

The Vanity

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Belles Lettres Book Club Questions for Discussion:

1. Titles for novels are (usually) carefully selected. This story is not just about a piece of furniture. Discuss vanity in the human condition. How do Eddie and Louise, each reflect that characteristic? How does it become a driving force in the story? Can you think of other novels or movies or poems that speak of the (negative) power of vanity?
2. Good stories have characters that become foils for other characters (or the main characters). Discuss the use of foils in *The Vanity*. How does it add to the depth of both characters? (Eddie and Mike, Eddie and W.C. Fields, Mike and Jay, Lorraine and Connie.)
3. Discuss the ‘success’—or lack of?—the opening chapter in ‘reeling in’ the reader. Does the reader feel inclined to read on? If so, why? Can you cite other chapters in the book that use this ‘technique?’
4. What folks sometimes miss in reading *The Vanity* is that they already know the ending. That Mike is crossing time only to ‘put in place’ the history that we know today. By preventing the news article from being published in the *LA Times*, Louise does not commit suicide and, hence, lives a long life as she really did. Eddie is not shot by the Mafia. He lives to direct plays well into the 1960’s. Why does the story work even though you know everything will work out?
5. Did anyone notice the hints/ clues regarding a ‘hidden’ relationship between Dan Sterling and Mike Lundy? Sprinkled throughout the story are similarities between the two men. Can you name any? Even Louise notices the resemblance when she says to Dan while in Hotchkiss’s office: “Strange. Have we met before, Dan?”
6. ‘Showing,’ and not ‘telling,’ is an important technique in writing. The young woman was nervous or upset because she was drumming their fingers, pacing, or shredding a napkin. Simply telling that “She was nervous” will bore any reader. What examples from *The Vanity* do you recall—or maybe find—where we learn more about the character (or the situation) by what happens and not what is directly told?
7. Discuss why ‘time-travel’ stories have always fascinated audiences? What other authors have used the idea of altering ‘time’ in their works? What differences do you find in their techniques? Time machines vs. re-positioning in a certain place, for example.