Tammie is a remarkably vapid and singularly uninteresting character. Her entire focus is on taking drugs—usually prescription sedatives such as Quaaludes or speed. Tammie, a young and excitable redhead, also enjoys an insatiable sexual appetite and 'flirts' with men by yanking down their pants and fondling their genitals or attempting oral sex—in public. As she is twenty-three and has a six-year-old daughter, it follows that Tammie's sexual proclivities began at a young age.

Henry and Tammie's burgeoning relationship is briefly interrupted by Lydia's last violent outburst—she appears in Los Angeles, stalks Henry, and then rampages through his

apartment, destroying his meager belongings (notably, damaging his collected works of his own published poetry). Eventually the police haul her away and her relationship with Henry ends. Tammie appears entirely unconcerned. Whereas Henry apparently views Tammie as his personal property, she suffers from no such restrictions. Henry begins to realize that Tammie is having sex with Bobby and suspects that she might be seeing other men, too. He retaliates in kind, and flies off to have sex with someone else.

Chapters 54 through 57

Chapters 54 through 57 Summary

Joanna picks up Henry from the airport in Galveston, Texas. They return to her posh apartment and make small talk. They go out for food, return to the apartment, drink, talk, and then Henry passes out. In the morning, they have sex and use drugs and drink. In the evening, they take mescaline and Henry paints, gets frightened, and rages at Joanna for putatively sneaking up on him. After about a week Henry gets bored and returns to Los Angeles.

Henry meets Tammie at his apartment and she seems nearly unaware that he has been gone—she is high on drugs and disoriented. Henry announces he is shortly traveling to New York City to perform a reading and Tammie begs to accompany him. When Henry's editor agrees to pay for Tammie's expenses, Henry announces that she can accompany him to New York City. An excited Tammie and a dubious Henry then have sex to celebrate their impending trip.

Chapters 54 through 57 Analysis

This brief segment stands in the middle of Henry's relationship with an increasingly erratic and depraved Tammie. Henry again visits Joanna and they have sexual adventures. Joanna is incredibly wealthy and very well connected. She appears to view Henry more as a professional asset than a person and therefore can overlook his less than pleasant demeanor. The most interesting aspect of the chapters involves Henry's use of mescaline and his resultant paranoia. In any event, Joanna is entirely irrelevant to the narrative outside of her immediate presentation.

Chapters 58 through 64

Chapters 58 through 64 Summary

Henry and Tammie prepare to travel to New York City. Henry stops at Tammie's apartment to pick her up and discovers that Dancy is still at the apartment—Tammie plans to drop her child off at her mother's house. Dancy runs around having a minor tantrum and Henry gets irritated. Tammie is in no apparent rush and loading the car takes a considerable amount of time. At Tammie's mother's place, the scene is repeated; while Henry fumes and frets about missing the flight, Tammie is unconcerned and distracted. At the airport, Tammie insists on further dawdling and Henry, nearly apoplectic, dashes onto the plane ahead of Tammie just as the door closes. On the flight, Tammie spends an inordinate amount of time putting on makeup and trying various facial poses into her pocket mirror. When she goes to sleep an older woman scolds Henry for being an obvious dirty old man; he finds the rebuke amusing. At the end of the flight, Henry has difficulty awakening a drugged Tammie. They catch a ride to the Chelsea hotel and, later, go on to the reading at a church.

Just before the reading, Henry vomits several times, then drinks. Tammie can't decide how to wear her hair for the reading and it is thus delayed. The reading is uneventful; Henry and Tammie return to the hotel and drink. In the morning, Tammie finds an old prescription and determines to have it filled. Henry and Tammie wander around New York City unsuccessfully looking for a pharmacy. Tammie keeps stopping and staring at inconsequential things like a magazine cover or a discarded piece of furniture. Henry gets irritated and starts to yell at her. He then leaves her, returns to the hotel, and drinks. She arrives some time later, stoned but sans prescription, and passes out. Henry throws Tammie on the bed, and sexually molests her while she feebly and unsuccessfully resists.

Chapters 58 through 64 Analysis

Henry and Tammie visit New York City for a reading. Most of the action is amusing but inconsequential and focuses on Henry's attempt to get to the airport in time. He is nearly foiled by Tammie's lollygagging and total unconcern. When they finally board the plane in the final few seconds, Tammie's laconic remark that they made it after all is amusing. On the plane, Tammie puts on makeup and fusses with her face; her show is obviously sexual, and Henry gets an erection and notices another male passenger surreptitiously masturbating while watching Tammie's posturing. In addition, while on the plane, Henry receives a rare rebuke from a fellow passenger—an older woman who basically accuses him of being a dirty old child molester, which is evident. The plot moves forward, but little through this section—Tammie is increasingly portrayed as a burned-out drug abuser, with little mental function but with a robust libido. By now, however, it is obvious that Tammie is a central figure in a lengthy segment of the novel; unfortunately, she is a singularly uninteresting character and does little to advance the narrative.

Chapters 65 through 73

Chapters 65 through 73 Summary

Henry and Tammie return to Los Angeles and Henry performs a reading at a local club. The club owner tells Henry a rather long story about breaking up with a woman who turns out to be really crazy and vindictive. Henry responds by saying it sounds like one of his own old girlfriends. Before the reading, Tammie gets stumbling drunk and Henry drinks a copious amount. The opening act is booed from the stage and then Tammie insists on introducing Henry and, surprisingly, does a creditable job. Henry reads and drinks, then goes to the back office to drink some more, use some drugs, and receive his check. Tammie flies into a rage when she discovers the check is not for the amount promised and Henry basically drags her out of the club. They return home and Tammie flees into her own apartment and locks the door.

Several days or weeks go by and Henry gets very sick. Tammie and Henry spend much time in Henry's apartment and Tammie's brother and some of his friends stop by. Henry gets irritated at Tammie's brother and so she takes them all upstairs to her apartment. Henry gets suspicious and investigates without seeing anything. The next morning Tammie comes by, and Henry viciously accuses her of infidelity, after which they drink together. The days go by, full of drinking, drugs, and sex. One night Tammie and Dancy mock Henry by calling him names. Henry begins to realize that Tammie is sleeping around with many men, including some of her brother's friends as well as Bobby. Then Tammie is evicted. She wants to call the apartment owner and plead her case but Henry doesn't have the telephone number. Tammie walks around the complex knocking on doors, offering to trade fellatio for the owner's telephone number—she is unsuccessful. Tammie moves away to her mother's house, abandoning all her belongings. Henry packs them up into boxes and stacks them in his apartment.

Meanwhile, a woman named Mercedes begins to visit Henry. On her first visit they drink, talk, and then have sex. Henry thinks Mercedes is average in looks but enjoys her sexual prowess—even so, he has difficulty climaxing because he's too drunk and she's too aggressive. The sexual intercourse appears fairly violent and nearly akin to a rape, though Mercedes does not definitively resist. In the morning, Mercedes does not remember having had sex, which astounds Henry.

Henry visits Tammie at her mother's house and learns that she is now regularly sleeping with Bobby. Henry gets mad, shouts, leaves, and then makes repetitive trips between his apartment and Tammie's mother's house to shuttle all of Tammie's belongings. Henry gets a large chair stuck in his car and, too drunk to resolve the situation immediately, abandons the vehicle and passes out. A few days later, he completes the move, has an apparently final conversation with Tammie, and returns to his apartment.

Mercedes continues to visit but announces that she has just married a man named Little Jack, and thus she can drink and talk with Henry but not have sex. She visits him and

they drink and talk, then use drugs until Mercedes is nearly passing out. Henry insists she strip and get in bed, which she does while feebly exclaiming that they must not have sex because she fears getting pregnant. Henry rolls her over, pins her down, and anally rapes her. She screams and he tells her to shut up and further abuses her, although she remains until the morning.

A week later Mercedes again visits Henry. She begins the conversation by telling him that further anal sex is entirely unacceptable. They drink and talk and then Mercedes tells Henry she wants to watch him masturbate. He complies until she joins in, masturbating him nearly to climax and performing fellatio. She stops short of bringing him to climax, however, and then attempts to leave. Frustrated, Henry forces her back on the bed and has sexual intercourse with her, despite her feeble resistance.

Chapters 65 through 73 Analysis

These chapters narrate the end of Henry's relationship with Tammie. Their final break-up is remarkably complex and unfortunately not particularly interesting. It is strange that Tammie exhibits no interest in recovering her things; nevertheless, the usually selfish and disconnected Henry goes to great length and effort to salvage Tammie's things and return them to her. What for most people would be a simple exercise in moving is for Henry, the enraged alcoholic, nearly insurmountable, and the entire process takes him several days and partially ruins his automobile. In the end, a frustrated Henry leaves Tammie not exactly knowing if she is with Bobby or one of her brother's friends or—most likely—both. That Henry and Bobby's relationship endures beyond Tammie indicates its fundamental strength.

Henry recuperates from Tammie's abandonment by hard drinking, after which Mercedes appears on the scene. She is an interesting and pathetic character who apparently lacks any sense of self-worth. She visits Henry on three occasions, each one consisting of heavy drinking, smoking, drug use, and a sexual encounter that is best characterized as rape. On the first occasion, Mercedes gets drunk and appears slightly disoriented and slightly resistive. An agitated Henry forces her onto the bed and vaginally rapes her. On the second occasion, Mercedes has recently married and declines to have sex, stating a desire to remain faithful and a fear of pregnancy. She nevertheless gets drunk and becomes slightly disoriented. Again, an agitated Henry forces her onto the bed and anally rapes her in what is probably the most disturbing scene in the novel. On the third occasion, Mercedes remonstrates with Henry for his previous behavior but still gets drunk. She then asks him to perform a sexual show for her by masturbating in her face. Henry complies and then Mercedes tentatively participates by fondling his genitals and performing brief fellatio. An aroused and agitated Henry then forces her onto the bed and once again vaginally rapes her. At this point, even the downtrodden Mercedes has had enough, and declines to visit Henry again. The relationship is disturbing and moves Henry's character into a very unsympathetic location within the novel's construction. Mercedes contrasts well with Cecelia, a character who appears later in the novel, because they are two of the only women who—at least ostensibly—decline Henry's sexual advances; Mercedes' refusal, however, is ineffectual.

Chapters 74 through 82

Chapters 74 through 82 Summary

Henry travels to Illinois to perform a reading. He stays with another writer, William Keesing. Henry is impressed by Keesing's literary output and his accomplishments. Keesing, however, is a drug addict and Cecelia, his wife, sickened by his constant drug use, has divorced him. Even so, they are on good terms and occasionally spend the night together. Henry finds Cecelia solid, sturdy, and sexually attractive. The reading is subdued but completed. In the morning, Henry notes that Keesing is ill. The next evening Henry gives another reading, which is not well received. The next morning Keesing is again ill.

Henry returns to Los Angeles and about two weeks later receives a late-night telephone call from Cecelia—she tells him that Keesing has died. Over the next few days, Henry telephones Cecelia to inquire after her emotional state. About a month later, Henry is asked to write the foreword for a forthcoming edition of Keesing's poetry. He accepts, and a few days later Cecelia is in town to meet with the editors of the book. She stays at Henry's apartment. Henry learns that Cecelia is a vegetarian and finds wonder and fascination with the world. He tries to get her drunk and ogles her as they talk. They proceed to bed but Henry is too drunk and passes out; it is unclear if Cecelia is disappointed.

After a few days, Henry and Cecelia accompany Bobby and Valerie on a vacation to Manhattan Beach. The sit and smoke, drink, and talk. Cecelia goes for walks while Henry gets agitated. His periods of being alone are filled with strange introspection and he concludes that all of life is a diversion—drinking, gambling, and copulating are just his way of passing confused time. When Cecelia returns, she allows Henry to kiss her but then flatly states that she has no desire for sex. Henry is flabbergasted and searches out Bobby and Valerie for consolation. They go swimming in the hotel's pool. Cecelia arises very early in the morning and goes to watch the sunrise. Henry drinks and goes back to sleep. Later in the day, Henry starts to flirt with a girl in a bar, but Cecelia interrupts. Later that night the four friends sit, drink, and smoke and Henry realizes that Cecelia finds him repulsive. After a few hours, Cecelia demands that Bobby drive her to the airport—she has had enough and she is moving on. On the drive to the airport, Henry sits in the back seat and fondles Cecelia's knee while she cringes away from him in revulsion.

Chapters 74 through 82 Analysis

Henry finds himself once again without a girlfriend. He performs a reading with a nominal friend who subsequently dies, presumably from a drug overdose. The friend's wife, Cecelia, then begins a tentative friendship with Henry. Henry mistakes Cecelia's overture of friendship as an offer of sexual experience, however, and attempts to force

himself upon her. Cecelia is obviously somewhat napve and spends several days in Henry's company. Throughout the period, he becomes more offensive and abusive and she retreats from him. At the end of their brief relationship, she has come to view him as repulsive and disgusting. Cecelia is thus an entirely unique character within the novel because she not only refuses Henry's sexual advances but also immediately realizes that he has nothing positive or constructive to offer. She views him as an entirely regrettable human being and wants nothing to do with him. Even so, she is not particularly cautious around Henry and during the first few days of their friendship she does sleep in the same bed as Henry without wearing clothing and does allow him to fondle and kiss her—it is strange indeed that Henry does not simply rape her. Fortunately for Cecelia, her rejection causes Henry to drink even more heavily than usual and his confused semi-consciousness probably saves her from being brutally assaulted.

Chapter 83 through 85

Chapter 83 through 85 Summary

Henry gives a reading north of Los Angeles. He stays in a hotel in a room next door to William Burroughs. Some common acquaintances offer to introduce Henry to Burroughs but Henry declines. Burroughs, the king of beat literature, sits in his room and stares vacantly about. Henry sneaks in a look at the imposing hero of underground media and Burroughs looks right through him.

A few days go by. Henry has been corresponding with a woman named Liza Weston who lives in San Francisco. Liza, who runs a dance studio, is traveling to Los Angeles to buy some costumes. She arranges to stay at Henry's apartment. She arrives and Henry finds her attractive, particularly because she wears a full-length dress. They sit on the couch and have a remarkably lengthy and interesting discussion while drinking and kissing. That night Liza sleeps on blankets in the front room. She leaves early in the morning to purchase her costumes after having a brief conversation with Henry, in which she teasingly but accurately describes him as "the big, tough, drinking, woman-fucker" (p. 189). Henry goes back to sleep until after noon, then gets up and waits for Liza. She soon returns and performs a strange sort of fashion show, changing into each of the costumes in the bathroom and then parading before Henry. After the show, he grabs her. They have rough sex and then go out for dinner.

They drink a lot and then Liza starts to act cautious around Henry. Nevertheless, they continue to have sex and oral sex, and when Liza returns to San Francisco Henry accompanies her. Henry begins to find her idiosyncrasies annoying and she criticizes him in minor ways. That night they again have sex but it becomes very rough and Henry describes it as a savage rape. The next day Liza takes Henry to her dance studio. Several days pass in a similar way and then Henry returns to Los Angeles. A month later, Liza again visits him. He takes her to bars, a few movies, boxing matches, and the racetrack. At the end of this time, Liza has become despondent and disillusioned and asks Henry to drive her to a friend's house where she spends the last few days of her vacation.

Chapter 83 through 85 Analysis

These few chapters are atypically long and contain easily the best dialogue in the entire novel. Liza is an interesting and insightful woman, though it takes her a surprisingly long time to consciously realize that Henry is simply a drunken man who likes to abuse women. The narrative construction during this segment is a distinct departure from the previous sections even though the plot events are fairly similar in tone. Although Henry does not realize it, Liza in some ways closes the narrative development and is the culmination of the novel. Henry has moved from a serious and long-term relationship with Lydia through what amounts to a series of casual affairs where he abuses women.

Although Dee Dee, Katherine, and Tammie have been longer affairs, they are essentially correctly viewed as entirely sexual and ephemeral in nature. Interspersed with his slightly longer relationships, Henry has enjoyed remarkable success in having multiple sexual encounters with a variety of younger partners. As the novel moves into its concluding phase, this does not change; thus, Liza can be viewed as the end-point of any minimal plot development that occurs in the novel.

Liza is in many ways a symbolic character. She is professionally and gainfully employed and yet her time is largely her own. She is deeply immersed in the arts but is not enmeshed in literature. She is older, wiser, and experienced, and yet is also sexually attractive and active. She has a balanced blend of self-assurance and timid self-doubt. She literally parades around Henry's apartment as many women, demonstrating her various costumes. Finally, her sexual experiences with Henry run the gamut from casual sex through rape, including vaginal and oral penetration. This many-faceted woman is also very insightful and correctly sums up Henry's personality when she refers to him as an alcoholic woman-fucker. Lisa, then, can be viewed as the apex of Henry's character development, the culmination of the novel's plot development, and thus a minor turning point in the narrative. Although Henry continues briefly to engage in meaningless sexual escapades with any willing partner, he does not develop further as a character, outside of suffering one minor crisis of conscience.

Chapters 86 through 90

Chapters 86 through 90 Summary

One day, two young German girls stop by Henry's apartment. They introduce themselves as Hilda and Gertrude. Hilda is nineteen and thin; Gertrude is twenty-two and heavy. They both speak English and have both read Henry's poetry in German translation. They stay with Henry for a few days of hard drinking and group sex. On one of the days, Henry receives a mail delivery from a postal employee who looks into the filthy apartment, sees two young nearly naked girls, and is stunned at Henry's lifestyle. The girls then meet a man who offers to pay them a lot of money, probably a pornographic film producer, and they leave Henry's apartment.

A few days later Henry gives a successful reading at a local club. Afterwards he meets three women—Cassie, Debra, and Sara. Cassie is tall with exceptionally long blonde hair and a very thin, supple body. Debra is in her mid thirties, a Jewish woman with large brown eyes and a large mouth liberally smeared with lipstick. Sara is thirty-two and Henry describes her as a "classy wench" (p. 201), with long and straight red-blonde hair. Debra and Sara write Henry little notes with their telephone numbers and he goes home with Cassie. Henry and Cassie have sexual intercourse but Henry is too drunk to perform even though Cassie has a Playboy-style body. A few days later Cassie invites Henry to visit her again. He arrives and they drink and make small talk. Cassie works in the music industry and tells Henry that Dee Dee Bronson had traveled to Mexico and hooked up with a bullfighter who had later beat her up and stolen all her cash. After that, Dee Dee had been involved in an automobile accident. Henry and Cassie then have sex again.

A few days later Henry finds Debra's note, calls her, and visits her house in Playa del Rey. Contrary to expectation, he finds the locale charming and clean. Debra's house is over-decorated and cluttered and she has close platonic relationships with several gay men who are her neighbors. Debra is planning a Thanksgiving gala and invites Henry, who accepts. Debra dresses in a very old-fashioned style and behaves in a proper way; she runs a court transcription service and employs Tessie, a young typist. After a few hours of drinking, Debra and Henry have sexual intercourse. While having sex, Henry thinks of all the women he has had sex with and realizes that his life's fantasies are recently coming true thanks to poetry.

The next day, Debra and Henry have breakfast and make small talk. Debra insists that Henry brush his teeth and take a shower. Then Debra's assistant Tessie comes over and the three of them go shopping for antiques. Henry quickly becomes bored and returns to the car where he sits and drinks. Debra purchases a table and then the three characters return to Debra's apartment. Debra gets one of her gay male friends to go with her and pick up the table; while they are gone, Henry gropes Tessie who rebuffs him. Then, apparently, she rethinks the situation and she and Henry quickly have sex on Debra's bed. Henry finishes just as Debra pulls into the driveway, and Tessie tells him

she will be fired if Debra discovers their adventure. Henry then goes through an elaborate series of ruses to ensure that Debra does not discover his infidelity. That evening Debra and Henry try to have sex, but he is exhausted and falls asleep.

Chapters 86 through 90 Analysis

The section begins with Henry having sex with two young women at the same time. They simply drop by his apartment and have group sex with him, clearly the culmination of the male-fantasy aspect of the novel. After satisfying Henry's lust, they depart without further complication. Henry then meets three women at a reading and all of them more-or-less throw themselves at him. Obviously, he first selects the youngest and most attractive of the trio, but banks the other two women for later. Interestingly enough, the other two women will become slightly significant in his life—one will precipitate his moment of crisis and the other will ostensibly help him pick up the pieces and move forward to what Henry considers a more honest approach to life.

Henry treats Debra like he treats any woman—he has sex with her and then largely dismisses her. He even finds her distasteful and cheats on her with her employee on her own bed. The strange aspect of the illicit encounter, however, is that Henry suddenly seems oddly concerned that Debra will discover his infidelity. He carefully and quietly washes his penis; later he deliberately musses up the bedspread to cover up any remaining traces; and finally, he affects nonchalance around Tessie, his complicit sexual partner. This is all very un-Henry-like and marks the first significant character development presented in the novel, though it is transient behavior. Henry's relationship with Debra will continue for a few more days even as he pursues other relationships. The casual invitation to Thanksgiving that Henry accepts from Debra will come to have rather serious narrative repercussions.

Chapters 91 through 93

Chapters 91 through 93 Summary

Henry telephones Sara, the last of the three women he met at his most-recent reading. Sara invites him to visit her at her health-food cafy, named the Drop On Inn. Henry drives around and finds the cafy, but stops at a nearby bar to have a few drinks. He enters the cafy at closing time and Sara makes him a sandwich and instructs him to help her close up. They then return to her apartment and drink. Sara tells Henry that she is a spiritual adherent to Drayer Baba, a recently deceased mystic who claimed to be God. A huge number of acquaintances visit Sara's apartment and Henry feels ill at ease. After all the guests leave, Henry and Sara kiss and then fondle each other. Sara, subservient to the teachings of Drayer Baba, will not engage in pre-marital sexual intercourse. Instead, she rubs Henry's penis against her clitoris until he is too raw to continue. Henry meanwhile mentally compares Sara to Lydia Vance. Sara incidentally invites Henry to spend Thanksgiving with her—he accepts and then promptly forgets.

In the morning, a frantic Debra telephones around until she finds Henry at Sara's house. Debra insists that Henry immediately return. Instead, he and Sara go to a restaurant for lunch and Henry once again mentally compares Sara to Lydia. After eating, Henry returns to Debra's apartment. Over the next several days, he contemplates relationships with an unusual amount of consideration and depth, and concludes that Sara is special. On November 11, Veteran's Day and Sara's birthday, Henry visits Sara and takes her an expensive gift of health foods. Sara appreciates the gift but turns the stereo up very loud. She sends Henry off on some shopping errands. When he returns, the stereo is still at full volume, which irritates Henry. He gets very angry and verbally abuses Sara for having the stereo so loud, and then storms out. She follows him, throwing things at him until he drives away.

Henry then goes to Vancouver to perform a reading, which goes well. After the reading, Henry flirts with Iris Duarte, a beautiful young woman. She returns to the hotel with him and they have sexual intercourse, but Henry is too drunk to perform. In the morning, Henry returns to the airport and flies home. A few days later Iris telephones Henry and tells him she is coming to Los Angeles for Thanksgiving—Henry accepts her offer. That night Henry eats with Debra and she mentions how excited she is for her big Thanksgiving party. The next day Henry suffers a giant conflict of faith and values—he wanders around Debra's apartment while she is at work and frets about what he should do. Although he has already made up his mind to spend Thanksgiving with Iris, he worries about how Debra will react. He takes the unprecedented step of seeking advice and telephones Sara, tells her the salient details, and asks for advice, which she sensibly refuses to give. Henry sits on the bed thinking and weeping; he is disgusted with his own actions of the past several years and wonders why he has been acting the way he has. He wanders around the streets thinking, pondering, and introspecting. He attempts to telephone Debra to tell her the truth—that he won't be there for Thanksgiving. Tessie tells Henry that Debra is out for the day at the courts and will

return directly home from the court. Henry sits, drinks, and frets. When Debra finally arrives, a drunken Henry weeps, refers to himself as "a GIANT HUNK OF SHIT!" (p. 241), and informs Debra that he will not be there for her on Thanksgiving before he runs away from her house.

Chapters 91 through 93 Analysis

Henry's random shenanigans continue as he juggles his sexual relationship with Debra, attempts to have sex with Sara, and picks up casual sex after a reading in Vancouver, Canada. Henry then makes triple plans for Thanksgiving—he accepts a serious invitation to Debra's important Thanksgiving party, accepts a casual invitation to Sara's low-key Thanksgiving dinner, and accepts a visit from Iris for a sex-laden Thanksgiving evening. Then Henry begins to feel guilty about his behavior. Little to no narrative motivation is provided for Henry's sudden change, though it has been lightly foreshadowed in earlier chapters. Henry spends one day of crisis, in emotional conflict over how to tell Debra that he will not be with her on Thanksgiving.

The novel's dramatic structure, such as it is, is thus nearly complete. The exposition of the plot during the early chapters establishes Henry as an alcoholic and uninhibited man who takes every opportunity presented to have sex without regard to consequence. The novel's exciting force is vaguely established as Henry's desire to get to know women through intimate sexual acts, though this thematic element is only partially and insufficiently developed. This leads to conflict when Henry finally comes to realize (or perhaps comes to admit) that his 'research through intercourse' is exceptionally damaging to many of the women he putatively loves. The turning point quickly follows when Henry must chose between having sex with a young attractive woman and keeping his verbal pledge to attend a gathering of friends; itself symbolic of being faithful to a woman he is already with. Henry's hesitating failure to do the morally valid thing precipitates his own mental conflict and emotional crisis—what would usually be interpreted as the novel's central catastrophe save that the character of Henry is so completely unsympathetic. The remainder of the novel treats Henry's ever-ponderous mental calculus and his slow resolution to become more truthful in his relationships with women. Whereas most individuals might conclude that infidelity is wrong, Henry simply concludes that hiding infidelity is wrong.

Chapters 94 through 97

Chapters 94 through 97 Summary

Henry picks up Iris from the airport. While he waits, he reads a letter from a twenty-two-year-old woman named Tanya. In the letter, Tanya says she wants to visit Henry and have sex with him—she encloses a photograph of her genitalia and describes herself as a 'cute bitch'. Henry drives Iris back to his apartment. Valerie calls Henry and asks to come up, apparently interested in having lesbian sex with Iris; Henry declines. That night Henry and Iris have sex. The next day is Thanksgiving and Iris cooks a big turkey. Bobby and Valerie visit and talk to Iris while Henry thinks about Tanya. The next day Iris and Valerie go shopping and Henry writes a vapid letter to Tanya. When Iris returns, Henry pins her down and has fairly violent sex with her, slapping her face and holding her down. At any rate, he is surprised when she can stand up and walk to the bathroom. After several more days of drinking and sex, Henry takes Iris to the airport. On the way, he rationalizes about having sex with her, unconvincingly concluding that there must have been some real connection between them. Iris is reserved and fairly judgmental, and then she boards her plane and flies home.

On the way home from the airport Henry stops to run an errand and is propositioned by a young, attractive, black woman. He makes a feeble excuse of having a prior engagement and drives off. After picking up alcohol and cigarettes, Henry drives around until he spots another black prostitute. He calls to her and they fix on twenty dollars for oral sex. He drives her to her apartment and follows her inside. Then Henry becomes very suspicious and searches the apartment, figuring she has someone waiting to beat him up. He discovers nothing and then demands oral sex—she demands payment first. Henry becomes increasingly paranoid and agitated and eventually runs away from the apartment without receiving oral sex or paying her anything. That night Henry sits in his apartment and drinks until Bobby invites him to visit. At Bobby's apartment, Henry and Bobby drink while Valerie puts on a lingerie fashion show. After a while Valerie and Bobby start to have sex while Henry watches—then Henry joins in and has sex with Valerie for a few minutes before Bobby asks him to leave.

A few days later Henry receives a letter from a woman named Valencia who wants to meet him to have sex. Henry calls her and they meet at a bar. Henry immediately finds her unlikable and considers her fat and ugly. Nevertheless, they proceed to his apartment and have mechanical and comical sex; she refuses to actively participate and Henry spends some time 'sloshing around' her giant breasts. Then he drives her home and vomits in her bathroom.

Chapters 94 through 97 Analysis

Instead of altering his behavior subsequent to his crisis of conscience—as might be expected in the typical novel—Henry releases himself from Debra's encumbrance and

continues along with his lifestyle of drinking and casual sex. He picks up Iris for a week of sex and then sends her home again. While she visits him, he fantasizes about another woman with who he has been corresponding. On the way home from the airport he picks up a prostitute but then has an odd attack of paranoia and runs away from her without any actual contact. This scene is notable as it involves Henry in close proximity to a woman of color, nearly the only time this happens in the novel—and in the event he is certain that she is going to double-cross him, have him beat up, and rob him of his meager cash; this is certainly a blatantly distasteful narrative statement regarding race. The few subsequent encounters with women of color affirm Henry's racism.

Henry then goes home and in a rather bizarre scene plays a minor role-reversal on Bobby. Usually Henry's women sneak off to have sex with Bobby, but in this instance Bobby and Valerie invite Henry down to have drink and then to have sex. After the entire novel, Henry finally has sexual intercourse with Valerie, the most-constant but minor female character in the novel. He finds her sexual ability to be average, at best, and also notes that Bobby's oral sex technique is pedestrian. Henry begins to pleasure Valerie and then has sexual intercourse with her while Bobby gamely participates and then retreats to the bathroom to watch from a distance. After a few moments of observation, Bobby insists that Henry leave.

Henry then receives a letter from a woman and subsequently meets her in a bar; their arrangements are clearly focused on having sex that evening. Henry unfortunately finds her unlikable, fat, and ugly—but at least very busty. But she has Henry committed, and in another humorous scene of role-reversal Henry takes home the ugly fat middle-aged white woman and attempts to pleasure her without success. He then drives her home and vomits in her bathroom. One can only wonder what Valencia's impression of Henry could be. It is obvious that Henry's luck has temporarily changed. He has moved through a series of very desirable women to a moment of clarity and mental crisis; he has continued on through the wonderfully sexual Iris, and then he has attempted to rationalize his behavior in light of his newfound mental confusion. The end result is that he runs in paranoid fear from a prostitute, angers his friend by besting his sexual performance in a bizarre two-man-one-woman sex encounter, and finally having sex with an unattractive fat middle-aged woman. One would assume that the novel's narrative development would build meaningfully on these changes, but such is not the case.

Chapters 98 through 104

Chapters 98 through 104 Summary

Henry and Sara continue to develop their relationship, meeting every few days to make out and pet, but Sara will not allow penetration. Several days after Thanksgiving Sara visits Henry's apartment. She performs home maintenance and cooks a large meal. Afterwards, they look unsuccessfully for a Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve Sara and Henry talk in his apartment until a woman whom Henry describes as a 'sex symbol' stops by. Her name is Edie and she is looking for Bobby—Henry is unable to peel his eyes away from Edie's gigantic breasts covered in tight fabric, and expects that at any moment one of both of them will pop out of Edie's clothing. Edie delivers a vapid and prolonged monologue about employment that is fairly incoherent and then leaves. Sara and Henry then argue. Later Sara prepares a huge Christmas feast that is interrupted by a series of telephone calls. Henry receives festive holiday calls from Debra, Cassie, Iris, and an unnamed male fan at whom Henry curses. Then Sara and Henry get into a fight. The next day Sara leaves and Tammie stops by and wishes Henry well, and then eats much of the refrigerated Christmas dinner that Sara had prepared. The next day Sara returns and converts the remainder of the dinner into soup. The next day Tammie again visits and eats all of the soup. On New Year's Eve, Sara and Henry meet at Henry's apartment and make small talk. A few friends with a guitar stop by and a quiet evening is passed. Henry and the guitarist speculate about art and literature but the discussion is uninteresting. That night Sara and Henry get into bed and begin their usual nude wrestling when Sara finally gives in and allows sexual intercourse. After, she wishes Henry a happy new year.

A few days later Tanya calls and makes plans to visit Henry and have sex with him. Henry ponders the moral course and finally calls Sara and informs her that he plans on having sex with Tanya. Sara is upset but tells Henry to contact her once Tanya has gone. Henry goes to the airport to pick up Tanya. While he waits for the plane to land, a black female prostitute propositions him. Tanya arrives—she weights only ninety pounds and appears to be eighteen years old, though she claims to be fully twenty-three. Henry and Tanya get drinks in the airport bar where the black prostitute insults Tanya, who responds by threatening violence; Tanya refers to the woman as a 'groid' and explains that it is a pejorative: "A groid is a black" (p. 280). They return to Henry's place, continue to drink, and then kiss. Henry compares themselves to an elephant and a church-mouse. Tanya hikes up her skirt and reveals a lack of underwear; she puts on a minor pornographic show and then strips down and they have sex. Henry considers the intercourse to be child rape but, nevertheless, he pursues it with gusto.

Henry is dismayed to learn that the hard-drinking and foul-mouthed Tanya wakes with the dawn. She wakes him up long enough to have sex and put on a sort of perverse sex act and then he goes back to sleep while she spends time alone. One day Henry takes Tanya to the track and they bet on the horses. He teaches her his betting system. At the track, Henry meets an old acquaintance from work but can't remember his name. Back

at the apartment, Henry muses about Tanya's life as they have sex. He finds Tanya's oral sex technique boring and resorts to fantasies of group sex and torture to reach climax. They drink, listen to music, have sex, and then Henry drives Tanya back to the airport and they leave. He returns home and telephones Sara. Sara expresses her injury and then agrees to resume the relationship-Henry haltingly insinuates that his days of carousing are over. Henry then goes out and buys some wine. At the store, he picks up a young Mexican female prostitute and they agree to exchange twenty dollars for oral sex. They return to Henry's apartment but he is unable to achieve an erection and blames the prostitute, vituperating her ability. He finally tells her to stop, pays her, and drives her to a street corner. When he returns home, he again telephones Sara and says that he will shortly be coming over. After he hangs up, the telephone rings and a woman named Rochelle announces herself as a nineteen-year-old cute chick who wants to come over and have sex. Henry says no and hangs up the telephone, then returns to hard drinking.

Chapters 98 through 104 Analysis

The novel's resolution occurs in the final chapters; Henry putatively finally settles on Sara for a permanent relationship. The decision, however, has relatively nothing to do with Henry's capacity for change—instead it is nearly entirely based upon Sara's apparent ability to absorb a gigantic amount of emotional abuse without shirking. First, Henry allows Sara to come over and clean and cook as well as perform some home improvement projects such as building a new bed. Then he allows his ex-girlfriend Tammie to eat the food that Sara has prepared—not once, but twice. Then he dismisses Sara to pursue a sexual adventure with a woman so young that even the perverse Henry describes their union as child rape—on the bed that Sara built. Then he hires a prostitute to perform oral sex but cannot achieve an erection. Then, finally, he tells one woman that he would not like to meet her as if this is a notable change brought about by some type of character change. Henry then returns to Sara who, presumably, timidly waits to forgive his various indiscretions.

The chapters dealing with Tanya add another layer of destructive commentary about gender to a narrative already rich with negative ideas. Tanya claims to be twenty-three (she appears to be younger) and Henry is nearing sixty; he weighs 225 pounds, she weighs 90. He has sex with her without compunction and even as they have sex, his thoughts dwell on child rape. Henry absolves himself by noting her perversity and her obvious enjoyment of sex, concluding that he the rapist has in fact been raped. These mental gymnastics notwithstanding, Henry's behavior throughout the novel has never been more repulsive than his fantasies of torture and group rape while Tanya performs oral sex.

If the novel can be said to have any development at all, it is in the mental change in attitude that Henry takes toward infidelity. That is, at first he finds it normal and unremarkable—he engages in infidelity and pursues it without contemplating what effects it might have. Then, with Debra, he begins to see that his actions may perhaps hurt others. Instead of worrying about that, however, his moment of clarity comes when

he determines to announce simply and deliberately his intention to pursue infidelity and believes, apparently, that he is thereby resolved of any blame. In other words, Henry telephones Sara to inform her that he will shortly be pursuing an extra-relationship affair.

The final chapters also present race in a very negative and destructive way. The prostitute at the airport is manipulative, rude, and blatant—and also is black. Like every other black woman presented in the novel, she is a hardened prostitute. Throughout the novel, Henry comments on his sexual arousal by prostitutes—and yet he finds the several black prostitutes that he meets to be unattractive. The final prostitute in the novel is the young Mexican woman with whom Henry does attempt sex. Yet, even this woman is unable to arouse him sexually, and as she performs fellatio he cannot achieve an erection; needless to say, Henry blames the woman.

Characters

Miriam Aarons

Miriam Aarons, a twenty-eight-year old stage actress who stars in musical comedies, is part of Mary's social circle. Early in the play Miriam is having an affair with Howard Fowler, Sylvia's husband. While in Reno, Sylvia learns that Miriam is the woman for whom Howard has divorced her and that he plans to marry Miriam after the divorce. Upon hearing this, Sylvia physically attacks Miriam, and the two women engage in a vicious hair-pulling fight. After Miriam marries Howard, she is referred to as the second Mrs. Fowler. Toward the very end of the play, Miriam helps and encourages Mary to trick Crystal Allen into admitting that she is cheating on Stephen.

Crystal Allen

With Crystal Allen, Luce portrays a working-class woman who is able to improve her socioeconomic status through being the mistress, then wife, of a wealthy man. Crystal is a young shop-girl who is having an affair with Stephen Haines, the husband of Mary Haines. Crystal first met Stephen while working at the perfume counter of Saks Fifth Avenue. As the play opens, Crystal has been living for several months as Stephen's mistress in a fancy apartment in the Hotel Waverly.

Crystal is described by one character as a "terrible man-trap." She first appears in the play at a women's clothing store, where she is trying on clothes to be paid for by Stephen. When Mary confronts Crystal in the dressing room of the store, Crystal is completely unapologetic about being Stephen's mistress. She tells Mary that Stephen plans to get divorced and marry her. Crystal thus succeeds in humiliating Mary.

After Crystal is married to Stephen, she complains that he is no fun to be with, because he feels guilty and regretful about having lost Mary. Crystal is unfaithful to Stephen and has an affair with Buck Winston. After Little Mary overhears Crystal talking "lovey-dovey" on the telephone to Buck, she tells her mother about what she has overheard. Mary is thus able to sabotage Crystal's marriage to Stephen by forcing her to confess to the affair with Buck.

Nancy Blake

Nancy Blake, aged thirty-five, is the only woman in Mary's social circle who has never been married. Nancy is a financially independent woman who supports herself as a novelist, although her novels are not particularly popular. Because she's never been married and does not seem to be trying to find a husband, she is above all of the in-fighting that takes place between the other women over competition for husbands.

Peggy Day

Peggy (Mrs. John Day), age twenty-five, is the youngest member of Mary's social circle. Peggy is a more sympathetic character than most of Mary's friends. Whereas the other women have a callous attitude toward each others' marital troubles, Peggy is genuinely sympathetic regarding the crises in her friends' marriages. When she learns that Mary's marital problems have been confided to a gossip columnist, she is genuinely upset. Likewise, Peggy cries when she learns that Sylvia's husband has kicked her out and wants a divorce.

Later, Peggy tells her friends that she and her husband are getting divorced. While in Reno processing her divorce, Peggy learns that she is pregnant by her husband. Her friends convince her to call John and reconcile with him, which she does. Peggy then packs to return to New York and reunite with her husband.

The Countess De Lage

The Countess de Lage, a wealthy middle-aged woman, is a member of Mary's social circle. The countess has been divorced four times. Because she is so wealthy, she tends to attract younger men who want to marry her for her money. While in Reno, she considers marrying a cowboy by the name of Buck Winston.

After the countess marries Buck Winston, she helps him to become a movie star in Hollywood. Toward the end of the play, she confides to her friends that she suspects Buck is cheating on her. It is later revealed that Buck has been having an affair with Crystal Allen.

The countess seems to have a somewhat different attitude about marriage and divorce from the other women in Mary's social circle. She expresses a more light-hearted perspective on the series of marriages and divorces she has engaged in. She does not seem to be bothered much when one marriage fails and is ready to move on to the next marriage.

Sylvia Fowler

Sylvia (Mrs. Howard Fowler), aged thirty-four, is one of the married women in Mary's social circle. Sylvia causes the initial incident that sets off the central conflict of the play when, in the opening scene, she announces to her friends that Mary's husband is having an affair. Sylvia does not tell Mary this information directly but suggests that Mary get a manicure from a woman named Olga, who is sure to pass the gossip on to her. Sylvia recommends that Mary get her nails painted "Jungle Red," the same color she herself is wearing.

Sylvia once again sets off a major conflict in Mary's life when she convinces Mary to confront Crystal Allan in the dressing room of a clothing store. When this incident gets into the hands of a gossip columnist, Mary's marriage is severely affected by it.

Later, Sylvia's husband kicks her out because she has been having an affair with a young man who works for him. Sylvia's husband divorces her because he wants to marry another woman, with whom he has been having an affair. While Sylvia is in Reno to obtain her divorce, she learns that the woman her husband wishes to marry is her friend Miriam. Miriam happens to be in Reno as well, in the process of divorcing her husband so that she can marry Sylvia's newly ex-husband. When Sylvia receives this news, she and Miriam get into a physical fight.

In the final scene of the play, Sylvia unintentionally provides evidence that Crystal Allen is having an affair with Buck Winston. Whereas Sylvia's gossip in the beginning of the play works to sabotage Mary's marriage, her gossip in the final scene works to further Mary's goal of getting Stephen back.

Mary Haines

Mary (Mrs. Stephen Haines) is the central protagonist of *The Women*. She has been married for twelve years and has a son and daughter. Mary's attitude toward her marriage in the beginning of the play is very romanticized and based on traditional assumptions about love and fidelity. Her friends comment that she may be "living in a fool's paradise." By the end of the play, however, she has learned that, in order to hold onto her husband, she must adopt a more realistic, more modern attitude about marriage.

As the play opens, Mary is contentedly married to Stephen Haines. She considers herself to have a happy marriage with a husband who loves her and is faithful to her. Mary's whole world is turned upside down when she learns from a gossipy manicurist that her husband is having an affair with a shop-girl by the name of Crystal Allen. Mary asks the manicurist to stop gossiping about her husband. She then follows her mother's advice to say nothing to anyone about the affair and simply wait for it to end. Because of the scandal caused by the affair being published in a gossip column, however, Mary feels she has no choice but to divorce Stephen.

While Mary is in Reno obtaining her divorce, she learns that Stephen has married Crystal. Up to this point, Mary had been hanging onto the hope that Stephen might ask her to come back to him. With the news of his remarriage, however, Mary settles into the reality of being single. She moves into an apartment in New York, where she lives with her children.

Mary's resignation to having lost her husband to another woman is disrupted when she learns that Crystal is cheating on Stephen. Mary's response to this information is quite different from her response to earlier events regarding Stephen. Previously, Mary did not try to win Stephen back from Crystal, but she has learned by the end of the play to

use whatever resources are available to her to compete with other women for Stephen□even if this includes the spreading of vicious gossip.

In the closing lines of *The Women*, Mary triumphantly announces that she has "sharpened her claws," an indication that she has learned to actively fight to keep her husband. Mary states that she has painted her nails "Jungle Red." "Jungle Red" comes to symbolize the ruthless laws of the jungle, according to which Mary and her friends must fight viciously to compete with other women in the struggle to capture and keep husbands.

Little Mary

Little Mary is the daughter of Mary and Stephen Haines. Mary is an intelligent and sharp-witted child who is insightful about the ways in which women's lives are limited by the constraints of social convention. She expresses dismay at the prospects of being female, and confides to her mother many negative feelings about what it means to be a woman.

In an early scene, Little Mary's governess reports to Mary that her daughter has punched her son. The governess advises Mary to start teaching Little Mary at an early age that men will always have more power and status than women. Little Mary's act of beating up her brother suggests both her anger toward the opposite sex and her superior strength to the male child, who is nonetheless given higher status in the family structure.

In a scene toward the end of the play, Little Mary walks into the bathroom of her father's house, where Crystal Allen, his new wife, is luxuriating in the bathtub. Little Mary inadvertently overhears Crystal's telephone conversation to a man with whom she is having an affair. Later that night, Little Mary, who is not aware of the implications of what she has heard, tells her mother about Crystal's conversation. This provides Mary with the information that she needs to expose Crystal's infidelity to Stephen and win him back for herself. Little Mary thus provides a link of communication that ultimately results in the reunion of her parents.

Lucy

Lucy is a caretaker at the resort ranch in Reno where Mary and her friends stay while awaiting their divorces. Lucy provides a working-class woman's perspective on marriage and divorce, explaining to the wealthy society women that economic factors make it more difficult for poorer women to get divorced.

Mrs. Moorehead

Mrs. Moorehead, Mary's mother, is described as a bourgeois aristocrat of fifty-five. She presents Mary with brutal facts about marriage, informing her that all men cheat on their

wives, even Mary's father. When Mary confides to her mother that Stephen is having an affair, Mrs. Moorehead's advice is for Mary to ignore it, and it will eventually end of its own accord. She also advises Mary not to discuss the matter with any of her friends. Instead, Mrs. Moorehead suggests that Mary deal with the affair by going on a long vacation, in hopes that Stephen will miss her in her absence and will be motivated to end the affair. Mrs. Moorehead takes Mary on a vacation in Bermuda for two months.

Later, when Mary is packing to go to Reno for her divorce, Mrs. Moorehead tries to talk her into reconciling with Stephen instead. Unlike Mary's friends, who tend to divorce and remarry, Mrs. Moorehead feels that it is best for women to stay married, even if their husbands are unfaithful to them.

Olga

Olga is the gossipy manicurist who first reveals to Sylvia that Stephen Haines, Mary's husband, is having an affair with Crystal Allen. Olga is a friend of Crystal's and used to work with her at the perfume counter of Saks Fifth Avenue. Sylvia later suggests to Mary that she get a manicure from Olga, knowing that Olga will inform Mary of her husband's affair. When Mary sits down to her manicure with Olga, the manicurist is not aware that she is the wife of Stephen Haines. Olga relates to Mary the gossip about Stephen's affair, as she would to any other customer. When Mary hears this, she immediately informs Olga that she is Mrs. Stephen Haines and demands that Olga stop spreading such gossip to others.

Edith Potter

Edith (Mrs. Phelps Potter) is a member of Mary's social circle who seems to be perpetually pregnant. Edith is instrumental in sabotaging Mary's marriage when she confides to a well-known gossip-columnist about Mary's husband's affair and about Mary's confrontation with Crystal Allen in the clothing store dressing room. Edith claims that she had forgotten while relating this gossip that the woman she was talking to was a columnist. However, the implication is that Edith knew all along to whom she was talking and maliciously spread this gossip about Mary's personal life.

Although Edith has many children already, she is either pregnant or has just given birth during every scene in which she appears. However, Edith dislikes being pregnant, dislikes caring for babies, and dislikes children. She complains about every stage in the process of being pregnant, giving birth, and raising children. With the character of Edith, Luce presents a very harsh, unromanticized view of the role of women as child-bearers and child-rearers.

Objects/Places

The Post Office

For many years, Henry worked as a postal clerk for the United States Postal Service. Henry had quit his secure job to pursue writing full-time. Throughout the novel, he refers to the post office as a sort of secure but intolerable situation, and makes it analogous to a living hell. On one humorous occasion, Henry receives a mail delivery from a postal employee who peers into Henry's apartment and is astounded to see two partially nude young women cavorting about. In the novel, the post office is a symbol for traditional values.

Los Angeles

The novel is set in Los Angeles, California, where Henry Chinaski lives. Nearly all of the novel's action transpires in Los Angeles, and Henry identifies strongly with the city. When Henry leaves Los Angeles, he generally feels disoriented and lost. Although he does not fully develop the theme of Los Angeles, he often refers to addresses and the generally known atmosphere of the city.

Henry's Sculpted Head

During the initial period of the relationship between Henry Chinaski and Lydia Vance, Lydia sculpts Henry's head from clay. When their turbulent relationship is 'on again' the head is housed at Henry's apartment. When their relationship is 'off again' Henry returns the head to Lydia, depositing it on her doorstep and then telephoning her to inform her that he has returned the head. The ultimate fate of the head is not revealed in the novel and its symbolic value is only partially developed in the narrative—even though it is the most obviously symbolic object presented in the text.

Vance Pastures

Vance Pastures is the name given to Lydia's family property by Henry Chinaski. The area is near Muleshead, Utah, and features a small reservoir, a dam, and a waterfall. Much of the area is swampy. Henry becomes lost wandering around Vance Pastures. The area sums up Henry's idea of the world outside of Los Angeles—he views it with open hostility and distrust.

It Runs Around the Room and Me, and others

It Runs Around the Room and Me is the title of one of Henry Chinaski's volumes of poetry—he has apparently about twenty to twenty-five volumes in print. The named

volume was one of his first, written while he was still a postal employee. Henry values his personal collection of his printed works, but Lydia Vance largely destroys them during one of her rampages.

Henry's Apartment

Throughout the novel, Henry lives in the same apartment in Los Angeles. The apartment is apparently normal in most respects; Henry does not describe it in detail except to note that it is on a middle floor—that is, there is at least one floor below and one floor above his floor. The apartment complex has a court with poinsettias and other vegetation. Henry mostly describes his apartment in context of its filthy condition, noting that empty bottles, butts, and razor blades are strewn about; that the bathtub is disgusting; and that the toilet is smeared with ancient feces. Henry's apartment contrasts with the post office and is symbolic of Henry's untraditional values. The apartment is the setting for much of the action within the novel.

Henry's Blue Volkswagen

One of Henry's only durable possessions is his car, a blue Volkswagen. Many of the novel's scenes involve the automobile; he offers its license number, describes the car, and even describes the keys. During one memorable experience, he wedges a large chair into the car, which damages the windshield. The car is an awkward symbol of Henry's charisma; instead of driving a sporty car, he selects a rundown and ancient but durable and dependable people's car.

Drayer Baba

Drayer Baba is an ill-defined mysterious religious leader who claimed to be God and taught complete sexual abstinence outside of marriage. His other teachings are not discussed, but Sara is an adherent. Thus, she refuses to have sex with Henry before they are married. She instead rubs Henry's penis against her clitoris until he is too raw to continue.

The Christmas Turkey and the Soup

Sara and Henry go shopping and buy a turkey for Christmas. Sara prepares the meal at Henry's apartment, but a series of telephone calls from old lovers leads to an argument and the food is refrigerated. The next day one of Henry's old lovers stops by the apartment and he allows her to savage the meal. That night Sara converts the remains into a soup; the next day the same ex-lover visits again and consumes the soup. The food items are symbolic of Sara's attempt to forge a meaningful relationship and Henry's unconcerned attitude toward Sara's emotional state.

Bars and Alcohol Shops

Henry is a devoted alcoholic—in fact, at one point in the narrative, he states that if he had to choose between alcohol and sex he would give up sex. Within the narrative, Henry rarely leaves his apartment unless it is to travel to an alcohol shop to purchase drinks. Whenever he seeks a social setting to meet a woman he selects a bar, be it the corner bar, the airport bar, or the bar at the racetrack. Henry is most comfortable when he is home; but for Henry, the setting of a rundown bar is nearly as secure as the setting of his apartment.

Themes

The Modern Woman

In *The Women*, Mary Haines goes from being an idealistic woman, maintaining traditional beliefs about marriage, to being a modern woman with a realistic perspective on the harsh realities of marriage. Luce makes reference to the "Modern Woman" in *The Women* to emphasize the differences between the traditional, idealistic view Mary holds at the beginning of the play and a more modern, cynical understanding of marriage as a game of power, money, and competition. In the beginning of *The Women*, Mary is idealistic about her marriage, believing that her husband would never be unfaithful to her because he loves her and is happily married. Over the course of the play, she becomes disillusioned with marriage and eventually learns to accept that only by facing the harsh realities of the institution of marriage can she effectively fight to regain her husband. By the end of the play, she understands and is able to function successfully in a ruthless modern world where women must engage in fierce competition with each other for men. Toward the end of the play, Mary sums up what she has learned with the statement, "Modern life is complicated."

Marriage and Divorce

The Women is centrally focused on issues of marriage and divorce as they affect the lives of women. Luce portrays marriage as a societal institution defined by power, status, and money rather than being based on mutual love and fidelity between husband and wife.

The marriages portrayed in *The Women* are characterized by chronic infidelity. Luce portrays a social world in which all husbands cheat on their wives and many wives cheat on their husbands. When Mary confides in her mother that she has discovered Stephen's infidelity, her mother responds that all men cheat on their wives, and that the best way for a woman to deal with it is to ignore it. Because she is idealistic about marriage, however, Mary feels she has no choice but to divorce Stephen because of his infidelity. By the end of the play, Luce has delivered a rather cynical message that women are better off accepting the reality of male infidelity and learning to live with it than idealistically expecting their husbands to remain faithful to them.

Most of the marriages in *The Women* eventually result in divorce. Mrs. Moorehead laments that modern laws have made divorce easier to obtain and have thus destabilized the institution of marriage. Mary travels to Reno in order to obtain a divorce from Stephen and finds herself in a "reunion" with many of her friends from New York, who are also getting divorces□either because their husbands have cheated on them or they have cheated on their husbands or both. By the end of the play, however, Mary comes to the conclusion that it is more important to her to be married and tolerate her

husband's infidelities than to divorce her husband and lose the benefits of being married.

Female Friendship

In *The Women*, Luce portrays female friendship as a set of interactions poisoned by malicious gossip, competition over men, backstabbing, and ruthless self-interest. Luce paints an extremely negative picture of women's friendships as characterized by cattiness. Most of Mary's "friends" do more damage than good in her life. It is a friend who encourages her to make an appointment with the manicurist who gossips about Stephen's affair. It is a friend who encourages her to confront Crystal in the clothing store. And it is a friend who carelessly tells a gossip columnist all about Mary's marital problems.

At the beginning of the play Mary is idealistic about her friendships, seeing everyone in the most positive light she can. By the end, however, Mary has learned not to trust her female friends. In the closing lines of the play, Sylvia says to Mary, "what a dirty female trick you played!" Mary has learned to utilize ruthless methods in order to fight other women and secure her own self-interests.

Gossip

Luce presents the world of society women in *The Women* as one in which gossip is rampant, ruthless, and potentially devastating. The friendships between women, and the various settings in which women gather together without men around, are characterized by gossip. Mary's friends gossip about her and each other whenever they get the chance, and even Mary's servants gossip about her marital problems.

Mary first learns of Stephen's infidelity from a gossipy manicurist who does not realize who she is. Mary's position is worsened when a friend of hers gossips to another woman about the affair, and this woman turns out to be a professional gossip columnist. When the story about Stephen's affair with Crystal is published in a tabloid newspaper, Mary feels she has no choice but to divorce him, because of the public scandal. Unlike her friends, however, Mary refrains from gossiping about others, preferring to mind her own business and stay above the fray. By the end of the play, however, Mary learns to use every means available to her in order to get Stephen back□including the spreading of malicious gossip about another woman.

Beauty Standards

The women in *The Women* spend most of their time on activities devoted to making them attractive to men. Much of the play is set in beauty salons or women's clothing stores, where women are shown putting themselves through a wide variety of uncomfortable, painful, or unpleasant processes in order to improve their looks. A

hairdresser at Michael's beauty salon reminds her client, who is undergoing a painful hair treatment, "We must suffer to be beautiful."

The women's focus on trying to look good is portrayed as motivated by a desire to either attract men as potential husbands or to keep their husbands interested in them. These women fear the aging process, because they feel that they have to compete with younger women for their husbands' attentions. Mary at first believes that her husband is attracted to her because he loves her. Eventually, however, she has to admit that, as she has grown older, she is no longer physically attractive to him.

Luce conveys a harsh picture of the status of women in marriage as one that is inherently insecure; as the wives age, their husbands inevitably seek the attentions of younger, more attractive women. The extensive efforts made by the aging wives to be beautiful are shown to be futile, because their husbands will eventually lose interest in them and engage in extramarital affairs.

Women and Socio-Economic Class

Luce focuses on the different conditions of women's lives based on their socio-economic class. The high-society women, such as Mary and her friends, are married to wealthy men and enjoy the social status and economic privilege that comes with wealth. These women seem to have no idea of the suffering and economic hardship experienced by much of the population.

The working-class women in *The Women* lead harder lives than the high-society women. Luce portrays working women such as a nurse, a secretary, and a maid, who complain about the hard work, poverty, and difficult conditions of their lives. While Edith is in the hospital, having just delivered a baby, she complains of the difficulty of giving birth. Disgusted with Edith's lack of awareness of how privileged she is to be lying in a comfortable bed, having given birth in a hospital, the nurse angrily blurts out:

women like you don't know what a terrible time is. Try bearing a baby and scrubbing floors. Try having one in a cold filthy kitchen, without ether, without a change of linen, without decent food, without a cent to bring it up□

The difficulties single working women must face as they struggle for financial security are elaborated upon by Stephen's secretary, who relates:

I'm sick and tired of cooking my own breakfast, sloshing through the rain at 8 a.m., working like a dog. For what? Independence? A lot of independence you have on women's wages. I'd chuck it like that for a decent, or an indecent, home.

Luce thus emphasizes the economic factors women must consider in deciding whether to marry or divorce regardless of whether the marriage is a happy one.

Drinking Alcohol

The dominant theme of the novel is drinking alcohol. Henry is an alcoholic. Rather than fight against this shortcoming he embraces it as a defining characteristic. To Henry, life is drinking, and he feels best when he is drunk. Every social situation in which Henry participates is focused on alcohol. For example, when Henry gives readings, they are stale and boring unless he is simultaneously drunk and drinking. When Henry travels to distant cities, he prefers to sit inside and drink. When friends visit, Henry invites them inside and they drink. When Henry visits other people, he calls ahead to ensure they have alcohol—if they do not, he buys huge amounts on the way. Henry's days are scheduled around the availability of the liquor store. He knows where they are, what they stock, and when they open and close. When he is alone, he drinks. After he vomits, he drinks. A typical day for Henry involves drinking interspersed with other activities. In all, easily the most dominant theme in the novel focuses on Henry's propensity to devour alcohol. Needless to say, it is a particularly insipid narrative element and one that loses positive significance almost immediately. A similar theme, perhaps, is drug use. Many secondary characters prefer various drugs to alcohol, and although Henry disagrees with their preference, he always joins them in drug use: mixed, of course, with alcohol.

"Woman-fucker"

Second only to alcohol consumption, Henry likes to have sexual intercourse with women. Although he often defends himself as sympathetic to women or interested in their behavior or emotional construction, such a presentation is disingenuous. In fact, what Henry likes to do is to abuse women through sexual intercourse, verbal and sometimes physical attacks, and infidelity. Beside Henry as narrator, nearly every character presented in the novel in any significant role is a white female. Nearly without exception, they are younger than Henry, sexually attractive, and sexually available. Also nearly without exception, Henry rapidly engages them in sexual intercourse and then discards them for the next woman. One of the more intelligent women in the text, Liza, sums Henry up as "the big, tough, drinking, woman-fucker" (p. 189), and this sentence summarizes Henry's character and, unfortunately, presents the novel's entire plot and theme in one sentence. Henry's experiences with women range between one night stands to encounters with prostitutes to scenes of anal rape and immoral, if not strictly illegal, child molestation. Through all of this he is drunk and frequently on drugs and, if he cannot achieve an erection or orgasm, he blames his partner's sexuality. Thus, Henry as the "woman-fucker" is a dominant theme within the narrative.

Writing

Henry Chinaski is a writer-a poet-of some repute. After working for many years as a postal clerk for the United States Postal Service, Henry quits to devote his time and energy entirely to writing—and drinking. At the beginning of the novel, Henry has had some literary success. He has published numerous poems that have apparently been

collected into about a dozen published volumes. Henry also is working as an editor for a little magazine and has a small circle of literary acquaintances. Although Henry does not actually perform much writing within the text, he does often allude to writing. He seemingly denigrates the art at every opportunity—for example, instead of stating that he is a poet, he will often make up some arbitrary profession, and he refers to typing poems as banging on a typewriter and so forth. However, an evident respect for the craft does show through the practiced exterior disdain. Throughout the novel, Henry appears at a number of readings at universities and even performs several private readings at bookstores or literary institutes. He also apparently has published about eight additional volumes of collected poem during the approximate six years of the novel's primary timeline. However, this information is only presented incidentally and much of it must be inferred from casual comments within the narrative. Unfortunately, the minor theme of writing is not very developed within the text, though it is nearly the only positive element offered.

Style

Settings

The Women is set in both New York City and Reno, Nevada, in locations frequented primarily by women. The settings in New York include a beauty salon, the dressing rooms of a women's clothing store, Mary's bedroom, and Crystal's bathroom. A number of scenes are also set in the Park Avenue apartments of wealthy society women and their families. In these settings, Luce emphasizes the luxury and comfort enjoyed by these married women, who have servants to wait on them hand and foot. All of these settings also characterize the fact that most of the central characters in *The Women* do not have to work, and so they have a lot of free time to spend in shopping, getting manicures, and playing bridge.

Social Satire

At the time of its original production, *The Women* was a hugely popular success as a Broadway comedy. The play is considered a social satire, or comedy of manners, in that it ridicules the foibles of upper-class society, particularly in the realm of male-female relationships. Luce has said that the women she portrayed in *The Women* represented the type of women she met in high society, whom she despised. Many of the characters in the play have exaggerated traits of selfishness, shallowness, and self-centeredness that make them objects of ridicule in the eyes of the audience. Luce's stinging comedic dialogue further captures the atmosphere of competition and selfishness among the central female characters.

Cat Imagery

Throughout *The Women*, Luce's characters describe one another in terms of animal imagery. Animal imagery is a recurring motif, utilized to further express some of the central themes of the play. The predominant animal imagery in *The Women* is the comparison of women to cats. "Cattiness" is associated with competitive, malicious, vicious behavior in women's interactions with one another. The tussle between Sylvia and Miriam that takes place in Reno is regarded as a cat-fight. The cattiness of these characters is compared more to the behavior of a wild cat, such as a lion, tiger, or leopard, than a housecat, because of the fierceness with which the women compete with each other.

In the closing lines of the play, Crystal tells Mary, "you're just a cat like all the rest of us." Mary triumphantly replies that she has had two years to sharpen her claws, which are painted "Jungle Red." This statement is a culmination of the wild-cat imagery that recurrs in the play. Earlier on, Nancy had referred to "Jungle Red" nail polish, a popular color among this set, as "just the thing for clawing your friends apart." Luce's message is that the realm of competition between women to claim husbands operates according

to the laws of the jungle□only the fiercest, most vicious, ruthless fighters win out in the end. Through the recurring motif of animal imagery, Luce portrays the realm of high society women as a primitive, animal-like struggle for money, men, and power.

Point of View

The novel is narrated from the first-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is somewhat reliable but decidedly biased in presentation. Narrative reliability is confounded by the narrator's admitted alcoholism; thus, many scenes end when the narrator passes out and the action resumes when the narrator regains consciousness. While this could be utilized effectively in construction it generally is not, and the moments when the narrator loses consciousness are random and do not contribute materially to the development of the text. The point of view is highly concentrated on Henry and the text has little room for consideration of the opinions, insights, or feelings of any other character.

Characters beyond the narrator are described only in the most general terms. Men are usually described only as reference to their presence, though a few are discussed at slightly more length. Women are in general described as collections of body parts, sexual ability, and sexual behavior. For example, Edie is described in this way: "A sex symbol walked in...in tight black outfit and her huge breasts looked as if they would burst out of the top of her dress" (p. 263); such descriptions are the norm. With a single exception, Henry quickly has sexual intercourse with all of the women and then disposes of them.

Setting

The novel is largely set in Los Angeles, California, and frequent reference to specific locations or streets are made. The tone and texture of the downtrodden parts of Los Angeles are also invoked in the narrative but the narrator assumes that the reader is heavily familiar with the setting and provides little concrete description. The net effect is that the city is named but not described and becomes nearly interchangeable with any large blighted urban area.

More specifically, the novel is largely set in the apartment of Henry Chinaski. The apartment is probably on the second floor of a three-floor apartment tenement that is likely built around a central courtyard. However, such a construction must be tentatively inferred from various comments in the text. In any event, the physical layout is mostly unimportant. Henry's apartment appears to be a multi-room space with at least a kitchen area, a private restroom, one bedroom, and one other living space. The rent is cheap and Henry mentions that the utilities are frequently in disrepair. Henry has a telephone with long-distance service. Henry's apartment is filthy and full of debris and trash—he appears to take pride in the squalor and never attempts to clean or make any improvements.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in an elementary and straightforward style. Meaning is generally limited to the surface and there is little to no symbolic meaning or literary construction within the text. It is tempting and natural to assume that the novel must be subtly and symbolically discussing lofty things by its repetitive discussions of sex and infidelity—but such interpretation probably is not warranted. In essence, the novel provides no plot, no characterization, no development, and no conclusion—and is little more than a series of pornographic vignettes strung together by the happenstance of featuring the same drunk, fat, and aged male participant. Meaning is thus simple and simply constructed: Henry likes to have sex with lots of women; Henry's profession as poet appeals to lots of women; Henry has sex with lots of women.

Language within the novel is similarly simple. Although the dialogue in chapters 83 through 85 is surprisingly cogent and strong, it is the exception rather than the rule. For example, some of the last dialogue in the novel is between Henry and a prostitute as they arrange a price for oral sex. Henry does not notice much beyond alcohol and sexually available women, or if he in fact does notice it, he does not mention it. The novel features a notable amount of vulgar language, including explicit descriptions of various sex acts, and numerous pejoratives for gender and race. In fact, the constant and routine descriptions of semi-violent sexual intercourse and very young women's body parts quickly becomes little more than vapid and rote male fantasy.

Structure

The 291-page novel is divided into 103 enumerated chapters or sections. Unlike a more traditional use of chapters, the chapters in the novel serve to denote individual events; in general, a few hours elapse between chapters and, presumably, during this time gap, no events critical to the novel's development occur. The novel states that the narrative covers a period of about six years. This seems credible; however, from the timelines given and milestone dates noted it is impossible to verify the statement. Nearly all events are presented in strictly chronological order, but periods between events are specified only hazily. For example, during the period covered, Henry appears to publish about eight volumes of collected poetry, which indicates a substantial but not improbable output.

The linguistic construction of the text is very basic and easily accessible. In fact, reading is quite easy and sentence and paragraph construction is basic. The novel suffers from a dearth of imagery, foreshadowing, and other thematic elements. Furthermore, the novel's plot development is slight, at best, and in most literary respects, the text has little to offer. Language used is often harsh and vulgar, particularly in dialogue, and numerous offensive pejoratives liberally are applied to women and people of color. By any estimation, the text is offensively and virulently sexist and racist. The text contains nearly non-stop descriptions of sexual acts, including group sex, anal penetration, oral

sex, masturbation, prostitution, and rape. In addition, drug use is common and alcohol use is pervasive.

Historical Context

The Great Depression

In the fall of 1929, the United States economy was devastated by a collapse of the stock market. Now known as the Stock Market Crash of 1929, these events plunged the United States, and eventually many nations throughout the world, into a devastating economic crisis that lasted until the beginning of World War II in 1939. This roughly ten-year period is known as the Great Depression. As a result of the collapse of the economy during the Great Depression, many people were out of work, lost their homes, and lived in abject poverty. Unemployment rates reached as high as 25—30 percent of the employable workforce. In the realm of international economy, the levels of world trade were reduced by more than half their previous volume.

Political measures to address the problems of the Great Depression in the United States were dominated by the leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who began his first term in 1933. Roosevelt initiated a wide variety of government programs in an effort to relieve the burden of poverty, raise the employment rate, and stimulate the economy. Roosevelt's domestic program for addressing the Great Depression is known as the New Deal. The crucial first few months of Roosevelt's institution of the New Deal are known as the Hundred Days.

The Women was originally produced in 1936, during the heart of the Great Depression. In this play, Luce emphasizes the stark differences between the experiences of wealthy, privileged women and those of poor working women. Within the context of Great Depression—era America, Luce's critical perspective on the behavior of these society women is that much more pronounced.

In her play, Luce makes satiric reference to the New Deal in a bit of clever dialogue when one of Mary's friends refers to her ex-husband's new wife as his "New Deal."

The Reno Divorce

Act 2, scene 2 of *The Women* takes place in the hotel room of a resort ranch in Reno, Nevada. In order to understand why Mary and her friends travel to Reno, one must have some knowledge of the history of divorce laws and practices in the United States. During the period in which *The Women* takes place, divorces were much more difficult to obtain than they were in the early 2000s. Divorce was also considered to be scandalous and embarrassing for both parties, but especially for divorced women. Furthermore, divorce laws varied from state to state, making them easier to obtain in some states than in others.

Because Nevada had relatively liberal divorce laws, as well as very short-term requirements for state citizenship (only six weeks, at the time), many wealthy society women during the 1930s went to Reno in order to get divorced. Because these women

needed to stay in the state for a period of weeks, in order to obtain state citizenship, an industry of resort ranches developed to accommodate them. For this reason, Mary and many of her New York society friends, like many high society women during that period, find themselves together in Reno while waiting for their divorces to go through.

Popular Culture References

Throughout *The Women*, various characters make references to public figures who were well known during the 1930s, but who may be unfamiliar to readers in the early 2000s. In order to appreciate some of Luce's humorous dialogue, and to make sense of what the characters are saying, it is helpful to have some idea of who these figures from popular culture were.

There are a number of references in *The Women* to popular Hollywood movie personalities of the era. Luce's characters mention movie stars such as Mae West and Joan Crawford, as well as the romantic lead actor Clark Gable, and the comic actor Harpo Marx. Other Hollywood personalities mentioned in *The Women* include well-known movie studio moguls such as Darryl F. Zanuck, co-founder of 20th-Century Fox, and Louis B. Mayer, vice president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studios.

The mention of a "Mrs. Astor" by one character resonates with the themes of gossip and divorce in *The Women*. Mary Astor was a popular movie star of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Several scandalous aspects of Astor's personal life became a subject of widespread gossip in the popular press. Her three divorces, severe alcoholism, and attempted suicide were among the topics seized upon by gossip columnists. The biggest scandal of Astor's life hit the presses in 1936 (the same year in which *The Women* was first produced), when, in the process of Astor's second divorce, her personal diary was publicly presented in court, revealing clandestine affairs with many Hollywood personalities. This revelation became the subject matter of widespread gossip and intrigue.

Critical Overview

From its initial production in 1936 to its revivals in the 1970s and 1990s, *The Women* has always received mixed, sometimes heated, reviews.

Luce's play has been most enthusiastically received when regarded as a hilarious social satire featuring outrageous caricatures of high society women who reel out witty, acerbic dialogue. During the 1930s, however, *The Women* was not without controversy. Scheduled productions in London and Providence, Rhode Island, were canceled by authorities on grounds of immorality. In her essay "Social Darwinism in the Powder Room," Mary Maddock characterized these efforts to censor *The Women* when she commented, "The play's unvarnished presentation of the female perspective on sex, birth, extramarital affairs, divorce, and dull husbands clearly offended a certain sector of its audience."

However, the most substantial critical debate about *The Women* concerns Luce's representation of women and female friendship. Anita Gates, in "What Is It About *The Women*?" noted, "Whether Luce's play is dangerously misogynistic or subversively feminist has always been a matter of opinion."

During the 1930s, many critics of *The Women* were quick to disparage Luce's representation of women as selfish, shallow, scheming cats, lacking in depth or compassion. However, Luce has defended this view of her work by asserting that it was not her intention to suggest that the particular characters in this play represent *all* women. Rather, she put forth, her aim was to ridicule a very specific segment of high society women, whom she despised.

Since the 1970s, critical discussion of *The Women* pointedly addressed the question of whether it is a feminist or a misogynist text. A number of critics interpreted *The Women* as a societal critique addressing issues of both class and gender through an unromanticized representation of marriage as a socio-economic institution. As Maddock observed, "Boothe's women are corrupted by the materialistic and competitive values a moneyed and power-broking male world generates."

Reviewers of several different revival productions of *The Women* during the 1990s and early twenty-first century applauded the play's timeless treatment of women's issues, while acknowledging that it is in many ways dated. Steven Winn noted in a review entitled "The Women without their Men," that "Luce touches lightly but deftly on a range of what are now known as women's issues." Winn added,

Luce may not have written a play for the ages, but in refracting the spirit of her time with a satiric glint, *The Women* casts a reflected light on the very notion of "progress" in the relations between the sexes.

Winn opined, "At a time when feminism is encountering a fresh wave of backlash, this seemingly dated period piece picks up resonance without having to amplify it artificially."

Other reviewers of recent revivals of *The Women* commented on the play's representation of female friendship. Jayne Blanchard noted in "Conniving World of *Women*," "the idea of women being socialized from the cradle to gossip about and betray one another is painfully timeless." Elysa Gardner commented in "*Women*: Fresh, Funny, and Feline," that *The Women* still resonates in the 2000s because "feminist advances hardly have eliminated the territorial tensions and feline feuds that hamper our relationships with our fellow sisters." Gardner concluded that *The Women* ultimately provides a positive picture of female friendship, stating that it "ultimately celebrates female camaraderie even as it mocks our capacity for cattiness."

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, reviewers also praised *The Women* from a feminist perspective in observing that the story ultimately demonstrates Mary's "believable journey from generous and oblivious ignorance to wiser and more wicked self-awareness," as stated by Terry Byrne in "Stage on Screen: *The Women*." Gates echoes that statement, writing "in New Age terms, *The Women* is about Mary's journey to empowerment." Maddock likewise asserted, "The difference between Mary at the play's opening and at the play's conclusion is social and economic enlightenment."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Brent holds a Ph.D. in American culture from the University of Michigan. In this essay, Brent discusses the theme of love in Luce's play.

At the beginning of *The Women*, Mary's attitudes about love are traditional and idealistic. She believes that her husband Stephen married her because he loves her and that he will always love her. She also believes that love between man and wife is the central element of a marriage and that a marriage without love is not worth maintaining. Over the course of the play, however, Mary comes to the conclusion that marriage is a matter of compromise and that love between husband and wife is not the most important factor in maintaining a marriage.

In an early scene of the play, Mary tells her friend Nancy that she now realizes Stephen loved her when she was younger because she was very pretty but that, as she has aged, the loss of physical attraction has decreased his love for her. Nancy responds with a quote from Shakespeare: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." In other words, if a man stops loving a woman because she is no longer beautiful, then he never truly loved her in the first place. Nancy thus expresses the idea that true love is an ideal that goes deeper and endures longer than mere physical attraction.

Many of Mary's friends, however, express attitudes about love in marriage that are more cynical and less idealistic than those expressed by Nancy. These women regard marriage as a social and financial arrangement to which idealistic notions of love do not apply. Early in the play, they make fun of Peggy, who is a young wife, because she is still in love with her husband; they assure her that, once she is married long enough to develop a realistic opinion of her husband, she will no longer love him. When Sylvia finds out that Miriam is going to marry Sylvia's ex-husband, Sylvia is furious. Mary, however, points out, "But, Sylvia, why do you care? You don't love Howard," to which Sylvia responds, "Love has nothing to do with it." According to these women, love is not the object of marriage.

Several of the women in *The Women* express the opinion that marriage is not a matter of love between husband and wife, but of raising children and maintaining a household. Mrs. Moorehead asserts that Mary should not get divorced because parents should stay together for the sake of the children. Mary retorts that there is no value in raising children in a home without love. After Mary's maid and her cook overhear her argument with Stephen about the affair, they discuss their own attitudes about the role of love in marriage. Maggie, the cook, comments, "Marriage is a business of taking care of a man and raising his children," adding, "What's the difference if he doesn't love her?"

Mary's daughter, Little Mary, also expresses a cynical attitude about love in marriage. Early in the play, Little Mary espouses the idea that women's lives are not very enjoyable, because, once they fall in love, they lose all of their personal ambitions. Little Mary tells her mother that once women "get the lovey-dovies," they stop doing interesting things, such as pursuing careers in aviation, politics, or business. Mary

assures her daughter that a woman's life is fulfilled after marriage by having children, but Little Mary does not seem convinced by this.

The attitude of the Countess de Lage about love in marriage is in strong contrast to the attitudes of Mary's friends. Although she has been married four times, the countess never loses her faith in love. Despite her multiple divorces, she remains cheerful and optimistic about her prospects for love and continues to believe that idealistic love is a worthwhile pursuit in marriage. From her perspective, love is the only motivation for getting married. Unlike Mary, however, the countess is never disillusioned when her marriages fail; she simply cuts her losses and looks forward to the next adventure in love. The countess often sighs cheerfully and utters the phrase, "Ah! *L'amour*!" which is French for, "Ah! Love!" The countess says of the more cynical women in Mary's social circle, "They've lost their equilibrium because they've lost their faith in love."

After Mary finds out that Stephen is cheating on her, she talks to her mother, Mrs. Moorehead, about her marriage. When she tells her mother, "I love him so much," her mother assures her, "he loves you too, baby." Mrs. Moorehead's concept of marital love, however, is very different from Mary's. Mrs. Moorehead explains to Mary that the most important thing about marriage is to stay together in the long run. She tells her that a husband's infidelities are not a matter of love. Rather, Mrs. Moorehead explains, as men begin to age, they feel a need to have affairs with younger women so that they can feel young again. She asserts that these affairs are meaningless to the men, in the sense that they are not about love. Therefore, Mrs. Moorehead says, a wife should understand that her husband still loves her, even though he is cheating on her. Thus, she assures Mary, Stephen's extramarital affair with Crystal Allen is not an indication that he no longer loves her.

At first, Mary tries to take her mother's advice, reassuring herself that Stephen is not in love with Crystal Allen. But when Mary confronts Crystal in the dressing room of the clothing store, she is presented with a very different set of ideas about love, marriage, and infidelity. Mary tells Crystal, "Stephen doesn't love you. . . . He couldn't love a girl like you." Crystal, however, uses the word "love" in the physical sense and indicates that she and Stephen have been engaged in a sexual relationship for the past six months. Crystal points out to Mary that, although Stephen has been "loving" her (Crystal) in the physical sense, Mary still enjoys all of the social and economic privileges of marriage. Crystal asserts, "You've got everything that matters. The name, the position, the money."

When Mary argues with Stephen over the affair with Crystal, she brings up the question of love in their marriage. When she tells him, "But you don't love me!" Stephen's response is to assure her that he is very "fond" of her. Mary is terribly hurt by Stephen's use of the word "fond" as a substitute for love. In the course of their argument, she tells him, "You've killed my love for you."

As Mary is preparing to leave for Reno to obtain a divorce, her mother tries to talk her into patching up her marriage instead. Her mother tells her that, although Stephen may no longer love her, he is "fond" of her. Mary is once again upset at being told that her

husband is "fond" of her, when she really wants him to love her. At this point, Mary still believes that "deep down, Stephen does love me." She believes that by threatening him with divorce, she will motivate him to realize that he still loves her, and he will try to win her back.

Before she leaves for Reno, Mary tries to explain to her daughter (Little Mary) why she and Stephen are getting divorced. Mary makes a distinction between love between adults and love between adults and their children. She tells Little Mary that adults sometimes fall out of love with each other. Little Mary, distraught, asks if that means she herself will stop loving her parents when she becomes an adult. Mary tries to assure Little Mary that that is a different matter, but she leaves her daughter confused and upset about the idea that people who once loved each other can stop loving each other.

By the end of *The Women*, Mary has developed a more practical, more cynical attitude about the role of love in marriage. Admitting to herself that she still loves Stephen, even if he no longer loves her, she comes to the conclusion that getting him back as her husband is more important to her than being loved by him. She further realizes that she could not have maintained the youthful passion that once characterized her marriage.

Mary also comes to the conclusion that love and marriage are a matter of compromise, and settling for what you can get, rather than being a matter of ideals and pride. While in Reno, she tells her friends, "Love has pride in nothing□but its own humility." In other words, Mary has decided that she would rather swallow her pride and try to get Stephen back, than stick by her principles and divorce him because he has humiliated her by having an affair. Mary tells Sylvia that pride is "a luxury a woman in love can't afford."

Mary now feels that what matters to her is for Stephen to need her as his wife, even if he no longer feels love or passion for her. Toward the end of the play, she tells her friends that unrequited love ("lopsided amour") is better than no love at all. She tells the countess to hang onto her new husband, even though he is cheating on her, advising, "let him make a fool of you. Let him do anything he wants, as long as he stays."

By the end of *The Women*, Mary has come to the conclusion that it is worth it to her to compromise her ideals, swallow her pride, and fight to get back the man she loves, even knowing that her love is "lopsided." Just before going out to the Casino Roof for the final battle with Crystal, Mary reads aloud from a book about love: "When love beckons to you, follow him, though his ways are hard and steep. . . . Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the North Wind lays waste the garden."

Mary is willing to suffer losing her pride and having her ideals shattered about love in order to hang on to the husband she still loves, even if he no longer loves her.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *The Women*, in *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Quotes

"I was 50 years old and hadn't been to bed with a woman for four years. I had no women friends. I looked at them as I passed them on the streets or wherever I saw them, but I looked at them without yearning and with a sense of futility. I masturbated regularly, but the idea of having a relationship with a woman—even on non-sexual terms—was beyond my imagination. I had a 6 year old daughter born out of wedlock. She lived with her mother and I paid child support. I had been married ten years before at the age of 35. That marriage lasted two and one half years. My wife divorced me. I had been in love only once. She had died of acute alcoholism. She died at 48 when I was 38. My wife had been 12 years younger than I. I believe that she too is dead now, although I'm not sure. She wrote me a long letter each Christmas for 6 years after the divorce. I never responded..." p. 7

"'Now,' she said, 'this is how you eat a fish. I'm a country girl. Watch me.'

"She opened that fish, she did something with her knife to the backbone. The fish was in two neat pieces.

"'Oh, I really *liked* that,' said Diana. 'Where did you say you were from?'

"'Utah. Muleshead, Utah. Population 100. I grew up on a ranch. My father was a drunk. He's dead now. Maybe that's why I'm with him...' She jerked a thumb at me.

"We ate.

"After the fish was consumed Diana carried the bones away. Then there was chocolate cake and strong (cheap) red wine.

"'Oh, this cake is good,' said Lydia, 'can I have another piece?'

"'Sure, darling,' said Diana.

"'Mr. Chinaski,' said a dark-haired girl from across the room, 'I've read translations of your books in Germany. You're very popular in Germany.'

"'That's nice,' I said. 'I wish they'd send me some royalties...'

"'Look,' said Lydia, 'let's not talk about literary crap. Let's *do* something!' She leaped up and did a bump and a grind. 'LET'S DANCE!'" p. 23

"It was 4:14 AM. I sat and watched the clock. It was like working in the post office again. Time was motionless while existence was a throbbing unbearable thing. I waited. I waited. I waited. I waited. Finally it was 6 AM . I walked to the corner to the liquor store. A clerk was opening up. He let me in. I purchased another pint of Cutty Sark. I walked back home, locked the door, and phoned Lydia.

"'I have here one pint of Cutty Sark from which I am peeling the cellophane. I am going to have a drink. And the liquor store will now be open for 20 hours.'

"She hung up. I had one drink and then walked into the bedroom, stretched out on the bed, and went to sleep without taking off my clothes." p. 42

"Pain is strange. A cat killing a bird, a car accident, a fire... pain arrives, BANG, and there it is, it sits on you. It's real. And to anybody watching, you look foolish. Like you've suddenly become an idiot. There's no cure for it unless you known somebody who understands how you feel, and knows how to help.

"We went back to the car. 'I know just where to take you to cheer you up,' said Dee Dee. I didn't answer. I was being catered to as if I was an invalid. Which I was.

"I asked Dee Dee to stop at a bar. One of hers. The bartender knew her.

"'This,' she told me was we entered, 'is where a lot of the script writers hang out. And some of the little-theater people.'

"I disliked them all immediately, sitting around acting clever and superior. They nullified each other. The worst thing for a writer is to know another writer, and worse than that, to know a number of other writers. Like flies on the same turd." p. 53

"That night she drank half a bottle of red wine, good red wine, and she was sad and quiet. I knew she was connecting me with the racetrack people and the boxing crowd, and it was true, I was with them, I was one of them. Katherine knew that there was something about me that was not wholesome in the sense of wholesome is as wholesome does. I was drawn to all the wrong things: I liked to drink, I was lazy, I didn't have a god, politics, ideas, ideals. I was settled into nothingness; a kind of non-being, and I accepted it. It didn't make for an interesting person. I didn't want to be interesting, it was too hard. What I really wanted was only a soft, hazy space to live in, and to be left alone. On the other hand, when I got drunk I screamed, went crazy, got all out of hand. One kind of behavior didn't fit the other. I didn't care.

"The fucking was very good that night, but it was the night I lost her. There was nothing I could do about it. I rolled off and wiped myself on the sheet as she went into the bathroom. Overhead a police helicopter circled over Hollywood." p. 104

"There is a problem with writers. If what a writer wrote was published and sold many, many copies, the writer thought he was great. If what a writer wrote was published and sold a medium number of copies, the writer thought he was great. If what a writer wrote was published and sold very few copies, the writer thought he was great. If what a writer wrote never was published and he didn't have the money to publish it himself, then he thought he was truly great. The truth, however, was that there was very little greatness. It was almost nonexistent, invisible. But you could be sure that the worst writers had the most confidence, the least self-doubt. Anyway, writers were to be avoided, and I tried to avoid them, but it was almost impossible. They hoped for some sort of brotherhood,

some kind of togetherness. None of it had anything to do with writing, none of it helped at the typewriter.

"'I sparred with Clay before he became Ali,' said Morse. Morse jabbed and shuffled, danced. 'He was pretty good, but I gave him a workout.'

"Morse shadow-boxed about the room.

"'Look at my legs!' he said. 'I've got great legs!'

"'Hank's got better legs than you have,' said Tammie.

"Being a leg-man, I nodded." pp. 140-141

"Cecelia wanted to go for a constitutional around 2 PM. We walked through the court. She noticed the poinsettias. She walked right up to a bush and stuck her face into the flowers, caressing them with her fingers.

"'Oh, they're so *beautiful!*'

"'They're *dying,* Cecelia. Can't you see how shriveled they are? The smog is killing them.'

"We walked along under the palms.

""'And there are birds everywhere! Hundred of birds, Hank!'

"'And dozens of cats.'" p. 175

"We continued drinking. Cecelia had just one more and stopped.

"'I want to go out and look at the moon and stars,' she said. 'It's so beautiful out!'

"'All right, Cecelia.'

"She went outside by the swimming pool and sat in a deck chair.

"'No wonder Bill died,' I said. 'He starved. She never gives it away.'

"'She talked the same way about you at dinner when you went to the men's room,' said Valerie. 'She said, "Oh, Hank's poems are so full of passion, but as a person he's not that way at all!"'

"'Me and God don't always pick the same horse.'

"'You fucked her yet?' asked Bobby.

"'No.'

"'What was Keesing like?'

"'All right. But I really wonder how he stood being with her. Maybe the codeine pills helped. Maybe she was like a big flower-child-nurse to him.'

"'Fuck it,' said Bobby. 'Let's drink.'

"'Yeah. If I had to choose between drinking and fucking I think I'd have to stop fucking.'

"'Fucking can cause problems,' said Valerie.

"'When my wife is out fucking somebody else I put on my pyjamas, pull the covers up and go to sleep,' said Bobby.

"'He's cool,' said Valerie.

"'None of us quite know how to use sex, what to do with it,' I said. 'With most people sex is just a toy—wind it up and let it run.'

"'What about love?' asked Valerie.

"'Love is all right for those who can handle the psychic overload. It's like trying to carry a full garbage can on your back over a rushing river of piss.'

"'Oh, it's not *that* bad!'

"'Love is a form of prejudice. I have too many other prejudices.'

"Valerie went to the window.

"'People are having fun, jumping in the pool, and she's out there looking at the moon.'

"'Her old man just died,' Bobby said. 'Give her a break.'

"I took my bottle to my bedroom. I undressed down to my shorts and went to bed. Nothing was ever in tune. People just blindly grabbed at whatever there was: communism, health foods, zen, surfing, ballet, hypnotism, group encounters, orgies, biking, herbs, Catholicism, weight-lifting, travel, withdrawal, vegetarianism, India, painting, writing, sculpting, composing, conducting, backpacking, yoga, copulating, gambling, drinking, hanging around, frozen yogurt, Beethoven, Bach, Buddha, Christ, TM, H, carrot juice, suicide, handmade suits, jet travel, New York City, and then it all evaporated and fell apart. People had to find things to do while waiting to die. I guess it was nice to have a choice.

"I took my choice. I raised the fifth of vodka and drank it straight. The Russians knew something." pp. 176-177

"I thought about breakups, how difficult they were, but then usually it was only after you broke up with one woman that you met another. I had to taste women in order to really

know them, to get inside of them. I could invent men in my mind because I was one, but women, for me, were almost impossible to fictionalize without first knowing them. So I explored them as best I could and I found human being inside. The writing would be forgotten. The writing would become much less than the episode itself until the episode ended. The writing was only the residue. A man didn't have to have a woman in order to feel as real as he could feel, but it was good if he knew a few. Then when the affair went wrong he'd feel what it was like to be truly lonely and crazed, and thus know what he must face, finally, when his own end came.

"I was sentimental about many things: a woman's shoes under the bed; one hairpin left behind on the dresser; the way they said, 'I'm going to pee...'; hair ribbons; walking down the boulevard with them at 1:30 in the afternoon, just two people walking together; the long nights of drinking and smoking, talking; the arguments; thinking of suicide; eating together and feeling good; the jokes, the laughter out of nowhere; feeling miracles in the air; being in a parked car together; comparing past loves at 3 AM; being told you snore, hearing her snore; mothers, daughters, sons, cats, dogs; sometimes death and sometimes divorce, but always carrying on, always seeing it through; reading a newspaper alone in a sandwich joint and feeling nausea because she's now married to a dentist with an I.Q. of 95; racetracks, parks, park picnics; even jails; her dull friends, your dull friends; your drinking, her dancing; your flirting, her flirting; her pills, your fucking on the side, and her doing the same; sleeping together...

"There were no judgments to be made, yet out of necessity one had to select. Beyond good and evil was all right in theory, but to go on living one had to select: some were kinder than others, some were simply more interested in you, and sometimes the outwardly beautiful and inwardly cold were necessary, just for bloody, shitty kicks, like a bloody, shitty movie. The kinder ones fucked better, really, and after you were around them a while they seemed beautiful because they were. I thought of Sara, she had that something extra. If only there was no Drayer Baba holding up that dammed STOP sign." (pp. 227-228)

"I was walking around feeling worse and worse. Perhaps it was because I had stayed over instead of going home. It was like prolonging the agony. What kind of shit was I? I could certainly play some nasty, unreal games. What was my motive? Was I trying to get even for something? Could I keep on telling myself that it was merely a matter of research, a simple study of the female? I was simply letting things happen without thinking about them. I wasn't considering anything but my own selfish, cheap pleasure. I was like a spoiled high school kid. I was worse than any whore; a whore took your money and nothing more. I tinkered with lives and souls as if they were my playthings. How could I call myself a man? How could I write poems? What did I consist of? I was a bush-league de Sade, without his intellect. A murderer was more straightforward and honest than I was. Or a rapist. I didn't want *my* soul played with, mocked, pissed on; I knew *that* much at any rate. I was truly no good. I could feel it as I walked up and down on the rug. *No good*. The worst part of it was that I passed myself off for exactly what I wasn't—a good man. I was able to enter people's lives because of their trust in me. I was doing my dirty work the easy way. I was writing *The Love Tale of the Hyena.*

"I found myself sitting on the edge of the bed, and I was crying. I could feel the tears with my fingers. My brain whirled, yet I felt sane. I couldn't understand what was happening to me.

"I picked up the phone and dialed Sara at her health food store." pp. 236-237

"Valencia got up and went to the bathroom. When she came out she was naked. She got under the bedsheet. I had another drink. Then I undressed and got into bed. I pulled the sheet back. What huge breasts. She was one-half breast. I firmed one up with my hand as best I could and sucked at the nipple. It didn't harden. I went to the other breast and sucked at the nipple. No response. I sloshed her breasts about. I stuck my cock in between them. The nipples remained soft. I shoved my cock at her mouth and she turned her head away. I thought of burning her ass with a cigarette. What a mass of flesh she was. A worn out busted down streetwalker. Whores usually made me hot. My cock was hard but my spirit wasn't in it.

"'Are you Jewish?' I asked her." p. 259

"Tanya got up with her drink, hiked up her skirt, and straddled my legs, facing me. She wasn't wearing pants. She began rubbing her cunt against my hard-on. We grabbed and kissed and she kept rubbing. It was very effective. Wriggle, little snake child!

"Then Tanya unzipped my pants. She took my cock and pushed it into her cunt. She began riding. She could *do* it, all 90 pounds of her. I could hardly think. I made small half-hearted movements meeting her now and then. At times we kissed. It was gross: I was being raped by a child. She moved it around. She had me cornered, trapped. It was mad. Flesh alone, without love. We were filling the air with the stink of pure sex. My child, my child. How can your small body do all these things? Who invented woman? For what ultimate purpose? Take this shaft! And we were perfect strangers! It was like fucking your own shit.

"She worked at it like a monkey on a string. Tanya was a faithful reader of all my works. She bore down. That child knew something. She could sense my anguish. She worked away furiously, playing with her clit with one finger, her head thrown back. We were caught up together in the oldest and most exciting game of all. We came together and it lasted and lasted until I thought my heart would stop. She fell against me, tiny and frail. I touched her hair. She was sweating. Then she pulled herself off me and went into the bathroom.

"Child rape, finalized. They taught children well nowadays. Rapist raped. A final justice. Was she a 'liberated' woman? No, she was simply red hot.

"Tanya came out. We had another drink. Damn it, she began to laugh and chat, almost as if nothing had happened. Yes, that was it. It had simply been some exercise for her, like jogging or swimming." pp. 280-281

Adaptations

The Women was adapted to the screen as a major motion picture in 1939. This film version was directed by George Cukor and starred Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer, and Rosalind Russell. It was produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer from a screenplay written by Anita Loos and Jane Murfin.

Topics for Further Study

The Women was originally written, produced, and set during the era of the Great Depression. Learn more about the history of the depression and its impact on the everyday lives of Americans. In what ways were women and men affected differently by the hardships of the depression? How were women in different regions of the United States affected differently by the depression? To what extent did the depression affect the wealthier segments of society?

The Women focuses on a wide variety of procedures women go through in their efforts to look attractive. Different cultures often have very different standards of beauty. Find out more about the beauty standards of a culture very different from your own. Write an essay comparing the beauty standards of your own culture with those of the culture you have researched. What insights does this provide into the role and significance of beauty standards to each culture?

All of the characters in *The Women* who appear on stage are female, and the events of the play take place in locations that tend to be exclusively or predominantly female. Yet, these women spend most of their time discussing their relationships with men. Write a short play that describes a conversation between three or four of the characters of the same gender (all male or all female) in a setting were members of that gender tend to congregate. Focus on the particular ways in which these characters interact with one another when they are not in the presence of the opposite gender. With a group of other students, perform your short play for the rest of the class.

The characters in *The Women* express a variety of attitudes about the role of love in marriage. Write an original essay, expressing your own ideas about the role of love in marriage. How important is love as a factor in the decision of two people to get married? Why? If two people who are married no longer love one another, should they get divorced? Why or why not? Should married people with children stay together for the sake of the children, even if they no longer love each other? Why or why not? Give examples to help explain your answers to these questions.

In addition to being an author, Luce devoted much of her life to politics. Find biographical material on Luce that covers her political career and write a critical essay discussing the role of politics in her life. What political perspectives did Luce put forth over the course of her life? Did her political views change over time? In what ways was she most influential on the political scene?

Compare and Contrast

1930s: The United States is in the midst of the Great Depression, the worst economic crisis in the history of the nation. Unemployment is at an all-time high.

Today: While the economy fluctuates greatly, many regulations work to ensure that an economic collapse such as that which caused the Great Depression is not repeated. While unemployment rates also fluctuate, they do not reach the devastating levels of the Great Depression era.

1930s: Divorce laws, which vary widely from state to state, result in the development of Reno, Nevada, as a locus where people from all over the country come to obtain divorces.

Today: While divorce laws still vary from state to state, an overall liberalization of divorce laws makes it easier for couples to obtain divorces within their home states.

1930s: Women's opportunities for earning an independent living through professional endeavors are limited by a male-dominated work world. Because of limited job opportunities, most women are dependent on their husbands for economic support.

Today: Women's professional opportunities are greatly increased, allowing women to pursue any profession a man can with reasonable hope for success. Many women earn enough to enjoy complete economic independence.

What Do I Read Next?

Kiss the Boys Goodbye (1938) was one of Luce's most successful plays. This farcical comedy concerns the antics of a Hollywood producer in the process of recruiting a star for his upcoming movie.

Margin for Error (1939), another of Luce's most successful plays, is a satirical detective story about a German consul who is suspected of murder.

Europe in the Spring (1940) is a personal memoir of Luce's experiences as a journalist in the early years of World War II.

Luce's plays have been compared to those of the Pulitzer Prize—winning playwright Wendy Wasserstein. Wasserstein's comedy *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977) concerns five women who meet for lunch and reminisce about events from their college years.

Rage for Fame: The Ascent of Clare Boothe Luce (1997), by Sylvia Jukes Morris, provides a critical biography of Luce, focusing on her ambitious personality and her various professional and political successes.

Clare Boothe Luce: A Research and Production Sourcebook (1995), by Mark Fearnow, provides an overview of Luce's life and career, a detailed plot summary of her major works and their critical reception, and an annotated bibliography.

Further Study

Dubofsky, Melvyn, and Stephen Burwood, eds., *Women and Minorities during the Great Depression*, Garland, 1990.

Dubofsky and Burwood have compiled a collection of essays by various authors discussing the impact of the Great Depression on women as well as on African Americans and other minorities.

Gimlin, Debra L., *Body Work: Beauty and Self-image in American Culture*, University of California Press, 2001.

Gimlin offers a critical discussion of cultural and social aspects of beauty standards in the United States.

Himmelberg, Robert F., *The Great Depression and the New Deal*, Greenwood Press, 2001.

Himmelberg provides a concise history of the Great Depression years and the impact of New Deal policies in the United States.

Martin, Ralph G., *Henry and Clare: An Intimate Portrait of the Luces*, Putnam's Sons, 1991.

Martin offers a biographical study of Luce's relationship with her second husband, Henry Luce, a widely influential publishing magnate.

Peiss, Kathy Lee, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of American Beauty Culture*, Metropolitan Books, 1998.

Peiss offers a critical historical perspective on the development of beauty standards and the cosmetics industry in the United States during the twentieth century.

Watkins, T. H., *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s*, Little, Brown, 1993.

Watkins provides a history of the impact of the Great Depression and New Deal policies on American culture and society.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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