

### Notes on *The Loved One*

One of the central characteristics of the characters in the novel (and the groups of people they represent) targeted by the novel's satire is their **selfishness**. Ironically, they are selfish even in "love": the clients of the Happier Hunting Ground simply want their pets disposed of in such a way that they don't have to deal with the details, the executives at Megapolitan Studios feel no loyalty to Sir Hinsley even after his long history of service, Dennis simply wants to possess Aimee and do so to his own financial advantage, Mr. Joyboy's mother is horribly self-absorbed (and Mr. Joyboy cares about pleasing his mother so much that he ignores Aimee's feelings), Sir Abercrombie only cares about losing face, etc. Even in the wake of the deaths of Sir Hinsley and Aimee, concern about the despair that drove them to suicide is hardly the primary issue on the minds of the various characters.

Another dominant characteristic of the people and their environment is **fakery and insincerity**, which suggests, among other things, an inability to cope with unpleasant realities; the characters try to avoid unpleasant and uncomfortable situations by lying, by covering up the truth, by creating an artificial reality that is more pleasant. The most obvious manifestation of this is in the practices of the funeral industry, but Hollywood is also a symbolic source of such fakery, and each of the characters displays this tendency in different situations: Dennis hides the truth about his job and presents others' poetry as his own, the British characters are primarily concerned with presenting a certain impression of their people and their country, many of the wealthy characters feel driven to show off their wealth, the Guru Brahmin is not what "he" purports to be, etc.

In tragedies, the tragic fate of the character(s) is largely due to a character flaw or failing that leads to that person's downfall. The novel's subtitle, "An Anglo-American Tragedy," might thus be interpreted to mean that the "tragic flaw" in this case is the Anglo-American values that are so pointedly satirized throughout the novel. It isn't necessarily individual character failings as much as the failings of our cultural values that bring about the tragedies in the story. In the deepest sense, it is the selfishness, fakery, insincerity, and inability to cope with the truth (and other qualities besides) that are characteristic of Anglo and American culture, as displayed by all of the characters in the story, that cause the suicides of Sir Hinsley and Aimee.