

Reading Group Guide

Of Saints and Sinners

1. How does the opening set the mood for the rest of the book, knowing that the main character is a man condemned to death? Would the mood have been different if he were simply sentenced to life in prison, or some other shorter term? Would the mood have been different if his crimes had been less than murder?
2. Considering that Owain had several siblings who all turned out well, how much blame can be placed on his parents for his behavior? Do you think they were right to try and beat it out of him or else put him to hard work? What other methods do you think they should have tried, if any?
3. What role does society play in shaping children and deterring crime? Do you think these measures were sufficient, or could they have done more? Should they have done more? Whose responsibility is it to discipline children and keep them from becoming career criminals?
4. In the interludes, Forthill expresses a desire to counsel Owain before he hangs. Later he is inspired to write a letter to give him more time to speak to Owain. Do you believe this is a good idea? Why or why not? Do you believe Owain has had a true change of heart? Do you believe the warden is as heartless as he seems? Is his position understandable?
5. How does Owain's treatment by his father affect his desire to change and become a better person? Do you believe that his father would have come back around if Owain had stuck around and made an effort to change? Consider things from his father's perspective. How does Owain's behavior reflect on him and the family? What does he have to take into consideration when looking at things like marriage, family, children, grandchildren, and his children's inheritance?
6. What do you make of the change in Owain's aggression, from raw, primal rage, to more cunning and sophisticated? Do you believe he is simply maturing out of crime, as some ex-convicts are known to do, or is he simply evolving to a higher, more sophisticated crime? Other than simply pretending to be richer and more knowledgeable than he really is, is anything he is doing really illegal? Do you think it would help or hurt him in the long run?
7. Examine the axiom, "You can choose to jump off the cliff, but you can't choose not to fall." Owain often ponders the intersection of free will and predestination. Are there times when you believe he is predestined to make certain choices, or that certain events are inevitable? Are there times where you believe he is acting entirely in free will? How does the story change if other choices were made?
8. What is the significance of Owain committing the murders while sober? How does it affect his character? Does it change your perception of him and why he is in prison?
9. What effect does the shift in perspective have on the story, going from a first-person retelling to a third-person narrative? Does it work for the story at hand? How does it shape the focus of the

story? What do you believe is the focus? How would the story have been different if it had been entirely first-person or entirely third-person?

10. What is the significance of Owain's encounter with the pagan priest? How does their discussion of free will differ from Owain's discussion with the Protestant priest? How are they the same? How does each conversation shape Owain's view of the world and himself? How does Owain's stay with the pagan community affect his decision to return home? How does it affect his character and his mindset going forward?
11. What do you make of the argument between Teo and Gwyneth when Owain returns home? Is each position understandable? Whose side do you agree with more? Is there a third side to consider? How does each side handle justice versus forgiveness? Is either side completely right or completely wrong, or is there merit to both?
12. How does life change for Owain when he reaches America? Do you think it would be easier or harder for him to change his ways? Why? How do things change as he adopts each of his personas—himself, the Irishman, and the Londoner? How do these help or hurt him as he moves from New York City to the South? How does this affect his view of America and himself?
13. How does Owain's travels with the Confederates shape him? Do you believe the deaths of Henry, Jack, and George are his fault? How does it change when he stages their deaths to look like a robbery? What would you have done in this situation? How does the fact that he gets away with it affect him?
14. Consider Teo's reaction when Owain finds him. Do you believe it is justified? How would you have reacted in this situation, in either role? What do you make of Teo's challenge to his brother? Do you believe it was just a polite way of getting rid of him, or a test, as Owain later believes? How do you think things would have played out if Owain had gone out at first light? If he'd been able to return to his brother's farm (with or without Tommen)?
15. What would be your reaction if you walked out of your house one day and seventy years had passed? Everyone you knew is dead and life has moved on. Would you have taken your own life or asked someone to do it for you? What would be the first thing you would want to do or see or know?
16. How does Owain's past life as a banker and investor help him start and maintain a business during the Great Depression? How does he feel about it? How does he view his past life now that he is safely removed from it? Has his opinion of Balk changed any?
17. What does the decision to leave Mark say about Owain's character and his adjustment to the modern world? Do you believe he is growing into a decent human being? How does being on his own for the first time affect him, for better or worse?
18. Do you think Owain is a coward for dodging the draft? Do you think it was necessary if he was able to pass as a much older man? How does he handle Mark being drafted? What does his reaction to Mark's death say about him and their relationship?

19. What do you make of Kevin's statements regarding education and experience, whether a Time Agent looks young or old? How does this change Owain's perspective about himself and his life?
20. Imagine that you could live the next ninety years without aging. Would you become more or less interested in society? In politics? In other things? How does Owain's withdrawal from society at large affect him? Is this part of his cowardice, or simply a reshuffling of perspective and priorities?
21. How does intentionally becoming a police officer affect Owain? How does he feel to be on the right side of the law for the first time? Does he feel more or less qualified? Would you want to see him on the beat, knowing that he has a checkered past?
22. After almost a century of waiting, what advice would you give to Owain about continuing to wait for Tommen? When would you advise he give up, if ever?
23. What does Owain's push for a DNA test say about his desire to adopt and raise Tommen? Do you believe he could have remained a presence in Tommen's life if Tommen had been adopted out to another family? Do you believe there was another solution no one had considered yet?
24. Despite his strong desire to adopt and raise Tommen, why does Owain refrain from telling Tommen the truth? Do you believe this helps or hurts their relationship in the long run? Consider Micaiah's statements on the matter.