

STUDY QUESTIONS: 250K

The Moviegoer

- 1.) *The Moviegoer*. Explain the theories of rotation and repetition which Binx discusses at various points.
- 2.) Explain the importance of Lonnie, Binx's half-brother, who dies at the novel's close.
- 3.) What is the point of Binx's decision to study medicine?

The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg

- 1.) Does the novel have any structure other than recounting events that happened (or may have happened) during World War II with the German war machine? One paper suggests that the novel's title may hint at another way of approaching or seeing this story.
- 2.) Stauffenberg often questions himself about his importance, mission, and sense of self; what is the point of these frequent ruminations?
- 3.) Historical fiction has about it the scent of something and decidedly commercial, the stuff of minor writers whose imaginations are poorly stocked and who can't decide whether they are historians or novelists? How well does West meet the demands of history and fiction?
- 4.) What is the point of the novel's narrative point of view?

Little Big Man

- 1.) Who is Jack Crabb, literally and figuratively?
- 2.) It is obvious that the novel is a Western, but what kind of Western is this? Consider the conventions of the Western form (relying on novels first or films you are familiar with) and apply those to the novel.
- 3.) There are repeated comparisons between the white and Native American cultures. What is revealed through these?
- 4.) Look closely at Custer; why so much attention given to this figure, what do you suppose is the point?
- 5.) Take an overview of the novel--what is it saying, how is it important, analyze it as a document of postmodern American literature.

Housekeeping

- 1.) Analyze the importance of the house. Look closely at descriptions of the structure and its individual parts. What significance does it have?
- 2.) There are repeated references to the lake and water in general. Analyze these for their importance.
- 3.) Explain the meaning and significance of the title.
- 4.) Ruthie frequently meditates on the importance of memory and dreams; explain and analyze this importance.
- 5.) Compare the work with others this semester; what areas of similarity do you find?

The Counterlife

- 1.) Roth is not only telling a story (or a series of stories) but exploring a theory of fiction through the

actual writing of this fiction. What is that theory he is advancing?

2.) What is the purpose of the "Judea" and "Aloft" sections and their focus on Judaism? What is Roth exploring and/or suggesting here?

3.) What is going on in the last section, "Christendom"?

4.) Roth has commented, "Fiction has an obligation to be about those things that we're too ashamed to talk about with those we trust the most. . . . I think fiction--at least my kind of fiction--is about that." Analyze the relevance of this comment for *The Counterlife*.

Lolita

Nabokov I

1.) What is the point of the many references to Annabel Lee and to various writers throughout the course of the narrative?

2.) Explain the significance of the many foreign phrases and sentences.

3.) What is the point of the many scenes of Hum and Lo on the road?

Nabokov II

1.) What happens to Humbert over the course of time; does he develop or change?

2.) Notwithstanding Nabokov's remark about "aesthetic bliss," the novel's style is curious, often florid and overwritten. What is going on here?

3.) What is Nabokov getting at in this novel; what points or themes is he developing?

Beloved

1.) "Beloved reads largely like a melodrama lashed with the structural conceits of the miniseries." Do you agree; what evidence is there to support an alternate argument?

2.) The same reviewer writes, "Yet to render slavery with aesthetic authority demands not only talent, but the courage to face the ambiguities of the human soul, which transcend race." Do you feel Morrison has done that; explain?

3.) What is the nature of slavery portrayed here? Indeed, there are atrocities performed at the hands of whites, but is there something more subtle being developed as well?

4.) Examine the novel's curious structure, its fractured method of narration. What is the purpose?

The Crying of Lot 49

Pynchon I

1.) What is the point of the Rapunzel and tapestry images? Look esp. at the description of Remedios Varo's painting, "Bordando el Mando Terrestre" ("Embroiderers of the Terrestrial Blanket"), and Oedipa's reaction to it. Why does she respond as she does?

2.) What is the Second Law of Thermodynamics and what is its significance for the novel?

- 3.) What is entropy; how does it figure in the novel?
- 4.) What is the significance of Maxwell's Demon, which John Nefastis has perfected?

Pynchon II

- 1.) What is the Tristero system?
- 2.) Why all the strange character names; do they have any significance?
- 3.) Is there any point to this novel; is Pynchon simply trying to induce reader hysteria or are there ideas of any weight here?

White Noise

- 1.) What is the point of all the imagery with static, lasars, waves, pulses, etc.?
- 2.) What is the point of the death angst that Jack and Babette suffer from?
- 3.) Explain the ambiguous discussion about faith between Jack and the nun/nurse in the hospital near the novel's end?
- 4.) Does the novel fit with some of the existential themes we have discussed this semester. If so, which ones and how?